

Mufida The Useful Treatise

Sayyidnā ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad 5th dai

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

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

All praise is due to God, who illuminates the insights of the followers of the family of Muḥammad—peace be upon them—with the light of guidance, and who discloses to them, through His merciful grants, the secrets of creation, which remain hidden from the arrogant who turn away from obedience to them. It is He who revealed concerning them and their grandfather, the Chosen One—peace be upon them—“You are only a warner, and for every people there is a guide.”

We praise Him for granting us the grace of following them, and we thank Him for placing us among their partisans—praise and thanks worthy of one who understands the station of praise and gratitude, and thus praises and thanks accordingly; who is afflicted for their love, yet accepts it with contentment and endures it patiently.

We bear witness that there is no god but God—He who has veiled minds, both high and low, from describing Him. They are humbled before Him in submission, acknowledging their bewilderment and limitation. He has prevented thoughts from grasping Him, and thus they are halted, confessing their incapacity and weariness in attempting to reach what they sought.

How could the originated, crafted thing comprehend what brought it into being and fashioned it? Or how could the created, contrived being find a way to describe the One who created and invented it?

Exalted is His praise and greatly high is He above such things.

And we bear witness that Muḥammad is the most excellent of the chosen, selected for delivering His message, and the noblest of those sent and brought near, dispatched to guide His creation—mercy incarnate, made visible in human form, possessing the highest rank of divine support in the sacred realm.

May God’s blessings be upon him, and upon his brother, his executor, and his cousin—‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib—who breathed the spirit of life into the body of his purified law through the clarification of esoteric interpretation (ta’wīl), and who made manifest the hidden meanings embedded within the folds of revelation. He guided whoever followed him from among the community to the straight path.

And upon his wife, the celestial Fāṭima al-Zahrā’, the blessed tree from which the branches of Imāmate spring, the locus of the Islamic essence.

And upon her two sons, the two noble Imāms, the good and perfect grandsons, repositories and resting-places of the secret of Imāmate, and the distinguished ones who inherited the pride of both prophethood and divine vicegerency.

And upon the Imāms from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, the guides of creation, the houses of light of the Almighty Creator, and upon their partisans who tread their path—the noblest of methods and clearest of ways.

And upon the one whose glad tidings preceded his earthly appearance, the one refined by the days and nights—our master, our lord, the Imām of our age, al-Ṭayyib Abū al-Qāsim, Amīr al-Mu’minīn, the seal of the cycle of manifestation (dawr al-ishhād) and the inaugurator of the cycle of substitution (dawr al-ibdāl)—and upon the pure and noble Imāms from his progeny. May countless blessings be upon them all.

Now then:

One of the virtuous brethren—may God increase and elevate them, protect them from harm in both their religion and worldly life, and guard them—came across a poem attributed to the master Abū ‘Alī ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)—may God sanctify his soul. Its meanings were veiled, and it alluded to true esoteric secrets, building its structure upon those foundations. He composed it such that its hidden treasures could not be easily extracted, nor its precious pearls easily dived for—so that only those whom God has blessed with access to its interpreters, and whom grace has reached from the treasurers of the houses of wisdom (to which one must come through the proper doors), might understand them.

He did so to prevent those dominated by their wretchedness—of the parties of devils and demons, and those who falsely claim ranks they do not deserve in their scramble for vanishing worldly scraps—from laying eyes on them. Rather, he intended its forms and images to serve as an awakening for people of discernment from the slumber of heedlessness, urging them to investigate its veiled contents, and as a reminder to those of lofty aspiration to seek insight into its enigmas and hidden meanings.

This brother asked me to explain what secrets and riddles were embedded within it, and what noble truths and esoteric symbols it pointed to in its content. So it became an obligation upon me to answer him, fulfill his hope, and respond to his request—out of desire for God’s reward in disseminating wisdom to its seekers among its rightful recipients, and delivering it to those who long for it, who know its worth.

As the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) said:

“Do not give wisdom to those unworthy of it, lest you wrong it; and do not withhold it from those who are worthy, lest you wrong them.”

I composed this explanation in this epistle and named it al-Mufīda (The Beneficial) in clarifying the riddled poem. In God I seek assistance and upon Him I rely. Through the blessing of the One whose orbit encompasses me and whose sphere surrounds me, I seek aid in what I attempt therein, and upon Him I depend.

I have not departed from the method of symbolic indication (ishāra)—that which closely resembles explicit expression—so as to safeguard wisdom from falling into the hands of the ignorant rabble, and to protect the secrets of God’s friends from those undeserving, wicked, and obstinate in error.

Whatever error may be found in this—without intent—or lapse without purpose, is attributable to the dullness of my insight and the limitation of my form. Whatever is correct comes from the blessings of the friends of my Lord and the causes of my guidance.

In God Almighty—and through their blessings—I seek refuge from error and misstep, and I ask Him for success in saying and doing what is right.

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

Avicenna said—may God sanctify his soul:

I descended to you from the loftiest place,
A dove full of pride and untouchable grace.

Concealed from every seeing eye,
Yet unveiled, without a veil to lie.

She came to you despite her will—
She grieves departure, yet clings to you still.

She fled but found no joy apart,
Then grew fond of ruins and the barren heart.

I think she’s forgotten vows once sworn,
And homes whose loss she used to mourn.

Until she landed from the heights sublime,
At "Mīm"—her station in the dust and time.

She was bound by "Thā'" of weight and care,
Among the crumbling homes left bare.

She weeps when she recalls the past,
With tears that flow, but do not cease fast.

She coos upon the ruins laid,
That time has worn and winds betrayed.

The dense form caged her wings so wide,
From soaring in the open sky.

She parted from those left behind,
Alone, unwept, by dust confined.

But when the path drew near her land,
And nearing came the open span,

She sang—and veils were pulled aside,
She saw what sleep-blind eyes can't find.

She chirped atop a peak so high,
For knowledge lifts those cast down low and dry.

Why then was she cast from height,
To the lowest depths of darkest night?

