

Majmū‘ al-Tarbiyah, Part Two

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

Praise belongs to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen.

A Discussion Concerning Divine Unity

If it is asked, “Does God have a dhāt (essence/substance)?” it is said: **No**. The dhāt is that which can accept a form, whereas God is exalted above that.

And if it is asked, “Does God have a will?” it is said: **No**. Will is an accident, and such a thing is not appropriate to God, the Exalted.

And if it is asked, “Does God have knowledge?” it is said: If He has knowledge, this would require that the things known by Him be eternal along with Him. For knowledge is the apprehension of the realities of existing things as they actually are, and knowledge does not pertain to anything that does not exist.

Then, in that case, His knowledge must either be of the same kind as our knowledge, or it must not be of the same kind as our knowledge.

If it is of the same kind as our knowledge, then our knowledge is originated, and therefore His knowledge would be originated.

But if His knowledge is not of the same kind as our knowledge, this would require that the thing known by Him be different from what is known by us, to the extent that what is an accident for us would be a substance for Him; or that a knife would be a knife for us while it would be a mat for Him. And that is impossible.

And if it is asked, “Is God, the Exalted, existent or nonexistent?” it is said: *mawjūd* (existent) is on the pattern of *maf‘ūl* (something acted upon), and likewise *ma‘dūm* (nonexistent).

Therefore, if it is said that He is existent or nonexistent, this would imply that He is something acted upon. Yet God is exalted and far above what the wrongdoers say.

The existent is that which exists in actuality, while the nonexistent is that which exists potentially. And if the existent and nonexistent are two categories of existence, then neither category is appropriate to God, the Exalted.

The objector to matters such as these is therefore obliged to learn from one who possesses knowledge, and not to object concerning something about which he has no right to speak except on the basis of clear evidence.

And peace.

Chapter

If the sincere people of religion knew the greatness of their position and the exaltedness of their rank among those possessing the higher degrees of sanctity—those of the spiritual, psychic, and spiritual realms—they would prefer what they possess of religious devotion over all the benefits of this world.

They would increase in humility, reverence, unity, and cooperation in righteousness and piety. Their delight, happiness, and joy would increase at the shining of their lights, at what God has raised of their ranks, and at what they are continually increasing in at every moment: true knowledge, pure and free from impurity.

Their exalted fathers and mothers rejoice in them, and they strive to perfect their spiritual faculties, just as God, Glorious and Exalted, says:

“And they rejoice concerning those who have not yet joined them.”

And the believer does not wish for his brother except what he wishes for himself.

Would any of you be pleased for a child to be born before it was complete, with its limbs incomplete? Rather, he strives to the extent of his ability through proper care, nourishment, and medicine.

If the time, the mineral, the seed, the receptivity, and the divine success all come together, the result of the perfected process is a **sun**. If something falls short, then it is a **moon**; otherwise it is a **star**, or something below that, or **lead**, or burnt dross, when an error occurs and a thing is placed where it does not belong.

So how could one who is more capable than us, the Lord of the worlds, be pleased for children to reach Him incomplete, with some of their limbs lacking, when He is more capable of perfecting them than they are themselves?

The practitioners of the mineral craft have said that when the mercury is pure, the sulfur is refined, the time is moderate, the process is perfected, and the craftsman is intelligent and experienced, the result is a pure **mineral sun**.

If something falls short and this occurs at the time of the full moon, the result of the process becomes a **moon**.

And according to the degree of divine success, so it will be, with the help and will of God.

And God is the helper in His obedience.

May God bless our master Muhammad, his progeny, and his purified family.

This is the Majlis al-Mu’ayyadī

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

Praise be to God, who makes ease follow hardship; who grants victory to His friends; who sends forth the winds of His mercy, announcing triumph and victory before them as glad tidings; who splits the seed and the date-stone; who accepts deeds according to intentions, so that every person shall have what he intended; who casts the spirit upon whomever He wills of His servants, so that he may warn of the Day of Meeting—the day when they will be brought forth to stand for the judgment of their destiny.

His bounty is abundant, His kindness immense, His grasp severe, and His taking painful. He created everything, and He has knowledge of all things.

May God bless Muhammad, the best of the messengers whom He sent to His creation, whose religion is upright, whose character is magnificent, and whose path is straight.

God, Glorious and Exalted, said:

“There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; he is concerned for you, and toward the believers he is compassionate and merciful.”

And upon his successor, the best of successors, the one who is the divider between the Fire and Paradise: ‘**Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib**, by whose sword the pillar of Islam was strengthened and the pillar of disbelief was demolished; whose exposition of knowledge veiled those who wore the

clouds of ambiguity; and upon the Imams from his descendants, who are stars of guidance and missiles against the devils.

O company of believers, may God make you among those for whom the purest portion of knowledge and wisdom has become drink and nourishment, so that they stand in the stations of those who speak, each of whom has a known station.

Seek refuge in God from a people who say with their mouths that they are Shi'a, while they are among the worst vanguard of disbelief and irreligion.

They ride the mount of permissiveness, incline toward ease, and say that all obligatory commands are merely symbols pointing toward certain things; once those things are understood, the acts of worship and religious obligations fall away.

Woe to them on the day when sorrow overtakes them from above and regret overwhelms them.

They continue with this doctrine until they loosen every bond of the religious law and plunge into the worst form of desire by permitting what has been prohibited.

We seek refuge in God from that.

O company of believers, awaken from the sleep of heedlessness and stop wandering in the valley of error, before death awakens you by bringing your appointed time to completion, and before the army of death surges against you and its violent winds rage—the army whose force is composed of the dust of bodies.

Build, through sound knowledge and righteous deeds, a house in Paradise, beautifully preserved and furnished.

For here are the houses of your bodies already announcing their ruin and collapse.

Pray and fast before you find neither night nor day in which to pray and fast.

Give alms before you find wealth from which to give alms.

Perform the pilgrimage and strive before you find a mount upon which you can travel.

Prepare yourselves for the arrival of death, for there is already an advance guard and watchman over you.

Prepare yourselves for its sudden leap, for its garment is new.

It is as though it has already seized you by the throats, grasping you by the necks and extending its hand over the middle of the paths.

Yet you remain distracted, heedless in your confusion, unaware of what is intended for you.

You are occupied with the affairs of your worldly life and surrendered to its desires.

You turn away from the reminder and are cut off from hearing.

Is there among you one who is awake? One who listens? One who takes warning? One who obeys?

Ah, ah! How wisdom departs and is lost!

Ah, ah! What is the matter with souls that neither hear nor obey?

Why are your hearts harder than stones?

No! Rather, a covering has come upon your hearts, while the soul is indeed commanding toward evil.

Otherwise, where is the nourishment of knowledge within you, so that your virtues may become manifest?

Where is the bringing forth of righteous deeds, so that your scales may become heavy?

Why do you strip from yourselves the garment of piety to which you are entitled, and instead clothe yourselves in the excuse of your own shortcomings?

Otherwise, where are the sacred rites of your worship?

Where is your eagerness to gather together in your assemblies and congregations?

Do you not take the Imams of your religion as examples, when you have from them lamps and signs?

And from their knowledge you possess clear proofs whose perceptible aspects testify to their rational meanings.

Yet after all this, heedlessness has struck your ears, and you remain unaware, in general, of what is intended for you and for your souls.

Your Imam is free of responsibility for the one who deliberately changes and substitutes, and free of responsibility from the one who, after knowledge has been made obligatory upon him, nullifies it.

You have been called upon to add knowledge to action, so that knowledge may be the spirit and action the body. Through their combination you live the life of truth, and through their uprightness you remain upright upon the path.

But those who wronged substituted a statement other than the one that had been said to them.

Know that your Imams make you beloved to God, the Exalted, through guidance and remembrance.

Therefore, do not make them hated by people through ugly deeds and consequences.

They embrace you with what will save you from the Fire, so do not make your deeds a path of disgrace against them.

Know that this is the month of **Rajab**. Its fortunate wing has reached you, and it has brought you success in whatever brings a servant closer to his Lord.

The servant's offering to his Lord is his drawing near through his bowing and prostration.

So glad tidings to the one from whom the month passes while he has received its goodness.

Blessed is the one from whom it departs while he has been endowed with knowledge and understanding.

Let whoever acts in it act according to what pleases God, and let the one who is sluggish and lazy lighten himself through good obedience during it.

Take advantage of these blessed days and nights, so that the tremendous burdens of sin may be lifted from you.

Devote yourselves to nightly prayer and fasting during the day.

With your determination, depart from the abode of destruction toward the abode of permanence by your own choice, before you are forcibly removed by compulsion and coercion.

For fortunate is the one whose heart is attached to the Hereafter and whose attachment and love for this world have been severed.

A Question Concerning Religious Obligation

A questioner asked about the reason God obligates His servants to obey Him, even though He has no need of their obedience, while they find it burdensome and exhausting.

He said:

“I am astonished at the statement of one who claims that the reason He made it obligatory upon us is in order to make reward obligatory. God, Exalted is He, was certainly able to have mercy upon His servants and admit them into His Paradise without making them undergo hardship, and He was capable of doing so.”

The respondent answered:

“I too have an equal wonder that I wish to present to you.

God has withheld from His servants the provisions sufficient for them except through the sweat of the brow, through acquisition and seeking.

Yet He was capable of providing for them without effort or seeking.

This is analogous to what you have mentioned.

If you do not find this astonishing, then there is no reason to be astonished at that.

And if both matters astonish you, then you ought to begin your astonishment with whichever of the two is closer in its ruling.”

The questioner said:

“You have taken me from one perplexity into two perplexities, and placed upon me two responsibilities where I had one.”

The respondent said:

“When the person questioned points from the unseen to something witnessed, he has fulfilled the right of conveying the answer and fulfilled the requirement of clarification.”

The questioner then said:

“What is the reason that prevents these two things from being obtained except through exertion, despite the vastness of God's power to provide without toil?”

He said:

“I have also been asked this question, by someone who had not fulfilled the right of examining and contemplating the matter.

The provision which you attribute to cutting off and withholding is the provision of one whose situation makes it impossible for him to continue giving it—either because his ability has stopped, or because an error by the giver necessitates the cessation of his giving.

A giver who withholds is condemned by everyone and in every religious community.

God, the Exalted, is far above such a thing.

If you ask, ‘Is there a provider other than Him?’ I say: No—except in a remote, derivative sense.

For provision which can only exist through the earth and water, which arises through the influence of the sun, moon, and stars, and through the activity of the farmer, cannot simply be called God's provision in an absolute sense because of all these intermediaries.

Rather, His provision is that which is purified from these intermediaries and made free of them.

Thus your question has become defective from its very foundation, and you have begun constructing one layer upon another, moving from one wonder to another.”

There are, moreover, causes that necessitate the world being constituted in this particular manner.

And since the world has been constituted in this way because of the causes mentioned, it is necessary that the religious law be constituted according to the likeness of the world, so that creation and command correspond to one another—the two of which God, Exalted is He, mentioned:

“Unquestionably, His are the creation and the command.”

Therefore, the people of the religious law are charged with obligations for the interests of the Hereafter, just as obligation is necessary for the interests of worldly life.

This demonstrates that the origin of the command brought to them corresponds exactly to the origin from which creation itself came.

Just as there is no provision without hardship and effort, there is no reward without hardship and effort.

Whoever attempts to change the ruling of the religious law must therefore begin by changing creation itself.

And it may also be said to the one who is obligated:

Before you were charged with worshipping your Lord, were you not charged by your parents who gave birth to you—or by others who cared for you—to take up a profession or learn a craft by which you could live?

Was that obligation something which, had you been left without it, would have resulted in your ruin?

He must answer: **Yes.**

Then it is said:

When you accepted that obligation, was its usefulness and benefit for you, or for the one who obligated you?

It must be said: **For you.**

Then it is said:

The same is true of the obligation imposed upon the person of the religious law.

It was something which, had he been left without it, would have resulted in his ruin.

Therefore he was charged with what would guide him toward the Hereafter, and its benefit belongs to him.

If you say:

“His parents were unable to benefit him except through obligation, while God was capable of benefiting him without it, as you claim—and this is the basis of my question,”

we say:

“Recall our statement that He was capable of providing for him without seeking or effort, yet He did not do so because of the causes whose explanation we have already given. This makes the correspondence between creation and command valid, so that the two examples correspond to one another.”

Furthermore, it may be said to the one who denies religious obligation:

Which would you prefer: that a receptive capacity for the form of knowledge be placed within you, so that you learn that you have a God to whom you will return and before whom you will be held accountable—or that such a capacity not be placed within you?

If he says, “**Do not give me that capacity,**” then he has chosen to be formed like the animals and to strip himself of the virtue of humanity.

If he says, “**Yes,**” then he has established the necessity of obligation.

For his soul is nobler than his body, and the body follows the soul.

Thus, when obligation to acquire knowledge is imposed upon the soul, obligation to worship is imposed upon the body.

For it is impossible for his soul to wander freely through the realm of the celestial kingdom while his body falls into the depths of animal existence, rushing after food and drink.

And when it is necessary for the soul to be purified through the teachings of divine unity, it is necessary for the body to be purified and disciplined through praiseworthy movements prescribed by the religious law, fulfilling the needs of the soul and keeping it away from whatever tarnishes it and distracts it from its worship.

Is it not fitting that the influence of a righteous soul upon the body should be greater than the influence of musk, which is enclosed in its musk-pod and spreads fragrance from it?

Another Argument

The human being occupies a middle position between the angels and the animal.

With respect to his soul, he is an angel **potentially**; with respect to his body, he is an animal **actually**.

Therefore, obligation must encompass what belongs to him in actuality through his body and what belongs to him potentially through his soul.

Through the union of his soul and body—one being actual and the other potential—he corresponds to the angels of God who exist in actuality, purified, glorifying Him.

God said:

“But if they are arrogant, then those who are with your Lord glorify Him night and day, and they do not become weary.”

May God make you among those who have suckled from the pearl of knowledge and wisdom, and who have gathered the pearls of words.

And praise belongs to God, who sent Muhammad with the manifest truth and supported him with the clear Book, and who made the Imams from his Household interpreters of the secret of His religion and those responsible for manifesting His proofs and evidences.

May God bless him, his brother and cousin, the one who removed his distress and grief, **‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib**, companion of the Qur'an and knight among the knights of the pulpit and battlefield.

And upon the Imams from his descendants, who are glory and nobility among the noblest tribe, and the means of approach intended by God, the Exalted, when He said:

“O you who believe, fear God and seek the means of approach to Him.”

And may He grant abundant peace.

God is sufficient for us, and He is the best disposer of affairs.

There is no power and no strength except through God, the Most High, the Almighty.

The Epistle of the Basmalah Concerning Knowledge of the Nineteen in Detail

Authored by our master ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Walīd, Qaddasa Allāhu Sirrah

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

“My success is only through God. Upon Him I rely, and to Him I turn in repentance.”

Praise be to God, who, whenever the preceding thoughts of intellects run through the field of investigation seeking to establish knowledge of Him, the hands of incapacity shoot at them arrows of inadequacy from the bow of separation and bewilderment. Thus they return restrained, unable to encompass the origin and manner of the first act of creation.

I praise Him with the praise of one incapable of describing and defining Him, turning toward Him through the abodes of His lights and His chosen purity.

And I testify that there is no god but God: whoever places upon Him the attribute of perception falls into the abyss of perception.

And I testify that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger, the finest sun to rise from the horizon of messengership, with angels visiting him through revelation and divine support, while divine beings aided him in bringing forth happiness and attaining the intended purpose of salvation.

May God bless him as stillness and movement alternate, and as monotheism and polytheism differ.

And upon his successor, who extends to his ally the means toward Paradise through the two divisions; he who, when the brave man confronts him, causes the courage of the brave to tremble.

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, liberator of souls from their chains and one who sets them free; one who chastises the lowly world and releases it.

And upon his wife and chosen bride, selected to receive his offspring and planting:

al-Zahrā’ al-Batūl Fāṭimah, whose knowledge is nourished from the milk of freedom from polytheism.

And upon those who sprang from that light, those who came from Mount Sinai:

al-Ḥasan, the veil; and **al-Ḥusayn**, the concealed martyr.

And upon **‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn**, the refuge of those who return to Him, and the punishment of those who deny and obstinately reject.

And upon the repository of knowledge explicitly designated by the Messenger—whose expression is expansive and whose exposition is established:

Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī, whose virtue God made manifest, raising him above every impurity and granting him distinction, and making him a direction of prayer for those who seek guidance.

And upon **Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq**, possessed of surpassing nobility, who opens what is closed in God's religion and closes what must be closed.

And upon **Ismā‘īl ibn Ja‘far**, possessor of the most luminous station and the most renowned virtue, who possesses the greatest share of honor, and whose allegiance restrains from indecency and wrongdoing.

And upon **Muḥammad, his son**, who is saved by the one who takes shelter beneath his shade, upon whom the abundant rain of his kindness pours, and whom the overflowing bounty of God's favor has sent forth, brought near and honored in His presence.

And upon those whom the darkness of concealment covered, whose radiant lights shine forth among their followers, whose connection continues at evening and dawn.

And upon the **sun of the West**, which illuminates that darkness and distress.

And upon the **Qā‘im by the command of God, the Fāṭimid, the devoted one**.

And upon his son, **al-Manṣūr**, possessor of renowned glory.

And upon **al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh**, possessor of abundant glory, guide to the straight path, **Ma‘add Abū Tamīm**.

And upon **al-‘Azīz bi-Allāh, al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, al-Zāhir li-l’zāz Dīn Allāh, al-Mustanṣir bi-Allāh, al-Musta‘lī bi-Allāh**, and **al-Āmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh**, who have been transferred to the abode of God's honor and descended into the courtyard of God's mercy.

They are the fathers of our master, the Commander of the Believers, whose guidance is clear to those who possess insight:

‘Abd Allāh, His friend and servant, the good Abū al-Qāsim, the Commander of the Believers, endowed with the Imamate in childhood and youth, the distinguisher between the living and the dead, the Imam of the age, the purest essence and the chosen one of the age, and the source of the water of life in meaning.

Through our arrival at it, we have been called and illuminated.

Peace be upon them all.

After this

O brothers—may God protect you.

I praise wakefulness, through which thought is illuminated, relying upon its decisive boundary that cuts the throats of doubt through the sharpness of explanation.

There is no doubt that whoever possesses it gathers from the fruit of its blessing something that increases light in his insight and grants him joy in his belief.

Especially one who spends his time with only a small amount of worldly living and does not squander the virtue of his time.

It has long been said:

“Fullness of the belly destroys intelligence.”

And excessive absorption in eating and drinking beyond one's need is a great disgrace.

When this is the case, and wakefulness accompanies him as a companion, a luminous light appears within his thought.

These words come from the least of the slaves of the slaves of the Imam, whom God has enveloped within the boundary containing His continuous favor—a favor that continually removes every doubt from him and pours upon him successive clouds of blessing.

That is the eminent, trustworthy, virtuous shaykh, the possessor of sharp understanding, by whom God has inhabited our Yemeni region with strongholds of religion and extended his hand in exposition and wisdom.

May God beautify our condition through his continued existence and protect us from wrongdoing through His grace and favors.

The aforementioned servant was freed from sleep by taking it as a mount for thought, and this brought him to an honorable secret and an exalted matter.

He presented his finding to him: if he approves of it, it is attributed to him; but if it is otherwise—and we seek refuge in God from that—then he seeks forgiveness for his own sin, error, fault, and slip.

The matter was that he reflected upon their statement concerning **the basmalah**, and upon the allusion of the people of esoteric designation to:

Bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm

“In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.”

He found that it is one word containing **seven letters**, like the seven letters of **Imamate**.

And from its letters—that is, the basmalah—**twelve letters** emerge through their spelling.

When these are added to the seven letters, the total is:

$$7 + 12 = 19.$$

These are the letters of:

Bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm

which are four words, although by another numerical correspondence they return to **five**, corresponding to what is five in number.

For example:

Muḥammad ‘Alī Fāṭimah Ḥasan Ḥusayn

which totals **nineteen letters**.

And when we say **basmalah**, it is five letters, corresponding to the number of the letters of **Imamate**.

From the letters of *Imamate*, when they are spelled out, **nine** emerge.

From the letters of *basmalah*, **eight** emerge.

Thus:

$$9 + 8 = 17$$

corresponding to the number of rak‘ahs in the five obligatory prayers, and to the number of letters in the sacred Imami sign—may God's blessings be upon its source.

The number **five** is the recurring number whose examples are numerous.

For example, in the realm of social arrangement, there can only be a guardian with two witnesses, and a husband and wife.

And in the realm of nature, that which is composed of the four elements/temperaments has a **fifth power** permeating it and carrying it within itself.

The philosophers have said:

“When a thing appears, its opposite is concealed within it.”

Thus, when the **hot and moist** appears, the **cold and dry** is concealed within it, and the fifth power carries them all.

And when we say:

hot, moist, cold, dry, combined

that is **nineteen letters**.

