



A TREASURY OF VIRTUES

SAYINGS, SERMONS AND TEACHINGS OF 'ALĪ
with the *One Hundred Proverbs* attributed to al-Jāhiz



AL-QĀDĪ AL-QUDĀ'Ī

TRANSLATED BY TAHERA QUTBUDDIN
FOREWORD BY ROWAN WILLIAMS

Insights into a life of integrity by a master of Arabic eloquence

A TREASURY OF VIRTUES
and
ONE HUNDRED PROVERBS

LIBRARY OF ARABIC LITERATURE

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A TREASURY OF VIRTUES

Sayings, Sermons and Teachings of 'Alī

BY

AL-QĀḌĪ AL-QUDĀ'Ī

WITH THE

ONE HUNDRED PROVERBS

ATTRIBUTED TO

AL-JĀḤIẒ



TRANSLATED BY

TAHERA QUTBUDDIN

FOREWORD BY

ROWAN WILLIAMS



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dedicated to
Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin
with deepest gratitude

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FOREWORD

ROWAN WILLIAMS

It is a commonplace among some modern commentators to say that in understanding Islam we should remember that it is a much “younger” faith than Christianity or Judaism, and thus further back in what has been called the curve of civilizational development (this is sometimes expressed in the historically illiterate use of “medieval” to describe contemporary extremism). Well-meaning writers use this sort of description to recommend patience and tolerance towards a tradition that has not yet matured properly; not-so-well-meaning observers treat it as confirming what they believe to be the essentially “anti-modern” character of Islam. But what both ignore is what might be called the sheer density of tradition: an accumulation of reflective life whose roots are deep in the Western Asian world before even the rise of the religion itself. Modern Muslim primitivism, whose excesses and atrocities are so regularly portrayed in our media, gives no sense whatever of this “density”—of the sophistication of moral and spiritual thought and the intense intellectual life of early Muslim communities. Alongside the radical newness of the Qur’an, Islamic culture built on an existing deposit of thought, often expressed in aphorisms and short narratives: the first great figures of Islam inhabited a world that was very far from the stereotype of simple desert-dwelling warriors beloved of contemporary essayists. The trade routes of the Western Asian world in the seventh and eighth Christian centuries were channels of intellectual as well as material exchange: texts, stories and sayings

travelled with the traders of the day and mingled creatively in the various centers of commerce and conversation that punctuated these routes.

And this is the world we find in the extraordinary collection of stories, prayers and aphorisms that is presented to us in this elegant translation by Tahera Qutbuddin. It is certainly a world in which warfare is frequently present and in which the metaphors and idioms of the desert are omnipresent; a world in which a great intellectual figure can also be both a skilled military strategist and a poet of elegies and encomia woven around armed conflict: this collection contains poetry that, in its subject matter, would not be alien to the early medieval West, the heroic laments and celebrations of Welsh or Anglo-Saxon verse from roughly the same period. But this is only a small corner of a remarkably diverse palette. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was of course a military leader among other things, but a military leader in the Western Europe of the day would have been most unlikely also to have produced prayers of eloquence and intensity, philosophical considerations of the “grammar” of God’s eternity and self-sufficiency, and “wisdom” sayings of profound economy and insight. The chapter of prayers and devotions in the *Treasury* is full of the same spiritual earnestness about sin and repentance that can be found in the Byzantine prayers of the early Middle Ages, and the language about the “heart” as center of spiritual life and true intellectual life alike is also echoed in the Eastern Christian world, not least in Syrian spiritual and theological literature. Conceptions of spiritual self-examination, the purifying of inner fantasies and the growth of transparency to God and before God are part of a shared world of deep seriousness about the disciplines of spiritual maturity. Here and there, there are distant echoes also of the aphorisms of the Desert Fathers, the early generations of monks in Egypt and Syria—texts which have, incidentally and intriguingly, left their mark on later Islamic traditions about Jesus. There is a great deal of work still to be done about the transmission of this kind of aphoristic wisdom between different religious confessions in the region.

But what is striking and distinctive about ‘Alī’s sayings and teachings is, first (as Professor Qutbuddin has stressed), the formation of a superbly fluent and musical Arabic as the vehicle for this material and, second, the sense of an unselfconscious and natural movement between devotional and intellectual material (perhaps the nearest to him in this respect in the Christian world is the seventh century Maximus the Confessor, a figure equally important for his writings on the contemplative life and his technical theological texts). ‘Alī is clear that wisdom, clarity of mind and heart, is at the center of the believer’s experience, and more significant for entrance into paradise than any amount of external performance; and the texts preserved in the *One Hundred Proverbs* (another cross-confessional echo here of the “centuries” of spiritual instructions popular in Syrian and Byzantine monastic culture) plainly define the heart as the source and home of this clarity. ‘Alī understands the life of the faithful as one of constant entry into the depths of created identity, confronting the selfish and idle habits that keep us from the truth and turning repeatedly towards the revelation of unbounded divine compassion and forgiveness. Bound up in this also is meditation on our mortality and on the urgency of acquiring spiritual self-knowledge before we face the judgement. All of this is an aspect of what I earlier called the “density” of tradition: ‘Alī and the transmitters of his teaching are constantly both reworking a range of intellectual and spiritual resources in the light of the Qur’an and generating fresh insights and challenges. And the wit and economy of these fresh articulations are notable: “Wisdom is the believer’s lost camel” is worth several pages of more abstract exposition. And “Acceptance is a free man, anticipation is a slave” again crystallises brilliantly a broad range of reflection on the futility of trying to possess a future that is in God’s hands alone and the supreme liberty that comes with the embrace of the present moment as the place where God is met.

Prominent at various points in these texts is a marked emphasis on forbearance and forgiveness. Faith rests on the pillars of “forbearance, conviction, justice and struggle against evil”; the

believer begins with the resolve to mirror God's own forbearing attitude towards the human creation. Every other person is either "a brother in religion or an equal in creation," and thus deserving of attention, service and patience. The forgiveness of enemies is a recurrent theme—and one that emerges in 'Ali's own life: after the attack which proved fatal to him, he refused to order the death of his assailant (though providing that, should he himself die, the assassin should receive an equivalent blow, whether or not it proved fatal) and explicitly prohibited punitive measures against the group from which his killer had come. If an enemy is conquered, the victor should give thanks to God and be merciful. 'Ali has to negotiate the difficult territory where justice must be done and the community of faith protected but also God's mercy must be honored by human forbearance and willingness for reconciliation.

The importance of this in our present context is considerable. The typology popular with some which opposes "moderate" and "radical" Islam is singularly unhelpful in dealing with the realities of Islamic communities: the texts in this volume show that compassion and human realism about the cost of vengeance and sustained conflict are not a matter of some Islamic assimilation of Enlightenment values, but grounded in a self-aware and sophisticated discipline of spiritual growth and accountability to God for the human neighbour—a discipline whose roots go back to the very beginnings of distinctively Islamic thought. Nor was this simply an abstract ideal. The biographical sources all make clear that 'Ali was reluctant to assume the authority others wished him to take, though in the event he discharged that authority judiciously and decisively; and he consistently held back from activities that would deepen the divisions between factions within the Islamic community. It is significant that he remains a figure of veneration for Sunni and Shi'ah alike, acknowledged as a paradigm of faithfulness, wisdom and responsible leadership. The publication of this translation offers an opportunity for some overdue revision of many Western stereotypes; but it also prompts questions about where the ground might

be identified for serious engagement within and between diverse Islamic communities. It could hardly be more timely.

The temptation to which both believers and secular analysts often succumb is to think of religious traditions as timelessly settled, frozen in a single moment of clarity and certainty, untainted by history or culture. But it is possible to believe uncompromisingly in the truth of revelation and yet to see that this both takes up a legacy of insight and teaching that goes back far before the emergence of a new and wholly distinctive scheme of thought, and also unfolds in the creation of a tradition in which wisdom and perception accumulate. In these pages we see a major thinker gathering up such a legacy and shaping such a tradition: ‘Ali is a teacher whose extraordinary stature deserves full recognition by those outside the Islamic community, and whose genius as spiritual, practical and intellectual guide prompts many questions of wide general import in our current troubled global community. But perhaps the most lasting impact will be through the briefest of aphorisms—the places where we encounter a rare distillation of immense truths into small compass.

“What is the distance between the sky and the earth?” he asks, and replies, “An answered prayer.” Sayings such as this amply explain why his work continues to be so valued by Muslims of all schools, and why it matters so much that it should be made available more widely.

Rowan Williams

Magdalene College, Cambridge

ABBREVIATIONS

For Arabic abbreviations of manuscripts used in the edition, see A Note on the Text.

AD	<i>anno Domini</i> = Gregorian (Christian) year
AH	<i>anno Hegirai</i> = Hijrah (Muslim) year
Ar.	Arabic
BC	before Christ
c.	century
ca.	<i>circa</i> = about, approximately
cf.	<i>confer</i> = compare
ch.	chapter
d.	died
ed.	editor, edition, edited by
fl.	flourished
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> = in the same place
lit.	literally
n.d.	no date
no.	number
n.p.	no place
p., pp.	page(s)
Q	Qur'an
r.	ruled
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> = under the word
viz.	<i>videlicet</i> = namely
vol., vols.	volume(s)

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I thank you all sincerely. جزاكم الله خيرا

INTRODUCTION

تنطق الحكمة على لسانه

“Wisdom speaks upon his tongue”

ḌIRĀR IBN ḌAMRAH, A COMPANION

OF ‘ALĪ, DESCRIBING HIM¹

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) was an acknowledged master of Arabic eloquence and a renowned sage of Islamic wisdom. When ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d. 132/750)—who has been called the “father of Arabic prose,” and who was a chancery official for the intensely anti-‘Alid Umayyads—was asked, “What enabled you to master the science of eloquence; what formed your training in it?”, he replied, “Memorizing the words of ‘Alī.”² Over the centuries, ‘Alī’s sermons, sayings, and teachings were avidly and assiduously collected, quoted, and studied, and extensively anthologized, excerpted, and interpreted. There are in fact tens of collections, in thousands of pages, of ‘Alī’s compiled words. Among the earliest and best known extant compilations are *A Treasury of Virtues* (*Dustūr ma‘ālim al-ḥikam wa-ma‘thūr makārim al-shiyam*) collected by the Fatimid Shafi‘ī judge, al-Qudā‘ī (d. 454/1062), and the *One Hundred Proverbs* (*Mi‘at kalimah*), attributed to the eminent Abbasid litterateur, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869). They include some of ‘Alī’s most moving sermons and a number of his pithiest maxims. In this volume, I present both these important compilations in the first English translation.

‘ALĪ IBN ABĪ ṬĀLIB (D. 40/661):

LIFE AND PERSONALITY

‘Alī is a well-known figure in Islamic history. Cousin, son-in-law, and ward of the prophet Muḥammad, he was the first male to accept Islam. The Shia believe him to be the Prophet’s legitimate successor in both his spiritual and temporal roles, and thus the first “Imām.” Sunnis regard him as the last of the four “Rightly Guided Caliphs.” Both Shia and Sunni Muslims laud him for his deep personal loyalty to Muḥammad, his valorous role in the early battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khandaq, Khaybar, and Ḥunayn, and his profound piety, learning, and justice. They recount numerous hadiths from the Prophet praising him, among the most famous of which are: “I am the city of knowledge and ‘Alī is its gateway”; “‘Alī is to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there is no prophet after me”; “You, ‘Alī, are my brother in this world and the next.”

To better understand ‘Alī’s words, it is important to examine the historical, religious, and political context from which his teachings arise. Most, perhaps all, of ‘Alī’s recorded sermons are said to be from the four turbulent years of his caliphate (36–40/656–61). His harsh censure of this world, his many death-themed sermons, and his urgent exhortations to prepare for the hereafter, clearly resonate the difficult reality of those years.

Born in Mecca around AD 600, ‘Alī was raised by his older cousin Muḥammad. He was about ten years old when Muḥammad began the call to Islam, twenty-three at the time of the Muslims’ migration to Medina, and thirty-three when Muḥammad died. He participated actively in the setting up of the Medinan polity, playing a key role in establishing Islam in its nascent stage. Early in his time in Medina, he married the Prophet’s youngest daughter Fāṭimah, and had four children with her: al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, Zaynab, and Umm Kulthūm. Muḥammad’s line continued solely through ‘Alī’s two sons, a line which would become an important locus for the Shia doctrine of the imamate.

After Muḥammad's death in 11/632, 'Alī took a back seat in government during the reigns of the caliphs Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān. The Shia say he spent those twenty-five years collecting the Qur'an and imparting wisdom to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. After 'Uthmān's assassination in 36/656, however, he was thrust into the limelight when the community pledged allegiance to him as the new caliph. During the four short years of his reign, he fought three major battles against groups of Muslims who had revolted against him: (1) The Battle of the Camel against the people of Basra, led by the Prophet's widow 'Ā'ishah and the companions Ṭalḥah and Zubayr (the battle is named after the camel 'Ā'ishah rode onto the battlefield); (2) the Battle of Ṣiffīn against the people of Syria, led by the governor of Damascus, the Umayyad Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān; and (3) the Battle of Nahrawān against a group of renegades from 'Alī's own army who came to be known as the Khārījites. In these battles, 'Alī was supported by many of the Prophet's companions from Medina, as well as the people of Kufa and Basra. Many of his close associates played key roles in his administration,³ and some are named as interlocutors in the *Treasury of Virtues*. 'Alī had moved to Kufa from Medina immediately after assuming the caliphate in order to intercept the first group of rebels, and thereafter remained in Iraq, occupied with the Syrian conflict. He spent his last few months unsuccessfully urging the Kufans to regroup and fight Mu'āwiyah. In 40/661, 'Alī was killed by a Khārījite assassin while he was praying in the mosque in Kufa. His shrine in present-day Najaf, near Kufa, has become an important site of Shia pilgrimage, scholarship, and activism.