If her descent by wisdom was decreed,
Then it's a secret the wise can't read.

Her fall—no doubt—was fate's design,
To hear the call once more, divine.

To learn what hidden truths conceal,
In all the worlds, with piercing zeal.

Time cut her path and made her stray,
So west she went from dawning ray.

Like lightning flashing in the vale,
Then vanishing as if it failed.

We say, by the aid of God the Exalted and His guidance, and by the assistance and insight of
His friend upon His earth—peace be upon him—and his instruction:

As for his saying at the beginning of the poem:

"I descended to you from the loftiest place,
A dove full of pride and untouchable grace,"

He intended thereby what transpired from the slackening of one who slackened in accepting the divine call in the world of origination (‘ālam al-ibdā‘), and his turning away after excuses had been offered to him, and his becoming thickened (takaththufahu). And what occurred of God's address—exalted is He—to him when he retreated, turning his back, as He said:

"Go forth to a shadow with three branches—neither shading nor protecting from the flame" (Qur’ān 77:30–31).

These three branches refer to the three dimensions that structure physical bodies, which cause their descent to the degrees of deficiency, away from the degrees of perfection and completion.

As He said—exalted is He:

"Descend! You are enemies to one another. On earth will be your dwelling place and livelihood for a time." (Qur’ān 2:36)

So they descended from the world of subtlety (‘ālam al-laṭāfa) to the place of density (maḥall al-kathāfa), and from the expanse of lofty lights to the place of decaying bodies, the captivity of nature, the ocean of hayūlā (prime matter) with its surging waves, the darkness of the world of generation and corruption (‘ālam al-kawn wa-l-fasād), and the domain of mixture (dār al-mizāj).

That virtuous man, the master of the epistles—peace of God be upon him—has mentioned this matter in many of his noble epistles, both through allusion and explicit statement. Among them is what he says in al-Risāla al-Jāmi‘a when discussing the epistle titled al-‘Ālam Insān Kabīr (“The World as a Great Human”):

"And when the sages speak of partial souls, they only mean the powers diffused from the Universal Soul, which have descended to the lower center, and been drawn into the world of nature. They are the ones that failed to accept the intellectual effusion, that grew weary of glorifying and sanctifying in the realm of lights, and so were made to descend to the station of the center and the burden of worship.

They belong to a class for whom there is still hope. To it they may return, if they repent from their transgression and seek release from their stumble. Thus, the entire cosmos shows

mercy to them and finds affinity with them. Messengers were sent to warn them, and they were aided by the angels brought near.

If they repent and return, they will return to [a state of] soul and sweet rest, and to a Lord who is not angry. But if they sin and turn away, persist in rebellion, act arrogantly, and abandon the warners—if they are reminded yet fail to remember, or see and yet do not perceive—then they fall into confusion and rupture like a torrent plunging from a mountain peak into the depths of the earth. They end up in the darknesses of the lowest of the low.

At times they descend through corruption; at times they ascend in coming-into-being to the realm of bodies; at times the turns of time carry them about, the changing of days alters them. They spread out across the horizons and are torn into nations."

And likewise, he—peace be upon him—said in *Jāmi‘at al-Jāmi‘a*, when discussing the Universal Adam (*Ādam al-Kullī*), his wife, the Universal *Iblīs*, and the forbidden tree:

"The matter in its beginning was not as it later appeared, nor the disobedience that arose in the realm of the soul. The matter was in how that power of the soul began to flow and spread in the first of the human individuals, in the Adamic form.

This is the partial Adam, the one who sinned by eating from the vegetative tree. Its clarification lies in its beginning among the primal simples, until its manifestation in the lesser world (the microcosm). What began in the simples in potentiality appeared in the world of composition in actuality."

And in this chapter he says:

"The beginning was not different in its essence with regard to its origination through creation (*al-khilqa al-ibdā‘iyya*). The difference and divergence lay only in the latent inclinations manifesting in imagination and fancy"—this is his statement.

Were we to expand upon the textual evidence from the noble epistles and other sayings of our masters—may God’s blessings be upon them—and the writings of the dignified ranks (*ḥudūd*)—may God elevate their sanctity—it would exceed the limits we have set for this treatise. But a little of this suffices the seeker of much.

Our master, the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib—peace be upon him—also alluded to some of this in places throughout his words, in *Nahj al-Balāgha* and elsewhere. Among such statements is:

"Let each of you consider: is he a traveler who is returning? For he has come from the hereafter and is returning to it."

And sufficient as proof are the verses of God, exalted is He:

"Go forth to a shadow with three branches—neither shading nor protecting from the flame."
(Q 77:30–31)

"Descend! You are enemies to one another. On earth will be your dwelling place and provision for a time." (Q 2:36)

"O tranquil soul! Return to your Lord, well-pleased and well-pleasing." (Q 89:27–28)

And the understanding in the Arabic language is that one is not told, "Return to such-and-such a place", unless he was already there previously.

There is in this a sufficiency for those whom God has granted success in knowing it and has guided to grasp its reality. May God make us among those granted success to accept the truth and be rightly guided, and not among those upon whom wrath is incurred nor those who have gone astray, by His grace and bounty.

As for his saying:

Concealed from every seeing eye,
Yet unveiled, without a veil to lie...

What he meant by that is this descending life that was previously mentioned, when it was overtaken by the waves of bewilderment, entangled with bodies, surrounded by the canopies of doubts, and plunged into the darkness of shadows. It is that which is sometimes referred to as nature, sometimes as the pervasive life, and sometimes as the primordial ferment (al-khamīra al-ibdā'īyya). God, Exalted is He, says: "He is the One who brings forth the hidden in the heavens and the earth"—and thus, no part of the macrocosm and its products is devoid of it, nor is any corporeal existent free of it. How could it be absent, when it is the substance that bears the accidents, which through it attain their best states and most complete purposes?

