

Mabda The Epistle on the Origin and the Return

by the most noble dā'ī, our master 'Alī ibn Ḥanẓala (may God sanctify him)

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Praise be to God alone, and blessings and peace be upon our master Muḥammad and his pure progeny.

Know, O fortunate brother, rightly guided and divinely favored—may God illumine your inner vision and purify your heart in devotion to the friends of God—that your letter has reached me, and with it, the means of success in the hereafter have been joined to you. You seek enlightenment by which you may attain nearness and felicity in your return. I have granted your request, knowing your worthiness due to your adherence to the bond of allegiance (wilāya) to the rightly guided Imams and your clinging to it, your fulfillment of the obligations upon you from the requirements of religion, and your inclusion among the ranks of those who strive to act upon the divine commands.

What I shall explain to you in this epistle of mine is from the secret of the spiritual kingdom (malakūt al-rūḥānī), which is connected by revelation (waḥy) to every luminous station, and from there to its pure ḥudūd (spiritual authorities), who are entrusted with rescuing creatures from the deluge of misguidance—the sincere ones.

It is the elixir of souls that dyes them with the pure, blessed dye of God, transforming them from being sensory and animalistic into rational and angelic. So guard it from all save the one I mention to you—may God protect you—and safeguard it—God will safeguard you.

And I take upon you, and upon everyone whom you permit to access it, the solemn covenant of God, which is emphatic and binding, the covenant He took upon His nearest angels, His sent prophets, the guiding Imams of His religion, and their rightly guided ḥudūd—peace be upon them all. Otherwise, you and whoever views it are disassociated from them all. Do not copy even a single letter from it—neither more nor less—and let no one read it but you or one whom you permit. You must return this copy to me after completing your reading of it. And God is a witness over what we say.

Know that the Unseen of the Unseens (ghayb al-ghuyūb), toward whom no thought dares approach, cannot be comprehended by reflection of heart nor encompassed by thought. No name or attribute can apply to Him. There is no path to perceiving Him save by affirming that all worlds have an Originator whom intellects are incapable of grasping.

Chapter (Fasl)

And know that tawḥīd (Divine Unity) is the knowledge of both the exalted and the lowly ḥudūd (spiritual ranks) and the acknowledgment that each of them is one in their own rank, none sharing that rank with them.

Tajrīd (abstraction) is the denial of divinity from all originated and created things, and the affirmation of it only for their Originator.

Tanzīh (transcendence) is the negation of all attributes from the ghayb al-ghuyūb (the Unseen of the Unseens), and the acknowledgment that all descriptions of majesty and honor, and all that languages express in terms of divine attributes, in truth apply to the First Intellect (al-ʿaql al-awwal), as I shall explain to you further, God willing.

This, then, is the reality of tawḥīd, tajrīd, and tanzīh—and the essence of what has come from the lords (mawālī)—peace be upon them—regarding tawḥīd.

Chapter

On the True Spiritual Origination (al-ibtidāʾ al-rūḥānī al-ḥaqīqī)

Know that the Mystery of Mysteries—mighty and exalted—is He who originated the World of Origination (ʿālam al-ibdāʾ) in a single act, without time or place. He brought forth numerous luminous forms that defy enumeration, equal in the First Perfection and the First Existence, which are life, power, and strength. This was in accordance with His justice—may He be exalted—for He made them equal, with no superiority of one over another. Their multitude is so great that their number cannot be calculated, which is a proof that intellects cannot encompass the extent of His grace and generosity—exalted is He.

All of them are called the World of Origination and the Spiritual World (al-ʿālam al-rūḥānī), because they are luminous spirits without density or corporeality, not contained by space, and their Originator had no need of time to bring them into being.

The proof of this lies in the fact that we find our own souls—being but an insignificant part of that vast, majestic whole—are capable of traversing the distance between East and West in the blink of an eye through a passing thought, and of conceiving and comprehending that which is absent without being constrained by place or requiring time. Indeed, the soul can encompass in its thought the farthest reaches of space—even the heavens, the earth, and all that lies between them—in less than a moment. If such is possible for us, in spite of our weakness and limitation, and the fact that our souls are bound to our bodies, then how much more so for those perfect beings who are free of any union with bodies?

Thus, the forms of the World of Origination are in such a state of majesty, nobility, virtue, and perfection that human intellects are incapable of comprehending even the least of their attributes. How then could they grasp the One who originated them, given their incapacity to fully grasp even His creatures? Nay, He is vastly exalted above such comprehension.

Then, one of those originated forms turned its attention to itself and to others of its kind, contemplating them. Through this contemplation—without a teacher or inspirer—it came to know that it and its peers had an Originator different from themselves, beyond their grasp. It negated divinity for itself and its kind, and affirmed it solely for its Originator. By this act, it earned the title of "First" and "Foremost." It is that which is called the First Intellect (al-ʿaql al-awwal), the First Originated (al-mubdaʾ al-awwal), and the Pen (al-qalam).

Then, a substance (mādda) was imparted to it by its Originator—glorified and exalted—exclusively for it and not for the rest of its kind, as a recompense for its act of affirming divine unity (tawḥīd) and glorification (tasbīḥ), and for recognizing the divinity of its

Originator. Through this substance, it gained knowledge of all that has been and all that will be, and was thereby distinguished with nobility, majesty, and grandeur over all of the World of Origination. Because of this, it became worthy of being referred to by the name of divinity (al-ilāhiyya) for two reasons: first, because it longed and was bewildered in its attempt to perceive its Originator and failed; and second, because the rest of the World of Origination longed and were bewildered in their attempt to perceive the majesty and grandeur with which it had been singled out due to its act. It was thus also called al-ilāhiyya for its yearning and desire (lahf and shawq) to perceive the grandeur of its Originator, though it was turned back by its incapacity.