An account of 'Alī by his close companion Ḍirār ibn Ḍamrah al-Ṣudā'ī al-Nahshalī nicely sums up his personality and image. Not only does it encapsulate his companions' affectionate yet reverent regard, it also highlights the austere lifestyle and the concern with the hereafter that underpin 'Alī's pietistic teachings. Moreover, it comments appositely for our purposes on 'Alī's wisdom and exposition. The report is as follows:⁴

Ḍirār came to Damascus to pay a visit to Mu‘āwiyah (now caliph after ‘Alī’s death).⁵ Mu‘āwiyah said: Ḍirār, describe ‘Alī to me. Ḍirār replied: Let it go, please. Mu‘āwiyah insisted and Ḍirār complied, saying:

‘Alī was farsighted and strong. When pronouncing judgment, he was discerning. When commanding, he was just. Knowledge gushed from his person. Wisdom spoke upon his tongue.⁶ He shied away from the ornaments of this world, taking solace in the lonely night. He wept copiously in prayer, thought deeply, and turned his hands one over the other, admonishing himself before admonishing others. He favored simple food and plain clothes. He lived amongst us as one of us, responding when asked, and answering when questioned. But despite our intimacy, we would approach him with reverent awe, hesitating to call him out for a casual conversation.⁷ He respected the pious and was kind to the poor. The powerful did not dare presume upon a favorable ruling and the weak never despaired of his justice.

I saw him once when the night had let down its curtain and the stars had set. He stood in his place of prayer with a hand on his beard, writhing as one who had been stung by a snake. Weeping grievously, he exclaimed: “O world! Tempt someone other than me! Is it me you have come to seduce? Is it me you long for? Far be it! Far be it! I have divorced you thrice, a divorce that does not permit reconciliation. Your life is short, your value little. Alas! My provisions are scarce, the distance long, and the journey must be made alone!”

Moved to tears, Mu‘āwiyah responded: May God have mercy on ‘Alī, truly he was as you describe! How do you grieve for his loss, Ḍirār? Ḍirār replied: My sorrow is akin to the anguish of a mother whose only child has been butchered in her lap.

ORALITY, AUTHENTICITY, AND COLLECTION OF 'ALĪ'S WORDS: LAYERED SOURCES

While writing was known in 'Alī's time—in fact, he is reported to have been one of the Prophet's scribes who wrote down Qur'anic passages as they were revealed—his society was primarily oral. Accordingly, the principal mode of verbal production, transmission, and collection was oral, and 'Alī's words were initially related for a century or more chiefly by word of mouth. This long period of oral transmission left room for errors in communication and even outright fabrication.⁸ Nevertheless, the existence of a genuine core of materials from the period is far from inconceivable. The robustness of the indigenous oral tradition gives us good reason to believe in the validity of the oeuvre. Mary Carruthers has shown that members of oral societies had prodigious memories on which they relied to transmit lengthy pieces of their artistic verbal production.⁹ Moreover, Gregor Schoeler has demonstrated that oral transmission in this society was increasingly supplemented by scholarly note-taking.¹⁰ Because 'Alī was an important figure in early Islamic history who preached often and in many different contexts to large public audiences, the early Muslims had good reason and ample opportunity to remember and pass on his teachings. So it is quite feasible that a portion of the words in our two texts were spoken—with some variation or even verbatim—by 'Alī himself.¹¹

'Alī's words were collected and passed down through the centuries by many individuals. We are told of a written collection by a man named Zayd ibn Wahb al-Juhānī (d. 96/715) who fought in his army at Šiffin,¹² but this is perhaps an anomaly. Writing became widespread in the Islamic world after the introduction of paper-making techniques to it from China in the mid eighth century AD, and it was only then that 'Alī's words—along with prophetic traditions, historical reports, and poetry—were systematically transcribed.

In the eighth and ninth centuries AD, historian-compilers such as Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774), Abū Naṣr al-Minqarī (d. 202/818),

Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 205/820), al-Wāqidi (d. 207/822), al-Madā'inī (d. 225/840), and al-Thaqafī (d. 283/896) are reported to have collected 'Alī's sermons, speeches, and epistles in independent works. In the tenth century, the Fatimid jurist and historian al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) is reported to have collected 'Alī's sermons and written a commentary on them.¹³ None of these early compilations survive. But 'Alī's words were also transcribed into synthetic historical works by the same historians mentioned above, as well as by several others, and many of these histories are extant.¹⁴

'Alī's words were culled from these historical works (and perhaps also copied from the earlier independent works) by literary anthologists such as al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869), Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889), Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940), Ibn Shu'bah al-Ḥarrānī (d. 336/948), and many other scholars. In the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries AD, major independent compilations of 'Alī's words were put together from the earlier written sources, still extant today: The celebrated compilation by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1014), *The Path of Eloquence* (*Nahj al-balāghah*) has attracted over four hundred commentaries. Al-Qudā'ī (d. 454/1062), the compiler of *A Treasury of Virtues*, was of the generation after al-Raḍī, and the contents of his collection overlap to a certain extent with *The Path of Eloquence*. Other extant compilations of 'Alī's words include *Scattered Pearls* (*Nathr al-la'ālī*) by al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153), and *Radiant Maxims and Pearly Sayings* (*Ghurar al-ḥikam wa-durar al-kalim*) by al-Āmidī (d. 550/1155).¹⁵

As a result of the early oral transmission of these materials, assorted renderings of the same piece appear in different works. There are even multiple renderings of the same piece within one collection, including a number of near-identical passages and maxims in the *Treasury of Virtues*. This phenomenon derives from the nature of compiling similar materials from disparate sources, as al-Qudā'ī has done. Moreover, some proverbs (and also some sermons), are attributed to more than one person.¹⁶

THE LITERARY STYLE OF 'ALĪ'S WORDS:
ORAL PATTERNS, ISLAMIC ETHOS, AND ARABIAN CONTEXT

Eloquence is a crucial component of preaching, and as Richard Lanham has argued, it “tacitly persuades.”¹⁷ A brilliant exposition is more effective than a clumsy harangue, beautiful language more likely to evoke a positive response than a plodding lecture. In combination with Qur’anic validation and rational argumentation, ‘Alī attempted to stir the hearts and minds of his audience with his verbal artistry, rhythmically expounding his lessons in cadenced parallelisms and vivid metaphors.

Understanding the orality of ‘Alī’s milieu is also crucial to parsing his literary style. In a study that addresses issues of both authenticity and technique, Walter Ong has shown that verbal expression in an oral culture is mnemonic.¹⁸ He argues that to retain carefully articulated thought, rhythmic patterns must be used. By and large, the materials in the present volume display such oral patterns (as do sermons and sayings attributed to the prophet Muḥammad and other prominent early Islamic orators). Parallelism, which is the hallmark of ‘Alī’s verbal creations, produces a strong acoustic rhythm, and pithy sentences, repetition, assonance, and prose-rhyme augment this rhythm. Several other features of oral-based verbal production are also discernible, including vivid imagery, testimonial citation, additive rather than subordinative phrases, aggregative rather than analytic expositions, an agonistic tone, and closeness to the human lifeworld, shown through the use of mundane objects and daily activities as metaphors physically showcasing abstract ideas.¹⁹ (Arabic prose produced after writing became widespread, such as the sermons of the tenth-century Syrian preacher Ibn Nubātah, would have a very different feel, including longer sentences, consistent rhyming, and much less parallelism.) To Ong’s list of features of orality, we can add an abundance of audience engagement features: direct address, emphatic structures, rhetorical questions, and prescriptive phrases. Together, these elements create a dense web

pulling in the audience toward participation in the speech act—and thus the persuasive goal—of the orator. Moreover, the elegance of Ali’s words is apparent in their dignified yet simple language and their apposite positioning.

Growing up under Muḥammad’s care, ‘Alī was continually exposed to the Qur’anic revelation; consequently, his words are permeated by its vocabulary and themes. From time to time, he also cites Qur’anic verses verbatim, endorsing the gravity of his teachings with divine authority. There is a religious flavor, a focus on piety, in all modes of ‘Alī’s speech, undergirding even the material produced in a political or military context. At the same time, his words also have a distinctly local flavor, a cultural texture grounded in the desert topography, tribal society, nomadic lifestyle, and rich poetic tradition of the Arabian Peninsula. In his verbal production, Qur’anic themes merge with nature imagery to produce a distinctive template of Islamic preaching. Directives to contemplate the purpose of life and the majesty of the creator combine with the vocabulary and images of camel caravans, racing horses, and watering holes. Cultural, geographical, and religious strata converge, coming together in a single, seamless, whole.²⁰

AL-QĀḌĪ AL-QUḌĀ’Ī (D. 454/1062):

CAREER AND BOOKS

The compiler of *A Treasury of Virtues*, al-Qāḍī al-Quḍā’ī, was a Sunni-Shāfi’ī jurist, and a scholar of hadith and history who lived and died in Fatimid Cairo. His full name was Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Salāmah ibn Ja’far ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥakmūn al-Quḍā’ī, an affiliate of the Quḍā’ah, a tribe of Ḥimyar.

A senior government official, al-Quḍā’ī performed several singular functions for the Fatimids: He was judge over their Sunni subjects;²¹ he traveled in 447/1055 to Constantinople as Fatimid emissary to the Byzantine court; and he served in their chancery, being scribe for a time for the vizier ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Jarjarā’ī (d. 436/1045).

Al-Quḍā'ī would presumably also have had close contact with the eminent Fatimid scholar al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī (d. 470/1078), who was head of the chancery from 443/1051 to 448/1056; although the sources do not mention specific interactions, al-Mu'ayyad's dates at the chancery overlap with al-Quḍā'ī's time there.

Al-Quḍā'ī's scholarship was highly respected, especially in the collection and transmission of hadith. His student Ibn Mākūlā (d. 475/1082) praised his teacher saying: "He was a master of many different sciences . . . I don't know anyone in Egypt who approaches his stature."²² Writing a century later, the jurist al-Silafī (d. 576/1180) said of him: "His fame absolves me from lengthy expositions . . . he is counted among the trustworthy and reliable transmitters."²³ Following Ibn Mākūlā and al-Silafī, several medieval biographers chronicled al-Quḍā'ī's career and writings, and recorded the names of his teachers and students. Numerous hadith works cite him in their chains of transmission.²⁴ We are told that al-Quḍā'ī heard and transmitted hadith in his homeland, Egypt, as well as during his travels to Constantinople, in Syria en route to Constantinople, and in Mecca and Medina, when he performed the Hajj in 445/1053.²⁵

A prolific author, al-Quḍā'ī produced at least seven major books on a range of subjects, namely:

1. *Light in the Heavens* (*Kitāb al-Shihāb fī l-ḥikam wa-l-ādāb*, also called *Shihāb al-akhbār* or *al-Shihāb al-nabawī*), a book of "testaments, maxims, counsels, and directions for refined behavior" ascribed to the prophet Muḥammad. This is al-Quḍā'ī's most famous work, and some of the numerous commentaries on it have been published. A companion volume, the *Musnad al-Shihāb*, also by al-Quḍā'ī, provides the chains of transmission (*isnād*) for these hadith. The *Musnad* has been published in several editions.
2. *A Treasury of Virtues* (*Dustūr ma'ālīm al-ḥikam wa-ma'thūr makārīm al-shiyam min kalām amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī ibn Abī*

Ṭālib), published in several editions, and newly edited and translated in the present volume.

3. *Al-Quḍā'ī's History* (*Kitāb al-Inbā' 'an al-anbiyā' wa-tawārikh al-khulafā' wa-wilāyat al-umarā'*, also called *Tārīkh al-Quḍā'ī: min khalq Ādam ḥattā sanat 427 AH*, and *'Uyūn al-ma'ārif wa-funūn akhbār al-khalā'if*), a book on the history of the prophets and the caliphs up to the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-Zāhir. It has been published in several editions.
4. *The Merits of al-Shāfi'ī* (*Kitāb Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī* or *Kitāb Akhbār al-Shāfi'ī*), a lost hagiographical work on the merits of the founder of al-Quḍā'ī's legal school.
5. *Compendium of Teachers* (*Muḥjam al-shuyūkh*), a lost biographical listing of the scholars from whom al-Quḍā'ī transmitted hadith.