As Sayyidnā Ḥamīd al-Dīn (may God sanctify him) said in the first spring of the fifth section of Rāḥat al-ʿAql, when discussing the two parts—matter (hayūlā) and form (ṣūra)—he clarified that nature is the nobler of the two, being referred to as form. He says regarding it: it is an actual life emanating from the world of holiness, not independent in its existence by itself, nor abstracted from that upon which its existence depends, namely, the matter that bears it. He then said: it permeates the world of bodies and fills the heavens and the earth, such that nothing is empty of it and nothing escapes it. It acts upon everything, granting each thing its primary perfection that is tied to its existence. Thus, when related to beings generally, by

encompassing them with its action, it is the mover of everything that derives its perfection of being from it. And in particular, it acts in each category according to its respective action: if it moves the higher bodies, the result is a celestial orbit; if it moves fire and air, it is elevation due to lightness; if it moves water and heavy objects, it is descent due to heaviness; if it moves plants, it is for growth, giving rise to a vegetative soul; if it moves animals in pursuit of pleasures, it is a sensitive soul; and if it moves humans for comprehending existents, it is a rational soul. All of this is one nature in essence, yet multiple in its actions due to the various materials it acts upon—this ends the citation from him (may God sanctify him).

Now, we say: for this latent life to emerge from potentiality to actuality, the spheres were set in motion, the celestial orders were arranged, the mothers (elements) stirred, and from them emerged minerals and plants, and then the inverted animal (i.e., embryonic forms), until the process culminated in the coming into existence of the human being, who is the intended goal.

The first of these generated beings to appear was the mineral, in which this life was hidden and not manifest in its complete actions—except through observable properties, such as in magnetite, iron, diamond, gold, and the stone known as ghuṣṣat al-khall (the vinegar-biting stone), and the mutual repulsion between lead and diamond, whereby the weak breaks the strong. These properties are known to those skilled in mineralogy. Then the highest among them, such as coral, which is mineral in body but forms in the sea like a plant.

When this life appears in plant bodies, it becomes more clearly active, more forceful in effect, and acquires the seven faculties of the vegetative soul: attraction, retention, digestion, repulsion, nourishment, growth, and formation. It attracts fine particles with the attractive faculty, retains them with the retentive, digests them to suit its body with the digestive, propels them to their appropriate parts with the expulsive, nourishes itself with the nutritive, grows its organs and branches with the augmentative, and shapes what it needs—leaves, seeds, grains—with the formative faculty.

At this rank, this life gains a kind of awareness, seeking moisture-rich places and avoiding hardness, and continues ascending through the types of plants until it reaches its peak—such as the date palm, which in its form is a plant, but in its properties and actions resembles an animal. It does not produce fruit without fertilization of the female by the male; if its crown is cut, it withers and dies. Its form on a stalk resembles the upright human posture.

When this life ascends from the plant stage to the stage of the inverted animal, it rises gradually through animal species, acquiring the five senses—hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch—one by one. It gains pain perception and the ability to defend itself, whether by fleeing or fighting, and the power to move voluntarily from one place to another. It keeps

progressing in kinds until it reaches the most noble and advanced, like the horse, which in bodily creation is an animal, but in disposition resembles a human.

When this life appears in the human upright form, it acquires qualities loftier than the preceding stages and higher faculties than those previously possessed: imagination, memory, recollection, insight, craftsmanship, discernment, and deliberation. Its progress through the human ranks continues until it reaches its ultimate station—ascending level upon level—until it reaches its final goal: the ranks of those supported (mu’ayyadūn), connected with the angels brought near, by their subtle souls, not by their dense bodies. That is the furthest extent it can reach—if it is accompanied by divine success, and the doer ceases from doing, and the end joins the beginning.

The meaning, then, of what he said in the verse—“Veiled from every eye that looks upon her”—is what we have mentioned of her progression through these stages, from lowest to highest, her ascent through the degrees of her ladder until she reached her pinnacle. Understanding this is difficult and obscure, except for one whom God inspires to receive it from its masters and the gates of mercy.

As for his saying: “She unveiled but did not veil herself”, it refers to what we clarified of her actions being made manifest—actions that bodies are incapable of performing upon close examination—acts that cannot proceed from anything but her, and which are visibly evident, requiring no proof or demonstration. So know this, God willing.

As for the verse:

“She arrived at your place reluctantly, though perhaps she hated parting from you, while full of lamentation”

—his intent in this is what was previously mentioned: her descent into this world by compulsion, without choice, and her fall by force, due to necessity. For when there occurred that which we mentioned—her lagging behind in affirming the covenant, her persistence in denial and arrogance, the envelopment of the darkneses of the three dimensions, and the divine wisdom necessitated her banishment and distancing—the one responsible for her knew that she could not remain in that noble spiritual world, that luminous holy realm. There was no deliverance for her from the disease inherent in her essence except through the passing of ages, the movements of celestial spheres, and the mixing of elements. Some of her was made a tool for others, and she was arranged in her stations, being passive in some and active in others, according to the requirements of justice.

This is the path of coercion and compulsion, in which there is no room for voluntary action or free will, being led through it toward her first bodily perfection—that is, the human individual in corporeal form. That is the meaning of his saying—“She arrived at your place reluctantly”. It

is, in truth, a compulsion between two choices, a hardship between two eases—and none comprehends it but the learned. So, glory be to the One who began His creation with free choice as a means of establishing justice, and concluded it with the same, placing compulsion in between for what He deemed most wise and fitting.

There is no god but He, the Lord of the Great Throne.

And as for his saying: “And perhaps I loathed your separation while being in a state of lamentation,”

its meaning is that all souls—righteous and wicked—abhor death. As for the wicked souls: having become familiar with the natural, animal world, and having been submerged in the dark sea of matter (*hayūlā*), they have forgotten the noble spiritual world which they once departed. Their condition is obscured to them, their origin and final end are hidden from them. Thus, they long to enjoy this perishable worldly life and cling to these decaying bodies. They hate death due to ignorance of what they will become and out of fear of what they are advancing toward.