And when we say:

yellow bile, black bile, blood, phlegm, chyle

that is **nineteen letters**.

And when we say:

ma’dhūn, dā’ī, bāb, ḥujjah, imām

that is **nineteen letters**.

These are five ranks, corresponding to the five letters of *basmalah* and the five letters of *imāmah*.

And when we say:

Salmān, Miqdād, Abū Dharr, ‘Ammār

that is **nineteen letters**, like the letters of:

Bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm.

Thus the meaning of the statement of the eminent and trustworthy shaykh, Ja‘far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman—may God exalt his sanctity—becomes clear:

“When you write five, you find it to be four letters; and when you write four, you find it to be five letters.”

So reflect upon this, my brother, and examine these examples.

And consider their statement:

“Their beginning occurs in their end.”

And consider the statement of the author of *Sarā’ir al-Ma‘ād wa-l-Ma‘āsh* at the beginning of his book:

“In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate: the opening of beginnings, the Wise Remembrance, the miracle of the repeated verses, and the Great Qur'an.”

Then, if we multiply **five by nineteen**, the result is:

$$5 \times 19 = 95$$

This is the number contained within the letters of the word “if” (*idhā*), where:

- kāf = 20
- lām = 30
- mīm = 40
- hā’ = 5

And the letters of the word “four” total:

99

which is the number of the **Names of God**.

Every **Nāṭiq, Waṣī**, and **Imam** is a “word.”

God said:

“O Mary, God gives you good news of a Word from Him; his name is the Messiah.”

And God said:

“Like a grain that produces seven ears, in every ear are one hundred grains.”

It has been transmitted in esoteric interpretation that the **seven ears** refer to the **seven Imams**, and that each Imam has one hundred ranks/limits.

Thus the word contains **ninety-nine**, which completes one hundred.

For this reason, **Ḥamīd al-Dīn**—may God sanctify him—corresponded them with **two hundred**.

The examples are numerous, as it has been said:

“In everything there is a sign indicating that He is One.”

And our word “one” (*wāḥid*) also contains nineteen:

wāw + alif + ḥā’ + dāl

for it is an odd-and-even number, **nineteen**.

This is because the Imam is **one in his age**, and he has united within himself these seven and twelve ranks.

The eminent and trustworthy shaykh, **Ja’far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman**, may God sanctify his spirit and grant us his intercession, said:

“From four, when spelled out, seven emerge; and from seven, twelve emerge.”

He pointed toward this aspect because **wāḥid** consists of four letters.

Chapter

This number—**nineteen**—has encompassed all existing things in their entirety.

For we say:

Ten Intellects + nine celestial spheres = 19.

And:

Seven planets + twelve zodiacal signs = 19.

And:

First, ascendant, seventh, tenth, fourth = 19.

And:

Fire + air + water + earth = 19.

And:

Mineral + plant + animal = 19.

And in the human being there are **seven openings**:

two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and a mouth.

And **twelve other bodily parts**:

two feet, two legs, two knees, two thighs, a belly, two hands, and a head.

Thus:

7 + 12 = 19.

The human being is:

living + speaking + responding

which is nineteen.

And:

ma'dhūn + dā'ī + bāb + ḥujjah + imām

which is nineteen.

And:

pen + tablet + jadd + faṭḥ + khayāl

which is nineteen.

It was said by our master, the Commander of the Believers, 'Alī, peace be upon him:

"Whoever mentions the basmalah over food that he eats will not be harmed by it, even if it contains deadly poison."

Ibn al-Kawwā' said:

"O Commander of the Believers, I did this with food that I ate, yet it caused me pain."

He said:

"Perhaps you ate different kinds of food and did not mention *Bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* over each kind."

He said:

"Yes, that was indeed the case."

Chapter

Then we construct a circle in which we demonstrate the correspondence between the ranks of **natural creation** and the ranks of **religious creation**, since the human being is the culmination of his natural creation in the ranks of his religious creation.

We make the pole/center of this circle **Muḥammad**, peace and blessings of God be upon him, because he is the foundation upon which reliance rests and toward whom support is directed. His name itself encompasses the number.

When we say **mīm**, it consists of three letters, corresponding to the letters of **Ādam**, the first of the Nāṭiqs.

When we say **ḥā'**, it is eight.

Thus:

$$8 + 3 = 11$$

and we remove the first number, **one**, for the first of the Nāṭiqs.

The third letter of his name is **mīm**, corresponding to **Ibrāhīm**, peace be upon him, because he is the third of the Nāṭiqs.

It is also the third of the places of the number **one hundred**, and **mīm** is the first letter of *mi'ah* ("one hundred").

The fourth letter of his name is **dāl**, which is four according to the calculation of *abjad*, corresponding to **Mūsā**, peace be upon him, the fourth of the Nāṭiqs, just as **alif** is the fourth of the places of number.

When we double/emphasize the third letter of the name Muḥammad, peace be upon him—which is **mīm**—it becomes the fifth, which is **ʿTsā**.

Its corresponding numerical position is **ten thousand**.

The sixth corresponds to **Muḥammad**, [whose numerical value is] **one hundred thousand**.

And the **Qā'im**, peace be upon his mention, corresponds to **one million**.

This is the form of the circle, so that you may observe and understand it.

Know this and reflect.

In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. And through Him we seek assistance.

"So blessed is God, the best of creators."

We therefore find that the letters of the ranks of the **natural creation of the human being** correspond numerically to the letters of the ranks of his **religious creation**.

Likewise, they correspond to the letters of the **seven Nāṭiqs** and to the letters of the **seven obligatory religious duties** imposed upon him.

Chapter

The letters of **mustajīb** ("the respondent") are six.

This indicates that above him are **six ranks**, which emerge from the three letters of **Ādam** when they are spelled out.

And from the letters of **sulālah** ("lineage/offspring"), which corresponds to both of them in natural creation, **nine** emerge when spelled out.

These are their letters.

Look, my brother, at this correspondence and equivalence.

The letters of **Nūḥ** are three.

From them, when spelled out, **five** emerge, which are the letters of **ma'dhūn**.

The first letter of *Nūḥ* is the last letter of *ma'dhūn*.

Their correspondence in natural creation is **the sperm-drop (nuṭfah)**.

Its first letter is the first letter of *Nūḥ*, and from it, when spelled out, five letters emerge, just as five emerge from *Nūḥ*.

These are the five letters of *ma'dhūn*, bearing witness that above it are **five ranks**.

Thus we find **Ibrāhīm** in four sections/letters, if the alif is counted.

It corresponds to the letters of **dā'ī**, from which seven emerge when spelled out.

These are the letters of Ibrāhīm.

Their correspondence in natural creation is **the clot ('alaqah)**, which consists of four letters and from which seven emerge when spelled out, just as from Ibrāhīm.

The four letters of *dā'ī* indicate that above him are **four ranks**.

And we find **Mūsā** consisting of four letters.

His correspondence in religious creation is **bāb**, from whose letters four emerge when spelled out, just as from Mūsā.

Their correspondence in natural creation is **the morsel/fetal mass (muḍghah)**, whose letters correspond to those of Mūsā.

Seven emerge from its letters when spelled out, corresponding to the letters of *bāb* and what emerges from them.

Know this.

The letters of **bāb** are three, indicating that above him are **three ranks**.

And we find the letters of **'Īsā**, peace be upon him, are four, from which seven emerge when spelled out.

Its correspondence in natural creation is **the bones**, whose letters are four, like those of *'Īsā*, and seven emerge from them when spelled out.

Thus:

$$7 + 7 = 14.$$

Their corresponding rank is **Dhū Miṣṣah**, whose letters are five, and nine emerge from them when spelled out.

Thus:

$$5 + 9 = 14.$$

The correspondence and equivalence are therefore established.

The five letters of *Dhū Miṣṣah* indicate that he contains the four ranks of the bones beneath him, since he corresponds to the bones covered with flesh.

And we find the letters of **Muḥammad**, peace and blessings be upon him, are four.

His correspondence in natural creation is **flesh**, which consists of three letters, from which five letters emerge when spelled out.

Likewise, their corresponding rank is **ḥujjah**, which consists of five letters.

And the seventh natural creation is another creation.

When we say **Imam**, it consists of six letters because it has incorporated the six.

The letters of **ḥujjah** are three, indicating that he has acquired what was possessed by the *bāb*.

He contains five because five emerged from *Dhū Miṣṣah*.

Likewise, **the Qā'im** consists of six.

Thus the correspondence and equivalence are established.

Praise be to God.

And may God bless Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets and Master of the Messengers; his successor, the noblest of successors; and the Imams from his purified descendants.

And peace.

A Good Narrative

It is related that in the days of **Plato the Wise** there was a madman who was deeply absorbed [in thought] and who had some fine and remarkable sayings. The people called him **Maṭrūsh**, and the boys would amuse themselves by tormenting him.

He fled until he entered the square/compound of Plato, whom he found sitting with his students.

He approached him, greeted him, and said:

“O wise man, give me food and give me sweet drink, so that I may present to you words which are measures of wisdom and jewels of philosophy.”

So Plato gave him what he requested.

The madman said:

“Now the obligation of hospitality has been fulfilled and confirmed, O wise man.

Did this soul descend from the heights to the lowlands by its own choice? Or, by divine will, did it leave that spiritual center and intellectual world and descend into these composite bodies made from the impurities of earthly elements?

Or did its Creator become angry with it and punish it by causing it to inhabit these lowly bodies and filthy vessels?

Or did its Creator desire to honor it, discipline it, purify it, complete it, and use it to complete what was deficient among earthly intelligibles?

Or is it returning to its luminous dwelling places?

Or does it circulate within these darknesses and blazing fires?

Or is it fixed, revolving through the spheres, moving through the composition of the cycles?”

Plato said to **Maṭṭāwush, Aristotle, and the Greek shaykh**:

“Answer him.”

Aristotle immediately spoke:

“It descended through overflowing mercy, and through divine mercy it came down.

The necessary power separated it from the center, and its Creator supported it and illuminated it with the light of divine intellect, making it the spirit of the world and completing the forms through it.

It remains, returning to the manifest circle.

If it is free from impurity and defect, it draws near to the point.

But if it is rejected, it continues moving through the divisions of the lines.

Have you understood, or shall I tell you again?"

The madman danced, jumped, and ran about.

Plato said:

"Have you understood the nature of this madman's soul?"

The Greek shaykh said:

"It is a pure, rational soul afflicted with a corrupt body. They are the souls to which Pythagoras referred."

He said:

"This is it."

The madman departed and entered Aristotle's house. He remained with him for some time, then said to him:

"Is there a remedy, O wise man?"

He answered:

"Your illness is your body, and its remedy is that it should perish and that your soul should join the divine realm."

The madman said:

"This is the medicine of every wise man."

Another Account

It is related that **twelve bābs**, from twelve different islands, gathered at the door of our master **al-‘Azīz bi-Allāh**, peace be upon him, asking permission to enter.

When they appeared before him, they prostrated themselves—all except one of them, who was from **Sind**.

He said:

"By your light in my recognition of you, and by what is within you I glorify you.

Through knowing myself, I have known you.

Glorified, glorified am I! I am you, and you are I.

There is no difference except in the rank of precedence."

Our master al-‘Azīz bi-Allāh said:

"O Sindī, the people are like Kabul: a hundred, yet there is not a single mount among them."

Socrates said:

"O captives of death, set your souls free through divine wisdom."

And it was said:

"The vessel is served. Whoever serves something other than his own essence is not free."

It was asked of Plato:

“What does philosophy require?”

He said:

“Intelligence, love, perseverance, sufficiency, the opener, and length of life.”

From the Words of the Commander of the Believers

The Commander of the Believers, peace be upon him, said:

“God has servants whom He singles out for blessings for the benefit of His servants.

He leaves those blessings in their hands so long as they give them.

But when they withhold them, He takes them away from them and transfers them to others.”

Luqmān the Wise

It is related that **Luqmān the Wise's son** said to him:

“O divine wise man, learned in God, spiritual soul—you have given life to souls, uncovered for them the light of morning, kindled within souls the knowledge of the lamp, and struck the flint of intelligence through beautiful counsel and righteousness.

I want you to teach me what made the righteous noble, what gave the knowers their excellence, what purified those who were certain, and what distinguished the believers.”

He said to him:

“My son, they turned toward religion with their whole being and gave it the greatest share of their hearts.

They preserved it in the highest place of their hearts and minds.

They devoted the length of their lives to it, emptied their thoughts and innermost secrets for it, and allowed no distraction to occupy them from it, night or day.

Until they prepared a resting place for their souls within it.

From it they acquired the noblest provision and sustenance, strengthened themselves with the strongest equipment and foundation, and attained from its secrets the finest promise and preparation.

Through this they became deserving of nearness to the Lord in the abode of return.

My son, your religion—your religion! Give it the greatest share of your heart and you will attain through it success from your Lord.

Make it your companion in solitude and your companion in sleep and wakefulness.

Do not allow it to leave your thoughts, nor let it disappear from your innermost self.

For it polishes hearts covered with rust, gives life to souls from harmful illnesses, refines noble intellects, and raises them to lofty degrees.”

His son said:

"I would like to ask you about matters that have passed through my thoughts and arisen within my innermost self. So grant me the answer to them and uncover from my heart the dense secret and its veil."

The wise man said:

"Ask whatever you wish, and I will answer you, God willing, Exalted is He."

He said:

"What is the noblest provision that souls store for the abode of return?"

The Beneficent One answered:

"Knowledge of the Worshipped One, obedience to the religious boundaries, and recognition of the nobility of the knowledge of existence."

He said:

"By what does the pure soul attain the perfection of the pleasures of reward?"

He answered:

"Through the perfection of the form of the holy soul and its separation from the whisperings of the sensory soul."

He said:

"By what does the soul attain perfection?"

He answered:

"By knowing the realities of religion and attaining knowledge of pure certainty."

He said:

"By what does the soul acquire everlasting existence?"

He answered:

"By becoming refined through the essence of the finest forms of knowledge and teachings."

He said:

"By what does the soul deserve immortality in the abode of its return?"

He answered:

"By accepting the effusion of generosity and knowing the effusion of the knowledge of the Generous One."

He said:

"By what does it rise to the kingdom of heaven, move through the vastness of space, and perceive everything above and below?"

He answered:

"By freeing itself from the bond of nature, riding the Burāq of the religious law, and standing by itself in the lofty stations."

He said:

"By what does the soul become refined and its lights shine?"

He answered:

"When it knows its own essence, comprehends what is known to it, beholds its light, and its veil and what was hidden concerning its deficiencies are unveiled."

He said:

“By what does it attain special distinction?”

He answered:

“Through good intention and pure sincerity.”

He said:

“By what does the soul become deserving of dwelling beside the Lord of the Lord?”

He answered:

“Through perfection in virtues and purification from every impurity and blame.”

He said:

“By what does the soul reach these universal virtues, become acquainted with these hidden secrets and religious teachings, and ascend these lofty stations?”

He answered:

“Through obeying its **present Imam**, who exists in its time, and fearing his anger in both its private and public conduct.

It should know that he is aware of the hidden aspects of its condition.

It should know him with true knowledge, be sincere toward him in its allegiance and love, and expend every effort in serving and honoring him.

For his command is the command of God, and obedience to him is obedience to God.

Fortunate is the one who knows him, and wretched is the one who is ignorant of him.

May God protect us from ignorance, through His grace and mercy.”

Praise belongs to God alone.

May God bless our master Muhammad and his family, and grant them peace.

The Report of Tamīm

A man named **Tamīm** entered upon the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and said:

“O Messenger of God, show me the keys to righteousness.”

The Prophet said:

“Seek knowledge.

For spending a night exhausted in the pursuit of knowledge is better than spending a night exhausted in mobilization in the path of God.”

He said:

“O Messenger of God, I already know the reward and recompense of the martyr.”

The Prophet said:

“His reward belongs to himself.

But the learned person is like a lamp: whoever surrounds it takes light from it.”

He said:

“O Messenger of God, I fear that I may acquire knowledge without acting upon it.”

The Prophet said:

“O Tamīm, spending a night having acquired one hundred chapters of knowledge is better than spending a night having acquired one hundred horses with which you intend to fight in the path of God.

Or did you not know that the knowledge possessed by the learned person restrains him? Whenever he intends to violate one of God's sacred limits, the knowledge he possesses restrains him.

This is better than seven expeditions—and seventy.

By God, O Tamīm, spending a night with knowledge spread beneath you or using it as your pillow is better than mastering the Qur'an while not knowing its reward from its punishment except through knowledge.

And a God-fearing scholar is better and more beloved to me before God than thirty friends, all of whom recite the Qur'an, spend the night in prayer, and fast during the day.”

A Good Narrative from the People of the Household

From **Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq**, peace be upon him, that he said:

“Learn knowledge, for learning it is a good deed, seeking it is worship, studying and discussing it is glorification, teaching it to one who learns it is charity, and giving it to those worthy of it is an act of drawing near [to God].

For knowledge is the beacon of the path of the people of Paradise, the companion in loneliness and solitude, the companion in foreign lands, the guide in prosperity and adversity, and the weapon against enemies.

Through it God raises peoples, making them leaders and Imams in goodness, whose traces are followed, whose actions are imitated, and whose opinions are consulted.

The angels desire their companionship and wipe them with their wings.

Every moist and dry thing, the fish of the sea and its creatures, the beasts of the land and its livestock, pray blessings upon them.

For knowledge is the life of the heart from ignorance, the lamp of sight from darkness, and the strength of bodies from weakness.

Through knowledge one reaches the stations of the righteous and the highest degrees in this world and the Hereafter.

Reflection is equivalent to fasting, and studying it is equivalent to keeping vigil in prayer.

Through it family ties are joined, the lawful and unlawful are known.

It is the leader of action, while action follows it.

God inspires the fortunate with it and withholds it from the wretched.”

Thus it was completed.

From Our Master al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī

It is related that he said to a man:

“O man, do not pursue your livelihood with the struggle of one who seeks to overpower [fate], nor rely upon destiny with the reliance of one who surrenders helplessly.

Seeking bounty is part of the Sunnah, and moderation/elegance in seeking is part of chastity.

Chastity does not repel provision, nor does seeking bring bounty, because provision is apportioned and the appointed term is fixed.

Excessive greed brings sin.”

Our master, the Commander of the Believers, peace be upon him, said:

“They do not abandon any matter of their religion for the sake of improving their worldly life except that God opens for them something greater than it.”

And among his words:

“To proceed:

Trials have endpoints at which they come to an end.

Therefore, the path of the intelligent person is to be patient through them.

For movement before their appointed duration has ended only increases their power over him rather than diminishing it.”

The Report Concerning Şiffin

It is related that an old man attended **Şiffin** with the Commander of the Believers.

He said to him:

“O Commander of the Believers, tell me about our journey toward Syria. Was our journey by the decree and destiny of God?”

He said:

“Yes, O brother of the people of Syria.

By Him who split the seed and created the soul, we did not set foot anywhere, descend into a valley, or ascend a hill except by a decree from God and His destiny.”

The Syrian man said:

“With God I reckon my hardship, O Commander of the Believers. I do not think that I have any reward for my effort if God decreed and destined it for me.”

He replied:

“God, Exalted is He, has magnified your reward for your journey while you were traveling, and for your remaining while you were remaining.

You were not in any of your states compelled, forced, or coerced into them.”

The Syrian said:

“How can that be, when decree and destiny drove us, and by them were our journey and our return?”

He replied:

“Woe to you, O brother of the people of Syria!

Perhaps you imagined an unavoidable decree and an absolute destiny.

Had that been so, reward and punishment would be invalidated; the promise and warning would fall away; and God's commands and prohibitions would have no meaning.

The one who does good would not deserve the reward of goodness more than the one who does evil, nor would the evil-doer deserve punishment for sin more than the doer of good.

That is the doctrine of the worshippers of idols, the party of Satan, the opponents of the Merciful, and the false witnesses—the Qadariyya of this community and its Magians.

God commanded His servants while giving them choice, and prohibited them as a warning.

He imposed difficult obligations, yet gave abundant reward for little.

He was not obeyed under compulsion, nor was He disobeyed because He had been overpowered.

He did not burden them with what they were incapable of.

He did not send the messengers in play, nor did He send down the Books to His servants in vain.

Nor did He create the heavens and earth and what lies between them without purpose.

That is the assumption of those who disbelieve, so woe to those who disbelieve because of the Fire.”

The Syrian said:

“Then what are the decree and destiny by which our journey occurred and from which it proceeded?”

He said:

“The command and judgment of God, Exalted is He, concerning it.”

Then he recited God's saying:

“And the command of God is a decree determined.”

The Syrian man stood up, joyful and happy upon hearing these words, and said:

“You have relieved me. May God relieve you, O Commander of the Believers.”

Then he composed:

**You are the Imam whom, through our obedience, we hope
to receive forgiveness from the Merciful on the Day of Judgment.**

**You have clarified for us from our religion what had been obscure;
may your Lord reward you with goodness for your goodness.**

The narrative is complete.