The above five books are listed in Ibn 'Asākir's *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, the earliest listing I have found of al-Quḍā'ī's books.²⁶

6. *Institutions of Egypt* (*Kitāb Khīṭaṭ Miṣr*, also known as *al-Mukhtār fī dhikr al-khīṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*), a lost book on the history of Egypt ascribed to al-Quḍā'ī by Ibn Khallikān and al-Maqrīzī, both of whom cite numerous reports from it.²⁷
7. *Qur'an Commentary* (*Tafsīr*), now lost, first mentioned by al-Silafī then by al-Maqrīzī;²⁸ this is possibly the same work as the *Book of Numbers* (*Kitāb al-'Adad*) ascribed to him by Ibn 'Aṭīyyah.²⁹

Two other works are ascribed to al-Quḍā'ī in rather late sources, perhaps erroneously: A work on preaching, *The Preacher's Pearl and the Worshiper's Treasure* (*Durrat al-wā'izīn wa-dhukhr al-'ābidīn*),³⁰ and a work on wisdom sayings, *Details of Reports and Gardens of Lessons* (*Daqā'iq al-akhbār wa-ḥadā'iq al-i'tibār*), the latter now published.³¹ Al-Silafī also reports that Ibn Mākūlā preserved his notes from al-Quḍā'ī's lectures, a "work" which does not appear to have survived.³² Yet other titles which editors of al-Quḍā'ī's various works

have ascribed to him are variant titles of al-Quḍā'ī's *History*, which they list incorrectly as independent works.³³

A TREASURY OF VIRTUES: FORM AND CONTENT

A Treasury of Virtues is lengthily titled in rhyming Arabic, *Dustūr ma'alīm al-ḥikam wa-ma'thūr makārim al-shiyam min kalām amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ṣalla Allāhu ta'ālā 'alayhi wa-ālihi wa-sallam)*, literally “A Compendium of Signposts of Wisdom and a Documentation of Qualities of Virtue from the Words of the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.” The Indian manuscript used for this edition also titles it *al-Shihāb al-'alawī (Light in the Heavens: Sayings of 'Alī)*, to mirror *al-Shihāb al-nabawī (Light in the Heavens: Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad)*. It is listed among al-Quḍā'ī's works by Ibn 'Asākir, al-Silafī, al-Dhahabī, and al-Maqrīzī.³⁴ In the introduction, al-Quḍā'ī tells us about the impetus for compiling the work. He explains that the success of his collection of the Prophet Muḥammad's sayings prompted a friend to solicit a similar work featuring 'Alī's wise words. Al-Quḍā'ī himself describes the compilation as a collection of “‘Alī's words and eloquent sayings, his wise maxims and counsels, his directions for refined behavior, his answers to questions, his prayers and communions with God, and his preserved verse and allegories, nine chapters in varying genres.”

The contents of the *Treasury of Virtues* are ethical and humanitarian, encouraging their audience to such virtues as honesty, sincerity, and moderation, and warning against such vices as greed, oppression, and stinginess. But they also contain supplications to God, directives to worship him, censures of this world, warnings of the transitory nature of human life, and exhortations to prepare for the hereafter by performing good deeds. A few pieces support a predestinarian position,³⁵ and a few other sections profess eschatological beliefs in the appearance of Dajjāl, the antichrist, at the end of time.

Al-Quḍā'ī's love for the family of the Prophet is evident not only in his collection of 'Alī's words, but also in his selection of materials. Some of the pieces in the *Treasury of Virtues* laud them, mention 'Alī's special status as Muḥammad's legatee, and confirm the special knowledge conferred on him by the Prophet. Al-Quḍā'ī's reverence for the Prophet's family may have its origin in the fact that the founder of al-Quḍā'ī's school, al-Shāfi'ī, composed numerous poems in praise of them.³⁶

The wide-ranging themes of the *Treasury of Virtues* are presented in several distinct genres and forms, including sermons, testimonials, and homilies focused on the hereafter, prayers for forgiveness and salvation, theological discourses on the oneness of God, dialogues about a variety of ethical and religious topics, epistles with pietistic counsel, and ad hoc teachings in the form of legal dicta, prescriptions, proscriptions, and nutritional advice. The work includes a chapter comprising verses composed as a spontaneous response to the battles fought by the early Muslims, as well as gnomic verses, and verses proclaiming 'Alī's closeness to the Prophet. There is also a chapter on sayings that use rare words or phrases. Proverbs are the single most prominent genre in the book, presented in three separate chapters, occurring in distinct grammatical and rhetorical patterns, and containing mostly moral advice.

AL-JĀḤIẒ (D. 255/869) AND THE ONE HUNDRED PROVERBS

Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ ("Pop-eyed") is one of the best known figures of Arabic literary history. Born and raised in Basra in a humble family of possibly African origin, he was a self-educated litterateur who wrote some 240 books and essays on diverse topics, of which 75 survive in whole or in part. His writings include: (1) books of literary criticism which also anthologize much prose and poetry such as the 4-volume *Book of Eloquence and Exposition* (*Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*), and the 7-volume *Book of Living Beings* (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*); (2) vivid portrayals and incisive

critiques of society in shorter books and essays such as *The Book of Misers* (*Kitāb al-Bukhalāʾ*), *The Virtues of the Turks* (*Manāqib al-Turk*), and *The Epistle on Singing Girls* (*Risālah fī l-Qiyān*); (3) rationalist theological and sectarian Sunni treatises, such as the *Epistle on the Createdness of the Qurʾan* (*Risālah fī Khalq al-Qurʾān*), and *The Epistle on the Position of the Supporters of ʿUthmān* (*Risālah fī Maqālat al-ʿUthmāniyyah*); and (4) expositions legitimizing the ruling Abbasids, such as the *Epistle on the Abbasids* (*Risālah fī l-Abbāsiyyah*).

Several manuscripts of the *One Hundred Proverbs* (*Miʿat kalimah*)—sometimes called *One Hundred Select Proverbs* (*Miʿat kalimah mukhtārah*) or *Maxims of ʿAlī* (*Amthāl ʿAlī*)—credit al-Jāḥiẓ with their compilation. These manuscripts cite the Abbasid scholar Ibn Durayd (d. 312/933), who says he obtained it from Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr (d. 280/893), a friend of al-Jāḥiẓ according to the report, who had himself solicited it from al-Jāḥiẓ. In this report, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir tells Ibn Durayd the following:

For years al-Jāḥiẓ had been saying to us that the commander of the faithful ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib had produced a hundred proverbs, each one worth a thousand of the best proverbs produced by the Arabs. I asked him many times to collect and dictate them to me. He would promise to do so, but deliberately, stingily, forget. One day toward the end of his life, he brought out several earlier drafts of his own works, culled from them ʿAlī’s proverbs, wrote them down with his own hand, and gave them to me.

The *One Hundred Proverbs* is also transcribed in full and attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ by three medieval scholars: al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1038) in *Inimitability and Pithiness* (*al-Iʿjāz wa-l-ijāz*),³⁷ Abū l-Muʿayyad al-Muwaffaq al-Khwārizmī (d. 568/1172) in *The Book of Virtues* (*Kitāb al-Manāqib*),³⁸ and Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 855/1451) in *Important Chapters on Recognizing the Imams* (*al-Fuṣūl al-muhimmah fī maʿrifat al-aʿimmah*).³⁹ The compilation and its ascription to al-Jāḥiẓ are also

mentioned by al-Āmidī in his introduction to the *Radiant Maxims* (*Ghurur al-ḥikam*).⁴⁰

And yet, the attribution of the collection to al-Jāḥiẓ is uncertain, perhaps even unlikely. Charles Pellat, who compiled a critical listing of al-Jāḥiẓ's works, expresses skepticism at the ascription (although he does not explain why),⁴¹ and when I looked through the indices of al-Jāḥiẓ's published works, I found just five maxims of the *One Hundred Proverbs* cited in them.⁴² If al-Jāḥiẓ culled the proverbs from his own works, this low number appears to belie the attribution. One possibility might be that al-Jāḥiẓ culled the hundred proverbs from earlier drafts of his own works (*musawwadāt taṣānīfihī*, according to al-Khwārizmī), and perhaps these drafts had materials not included in the final versions. Another important consideration is that only a fraction of al-Jāḥiẓ's works has survived, and the missing maxims might be from his lost books.

Whether or not al-Jāḥiẓ compiled it, the probability of the attribution of its contents to 'Alī is about the same as it is for other collections, because these same proverbs are also found scattered in many different sources. Authenticity of words attributed to 'Alī (and to others from his time) has to be considered at the level of the individual proverb or sermon rather than at the level of the compilation as a whole.

Whatever the authorship, the *One Hundred Proverbs* is a text that has attracted much attention. There are numerous commentaries in Arabic, as well as Persian and Ottoman Turkish translations, supercommentaries, and verse renditions, typically one or two couplets per saying, with handsome calligraphy and beautiful illumination.⁴³ The work continues to be studied assiduously by Muslims across the globe. Two well-known commentaries are: (1) al-Rashīd al-Waṭwāṭ (d. 578/1182), *What Every Student Needs, to Understand the Words of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (*Maṭlūb kull ṭālib min kalām 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib*); and (2) Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d. 679/1280), *Commentary on the One Hundred Proverbs* (*Sharḥ Mi'at kalimah*).⁴⁴ The *One Hundred*

Proverbs has also been translated into modern Turkish as *Hazrat-i Ali'nin Yüz Sözü*.

‘ALĪ’S WISDOM IN THE WEST

‘Alī’s words, particularly his proverbial sayings, were among the earliest pieces of Arabic literature with which the Western world engaged, presumably because of their universal ethical appeal. Following the first edition in the seventeenth century, there are at least two translations and four editions with translations from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of ‘Alī’s gnomic maxims and verse into Western languages, including Old English, Latin, and German (these are listed in the Bibliography). Al-Ṭabarsī’s *Scattered Pearls* seems to have been a particular favorite. In the twentieth century, no further translations of those specific compilations appeared. Al-Raḍī’s *Path of Eloquence*, however, was translated several times in Iran and India, unfortunately in rather lackluster translations; the one accurate and idiomatic partial rendition is Thomas Cleary’s English translation of its wisdom section.

The first Western translator of ‘Alī’s words was Simon Ockley, Professor of Arabic at the University of Cambridge in the early eighteenth century. He extolled the humanitarian grounding of ‘Alī’s sayings, adducing them as proof against accusations of “gross ignorance” leveled at the Arabians by eighteenth century Englishmen. His words are an appropriate characterization with which to conclude:

The Sentences are full, and to the Purpose: They breathe a Spirit of pure Devotion, Strictness of Life, and express the greatest Gravity, and a most profound Experience in all the Affairs of Human Life . . . All that I say, is, That there is enough, even in this little Handful, to vindicate, in the Judgment of any Man of Sense, the poor injured Arabians, from the Imputation of that gross Ignorance fastned upon them by Modern Novices.⁴⁵

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Any literary work in which rhythm and metaphor play a key role poses a challenge to the translator, and ‘Ali’s words have been described as “easy yet impossible” to mimic (*sahl mumtani*). As such, they are arguably some of the most difficult Arabic texts to translate. The language is for the most part deceptively simple, with straightforward syntax and a commonly used lexicon (common, at least, for ‘Ali’s time). Individual words are often unproblematic to translate on their own, but when strung together, the deeper meaning of the sentence is not so easy to convey. The Arabic text is pithy, and maintaining a similar succinctness in translation is difficult. Furthermore, the texts are poetically dense, abounding in culturally specific idioms and historical allusions, whereas English has a wholly different set of associations. A translator has to navigate treacherous waters, for unlike a commentator, she must select just one rendering to convey a host of meanings, a rendering that best articulates the substance of the original yet makes sense to an audience whose cultural background is quite different. On the one hand, it is important to use an idiom that resonates with the English reader. On the other, it is also important to retain raw and graphic expressions, and to translate metaphors literally, rather than interpreting them away into hollow abstractions that dilute the cultural specificity of the original.

Keeping these larger issues in mind, I have striven for sentence to sentence translation, rather than word to word correspondence. Instead of pedantically trying to reproduce the lexical meaning of each word, I have found it is more important to convey the spirit of what is being said in the Arabic. The following list catalogs the choices I have made in the translation to achieve this purpose. Where appropriate, I have:

- added words to unpack the dense Arabic;
- modified syntax and morphology for an idiomatic English rendering;
- changed third person to second person in proverbs;
- replaced pronouns with names for clarity;
- converted passives to actives;
- dropped “He said, . . . I said . . .” phrases introducing individual lines of the question-and-answer pieces in chapter 5;
- translated a single Arabic word differently in different places;
- removed the phrase “another category” that occurs at the head of certain sets of proverbs in chapters 1 and 4, which indicate the groupings’ similar grammatical structure (they are retained in the Arabic);
- removed “narrated from ‘Alī” and similar phrases from the chapter titles; and
- presented in smaller and italic font: (a) the chains of transmitters in several chapters, and (b) al-Qudā’ī’s explanation of rare words in chapter 6.

Three other points to note:

- Translations of Qur’anic verses are my own; I have found it preferable to do so in order to maintain the consistency of the translation, as well as to highlight the meaning of the verse in the context of each piece.
- Specialized terminology is a challenge encountered equally by translators of literary and non-literary texts. As any good

Saussurian knows, differences in language arise not just from differences in the signifier, but more deeply, from differences in the concepts signified. There is no perfect translation of these culturally specific words, but some renderings come closer to the import of the word in the original culture than others. To this end, I have translated certain technical religious terms differently from their conventional English rendering, to convey better what I believe is the traditional usage of the term in its Islamic context: For example, I translate “Islam” as “commitment to God’s will” (rather than “submission” to it); *taqwā* as “piety” or “being conscious of God” (rather than “fear of God”); *zuhd* as “rejection of worldliness” or “indifference to the world” (rather than “rejection of the world” or “asceticism”).