As for the righteous souls: the friends of God (*awliyā’ Allāh*), peace be upon them, once they realized the calamity into which they had fallen and recognized the error and sin that caused it, they regretted their past deeds and hastened to repentance. They profited by acquiring good deeds through the instrument of the body so long as they remained in the realm of acquisition. For this reason, they too disliked death.

This was elaborately clarified by the virtuous figure, our master, the author of the epistles, peace of God be upon him. He said in the *Majālis al-Tanzīf wa Ṭahārat al-Nufūs* ("Sessions on the Purification and Cleansing of Souls")—a saying we have quoted here in full due to its inclusion of subtle meanings and profound, hidden wisdoms that perplex the most penetrating intellects. Amidst its expressions glimmer the rays of light to insightful hearts:

“Know—may God and we be aided by a spirit from Him—that death is abhorred by all people. Everyone dislikes its coming and is distressed by its arrival. But not for one reason alone; rather, for various causes. The reason the friends of God dislike death is different from the reason the enemies of God dislike it.

Before explaining that, let us introduce a preliminary point as a clarification and prelude to what follows:

The rational soul in the human being is distinguished by three noble, graceful, and subtle acts:

One class of actions it performs in conjunction with the body—namely, outward speech perceptible to the senses, which includes articulated expression of inner speech, verbal

indications of the thoughts formed in the heart, and, in general, the exposition of intention and unveiling of the inner states.

Another class it performs through the faculty of thought, by summoning memory, employing reflection and contemplation, uncovering hidden things by analogical reasoning based on evident phenomena, and extracting subtle, hidden meanings.

A third class is through the faculty of judgment and governance—acquiring and determining matters. This involves choosing the best among what is possible, and selecting the most excellent among what lies within the limits of feasibility.

Through these functions, one realizes that although the soul is described as one in essence, it is manifold in its faculties. Of its faculties, the most encompassing is outward speech—articulation, verbal expression, and the revelation of the inner self. Its most exalted and specific faculty, however, is the ability to choose the best possible course and to prefer what is optimal among alternatives. Through this faculty, the soul comes to know itself, becomes acquainted with the things that can deliver it, and is distinguished by its virtuous choices. It thereby acquires and internalizes spiritual qualities, and ascends toward the noblest sincerity and liberation.

By this power, the soul becomes a governor of deficient souls, bestowing knowledge and wisdom upon them, drawing them forth gradually through refinement, cultivation, and training, toward the loftiest virtue and the true means (to salvation). The highest rank therein is prophethood and the station of messengership, acceptance of divine revelation, and access to the secrets of the unseen. This is the ultimate degree attainable by human souls and persons of humanity: witnessing the truth in its essence and acting as an intermediary between the Creator and creation.

Whenever a soul reaches this station and a person attains this state, that soul is called refined (*mushaffa*), a sanctified spirit, a messenger and prophet, an ambassador and trustee, one who is inspired and receives revelation, a friend (*walī*), an intimate (*ṣafī*), a truthful one (*ṣiddīq*), a martyr (*shahīd*), a seer, and one granted success in preferring praiseworthy, saving traits. Such a person is guarded from destructive vices, becomes a caller to God and His good pleasure, a conveyor of His scriptures and messages, a pointer to the secrets of His unseen, and an expositor of the obscurities of His books. He stands between God and His servants, striving in God as is due, both publicly and secretly, concealed and manifest, warning and clarifying to the people what has been revealed to them, and making known what has been enjoined upon them—as He said:**

“We sent no messenger except in the language of his people, so that he might make things clear to them” [Q. 14:4],

and,

“We revealed to you the Reminder that you might explain to the people what was sent down to them—so that they may reflect” [Q. 16:44].

Then, after them came the rightly guided successors (khulafā’ rāshidūn), and the rightly guided Imams, who judge with truth and establish justice by it. Then came the scholars of the nations, the custodians of the faiths, the righteous friends of God, the noble substitutes (abdāl), the divine sages, the theosophical philosophers, the distinguished virtuosi, the purified intelligentsia. Then the general populace, the masses, followed by the four-legged beasts, then the animals, then trees and vegetation, then the inanimate bodies and minerals—on to the last of the beings, each of them distinguished by their different forms, various kinds, and motions.

He maintains the hierarchy of their ranks and the specificity of their levels, as He, exalted is He, said:

“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth” [Q. 24:35],

and also:

“God holds the heavens and the earth lest they vanish” [Q. 35:41].

Souls vary in the degree to which they can receive this light. The most receptive are the archangels (al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn), followed by the commissioned prophets, then the Imams, the friends of God, the substitutes (abdāl), the sages and the virtuous—then those of ascending rank and proximity.

Thus, all beings have been preserved and rendered intelligible and radiant by the diffusion of His guidance, which flows and permeates through the upper and lower realms, the great and the small. By His guidance to creation, we mean that He brought forth all essences (jawāhir) as guided to their own benefits, established in those benefits, and seeking subsistence to the degree possible for each according to its capacity—manifesting its potential into actuality.

In other words: everything is illumined by this light, perceiving through it what is good for itself. It plays the role of life itself for those essences that possess sensory capacity. It is what grants these essences the virtues of rational souls and instills in them calm and tranquility with regard to their perceptibles. It also generates within them yearning for perception and awareness, such that the rational faculty is perfected even in sleep, let alone wakefulness.

As for the power by which actuality is brought forth—this the sages call the bounty (jūd) of God. As for the drive toward preservation—this they call the measure (taqdīr) of God. And as for the guidance toward benefits—this they call the wisdom (ḥikma) of God.

These three together are termed the governance (siyāsa) of God. The world remains preserved and intelligible, maintained and ordered, by the perfection of His governance—that is, by His bounty, measure, and wisdom.

Every being among the existents acts through this illuminating guidance: namely, its own guidance to its benefit, the emergence of its potential into actuality, and its desire for self-preservation. These are three acts—one relating to its form, another to its matter, and a third to the completion of its composite self. It acts upon that which is below it by means of its form, receives the action of that which is above it by means of its matter, and completes itself through its very composition—that is, it completes itself by both form and matter.