It is transmitted from the book **al-Ghurar wa-l-Durar** by **al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā**. May God pardon us and him through His grace and mercy.

Aristotle Said

“Whoever has a balanced constitution, the influence of the soul upon him becomes strong. Whoever has a strong influence of the soul within him, his aspiration rises toward what he approves.

Whoever's aspiration rises toward what he approves becomes adorned with human virtues.

Whoever becomes adorned with human virtues perceives divine intelligibles.

Whoever perceives divine intelligibles exists insofar as he is a human being, without existing insofar as he is an animal.

Whoever exists insofar as he is a human being, without existing insofar as he is an animal, has cast off his material nature.

Whoever casts off his material nature has his natural obstacles removed.

Whoever has his natural obstacles removed acquires formal existence after death.

Whoever acquires formal existence after death has reached the ultimate goal at which humanity stops, and there is no further ascent for anyone after that.”

God is sufficient for us, and He is the best disposer of affairs.

May His blessings be upon His Messenger, our master Muhammad, and his purified Imams from his family.

And peace be upon them all.

Chapter: The Difference Between Angels Potentially and Angels Actually

From the words of al-Nakhbashī

As for **angels potentially**, they are the **Mu’ayyadūn**—those who are supported [by divine aid]—because they are God's messengers to His creation.

The reason is that the word **malā’ikah** in the language means “messengers,” as does **alūk**.

Labīd ibn Rabī‘ah al-‘Āmirī said:

“And a boy whom his mother sent as a messenger, and we gave him what he requested.”

The word **malak** is a shortened form of **malā’ik**, understood in the sense of “one sent as a messenger.”

The Arabs omitted the hamzah just as they omitted the hamzah in *yus’al* and made it *yusal*, and similar cases.

When the physical forms of the **Mu’ayyadūn** become corrupted, their spiritual forms emerge from the state of **potentiality** into the state of **actuality**.

Thus they become **angels actually**, after having been angels potentially.

They are the **angels brought near**, who do not disobey God in what He commands them and do what they are commanded.

God said:

“Had We made him an angel, We would have made him a man, and We would have confused for them what they themselves confuse.”

That means: a messenger who makes them among the **Mu’ayyadūn**—those who are angels potentially—possessing protection and soundness so that neither arrogance nor disobedience occurs from them, just as with the angels actually, who do not disobey God in what He commands them and do what they are commanded.

Thus what we have said is established:

The angels brought near are angels actually, while the other angels are angels potentially.

God said, confirming our statement:

“The Messenger has believed in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and the believers—all have believed in God, His angels...”

That is, the angels brought near, who are angels actually, because they are closer to God in rank than the others.

And:

“...His Books...”

meaning their revelation, their esoteric interpretation, their decisive and ambiguous passages, their outward and inward meanings.

And:

“...and His messengers...”

meaning the **Mu’ayyadūn**, who are angels potentially.

There is a clear distinction between angels potentially and angels actually:

The angels actually **cannot disobey God in any respect**.

But it is possible for an angel potentially to disobey God, oppose His command, and reject His signs, thereby becoming **Iblīs**, punished after having been an angel who was rewarded.

God likewise said:

“And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam,’ they prostrated, except Iblīs. He refused and was arrogant and became among the disbelievers.”

Had these angels been angels actually, none of them could have disobeyed God for even an instant, because of His statement:

“They do not disobey what He commands them, and they do what they are commanded.”

Another Aspect

Iblīs, Hārūt, and Mārūt, had they been angels actually, would not have opposed God's command or disobeyed Him.

For whoever among the angels disobeys God is unlike those concerning whom God denied disobedience when He said:

“They do not disobey God in what He commands them.”

Another Aspect

One distinction between angels potentially and angels actually is that the angels actually are the **angels brought near**, and they are superior to the angels potentially, who are the messengers.

The proof is that a group of Christians came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and said:

“You speak ill of our companion.”

He said:

“Who is your companion?”

They said:

“Jesus son of Mary.”

He said:

“What do I say?”

They said:

“You say that he is a servant of God.”

Then God revealed the verse establishing the superiority of the angels brought near over Jesus:

“The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God, nor would the angels brought near.”

In this there is evidence that the angels brought near are superior to the messengers.

For comparison with an inferior would be inappropriate in this context.

It is acceptable to say:

“So-and-so does not disdain to do such-and-such, nor does the prince,”

when the one used as the comparison is superior.

But if the one used as the comparison is inferior, the expression is considered inappropriate.

It would be like saying:

“The caliph does not disdain to do such-and-such, nor does the tailor.”

Since this is not appropriate, it follows that the angels actually are superior to the messengers.

What further confirms our statement is what God, Mighty and Exalted, says in two verses concerning **Noah** and **Muhammad**, peace and blessings be upon him.

In each case He says:

“Say: I do not tell you that I possess the treasures of God, nor that I know the unseen, nor do I tell you that I am an angel.”

Since it is unanimously accepted by the community that whoever possesses the treasures of God and whoever possesses knowledge of the unseen is superior, it follows that the angels actually are superior to them.

Another Aspect

What further confirms and explains our statement is that those who do not disobey God in what He commands them and who do what they are commanded are superior to those who commit sins.

Therefore God, Mighty and Exalted, said:

“And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate...’”

meaning the **twelve appendages/ranks**, “prostrate before Adam.”

And they prostrated.

Thus we know with certainty that the angels who were commanded to prostrate before Adam—and who are inferior to Jesus in rank—are different from the angels whom God made superior to Jesus.

For Jesus is superior to Adam by four degrees.

If someone asks:

“How did you permit the angels brought near, who do not disobey God in what He commands them and do what they are commanded, to be equated with sinful messengers who need repentance, turning back, and seeking forgiveness, when you apply the name ‘angels’ to them?

They include Adam, Jonah, Joseph, David, Solomon, and Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

God said concerning Adam: ‘Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray.’

Concerning Jonah: ‘He thought that We would not constrain him...’

Concerning Joseph: ‘She desired him, and he desired her.’

Concerning David: ‘He sought forgiveness from his Lord, fell bowing, and repented.’

Concerning Solomon: ‘And We cast upon his throne a body; then he repented,’ and he said, ‘My Lord, forgive me...’

And concerning Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him: ‘Indeed, We have granted you a manifest victory...’”

We answer:

There is **no equality in reality** between the messengers and the angels, even if they are equal in name.

They are equal in name because the messengers are **angels potentially**, and one day they become **angels actually**.

Could there be a difference clearer or more evident than this?

Another Aspect

The application of names to God, Mighty and Exalted, is something He applies to whomever He wills and withholds from whomever He wills.

Therefore, we cannot deny someone a name that God Himself has applied to them.

The Exalted One has applied the name **“angels”** to the Mu’ayyadūn when He said:

“And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam.’”

There is no disagreement among the community that these angels were on earth.

Therefore, we know that they were **angels potentially**, not actually.

For God has informed us that the earth is not the dwelling place of the angels brought near—those angels who are actually angels.

They walk upon the earth peacefully, such as **Hārūt, Mārūt, and ‘Azāzīl**, and those like them, unlike the angels who are in the heavens.

Another Aspect

Sins do not remove a believer from the name **“believer,”** even though many believers are protected from sin.

Likewise, sins do not remove the Mu'ayyadūn from the name **"angels,"** even though many angels are protected from sin.

Thus:

A sinful believer is a believer, God willing.

And:

A protected believer is truly a believer.

Likewise:

A sinful angel is an angel potentially.

And:

An infallible angel is an angel actually.

Another Aspect

An angel potentially is equal to an angel brought near **in name, but not in meaning.**

Created beings are all equal either in name or in meaning.

But this is denied of the Creator of creation, because He does not resemble created beings in any respect—not in name and not in meaning.

As for denying the attributes of created beings of Him, this is like His statement:

"There is nothing whatsoever like Him."

And His statement:

"Yet they dispute concerning God, while He is severe in contention."

As for denying the marks/signatures of created beings from Him, this is like His statement:

"Persevere in His worship. Do you know of anyone named like Him?"

And His statement:

"They do not encompass Him in knowledge."

So how could we give names to One whom they cannot encompass in knowledge, despite our necessity and need to do so?

That is, **all names are ultimately negated of Him, Mighty and Exalted is He.**

On the Difference Between Jinn and Humans

As for what we have said concerning the difference between the **jinn and humans in actuality:**

The jinn are the **inward ones**, because they are concealed from those who are outward.

Their beliefs and their knowledge are inward and concealed.

For this reason a shield is called **junn**, because it conceals the warrior's vulnerability.

Imru' al-Qays said:

**"It has a forehead like the back of a shield,
which the skilled craftsman fashioned."**

For the same reason the fetus is called **janīn**, because it is concealed inside its mother's womb.

God, Mighty and Exalted, said:

“And when you were embryos in the wombs of your mothers...”

And **junnah** means a shield because it conceals the one wearing armor.

Likewise, a garden with trees is called **jannah**, because it conceals those who walk within it.

It is said:

ajannah al-layl and **janna ‘alayhi al-layl**

when the night conceals and covers someone.

And **jinān** means the heart.

It is also called the **spirit of the heart**.

The heart is called *jinān* because it is concealed within the body.

Hence it is said:

“A person is [known] by his two smallest members: his heart and his tongue.”

When he speaks, he speaks with eloquence; and when he attacks, he attacks with courage of heart.

The grave is also called **jinān**, because it conceals the dead.

And may God bless His Messenger, our master Muhammad, and all of his family.

The Treatise Entitled *Maḥajjat al-Irshād*, Clarifying the Path of Salvation from the World of Generation and Corruption

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Praise be to God, who has preferred His religion over all religions, and who brought the worlds into existence and brought them forth from the judgment of non-being into the reality of being. I bear witness that there is no god except Him who has restrained intellects with the bridle of servitude from rising in the field of the majesty of movement, and has sealed the faculties of inner perception with the seal of lordship so that they may not aspire to apprehend His radiant majesty. The utmost attainment of the monotheist who possesses knowledge is to affirm the transcendent Identity without limit or attribute; and the ultimate attainment of the intelligent and discerning person is to acknowledge his inability to comprehend Him—for that itself is the true reality of knowledge.

Glory be to Him, the God before whose majesty and greatness faces have fallen, humbled and prostrate, while pure intellects, through their knowledge of the reality of His creation, have recognized His unity and worshipped Him.

And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger, the best of the messengers whom He sent to his community as a guide and as one calling to the most upright path of salvation. May God bless him, his brother and legatee, upon whom he openly declared the designation at Ghadir Khumm, and who stood proclaiming it, so that he became his successor among his community and followed him in rank, honor, and virtues: **Ali ibn Abi Talib**, interpreter and expounder of the Book of God, who gave charity with his ring while bowing in prayer;

and upon **Fatimah al-Batul al-Zahra**, the noblest woman ever to walk upon the earth;

and upon her two sons, beloved of God Most High, in whose love the wicked and the righteous share: **al-Hasan**, entrusted with the exalted rank of the Imamate, and **al-Husayn**, established in its lofty virtue;

and upon the Imams from the descendants of Husayn ibn Ali, whose virtues are renowned, whose seas of knowledge and wisdom are overflowing, through whom the blessings of God Most High upon His creation are complete, and through whom His gifts and virtues encompass them all;

and upon the one to whom their pure nobility ultimately reaches, and with whom their lofty excellence comes to rest.

Blessed is the one who holds firmly to the strong bonds of their *walāya* and follows the limits of their religion, and who boards their ship of knowledge, which saves from the flood of misguidance and innovation. And ruined is the one who inclines away from them, casts off their noble covenant from his neck, severs the ordered thread of the Imamate by denying its exalted station, and cuts the cord which God has commanded to be joined.

Our master and lord, the Imam al-Ṭayyib Abū al-Qāsim, Commander of the Faithful, who opens for his adherents the broad and well-trodden path of salvation, calling his followers toward prosperity. Glad tidings, then, to the one who possesses understanding, and who listens to his call, responding to it from the death of ignorance.

Peace be upon him and upon all of them—a continuous peace until the Day of Judgment.

Now then:

O brother, may God make you happy in your hereafter and your worldly life, encompass you with His protection from that which you fear and guard against, and take you under His care.

You mentioned that many of the brothers who have taken upon themselves the covenant of the Imam of the Age sometimes take lightly the performance of certain prescribed religious matters and become heedless of fulfilling the obligations imposed upon them. You asked me to explain this matter to you in a way that might awaken whoever encounters it from the habit of heedlessness, and might incite and encourage those whom you mentioned to perform what has been made obligatory upon them.

Know, O brother, that when the period of concealment became prolonged, and the period of interruption became widespread because the sun of guidance remained hidden from sight in the cave of *taqiyya*, and the situation became difficult and the trial immense because of the absence of the Lord of the Age and Time, his noble person was concealed from the eyes of those who look so that God might distinguish those who believe and destroy the unbelievers.

As one of the *ḥudūd* of the religion, may God sanctify his soul, said in verse concerning this:

As a trial for the believers, so that they may be distinguished:
the mixed from the lowly, and purity from impurity.

And because of the ugly and blameworthy actions acquired by those who affiliated themselves with the purified *da‘wa*, and the beliefs of extremism and deficiency that they adopted, turning away from the middle and upright path—and for other reasons as well—he was concealed as a protection for him from those who were not worthy of him. He remained absent, while those among the people of his *da‘wa* who were pure, possessing understanding, attained knowledge of him.

As a result, the beliefs of many believers became weak and the intentions of the majority of those who had responded became feeble, except for those who clung to the strong heights of

true knowledge and grasped the firm bonds of attachment to the secret of the Imam and the Imamate.

May God Most High hasten the rising of the dawn of deliverance for His rightly guided friends, and unite for them the happiness of this world and of religion, by the right of Muhammad and his purified family.

Your brother has seen nothing but to assist in what you requested of him and to hasten toward what you called him to undertake. He has taken this from the Book of God Most High, from the words of the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, from the speech of the purified Imams, peace be upon them, and from their noble *ḥudūd*.

Although our predecessors among the *ḥudūd*, may God brighten their faces, have already explained the obligation concerning this matter and spoken with such severity that even a small portion of what they said would suffice as proof and satisfaction for anyone who has a heart or lends an attentive ear while being a witness, whatever he has brought forth that agrees with the intended purpose is from the blessing of the Benefactor upon him and from the abundance of His favors bestowed upon him. Whatever error it contains—God forbid—is attributed to its compiler and author.

He therefore made this into a treatise and joined to it other matters that must be followed, hoping from God Most High for abundant reward in his return and final destination. He named it **Maḥajjat al-Irshād**, *The Clear Path of Guidance*, clarifying the path of salvation from the world of generation and corruption.

He divided it into four chapters:

The First Chapter: Concerning the *walāya* of the Imams, peace be upon them, what has been transmitted emphasizing it, and the glad tidings given to their friends.

The Second Chapter: Concerning encouragement toward religious works and perseverance in them, and the stern warnings and emphasis transmitted concerning them.

The Third Chapter: Concerning encouragement to seek knowledge and the exhortation to pursue it.

The Fourth Chapter: Concerning what believers owe one another, how a believer should associate with his beloved companions, the prohibition against envy and hatred, and an explanation of what God and His *Walī*, peace be upon him, have made obligatory in this regard.

He asks for assistance in completing what he has intended and undertaken, and seeks from them both the success needed to attain the purpose he has hoped and desired.

The First Chapter

Concerning the *Walāya* of the Imams, Peace Be Upon Them, What Has Been Transmitted Emphasizing It, and the Glad Tidings Given to Their Friends

We speak with the aid and assistance of God Most High, and through the favor and instruction of His *Walī* upon His earth, peace be upon him.

Know, O brother—may God grant you success and happiness, and bring you to what you hope and desire in both worlds—that all religious works and acts of worship, obligatory duties and prescribed obligations, have neither order nor foundation, nor does the foot of the one who performs them remain firmly established upon the path of guidance, nor does his hand cling

to the rope of salvation, unless he makes his *walāya* sincere toward the Lord of his time and age, and makes it his distinguishing mark in secret and in public.

He must also join to this disavowal of those who deny his purified rank and reject his noble right—those who harbor an evil opinion of God by claiming that there is no intermediary between Him, Most High, and His creation, as though they had not heard the saying of God Most High addressed to His Prophet, peace be upon him:

“You are only a warner, and for every people there is a guide.”

Nor have they understood the corruption in His wisdom and the contradiction they attribute to their Creator, exalted is He, nor the judgment they ascribe to Him concerning His creation without justice, nor the pure injustice with which they describe Him, exalted and sanctified is He.

According to their claim, He is permitted to create some of His creatures with someone to guide them toward the path of their salvation while depriving others of such a guide. This they do by turning away from the guarantor who cleanses the corruption of their beliefs and purifies their souls from them with the water of philosophical and wise knowledge, rejecting the counsel he offers them and casting it behind their backs.

Instead, they persist in what the scholars of misguidance have fabricated—falsehood that leads them to ruin and defeat in the hereafter. Thus they remain wandering and wavering in the darkness of confusion and bewilderment, prevented from being illuminated by the light of guidance because of the envy they harbor toward its possessors for what God has bestowed upon them of His bounty, and because of the arrogance they have displayed toward them.

We ask God Most High, by the honor of His friends upon His earth and in His heaven, to establish you and us, O brother, and all the believers, firmly upon the *walāya* of His chosen ones, those entrusted with authority, and to grant us all success in that which brings victory in our return and abundant reward.

Indeed, He is capable of this, and He is the Helper and Supporter of whoever seeks refuge in the sanctuary of His religion.

Section

God Most High said to His Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, when a group of the Helpers offered their wealth to him in return for his having guided them, and bestowed it upon him generously:

“I ask of you no reward for it except love for my near kin.”

And He Most High said:

“O you who believe, obey God, obey the Messenger, and those vested with authority among you.”

And He said:

“Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed God.”

And He said:

“Whoever follows me is of me.”

And He said:

“On the Day We call every people with their Imam.”

And God Most High said:

“O you who believe, fear God and be with the truthful.”

And God Most High said:

“Thus We have made you a middle community, so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger may be a witness over you.”

Section

It is related from our master, the Qadi al-Nu‘mān ibn Muhammad, may God sanctify his soul, from what he narrated from the Imams, peace be upon them, at the beginning of his book *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*.

Among this is what was narrated from Abū Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Ali, peace be upon him:

A group of people came to him from Khurasan. He looked at one of them and saw that his feet had become cracked and split. He said to him, “What is this?”

He replied, “The distance, O son of the Messenger of God. By God, nothing brought me from where I came except my love for you, the People of the House.”

Abū Ja‘far said to him:

“Rejoice, for by God, you will be resurrected with us.”

“With you, O son of the Messenger of God?”

“Yes. No servant loves us except that God will resurrect him with us. And is religion anything other than love? God Most High says: *‘Say: If you love God, then follow me; God will love you.’*”

It is also related from him, peace be upon him, that Ziyād al-Aswad entered upon him. He looked at his feet and saw that they had become cracked. He said:

“What is this, O Ziyād?”

He replied:

“O my master, I set out upon a weak young camel and walked most of the journey. I did not have enough to purchase an older camel, so I kept adding one thing to another until I was able to buy this young one.”

Abū Ja‘far felt compassion for him, until we saw his eyes fill with tears.

Ziyād said:

“May I be your ransom! By God, I have many sins and have transgressed against myself so greatly that sometimes I say, ‘I am ruined.’ Then I remember my *walāya* toward you and my love for you, the People of the House, and through that I hope for forgiveness.”

At that, Abū Ja‘far turned toward him and said:

“Glory be to God! Is religion anything other than love? Is religion anything other than love? God, Blessed and Exalted, says in His Book: *‘He has made faith beloved to you and adorned it in your hearts.’* And He Most High says: *‘If you love God, follow me; God will love you.’* And He says: *‘They love those who migrated to them.’*”

Then Abū Ja‘far said:

“An Arab came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and said, ‘O Messenger of God, I love those who pray, but I do not pray; I love those who fast, but I do not fast.’

“Abū Ja‘far, peace be upon him, explained: ‘Meaning, he did not pray or fast voluntarily; he was not referring to the obligatory acts.’

“The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said to him, ‘You will be with the one whom you love.’

“Then Abū Ja‘far, peace be upon him, said to them:

“What are you expecting? By God, if an event occurred that frightened the people, you would seek refuge in none but us, and we would seek refuge in none but our Prophet. You are with us, so rejoice, and rejoice again. By God, God will never make you equal to others. No, by God—and they have no honor!”

It is also related from him that he said:

“Paradise longs for the coming of the family of Muhammad and their Shi‘a, and its light becomes more intense. Even if a servant worshipped God between the Corner and the Station until his limbs were severed, while not worshipping God through our love and *walāya*, the People of the House, God would not accept it from him.”

And it is related from him, peace be upon him, that he was asked concerning the saying of God Most High:

“Say: O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins; He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.”

“Is this specific or general?”

He replied:

“Rather, it is specific to our Shi‘a.”