For all these reasons, the name of divinity was applied to it. It is eternal in its ultimate perfection, though not the primordial eternal.

Then, two forms among those originated became aware of what this great being had come to realize. They gazed as it had gazed, negated divinity for themselves and their kind, and affirmed it for their Originator. They bore witness to this, and acknowledged the First's precedence and virtue. Because of this act, they were called "the two Emanated Ones" (al-munba'ithayn), for they had been stirred into being by following the First and its act.

One of them was quicker than the other in performing this glorification, sanctification, and affirmation of unity. Due to its precedence, the First Intellect took it as a gateway (bāb) and veil (ḥijāb) through which it would address those below. It granted it a portion of the same substance it had received from its Originator, thus elevating it above the second Emanated One and all others of its kind. Through that substance, it came to know all that was and will be. It is called the Universal Soul (al-nafs al-kulliyya), the First Emanation (al-inbi'āth al-awwal), and the Tablet (al-lawḥ).

The second Emanated One, however, did not acknowledge the first one's precedence and superiority, mistakenly assuming himself to be equal to it. This mistaken assumption caused him to fall from his rank and be cast down from his station.

Then, the First Intellect called all of the World of Origination to affirm their Originator's unity and to glorify Him. It made this call through the First Emanation, which it had designated as its gateway and veil. Seven intellects from among those luminous forms responded to the call—each following the other. Within each of them was a multitude of originated forms too numerous to count. Each of the seven intellects took the First Intellect as their leader, guide, and exemplar due to its precedence, and were themselves his followers. Thus, the ranks of the World of Origination became nine: the First Intellect, the First Emanation, and the seven intellects who answered the call.

Now, the second Emanated One—because of his mistaken assumption and the seven intellects having surpassed him—resorted to the last of the seven (the ninth), inquiring about his condition and the cause of his fall. The ninth intellect informed him that it was his assumption of equality with his predecessor that had brought about his descent. The Emanated One sought intercession from the ninth, who interceded on his behalf to the one above him, and so on, until the intercession reached the First Emanation.

The First Emanation recognized that the second Emanated One had repented for what had happened, had not acted with malice, and did not persist in his error. Thus, it accepted its repentance for its lapse and forgave its transgression.

It then supplied it with an effusion of the Eternal Substance which had become joined to it from its predecessor—the very substance with which all those intellects had been supplied when they answered the call. Through this, the darkness that had arisen from that corrupt assumption was removed from it and departed. By means of that substance, it came to know all that has been and all that will be, and it was established in the tenth rank. Though he had been second in origination, he now became third in enumeration and tenth in rank. Through that substance, he and the other intellects before him attained the Second Perfection (al-kamāl al-thānī) and the Second Existence (al-wujūd al-thānī), by which they became eternal and protected from transformation and annihilation.

Now, there remained from among those luminous originated forms a vast number who had failed to respond to the call along with the seven intellects, having followed the example of the Tenth in their delay. When the Tenth repented and received the eternal substance through the intercession of the other intellects—these being the "words" which Adam received from his Lord (for he is the spiritual Adam about whom God says: "Then Adam received words from his Lord, and He turned toward him in mercy. Verily, He is the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful")—he was told: "Turn to those who followed you in your delay and call them and deliver them from what they have fallen into. For whoever breaks a bone must mend it."

So he turned toward those who had lagged behind and said to them: "We have erred in not acknowledging the virtue of our predecessor. I have repented for what has passed; now you must repent as well, and you will be saved and prosper."

But they all replied: "There is no virtue for him over us, nor for you, for we are all originated by the Originator, created equally."

When they said this, their essences darkened after having been luminous. Upon seeing the darkness that befell them, they were troubled and dismayed. They gathered together—they are the ones referred to as the First Matter (al-hayūlā al-ūlā)—and moved together with a motion seeking to remedy their situation. From this first movement, the dimension of length was generated. They were dismayed and unsettled by it even more than before. They moved again, and this second motion brought about the dimension of breadth. Still dissatisfied, they moved a third time, and from this came depth. They thus became a single, composite body—intermixed and mingled.

These movements were by the wisdom of the Tenth, who had taken charge of managing their affair. For he knew, from their open rebellion, that they could not be redeemed in the World of Purity ('ālam al-ṣafā'), which is a realm free from opposition and disobedience. He therefore stirred them until they became a composite corporeal body, from which he might extract tools and instruments to redeem them, and from which he would establish a call (da'wa) through which the salvation of those among them who respond could proceed, stage by stage—as we shall explain later, God willing.

These laggards were not all the same in their inner dispositions: among them were the penitent and seeking forgiveness (al-nādim al-mustaghfir), the doubting and bewildered (al-shākk al-mutaḥayyir), and the defiant and arrogant (al-muṣirr al-mustakbir). When they had all become a single body and descended from the realm of purity—due to the density that had overtaken them (for it is the nature of all dense things to descend, just as it is the nature of all subtle things to rise)—the Wise Director (al-Ḥakīm al-Mudabbir) assigned the purest among the descending to become the spheres and stars; the intermediate became the elemental mothers; and the densest became the "Rock" (al-ṣakhra) known as the "Center (al-Markaz)," which lies beneath the earth.