For it is that which exists between the two extremes, the intermediary between the two limits, partaking of both. It is neither a mere passive recipient nor a pure agent, but both at once.”

Translation:

So, once this has been established, we say: these divine matters—illuminating all of creation in general—are particularly those which stir human souls with longing to acquire the actions specific to them, as we previously clarified. These actions are of two types: either the soul performs them in partnership with the body, or it performs them independently, alone and abstracted from the body.

What the soul performs in isolation remains with it perpetually and can never be lost under any circumstance, for it has no cause other than its own essence and its distinctive attributes. It does not require anything beyond itself, and no barrier exists between it and these acts, so long as it remains unbound and pure from defilement.

Not so are the actions it acquires through the mediation of the body: the soul benefits from these, seizes the opportunity, and desires a long reprieve in order to attain through the body its own deeds, and to acquire the virtues made possible by its means—so long as the body accompanies it. It knows that once the body departs, it can no longer attain such actions, but it will retain what it had already acquired.

This, then, is the reason why the friends of God (awliyā’ Allāh) dislike death—which is the separation of the soul from the body—and love life, through which the two remain united. Because of this, they are highly diligent in making use of good deeds which they fear may escape them (through death), and this is what restrains them from those goods which they do not fear to lose—meaning the ones the soul performs through its own essence.

It is right for them to dislike death for this reason, for they have found in the body a means of empowerment, and in its life an opportunity to take advantage of it—an opportunity which

they saw would lead them to safety, security, spiritual repose, and divine bliss. Indeed, the soul views the body as a kind of capital investment, seeing in it abundant profit and great advantage—if it engages with it in trade, it secures gain. Thus, it dislikes parting with it for fear of losing that expected profit and awaited bounty.

For the friends of God perceive this body and its faculties as an interpreter (tarjumān) mediating between the speech of God—Exalted is He—and the symbolic mysteries of His signs, which are articulate and truthful, and the languages of people, with their varied tongues and differing expressions. Through this medium, they invite people to God and guide them through the revelation that leads to Him, with signs pointing to Him.

So long as they possess the instruments of the body, they are capable of remedying loss, reviving the dead, freeing bodies from the bondage of lusts, the chains of illusions, and the snares of sins. They become the true masters—God’s allies—belonging to the victorious party of God and His righteous servants, inheritors of the Hereafter and possessors of lasting authority. Their successors arise in their place, following their example, reviving souls through knowledge and remembrance, and doing all else that the soul can accomplish through the body's cooperation.

Thus, the length of their lives becomes an increase in their good deeds—as the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Blessed is the one whose life is long and whose deeds are good." For this reason, the friends of God dislike death and love life and continued existence.

On the contrary, the enemies of God dislike death because when they gained control over the body and were granted a span of life, they veered to the left side (of error), becoming blind to the way of truth and the limits of insight. They assumed that death meant extinction and ruin, and that the human condition was no different from that of animals and plants.

They reflected on their existence and observed that plants form, grow, reach their peak, and then deteriorate, decay, perish, and are replaced by new ones—and so it is with animals. Seeing this, as described, they applied it by analogy to the human condition, saying: "We are created, we grow old, we die and live again, and nothing destroys us except time."

But God—Exalted is He—said: "They have no knowledge of that; they follow nothing but conjecture and their own desires" [cf. Q. 45:24]. And He also said: "Conjecture avails nothing against the truth" [Q. 10:36].

Thus, they hated death because they believed it would lead to nonexistence, which has no being and no life besides it. Some of them verbally acknowledged the resurrection but did not truly believe in it—they professed with their mouths what was not in their hearts. They despaired of God’s mercy because they had veered leftward, disbelieved in God's signs, and

became veiled from their Lord. They recognized nothing beyond worldly life, hated to part from it, and thought that death brought ruin.

Some acknowledged the resurrection with their tongues but without understanding it in their hearts or knowing its reality in their intellects. Their acknowledgment was mere submission and imitation of the prophets—peace be upon them—and their sayings. Such people stand wavering between power and weakness, despair and hope. They do not know how their end will be, what their fate will be, or how their lives will conclude. Thus, they hate death because they are uncertain about what they are returning to and into what condition they will be transformed.

Some are attached to the world, drawn to its surface appearances, deceived by its glittering vanities. They become accustomed to the pleasures of the body and its sensory delights. They hate death because it separates them from these pleasures, cuts off their desires, and puts an end to their indulgences.

In short, both the friend and the enemy hate death and fear loss, and both grieve at parting with this body. The friend sees in its departure a loss of profits and benefits acquired through the body's mediation, and the goods that came to the soul through its partnership. The enemy sees in it the loss of life itself, the assault of death, and a flood of regret and sorrow over what was lost and unrepaired.

Know—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that all types of animals dislike death and love life, as we established at the beginning of this section and will mention again at its end. The reason why animals love life and hate death lies in two causes: one, the pain and suffering that afflict their souls and bodies through death; the other, a natural inclination and essential disposition among all created beings toward love of existence and aversion to annihilation, as we have previously clarified. This is a manifestation of God's guiding wisdom that flows through all existents.

Know that the reason for these two inclinations being embedded in the nature and essence of all creation—love of survival and hatred of destruction—is because the Creator, Exalted is He, being the originator of beings, the cause of their existence, their sustainer and perfecter, is Himself eternally existent, ever-abiding. He therefore instilled within creation a love for existence, which mirrors His own being, and a loathing of annihilation, which is the opposite of being. Thus, they are naturally drawn toward existence and flee from nonexistence.

And since their acceptance of existence is a kind of motion—that motion which brought them from non-being into being—He, in His supreme wisdom, made the cause of their continued existence another kind of motion, namely, the motion of striving to remain and fleeing from annihilation. This love and hatred then became a motivation for souls to seek the means,

causes, and matters by which their survival is assured and by which they can reach the loftiest ends and most complete fulfillments.