Section

It is narrated from Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him, that he said to his Shi‘a:

“Shall I not tell you of the good deed which, if a person comes with it, will protect him from the terror of the Day of Resurrection, and the evil deed which, if a person comes with it, will cause God to cast him upon his face into the Fire?”

They said:

“Yes, O son of the Messenger of God.”

He said:

“The good deed is our love, and the evil deed is hatred of us.”

And it is related from him, peace be upon him, that a man was mentioned to him, and someone said:

“O son of the Messenger of God, by God, he had a good opinion of you and loved you.”

Abū ‘Abd Allāh said:

“No servant loves us except that he will be with us on the Day of Resurrection, sheltered beneath our shade and accompanying us in our dwellings. By God, a servant does not love us until God purifies his heart, and He does not purify his heart until he submits himself to us. When he submits himself to us, God will save him from the evil of the reckoning on the Day of Resurrection and make him safe from the greatest terror.

“The people of this matter truly rejoice when the soul of one of them reaches this point”—and he pointed with his hand toward his throat.

It is related from him, peace be upon him, that he said:

“It does not harm the one who is upon our *walāya* and our love if he has nothing beneath which to seek shade except a tree, and eats nothing except its leaves. People have taken the paths to the right and left, while you have remained attached to us.”

One of those present said:

“May I be your ransom! We hope that God will not make us equal to these people”—meaning the general populace.

He said:

“No, by God, nor will they receive any honor!”

And it is related from him, peace be upon him, that he said one day to some of his Shi‘a:

“You loved us while the people hated us; you took us as your friends while the people treated us as enemies; you believed us while the people called us liars; you maintained ties with us while the people severed them. Thus God has made your life our life and your death our death.

“By God, there is nothing between one of you and seeing what will delight his eyes except that his soul reaches this point”—and he pointed with his hand toward his throat.

“Are you not pleased that you pray and they pray, yet yours is accepted while theirs is not; that you perform pilgrimage and they perform pilgrimage, yet yours is accepted while theirs is not?”

“By God, prayer, zakāt, fasting, pilgrimage, jihad, and all acts of righteousness are not accepted except from you.

“The people have taken paths here and there, while you have taken the path from where the Prophet of God and his friends took it.

“God chose Muhammad and his family from among His servants, and you chose what God chose. So fear God and deliver the trust to the black and the white, even if he is a Kharijite, and even if he is a Syrian.”

And it is related from him that he addressed his Shi‘a one day and said:

“We will take hold of the belt of our Prophet on the Day of Resurrection, and you will take hold of our belts. So where do you think you are going?”

One of them said:

“To Paradise, if God wills.”

And it is related from him that he said to Abū Baṣīr one day, when he had entered upon him after growing old, losing his sight, and becoming short of breath:

“What is this breathlessness, O Abū Baṣīr?”

He replied:

“May I be your ransom! I have grown old and my appointed time is near, while I do not know what I shall face in my hereafter.”

He said:

“And you say this, O Abū Muhammad? Do you not know that God honors the young man among you by not punishing him, and is too modest before the elderly to call them to account, and respects the old man?”

Abū Baṣīr said:

“Is this for us, O son of the Messenger of God? May I be your ransom?”

“Yes, and more.”

“Give me more, O son of the Messenger of God, may I be your ransom.”

“Have you not heard the saying of God, Mighty and Exalted:

‘Among the believers are men who have been true to the covenant they made with God. Some of them have fulfilled their vow, and some await it, and they have not changed in the least’?”

He said:

“Yes.”

Abū ‘Abd Allāh, peace be upon him, said:

“By God, He meant none other than you. You fulfilled for God what He took from you of His covenant, and you did not replace us with anyone else.

“Does that please you, O Abū Muhammad?”

He said:

“Yes, may I be your ransom. Give me more.”

He said:

“The people rejected goodness, while you rejected evil. They divided themselves into sects and branched into factions, while you followed the People of the House of your Prophet.

“So rejoice, and rejoice again. By God, you are the ones upon whom mercy is bestowed; the good among you will be accepted, and the wrongdoing of your sinners will be overlooked.

“Whoever is not upon what you are upon, God will accept from him neither compensation nor justice; He will not accept a good deed from him nor overlook an evil deed.

“O Abū Muhammad, does that please you?”

He said:

“Yes. Give me more, may I be your ransom.”

He said:

“God has appointed some of His angels to remove the sins of our Shi‘a just as leaves fall from trees when their season of falling arrives.

“This is the meaning of His saying:

‘Those who bear the Throne and those around it glorify their Lord with His praise, believe in Him, and seek forgiveness for those who believe: Our Lord, You encompass all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who repent and follow Your way.’

“By God, the angels’ seeking forgiveness for you is greater than this for all other people.

“O Abū Muhammad, does that please you?”

He said:

“Yes. Give me more, may I be your ransom.”

He said:

“God mentioned you in His Book when He said:

‘Among the believers are men who have been true to the covenant they made with God. Some of them have fulfilled their vow, and some await it, and they have not changed in the least.’

“You are they. You fulfilled what you pledged to us.

“He mentioned you in another place, saying:

‘And they said: Why do we not see men whom we used to count among the wicked? Did we take them in mockery, or have our eyes turned away from them?’

“By God, you are rejoicing in Paradise, while they search for and seek you in the Fire.

“O Abū Muhammad, does that please you?”

He said:

“Yes, may I be your ransom. Give me more.”

He said:

“God mentioned you in His Book:

‘On the Day when no intimate friend will avail an intimate friend in anything, nor will they be helped—except those upon whom God has mercy.’

“By God, He did not exclude anyone other than Ali, peace be upon him, his family, and his Shi‘a.

“And God mentioned you elsewhere in His Book:

‘Those are with those upon whom God has bestowed His favor: the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous.’

“The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, is the one meant here by ‘the prophets’; we are the truthful and the martyrs; and you are the righteous.

“O Abū Muhammad, does that please you?”

He said:

“Yes. Give me more, may I be your ransom.”

He said:

“God mentioned you in His Book:

‘Say: O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of God.’

“By God, God meant none other than you.

“O Abū Muhammad, does that please you?”

He said:

“Yes. Give me more, may I be your ransom.”

He said:

“God mentioned you in His Book:

‘Only those possessed of understanding take heed.’

“By God, you are those possessed of understanding.

“O Abū Muhammad, does that please you?”

He said:

“Yes. Give me more, may I be your ransom.”

He said:

“God, Mighty and Exalted, said:

‘Indeed, over My servants you have no authority.’

“You are the servants whom He meant.

“O Abū Muhammad, does that please you?”

He said:

“Yes. Give me more, may I be your ransom.”

He said:

“Every verse in the Book of God that awakens longing for Paradise and mentions goodness applies to us and to our Shi‘a; and every verse that warns against the Fire and mentions its inhabitants applies to our enemies and those who oppose us.”

Then he heard the people performing the pilgrimage while he was at al-Abṭah, and he said:

“How numerous are the pilgrims, and how few are those who cry out!”

By God, God has accepted nothing except from you and your companions.

Then he rose and departed to his home.

Section

Among what was narrated from Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far ibn Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is that he said:

While the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, was sitting one day in Medina with a group of his companions around him, he looked up and saw a great black mass descending from the sky.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, rose in alarm, and his companions rose with him. He passed through the streets of Medina, watching the black mass until he reached it.

There he found a bier carried by four slaves, with no one following it.

He asked them:

“Who is this dead man?”

They said:

“O Messenger of God, he was a slave belonging to Banū Riyāḥ. He had transgressed against himself. His masters had chained him, and he died while still in chains. They ordered us to bury him.”

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“O Ali, look at him. Perhaps you know him.”

Ali uncovered his face, and there was a black man with an iron collar around his neck and fetters on his feet.

Ali, peace be upon him, said:

“Yes, by God, O Messenger of God, I know him. Whenever he met me, he would say to me, ‘By God, I love you.’

“And I bear witness that no one loves you except a believer, and no one hates you except an unbeliever.”

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Indeed, by God, that has benefited him.

“By God, these are seventy tribes of angels, each tribe numbering a thousand angels, who descended from heaven to bear witness at his funeral and pray over him.”

The Messenger of God ordered that the collar be cut from his neck and the fetters removed from his feet. He prayed over him, buried him, and invoked mercy upon him.

And from ‘Abbād ibn Ziyād, who said:

Abū ‘Abd Allāh, peace be upon him, said to me:

“O ‘Abbād, there is no one upon the religion of Abraham except you. Pilgrimage is not accepted except from you, and sins are not forgiven except for you.

“Our souls love your souls, and we love seeing you and visiting you.”

And Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī narrated:

Ali ibn al-Husayn, peace be upon him, said to us:

“Which places are the most excellent?”

I replied:

“God and the son of His Messenger know best.”

He said:

“The most excellent place is what lies between the Corner and the Station. If a man lived there for as long as Noah lived among his people, fasting by day and standing in prayer by night in that place, and then met God without our *walāya*, that would not benefit him.”

Among what he, may God sanctify his secret, related in *The Book of Gatherings and Journeys* is the following:

He said:

“I heard the Imam al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh say: ‘I heard al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh, peace be upon him, say:

“‘I saw al-Mahdī bi-Allāh standing with one of the great elder *dā‘īs*. After rising from his gathering, he spoke with him for a while and then departed from him.

“‘That old man then went to the place on the ground where al-Mahdī had been standing. He took some of its soil in his hand, kissed it, and wrapped it in a handkerchief that he had in his sleeve.

“I do not know how al-Mahdī noticed him after he had gone some distance away and saw what he had done. He said to him, “May God reward you for that with good, O Abū So-and-so.”

“Neither I nor that old man thought that he had seen what he had done, because he had only done it after turning his back to him and walking away.””

Section

Among what was also transmitted from him, he said:

“I heard the Imam al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him, say one day to one of the elder *awliyā’*, who had recovered from an illness but was still weak:

“How are you?”

He replied:

“I am in the best condition, O my master, since God extended my life until I could look upon you.”

He said:

“May God preserve you and all our *awliyā’* until, if God wills, you see what you hope for and expect from the promise of God Mighty and Exalted to us.

“Whoever among you dies before that will see what delights his eyes from the mercy of God, and will attain what he had hoped for.

“Our grandfather Ja‘far ibn Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said to his Shi‘a:

“By God, through your taking us as your *walī*, all of you are among the people of Paradise. I guarantee this for you from God Most High.

“But we wish all of you to be with us there, with your dwellings brought closer to ours through your righteous deeds. So do not delay yourselves from our proximity through sins.

“For Paradise has degrees and dwellings, as God Mighty and Exalted said:

‘And the hereafter is greater in degrees and greater in excellence.’”

Section

He said:

“I heard him say one day to a group of Husaynids who had come to him from the region of Yemen and the Hijaz. He had honored their lodging and treated them generously. When he permitted them to depart, they entered upon him to bid him farewell.

“They thanked him and acknowledged his virtue, saying:

“‘We, O our master, are your servants, and that alone is sufficient honor and pride for us. Our fathers and those of our forefathers who came before us commanded us and entrusted us to obey and follow the Qā’im from among the People of this House, to submit to him, and to recognize his excellence.’

“He, peace be upon him, said:

“‘Whoever recognizes that for us, by God, has prospered and rejoiced; his birth is blessed and his religion is sound. Whoever denies it has lost both this world and the hereafter.

“By God, the closest of you to Muhammad and the most entitled to him are those who acknowledge our excellence and recognize our right. The farthest of you from him are those who deny and remain ignorant of that, claim a rank below ours, and reject it.

“God Mighty and Exalted says:

“Indeed, the people closest to Abraham are those who followed him—and this Prophet.””

Section

Among what is transmitted from him, may God sanctify his secret, in *The Book of Aspiration concerning the Etiquette of Following the Imams*, concerning what is required of believers in their belief in the Imams' *walāya* and adherence to their Imamate, he said:

“This is the first matter with which we begin our book and with which we open it: whoever recognizes their right, believes in their Imamate, observes what is obligatory toward them, and obeys their commands in the manner that he sees to be an obligation and a binding right imposed upon him by God Mighty and Exalted, will have their majesty become greater in his breast and their awe greater in his eyes than the awe and majesty of the kings of this world in the hearts and eyes of their followers.

“For God, Glorious and Exalted, has made obedience to them obligatory upon His servants in His Book and joined it to obedience to Him and to His Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him. He said—and He is the truest of speakers:

‘Obey God, obey the Messenger, and those vested with authority among you.’

“Therefore, whoever God has singled out, granted, and favored by placing him among the ranks of the followers of the Imams, peace and blessings be upon them, should believe in their Imamate with the belief of one who sees and knows that their pleasure is joined to the pleasure of his Lord, and their anger is joined to His anger.

“He should therefore seek that through which he hopes to attain the pleasure of God, who has made Paradise his reward, and avoid whatever brings about His displeasure, for which He has made the Fire his punishment.

“He should devote himself to whatever brings him closer to them and makes him favored in their sight; he should exert himself in whatever agrees with them and corresponds to their desire, earning their pleasure in what they love and hate, in what pleases them and what angers them.”

This is his statement, may God sanctify his secret.

Section

Among what came from our master al-Mu’ayyad fī al-Dīn, may God sanctify his secret, in one of his gatherings, after he compared the stages of the creation of the embryo with the religious obligations, he said:

“The final creation is the end and completion. It occupies, in what the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, spread out upon the religious carpet, the position of *walāya*, through which the obligations attain completion.

“This is like the saying of God Most High:

‘Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and chosen Islam for you as a religion.’

“Just as, if the meaning called ‘the final creation,’ through which the creation reaches completion, were destroyed, the lineage, the sperm-drop, the clot, the lump, the bones, and the flesh would likewise be destroyed through its destruction, so too, when *walāya* is undone, purity, prayer, zakāt, fasting, pilgrimage, and jihad are undone through its being undone.

“The bonds of the religious law become loosened, and religion returns to the state of ignorance.

“For the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

‘Whoever dies without knowing the Imam of his age dies the death of ignorance.’”

Section

And he, may God exalt his sanctity, said in another gathering:

“It is known that the obligations which God, Glorious and Exalted, prescribed in His Book will be subject to various circumstances that may excuse them, invalidate them, or introduce deficiency into them.

“For example, prayer is subject to deficiency because of illness: its standing becomes sitting, and its sitting becomes lying down.

“Likewise, zakāt is nullified by the absence of wealth.

“Fasting is affected by the circumstance of travel and by the menstruation of a menstruating woman.

“Pilgrimage is affected by the absence of ability to perform it.

“But *walāya* is the established obligation which nothing invalidates and which no circumstance, under any condition, can excuse or suspend.

“This demonstrates that it is the foundation and axis of all obligations and their sustaining principle, one toward which the hands of circumstances cannot extend.

“Another statement is that God Most High divided the obligations of His religion into categories. He made prayer from the human being an obligation upon his body; zakāt an obligation upon his wealth; pilgrimage and jihad an obligation upon his body and wealth; and He made *walāya*, among all of them, an obligation upon his heart, which is the commander of all his limbs.

“This is evidence that *walāya* is the commander of all obligations.

‘Indeed, in that is a reminder for whoever has a heart or lends an attentive ear while being a witness.’”

Section

It came from our master Ḥamīd al-Dīn, may God exalt his sanctity, at the end of *Tanbīh al-Hādī wa-l-Mustahdī*:

“Know, O brother, that the station of the Imams, peace be upon them, among creation is immense, and that which God Most High has singled them out for of rank is a tremendous matter.

“No one attaches himself to the hems of their obedience except that he is saved and turns in repentance; no one calls upon God through their mediation except that He answers.

“God has decreed for whoever follows them the Gardens of Bliss, and for whoever innovates and opposes them painful punishment.

“They are persons whose roots and branches are established in heaven, for whoever ascends the steps, follows the paths, is illuminated by the suns, and passes beyond the Day of Distress.

“God Most High has made it obligatory for them to take hold of the reins of those who desire the expanse of divine pleasure, and by the forelocks of the arrogant toward the realm of the Fires, through a clear statement and a radiant command.”

Section

“If we were to undertake an exhaustive explanation of everything that has been transmitted in this chapter, we would pass from the limits of brevity into length and elaboration. Yet even a little of it contains enough to guide the one who seeks his deliverance and salvation and hopes from Him Most High for the forgiveness of his sins and the erasure of his evil deeds.

“So, O brother, blessed is the one who makes his intention sincere through correct *walāya*, joins together the three acts of obedience, and thereby separates himself from the people of misguidance and error, fearing that the cord of his deeds and worship might be severed, through denial of the *Walī* of his command, and that he might thus become among those concerning whom God Most High said:

‘We shall turn to whatever deeds they performed and make them scattered dust.’”

The Second Chapter

Concerning Encouragement Toward Religious Works and Perseverance in Them, and the Stern Warnings and Emphasis Transmitted Concerning Them

God Most High said:

“Successful indeed are the believers, those who are humble in their prayers, those who turn away from vain talk, those who perform zakāt, and those who guard their private parts.”

And He Most High said:

“O you who believe, bow, prostrate, worship your Lord, and do good, so that you may prosper.”

And He Most High said:

“Those who faithfully maintain their prayers—they shall be honored in Gardens.”

And He Most High said:

“Indeed, God has purchased from the believers their lives and their wealth in exchange for Paradise. They fight in the way of God, killing and being killed. It is a true promise binding upon Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an. And who is more faithful to his covenant than God? So rejoice in the bargain you have made, and that is the supreme triumph.”

Then He Most High described those meant by this, saying:

“Those who repent, those who worship, those who praise, those who journey, those who bow, those who prostrate, those who enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and those who preserve the limits of God. And give glad tidings to the believers.”

And God Most High said:

“To Him ascends the good word, and the righteous deed raises it.”

And He Most High said:

“The believers are only those whose hearts tremble when God is mentioned, and when His verses are recited to them, their faith increases, and upon their Lord they rely; those who establish prayer and spend from what We have provided them.”

And He said:

“The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, establish prayer, give zakāt, and obey God and His Messenger. Those—God will have mercy upon them. Indeed, God is Mighty, Wise.”

He said:

“Those who, if We establish them in the land, establish prayer, give zakāt, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong. And with God rests the outcome of all affairs.”

Section

The Qadi al-Nu‘mān ibn Muhammad, may God sanctify his secret, narrated that some people came to the Commander of the Faithful concerning a worldly matter, asking him for something. They sought to win his favor by saying:

“We are among your Shi‘a, O Commander of the Faithful.”

He, peace and blessings be upon him, looked at them for a long time and said:

“I do not recognize you, nor do I see upon you any sign of what you claim. Our Shi‘a are only those who believe in God and His Messenger, act in obedience to Him, avoid disobedience to Him, and obey us in what we command and call them toward.

“Our Shi‘a keep watch over the sun, moon, and stars”—meaning, peace and blessings be upon him, that they observe the times of prayer.

“Our Shi‘a have withered lips and hollow bellies; ascetic devotion is recognizable in their faces.

“He is not among our Shi‘a who takes anything other than what is rightfully his, nor one who wrongs people, nor one who takes what does not belong to him.”

It is related from Abū Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Ali, peace be upon him, that a man mentioned another man to him, saying:

“He has violated the sacred prohibitions and committed forbidden acts, and treated the obligatory duties lightly, to the extent that he abandoned the prescribed prayer.”

He had been reclining, but when he heard this he sat upright and said:

“Glory be to God! He abandoned the prescribed prayer? Abandoning the prescribed prayer is a grave matter before God.”

And Jābir al-Ju‘fī said:

Abū Ja‘far said to me:

“Is it sufficient for one who claims Shi‘ism merely to say that he loves us, the People of the House?

“By God, our Shi‘a are only those who fear God and obey Him.

“They are recognized, O Jābir, only through humility, reverence, abundant remembrance of God Mighty and Exalted, fasting and prayer, honoring their parents, showing compassion and maintaining ties with their neighbors, particularly the poor, the needy, those burdened by debts, and orphans; through speaking truthfully, reciting the Qur‘an, and restraining their tongues from speaking about people except with good.”

Jābir said:

“I said, ‘O son of the Messenger of God, we do not know anyone today who possesses all these qualities.’”

He said:

“O Jābir, do not let different paths carry you away. Is it enough for a man to say, ‘I love Ali and take him as my *walī*,’ while not acting righteously?

“If he were to say, ‘I love the Messenger of God,’ but did not follow his way, his love for him would not benefit him. And the Messenger of God is better than Ali.

“So fear God and work for what is with God.

“There is no kinship between God and anyone. The most beloved of God's servants to Him, and the most honored of them, are those who fear Him most.

“So act, O Jābir, in obedience to God and in whatever brings you nearer to Him. A servant draws near to God only through obedience to Him.

“We do not possess immunity from the Fire for you, nor does anyone possess an argument against God.

“Whoever is obedient to God is our *walī*, and whoever is disobedient to God is our enemy.

“By God, we attain neither the favor of God nor proximity to Him except through righteous action and piety.”

And ‘Umar ibn Sa‘īd said:

“We entered upon Abū ‘Abd Allāh while we were a group of Shi‘a. He said to us:

“‘Be like the middle cushion, to which the extremist returns and the one who rejects us joins.