This was an act of justice and wisdom: to place each group where it deserved, according to the intention and disposition it had previously held. When this dense mass fell downward, certain movements had occurred from the first motions—these brought about the four cardinal points of the celestial sphere: the Ascendant ((al-Ṭālī'), which is the zodiacal sign situated on the eastern horizon), the Descendant ((al-Ghārib), which is the sign situated on the western horizon), the Midheaven (directly overhead, the 10th), and the Imum Coeli (beneath the earth, the 4th). When that dense mass descended, it was drawn by these four cardinal points from their respective directions, and by the two poles of the celestial sphere (north and south). It came to rest at the center of the sphere, which now encompassed it entirely, just as the yellow yolk of an egg is surrounded on all sides by the white and the shell.

Then, the atmosphere opened up, and the heavens arched into nine celestial spheres—each one nested within the other. The outermost sphere encompasses all the others and moves them in a divine, unified motion every day and night from east to west, by the power of the Director and the substance imparted to him. The seven wandering stars were arranged, each in its own sphere. All the fixed stars were placed in the eighth sphere, known as the Sphere of the Zodiac (falak al-burūj), divided into twelve constellations. The ninth sphere remained empty of constellations and stars, owing to its subtlety and nobility.

Chapter

Then, when the celestial sphere began to move with the First Motion, the stars cast their rays toward the earth. On its surface remained something of the same kind as the celestial sphere. The stars drew it to themselves and transformed it into luminous shells—this is the light perceived by the sight from the stars. Otherwise, they were previously imagined like the spheres, invisible to the eyes. So, the Ordainer, exalted be He, made these shells by His wisdom for the illumination of the dark corporeal world and so that human senses might perceive them, thereby affirming for them the power of the Ordainer and the true existence of the celestial world.

When the sphere moved, the air adjacent to it—contained within the lunar sphere—reached the utmost degree of heat and dryness, which is the nature of fire. It came to be called ether (athīr), which is one of the four primordial elements (ummuhāt) and the first of them. It is the center and origin of fire, although fire itself is not visible within it to the eyes. If its light had been manifest, it would have prevented the eyes from perceiving the celestial realm, so its concealment was a wisdom from the Ordainer, exalted be He.

Then, the layer of air beneath the ether became warm and moist, due to its distance from the celestial movement, and became moderate. It was called air (*hawā'*), the second of the four primordial elements. Then the layer beneath that became cold, moist, and fluid—it is the center of water, the third of the primordial elements. Then came the earth and the layer of air adjacent to it, extremely cold and dry due to its farthest distance from the sphere. This is the fourth element—earth (*arḍ*).

Then, when the Ordainer willed to make the earth the abode of the manifestations of beings—the minerals, plants, and animals—and its adjacent layer of air was in utmost extremity of coldness and dryness, He moved the sphere. The stars cast their rays toward the earth, which by then had become a solid rock due to the severity of cold and dryness. The rays could not penetrate due to its solidity, so they were reflected, heating the face of the earth and its adjacent air, rendering it moderate between heat and cold, moisture and dryness. This came to be called the Sphere of Breeze (*kurrat al-nasīm*), and it is in truth the center of water, from which it will be generated, as we will mention later, God willing.

The reflection of the rays warmed the air up to a certain extent. That portion of air which the stars' rays did not reach retained its original nature of cold and dryness. It is above the Sphere of Breeze and is called the Sphere of Frost (*kurrat al-zamharīr*).

Chapter

Then the Ordainer, exalted be He, delegated the governance of the world to Saturn (*Zuhal*) by His power and His setting of the sphere into motion. Saturn governed the world for a thousand years. During this time, the aforementioned elements mingled with one another, and vapors, mists, and continual, unbeneficial rains arose. The earth became a wavy sea, and throughout that millennium, what matched the nature of Saturn—iron, stones, and human types—underwent fermentation. The earth was submerged by water, and all kinds were sorted by kind. The seeds of the blacks, cultivators, and all wretched and miserable folk were fermented.

Then Jupiter (*Mushtarī*) supported Saturn in governance during a second millennium. By its heat, it dried most of the moistures, distinguished the praiseworthy things matching its noble nature from the blameworthy, and fermented the seeds of those matching its lofty nature—people of religion and gentleness. During its era, the first vegetation sprouted, creeping creatures appeared, ants, and the plants of *Wardan* emerged.

Then Mars (*al-Mirrīkh*) supported Saturn in the third millennium. These two—Saturn and Mars—are the malefics of the celestial sphere. Mars, through its heat and dryness, further dried and absorbed much of that moisture. The mountains that had condensed during Saturn's time were split apart and turned to sand. In its age, small harmful creatures appeared—mice, cats, and similar predatory beasts, reptiles, and poisonous animals. It fermented the seeds of commanders, soldiers, and warriors, and also minerals and plants matching their temperaments.

Then the Sun supported Saturn in the fourth millennium. It removed those mists and darkneses from the face of the earth, moderated the rainfall somewhat, and fermented the seeds of kings and nobles, and their likes among noble things such as rubies and gold, and their equivalents among animals. The atmosphere reached a degree of temperance.

Then Venus (al-Zuhara) supported Saturn in the fifth millennium. She fermented the seeds of Arabs, women, and people of play and delight. Sweet water springs gushed forth, and moderate rains fell. Fruit-bearing, fragrant trees emerged, birds spread in the air, and temperate, beneficial animals formed. All of this was a prelude to the appearance of the human being.

Then Mercury (‘Uṭārid) supported Saturn in the sixth millennium. It increased the moderation of rain and refinement of the elements, fermented the seeds of scribes, ministers, and accountants, and increased the temperate, nourishing plants and lawful animals.