Know that common people, in general, are more intensely averse to death than others, because many of them have no certainty about what will become of them, where they will end up, or how their resurrection and return will take place. They do not know the outcome of their affairs or the conclusion of their lives, and are thus more fearful of death than others.

This is the meaning of the Imam's—peace be upon him—saying: "She may hate to part with you, though her heart is full of anguish." And praise be to God who has blessed us with the guidance of His friends and protected us from the snares of His enemies—a praise abundant, lasting, and eternal.

Section

As for his statement:

"She resisted, and when I approached she turned away—
then, once she united with me, she found familiarity even with the desolation of ruin."

Its meaning has already been explained in the previous section before this chapter, concerning the soul's familiarity with the world of bodies after its initial resistance, and its inclination toward the destructive superstitions of nature. The master of the Rasā'il (Epistles)—peace be upon him—struck a parable on this matter. In it, he alluded to the souls' departure from the realm of spiritual simples, their association with compounded corporeal structures, and their becoming familiar with them after initial aversion and estrangement, and their longing for them after bewilderment and dismay upon falling into them. We present it here in full because of the complete and clear evidence it contains, its sufficient and manifest wisdoms, its lucid indications regarding the meaning of origin (mabda') and return (ma'ād), and its ample admonitions for the righteous and upright.

It is his statement—peace be upon him—in the Epistle on the Belief of the Brethren of Purity (Risālat Bayān I'tiqād Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'):

They recounted that there was once a city situated atop a mountain on one of the islands in the sea. It was fertile, full of blessings, with a comfortable life, clean air, sweet water, good soil, many trees, and delightful fruits. It was populated by people who were brothers and cousins to one another, descended from a single man. Their lives were the most tranquil imaginable, bound together by love, mercy, compassion, and gentleness, untroubled by envy, oppression, enmity, or the evils found in tyrannical cities where natures conflict, faculties clash, opinions diverge, and actions and ethics are ugly.

Then a group from that virtuous city embarked on a sea journey. Their ship broke apart, and the waves cast them upon another island, one with a rugged mountain, tall trees with sparse fruit, hidden springs of murky water, dark caves, and predatory beasts. Most of the inhabitants of that island were monkeys. In one of the sea's islands, there was a massive, powerful bird that would descend upon them daily and nightly, snatching away several of the monkeys.

The survivors of the shipwreck scattered across the island and the valleys of that mountain, seeking whatever fruit they could find to sustain themselves due to their hunger. They drank from those springs, sheltered under the trees' leaves, and took refuge in the caves at night to protect themselves from the heat and cold. The monkeys became familiar with them, and they, in turn, grew familiar with the monkeys—since the monkeys most resembled human beings in form among the beasts. The female monkeys developed affection for them, and some among them, driven by lust, reciprocated. The monkeys conceived and bore children with them, and they multiplied and became numerous.

As time passed, they settled permanently on that island and clung to that mountain. They became accustomed to that life, forgetting their homeland, their prior comforts, and the families they once knew. They began to construct buildings from the mountain's stones, fashion homes from them, and zealously gather the island's fruits—those with greed storing them. They began to compete for the female monkeys, envying those with greater "share" in those conditions. They wished to remain there forever. Enmity and hatred grew among them. The fires of war were kindled.

Then one of them saw in a dream that he had returned to his homeland. The people of that city rejoiced at his return. His relatives greeted him outside the city. When they saw how travel and exile had changed him, they were reluctant to let him enter in that condition. At the city gate there was a spring; they washed him, shaved his hair, trimmed his nails, dressed him in fresh clothes, perfumed him, adorned him, and mounted him on a beast. They brought him into the city.

When the city's inhabitants saw him, they rejoiced and began to question him about his companions, their journey, and what fate had done to them. They seated him at the head of their gathering, surrounding him in wonder at his return after they had despaired of him. He was overjoyed to see them, and grateful to God—exalted is He—for rescuing him from that exile, the shipwreck, the company of those monkeys, and that wretched life. He thought he was seeing all this in waking reality.

But when he awoke, he found himself still in that place, among those monkeys. He awoke saddened, brokenhearted, detached from that place, distressed, contemplative, yearning to return to his homeland. He recounted his dream to a brother, who then recalled what time

had made him forget—about their homeland, their families, and the blessings they once enjoyed. They consulted with one another, deliberated, and said: “How can we return? How can we escape from here?”

An idea occurred to them: that they might work together to gather wood from the island and build a boat to cross the sea and return to their homeland. They pledged to one another, swearing a covenant and firm agreement not to slacken or grow lazy, but to strive with united purpose in what they resolved. Then they thought: “If we had another person with us, he would help us even more. The more of us there are, the more surely we will reach our goal.” So they began reminding their brethren of their homeland and urging them to return, making them discontent with remaining in that place.

Eventually, a group among them united in the determination to build a ship to sail back to their homeland. While they were busy chopping trees and sawing planks for the boat, that same bird—who used to snatch monkeys—came and seized one of them, flying off with him to eat. But as the bird flew further and examined its catch, it saw that the man was not one of the monkeys it usually devoured. So it soared on until it passed over the man’s city and dropped him onto the roof of his house.

When the man looked around, he realized he was truly home, with his family and relatives. He began to wish that the bird would come every day to snatch one of them and return him home, just as it had done for him.

As for the rest of the group, when the bird took him, they wept in grief over his separation, not knowing what had become of him. But if they had known his state and what he had attained, they would have wished the same for themselves.

Thus should be the belief of the Brethren of Purity concerning one who is overtaken by death before his companions: this world is like that island, and its people are like the monkeys; death is like that bird; the friends of God are like those whose ship was wrecked; and the hereafter is like that city where their homeland and families are.

This is his statement—peace be upon him—which fully clarifies the meaning encompassed by the previously cited verse. So take heed of that.

Section

As for his saying in the other couplet:

"And I think she forgot the promises made in the protected sanctuary,
And did not find contentment in her separation from it."