- For pronouns referring to the world (*al-dunyā*), I have sometimes used the neutral form “it,” and at other times, when the context is clearly playing to the metaphor of the world as temptress, the feminine “she”; the word *al-dunyā* is feminine in Arabic.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

- 1 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 24: 402.
- 2 Al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-Wuzarā'*, p. 82. Other accolades include those by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (*Nahj al-balāghah*, pp. 28–29), Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd (*Sharḥ Nahj al-balāghah*, 1:24), Muḥammad 'Abduh (*Nahj al-balāghah*, p. 23), and Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn (*Tadhkirat al-labīb*, pp. 80–81). Eulogies for 'Alī's wisdom and eloquence abound, many of which have been collected by 'Abd al-Zahrā' in *Maṣādir*, 1:43–47, 87–99, and by editors of compilations of 'Alī's words.
- 3 'Alī's close companions include Salmān al-Fārisī, 'Ammār ibn al-Yāsir, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Miqdād ibn al-Aswad al-Kindī, Ḥudhayfah al-Yamān, Mālik al-Ashtar, 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abbās, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, and Kumayl ibn Ziyād.
- 4 This report is found in several sources; this version is from the earliest: al-Qālī, *al-Amālī*, 2:147. Other sources include: al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab* 2:415; Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, 1:84–85; al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāghah*, pp. 641–42; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 24:401; Ibn Ḥamdūn, *al-Tadhkirah*, 4:28; Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāghah* 18:225–26; it is also cited in the modern anthology by Ṣafwat, *Jamharat khuṭab al-'Arab* 2:374.
- 5 This line is added from the al-Mas'ūdī version, *Murūj al-dhahab* 2:415.
- 6 Lit., “Wisdom spoke from his sides” (*tanṭiqu l-ḥikmatu min nawāḥihī*), its meaning is not conveyed clearly if translated literally. I have modified the word “sides” to “tongue” here, basing my translation on the variant version of Ibn 'Asākir (*Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 24:402): “Wisdom spoke upon his tongue” (*tanṭiqu l-ḥikmatu 'alā lisānihī*).

- 7 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab* 2:415, adds here: “His smile revealed two rows of strung pearls. He respected the pious and was kind to the poor. He fed the hungry, «orphaned relatives, and the starving destitute.» [Q Balad 90:15–16]. He clothed the naked and consoled the grieving.”
- 8 What is more, just as some of the materials that entered the corpus of teachings attributed to ‘Alī were likely produced afterward, some may even have preceded him. Dimitri Gutas in “Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope,” and Riad Kassis, in *The Book of Proverbs and Arabic Proverbial Works*, argue that some maxims from the Islamic corpus may actually be older than Islam, arising from a mixture of Biblical and other Near Eastern cultural material.
- 9 See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*.
- 10 See Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam*, and *idem*, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*.
- 11 I have argued this position in more detail elsewhere: see my article, “*Khuṭba*: Evolution of Early Arabic Oration,” pp. 187–89, and my forthcoming book, *Classical Arabic Oratory*. See also ‘Abd al-Zahrā’, *Maṣādir*, vol. 1. A list of people who transmitted from ‘Alī is provided by Habbūd in the introduction to his edition of the *Dustūr*, p. 20.
- 12 See ‘Abd al-Zahrā’, *Maṣādir*, 1:51.
- 13 For details of these attributions, see ‘Abd al-Zahrā’, *Maṣādir*, 1:51–66.
- 14 Scholars who recorded ‘Alī’s words in synthetic works of history include Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/845), al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), Ibn al-A‘tham al-Kūfī (fl. early third/ninth c.), al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 284/897), and al-Ṭabarī (d. 314/923).
- 15 For a full list, see ‘Abd al-Zahrā’, *Maṣādir*, 1:66–86.
- 16 For example, a few maxims are attributed to ‘Alī in the *Treasury of Virtues*, but credited to the prophet Muḥammad in certain hadith compilations, and a pious sermon from the *Treasury of Virtues* is ascribed in another source to the Khārijite commander Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā’ah.
- 17 Cf. the detailed exposition in Richard Lanham, *Analyzing Prose*, pp. 122–39 (ch. 6, “Tacit Persuasion Patterns”).
- 18 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 34 and *passim*.

- 19 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 34–57.
- 20 I have explored this confluence in some detail through a close reading of certain key texts of ‘Alī’s sermons in a recent article, “The Sermons of ‘Alī.”
- 21 “Egyptian” subjects, *per* Ibn Khallikān.
- 22 Ibn Mākūlā, *Kitāb al-Ikmāl*, 7:115.
- 23 Al-Silafī, *Mashyakhat al-Rāzī*, 1:241–42.
- 24 Al-Quḍā’ī’s biographers include: al-Ḥabbāl, *Wafayāt qawm min al-Miṣriyyīn*, 1:87; Ibn ‘Aṭiyyah, *Fihris Ibn ‘Aṭiyyah*, 1:128; Ibn ‘Asākīr, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 53:167–70; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a’yān*, 4:212, 4:523–24; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* 30:368–70; al-Yāfī’ī, *Mir’āt al-jinān*, 3:75; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyyah al-Kubrā*, 3:62–63; and Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 3:293.
- 25 Al-Quḍā’ī studied hadith with several well-known scholars including Abū Muslim Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Baghdādī, Aḥmad ibn ‘Umar al-Jīzī, and Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Yamanī. He transmitted hadith to men who would become well-known jurists in their own right, including Ibn Mākūlā, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Khaṭīb, Abū Sa’d ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Sāwī, Muḥammad ibn Barakāt al-Sa’īdī, Sahl ibn Bishr al-Isfarā’inī, and Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Rāzī.
- 26 Ibn ‘Asākīr, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 53:168–69.
- 27 Al-Maqrīzī mentions al-Quḍā’ī’s *Khīṭaṭ* in his own *Khīṭaṭ* (1:5) but oddly, does not do so in his biographical entry on al-Quḍā’ī in the *Muqaffā* (5:710–11).
- 28 Al-Silafī, *Mashyakhat al-Rāzī*, 1:241–42; al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, 5:710. Ḥabbūd, in his edition of the *Dustūr* (p. 33) and al-Salafī in his introduction to the *Musnad al-Shihāb* (1:9) say al-Quḍā’ī’s *Tafsīr* is in 20 volumes, but they do not cite the medieval source for their information.
- 29 Ibn ‘Aṭiyyah, *Fihris*, 1:128, presumably about the number of verses in the Qur’an, in the vein of several other books by that name.
- 30 The *Durrat al-wā’izīn* is cited by Ḥājji Khalīfah, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, 1:745. Ḥabbūd in his edition of the *Dustūr* (p. 33) says it is extant in manuscript form, but does not provide its location.

- 31 The *Daqā'iq al-akhbār* is cited by Ismā'īl Pāshā, *Hadiyyat al-'ārifīn*, 6:70.
- 32 Al-Silafī, *Mashyakhah*, 1:242.
- 33 Suwaydān ed. pp. 13–14, Habbūd, p. 33, al-Salafī, pp. 9–10, citing al-Marāghī, *al-Lubāb fī-sharḥ al-Shihāb*.
- 34 Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 53:169; al-Silafī, *Mashyakhah*, 1:241; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* 30:370; al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, 5:711.
- 35 See for example 5.7, 8.1.41.
- 36 Al-Shāfi'ī, *Dīwān*, 5 segments, pp. 58, 73, 89, 113.
- 37 Al-Tha'libī, *al-I'jāz wa-l-ījāz*, pp. 37–38.
- 38 Al-Khwārizmī, *Kitāb al-Manāqib*, pp. 270–73.
- 39 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimmah*, pp. 537–48.
- 40 Al-Āmidī, *Ghurur al-ḥikam*, p. 2.
- 41 Pellat, “Nouvel essai d’inventaire de l’oeuvre Ġāḥizienne,” p. 131, no. 35.
- 42 I found three maxims from the *One Hundred Proverbs* in al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*: “قيمة كل امرئ ما يحسنه” (1:83, 2:77); “الحكمة ضالة المؤمن” (1:85); and “السعيد من وعظ بغيره” (1:398); the first of these also occurs in his *Risālah fī l-Mu'allimīn* (*Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, 3:25) and *Risālah fī Manāqib al-Turk* (ibid., 1:29); a fourth maxim occurs in *Risālah fī l-Jidd wa-l-hazl* “رأي الناس بأزمانهم أشبه منهم بآبائهم” (*Risālah fī l-Awṭān wa-l-buldān* (ibid., 4:79).
- 43 See the folio from an illuminated manuscript of the *Mi'at kalimah* in the Bavarian State Library, with Arabic original and an anonymous scholar's Persian verses, in *The Wonders of Creation*, pp. 148–49; and another with al-Waṭwāt's verses in *ibid.*, pp. 174–75.
- 44 Al-Baḥrānī also wrote two commentaries on the *Path of Eloquence*.
- 45 Ockley, *Sentences of Ali*, section A3: “Preface.”



CHAPTER 1

WISE SAYINGS

The best experience gives good counsel.	1.1
The best kinsman suffices in times of need.	1.2
The best words are backed by deeds.	1.3
The best country is one that sustains you.	1.4
The best affairs are those in the middle.	1.5
Every affair has a consequence.	1.6
Every life has an appointed end.	1.7
Everything that moves forward turns back.	1.8
Everything has its fodder; you are Death's.	1.9
A trader takes risks.	1.10
Constancy is a sign of character.	1.11
Friends are like kin.	1.12
Poverty humiliates.	1.13
Justice comforts.	1.14
The quarrelsome have no shame.	1.15
Delay causes waste.	1.16

- 1.17 Greed debases.
- 1.18 Fornication begets poverty.
- 1.19 Generosity attracts affection.
- 1.20 Depravity isolates.
- 1.21 Dishonor bankrupts.
- 1.22 Incapacity is a form of wretchedness.
- 1.23 Incapacity is a calamity.
- 1.24 To hasten is to fall.
- 1.25 Tardiness wearies.
- 1.26 Forbearance is a form of courage.
- 1.27 Cowardice is a defect.
- 1.28 Stinginess is a vice.
- 1.29 Falsehood is a disgrace.
- 1.30 Prudence is smart.
- 1.31 Refinement elevates.
- 1.32 Wantonness is like its name.⁴
- 1.33 Obstruction is a sign of hatred.
- 1.34 Too many excuses are a sign of stinginess.
- 1.35 False accusations cause discord.
- 1.36 Waiting on God's succor is a form of worship.
- 1.37 Thought is a polished mirror.
- 1.38 Cheerfulness is the marrow of friendship.
- 1.39 Patience is a shield against destitution.
- 1.40 Greed is a sign of impoverishment.

To shirk is to wear humiliation's robes.	1.41
Affection is a valuable form of kinship.	1.42
Conceit is the enemy of good judgment.	1.43
A lesson learned counsels best.	1.44
A lesson learned guides you aright.	1.45
Avarice disgusts.	1.46
A friend is true in your absence.	1.47
Desire blinds.	1.48
Falsehoods beget blame.	1.49
Teasing bequeaths malice.	1.50
Effort is the most profitable commodity.	1.51
Frugality increases what little you have.	1.52
Discord destroys prosperity.	1.53
A wise man's heart is a vault for his secrets.	1.54
The real exile is the person who has no-one to love.	1.55
A pauper is an exile in his hometown.	1.56
Forbearance is a tomb for shortcomings.	1.57
Conviction is the pinnacle of religion.	1.58
Compassion is the pinnacle of knowledge; harshness is its scourge.	1.59
Religion is a body; its head is knowledge of God, its spine obedience to him.	1.60
Well-being comes from uprightness.	1.61
Haste will be followed by a fall.	1.62
Supplication is the key which unlocks God's mercy.	1.63

- 1.64 Almsgiving is powerful medicine.
- 1.65 Repentance is complete when you cease to sin.
- 1.66 Right guidance banishes blindness.
- 1.67 The one who carries your message is your intellect's interpreter.
- 1.68 The one who sets right what you have done wrong is a friend indeed.
- 1.69 An intelligent man is counseled by experience.
- 1.70 A feared man is feared for his evil.
- 1.71 You protect your own secret best.
- 1.72 Oppressing the weak is the worst oppression.
- 1.73 Learning from experience is smart.
- 1.74 Decency adorns poverty.
- 1.75 Gratitude adorns affluence.
- 1.76 Gratitude and self-restraint are a shield.
- 1.77 Rejecting worldliness means desiring little.
- 1.78 Reject worldliness and you will draw closer to God.
- 1.79 Forbearance is an illustrious trait.
- 1.80 Knowledge is a noble legacy.
- 1.81 Thought is radiance, heedlessness is error.
- 1.82 Righteousness is exemplary, iniquity unsound.
- 1.83 Righteousness saves, iniquity destroys.
- 1.84 The cure for every illness is in its concealment.
- 1.85 Refined behavior is like new clothing.
- 1.86 Good character is your best companion.

Direction from God steers you best.	1.87
Refined behavior is the best legacy.	1.88
A just leader is better than abundant rainfall.	1.89
Better the companionship of the poor than the friendship of those who are wealthy but harsh.	1.90
Better a ravenous, devouring wild animal than a violent, tyrannical governor; and better a violent, tyrannical governor than lasting sedition.	1.91
An elder's advice is worth more than a youth's martyrdom.	1.92
Better turbidity in unison than purity in dissension.	1.93
Self-restraint combined with an occupation is better for you than gratification paired with dissoluteness.	1.94
The timid will falter and the meek lose their share.	1.95
Better to accept privation with grace than to solicit others.	1.96
Better good planning coupled with simple fare than plenty coupled with waste.	1.97
Good deeds are the richest treasure and the most impregnable fortress.	1.98
Opportunity passes like a cloud, so seize every opportunity for good.	1.99
Guarding your property is far better than coveting another's.	1.100
Making up for too much silence is easier than retracting what escapes your lips.	1.101
All affairs bow to the fates; sometimes too much planning can lead to death.	1.102
Lack of trust in God's power debases.	1.103
Dissociating from a fool is equal to befriending an intelligent man.	1.104

- 1.105 Ingratitude for God's favors is contemptible, and the company of the ignorant is grievous.
- 1.106 It is most fitting for a deceiver to be deceived.
- 1.107 Utter despair is excessive.
- 1.108 Silence saves you from regret.
- 1.109 God's sustenance is located in the expanses of noble character.
- 1.110 Resisting the appetite fosters rectitude.
- 1.111 New experiences rejuvenate knowledge.
- 1.112 Meeting good people makes the heart blossom.
- 1.113 The noble fulfill their pledges.
- 1.114 Better to withhold something from your brother with kindness than to proffer it with severity.
- 1.115 Gentle character is a sign of nobility.
- 1.116 Affection toward kin is a sign of nobility.
- 1.117 Protection of women is a sign of nobility.
- 1.118 Resolve brings self-control.
- 1.119 A man's greatest fortune is a virtuous life partner.
- 1.120 Delay causes deprivation.
- 1.121 Squandered provisions make for a hard journey.
- 1.122 Envy is one of man's worst companions.
- 1.123 Pausing when you are confused is a sign of God's stewardship.
- 1.124 A man's intelligence determines his rank.
- 1.125 The measure of a believer's honor is his self-reliance.
- 1.126 A believer does not oppress his detractor.