Then, at the end of his governance and the beginning of the Moon’s governance, the human being appeared—sprouting from the earth, as God the Exalted said:
“And Allah brought you forth from the earth as a growing thing.” (Qur’ān)

On the Emergence of the Human Being

The Divine Governor moved the celestial sphere again. Vapors formed from the purest aspects of minerals, plants, and animals, rising upward and becoming clouds. Then they descended to earth as pure, balanced rain. The rain carved shallow channels in the earth, and the purest water settled into its depths.

Then a vapor rose—higher, more refined, nobler, and purer than the first. It fell again as rain resembling the semen of a man and entered those channels and fissures, which were like wombs. The water already present within them—resembling the water of a woman—intermingled with it and became one substance. The earth’s heat warmed it, and it rose trying to escape the heat. But the cold of the breezes outside the fissures struck it, forcing it back down. It kept rising and falling, contracting, refining, and coalescing, and the stages of formation continued for nine months under the management of the Divine Governor and the influence of the planetary and celestial powers.

When the appointed time was completed, it opened its eyes and senses, inhaled the breeze, and sensory life entered it through the medium of the breeze. It began to stretch, sit, and roll its body in the remaining water from which it was formed. Its body now absorbed that water, which had become oil. Then it sought nourishment by mouth, though previously it had fed through its navel from the purest of that oil. It began to suck its thumb, and God caused pure milk to flow therein. It fed on that, sleeping and sitting until it reached one year of age. By that time it stood upright, though its bodily size was comparable to that of a child of four years, because of the greatness of its two parents, namely the heaven and the earth.

It walked and fed on what was nearby: figs, grapes, and fruits that the Divine Governor had prepared for it. This new growth occurred in all twelve islands of the earth. From the remnants of those waters, females were formed, while the firstborns were all males.

The Divine Governor had selected the purest, noblest, and most excellent part of those waters and led it to the noblest land in the beginning of creation—the island of Sarandīb, as it was the region of equilibrium on earth at that time. In the fissures of that island, twenty-eight persons were formed, superior in nobility, purity, and excellence over the rest of humankind, like the superiority of the red ruby over all stones.

Among them was one person whose excellence over the other twenty-seven was like the superiority of the ruby over other stones. . He was the cream, the essence, and the choicest part of the world.

The superiority possessed by these twenty-eight over the rest of mankind, and by this one individual over the remaining twenty-seven, was due to the purity of their intentions and the abundance of their repentance for their former transgression when the Tenth Intellect had summoned them.

This one person—purest, noblest, and most distinguished—when he emerged from those fissures like others of his kind, looked upon the world by his own self without teacher or inspiration. He saw a well-constructed sky, an adorned earth, and diverse kinds of creatures. Through reflection, he reached the Truth and realized that he and his kind—and all creation—had an Originator unlike them. He denied divinity to himself and to all creatures and affirmed it for their Creator, bearing witness to their Maker. Thus, in the lower world, he occupied the station held by the First Preceder (al-Sābiq al-Awwal), The First Intellect, in the spiritual world. He received his portion of substance (mādda) and support (ta'yīd) through the mediation of the Preceding Intellect and via his own boundary who had drawn him out from the natural world—the Tenth, governor of the world of nature. Thus, he surpassed his peers through that substance and came to know what had been and what would be.

He then turned to the twenty-seven persons who were with him and invited them to affirm God's oneness and to deny divinity for themselves and all others. They responded affirmatively. The meaning of all this is the reality of God's saying:

"God bears witness that there is no god but He, and so do the angels and those endowed with knowledge, upholding justice."

The name "God" in this verse is interpreted as referring to the First Intellect, the First Preceder in the world of Origination. The "angels" are the immaterial intellects that hastened to answer his call and bore witness to what he bore witness. The "those possessed of knowledge" are this distinguished human person, possessing an originating body, together with his twenty-seven ranks (ḥudūd) who responded to his call and bore witness as he did.

They are designated as "those possessed of knowledge" because they are the receptacles of the support and substance that constitute true knowledge, with which each one of them was endowed, and with which he himself endowed them according to their respective degrees of purity and responsiveness.

Chapter

Then the Moon assisted Saturn in the governance of the world for a thousand years. This was the millennium of felicity and the establishment of the noble mission (da'wah), when the powers of all the planets came together.

Then this distinguished person divided twelve of the twenty-seven and sent them to the twelve islands of the earth, that they might call their inhabitants to the worship and obedience of God, teaching them the knowledge of this world and the next. Each one of them knew the language of those to whom he had been sent, for the people of every island possessed their own language. This is the meaning of God's saying:

"We sent no messenger except in the language of his people."

Had it not been for the revelation and divine support connected to this distinguished person, and for his being informed thereby of all that had been and all that would be in the world, no human being could have known by his own efforts the properties of minerals, plants, and animals, nor their benefits and harms, nor their medicinal virtues and deadly poisons.

This is the true meaning of God's statement:

"And He taught Adam all the names."

For this person is the First Adam, and he is the father of mankind insofar as he teaches them the affairs of their worldly life and their return to the next life. Thus he is the cause of their life in both worlds. Had not God favored them by sustaining them through him with that with which He had sustained him—something he deserved through his glorification and sanctification of God—they would have perished.

Accordingly, each missionary proceeded to his island. He first taught its people how to make clothing from trees and how to obtain nourishment from plants, minerals, and animals. He also taught them the path of salvation through the worship of God and obedience to His chosen representative upon the earth.