This confirms what we mentioned earlier about her connection to the world of bodies and her forgetfulness of the subtle world — the realm of the chosen, the elect, the noble angels — as was previously explained in the narrative given in the chapter before this one. It refers also to those people whose vessel was broken and who fell upon that island, forgetting their city from which they had come out and where they had been raised, along with the complete blessings and comprehensive comfort they had there. This is sufficient to convey the meaning.

As for the lines:

"Until the radiance of her descent was complete
From the 'mīm' of her center in the essence of the dull one,
She was attached by a heavy 'thā', and became
Between the dwellings and the submissive ruins."

Its meaning is what has been repeatedly explained about the descent and the attachment to the body, which is indicated by the heavy letter "thā" at the fall and arrival to the center, which is the earth, by the decree of the One who holds expansion and contraction.

As for the lines:

"She weeps when she remembers the promises made in the protected sanctuary,
With tears flowing that do not cease,
And she remains restless over the dung that
Has been trampled repeatedly by the four winds."

This is a metaphor for the regret and remorse that afflicts her for what she has missed of the reality of existence after entering the realm of non-existence (void). With this remorse, the soul rises in the ladder of ascent, clings to the extended rope of God, and adheres to the Lords of guidance from the Imams and the Boundaries.

"For the dense form has obstructed her, and confined her,
A cage from the vast, high summit,
And she became separated from every companion
That was once close to her, except the dust, without company."

This points to the dense, dark body that she dwelled in and associated with, so that it prevented her from returning to her noble world, and from returning to the place she had left, which was illuminated by subtle light. The phrase "companion of the dust without company" means the return of the soul to the earth in which it was and grew, deriving nourishment from it. If the soul returns to its place and its parts reunite in entirety, it will be victorious in safety, dwelling in the abode of permanence. As one of the Boundaries said: "Every species follows its species,

From a shell it remains in the realm of the senses,
And the essence follows the Spirit of Holiness."

May God join us with our masters and gather us in their company, and may He not deprive us of their accepted intercession, and make the universe among their ranks by His grace and generosity.

Section

As for his saying, Qass (the poet):
"Until the journey approached the protected sanctuary,
And the departure neared the widest expanse."

His meaning here is the arrival of this raw vital essence to the "Millennial Form" (al-qāmah al-alfiyya), the human image, which is the last of the essential existence and the first of the formal existence, after having passed the crooked, inverted, and curved paths. Now standing on the straight path, prepared and ready, God's grace permitting, to enter the gates of the Garden of Bliss, ascending the ladder of salvation, attaining the second perfection, and winning the vast spiritual and holy expanse. Know this.

As for his saying:
"She spoke in rhymes, having unveiled the veil, and saw
What eyes of sleep cannot perceive."

This means that when she reached this rank, which is the last gate of the world of creation and decay, having attained existence by obeying the Imams of guidance, ascending the spiritual stations, and looking into the ranks of the bodily and spiritual Boundaries of Holiness, her essence was adorned with knowledge. To the extent of her rank, everything hidden from those below her became clear. The veil was lifted from the secrets of hearts; the hidden became apparent to her insightful eyes. She awakened from the sleep of heedlessness, seized the opportunity to acquire knowledge in the time granted, and spoke in the tongue of wisdom and reflection, expressing her inner joys and longing to join the righteous of her form and her brethren. As the poet said:

"And longing will last for days
When the homes come near to homes."

And as the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon him, said:

"If the veil were lifted, my certainty would increase,
And my nearness to what God has prepared would be fulfilled."

At the moment of the strike he said:

"By the Lord of the Ka'bah, I have succeeded!"

And as said by someone else, namely the great sovereign, the noble al-Khaṭṭāb ibn al-Ḥasan, may God exalt his sanctity, in a line from one of his poems:

"Oh my long journey, perhaps what
Has decreed for you may decree my remedy and my cure.
Oh my phantom that hinders me from my desires,
I have destroyed you for you are not my companion.
I accompanied you when my eyes were veiled,
But when it cleared, my capacity was freed from you.
Is there anyone among us who can separate us,
A separation that is said to be final and distant?
And every species follows its species,
And its likeness from earth and sky.
I truly hope, and God is the guarantor,
To fulfill my hopes and attain my desires.
And know for certain, not by conjecture, what
My enemy is upon when I unveil my veil.
And I do not see any bliss whenever I strive
For it the description is beyond my thought and my intellect."

And so on with what he mentioned from this poem. This is the meaning of what he mentioned in the couplet — know this.

Section

As for the verse:

"And she became singing atop a towering peak,
While knowledge elevates the rank of those not raised."

We say that this verse has been previously explained in the preceding section regarding her singing and poetic rhythm, which symbolize her attainment of divine sciences and knowledge of hidden mysteries and truths, and her longing to join her like-minded, purified peers and to part from the opposers and rebellious sects.

The "towering peak" refers to the highest point she reached in the universe in this thousandfold form (al-qāmah al-alfiyya) resembling the primal creative essences. She ascended through the ranks of the ḥudūd (spiritual limits or degrees) and climbed the spiritual ladder of ascent, becoming at its high summit, possessing both essential and apparent perfection, yearning to manifest in the most noble luminous station and the best, pure, and generous form (al-kāfūrī al-ʿafḍal). Then from her would emerge the Light of Lights, and the Truth would be revealed at the time of manifestation.

As for the phrase:

"And knowledge elevates the rank of those not raised,"

how could it be otherwise? It is the greatest magnet attracting noble souls toward the abode of return (dār al-ma'ād), preserving their essence from decay and corruption, coloring them with the beautiful and radiant attribute of God, linking them to the lights of the higher world—illuminating, radiant, and removing vile habits and base morals. It endows them with royal noble traits, adorning their essence after it was among the accidents that determine eternal felicity and the attainment of aims that elevate them to the presence of the Almighty Sovereign, reaching the garden of abode, safe from fall and loss, protected across ages and epochs.