Believers are brothers: they should not cheat, or slander, or hesitate to help one another.	1.127
Believers, wisdom is like your own lost camel; seek it even among the infidels.	1.128
A piece of advice is a sheltering cave for the heedful.	1.129
Humility guides you to safety.	1.130
The passing hours inexorably devour your allotted lifespan.	1.131
Desire is the key to fatigue and the steed of exhaustion.	1.132
To gluttony accrue all the worst faults.	1.133
Envy is the bane of religion.	1.134
One whose soul becomes weak loses his virtue.	1.135
One who dons the robe of greed belittles himself.	1.136
One who lets his tongue command him denigrates himself.	1.137
If you reveal your troubles be ready for humiliation.	1.138
He who disdains advice puts his life in danger.	1.139
What is lost by thanklessness may yet be obtained by gratitude.	1.140
Accepting that hopes may not be realized could mean their realization, whereas coveting them could bring destruction.	1.141
Conceit begets loneliness.	1.142
The noblest lineage is good character.	1.143
Greed invites you to rush blindly into sin.	1.144
The best treasure is heartfelt affection.	1.145
Poverty strikes a clever man dumb, preventing him from presenting his arguments.	1.146
Planning before action secures you against regret.	1.147

- 1.148 The greatest wealth is abandonment of desires.
- 1.149 Rejection of worldliness is best done in secret.
- 1.150 Humility clothes you in safety.
- 1.151 God will surely destroy this world and elevate the hereafter.
- 1.152 The one whose share from God is appropriated is truly cheated.
- 1.153 Modesty is the road to every kind of favor.
- 1.154 The sturdiest rope is the one that links you to God.
- 1.155 Believers' deeds in this world will be presented to them in the hereafter.
- 1.156 Kindness to one's parents is among the noblest of attributes.
- 1.157 One who follows the middle road does not perish from want, and one who rejects worldliness is not afflicted with poverty.
- 1.158 A man's intention reveals his true worth.
- 1.159 To show gratitude for God's favors, refrain from what he has forbidden.
- 1.160 If goodness is stupid, then stupidity is good.
- 1.161 When you become strong, strengthen in your obedience to God, and when you become weak, weaken in your transgressions of the Almighty's prohibitions.
- 1.162 New ruler, new age.
- 1.163 How soon the meeting when you are in retreat and death is pressing forward!
- 1.164 When usury spreads in a society, epidemics will plague them, and when they refuse to pay the tithe, years of drought will afflict them.
- 1.165 When you are guided to your purpose, humble yourself truly before your lord.

When you have sinned, be quick to erase it with repentance.	1.166
If you would bewail the loss of what you once had, then bewail also the lack of things you never had.	1.167
Intelligence is the most precious wealth and foolishness the greatest poverty.	1.168
Acceptance of God's will is the best companion.	1.169
Forbearance is the best of traits.	1.170
Contentment is a believer's best fortune.	1.171
Conviction is the best repudiator of cares.	1.172
Avoiding shameful acts is the best moral trait.	1.173
Righteous behavior is the best of knowledge's viziers.	1.174
Patience is the best of religion's aides.	1.175
How vile is forbidden food!	1.176
Debt's shackles on an upright man are the worst ornament.	1.177
The tongue can rarely be discriminating when disseminating put-downs or kindnesses.	1.178
Wishes are seldom realized.	1.179
Not everything you fear will come to pass.	1.180
How close to the treacherous has their punishment drawn!	1.181
Not every deluded person should be chastised.	1.182
How can a good thing be good if it leads to hellfire!	1.183
How can a bad thing be bad if it leads to paradise!	1.184
What is the good of a good thing obtained through evil! Or of ease obtained through hardship!	1.185

- 1.186 How repugnant is severance after attachment, aloofness after association, enmity after friendship, treachery toward the trusting, and duplicity toward the submissive!
- 1.187 How ugly is feigned humility in times of need, and aloofness in times of affluence!
- 1.188 I do not fear the consequences of my sins as long as I can pray for forgiveness.
- 1.189 Sustenance is of two types: sustenance you seek, and sustenance which seeks you. If you do not find it, it will find you.
- 1.190 How many a persistent sinner repents at the very end of his life!
- 1.191 How many a mortally ill person recovers, and a healthy man is felled!
- 1.192 Injustice by those in power is the vilest form of baseness.
- 1.193 Woe to the unjust from «the wisest of judges!»⁵
- 1.194 If patience were a man, he would be virtuous.
- 1.195 Among virtue's treasures are forbearance in distress and concealing one's problems.
- 1.196 One who persists in sinning yet hopes for God's forgiveness is truly deluded.
- 1.197 Just as bodies tire, minds tire, so seek pearls of wisdom for them.
- 1.198 God's generosity allows even corruptors of his religion and transgressors against his creatures to enter his garden.
- 1.199 If you can arrange things so that no benefactor stands between you and God, do so.
- 1.200 When a learned man dies, his death makes a breach in Islam that will not be filled till judgment day.
- 1.201 If the fringes of God's favors reach you, do not drive away the favors yet to come with a lack of gratitude.

A little from God is both more and of greater worth than a lot from his creatures. Ultimately, everything comes from him.	1.202
When a person's heart gives thanks for a favor from God, more favors are allotted to him even before his tongue expresses gratitude.	1.203
When you conceal something in your heart, it becomes manifest in the slips of your tongue and the lines of your face.	1.204
How clear is the truth to one who possesses two eyes!	1.205
Death will surely come, if not today, then tomorrow.	1.206
It is the same to me whether hardship is thrown at me or ease, for I owe it to God to accept God's will in times of hardship, and to give thanks to him in times of ease.	1.207
How the heart is gladdened when a learned man, asked about something he does not know, answers "God knows best."	1.208
Well-being has ten parts: nine are obtained by keeping silent in all things except when praising God, and the tenth by refusing the company of fools.	1.209
One who is not in great distress should pray no less than one who is, since he has no security against it.	1.210
Righteous struggle is of three types: the first thing to be overcome in this struggle is the hand, then the tongue, then the heart. Once the heart cannot recognize good or decry evil, it is upended and turned topsy-turvy.	1.211
'Alī said: Four things kill the soul: incessant sinning, arguing with fools, excessive dallying with women, and keeping company with the dead. Who are the dead, commander of the faithful? 'Alī's companions asked. All those mired in luxury, he answered.	1.212
Suffice this honor for knowledge: he who does not have it claims it, and if he is called learned he is overjoyed.	1.213

- 1.214 A true believer prefers a truth that hurts him over a falsehood that benefits him.
- 1.215 A shrewd man hides secrets even from loved ones, lest they reveal them in a moment of anger. A strong man is strengthened by his conviction, and his resolution is manifest in his reliance on God.
- 1.216 Pure goodness, untainted by evil, is this: to be grateful when blessed, and forbearing when afflicted.
- 1.217 The first reward for a man of restraint is people siding with him against the reckless.
- 1.218 A learned man is better than one who fasts, prays, and battles in the path of God.
- 1.219 A learned man is like a date palm; you can expect a date to drop on you at any moment.
- 1.220 A learned man without good deeds is like an archer without a bow.
- 1.221 By consoling the heartbroken and comforting the grief-stricken you atone for the gravest sins.
- 1.222 When the world smiles at someone, it lends him the good qualities of others, and if it turns away from him, it snatches from him his own.
- 1.223 A learned man realizes that what he knows is little compared to what he does not know, thus he considers himself ignorant, and increases his efforts to seek knowledge. An ignorant man, because he is ignorant of how much he does not know, considers himself learned and contents himself with his own opinion.
- 1.224 Your greatest assets are the deeds you carry to the grave.
- 1.225 The heart of a young man is like untilled earth—whatever is planted in it will grow.
- 1.226 I would be mortified before God if there were a transgression greater than my forgiveness, a fit of anger greater than my

forbearance, a shame that my robe could not conceal, or a need that my generosity could not fill.	
Often the very thing you strive for harms you when you get it.	1.227
A counselor can sometimes guide you to harm.	1.228
Ambitions are often unfulfilled, hopes often disappointed.	1.229
A wish often ends in privation, profits often end in loss.	1.230
A pursuit often leads to deprivation.	1.231
A seeker often finds death.	1.232
A joke can turn serious.	1.233
Those far are often closer than those nearby.	1.234
Often a thing you anxiously seek could, when found, destroy your faith.	1.235
Sometimes the cure becomes the disease.	1.236
Coveting does not always mean getting.	1.237
A person who does not intend it often unwittingly counsels, and a well-wisher often unwittingly deceives.	1.238
Sometimes a perceptive man misses the target and a blind man hits the mark.	1.239
Sometimes you are not given what you seek, but are given something better, either here or in the hereafter—the better thing turned away what you sought.	1.240
Sometimes an answer to your prayer is delayed so that you ask longer and receive more.	1.241
Whosoever talks too much blathers.	1.242
Whosoever thinks perceives.	1.243
Whosoever yearns too long forgets why.	1.244

- 1.245 Whosoever gets what he wants becomes arrogant.
- 1.246 Whosoever jokes too much is not taken seriously.
- 1.247 Whosoever does something often becomes known for it.
- 1.248 Whosoever commits adultery invites adultery.
- 1.249 Whosoever is harsh is cruel.
- 1.250 Whosoever leaves the middle road deviates.
- 1.251 Whosoever unsheathes the sword of treachery is slain by it.
- 1.252 Whosoever digs a well risks falling into it.
- 1.253 Whosoever scorns religion is crushed.
- 1.254 Whosoever asks good questions learns; whosoever learns performs good deeds; and whosoever performs good deeds is saved.
- 1.255 Whosoever pitches himself against fate perishes from exhaustion, and whoever jumps into the deeps drowns.
- 1.256 Whosoever delights in his own opinion will go astray; whosoever suffices himself with his own knowledge will slip; and whosoever is too arrogant to ask others for advice will be humbled.
- 1.257 Whosoever gives free rein to his eyes long regrets it.
- 1.258 Whosoever wrestles truth is knocked out by it.
- 1.259 Whosoever transgresses the truth finds his path closing in on him.
- 1.260 Whosoever controls his base desires protects his standing.
- 1.261 Whosoever conquers his tongue, people make him their leader.
- 1.262 Whosoever's character is harsh, his own family tires of him.
- 1.263 Whosoever seeks something obtains it or part of it.
- 1.264 When words multiply, errors multiply; when errors multiply, modesty lessens; when modesty lessens, self-restraint lessens; when

self-restraint lessens, the heart dies; and whosoever's heart dies enters hellfire.

Whosoever carries a burden beyond his strength wearies. 1.265

Whosoever enters places of vice is suspect. 1.266

Whosoever pursues truth cares not about his belly. 1.267

Whosoever seeks to resemble a people is reckoned among them. 1.268

Whosoever limits himself to his capacity abides. 1.269

Whosoever pursues alchemy is impoverished. 1.270

Whosoever pursues astrology turns into a soothsayer. 1.271

Whosoever thinks too deeply about the nature of God Most High loses faith. 1.272

Whosoever is complacent about making slips himself usually overstates the slips of others. 1.273

The smug invite detractors. 1.274

Whosoever associates with the learned is honored, and whosoever associates with the reviled is scorned.⁶ 1.275

Whosoever cannot control his anger, his mind is not mature. 1.276

Whosoever solicits others' opinions will recognize potential errors. 1.277

Whosoever is shunned by those close to him will find help from distant strangers. 1.278

Whosoever gallops forward loosening the reins of his hopes will stumble into death. 1.279

Whosoever perceives his own faults is too preoccupied to see the faults of others. 1.280

Whosoever is happy with the sustenance God has given him will not be saddened if another has more. 1.281

- 1.282 Whosoever contemplates death wants little from this world.
- 1.283 Whosoever realizes that words are like deeds will speak only when it benefits him.
- 1.284 Whosoever remarks on the faults of others while tolerating his own is the epitome of a fool.
- 1.285 Whosoever has confronted many situations recognizes the true essence of men.
- 1.286 Whosoever takes pleasure in sinning against God, God will bequeath him humiliation.
- 1.287 Whosoever has seen battle knows to prepare.
- 1.288 Whosoever becomes known for wisdom will be regarded with respect.
- 1.289 Whosoever rises daily with the hereafter in mind will be wealthy even without riches, at peace even without family, and strong even without a tribe's backing.
- 1.290 Whosoever knows his brother to be a decent man should not give ear to rumors about him.
- 1.291 Whosoever contents himself with basic rations attains tranquility and peace of mind.
- 1.292 Whosoever rushes precipitously into affairs without thinking of the consequences exposes himself to terrible dangers.
- 1.293 Whosoever steals a handspan of land, God will make him carry it on his back on judgment day.
- 1.294 Whosoever's steeds are Day and Night is carried forward even when he does not move.
- 1.295 Whosoever trusts the age will be deceived by it. Whosoever is arrogant toward it will be reviled by it. Whosoever shows anger at it will be abased by it. And whosoever takes refuge in it will surrender to misfortune.