This distinguished person retained twelve individuals in his own presence. They were the Hujjats of the Night, and they were superior to the eight others. Among four of these was one who surpassed them all and who served as the Gate (Bāb) to that noble station.

Before himself, together with his missionary in each island, he established a Mukāsir, an Absolute Ma'dhūn, and a Restricted Dā'ī. These ranks are preserved and never cease, accompanying every Speaking Prophet (Nāṭiq) in his cycle, every Legatee (Waṣī) in his age, and every Imam in his time.

Then each missionary commanded the people of his island that every man should marry the female who had been formed in a cavern other than his own, and that he should take from another the woman who had been formed in the cavern in which he himself had arisen. Since she had appeared from the residue of his own water, she was like a sister to him and therefore unlawful for him to marry.

This, the author says, is the pure way of the people of truth, whose practitioners are free from defilement. It is not as the ignorant exotericists (ahl al-ẓāhir) imagine, namely, that Adam married the children of the first birth to those of the second, thereby making the origin of mankind an act of incest. God forbid such a thing. They merely heard reports without understanding their true meaning. The correct account, according to the author, is what has been stated here.

Praise belongs to God, who guided us to this; for we would never have been guided had God not guided us.

The emergence of humans directly from the earth occurred only in that first and unique generation. Thereafter reproduction returned to the ordinary process of procreation between men and women, continuing until the present.

The mission continued until that distinguished person brought forth his noble son, who would succeed him in his rank, selecting him from among his spiritual ranks and the people of his mission, as will be explained later, God willing.

Thus this is the reality of the Beginning (al-Ibtidā'), set forth openly without symbolism or allusion. Therefore receive what has been given to you and be among those who are grateful to our masters for the favors they have bestowed upon us. May God reward them with the best reward.

Chapter

And praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds.

Then the soul is drawn by the Divine Magnet—that is, the connected spiritual substance (al-māddah al-muttaṣilah) of which we have previously spoken. It is a flowing and continuous pillar of light, imperceptible to the eyes and whose greatness and majesty the mind cannot comprehend. This pillar draws the soul until it becomes joined to the form of its instructor, to whom it is worthy of being transferred. It mingles with his form and remains adjacent to his soul. Thus it hears through his ear, answers through his tongue, and communicates through his speech until the time of his own departure.

Thereupon, it mingles with the soul and form of the one to whom he has been transferred—that is, the spiritual superior (al-maḥdūd)—for his soul and form have already become one. Then the magnet draws both of them to the form of the higher rank above them. They remain adjacent to his soul while mingling with his form, as has already been explained.

The reason why the transferred soul remains merely adjacent to the soul of the superior to whom it has ascended, rather than mixing with it, is due to God's wisdom and justice. For if —God forbid—a lapse or doubt should overtake that superior, and he should apostatize and perish, then the soul that had ascended to him would continue upward by means of the form which the superior had fashioned for it and which constituted its reward. Meanwhile, the apostate's own soul would be cast back after being stripped of its righteous form and would instead assume a dark form corresponding to its later evil deeds, for deeds are judged by their endings.

We ask God Most High to grant us, you, O brother, and all our brethren a good ending, through the right of Muhammad and his pure family, peace be upon them all.

Thus, these forms continue to ascend with every rank at the time of his departure to the rank above him, until they arrive at the Bāb of the sacred rank—upon whom be the most excellent peace. At his station, the forms from all the islands of the earth gather together and return to him.

There, a luminous structure is built in the likeness of a human being, though it is entirely composed of light. Were it to become manifest to human sight, the eye could not endure its vision; rather, it would be overwhelmed and carried away. For if the eye cannot gaze directly upon the light of the sun in its orb, though that light is corporeal, how then could it bear the spiritual, holy, and eternal light?

These noble forms continue to arrive and be arranged within the noble Bāb according to what the Governor determines they deserve on account of what they acquired in this world. Some are worthy of occupying the position of the heart; others that of the brain; others the place of the eye, the ear, the hand, or the foot; while others occupy the position of the hair, the nails, or the lowest part of the foot. Each receives his station according to his deeds and merits. There is no injustice toward anyone, nor any favoritism, but only recompense according to what each has earned.

The forms continue to gather and be built up until a complete luminous and holy body comes into being.

For this reason the rank is called the Bāb ("Gate"), because this body assembled with him is composed of albāb—that is, intellects, since the intellect (‘aql) is the lubb ("kernel" or "essence"). Understand this well.

This luminous body is what is called the Imamate (al-Imāmah).

On the Manner in Which the Imam Through Whom the Imamate Appears Comes into Being

Know that every believer, when his soul separates from his body—as I have explained to you—leaves behind in his body traces of the vegetative soul, which are the innate heat. This heat becomes latent within the body. When the body is buried, those remaining traces of the vegetative soul appear after three days. They are then called the “spiritual soul” (al-naḥs).

al-rīhiyya). On the third day, this soul emerges, ascending as a subtle vapor that cannot be perceived by sight. The rays of the moon meet it, and then it ascends to the sun, which receives it through the mediation of Mercury and Venus. It remains with the sun for as long as the Director (al-Mudabbir) wills, and then the sun delivers it to Jupiter, where it stays as long as the Director wills.

These spiritual souls return from all the islands (of the Earth), and the sun and Jupiter distill and purify them until the form described earlier at the Bāb (Gate) is completed. These spiritual souls are completed at the sun. Then, when the Director — exalted be He — permits the appearance of the Imam-person, He moves the sun to deliver those spiritual souls to the moon, through the mediation of Venus and Mercury. Then the moon conveys them with its rays either to pure water or to a noble fruit, upon which they settle like dew.