“And perform righteous deeds, O Shi‘a of the family of Muhammad. There is no kinship between us and God, nor do we possess an argument against Him, and one draws near to Him only through obedience.

“Whoever is obedient to God, our *walāya* benefits him; whoever is disobedient to God Mighty and Exalted, our *walāya* will not benefit him.”

Section

It is related from Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far ibn Muhammad, peace be upon him, that he advised some of his Shi‘a, saying:

“Be silent callers to us.”

They asked:

“How is that, O son of the Messenger of God?”

He said:

“You act according to what we have commanded you concerning obedience to God, and you refrain from what we have forbidden you concerning disobedience to Him.

“When people see what you are upon, they will recognize the excellence of what we possess and hasten toward it.

“I call my father, Abū Muhammad ibn Ali, may God be pleased with him, to witness: I heard him say:

“‘In former times, the best people among our Shi‘a were found among them. If there was an imam of a mosque in the neighborhood, he was one of them. If there was a caller to prayer in the tribe, he was one of them. If there was someone entrusted with a deposit or a trust, he was one of them. If there was a scholar to whom people turned concerning their religion and the welfare of their affairs, he was one of them.

“So be like that yourselves. Make us beloved to people and do not make us hateful to them.”

And it is related from him, peace be upon him, that he said to al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar:

“O Mufaḍḍal, tell our Shi‘a: be callers to us by restraining yourselves from the sacred prohibitions of God, avoiding disobedience to Him, and following His pleasure.

“For when they are like this, people will hasten toward us.”

And al-Mufaḍḍal said:

Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far ibn Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“The Shi‘a of Ja‘far are only those who restrain their tongues and work for their Creator, until they become like a bent bow from the abundance of prayer, like the fasting ascetic from prolonged fasting, and like a mute person from prolonged silence.

“Is there anyone who claims to be among our Shi‘a who has worn out his night through prolonged standing in prayer and worn out his day through fasting, who has restrained himself from the pleasures and comforts of this world out of fear of God and longing for us, the People of the House?

“How could they be our Shi‘a while they quarrel with our enemy, increasing his enmity, growling like dogs, and coveting like crows?”

Section

Our master al-Nu‘mān ibn Muhammad, may God sanctify his secret, said:

“What has come in this chapter”—meaning the final section of *Sharḥ al-Akḥbār*, concerning the Imams' advice to their friends to obey God Mighty and Exalted and their disavowal of those among them who commit acts of disobedience—“is not contrary to what came in the preceding chapter concerning the mercy of God Mighty and Exalted toward those among them who sin and His forgiveness of all of them.

“For what they commanded them to do and encouraged them toward—obedience to God Most High and avoidance of disobedience to Him—is what brings them to attain virtue before Him and an honorable rank in His presence.

“Those among them who commit sins are therefore below these people in rank, although they may be among those who are forgiven in the hereafter.

“This is made clear by what Buṣayr ibn Ḥakam al-Khush‘amī narrated from Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far ibn Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, who said:

‘Believers are of two kinds.

One is the man who is true to the covenant he made with God and fulfills its conditions. He is among those concerning whom God Most High said:

“Among the believers are men who have been true to the covenant they made with God.”

He is among those whom neither the terrors of this world nor the terrors of the hereafter afflict. He intercedes and none intercedes for him.

The other is a believer like a tender shoot of grain: sometimes it bends and sometimes it stands upright. He is among those whom the terrors of this world and the terrors of the hereafter afflict. He is one for whom intercession is made, though he does not himself intercede.”

Among what came from him, peace and blessings be upon him, is that he said to a group of his Shi‘a:

“By God, all of you are in Paradise. But how ugly it is for a man among you to enter Paradise alongside people who exerted themselves and performed righteous deeds, while he is among them like one who has torn away his covering and exposed his nakedness.”

It was asked:

“Can that really happen?”

He said:

“Yes. When he does not guard his stomach, his tongue, and his private parts.”

This is an explanation of what we have said.

So may God have mercy upon the person who strives for the highest degrees and does not accept for himself a lower station in the everlasting and eternal abode, concerning which God Mighty and Exalted said:

“And the hereafter is greater in degrees and greater in excellence.”

Section

Among what he, may God sanctify his secret, mentioned in *The Book of Gatherings and Journeys* is the following:

“Some person presented to our master al-Mu‘izz a written note while he was standing before him. He read it, then looked at me and said:

““This is the note of so-and-so. He mentioned to us, on the day we rode out, the report narrated from our grandfather Abū Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Ali from the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, that he looked toward the Ka‘ba, the Sacred House, and said:

“Looking at it is an act of worship.”

“I said, ‘Indeed.’

“He said:

“‘God Mighty and Exalted has not made the proof of something superior, or its likeness, except something itself superior, whether it be an animal, plant, or inanimate object.

“‘For this reason God has preferred some regions over others.

“‘We know that this House is built from the stones and clay of the earth. The one established as its likeness, however, He honored and magnified and made, as He Mighty and Glorious said, “a place of return for mankind and a sanctuary.”

“‘He made pilgrimage to it and circumambulation around it obligatory upon them.

“‘Whoever does not venerate the proof of a thing and its likeness has not venerated it.’

“Then he, peace be upon him, said:

“‘Among the forms of treating the outward aspect lightly, many of those who knew the inward have perished. May God curse the one who treats it lightly, casts it aside, and regards it with contempt.

“‘No, by God! God did not prescribe an obligation nor magnify a matter except that its veneration is obligatory in both its outward and inward aspects.

“‘The outward form of the lawful is lawful and honored, while the outward form of the forbidden is forbidden and blameworthy—and the same applies to their inward aspects.

“‘Every obligatory religious matter that points toward something or serves as its likeness likewise follows its course and is connected to it.’”

This was his statement, peace be upon him.

Section

Our master Ḥamīd al-Dīn, may God sanctify his soul, said in the First *Mashraʿ* of the First *Sūr* of *Rāḥat al-ʿAql*:

“We say that since the soul's nobility lies in attaining its second perfection—which is everlasting happiness and attaining eternal existence in the proximity of the Creator—its attainment of this second perfection occurs through two things.

“The first is its purification from the manifestations and darkness of nature: anger, injustice, greed, lack of mercy, and other natural vices, so that when it becomes free of these low qualities, it corresponds to what enters its essence at the time of conception in the form of the divine forms, thereby benefiting from them through its preparedness and harmony with them.

“The second is its conception of the divine realities, which consist of encompassing what preceded it in existence: the individual entities of the originating and emanating intellects, and the celestial and terrestrial bodies, until it reaches in this regard the degree at which it can stand, and becomes intellectually identical with what it has conceived, like the object itself that has been conceived, with no difference between them from this perspective.

“When it first comes into existence, however, it is neither purified nor prepared to receive the divine blessings—the intellectual forms that will give it its perfection.

“It is like mineral bodies that fall short of their perfection as gold, which cannot accept the coloring that would bring them to their perfection except through two things.

“The first is that they must initially be purified of their impurities and prepared by being dissolved and subjected to fire, so that through their melting and the dissolution of their parts they become prepared to receive the coloring that will place them in the rank of their perfection.

“The second is that the coloring must finally be applied to them, so that their interior and exterior become as the coloring has made them.

“Thus the seeker must first purify himself and take refuge in that which refines and prepares him; then he must proceed, secondly, to the degree of conception, so that through refining himself he comes to the horizon of what he wishes to become and conceives of it, allowing it to take effect in him just as coloring takes effect upon molten matter.

“Otherwise his purpose will not be fulfilled.

“A seeker cannot color a body without first melting it in the fire. For when something is approached through its proper path, it becomes easy; when it is sought through a path other than its own, it becomes difficult.

“Since this book of ours combines the two things through which the soul attains perfection and happiness into one thing—namely, what it conceives and what is impressed upon it of divine knowledge, through which it becomes rational in itself and, through knowing itself, rises to its highest degrees—and since these matters are of no benefit to a soul that has not first been purified before entering their paths and drinking from their springs, and has not been disciplined through exercise according to the sacred laws and established ordinances, while being stripped of the garment of worship and knowledge of the limits of testimony, it is necessary that its reader and student should first have disciplined himself through that which prepares, purifies, and sets him right.

“This consists of the acts of worship whose forms were brought by Muhammad, the Chosen One, peace and blessings be upon him and his purified family.

“These acts operate in its discipline, training, and acquisition of soundness of substance just as fire operates in the purification and melting of mineral bodies when they are acquiring perfection.

“He should have revived the soul by establishing the obligations and the *sunna*, and subjected it to the command of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, who is the leader of the religious community and the guide toward the direction of the qibla, and to the command of the Imams who stand in his place—may God's peace and blessings be upon them.

“His habits should have become firmly established through what the noble religious law requires, so that he becomes like one compelled, unable to act according to his own inclination except according to what he has undertaken: stopping at the command and prohibition, and establishing worship in both its aspects and both its dimensions.

“Only then can he benefit from what he encounters.

“When he reads our book and grazes in the gardens of our words, he will be like sweet water into which sugar is placed: its taste becomes apparent and its sweetness increases. He will not be like salt water, which corrupts the sugar when it is placed into it, so that the saltiness overwhelms both the sugar's essence and its sweetness.

“We have said that the works of the religious law, which are acts of worship, operate upon the soul as fire operates upon prepared mineral bodies, and that they are what prepare it and give soundness to its substance.

“For every one of these acts gives the soul a virtue and removes from it a vice, as we explained in our book known as *Tanbīh al-Hādī wa-l-Mustahdī*.

“They are the seeds of intellect, which make souls into intellects through persevering in them. Therefore, in truth, no one deserves to be called rational except one who has fulfilled all of them and adhered to the ordinances of their Lawgiver, such as the *Nāṭiqs*, the legatees, the Imams, peace and blessings be upon them, and their followers.

“Every command among the commands and every *sunna* among the *sunan* gives the soul, through its revival, a strength whose effect upon it becomes evident; abandoning it causes harm, whose evil becomes apparent upon it.

“This is because, since the soul exists in the world of nature, the appearance of vices in it is swifter than fire reaching oil. Nothing removes those vices from it except the religious law and its ordinances.

“Whoever adheres to the command and disciplines himself by bearing its burdens is truly our brother, and at every station he will find a genuine pleasure within himself.

“Whoever rebels against it by performing some of it and abandoning some, or neglecting all of it, harms no one but himself. God will do with him what is required by His judgment, and He is swift in reckoning.

“Let the reader of this book therefore reflect upon himself and accept the counsel. Indeed, I am one who sincerely advises him.

“I seek forgiveness from God, the Merciful, for myself and for the community of believers.”

This is his statement, may God sanctify his secret, in this *Mashraʿ*, which we have reproduced in full.

Then another statement from him came concerning this subject in the Sixth *Sharʿ* of the First *Sūr* of this book. We have abbreviated its mention for fear of excessive length; it is available to whoever wishes to examine it.

Section

We have decided to conclude this chapter with what he, may God sanctify his soul, mentioned in *Tanbīh al-Hādī wa-l-Mustahdī*, from a counsel he gave to his *mawlā*.

He said:

“Al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, peace be upon him, said in his counsel to Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Kirmānī when he sent him to undertake the *daʿwa* in the island of Iraq:

‘Follow our command in the worship of God, and seek our pleasure by acting according to the commands of God.

‘Revive the *sunna* of our grandfather, the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, by calling people to the oneness of God.

‘By doing this, you will increase only in nearness to God and to us.

‘Beware of مخالفة—opposition—for the one who opposes our command increases only in distance from God.

‘Perform the obligatory acts of obedience: establish the prayers, preserve righteous works, and fulfill the performance of trusts, so that your end may be sealed with goodness and you may inherit the station of proximity.

‘Urge all the believers to hold firmly to the strong bonds of religion and to fulfill the conditions of the covenants and trusts that have been made obligatory upon them and written in the records of their deeds.

‘Know that our intercession will reach only the one who acts according to the Book of God and the *sunna* of the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, and worships God Most High through obedience to us.

‘Make all our *awliyā*’ know this from us.’”

This was his statement, upon whom be God's blessings and prayers.

Section

After all this, O brother, is there any justification for a rational person to take lightly what has been made obligatory upon him, or to become heedless?

Is it fitting for him to incline toward resting from performing his duty, or to become lazy?

Does he possess any ability to retrieve the garment of his lifetime after it has been stripped away by annihilation?

How could he have the power to recover what he neglected to acquire while he had the opportunity to perform righteous deeds and then squandered it?

What excuse will he have for the shortcomings he committed in the worship of his Lord?

God Most High has said:

“Did We not give you lives long enough for whoever wished to take heed to take heed, and did not the warner come to you?”

The Third Chapter

Concerning Encouragement to Seek Knowledge and the Exhortation to Pursue It

God Most High said:

“Ask the people of remembrance if you do not know.”

And He said:

“Are those who know equal to those who do not know? Only those possessed of understanding take heed.”

He said:

“Rather, these are clear signs preserved in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge.”

And God Most High said:

“None knows its interpretation except God and those firmly grounded in knowledge.”

And He Most High said:

“God raises those among you who believe and those who have been given knowledge by degrees.”

Section

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Learn from a scholar of the People of my House, or from one who has learned from a scholar of the People of my House, and you will be saved from the Fire.”

And he said:

“Whoever God intends good for, He grants him understanding in religion.”

And he said:

“Everything has something lost from it, and the lost possession of the believer is a word of wisdom.”

And he, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Four things are incumbent upon every person of understanding and proof among my community.”

It was asked:

“O Messenger of God, what are they?”

He said:

“Listening to knowledge, preserving it, acting upon it, and spreading it.”

And he said:

“There is no ease in life except for a speaking scholar or an attentive listener.”

He, peace be upon him, also said:

“This knowledge is carried in every generation by its trustworthy people. They remove from it the distortion of the ignorant, the false claims of those who fabricate, and the interpretations of those who go to excess.”

And he said:

“When a man goes out seeking knowledge, his footsteps are recorded for him as good deeds. When he meets a scholar and the two discuss something concerning the command of God, the angels shade them, and a voice calls from above them:

“‘You have both been forgiven.’”

And he said:

“Seek knowledge even if it be in China.”

Ali, peace be upon him, said:

“There are four things for which, even if riding animals were driven until they became exhausted in pursuit of them, it would still be little:

“The servant should hope for nothing except his Lord;

“fear nothing except his sin;

“the ignorant person should not be ashamed to learn;

“and the scholar, when asked about something he does not know, should not be ashamed to say, ‘I do not know.’”

And he said:

“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim.”

Section

The Qadi al-Nu‘mān ibn Muhammad narrated from al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him, that he said:

“Seek knowledge and adorn yourselves with forbearance and dignity alongside it. Be humble toward those whom you teach knowledge, and do not become tyrannical scholars, lest your falsehood destroy the truth that belongs to you.”

And he, peace be upon him, said:

“If a young man from our Shi‘a who had not acquired understanding of religion were brought to me, I would discipline him well.”

And it is related from him, peace be upon him, that Luqmān the Wise said to his son:

“My son, do not learn knowledge so that you may boast before scholars, argue with fools, or seek status through it in gatherings.

“And do not abandon knowledge out of ascetic disdain for it and preference for ignorance.

“My son, choose your gatherings carefully.

“If you see a group remembering God, sit with them. If you are a scholar, your knowledge will benefit you, and they will increase your knowledge with more knowledge. If you are ignorant, they will teach you.

“Perhaps God will envelop them in His mercy, and it will encompass you along with them.

“My son, if you see a group that does not remember God, do not sit with them. If you are a scholar, your knowledge will not benefit you; and if you are ignorant, they will increase your ignorance with more ignorance.

“Perhaps God will envelop them in punishment, and it will encompass you along with them.”

And it is related from him, peace be upon him, that he said to some of his Shi‘a:

“Speak about us and gather in your assemblies to remember us.

“For whenever a group from among those devoted to our *walāya* gathers to remember our virtues and discuss among themselves what they have learned of our knowledge, they wander through the gardens of Paradise.

“The angels shade them and seek forgiveness for them, and God Mighty and Exalted turns toward them with the face of His mercy.”

Section

Our master Ḥamīd al-Dīn, may God exalt his sanctity, said in *Tanbīh al-Hādī wa-l-Mustahdī*:

“O brother, worship is of two kinds: worship through action, which is performed by the limbs, and worship through knowledge, which is held in one's thoughts.

“Worship through action is what we have already encouraged in general, and its benefit becomes evident through the way it disciplines the soul: through acquiring good character and virtues by observing its rites; through nearness to God, truthfulness, humility, generosity,

chastity, trustworthiness, courage, longing, patience, and other qualities produced by and contained within these virtues.

“It strips the soul, through adherence to the revival of these practices, of bad character and vices: distance from God, lying, arrogance, stinginess, slander, treachery, cowardice, hardness of heart, impatience, and all the other evils produced by and following these vices.

“Through this, there is evidence of the truthfulness of Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, his messengership, his mercy toward us, his compassion for us, and his concern for us, demonstrated by his calling us toward such noble deeds—deeds that transform souls inclined toward evil into purified angels.

“Worship through knowledge is knowledge of that which leads to the unity of God Most High, knowledge of the *ḥudūd* of God's religion, knowledge encompassing their stations and ranks, and giving each of them their due as God Most High commanded.

“This grants the soul the nobility of perfection and joins it to those possessed of splendor and majesty.

“The need for it is like the need for practical worship.

“For in the latter—meaning practical worship—is the disciplining and training of the soul; while in the former—meaning intellectual worship—is its formation and the illumination of its essence.

“When the soul does not know the unity of God Most High, nor the essences of the near angels, nor the stations of the prophets and legatees, nor the ranks of God's *ḥudūd*, concerning which God Most High said:

‘Whoever transgresses the limits of God has wronged himself’ —

“then even if it has acquired the virtues mentioned through devotion to practical worship, it remains deficient in its perfection and does not join the righteous Imams in its ultimate destination, nor is it counted among them.

“Its deficiency in perfection is comparable to the deficiency of coal and soot compared with the degree of a glowing ember, and to the deficiency of unleavened bread compared with the degree of leavened bread.

“For knowledge of the *ḥudūd* of God Most High, which leads to knowledge of the unity of God Most High, is what makes the soul everlasting and strengthens it through the overflowing of blessings.

“It grants it perfection through the knowledge of God's lofty signs impressed upon its essence and through its drinking from the water of longing for the Messenger and the Imams, the leaders of humanity.

“Through the correction of its character that it has acquired, it becomes of the same kind as that world toward which it is destined and which preceded it in existence.

“It is to the soul like fire is to coal, or leaven to dough: it gives it simplicity and, through thorough kneading, makes all its parts resemble itself in eloquence and smoothness.

“It resembles that which preceded it in existence just as fire makes coal resemble itself, and leaven makes dough resemble itself, having preceded it in existence.

“When the soul acquires virtues through outward worship but does not acquire the knowledge we have described, it is like coal or dough without leaven, remaining in the state of its original nature and not resembling what it is intended to become.

“It is like unleavened bread, which has no preparation for what it is meant to become and is not compatible with the stomach, because it lacks what would make it suitable and homogeneous with it.

“And when the soul acquires knowledge but does not acquire action, it derives no benefit from it—just as if leaven were placed in dough but the dough were not given its due of water, kneading, and turning until the smell of the leaven reached every part of it, no benefit would result.”

Section

Our master, the virtuous person, the author of the *Epistles*, peace be upon him, said at the end of *al-Risāla al-Jāmi‘a*:

“Those before you among our brothers and the righteous servants of God warned against hostility toward the sciences, and against zealotry and fanaticism for one group or another, or for one branch of knowledge while rejecting another.

“They did so because they might be ignorant of the meaning of something when they became fanatically attached to something else and preferred it over it, without considering its meanings or examining what it contains.

“Do not abandon any book of the sages, nor any doctrine of the prophets, nor hate any of the true sciences, even when their meanings are distant and their indications difficult to attain because of the remoteness of their aims.

“For whoever hates one of the sciences has failed to understand it. When he fails to understand it, he becomes hostile toward it, declares it false, and rejects it.

“Thus, when a person does this, he becomes an enemy of knowledge and of scholars, which is among his most distinctive qualities and what perfects his very being.

“This becomes a cause of loss and deprivation and a means of destruction and ruin.

“Therefore they should not abandon any science, because, as we have said, the sciences are nourishment for the soul, a source of companionship, a means by which the spirit is brought to life, and a path toward virtue, perfection, and attainment of the highest states.

“Instead, they should occupy themselves with what is most important: reforming their own beings, pursuing whatever leads them toward their goals, and following the path of their salvation.

“And they should show mercy toward all people and, whenever they call upon God for themselves, ask Him to guide His creation toward what He has guided them toward.

“For they themselves were once like those people, until God bestowed His favor upon them.

“And none among them is excepted from having entered that path.

‘And God will save those who are mindful of Him and leave the wrongdoers therein, fallen upon their knees.’”