Whosoever's behavior is virtuous, we can hope his intentions are also good.	1.296
Whosoever's soul turns away from lowly cravings will find his character perfected. Whosoever's character is perfected will be praised. Whosoever is praised is loved, and God's servants will only love someone if God loves him.	1.297
Whosoever rends the veil of another, the hidden shame of his own home will be revealed.	1.298
Who will trust you, or wish to associate with you, if you cut off ties with your own kin?	1.299
There is no honor higher than Islam.	1.300
There is no treasure more precious than piety.	1.301
There is no garment more beautiful than well-being.	1.302
There is no treasure richer than contentedness.	1.303
There is no refuge more protective than self-restraint.	1.304
There is no intercessor more effective than repentance.	1.305
There is no protection stronger than good health.	1.306
There is no treasure richer than contentment.	1.307
No wealth alleviates poverty faster than satisfaction with one's basic rations.	1.308
There is no good in a contemptible helper.	1.309
There is no good in a deed whose legacy is regret.	1.310
No good is obtained in this world except by two kinds of men: a man who commits a sin but atones for it by repenting, and a man who hastens toward good deeds.	1.311
Lineage has no value unless it is coupled with humility. Generosity has no value unless it is coupled with piety. Good deeds have no	1.312

value unless they are coupled with intent. Worship has no value unless it is coupled with conviction.

- 1.313 Not every seeker gets what he wants and not everyone who leaves returns.
- 1.314 Not everyone who seeks finds and not everyone who is vigilant escapes.
- 1.315 Not everyone who shoots hits the mark.
- 1.316 Not every gap in the fortress can be breached.
- 1.317 There is no benefit in a bolt of bright lightning for someone who persists in plunging into darkness.
- 1.318 There can be no prosperity where there is immorality; no oppression where there is justice; no justice where there is murder; no wealth where kin shun one another.
- 1.319 There can be no friendship where there is discord.
- 1.320 Do not reward someone who has pleased you by doing him harm.
- 1.321 Religion is not based on one's personal opinion; rather, it is to adhere.



CHAPTER 2

CENSURE OF THIS WORLD AND EXHORTATIONS TO REJECT WORLDLINESS

‘Ali said: This world begins in weariness and ends in death. You are 2.1
accountable for what is lawful in it and punishable for what is unlaw-
ful. The healthy are safe and the ailing remorseful. The wealthy are
seduced and the poor grieve. It escapes those who try to catch it
and comes willingly to those who ignore it. It blinds those who look
at it with longing and instructs those who view it with perception.

How excellent is the man who performs good deeds and under-
takes acts of purity, who earns something he can set aside and avoids
what he is warned against, who sets a goal for himself and guards his
store, who overcomes his desires and gives the lie to his wishes, who
makes forbearance the steed of his salvation and piety the provision
for his passing!

‘Ali said: This world is a place of perishing and weariness, of vicis- 2.2
situdes and instruction:

Perishing is this—Fate stands stretching his bow, loading his
arrows. His arrows do not miss and their wounds do not heal. He
strikes the young with old age, the healthy with illness, and the
living with death. He is a drinker whose thirst is never quenched; an
eater who is never satiated.

Weariness is this—A man gathers food he will not eat, and builds edifices he will not inhabit. He leaves this world to go to God, with no edifice to take with him, no property to carry.

Its vicissitudes are these—The world gladdens the deprived and deprives the glad. Between the two is only a pleasure that has ceased or a misfortune that has arrived.

Its lessons are these—A man is about to see his aspirations fulfilled when they are severed by the ending of his life. No aspiration is attained, and no aspirer attains.

God be praised! How deceiving are the pleasures of this world! How parching its drink! How scorching its shade! It is as though what existed in this world never did, and what is about to be already is. None who arrives is turned away and none who leaves can return.

Truly, the hereafter is a place everlasting, a place of permanence, whether paradise or hellfire. God's elect attain paradise in the hereafter through patience, and realize their aspirations through good deeds. They become companions of God in his abode, abiding there as kings forever.

- 2.3 'Alī said: This world is a place of barren deceptions and ephemeral embellishments. It is a fast-disappearing shade and a keeling support. It destroys whomsoever wants more of it, and harms any who try to benefit from it. How many place their trust in it, depend upon it! But it oppresses them with its bonds, binds them with its tethers, overcomes them with its strangling rope, and enmeshes them in its cords.
- 2.4 'Alī said: The world has turned away and declared its farewell. The hereafter is approaching and has almost arrived. Today is the day of training and tomorrow is the race.
- 2.5 'Alī said: Blessed are the people who reject worldliness, who place their desires in the hereafter. They take God's earth as bed, its dust as bedding, its water as perfume, the book as garment, and prayer

as robe. They sever all bonds with the world just as the Messiah, the son of Mary did.

A man said to ‘Alī, Describe this world to us, and he replied: 2.6

What can I say about a place in which the healthy fall ill and the sick are remorseful, where the poor grieve and the wealthy are seduced, where one is held accountable for what is lawful and where unlawful things lead to the fire?

‘Alī said: You will die, be resurrected after death, made to stand trial for your deeds, and rewarded or punished for them. Do not let this worldly life seduce you! Truly, the world is girded with calamities. It is known for its impending destruction and characterized by deception. Everything in it moves toward an inexorable end. It passes through the hands of people, turn by turn. Its condition is never stable and its residents never safe from harm. The very moment they wallow in luxuries and pleasures, calamity and deception beset them. Its conditions change and its times vary. Life in it is detestable and luxury in it fleeting. Truly, its people are targets: The world strikes them with its arrows, shattering them with mortal blows. Each person’s death is destined, his share of the world allotted. 2.7

‘Alī said: This world is an abode of transience that leads to an abode of permanence. People in it are of two types: one sells his soul and thereby destroys it; the other buys his soul and thereby frees it. 2.8

‘Alī wrote to Salmān al-Fārisī: This world is like a snake—she is soft to the touch, but her venom is lethal. The foolish lad rushes toward her, and the intelligent man is wary of her. Turn away from her attractions, for she will be with you only a short time. Shrug off her cares, for you will soon be leaving her. When you are most comfortable in her, beware of her most. For every time the dweller joyfully relaxes in her, an adversity forcefully removes him from her. Go in peace. 2.9

2.10 'Alī said, censuring the world:

2.10.1 Be wary of this deceiving, dishonest world. She appears in her jeweled ornaments, seduces with her deceptions, deceives with her false hopes, and adorns herself for her suitors. She is like a shining bride—eyes following her, souls enamored of her, hearts yearning for her—a bride who will kill every one of her husbands. The new husband does not take heed from the preceding one; the later one is not driven away by her evil marks on the earlier one. Even the intelligent do not benefit from their experiences with her. Hearts cannot but love her. Souls cannot but greedily guard her.

Two types of people seek her:

The first is a seeker who has won her and is totally taken in by her; he forgets to gather provisions from her in preparation for his departure from her. He resides in her for a short time, until he is bereft of her then slips away. When he is happiest in her, death comes to him. His regret is great, his loss heavy, his misfortune immense. The anguished convulsions of death and the remorseful pangs of loss together bear down upon him—the horror of what descends upon him is beyond words.

The other seeker has been wrested from her before he achieves his desire; he is separated from her with only his heedlessness and remorse to accompany him. He neither obtains what he sought from her, nor achieves in her what he had hoped.

Both seekers depart from this world without provisions and arrive in the hereafter unprepared.

2.10.2 Be wary of this world, utterly, absolutely wary. For she is like a snake—soft to the touch, but her venom is lethal. Turn away from her attractions, for she will be with you for only a short while. Shrug off her cares, for you will soon leave her.

When you are most comfortable with her, beware of her the most. For each time her companion contentedly relaxes with her, an adversity forcefully removes him from her. Each time he is joyful at her kind ministrations, she rebuffs him, choking him. Each time she stretches her leg over him, she follows by turning her waist

away from him. This world's happiness deceives, her benefit harms. Her caresses are trailed by misfortunes and her life is followed by death. Her joys are mixed with grief, and your final sorrow in her will be a state of debility. Look at her with the eye of one who rejects worldliness, who is about to be separated from her. Do not look at her with the eye of a companion or lover.

Know, you, that she terrorizes the calm and serene, and afflicts the joyful and secure. The part of her that has turned away does not return, and the part that is coming cannot be known or guarded against. Her hopes are false, her wishes untrue, her pureness turbid. Man is constantly threatened by danger in this world: a good thing ceasing or a calamity arriving, a destructive catastrophe or a final death. She has made his life murky, if he would only understand. She has informed him about herself, if he would only listen.

Even if her creator had not warned us about her, or described her by analogies, or commanded disinterest in her and dislike of her, her own calamities and disasters should have awoken the sleeping, restrained the oppressors, and opened the eyes of the learned. But her base condition is all the more clear when censure of her has come directly from God, and signs and warnings about her have proceeded from him. She has no value or weight with God. From what has been recounted to us, God hates her the most of all his creation. He has not looked at her since he created her.

This world, including all her treasures and the keys to her, 2.10.3
were presented to our prophet, without reducing his share of the hereafter one wit, and still he refused to accept her. He knew God hated her, so he too hated her. He knew that God considered her of little worth, so he too considered her of little worth. He did not raise what God had lowered, nor did he aggrandize what God had belittled.

If nothing else were to apprise you of her lowliness in God's eyes, consider this: God made her too low for her virtues to be the reward for the obedient, or for her punishment to be the penalty for the disobedient.

Another indication of her lowliness is that God has by consideration and choice turned her away from his intimates and devotees, and presented her instead to his enemies as a test and a trial. He raised Muḥammad above her lowliness, when he tied a tight belt around his waist from hunger.⁷

He protected his intimate and confidant Moses from her when Moses became so thin that the greenness of the plants he ate showed through the skin of his stomach. The day he took refuge in the shade, he did not ask God for anything except for some food, because he was exhausted by hunger.⁸ It is reported that God said to him: If you see wealth approaching, say this is advance punishment for a sin, and if you see poverty approaching, say welcome, garment of the pious!

The Spirit and Word, Jesus, son of Mary, said: My food is hunger, my garment fear of God, my clothing rough wool, my mount my own two feet, my night-lamp the moon, my heating in winter the rays of the sun, my fruit what the earth has grown for grazing animals. I go to sleep owning nothing, yet no-one is wealthier than I am.

Or consider Solomon, son of David, and the kingdom bestowed upon him. He fed his family the finest wheat, while he himself ate bread made from coarse barley. When night fell, he would put on a coat of rough hair, shackle his hand to his neck, and spend the hours until morning weeping, saying, «O lord, I have sinned»⁹—«if you do not forgive me, if you do not have mercy on me, I will surely be lost.»¹⁰ «There is no god but you, exalted above all else—I am surely a transgressor!»¹¹

These, the prophets of God, his chosen and select, distanced themselves from the world, and rejected of her what God urged them to reject. They hated what he hated and considered lowly what he considered lowly.

The pious learned from their example and followed in their footsteps. They focused their reflection and benefited from exemplary lessons. In their short time, they forbore from acquiring ephemeral worldly goods for which they would be held accountable. Not

looking at her outward appearance, they pondered her bitter end, and so her redolent gifts failed to tempt them. Their souls steadfastly cleaved to patience. They considered the world carrion, lawful only in desperate situations. They ate only as much as would keep them breathing and keep the soul in the body. They considered the world a carcass of such overpowering stench that a passerby would hold his nose. They consumed little, and because of her stench they refrained from filling their stomachs. They wondered at those who gorged themselves on her meat, rejoicing at their share.

My brothers, by God, for the one who does well by his soul and takes care of it sincerely, this world is now and will always be smellier than a carcass and more detestable than carrion. Only the one who has grown up in a tannery full of untreated hides is not conscious of its stench; its smell does not pain him as it would a passerby or a person who has just come in and sat down. Suffice it for an intelligent man to recognize her for what she is: the fact that when a man dies leaving behind a powerful kingdom, he wishes he had lived as an ordinary, anonymous person; or that when he dies sound and healthy, he wishes that he had been afflicted with chronic illness instead. Suffice this as proof of her shame and despicable nature.

2.10.4

By God, if the world were such that whosoever wanted something from her found it, his hand just taking it without seeking it out, without fatigue, or trouble, or weariness, or travel, or striving; except that for whatever he took of her, he would have to pay God's dues, offer gratitude, and be held accountable—even then it would be incumbent upon an intelligent man to take from her only his basic needs, his daily food, apprehensive of being asked about it, for fear of the accounting, and in dread of falling short in gratitude. How much more so for the one who, in seeking her, has to bear the pain of bowing his neck, of lowering his cheek to the dirt, of crushing toil, of separation from loved ones, and of grave dangers—all the while not knowing whether the end will bring success or failure!

The world consists of three days: the day that has passed, taking all that was in it, never to return; the day you are in now, which you

2.10.5

must take advantage of; and the day which offers no security since you could die in it. Yesterday is a wise teacher and today is a friend about to take leave. As for tomorrow, all you can do is hope. If yesterday is beyond you, its wisdom nevertheless remains with you. If today has given you comfort by its arrival, it was long absent from you and will soon leave, so take provisions from it and bid it a fond farewell.