The Director — exalted be He — preserves this, so that no one can reach it until it reaches the Imam, peace be upon him. He and his noble, pure wife — who has been prepared and designated to be a pure vessel for the Imam-person — nourish themselves with it. When they both partake of that nourishment, intimacy occurs between them, and that essence gathers in the pure wife as a drop (nutfah). It continues to draw upon what remains in the nourishment, becoming a clarified substance that feeds and sustains the drop.

The mothers of the Imams, peace be upon them, are purified from menstrual blood, as God the Exalted has said: “Indeed, God desires to remove impurity from you, O People of the House, and to purify you completely.”

Thus, she continues to draw from that nourishment for the full term of pregnancy — nine months — until the Imam is born, appearing in a noble, camphor-like body.

Then the Bāb (Gate) transitions and his noble soul and luminous spiritual form (haykal nūrānī), which had encompassed certain phantoms (ashbāḥ), unite with the soul of the newborn Imam during a period that is no less than forty days and no more than four years. That luminous form then becomes radiantly present in the envelope, which is the Imam’s body. The haykal nūrānī is the Imamate. The camphor-like body is the Imam. He is called the ghilāf (envelope), the shabḥ kāfūrī (camphoric phantom), the nāsūt (human aspect). The haykal nūrānī is called the lāhūt (divine aspect), and the soul of the Imam-child carries the haykal nūrānī.

When his father designates him (naṣṣ) to the people of his time, the flowing spiritual substance mentioned earlier connects to him, mediated through his father and those above his father, up to the First Intellect. He becomes the Veil (ḥijāb) and the Gate (bāb), for the gaze of the First Emanator is directed to him alone among all the ranks (ḥudūd) of the world of religion. The gaze of the First Emanator is toward the Bāb, and the gaze of the intellects that follow it is toward the Ḥujja (Proof). Likewise, each of the creative intellects (‘uqūl al-ibdā’iyya) looks toward one of the boundaries (ḥudūd) of religion. This process continues over time.

Then, the Imam who has been designated turns his attention to the ranks (ḥudūd) by means of that spiritual substance, until he brings forth a son to succeed him — just as his father brought him forth, exactly the same, without any difference. The first Imam then ascends

and resides in the tenth heaven (ufuq al-‘āshir). As for the noble person possessing the creative form (ṣāhib al-juththa al-ibdā’iyya)—whom we have mentioned before—when he ascends to the tenth heaven, he is immediately succeeded in his rank, and he becomes the director (mudabbir) of the world. The one who was in the tenth ascends to a higher rank, and the one above him rises likewise, until the third among them — who is the first of the seven intellects in the Circle of First Emanation — reaches that higher rank.

This circle is called the Sanctified Enclosure (ḥaṣirat al-quds), and to it ultimately ascend all who rise from the intellects of the world of origination (‘ālam al-ibdā’) and the intellects of the world of nature (‘ālam al-ṭabī’a). But the rank of the First Preceder (al-sābiq al-awwal) is unreachable, for it is the rank of Oneness (waḥda). So understand this.

When the one with the creative body ascends to the tenth rank after bringing forth his successor, and his son in turn brings forth another son to succeed him, he (the first) ascends to his father's rank in the tenth heaven. Each Imam after him ascends likewise. They all remain in the tenth heaven until the Qā’im of the Resurrection (Qā’im al-Qiyāma) arises.

At that point, the ranks that had moved successively are joined together in him, just as forms gather at the Bāb. They become a single, great haykal (spiritual structure), with each Imam constituting one of its limbs. Through his hands, reckoning (ḥisāb), reward (thawāb), and punishment (‘iqāb) are administered. He brings forth a son in his da‘wa to succeed him, and he ascends with all the ranks included within him, having become one single image, like one of the intellects of the world of origination. The Qā’im then succeeds the one in the tenth rank, returning with spiritual substance and governance to the physical world. The ranks continue to cycle through his heaven — Imam after Imam — until the second Qā’im al-Qiyāma arises, just like the first. He ascends to his rank and succeeds him, just as the first was succeeded.

This continues during the Cycle of Unveiling (Dawr al-Kashf), which lasts fifty thousand years. Toward its end, evil deeds increase in the world and good deeds decrease. As a result, people deserve to have the truths veiled from them after they had been manifest during the Cycle of Unveiling — read openly from pulpits and in gatherings. The truths are then concealed from them, accessible only to those who seek them from their true gates, through covenants and pacts.

This is the Cycle of Concealment (Dawr al-Sitr). Its beginning is with Adam, the first Nāṭiq (Speaker-Prophet). After him came Noah, who abrogated his law and brought a new one. Then came Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and the last of them was Muḥammad — may God bless him and his family. Adam and the Imams of his cycle, along with their ḥudūd, are like the sperm-drop; Noah and his cycle are like the germ-cell; Abraham's like the clinging clot (‘alaqa); Moses' like the chewed lump (muḍgha); Jesus' like the bones; and Muḥammad's like the flesh.

Every Nāṭiq, Waṣī, or Imam — from Adam to the last of the Imams in Muḥammad's cycle — when they pass on, they ascend to the tenth heaven to become directors of the world of nature. This continues until the last Imam of Muḥammad's cycle is born — the Qā’im al-Qiyāma. All the Imams who had transitioned from Adam to his time are then united within

him. His noble soul carries them, and they and he become a single, luminous form standing upright.

Then the Qā'im, peace be upon him, appears, preceded by his ḥujja who calls to him. God grants His ḥujja dominion over the whole Earth and compels people to obey him. Then he commands someone to announce throughout all horizons: "Whoever chooses a religion, let him worship God through it — he is safe." Everyone then manifests their beliefs, and falsehood becomes dominant over the people of truth.