Section

Therefore, O brother, whoever seeks advancement through the ranks of religion and prefers to join the stations of the virtuous and rightly guided should never grow weary of studying the books of the *da‘wa* whose authors are known for the soundness and correctness of their

method, which is free from both excess and deficiency, and whose followers walk the soul along the path of its corruption and ruin.

He should combine perseverance in this with adherence to his *ḥadd*, whose command has been entrusted to him.

Then the eye of his inner perception will be opened, enabling him to perceive the hidden meanings in what he studies and encounters, and revealing to him the wondrous secrets contained within the very foundation of created existence.

At that point, when he recognizes this, he will say:

“Our Lord, You did not create this in vain. Glory be to You! So protect us from the punishment of the Fire.”

Chapter Four: Concerning What Believers Owe One Another

And how a believer ought to conduct himself with his brother, the prohibition against envy and hatred, and an explanation of what is incumbent in this regard.

God, exalted is He, said: **“The believers are but brothers.”** And He said: **“Let not some of you backbite others. Would any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would surely detest it.”** And He said: **“They love those who emigrated to them.”** And He, exalted is He, said: **“Severe against the unbelievers, merciful among themselves.”** And He said: **“Converse with one another in righteousness and piety.”** And He said: **“Do not place in our hearts any rancour toward those who believe. Our Lord, indeed You are Kind and Merciful.”**

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said: **“Whoever relieves his brother of one of the distresses of this world, God will relieve him of one of the distresses of the Day of Resurrection. Whoever is occupied with fulfilling the need of his brother, God will be occupied with fulfilling his need. Whoever conceals the fault of his brother, God will conceal his fault in this world and the Hereafter. God remains in the aid of the servant so long as the servant remains in the aid of his brother.”**

And he, peace be upon him, said: **“God, exalted is He, revealed to David: ‘O David, a servant may come to Me with a single good deed and I admit him into My Paradise.’ He said: ‘My Lord, what is that good deed?’ He said: ‘That he relieves his believing brother, even if only with a date.’”** David then said: **“It is fitting for whoever knows You that he never cuts off his hope in You.”**

And he, peace be upon him, said: **“The believer is to the believer like a building, each part strengthening the other.”** And he said: **“Among the things that necessitate forgiveness is bringing joy to your believing brother.”**

Section

Amir al-Mu’minīn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon him, said:

“Do not despise the weak among your brothers, for whoever despises a believer, God will despise him and be displeased with him, and He will not bring the two together on the Day of Resurrection unless he repents. A man should not make his brother ask him for what he needs when he already knows his need.”

And he, peace be upon him, said: **“Visit one another, show compassion to one another, and give generously to one another. Do not be like the hypocrite who describes what he himself does not do.”**

And he, peace be upon him, said: **"The Muslim is the mirror of his brother. If you see a slip in him, do not become hostile toward him; rather, guide him, advise him, accompany him gently, and have mercy upon him. When a believer says to his brother, 'Uff,' the affection between them is severed. If he says to him, 'You are an unbeliever,' then one of the two has become an unbeliever. He should not accuse him; for if he accuses him, faith between them melts away as salt melts in water."**

And he, peace be upon him, said: **"Whoever comes to the aid of a distressed believer, God will come to his aid on the day when there is no shade but His shade, will secure him from the greatest terror, and will secure him from an evil return. Whoever fulfills a need of his believing brother, God will fulfill many needs for him, one of which is Paradise. Whoever assists his believing brother against an oppressive ruler, God will assist him in crossing the Bridge when feet slip. Whoever visits his believing brother at his home, not because he has a need with him, but only for the sake of God, is recorded among those who visit God, and it is incumbent upon God to honour those who visit Him."**

He, peace be upon him, said to a questioner who asked him, **"What is greater than the heavens and the earth?"** He answered: **"Slander"**—that is, that a believer should falsely accuse another believer of something that is not in him.

And the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said: **"Do not quarrel with a believer and then strip him of his honour, as the bark is stripped from a branch."** And he said: **"Beware the tear of a believer, for it strikes down the one who causes him to shed it and extinguishes the seas of Fire from the one who shed it."**

Section

It is related that our master al-Mustanşir bi-llāh, peace be upon him, used to supplicate after every prayer he performed in the inhabited palace:

"O God, forgive him who forgives the sin of his believing brother, and turn in repentance toward him who does not hold his believing brother accountable for his offence. O God, establish guidance in the heart of him who has maintained a bond between himself and his believing brother and has not severed it. Conceal the fault of him who has concealed his fault and has not exposed it. Overlook the stumble of him who has overlooked his stumble and has not exploited it. O God, grant abundance to him who grants abundance to his believing brother in his provision, and make difficult the affairs of him who is miserly toward him. O God, destroy him who has made his faith subordinate to his worldly life rather than his Hereafter; erase his heart, blind his sight, humiliate his cheek, blunt his edge, and give his enemy victory over him. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds."

Section

It is related from Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh, may God sanctify his secret, that he asked our master Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, peace be upon him:

"My master, after your knowledge, can there still be deficiency?"

He replied: **"Yes. When a believer falls short in the rights of his brothers, does not share with them in the joy and hardship of their affairs, and appropriates the goods of this world for himself while excluding them, then knowledge is stripped from him and he is torn away from his religion. He is afflicted by such worldly trials and calamities as he cannot endure or bear—pain in himself, loss of his property, and the disruption of his affairs—as recompense for his failure to show goodness toward his brothers."**

Jābir said: “I was overcome with great grief and said: ‘O son of the Messenger of God, what right does a believer have over another believer?’”

He said: “O Jābir, he rejoices in his joy when it is for good, and grieves at his grief when he is sorrowful. He looks after all his affairs and seeks their betterment. He does not concern himself with anything of this perishing world without sharing it with him, until the two of them proceed together through good and evil as one, because he is his brother from his father and mother. He inherits from him, and he has greater right to his property, because the believer is the brother of the believer. But if he were his brother from his father and mother and did not know his right, and did not know this matter, then he would have no right to possess anything of his property nor inherit from him.”

Jābir said: “Glory be to God! Who could do that and be capable of it?”

He replied: “Whoever desires to knock upon the gates of Paradise, embrace the beautiful hours, join us in the Abode of Peace, and speak face to face with the Most High, the All-Knowing.”

Jābir said: “My master, then what of what I spend upon my family and children, who do not know the truth, when my compassion for them is greater than my compassion for my brothers, and they are from me and I am from them?”

He said: “God forbid! They are not from you, nor are you from them, if they do not know this matter.”

Jābir said: “Then I have been afflicted by them.”

He said: “By God, you have not been afflicted by them except because you abandoned goodness toward your brothers and neglected their rights. For the believer is your brother by your father and mother: he inherits from you and you inherit from him. There is nothing more excellent than knowledge of your brothers.”

Section

One of the transmitters related:

A man from the scribes of Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd was appointed over us in al-Ahwāz. I was liable to a tax under him, and this tax threatened the loss of my prosperity and the removal of my property. I was told that he professed this matter, but I did not dare place my hand in his hand, fearing that what had reached me might be untrue and that I would thereby fall into a situation from which I could not escape.

So I fled to Mecca—may God protect it. When I had completed my pilgrimage, I made my way to Medina and entered upon al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him. I said:

“My master, so-and-so son of so-and-so has been appointed over my country. I have heard that he is one of your adherents and one of those who follow you, the People of the House. I did not dare place my hand in his hand, fearing that what reached me might not be true, in which case I would lose my property and my prosperity. I fled from him to God and to you.”

He then wrote a small note in his noble handwriting:

**“In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Compassionate.

God has, beneath the shade of His Throne, a shade in which none dwells except a believer who relieves his brother of a distress, assists him with his own person, or does him a kindness, even if only with half a date.

And this is your brother.

Peace.”**

He then sealed it, gave it to me, and ordered me to deliver it to him.

When I returned to my country, I went to him by night. I told the chamberlain to say, **“The messenger of your master is at the door.”**

The chamberlain entered and informed him. Suddenly he came out barefoot toward me.

When he saw me, he greeted me and kissed me between the eyes. Then he said:

“My master, are you the messenger of my master?”

I said: **“Yes.”**

He said: **“Then you have set me free, if you are truthful.”**

He took me by the hand, brought me into his house, seated me in his place of assembly, and sat before me. Then he said:

“My master, how did you leave my master?”

I said: **“In good condition.”**

He said: **“God?”**

I said: **“God.”**

He repeated it to me three times.

Then I handed him the note. He read it, kissed it, and placed it upon his eyes. He said to me:

“My brother, state your affair.”

I said: **“Against me in your register is such-and-such a number of thousands of dirhams, and because of it I am ruined and destroyed.”**

He called for the register, erased what was owed by me, gave me a discharge, and released me from it.

Then he called for the chests containing his wealth and divided them equally with me. Then he called for his riding animals, taking one animal and giving me one. Then he called for his servants, taking one servant and giving me one. Then he called for his clothing, taking one garment and giving me one, allowing me to choose in all these matters.

He continued until he had divided all his property with me, saying:

“My brother, have I made you happy?”

I would say: **“Yes, by God.”**

And my joy only increased.

When the season of pilgrimage came, I said:

“By God, no! I cannot repay this brother with anything more beloved to God and His Messenger than going to Mecca—may God protect it—praying for him, going to my master, thanking him before him, and asking him to pray for him.”

So I went to Mecca—may God protect it—and made my way to my master.

When I entered upon him, I saw joy upon his face. He said:

“So-and-so, what news do you have of the man?”

I began relating to him what had happened between us. His face became radiant, and the joy upon it became manifest.

I said:

“My master, what he did for me brought me such joy that I pray God may make him happy in all his affairs.”

He said:

“Yes, by God, it has brought me joy. By God, it brought joy to my fathers. By God, it brought joy to the Commander of the Believers. By God, it brought joy to the Messenger of God. By God, it brought joy to God beneath His Throne.”

Section

Our master al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him, said:

“The believer is the brother of the believer by his father and mother; their father is light and their mother is mercy.”

And he, peace be upon him, said:

“By God, my spiritual connection to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is dearer to me than my physical lineage from him.”

This, O brother, is the spiritual lineage that unites the awliyā’ in religious birth. There is a great distance between this spiritual lineage and bodily lineage.

Consider, O brother, the inner, true lineage of Salmān al-Fārisī, may God be pleased with him, and how it ennobled him until the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Salmān is one of us, the People of the House.”

And consider the bodily lineage of Abū Lahab and how it availed him nothing, nor did his kinship to him, peace and blessings be upon him, raise him, as it has been said:

Islam raised Salmān of Persia
even as polytheism lowered the noble Abū Lahab.

In this is the fullest proof of the nobility of the lineage of religion.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“O Banū Hāshim, let not people come to me on the Day of Resurrection with their deeds while you come to me with your lineages, for I can avail you nothing against God.”

Thus, O brother, there is no lineage except the true lineage, and no brotherhood except religious brotherhood. Everything besides this is false, and every good deed performed by one who severs the bond of religious kinship is wasted and perishing.

Section

Perhaps, O brother, when one hears the words transmitted in this chapter, the matter may seem burdensome to him, and he may find himself unable to act upon it because of the hardship he perceives in it and cannot patiently endure. That distress may then lead him to cast it aside and abandon following any part of it.

What is incumbent upon him is to strive against himself and exert the extent of his ability. Even if he does not accomplish all of it, when he does what he is capable of doing and acts upon some of it, he will succeed and be saved, even if it is little.

For God, exalted is He, said:

“God does not cause the work of any worker among you to be lost, whether male or female.”

And He said:

“God does not cause the reward of those who do good to be lost.”

And He said:

“Whatever good you do, it will not be denied to you.”

And He said:

“Whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it.”

Section

Know, O brother, that among many of those encompassed by the circle of the noble covenant, hatred, hostility, and envy may arise. Perhaps some of them even strive to harm others. This is a departure from what they were bound to in the covenant taken from them concerning allegiance to the walī and hostility toward the enemy, and it is a violation of what was stipulated therein.

Let a man therefore take himself to account, and let him know that if he is transgressing against his companion, then by that he is surely ruined unless he rescues himself through repentance and turning back from it.

But if he is the one against whom aggression has been committed, let him praise God, exalted is He, for being wronged rather than a wrongdoer. God, exalted is He, is his avenger, as God said:

“Whoever is wronged, God will surely give him victory.”

Let him reckon whatever pain this has caused him as being for the sake of God. Through it God multiplies his good deeds and erases many of his evil deeds. Let him be patient with its bitterness.

For he, peace be upon him, said:

“The station of patience in faith is like the head in relation to the body.”

And he said:

“Patience is half of faith.”

God, exalted is He, said:

“Indeed, the patient shall be given their reward without measure.”

Section

Hatred and hostility are not among the qualities of the righteous whom God, exalted is He, excepted when He said:

“Close friends on that Day will be enemies to one another, except the God-fearing.”

And He, exalted is He, described their condition in contrast to that of the inhabitants of Hell, saying:

“He it is who strengthened you with His help and with the believers, and He united their hearts. Had you spent all that is upon the earth, you could not have united their hearts, but God united them. Indeed, He is Mighty, Wise.”

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“I and you, O ‘Alī, are the two fathers of the believers.”

Thus, without doubt, whoever hates his brothers in religion has been undutiful toward his two fathers. Because of his hatred toward his brothers, he deserves that they deprive him of their goodness and withhold from him their compassion and kindness.

Woe to the one who deprives himself of the benefit of their accepted intercession and does not join himself to their company.

Section

Beware—beware greatly—of envy, for the envious person is an enemy to the blessings of God. It has been said that envy is incompatible with faith.

Envy is the destroyer of the first and the last, the one who casts a person back to the lowest of the low. It is the root of evil, the summit of affliction, and the descent from the lofty and noble ranks into the lowliest and basest depths.

It was the foundation of what occurred in the origin of creation by way of transgression, and thereafter in the human stations of mankind, as in the case of Adam, peace be upon him, and the possessor of the Iblīsian station, and of whoever in every age assumes the garment of opposition, proceeding in envy of the masters of guidance and opposing them through the path of the Qārithian deviation.

Likewise, pride is among the mothers of sins.

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said that God, exalted is He, says:

“Pride is My cloak and greatness is My garment. Whoever contests Me in either of them, I shall cast him into the Fire.”

And he, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Pride is the garment of God. Whoever contests Him concerning it, He crushes him.”

One of the ḥudūd of the religion, may God sanctify his secret, said in some of his poetry:

Beware of pride and envy,
which destroy the very foundation of faith.

And it is incumbent upon every believer, O brother, to guard himself with the utmost care against making his brother hear ugly speech.

God, exalted is He, said:

“Do not call one another by offensive nicknames. Wretched is the name of wickedness after faith.”

Fisq is departure from obedience. Thus, whoever does this becomes one upon whose tongue Satan has breathed, and he departs from those concerning whom God said:

“Indeed, My servants—you have no authority over them.”

Section

Know, O brother, that among the community of believers there may be one who sees that the person entrusted with his affair has raised him to one of the ranks of religion and appointed him as one who benefits other mustajībūn, according to his worthiness and what his righteous action and noble knowledge have required.

Some then respond with contentment and submission to their walī al-amr, obeying the one whom he has appointed and carrying out his command. This is the path of religion: whoever follows it is saved, while whoever opposes and transgresses it is destroyed.

But envy may enter others, causing them to deny this appointment. It leads them to the ugliest of paths because of what they have concealed within themselves. They wrong themselves after their illumination, turn back upon their heels in retreat, and descend from the highest summit of existence to the lowest depths of corruption.

In the Hereafter they will be gathered among those described by the saying:

“Go back behind you and seek a light.”

So let anyone who finds within his heart anything of what I have mentioned examine himself and receive his affair with repentance and seeking forgiveness. Otherwise, his path will be the path of those who sought worldly leadership in former cycles, those who deserved, because of their envy of the people of rank in their ranks, to enter the lowest depths of the Fire.

We seek refuge in God, exalted is He, from denying the act of His awliyā’, and we ask Him to make us among those who submit to their command in prosperity and adversity.

Section

We wish, O brother, to conclude this epistle with what is required by the etiquette of religion and what is incumbent upon all the awliyā’ and believers.

Many of our brothers, perhaps having gained knowledge of the truth and been entrusted with some of its obscure and subtle secrets, may meet with another of their kind and disclose to him something which they have not been permitted to disclose. By doing so, they commit a grave sin and transgression, for the command concerning that knowledge has not been directed to the person who receives it, nor has his guidance been entrusted to him.

This is among the greatest of sins, from which he must dissociate himself and repent.

In truth, this is **inner adultery**, because he has entered into something for which the one entrusted with his affair did not grant him permission, nor was he given leave to teach it to another. Rather, he transgressed his limit and exceeded his proper station.

Just as ordinary, manifest marriage cannot be completed except through the father or guardian of the woman, otherwise the child is not attributed to his father according to the rulings required by the pure Sharī‘a and what it entails, so too one who acquires knowledge from someone who has not been permitted to impart it falls into this predicament.

Its outward form is that he is not attributed to the people of the lofty and exalted ranks, nor does he attain, in his return, a place within the noble religious lineage, corresponding in its outward form to the purified legal rulings of the Sharī‘a.

We ask God, exalted is He, by the right of the chosen ones among His excellent ḥudūd and the elect among His blessed awliyā’, to establish you and us, O brother, and all the believers upon the ways of guidance; to protect us all from the places of destruction and perdition; and to bind our causes to the causes of those whom He has made the gates of mercy:

Muḥammad and his pure, noble family, the Imams.

And thereafter, we conclude this epistle with that with which we opened it:

Praise be to God, whom the subtleties of imagination and thought are incapable of conceiving, and whose knowledge the illuminating faculties of insight fall short of fully realizing, let alone the eyes.

May God bless Muḥammad, His Messenger, who guides those who obey him to the path of salvation and brings them to the fountain of the Water of Life;

and upon his legatee, who occupies from him the station that his tablet occupies from his pen, ‘**Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib**, who clarifies the difficult matters with the lamp of his wisdom;

and upon the righteous Imams from his progeny, the guides to the path of truth and its ways;

and upon him who ascended to the highest summit of glory, who possessed the nobility of the Imamate in the days of his youth, **our master and lord, the Ṭayyib, Abū al-Qāsim, Amir al-**

Mu'minīn, unique of his age and the apple of his eye, and the Proof of God, exalted is He, over His creation and creatures.

May peace be upon them all, an unbroken peace until the Day of Resurrection.

God is sufficient for us, and He is the best of protectors.

A Copy of the Epistle Commissioned by the Exalted Sultan, Our Master al-Khaṭṭāb ibn al-Ḥasan, May God Sanctify His Secret

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Compassionate, and through Him we seek assistance in all affairs.

To Begin

Praise be to God, whose praise is the worthiest thing with which to begin and conclude, and the most fitting thing with which to open and complete. I praise Him with the praise of one who knows the worth of the blessings He has bestowed upon him, and I thank Him with the gratitude of one who has realized the full nature of what He has apportioned to him.

A praise that makes the recipient of it attain his intended aim and purpose, and a gratitude that brings the one who offers it to the fulfilment of the obligation imposed upon him.

I bear witness that there is no god but God, with certainty and realization, declaring Him transcendent above any likeness or correspondence to that which He has brought into existence, both in speech and in belief. I follow the way of those who affirm while declaring Him transcendent, abandoning the path of those who deny and those who liken Him to His creation—a testimony of one sincere in establishing it, one who knows its bounds and fulfils its rights.

And I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and His Messenger. He sent him with guidance and the religion of truth, that He might make it prevail over every religion, though the polytheists dislike it. He strengthened him with manifest miracles and clear signs that confounded what they fabricated.

May God bless him with a blessing that endures and remains, by which its believer is made happy in the return and does not suffer. And upon his family, whom He purified of impurity and whose love He imposed upon jinn and mankind.

To Proceed

Every blessing among the blessings has a known measure of gratitude and an understood share of praise. The grateful person neither exceeds the limit assigned to it nor falls short of the intended purpose. Rather, he does of it that for which he cannot be accused of deficiency, nor condemned for excess, so that the counterfeit of gratitude may be distinguished from its pure form, and excess in praise from its deficiency.

Since a person who possesses the remains of the goods of this world has nothing that he seeks except them, he is obliged to direct that toward praise and commendation, and must spread it through the eloquence of gratitude and praise, so that he may be like the good land that brings forth its vegetation by the permission of its Lord, and whose crops produce multiples of what was deposited in it as seed. By this he becomes deserving of continual increase and summons further renewal through what he possesses.

Then the one who has been granted a share of knowledge and given a portion, both contracted and expanded, of the gifts of wisdom, until its fruits have been made easy for him

and he has entered beneath its deep shade, is more worthy and more deserving of praising this gift and more capable of offering gratitude for it.

For by what he has contained and acquired, and by the nobility with which he has been distinguished and the success he has attained, he has reached an honoured station with his Lord, according to His saying, exalted is He:

“He gives wisdom to whomsoever He wills, and whoever is given wisdom has certainly been given abundant good.”