Place your trust in good deeds and beware of being deceived by false hopes. Do not let today bring on the cares of tomorrow. Let today's cares suffice; tomorrow will bring its own worries. If you add the cares of tomorrow to today's burden, you will increase your grief and tiredness, and pointlessly strive to gather something today to last you for many days, days that you may not have. Your grief will be great, your work doubled, and your fatigue considerable. Your resolve to do good deeds will be weakened by false hope. If you were to empty your heart of false hope, it would urge you once again to perform good deeds. Your false hope in today has hurt you in two ways: you have put off doing good deeds because of it, and your cares and grief have increased from it. Do you not see that the world is but an hour between two others? An hour that has passed, an hour that remains, and an hour in which you live? In the past and future hours, you find neither pleasure in luxury, nor pain in hardship. Regard the past hour and the one in which you live now as visiting guests. The departing guest has gone, blaming you. The one who is with you now is testing you. Your kindness to the resident guest will wash away your ungraciousness to the departed one. Make up for your ill treatment of the departed guest by pleasing the one who follows. Let not the testimony of both come against you, for together they will destroy you.

2.10.6 If a dead man in his grave were told: Choose: You can leave for your children—for whom you cared above all else—everything in this world, every last bit of its wealth. Or you can have back one day of your life to spend performing good deeds for your soul's salvation. He would choose the one day to make up for his evil deeds

over the legacy of all the world's riches bequeathed to his children. What prevents you, O deceived one, O powerless one, O shameful one, from performing good deeds now, when you still have time, before your end is upon you? Why is the man in the grave quicker to recognize the value of what you have in your hands than you? Will you not strive to remove your yoke, to break your bonds, and to protect your soul from a fire guarded by harsh, rough angels?

‘Alī said: O people! Look at the world with the eyes of those who 2.11
have little interest in her and detest her. Man was not created to spend his time in play, nor given reprieve to speak nonsense. The world he finds so beautiful is no substitute for the hereafter he finds so ugly. The vile stuff he gains from the world is no replacement for a share of the hereafter. The part of the world which turns away and leaves does not return, and there is no guarantee that the part which appears to be coming will arrive. Take heed! Notice the turning away of what has turned away, and the coming of what has come. It is as though what is never was, and what is coming has already occurred.

‘Alī said: Look at the world with the eyes of those who have little 2.12
interest in her. She will, by God, very soon displace her tenant, and afflict the complacent and secure. The part of her which turns away and leaves does not return, and the part of her which appears to be coming does not always arrive, such that it can be guaranteed. Her happiness is mixed with grief, and the last stage of your life in her is spent in growing weakness and incapacity. Do not be deceived by the abundance of her wonders, for she will only accompany you for a short while.

May God have mercy on the person who reflects and takes heed; who, taking heed, recognizes the turning away of what turns away, and the coming of what comes. In a short while, it will be as though this world never was, and as though the hereafter has already occurred. All that will come is at hand!

2.13 ‘Alī said: I counsel you, servants of God, to be conscious of him; and to seize the opportunity—as often as you are able—to perform deeds in obedience to him in your remaining days. To miss such an opportunity will bring great pain when you die. I counsel you to reject the world which will reject you despite your dislike of leaving her, and cause your decay despite your wish for renewal. You and she are like a band of travelers who, traversing a path, seem already to have crossed it, who, heading for a mountain, seem already to have reached it. How very likely it is that someone who runs toward a goal will soon attain it! How very likely it is that the life of someone alive today will not continue beyond it! For behind him is an assiduous seeker who drives him forward in the world until he makes him leave her.

Do not compete for the world or her glories. Do not be taken by her beauty or shaken by her injuries and sorrows. For her might and pride will be cut off, her beauty and delights will cease, and her injuries and sorrows will end. Each period of time in her will conclude. Each living being in her will perish.

Does the evidence of earlier peoples and the example of your forefathers not alert and enlighten you? If you would only understand! Have you not seen that those among you who pass away do not return? And that you, their remaining heirs, will not remain forever? As God Almighty has said: «It is forbidden to the village that we have destroyed—they will not return.» And the Almighty said: «Every soul will taste death. Indeed, you will be given your fair recompense on judgment day: One who has been snatched away from hellfire and given entry to paradise will have won. This worldly life is but a cargo of deception.»¹²

Do you not see the people of this world, evening and morn, in disparate states? A dead man lamented, another man consoled; one felled and afflicted, one who visits the sick, and another who gives up the ghost; a seeker sought by death, and a heedless man who goes not unheeded. Those who remain among us follow upon the traces of those who have passed.

To God belongs all praise, «lord of the seven heavens and lord of the great throne,»¹³ who remains when all else perishes. All creatures find refuge in God and all things return to him.

‘Alī said:

2.14

I warn you of the world, sweet and green, surrounded by delights, inspiring awe with her trifles, beloved for her favors, furnished with hopes, ornamented by deceit. Her joys do not remain and her calamities cannot be secured against. Deceiver, harmer, trickster, departer, vanisher, perisher, gorger, devourer! When she fulfills the wish of those who desire her and are happy with her, she never fails to become as God has said: «like water that we have sent down from the sky; the plants of the earth mix with it; then they become dry and crushed, scattered by the winds. God is able to do all things.»¹⁴ What is more, when a man finds gladness in the world, it is always followed by tears. When he derives joy from her in his belly, he is always injured by her in his back. A raindrop of her ease does not gently caress him without a cloudburst of her calamities pouring down upon him. If she is in good spirits towards him in the morning, she will change for the worse in the evening. If one part of her becomes sweet and sugary for him, another becomes bitter and sickens him. If he dons a garment of her prosperity in hope, her catastrophes oppress him with fatigue. A man does not spend the evening under the wing of security without waking up in the belly of fear. Deceiver, everything in her is deceit. Perisher, all in her will perish. The only good thing among the supplies she offers is piety. Whosoever gathers a little of her wants more, then she destroys him. Whosoever gathers more of her will lose that abundance, and it will soon dissipate.

2.14.1

She afflicts with loss those who trust her, fells those who put confidence in her, and tricks the trickmaster. She reduces grandees to abjectness, turns high-spirited men into nervous beggars, and flings crowned heads into the dirt.

Her rule swings from one to another. Her life is murky, her water brackish, her sweetness bitter, her food poisonous, her subsistence

decayed, her fruits sour. Those living in her are targets for death, the healthy are targets for sickness, and the protected are targets for cruelty. Her kingdom will be snatched away, the mighty will be brought down, guests will be ill-treated, and protégés looted. All this—and afterward the anguished pangs and deep sighs of death, the dread of the overlook into the terrors of hell, and the summoning before the judge, «so that he recompense those who did evil with what they did, and those who performed good deeds with good.»¹⁵

2.14.2 Do you not reside in the dwellings of those who lived before you? They were longer lived than you, had longer lasting monuments than you, were more numerous than you, had more abundant armies than you, and were more obstinate than you in opposing the truth. They worshiped the world devotedly and gave her complete precedence, then departed from her in humiliation. Have you heard tell that the world offered to let their souls go for a ransom? Or passed them over among those she destroyed? No, indeed! She weakened them with calamities, shook them with troubles, and killed them by slitting their throats. She gave strength to the blows of death that fell on them.

You have seen the world's disavowal of those who kowtowed to her, of those who gave her precedence and took comfort in her, when they separated from her eternally, departing to their final end. Did she supply them with anything other than wickedness, give them a residence other than a narrow home, give them light other than a murky gloom, or take them to anywhere but the fire? Do you give this precedence? Is this what you covet? Or take comfort from? God says: «As for those who prefer this worldly life and its ornaments, we will recompense their deeds in her; they will not be given a deficient measure. They are the ones for whom there is naught in the hereafter save the fire. All that they wrought will be in vain, and all they did will be of no value.»¹⁶ What a terrible abode for those who do not accuse her, are not wary of her. When she turns toward you, remember the speed with which she will turn away, how close her end, and how weak her compass.

Has the world not torn you to pieces just as she tore those who came before you? And did she not tear them to pieces just as she tore those who came before them—generation upon generation, community upon community, age upon age, descendant upon descendant? She is not ashamed of dishonor, does not cease to afflict, nor shy away from deception.

You should know—and you do know—that you will leave the world. She is, as God has described, nothing «but sport and diversion, beautiful ornaments, a cause for boasting among you, and rivalry for the most wealth and offspring.»¹⁷

Take warning from those who built on every height a monument for their amusement, who built for themselves mighty castles, hoping to live forever,¹⁸ and those «who said: is anyone mightier than us?»¹⁹

Take warning from your brothers whom you have seen die. They were borne to their graves, but cannot be called riders. They were given places to alight, but cannot be called guests. They were given tombs as coverings, earth as shrouds, and dried bones as neighbors, neighbors who do not answer the one who calls out to them, who do not protect from harm, who do not benefit from the laments chanted for them, who do not recognize bad or good, who do not give any more false testimony. If they get rain they do not rejoice. If they have drought they do not despair. They are all together, yet each one is alone. They are neighbors, yet distant from one another. They are in the same assembly, yet no-one visits them, nor do they visit anyone—mature leaders whose enmities have dissipated, rash youths whose hatreds have disappeared. Their blows are no longer feared. Their protection is no longer sought. They are as those who never were. And as God has said: «Those are their abodes, uninhabited after them except for a short time. We, yes we, will inherit.»²⁰

The world's claim is weak, her drink murky, and the path to her waterhole thick with mud. She is deception personified, her ash-wood spears are ready to strike, and any support she provides is unsteady. Her silk robes dazzle, and her beauty amazes. But she kills

the one who seeks excess of her, and prostrates the one who would benefit from her, by the unavoidable cessation of her pleasures, by her destructive desires, and by imprisoning whomsoever would break loose from her grip. She traps him with her snares, her arrows aimed at him, capturing him with paltry favors, teasing with trivial gifts, every night of his existence and all the days of his life.

Then the rope of death trusses him up and its cords strangle him, leading him in paroxysms to a narrow bed and a fearful place of return, to the company of the lifeless, to the witnessing of his new home, and the recompense for his deeds.

Then time shuts up his ears and he dies. He will not return. He will have to pay—his neck bound with the twine of sins he has earned, all traces accounted for in time for the verdict. «He who bears the burden of evil deeds has indeed failed.»²¹



CHAPTER 3

COUNSEL

‘Alī said:

3.1

You have been created by God’s power and are ruled by his might. You will be placed in the grave and turn to dry bones. Every one of you will be resurrected alone and held accountable for your deeds.

3.1.1

May God have mercy on the man who, having sinned, confesses. Fearful of punishment in the hereafter, he performs good deeds. Dreading it, he hastens to the straight path. Having been given a long life, he takes heed. Warned, he is driven back from error. Answering, he comes back to God. When he wavers, he repents. When he emulates, he takes good people as an example. He hastens to seek knowledge. He flees from error and is saved. He gives away entire treasures. He purifies his heart. He prepares for the return, gathering provisions for his day of departure when he will set forth on his path, for his moment of need and for his time of want. He assembles supplies beforehand to take to his final abode.

Prime your souls while your bodies are sound. Think: Do people fresh and youthful wait for anything but the humbling ravages of age? People of glowing health for anything but the hard blows of sickness? People still on earth for anything but the arrival of sudden annihilation? And the drawing nigh of death? And the approach of the passing? And the looming closeness of the end? And the piercing moans? And the sweating brow? And the dilating nostrils? And

the insomnia of anxiety? And the snuffing out of the last spark of life?
And the pain of burning grief? And the choke of the death rattle?

Servants of God! You, and all things with you in this world, are on the path of those who have gone before—people who lived longer than you, who were stronger in battle, and had more prosperous homes and longer lasting monuments. After a long run of power, their voices have become extinguished, their bodies decayed, their homes emptied, their monuments effaced. In exchange for fortified palaces and lavish thrones and cushions, they have been given rocks and stones propped up in the crushing shelter of dug out graves. Ruination has revealed the annihilation of their palaces, and dust has covered their towering edifices.

3.1.2 The grave is at hand. Its resident is like a stranger. He is with those who live together in one domicile and yet are lonely, who stay in one locale yet are too preoccupied to be concerned about each other. They have neither the comfort of a prosperous home, nor do they associate as neighbors and brothers. All this, despite their physical closeness and the proximity of their dwellings.

How could there be association between them, when decay has crushed them, and stones and earth have eaten them up? When after being alive, they have become dead bodies? After having had fresh life, they are now dry bones? Their loved ones are shocked by their death, a death that has sent them to live in the dust, departed, never to return. Woe! Woe! «No indeed, it is but a word that he speaks, while behind them is a barrier till the day they are resurrected.»²²

It is as though you have arrived at their destination: At the place of decay, solitary in the abode of the dead. It is as though you have already been yielded as collateral to that bed, and that depository has already enveloped you. How do you think it will be with you, when all affairs reach their end? When the contents of graves are scattered forth?²³ When «what is in people's breasts is reaped»?²⁴ When you are made to stand in front of the mighty judge for your hearts to be reaped? Hearts will flutter from their dread of punishment for

past sins. Veils and curtains will be rent. Faults and secrets will be revealed. In that place, each soul will be recompensed for what it has presented.²⁵ God says: «He will recompense evil with its like, and good with good.»²⁶

Take advantage of your days of health before the arrival of days of illness, of youth before the onset of old age. Hasten to repent before the time of regret. Do not let this respite prompt you to ride the back of lasting heedlessness, for the end of your life will destroy your hopes. The passing days are charged with disrupting your time span and with separating you from loved ones.