Then suddenly, the Qā'im al-Qiyāma rises. All creation from every region gathers to him. All those who have transitioned since Adam, peace be upon him, are present before him — as God said: "Verily the former and the latter will all be gathered for an appointed Day."

Then every Imam, every rank (ḥadd), and every believer is brought forth for the people of their time, along with their adversaries. They are made to acknowledge what they did. Then the Qā'im, peace be upon him, commands all believers to slaughter all the adversaries. Then fire descends from the sky and burns them. They are then cast into the greater torment — into Sijjīn, a rock in the depths of the Earth.

Then the Qā'im, peace be upon him, appoints his son — whom he had brought forth from among his da'wa — as his successor. He ascends with all those in his care and succeeds the one in the tenth rank, who in turn ascends to the rank above, as previously explained.

The Qā'im's cycle with his son lasts fifty thousand years — a cycle of unveiling (kashf). The cycles continue to alternate between kashf and sitr — the cycle of sitr lasts seven thousand years. Preceding it, there was a period of three thousand years at the end of the kashf cycle, a pause (fatrah) that is added to the sitr cycle. Those Imams who transitioned during this period are in the tenth heaven, until they join the Imams of the sitr cycle within the Qā'im al-Qiyāma, who seals the sitr cycle and initiates the next kashf. So understand this.

Then, each station (maqām) of a Prophet, a Successor (Wasi), or an Imam is continuously connected, as we mentioned, to the First Intellect (al-'aql al-awwal), never interrupted even for a moment. When the power, miracles, and acts that astonish creation manifest, that act is attributed to the one who perceives it, the one who is veiled by it, and the one to whom it is granted. But when incapacity appears, and pain afflicts him, and he experiences illness, and the conditions of human beings befall him, that is attributed to the external envelope, which is derived from the world of nature, consisting of the windy souls (anfs al-rīḥiyya), produced by bodily birth. Know this.

And beware, beware of exaggerating the status of any one of the Imams and believing that any one of them is a creative God. Rather, he is a god and lord only to those beneath him in the sense that those beneath him regard him as divine and are overwhelmed by his greatness; and he governs those beneath him by the wisdom bestowed upon him. All stations and ranks negate divinity for themselves entirely and affirm it only for the God of gods and Lord of lords, the Creator and Originator of all, exalted is His power, as God Almighty said:

"And whoever among them says, 'I am a god besides Him,' Hell will be his recompense,"

and likewise We recompense the wrongdoers.

Know that many people, upon witnessing the manifest miracles and astonishing acts that God showed through our Master, the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him), exaggerated in their regard for him and claimed that he was the God who creates and provides sustenance, that he was neither born nor gave birth. Upon them be the curse of God for such misguidance, disbelief, and transgression.

The correct belief that must be held is that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the best intellect of the world of nature and the most noble rank of the world of religion. The miracles shown by the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) are supported by the First Intellect in his favor, and they did not reach him except through the mediation of the Prophet and his matter (material), for he is his limit, teacher, nurturer, and spiritual ascender to that rank, his successor in his nation, and his proof during his life. The rank of the Prophet is the rank of the First Intellect that preceded him in his time, and the rank of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) in religion with him is the rank of the First Resurrection in his world.

The Prophet is like the male in religion, and the Commander of the Faithful with him is like the female midwife to him. The Prophet is like the sky, and the Commander of the Faithful with him is like the earth. When the Prophet passed away, the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) became his successor, standing in the world of religion at the station of the First Intellect, and his proof at the station of the First Resurrection.

Therefore, it must be believed that the Prophet and the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon them both) are in one and the same rank, with no superiority of one over the other. Rather, they are equal, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "I and Ali are like these two," and he gathered between the two fingers of his right and left hand that form the prayer beads. He said, "I do not say 'like these two' and gather the middle and ring finger, because one preceded the other."

Whoever believes that one of them is better than the other has exaggerated in one and fallen short in the other. Do not believe anything but this, and may God's curse be on whoever believes otherwise.

This is the reality of the Beginning and the Return, which I have revealed to you, O brother, plainly and purely without symbol or indication. This knowledge is revealed only to the great dā'īs, as our limits have taught us. May God suffice them with good and reward them from us with the best reward. Know this.

I explain this as a statement on the return of the misguided opponents to complete your understanding and raise your rank through this knowledge. So strive in the deeds of the people of goodness to join them all in the sacred precinct, near the Lord of the Worlds. Avoid the deeds of the people of evil so you are saved from falling into what they fell into. May God protect us and you by His grace and bounty.

Know that the opponent of the truth and enemy of the people of truth, at death, experiences a dark image of hostility and evil deeds. When that darkness is stripped away at death, it terrifies and frightens him, causing him to panic and tremble. That is his first torment.

Likewise, the joy of the believer at seeing the brightness of his image and its radiance at death is his first reward.

Then that dark image leaves the soul's opposite and wanders in the horizon seeking ascent but cannot find it, seeking return to that body but cannot find it. It wanders in the air; this is called the "m'anif" (the possessed or tormented spirit). It eventually meets one deserving to be possessed—whether a ignorant woman, a child, or someone similar—and enters them, causing epilepsy. It causes them to speak in its tongue, whispers to them, commands sin, and sometimes leaves them; sometimes it remains until the afflicted person dies, then departs to join its other evil forms in barren wastelands, filthy places, swamps, streams, and ravines.