Therefore what is incumbent upon him in this regard is greater and more abundant, and what is required of him is fuller and more complete—especially regarding a truth that he supports and advances, a falsehood that he defeats and refutes, a religion whose proof he clarifies, unbelief whose essence he extinguishes, guidance whose beacon he raises, error whose fire he puts out, a Sunnah whose banner he elevates, an innovation whose mark he erases, a praiser whose support he strengthens, an atheist whose scheme he weakens, faith whose foundation he establishes and builds, and hypocrisy whose root he uproots and destroys.

For if he makes this his purpose and concern, and devotes his judgment and resolve to it, out of anger for God and His Messenger, he will attain his desire and request, his share of reward and recompense will become great, and he will prosper in his return and final abode.

He will thereby be one who rises to fulfil praise and gratitude and rejects ingratitude toward and denial of the blessing. Thus he will call forth increase and deserve renewal.

May God, exalted is He, qualify us for that which pleases and satisfies Him, and establish us upon contentment and submission to what He decrees and requires, by the right of His mighty Name and His wise remembrance.

Section

When the epistle entitled **“The Most Luminous Proof, concerning the Inimitability of Sūrat al-Kawthar”** reached me—an epistle possessing the highest rank of eloquence and the fullest share of clarity—it came from one whom it demonstrated to be virtuous, for by it he had risen as a champion of the religion.

He composed it in reply to one who had drunk deeply from the spring of error and become excessive therein, who had deviated from the path of guidance and led others astray by claiming to oppose the Noble Qur’ān, **“to which falsehood cannot approach, neither from before it nor from behind it—a revelation from One Wise, Praiseworthy.”**

By doing so, that man departed from the circle of Islam, passed beyond the Sharī‘a of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, with the highest peace, inclined toward and joined himself to the party of falsehood, separated himself from and distinguished himself from the party of truth, exposed himself to the arrows of the curse shot from the bows of condemnation, turned backward after advancing, and relied upon the unbelieving faction.

By my life, whoever is greedy for exaltation, rushes recklessly through the fields of his passions, relies upon his own opinion and intellect, is ignorant of his own deficiency while being perceptive of his supposed merit, until blindness and bewilderment overcome him and doubt and ambiguity encompass him—it is not unlikely that God will abandon him to himself, wandering through the darkness of ignorance and stumbling blindly through the wilderness of error, until Satan becomes his sole companion and takes exclusive possession of him.

He then becomes entangled in the abyss of destruction and descends into it, having been diverted and slipped from the straight path, turned away from the radiant light, and destroyed, until his existence becomes nonexistence and is followed by regret and remorse.

As has been related from one of the righteous, who said:

“I found man to stand between God and Satan. If he obeys God, He delivers him and chooses him for Himself; otherwise, He leaves him to his enemy.”

I therefore regarded it as an obligatory duty to support him and as a necessary right to strengthen him. So I stirred myself to this task with the gentleness of one who is stirred, and resolved to clarify what had been overlooked in it and make it manifest: knowledge hidden behind veils, knowledge whose attainment of the degree of inimitability surpasses even wonder.

In this I shall follow the path of allusion and indication, dispensing with explicit statement, concerning matters which, when sound understandings comprehend them, long for their knowledge and yearn for them; and when the hidden recesses of thought contemplate them, they incline toward and desire their realization.

Thus what I present will be an increase in the outward manifestation and multiplication of the proofs, and a succession and reinforcement of the evidences for the inimitability of the Qur’ān, by the power and might of God, His assistance and His will.

I seek from God, exalted is He, the substance of success, and ask Him for protection from error and guidance toward sound speech and righteous action, by the right of His Names by which He is called and answers, and through which the supplicant seeks access to Him and is not disappointed.

Section

I say—and through God I seek assistance—that the first thing incumbent upon one who is stirred to defend the religion of God and undertakes this task is to avoid haste and adhere to deliberation.

One of the righteous said:

“People were destroyed only through haste; had they been deliberate, no one would have been destroyed.”

It has been related from the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, that he said:

“Deliberation is an act of God, and haste is an act of Satan.”

This is so that one does not plunge into matters he does not know, nor make statements that burden him with sin—statements that may be lies falsely attributed, fabricated falsehoods contrived and produced, prompted by the prejudice of their transmitter, revealed by the envy of their speaker, cast upon an innocent person, and thereby constituting slander, manifest sin, and an outrageous fabrication.

God, Lord of the worlds, has said:

“O you who believe, if a sinful person brings you news, investigate it, lest you harm a people in ignorance and then become regretful for what you have done.”

The soundest course, therefore, is to keep the reins of speech restrained and abstain from what God, exalted is He, has forbidden concerning backbiting, until one arrives at a matter that he can discern and verify, and finds evidence supporting it that confirms its truth.

Then he may speak while possessing insight and certainty concerning his matter.

He should seek out the possible objections to the claimant, without suspicion, having set before himself what has reached him of the man's statement and summoned his intellect to answer it. He should confront every word he finds with the appropriate argument that resolves its intended claim.

Let what he says consist of the finest expressions, far removed from obscurity, possessing a powerful proof, a clear path, decisive demonstration, and radiant exposition.

When he presents it in an ordered manner, reason should testify to its truth, so that the ignorant, misguided wanderer who has drunk deeply from the cup of error finds no escape from the snare of his own words nor any refuge from the trap of his argument.

This follows the approved Sunnah in the saying of God, exalted is He:

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good admonition.”

Yet whoever follows such paths, enters such destructive places, professes such a religion and believes it, and supports and strengthens it with his speech, has no sanctity by which one must refrain from confronting him in deed or word, nor any protected status requiring hesitation in opposing his schemes and attacks.

For the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“There is no sanctity for a sinful person.”

However, the learned man must not be one who responds to ignorance with ignorance. It has been said in the *Manshūr al-Ḥikam*:

“It is among the rights of excellence, by which the wise person is distinguished from the ignorant, to bear his slips, offer him instruction, care for him, and improve his guidance.”

For thereby he joins to his excellence the reward that comes from it, as well as good obedience to him and attentiveness to his proper station.

It has also been said:

“The best among the learned is he who sees the ignorant as a child, for whom mercy is more appropriate than harshness. He excuses him for his deficiency in what he does, but does not excuse himself for delaying in guiding him or for refusing the hardship of correcting him, for the finest fruit of the learned man is his correction of those beneath him.”

And it has been said:

“Let your concern for guiding the one who has deviated from you toward what is right in your affair be greater than your desire for revenge. For revenge lowers you from guidance and from the benefit of deliberation.”

And it has been said:

“How excellent a minister knowledge is for intellect; how excellent a minister for knowledge is forbearance; how excellent a minister for forbearance is gentleness; and how excellent a minister for gentleness is kindness.”

God, exalted is He, said:

“Argue with them in the manner that is best.”

And He said:

“It was by mercy from God that you were gentle with them; had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you.”

This, then, is the first obligation upon one who argues for a religion he supports and strengthens, and it is incumbent upon the one who upholds a Sharī‘a he establishes and reinforces.

Now that the discussion has reached what those possessed of understanding know to be sound and true, I shall return to discussing the epistle defending Islam, correcting what I found crooked within it and clarifying what was obscure in its method.

Section

The author of the epistle claimed that whatever a human being manifests through his action becomes invalid if it is opposed by something similar to it.

I say that the author of the epistle has struck the very heart of the matter and singled himself out by this merit.

Yet there is here a subtle point to which the results of reflection have drawn attention, by way of warning and reminder: **Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him, cannot be equalled, nor can anyone be his counterpart**, for that is impossible and plainly beyond human capacity.

Although he, peace and blessings be upon him, appeared in an Adamic form and resembled human beings in their outward features and attributes, the distance between him and them is as great as that between corruption and existence.

For even if they resemble him in their bodies, how could they resemble him in the tremendous virtues by which he was ennobled in respect of his essential substance, rather than merely in respect of his human bodily form?

It is related from Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, may God have mercy upon him, that he said to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him:

“My master, you once told me that between you and your Lord there is a mirror. What is that mirror, may my father and mother be your ransom, O Messenger of God?”

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, replied:

“Jābir, that is, by God, a heart that became radiant for God, and God made radiant through it.”

O Jābir, where could the piercing intellects lead one in this matter? How vast the difference between radiance and setting!

How could a human being ascend to the horizon of this tremendous virtue and occupy this exalted rank, which is above every designation?

By my life, whoever possessed such a station and attained it could bring forth the like of what he, peace and blessings be upon him, brought forth.

But that is something that cannot be.

No movement or stillness of imagination can encompass it.

Whoever claims such a thing for another human being besides him, peace and blessings be upon him, has gone astray and fallen into the depths of error, for the expressions transmitted from him, peace and blessings be upon him, attributed to him through chains of transmission, adorned in the garments of inimitability and manifest in the ornaments of eloquence and concision, have defeated those who sought to rival them.

Those who competed with them were driven backward before their goal; their arena cast them aside, and its dust remained beyond their reach.

They were too weak to produce anything like them and were unable to do so, despite having promised that they would.

Yet these expressions are attributed to him and counted as proceeding from him.

Why, then, did they not produce an example or weave something upon their pattern?

No! Both the Persians and the Arabs attempted this, yet the desired goal and objective proved beyond their reach.

Whoever adorns himself with such ornaments and claims the nobility of such an exalted station deserves to be pelted for his ignorance and excused only insofar as one excuses a person for claiming what does not belong to him.

If human capacity is restricted from attaining this, and their thoughts are confined from producing its like, while it is, in their estimation, merely the speech of an unlettered man and the utterance of a human being, then the claim that it would become invalid if opposed by something similar is impossible.

To require this of anyone besides him, peace and blessings be upon him, is mere claim and fabrication.

It has already been established in sound reason, confirmed in sound understanding, and made clear that human beings are incapable of producing the like of the speech of a human being like themselves, and that neither their first nor their last is capable of it.

How, then, could they oppose a discourse that did not arise from mere imagination or thought, when their minds and understandings are themselves incapable of encompassing the products of the thoughts and imaginations of those who are naturally akin to him in creation, and who are attributed and related to him—let alone producing anything like it in the arrangement of its divisions, the selection of eloquent speech, knowledge of separation and conjunction, or the correspondence between branch and root?

No. Had it proceeded from a merely human essence, its kind would have been capable of producing its like.

Even if he, peace and blessings be upon him, had merely gathered them together upon a level of equality, their excellences in comparison with his would have been no more than deficiencies.

He, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“I was sent with comprehensive words.”

That is the tremendous excellence.

This section has taken its full share of elaboration and gone beyond what is needed for persuasion in responding to the one who says that whatever a human being manifests through his action becomes invalid if opposed by something similar.

Section

With the assistance of God, Possessor of Majesty and Might, I now turn the reins of discourse toward explaining that **the inimitability of the Qur’ān in its meaning is more wondrous than its inimitability in its eloquence and concision of expression**, concerning which we have heard what the epistle set out to explain and whose hearing has taken the place of direct observation.

I say that the inimitability of the Qurʾān is not limited to what the author of the epistle described: powerful, commanding, majestic, inspiring, consoling, wondrous speech; eloquence and rhetoric; brevity; sweetness; concision; beauty; and all the other qualities which human speech cannot fully encompass, even if speech were gathered together and exerted itself in arranging its letters and refining its meanings to comprehend the least portion of its exaltation above every other speech, its fulfilment of every description, and its comprehensiveness beyond all elaboration.

The author of the epistle, in all that he displayed and repeated in praise of it, did well indeed and excelled.

Yet if its inimitability were only from this aspect, it would not constitute a proof against the non-Arabs, nor would it establish a clear path for them.

For God, exalted is He, said:

“We have not sent any messenger except in the language of his people.”

The Qurʾān has made clear that Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was sent to all people.

God, exalted is He, said:

“We have not sent you except to all mankind, as a bearer of good tidings and a warner.”

And he, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“I was sent to the black and the white.”

Thus this statement places both the Arabs, in whose language the Qurʾān was revealed, and the non-Arabs within one circle.

This presents a difficulty that grips the throat and a matter whose gravity is exceedingly great.

For the Qurʾān is his, peace and blessings be upon him, most wondrous sign and most compelling miracle.

If its miraculous quality and its sign were manifested only through the eloquence it contains, its powerful rhetoric, and the extraordinary fluency it encompasses, then this would necessarily apply to the Arabs and not to the other nations.

Its eloquence and fluency would not constitute a proof against the non-Arabs.

But if the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, was sent to all people, according to God's saying:

“O mankind, indeed I am the Messenger of God to you all,”

and the non-Arabs are joined with the Arabs by the common name of humanity, then his overwhelming miracle and wondrous signs—the Great Qurʾān and Wise Remembrance—must necessarily contain something that overwhelms the non-Arabs in the same way that its power of expression, concision, and eloquence overwhelms the Arabs, so that his miracle encompasses both groups.

If the Qurʾān were deficient in this noble rank and exalted degree, and its inimitability were restricted to its eloquence, fluency, concision, and the other qualities of its wording, then whoever restricted it to this would have diminished its fullest share, stripped it of its most splendid rank, deprived it of its finest ornaments, and stripped it of its most magnificent garment.

Its failure to be confined to this goal is not a deficiency in it, nor does it introduce any blemish or stain. Rather, the deficiency belongs to the one who restricts it to that.

For the Qur'ān encompasses such completeness that if a person of knowledge and understanding restricts himself to its lowest level, he will prevail and overcome; but if one who has reached the utmost degree of knowledge and understanding reaches its highest point, he will be astonished and overwhelmed.

For God, exalted is He, has included within it what He has made lawful and unlawful, permitted and prohibited, approved and disliked, commanded and forbidden; what He has promised those who obey Him of reward; and what He has threatened those who disobey Him with punishment.

Thus His promise serves as encouragement and His threat as warning, so that desire may motivate obedience and fear may prevent disobedience.

It also contains the stories of former peoples and reports of bygone generations, serving as admonition and reflection, through which desire is strengthened and fear increases.

This is only a little of the great abundance of its knowledge.

And, together with this, it is revealed and not created: the Speech of God, exalted is He, one of His attributes; from Him it began and to Him it returns.

“Say: This is my way; I call to God upon clear insight, I and whoever follows me. Glory be to God, and I am not among the polytheists.”

Section

Having fulfilled what was required of me in supporting the author of the epistle, and having alluded to the inimitability of the Qur'ān through what I have presented of matters concealed and veiled from him—for I had stipulated that I would present them by way of indication and dispense with explicit exposition—I shall now return to examining what his epistle contains and the obscure meanings included in his discourse.

Whatever beauties I have found within it, I shall proclaim and make known, praising and thanking him for them.

Whatever faults I have encountered, I shall conceal and cover, while drawing his attention to them and reminding him of them. I shall refrain from reproaching or condemning him because of them, unless there is an argument that I must clarify or an admonition that I must make explicit, following the saying of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him:

“The believer is the mirror of the believer: he shows him his good and his evil.”

It has been related from some of the righteous predecessors that he used to say:

“May God have mercy upon the one who directs me to my faults.”

By your life, the author of the epistle is among the foremost of his age, and I am not ignorant of his worth.

Yet my knowledge of his worth does not prevent me from establishing the truth against him.

I offer my apology and seek to be excused for the slip before I am held accountable for what I utter or burdened for what I extract from his words, since I find no alternative but to do so.

Even so, I shall not exceed the proper limit. Rather, I seek through what I have undertaken and been stirred to do that which raises and strengthens Islam.

For the author of the epistle sent it to me and presented it to me, displaying before me the page of his belief and seeking my assistance in achieving his purpose. He constructed it upon matters which he had set forth and secrets whose symbols he had concealed, inviting me to sound its depths.

Who, then, was more qualified for this task than I?

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Speak the truth, even if it is difficult, even if it is bitter.”

One of the righteous predecessors said:

“The truth has left us no friend.”

And one of the sages was asked:

“Which time is most difficult?”

He replied:

“The time that forces me to say something which, if I say it, angers my friend, and if I do not say it, angers God.”

Section

I say that the author of the epistle has represented Islam in the finest manner, defended its sanctuary with tooth and claw, drawn attention to the defence and protection of the domain of the Sharī‘a, and urged toward what brings and attracts the mercy of the Lord, exalted is He.

Yet he stumbled in it, disrupted its order, and introduced a matter which I reject. My desire to advise him is what has led me to mention it.

It is what is required by the meaning of the two verses with which he adorned his epistle and through which he expressed his belief and position. They are these:

Would that one might bring forth its like,
and relieve us from the burden of obligation,

and remove from us what we endure throughout our age—
the hunger of fasting and separation from the beloved.

The author of the epistle quoted these verses in attacking, as he claimed, the one who had composed the epistle against him. He employed therein the manner of jest and humour concerning what he had undertaken.

Yet in doing so, he gave the impression that the pillars of the Sharī‘a upon which it is founded, and the conditions of the religion attributed to it—purification, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage, striving, and all the other religious matters which God, exalted is He, has encouraged people to perform and forbidden them to cast aside or neglect; for which He has promised those who perform them abundant reward and tremendous recompense, and threatened those who turn away from them with painful punishment and severe retribution—are burdensome obligations and hardships to be endured.

This is a claim that reason rejects and understanding recoils from.

I maintain that whenever the author of these words finds a way to attain the comfort that such a position offers, he will follow it; and whenever he finds an excuse acceptable for abandoning one of these matters, he will abandon it.

I seek refuge in God from this doctrine, which calls to error, and I dissociate myself before Him from this belief, whose adherent proceeds through it toward unbelief.

Does the author of the epistle not know that God, blessed and exalted is He—to whom belong praise and thanks—when He prescribed worship for His creation, imposed upon them what He imposed, sent His messengers with it, and revealed His Books concerning it, did so as an act of gracious favour toward them, not because of any need that compelled Him or necessity that required it?

Rather, He intended by it to bestow grace upon them and lead them toward goodness and blessing, just as He graciously bestowed upon them innumerable blessings.

Indeed, the blessing contained in what He made their worship is greater, because the benefit of what is not among acts of worship is restricted to the losing world, whereas the benefit of acts of worship encompasses the benefit of this world and the Hereafter.

That which gathers both benefits is therefore the greater blessing and the more abundant grace.

Then God, exalted is He, through His gentleness and the perfection of His creation, divided what He prescribed for them into three categories.

One category consists of what He commanded them to believe: affirmation, tawḥīd, transcendence, abstraction, sanctification, acknowledgment, and affirmation of what His Messenger Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him, brought concerning promise and threat, resurrection and reckoning, the establishment of the Hour, the punishment of the grave, Paradise and Hell, the Throne, the angels, the Balance, the return, and other such matters.

This category belongs exclusively to the souls, not the bodies.

A second category consists of what He commanded them to perform: purification, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage, striving, and what follows from these.

This is a category in which souls and bodies participate together.

A third category consists of what He commanded them to abstain from.

Some of this belongs exclusively to the souls rather than the bodies: denial, associationism, unbelief, anthropomorphism, error, lying, hypocrisy, immorality, envy, pride, backbiting, tale-bearing, and sexual indecency.

Some of it involves both souls and bodies: committing forbidden acts, killing the soul whom God has forbidden to kill, transgressing the bounds, taking what has been prohibited, adultery, and whatever follows from these.

Since the acts of worship which God, exalted is He, imposed upon His creation and required them to perform—obeying what He commanded and refraining from what He forbade—lead toward His pleasure and the attainment of the reward which His truthful promise has preceded them with, they are removed from the category of obligation and hardship, as I shall explain, clarify, and establish in what follows, God willing.

The wisdom in this is radiant and clear, and the proof of its truth shines forth.

Can the rational person, when considering this, find any justification for falling short in what he has been commanded to do when it is a blessing upon him?

Or can he find any latitude in committing what he has been forbidden when it is a grace brought to him?

Can a blessing be treated in the same manner as a burden and hardship?

By the ordinary meaning of things, a blessing is enjoyed, while an obligation is experienced as something burdensome. Thus a person approaches a blessing with energy, openness, ease of thought, expansion of the breast, peace of mind, good disposition, alertness of perception, and dominant desire.

But he approaches an obligation with reluctance, weakness, laziness, boredom, yawning, stretching, troubled thoughts, constriction of the breast, distaste, distracted thought, and heaviness.

If these qualities necessarily belong to obligation, and if the pillars of the Sharīʿa, according to the author of the epistle, are obligations and hardships, then whenever he rises to perform one of them, he must necessarily experience the qualities experienced by one who undertakes something reluctantly.

With such an attitude, the obligatory acts would not be performed according to their true meaning.

And sufficient against such a person is the intention upon which all deeds depend.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Actions are only by intentions, and every person shall have what he intended.”

God, exalted is He, said:

“When they stand for prayer, they stand lazily, showing themselves to the people, and they remember God only a little.”

Could one upon whom God has bestowed a blessing neglect it despite his severe need for it and regard it as a burden and hardship, except that he would be blameworthy according to reason?

And this is further confirmed by what has been transmitted.

The author of the epistle, in claiming that the pillars of the Sharīʿa are burdens and hardships, has placed them in the same category as children when they are compelled to acquire discipline, good character, knowledge, and the rank of humanity; to cast off their animal nature; and to resemble the great, eminent, and excellent among people.