It is the strong rope of God—whoever grasps it wins and is saved—and the firmest bond—whoever holds onto it emerges into the light from the darkness of obscurity. Our master 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon him) said, "When God despises a servant, He prevents knowledge from him," and "God does not give knowledge to a servant except that He will save him by it one day." By it the predecessors advanced in antiquity, and by its blessing the latecomers emerge from the realm of non-existence into existence. It is the greatest elixir and the most noble, luminous pillar—its measure no describer can encompass, its grace no mystic's imagination can attain.

Section

As for the verse:

"No matter from which lofty place she descended,
She sank into the deepest, most despicable abyss."

We say we have clarified the reason for her descent previously: her confinement within the narrow confines of the realm of bodies. This was due to her failure to cling to the highest degree above her and her delay in adhering obediently to the One whose obedience she was bound to and was called to. Hence, she was veiled from connection to her share of the second perfection, which necessitated her descent into the perishable, fading world. What we said before suffices and needs no repetition.

Section

As for the verse:

"If her descent was by God's wisdom,
It was hidden from the distinguished, perceptive intellect."

We say this cause of descent and decline from the high place and the establishment in the dense, worn-out bodily realm has been mentioned repeatedly. Also mentioned is the compassion of the creative intellects for it, their sympathy, and the transmission of their noble substances to it to complete its deficiencies, raise its falling parts, and benefit it with

the perfection by which its essence is completed and its hearing made possible, which its previous mistake had concealed. This great wisdom is concealed from the door of creation; none reach it except those specially granted it, and none drink its pure spring except those guided by their rightful guardians. Know this.

Section

As for the verse:

"Her descent is undoubtedly a sharp blow,
That she might hear what she never heard before,
And become knowledgeable of all the unseen
In both worlds, and her veil was never patched."

It means what we said before about her inherent sciences and preserved wisdom, by which her essence is perfected and her element honored. She was made aware of the secrets of the two worlds—of density and of purity—regarding what was hidden from her under concealment and veil before the breach was patched by reaching it, and the veil loosened by insight. Know this.

Section

As for the verse:

"She is the one whom time cut off her path,
Until she set like the eye of the observer."

He meant that when she entered under the rule of the laws of time, the movements of the spheres, and the mixture of the elements, the power of the mother elements united and connected with the temperament and its mixture, to the first of the generated beings—the rank of minerals—referred to as the place of setting and rising because it is the last point reached when descending and from which she rises again returning parallel to the first beings.

This is what he meant by: "until she set like the eye of the observer." Sayyidnā Ḥumayd al-Dīn (may God sanctify his spirit) mentioned this in Ma'ālim al-Dīn when describing the first rank of minerals, which is gypsum, saying: "And when nature appeared reflecting back in correspondence with the first." Based on this, the noble sheikh 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Walīd (may God exalt his sanctity) in his treatise al-Ḍi'āl established the right side of the triangle as the path of descent of essences and the left side as the path of ascent of forms, and the base of the triangle as the place of generated beings—the last of decline and the first of ascent. The rank of minerals corresponds to the place of setting and the eye of the riser. Our master Ḥumayd al-Dīn Abū 'Alī Bāb al-Abwāb (may God exalt his sanctity) explained in Kitāb al-Dhāt wa al-Ṣūra that the compelled world is essences without forms, the chosen world is forms without essences, and between them are essences and forms. Our descent from that world

to this one was by essence, and our ascent from this world to that world is by form. Know this.

Section

As for the verse:

"She was like lightning flashing through the protective boundary,
Then it folded away as if it never shone."

He meant the state of her when she appeared in the human form and materialized in the human frame, the duration of her life, the nearing of her dissolution, and the disruption of her bodily composition, soon to decay—symbolized by lightning and its rapid fading. It serves as a warning to the predecessors to gather provisions for the Day of Return and hasten to do good deeds, restrain the angry self from blameworthy morals and vile actions, which are the essence of struggle (jihad), and resolve to perform worship acts and acquire enduring righteous deeds.

Also, it urges adorning oneself with the feathers of piety—which is the combination of scientific and practical worship—and allegiance to the friends of God and their boundaries (peace be upon them), who are the best of creation. Thus, one may attain eternal blessings, intellectual outpourings, and everlasting joys in the end.

Every wise, alert, and refined person must seize the opportunity of this brief life and make the most of this short respite—compared to lightning for its swift passing and leaving—before the appointed time approaches and death claims its due, bringing regret with no time for repentance. The breath is drawn in and the soul departs to its ultimate destination.

The believer should prioritize deeds done before death overtakes them. The one who delayed help will have no helper at that time, and the path will be narrow with no way out on that day.

We ask God to seal this for us and all believers with what He sealed for His close saints, to make us among those whose souls the angels take in purity, and to distinguish us from those who wrong themselves so that their excuses will not benefit them nor will they be granted respite.

We conclude this treatise with praise to God for His continuous favors and successive blessings, and with blessings upon the pinnacle of wisdom, Muhammad, the bringer of good news to former nations, and upon his successor, our master 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who sacrificed much for the precious and rare cause; and upon the Imams from their progeny who guard the repository of religion from the harm of innovators, radiant suns of truth and shining lights; and upon our master and lord, the Imam al-Ṭayyib Abū al-Qāsim, commander of the faithful,

whose knowledge removes doubts from the souls of his devoted followers. Peace and abundant blessings.

Sufficient for us is God; He is the best disposer of affairs, the best protector, and the best helper. There is no power nor strength except by God, the Most High, the Most Great.

The copying of this noble treatise was completed by the grace and help of God, the blessing of the guardian of God and His caller, the caller of the era and time, the most noble caller, the sun of the absolute callers, deputy of the houses of Ṭā and Yā Sīn, our master, lord, and owner, Abū al-Qā'id Juḥar Muḥammad Burhān al-Dīn—may God prolong his noble existence and perpetuate his honored sovereignty until the Day of Judgment—on Saturday, the fourth of Jumādā al-'Awwal, 1423 AH. Peace be upon its owner.