It appears to people in their dreams and incites them to acts of wrongdoing and enmity against the people of truth.

These forms are the despised jinn, devils, and evil spirits who afflict humans with afflictions and epilepsy. They are driven away by incantations, talismans, and Quranic recitations, fleeing from them.

Each form wanders in desolate places as long as the Master wills. Then it ascends to the dragon's tail, a darkness called the "tail and head," outside the sphere's boundary. Its origin is from the lowest darkness that fell into sin from the world of creation.

This darkness, the head and tail, is the magnet for that evil satanic form due to their affinity, and it is its center. It resides there, from which harmful acts to the world occur, the explanation of which is lengthy.

Then it goes to the lower purgatories of torment, then to the greater torment. Some of them, with fewer sins, respond to the call of some prophets, submit, remain, serve as pure helpers of the saints, and rescue those in hardship from among them.

Once they have completed their service and deserve recompense, they join the vegetable kingdom, then come to the praised ascension from mineral, plant, and animal to human forms, and then they respond and ascend.

This summarizes the matter of "taswir" (the forming or imaging of spirits).

Returning to the topic of the return of the body and soul of the opposite (the opponent):

When the image departs and the body is buried after the soul has dispersed from it, the soul disperses in the body but does not leave the image, nor the remaining breeze it once inhaled, which is called the "airy soul." This soul departs from all animal bodies at death.

When buried, the body decays and breaks down in the earth, and each part returns to its corresponding mother element: yellow bile to fire, blood to air, phlegm to water, and black bile to earth—all preserved by the power of the Divine Director, exalted is He.

Then what has risen joins and becomes rain falling among others, and what dissolves returns to the earth, which then nourishes plants for those who deserve to have them and for some types of the purgatory of torment.

The first of these is like the Zanj and their kind. When the male and female reproduce from it, that food appears evil like its parents, and it remains for the time it deserves, then dies.

Its soul disperses in its body, which first reflects it; then on return, the soul in its body becomes dense with sins and becomes a body for itself. Then it dies and dissolves like the first time, becoming a plant nourished by those who deserve it in the world, such as monkeys, wildcats, and bears.

Then it returns again and transforms like the first time, descending to lower levels, nourished by creatures like apes and dogs.

In sum, it goes into all the reprehensible animal forms. When this is complete, it is in the purgatory of torment in plants, then returns to reprehensible minerals like asphalt, sulfur, iron, lead, and their likes.

It completes its due among minerals, all by transformation again and again.

Its first attainment of animal forms is by transformation, nourishment, and birth—not as the people of reincarnation imagine, that the soul moves from the dead body to a newborn body at birth. That is error and ignorance and must not be believed. Its believer is doomed and cursed.

After completing the torment in these purgatories, the lowest torment, it dissolves from its last state near the rising of the Qa'im (the one to be mentioned, peace be upon him), joins the vegetable kingdom, is nourished by those like him among humans, and emerges as a human person.

When the Qa'im rises (peace be upon him), it encounters what preceded it, is made to weep by his actions, then it is slaughtered and burned by fire descending from the ether.

Afterward, it follows the path to prison, remaining in the greater torment for the duration of the great cycles, which is three hundred sixty thousand years multiplied by itself.

May God protect us all and the believers from this by His power and might, by the right of Muhammad and his family, peace be upon them all.

This concerns the major opposites, the great sinners, and the wicked evildoers. As for the rest of the common masses and the lowly rabble, they do not reach that state by the justice of God Almighty, for He recompenses everyone according to their deeds. Indeed, when a

commoner dies, their soul remains diffused within their body and does not depart except for the airy soul mentioned earlier. Then it decomposes and becomes part of the mentioned intermediate states (barāzikh) according to what they deserve based on their actions—whether some or all of it. Then it returns upward by transformation and rebirth to the human form, and the invitation (to faith) is presented again; if they respond, they are saved, otherwise, they are returned to what they deserve due to their deeds the second time. For God Almighty is just and does not wrong His servants nor break His promise.

The entire purpose of creation is to extract it from the sin and denial into which it has fallen. Whoever is purified ascends, and whoever refuses and opposes the limits falls back and descends. Therefore, be diligent, O brother, in righteous deeds and in lightening your sins. Do not be deceived by this world, for it is fleeting. Act as our master, the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him), said: “Lighten your load so you may keep up, for what is awaited for your first is the coming of your last.” Know this well.

This is a hidden secret entrusted to you, so guard it and God will protect you. Keep it from everyone except those I have mentioned to you; may God preserve you. God is the Trustee over what we say, and is a Witness over you. You are responsible for fulfilling this trust. Be very cautious not to alter or copy anything from it, not even a letter.

We ask God Almighty to grant us and you success in His pleasure, and to conclude for us and for all our brothers with goodness. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. May God’s blessings be upon our Master Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, and upon our Master Ali ibn Abi Talib, the most noble of the successors, and upon the Imams from their pure and righteous progeny, and upon our Master and Lord, the Tayyib Imam Abi al-Qasim Amir al-Mu’minin. And may abundant peace and blessings be upon them.

God is sufficient for us, and He is the best Disposer of affairs, the best Protector, the best Helper. There is no power nor strength except with God, the Most High, the Most Great.

This noble treatise—the Treatise on Origin and Return—was completed copying on the computer on the 24th of Jumada al-Akhira, Sunday, year 1423 AH (corresponding to 2002 AD), by the help and grace of His Guardian (peace be upon him) and the grace of His Dawah, the eminent caller our Master Muhammad Burhan al-Din—may God prolong his noble life until the Day of Judgment.