Children see these things as burdens and obligations because their desires incline toward play, frivolity, and leisure, and because, in the immediate life, they are ignorant of the later benefit of what they are compelled to do when they come to need it.

If they were indulged and excused, that would be more beloved and desirable to them.

Likewise, the author of the epistle regarded the pillars of the Sharīʿa as burdens and hardships because custom has accustomed nature to love idleness, prefer leisure, amusement, play, diversion, and worldly matters which the pillars of the Sharīʿa prohibit.

God, exalted is He, said:

“Indeed, prayer restrains from indecency and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of God is greater.”

The remembrance of God is the Qurʾān.

And because of ignorance of the ultimate benefit of these things in the Hereafter, when they are needed, if this were indeed their nature and there were a single means of indulgence by which they could be discarded, escaped, and cast off, he would hasten to do so.

The proof of this is the prayer for rain which he offered for the misguided misleader who claimed to oppose the Book of God, exalted is He, and his wish that its obligation might be abolished—his seeking relief from it because he found it burdensome, tedious, and distressing.

Section

We shall now begin explaining the pillars of the Sharī‘a against which the author of the epistle has made the claim that they are obligations and hardships, in a manner that removes them from the category of obligation under which he placed them and places them instead under the category of blessings from which he excluded them.

I say—and through God I seek assistance—that God, exalted is He, was gracious toward His creation and bestowed favour upon them by making an act corresponding to every obligation and assigning a share of reward to it. He encouraged them toward it and made the reward for a good deed tenfold, multiplying the recompense of the one who performs it and placing punishment upon the one who abandons it.

Among the subtleties of His wisdom is that He gave every act of worship two conditions: a condition of perfection and a condition of permissibility, as an act of gentleness toward His creation, for He knew beforehand that among them are those who hasten forward and those who are slow and burdened, and those who have no patience to carry out worship in its most perfect form.

Thus what a person leaves out from the forms of his worship does not invalidate the obligation, nor prevent him from receiving reward.

This is therefore among His blessings upon them and the excellence of His care for them.

The category of worship which He commanded them to perform contains the pillars of the Sharī‘a I have mentioned.

The first are **purification and prayer**, which pertain in worship to the bodies.

God therefore placed them before that which pertains to wealth, namely the obligation of **zakāt**, gradually training His creation to remain steadfast in obedience and exercising them in worship, since souls are more miserly regarding what concerns wealth and more generous regarding what concerns the body.

God therefore placed the obligation of purification before prayer because it is easier to perform and quicker to carry out, and because it is the gateway to prayer, which contains humility, supplication, and submission.

He, exalted is He, said:

“Indeed, God loves those who repent and loves those who purify themselves.”

Then He imposed prayer, which is bound to fear and desire: fear of Him and desire for Him.

For this reason the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“When one of you stands for prayer, and he is privately conversing with his Lord, let him consider with whom he is conversing.”

It is related from Amir al-Mu‘minīn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon him, that whenever the time for prayer entered, he would turn pale once and red another time.

He was asked about this, and he said:

“It is the trust which was offered to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it. I bore it, and I do not know whether I have dealt with it badly or well.”

It is related from ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, peace be upon him, that he prayed and his cloak fell from his shoulders. He left it there until he had completed his prayer.

One of his companions said to him:

“O son of the Messenger of God, your cloak fell from your shoulders, yet you left it and continued your prayer, although you have forbidden us from doing such a thing.”

He replied:

“Woe to you! Do you know before whom I was standing? By God, that occupied me completely from this.”

And it is related from him, peace be upon him, that whenever he performed ablution and began to enter into prayer, his face would become pale and change.

He was asked about this, and he said:

“I desire to stand before a mighty King.”

It is related from Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī and Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad, peace be upon them both, that whenever they stood in prayer, their complexions would change, at one time becoming red and at another pale, as though they were privately conversing with something they could see.

Section

Then He, exalted is He, made prayer subject to necessary conditions: removing ritual impurity and eliminating physical impurity, so that the one entering prayer might remain clean in preparation for meeting his Lord and purified for fulfilling His obligation.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“God will raise my community on the Day of Resurrection radiant and shining from the traces of ablution.”

And he, peace and blessings be upon him, said that when he was taken on the Night Journey to heaven, Gabriel said to him:

“Do you know concerning what the highest assembly disputed?”

I said:

“I do not know; teach me.”

He said:

“Concerning perfecting ablution during times of hardship, walking to the congregational prayers, and awaiting one prayer after another.”

Section

Then He, exalted is He, included within it the recitation of His revealed Book, so that one might contemplate its commands and prohibitions concerning prayer and reflect upon the inimitability of its words and meanings.

He commanded that it be recited with measured recitation, saying:

“And recite the Qur’ān with measured recitation.”

It has been said that measured recitation means that one makes it clear and distinct, neither scattering it like the scattered dates from a palm, nor shaking it like poetry is shaken.

He commanded that it be used to move the hearts, and that the concern of its reciter should not merely be to reach the end of the sūrah.

Section

Then He connected it to fixed times and successive periods, so that its times might follow one another and its appointed moments succeed one another, thereby causing humility before Him and supplication to Him to continue.

Thus fear of Him and desire for Him do not cease.

When fear of Him and desire for Him do not cease, the righteousness of creation is maintained.

According to the strength of desire and fear is the completeness with which prayer is fulfilled and the degree of deficiency permitted in it.

It is related from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him:

“The servant is closest to God when he is in prayer.”

And he said:

“The likeness of prayer for the one who performs it is like a man who enters before a king and listens attentively to him until he has finished presenting his need. Such is the one who prays when he enters into prayer.”

It has been said that the name *ṣalāt* is derived from the straightening of a branch, because when a man perfects his ablution, proceeds to his prayer-place, and stands before his Lord in private communion with Him, fear and awe of Him arise within his heart, serving as fire serves a branch in straightening its crookedness.

This is the wisdom behind prayer.

Whatever possesses this character has passed from the category of obligation into the category of blessing.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Prayer is a measure: whoever fulfils it fully fulfils it for himself, and whoever gives short measure has heard what has come concerning those who give short measure.”

And he said:

“Indeed, it is burdensome except for the humble.”

Section

Then God, exalted is He, imposed **zakāt upon wealth**, placing it before the obligation of fasting because fasting involves patience in abstaining from nourishment for the bodies.

They were quicker to respond to the obligation of zakāt than to the obligation of fasting.

The imposition of zakāt was an act of consolation toward the poor and an equalization between them and the wealthy.

He made its obligation one-tenth in some cases, one-fifth in others, one-half of one-tenth in others, and likewise established what is due concerning livestock.

When this is carefully observed and the right of God therein is delivered to the poor, it brings about their equality with the wealthy.

For if people were examined, the number of poor people in hardship who are entitled to this obligation would be less than one-tenth.

Then, among the wisdoms of zakāt is its assistance to those in need, which prevents them from falling into hatred, removes from them the rancour of hostility, prevents them from cutting off relations, and encourages them to maintain connection.

For the one who hopes expects to receive, and the one who hopes remains alive in hope.

When hope disappears and expectation is cut off, need intensifies and hatred arises, and envy emerges.

Then relations between those in need and the wealthy are severed, until matters reach the point of competing over wealth and deceiving souls.

This is in addition to the training of souls in generosity through the payment of zakāt and avoidance of blameworthy miserliness.

For generosity prompts one to fulfil rights.

Whatever He encouraged is therefore more deserving of praise, and whatever He turned people away from is more worthy of condemnation.

The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“The worst things given to a servant are consuming miserliness and cowardice that pulls back.”

Glory be to Him who governs His creation through His subtle wisdom and conceals from their perceptions the abundance of His blessing, until He deserves greater gratitude for concealing it than He would for displaying it.

Then, among the wisdoms of zakāt through which obedience becomes manifest and sincerity acknowledges itself, is that this obligation has a known minimum and an apportioned share by which the obedience of the hidden selves and the sincerity of the hearts are tested in fulfilling that known portion.

There is another aspect through which this obligation passes from the category of obligation and hardship into the category of pleasurable blessings.

It is what is found among people adorned with the garment of modesty and known for good character and generosity: the love of gratitude and praise, and the expenditure made in acquiring abundant praise from every extravagant poet, when perhaps the zakāt imposed upon a person is only a small portion of his wealth.

Then he finds sweetness in giving and pleasure in generosity, so that what leaves his wealth leaves it by way of acquisition, bringing him joy and delight.

His action therefore enters the category of pleasurable blessings rather than that of burdensome obligation, because he performs it with a contented soul, an open breast, and a willing disposition.

Whatever possesses this character does not belong to the category of obligation—especially when there is no expectation of compensation for what is spent, either in this world or the Hereafter, if it is intended for something other than the face of God, exalted is He.

If a person finds pleasure even when what he gives goes to those who praise him, despite receiving no compensation for it, then zakāt, which goes toward fulfilling the obligation of God and lending to Him, exalted is He, from what He has asked to be lent, with confidence in

the immediate replacement He has promised and the reward of the Hereafter, is even more deserving of delight and more fitting to be considered a blessing.

It is even more worthy that it not be considered an obligation and hardship which causes distress, heaviness, and reluctance.

Section

Then God, exalted is He, imposed **fasting**, placing it before the obligation of pilgrimage.

Its imposition contains mercy for the poor, feeding them and relieving their hunger, because of the severity of hunger they themselves experience during their fast.

It has been said to Joseph, peace be upon him:

“Why do you remain hungry while you sit over the storehouses of the earth?”

He replied:

“I fear that if I become full, I shall forget the hungry.”

Then among the purposes of fasting is the subduing and humbling of the soul and breaking the desire that dominates it, and making it conscious of its need for even a little drink and food.

One who needs something is humbled before it.

For this reason God, exalted is He, refuted those who took Jesus son of Mary and his mother as two gods besides Him—far exalted is God above that.

He, exalted is He, said:

“The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; messengers passed away before him, and his mother was a truthful woman. They both used to eat food.”

Thus He made their need for food a deficiency preventing them from being gods.

As for the wisdom in fasting by which it passes from the category of obligation into the category of blessing, its purpose is to strip oneself of animality and distinguish oneself from it, attaining the perfection of the rank of humanity by abstaining from food and drink for a month each year.

Animality has no restraint preventing it from this, nor any interruption cutting it off from it.

Fasting was therefore made a distinguishing boundary between animality and humanity, especially when it is fulfilled according to its conditions.

There is much more that could be said about the wisdom contained in this, but elaborating upon it would prevent the brevity we seek.

This is only the least of its aspects of wisdom.

I have merely indicated some of it and alluded to what I have alluded to, fulfilling what I undertook and carrying out what I promised: to present what removes the pillars of the Shari‘a from the category of obligation and places them within the category of blessings, by rational proof and transmitted exposition.

Whatever possesses this character has passed from the category of obligation and hardship into the category of blessing.

It is related from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, that he said:

“In Paradise there is a tree from whose root emerge piebald horses. They neither defecate nor urinate. They are bridled, their bridles are of gold, and they are saddled, their saddles

being of pearls and rubies. The people of the highest ranks mount them and pass by those beneath them.”

The people of Paradise will say:

“O Lord, by what did Your servants attain this honour?”

It will be said to them:

“They used to fast during the day while you ate. They used to stand in prayer during the night while you slept. They used to strive while you were cowardly.”

Praise be to God, who has made the worship of His creation a blessing for them, more fitting than a burden, and who rewards their perseverance in it and adherence to its conditions with such another blessing.

Section

Along with this, we find the agreement of the excellent among mankind in condemning overeating and praising moderation and hunger. They do not consider excess beyond what sustains life to be a virtue; rather, they regard it as a vice.

The sages have transmitted concerning this, and the learned and ascetics have related about it, more than can be enumerated without violating the requirement of brevity.

The eloquent Arabs have also said about it more than can be comprehensively collected or fully counted.

They adopted this as a deliberate aim, not because necessity compelled or required it.

Had I not deliberately refrained from including poetry in this epistle as a means of keeping it free from such material, I would have included in it what the Arabs took pride in concerning this subject, establishing that moderation is a virtue and overeating a vice.

If the burden and hardship of fasting were nothing more than abstaining from food, drink, and the like, then this would not truly belong to the category of obligation.

For what calls one toward it is a natural appetite and an animal habit inherited by later generations from earlier ones, passing down through descendants until removing it from one who has wrapped himself in its cloak becomes difficult for the one removing it, and even more difficult for the one from whom it is removed.

It only becomes a burden and hardship for one who intends by it something other than God, exalted is He, follows the path of ostentation, seeks worldly gain through it, or does not believe in the truth of the reward God has promised for it.

Or it becomes so for one who fears the sword of the Sharī‘a if he neglects one of its conditions or obligations, and therefore outwardly displays what he displays as hypocrisy.

Such a person treats it as did a group whose doctrine was that of unbelief, while outwardly they appeared to uphold the pillars of the Sharī‘a.

When one of them met another, he would say:

“How are you finding this forced labour?”

Their belief in it being among the worst of beliefs.

Upon them be the everlasting and repeatedly returning curse of God.

How could that which turns thoughts and reflection away from frivolity, nonsense, play, amusement, idleness, and imitation of animals, directing them instead toward worldly

matters from which no benefit is gained and from which no harm is escaped, toward recitation of the Qur'ān, study of knowledge, understanding of religion, purification, prayer, fasting, and imitation of the excellent among the awliyā' of God and His chosen creation—and, beneath them, the sages, scholars, ascetics, and worshippers—be an obligation and hardship?

God forbid that this should be a burden or hardship, except for one upon whose heart Satan has laid a covering, who is ignorant of knowing himself and his Lord, who relies upon his passions instead of his intellect, and whom Satan has counted among his tribe and party. Rather, it is an abundant, wholesome blessing and a generous, lofty gift.

This section has taken its full share.

Section

Then God, exalted is He, imposed **pilgrimage**, saying:

“And pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to God by mankind, for whoever is able to find a way to it.”

It is an act involving the body and a right involving wealth, after the obligations pertaining to the bodies and the obligations pertaining to wealth have been established, so that each of the two kinds may serve as a means of facilitating that which combines both kinds.

The imposition of pilgrimage therefore contains a reminder of the Day of Resurrection: separation from family, wealth, and homeland; the submission of the mighty and the lowly; standing before Him; the gathering of the obedient and the disobedient; fear of Him and desire for Him; the abandonment by sinners of what they have committed; and the repentance of those who have sinned for what they have done.

Few people perform pilgrimage without thereby beginning repentance for their sins and abandoning disobedience to their Lord.

For this reason the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Among the signs of an accepted pilgrimage is that its performer is better afterward than he was before it.”

For regret over sins prevents one from approaching them, and repentance from them expiates what preceded them.

When a person refrains from what he had been doing, this indicates the soundness of his repentance, and the soundness of repentance entails the acceptance of his pilgrimage.

Whatever calls a person to abandon disobedience, repent from sins, and adopt the character of the righteous does not belong to the category of obligation and does not fall under its condition.

Rather, because it is a blessing, it is more appropriately described as such than as an obligation and hardship.

This cannot be rejected by anyone except one upon whom God is angry, whom He has cursed, for whom He has prepared Hell, and wretched indeed is that destination.

As for the aspect of its wisdom that clothes it in virtue by placing it under the category of blessings and removes from it the vice associated with placing it under the category of obligation and hardship, it is this:

Mecca—may God protect it—is, according to what the learned have transmitted and the sages have witnessed in its reality, the centre and navel of the earth, the place where blessing and divine support descend, and the abode of success and right guidance.

Because it is a centre, it possesses no defect—being between two extremities. This point of the earth, which is the centre, therefore resembles the **middle community** concerning whom God, exalted is He, said:

“Thus We have made you a middle community.”

It deserves from the nobility bestowed upon other places what the middle community deserves in relation to the rest of mankind.

There is further discussion on this matter, but this is not its place.

Since Mecca—may God protect it—possesses this degree of excellence and nobility, God, exalted is He, chose it, making it the homeland of His sacred precinct, the abode of His House, and the place from which His Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, was sent.

He made His Sacred House, the Corner, and the Station a means of access to Him for whoever stands there, venerating His great sacred rites and noble stations, at which supplication is made and the supplicant is answered, and toward which people strive as He has commanded, so that the one who strives may be rewarded.

Whatever possesses this character—namely, a means leading toward witnessing Him—is included under the category of blessing and excluded from the category of obligation and hardship.

Now that the discussion has reached this point, let it have its limit and conclusion.

The author of the epistle extends toward God, exalted is He, the hand of humble, imploring supplication, seeking intercession through the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, asking that his error be overlooked, his deed accepted, and that he be granted good success in what brings him near to God and earns him proximity through His grace and mercy.

Everything contained in this epistle and included within it has been drawn and derived from the seas of the learned. From them it began, and to them it returns.

The author of these words does not claim for himself a single letter, or anything beyond it, of the proofs, demonstrations, or noble knowledge he has presented therein, nor does he attribute any part of it to himself so as to adorn himself with a necklace fashioned from what belongs to another.

Praise be to God with the praise of those who give thanks.

May His blessings be upon our master Muḥammad and his good and pure family.

And peace.

God is sufficient for us, and He is the best of protectors.

This Epistle by Some of the Dāʿīs, May God Sanctify Their Spirits

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Compassionate

From the author, the scribe of Shaykh al-Ḥamīd, Abū al-Fawāris Aḥmad ibn Yaʿqūb, the dāʿī in the province of Syria, servant of our master, the Imam al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, Commander of the Faithful—may the blessings of God be upon him and upon his pure progeny, and upon his

noble, rightly guided descendants—and may He single out his grandfather, Muḥammad, the master of the messengers, with the most excellent blessings and peace.

He said:

I asked my companion—may God assist me in obeying Him—about the obligation of the Imamate and the need for it, and about questions that arise from it at different times. He answered me—may God raise his rank—as he advanced in his explanation orally, using words which I understood and then set down in writing in an epistle that may reach everyone who desires success and salvation.

If it accords with what is correct, then that is through his blessings and the good fortune of serving him. And if it lacks refinement of expression and correctness of arrangement, I have nevertheless exerted my utmost ability, acknowledged the blessing, and given thanks for his beneficence. As the saying goes:

“The effort of one of little means is like the capacity of the capable; it is considered abundant from him, even if it falls short.”

He said:

Praise belongs to God, who did not create us in vain, nor neglect us without purpose, nor leave us in blind confusion or impenetrable darkness. Rather, He established the proof against us through evidences that guide us to the clear path. He made them the gates of His mercy, the custodians of His wisdom, and the guides to knowledge of His unity and obedience to Him—may the blessings of God be upon them all.

To Proceed

You asked me—may God guide you toward all that is good—about something which no believer can afford to remain ignorant of. So listen to what I say, preserve it, and hold it as a belief. Do not utter it carelessly, and you will attain benefit from it among your companions in this world and happiness through it in the Hereafter.

The First Chapter: What Is the Need for an Imam After the Prophet, Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him?

The Answer

Know—may God teach you all that is good—that the Imamate is obligatory according to both the Sacred Law and reason, for many reasons and from many different perspectives.

We shall mention of these whatever we are able, seeking concision and limitation, out of fear of excessive length and elaboration, so that it may be easier for those who hear it to grasp and so that its reader and contemplator will not become weary.

As for what the Sacred Law has stated concerning this, among it is the saying of God, Mighty and Exalted, in His decisive Book:

“On the Day We shall call every people with their Imam.”

And His saying:

“There is no community except that a warner has passed among it.”

And His saying:

“Messengers, bearing glad tidings and warnings, so that the people may have no argument against God after the messengers.”

And His saying:

“Lest they should say, ‘No bearer of glad tidings or warner came to us.’ Say: ‘A bearer of glad tidings and a warner has indeed come to you.’”

And His saying:

“How then will it be when We bring from every community a witness, and We bring you as a witness against these?”

And His saying to His Prophet:

“You are only a warner, and for every people there is a guide.”

And His saying:

“Whatever verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring forth one better than it or one like it.”

And concerning striving against the one who falsely claims the Imamate and usurps it, and declaring him an unbeliever, He says:

“So fight the leaders of unbelief; indeed, they have no faith, so that they may desist.”

And concerning His condemnation of those who deny the Imams of truth, He says:

“Then We sent Our messengers in succession. Whenever a messenger came to a community, they denied him. So We caused them to follow one another, and We made them mere tales. So away with a people who do not believe.”

Among this is also the saying of the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him:

“The Imamate is among Quraysh.”

And his saying, peace be upon him:

“Whoever dies without knowing the Imam of his time dies the death of the Age of Ignorance.”

And his saying, peace be upon him:

“Remove from it whoever does not deserve it. The Imamate is forbidden to the Ṭulaqā’ and the sons of the Ṭulaqā’ until the Day of Resurrection.”

There are many other verses in the Book of God and many reports from the Messenger of God of the same kind. We have limited ourselves to what we have mentioned because the proof is established by even a single verse or a single report, for the saying—