Hasten to repent—may God have mercy on you!—before the arrival of the calamity. Outpace your fellow men in preparation for that disappearance from which there is no return. Seek help in traveling the great distance through a sustained fear of God’s punishment.

How many a heedless person was complacent in his heedlessness, making excuses in his time of respite, hoping long hopes, building strong edifices? The approaching end of his lifespan truncated his long hopes. His death took him by surprise, severing his desires. After having might, power, honor, and standing, he became pawned to his destructive deeds. He left and will not return. He regretted but to no avail. He was reduced to misery by the things he accumulated in his day—and which another enjoyed on the morrow—and he became mortgaged to the earnings of his hands, distracted even from wife and children. What he left behind did not benefit him even a date pit’s worth. He found no path of escape.

Servants of God! Why do you race through the winding dunes from the first fall of night? Where will you flee, when death is here, stalking you, snatching up one person after another, not pitying the weak, nor having mercy on the noble? The recurring alternation of day and night urges on your lifespan and drives it forward inexorably. What is to come is at hand. After that, you will see the wonder of wonders. Make ready your answer for the day of reckoning and make plenty of preparations for the day of return.

May God protect us by aiding us to obey him. May he help us to do what will bring us closer to him. We come from him, and we belong to him.

- 3.2 God has decreed your life spans. He has given you instruction through parables. He has clothed you in splendid garments. He has elevated your mode of living. He has graced you with perfect favors. He has come to you with convincing arguments. He has bestowed on you gifts of happiness and ease. So tuck up your garments and make haste! The reckoning will begird you, and the recompense for your deeds is pledged.
- 3.3 Hardened hearts cannot absorb their full share of God's mercy. Distracted by worldly pleasures, they ignore their better judgment. They race in the wrong track, as though someone else were implicated.
- 3.4 Be conscious of God. Roll up your sleeves and apply yourselves. Strip yourself of worldly connections. Accelerate your pace. Speed up your preparations in your time of respite. Be fearful. Ponder the return to the refuge, the end result of patience, and the final homecoming. Surely God suffices as avenger and giver of victory. Surely the garden suffices as reward and gift. Surely the fire suffices as punishment and chastisement. Surely the book of God suffices as interlocutor and adversary.
- 3.5 May God have mercy on the man who wears the garment of grief and dons the robe of fear. Who, being a man of conviction, divests himself of doubt and patiently awaits the approaching end of his life on earth. Mindful of this end, his heart shines forth as a lamp of guidance. With its light, he brings the far close, and finds difficulties easier to bear. He escapes from the grip of blindness and from association with the dead, and becomes himself a key for the door of guidance and a lock for the door of perdition. He seeks to open the door of guidance

as scholars have done, plunging into its sea and venturing through its depths. Its paths and beacons shine bright for him. Grasping the sturdiest of handles, taking refuge in the strongest of mountains, he removes misfortunes, elucidates ambiguities, repulses calamities, and guides others through the wilderness. He pursues every repository of good, seeking it wherever it may be found.



CHAPTER 4

PRESCRIPTIONS AND PROSCRIPTIONS

- 4.1.1 Be good to others just as you would have others be good to you.
- 4.1.2 Show justice before justice is meted out to you.
- 4.1.3 Seek your share and your destiny will come to you.
- 4.1.4 Fate is a camel. Loosen its reins as long as it is docile.
- 4.1.5 Seize opportunities before they dissipate.
- 4.1.6 Discipline yourself to not do what you dislike in others.
- 4.1.7 Adorn your final dwelling place and trade this world for the hereafter.
- 4.1.8 Be kind to one who associates with you; perhaps then he will be kind to you.
- 4.1.9 How you wish to be treated should be the measure of how you treat others.
- 4.1.10 Choose for others what you would choose for yourself, and dislike for them what you dislike for yourself.
- 4.1.11 Consider ugly in yourself what you consider ugly in others.
- 4.1.12 Strive for excellence, give generously, and speak kindly to people.
- 4.1.13 Avoid saying “I guess,” “I suppose,” and “I reckon.”

Avoid talking about things you do not know, or addressing people regarding things which are not your concern.	4.1.14
Accept from others what you require of them.	4.1.15
Do not stop asking God—the gates of his mercy will open for you.	4.1.16
Spend righteously; do not hoard your wealth for others.	4.1.17
Impede evil, else you may speed its onset.	4.1.18
Accept your brother, whatever his faults.	4.1.19
Show kindness to those whom you wish to please.	4.1.20
Obeys your brother even if he disobeys you, and keep your bonds with him even if he would cut them.	4.1.21
Accept the apology of one who apologizes.	4.1.22
Fear God, and he will suffice you against harm.	4.1.23
Nourish your heart with refined behavior as you would stoke a fire with kindling.	4.1.24
Stay away from power, and do not become complacent against Satan's deceptions.	4.1.25
Always choose the best of qualities for your soul—being good is a cultivated habit.	4.1.26
Cut off the traces of care with the resolve of forbearance.	4.1.27
Enforce punishments on those close to you when they transgress, and the public will stay away from crime.	4.1.28
Associate with good people and you will be one of them. Stay away from evil people and you will be differentiated from them.	4.1.29
Give your brother sincere advice, whether palatable or unpleasant.	4.1.30
Help your brother in any circumstance; go with him where he goes.	4.1.31
Plumb the depths to find truth.	4.1.32

- 4.1.33 Live in this world as though on a journey.
- 4.1.34 Train your soul to be generous.
- 4.1.35 Choose carefully where you water your camels.
- 4.1.36 Accept people's apologies.
- 4.1.37 Beware of fickleness in religion.
- 4.1.38 Honor those who are generous to you.
- 4.1.39 Forgive those who are cruel to you.
- 4.1.40 Be generous even to those who belittle you.
- 4.1.41 Be good to those who treat you unkindly, and recompense those who treat you well.
- 4.1.42 Pray for those who are generous to you.
- 4.1.43 Thank God for the gifts he bestows upon you, and praise him for the trials he tests you with.
- 4.1.44 Be patient with those who are cruel to you, and accept apologies from those who proffer them.
- 4.1.45 Accept apologies. Do not do to anyone something he finds objectionable.
- 4.1.46 Do not covet another's property—don the garment of contentedness.
- 4.1.47 Pray the dawn prayer while the night is still dark and you will meet God with a shining face.²⁷
- 4.1.48 Learn the rules of religious practice, and train yourself to be patient when faced with difficulties.
- 4.1.49 Beseech God with all your heart, for he has the power to give or refuse.
- 4.1.50 Commit yourself to God in all your affairs—in him you have a sheltering cavern and a mighty protector.

- Take advantage of the opportunity to lend when you have wealth, and fix repayment for your day of need. 4.1.51
- Take what comes to you of this world, and turn away from what turns away from you. If you cannot bring yourself to do so, then at least be moderate in your ventures. 4.1.52
- Honor your soul by protecting it from base things, even if they lead to your heart's desire. Remember, you shall not get back what you expend of it. 4.1.53
- Acknowledge your indebtedness to one who guides you to the truth, whether he is high-placed or lowly. 4.1.54
- Cast off the fevers of anxiety with patient resolve and beautiful conviction. 4.1.55
- Be forgiving. Reproving forgiveness hurts an intelligent man more than a beating. 4.1.56
- Seek help from God in all your affairs. He is the most sufficient helper. 4.1.57
- Give a friend full affection but not blind trust. Help him, but do not tell him every secret. 4.1.58
- Beware the tears of the believer when he prays at dawn, for they crush the person who has occasioned them and douse the sea of fire engulfing the suppliant. 4.1.59
- Be gentle with your horses and camels. Do not keep them standing while loaded. Do not make them drink with their bits in their mouths. Do not load them beyond their capacity. 4.1.60
- Stay back from a course if you fear you will stray. Staying back when unsure is better than riding the ominous swells of the sea. 4.1.61
- Command good and you shall be good. Forbid evil with your tongue and your hand. Strive to differentiate yourself from those who do evil. 4.1.62

- 4.1.63 Give your brother your wealth, give your acquaintance your support, and give the public greetings and peace.
- 4.1.64 Maintain the bonds of kinship with your brother even when he is bent on cutting them. Perform kindnesses for him even when he shuns you. Be generous to him even when he hardens and is close-fisted. Stay close to him even when he distances himself. Be kind to him even when he is harsh. Placate him even when he is cruel. Behave toward him as though you were a slave and he a generous benefactor.
- 4.1.65 Ask only for things that befit you, whose beautiful goodness will benefit you, the burden of whose evil outcome will not weigh you down. Do not ask for things that will not remain for you or you for them. The time has drawn nigh when you will see the consequences of your deeds, good or bad. Perhaps the generous forgiver will forgive.
- 4.1.66 Do not cheat a person who has given you something in trust, even if he cheats you.
- 4.1.67 Do not reveal another's secrets, even if he reveals yours.
- 4.1.68 Do not shun your brother over a suspicion or cut him off without asking for an explanation.
- 4.1.69 Do not despair if you have sinned, for the door of repentance is open.
- 4.1.70 Do not oppress others, just as you would not have others oppress you.
- 4.1.71 Do not speak about things you do not know; indeed, do not speak about everything you do know.
- 4.1.72 Do not rebuke a person too much for something that is not a sin.
- 4.1.73 Do not squander mandatory religious obligations, while relying on your performance of supererogatory ones.
- 4.1.74 Do not make trickery the basis of your dealings; it is a vile trait.
- 4.1.75 Never leave off counseling your family; you are responsible for them.

Do not speak heedlessly, like someone gathering firewood in the dark, or like scum on surging waves.	4.1.76
Do not become the slave of another when God has made you free.	4.1.77
Do not censure too much, for it bequeaths hatred.	4.1.78
Do not judge when you are angry or intoxicated by sleep.	4.1.79
Do not allow someone who is not like you into your company.	4.1.80
Do not scorn someone who honors you.	4.1.81
Do not make it your custom to laugh loudly, for it lessens your poise and emboldens your antagonist.	4.1.82
Do not befriend ingrates or shun the obliging.	4.1.83
Do not quarrel with a believer or you will be stripped just as a branch is stripped of its bark. Do not hate people; a man of faith does not hate.	4.1.84
Do not befriend your friend's enemy, for you would be spurning your friend.	4.1.85
Do not doubt an upright man.	4.1.86
Do not seek to even the score with your brother even if he pours dirt into your mouth.	4.1.87
Do not squander your brother's rights, taking the bond between you for granted. If you squander his rights he is no longer your brother.	4.1.88
Do not be more capable of meanness than kindness, of miserliness than generosity, of negligence than munificence.	4.1.89
Do not heed counsel only when it dogs you and causes you pain. A rational person takes counsel from rebuke; only cattle are counseled by the whip.	4.1.90
Do not be incapable of expressing gratitude for gifts, even as you seek more.	4.1.91

- 4.1.92 Do not be ungrateful to someone who does you a favor—that is the lowest form of ingratitude.
- 4.1.93 Do not keep doubting others. Doubt does not leave space for reconciliation between you and your friend.
- 4.1.94 Do not let your family members be the ones who get the least share of you. Do not place your desires in someone who is indifferent to you.
- 4.1.95 Do not let your brother be more capable of cutting himself off from you than you of associating with him.
- 4.1.96 Do not let the oppressor's oppression trouble you unduly. Know that he harms himself and benefits you.
- 4.1.97 A friend is not a friend unless he protects his friend in his absence and when he is in trouble, and unless he protects his friend's children and his inheritance after he dies.
- 4.1.98 Do not despair if the answer is slow in coming. The gift will be commensurate to the petition.
- 4.1.99 Do not let unwarranted distrust deprive you of a compassionate friend.
- 4.1.100 Do not let someone's ingratitude stop you from doing good. The one who reaps no benefit from your generosity thanks you.
- 4.1.101 Do not quarrel with a fool or a sage. If you quarrel with a sage, you will be deprived of the good he does. If you quarrel with a fool, his evil will grieve you.
- 4.1.102 Beware lest belligerence's steeds bolt with you.
- 4.1.103 Beware lest ambition's steeds take off with you.
- 4.1.104 Beware of making excuses for a sin you could have refrained from committing. Your best apology is not to sin.
- 4.1.105 Beware lest you weary of life. That is weak-minded and contemptible.

Beware of putting faith in worldly hopes. They are the property of fools, and they hold you back in this world and the next. 4.1.106

Beware of holding back from doing what you know is right. Every person who has been given a reprieve will be held accountable for his deeds, words, and intentions. 4.1.107

Beware of befriending a fool, for he wants to benefit you but harms you instead. Beware of befriending a liar, for he brings near to you the distant and makes distant from you the near. Beware of befriending a miser, for he holds back from helping you when you most need him. And beware of befriending a depraved person, for he will sell you for a trifle. 4.1.108

Beware of associating with people who would harm your religion or your honor. 4.1.109

Beware of seeking advice from women, for their opinion can weaken and their resolve waver. 4.1.110

Beware of accepting gifts from adversaries. 4.1.111

Beware lest your ingratitude for God's favors causes his punishments to alight upon you. 4.1.112

Do not be one of those who expect the hereafter without work, or who anticipate forgiveness through lengthy aspirations. They speak of rejecting the world, but reveal their desire for it in the way they behave. When worldly possessions are withheld from them they are discontent, yet when given them they are not satisfied. Incapable of gratitude for God's gifts, they want more. They forbid others from evil, but do not themselves desist. They command others to do what they themselves do not. They love good people but do not behave like them. They detest the wicked but resemble them. They fear death because they have sinned for long, yet continue to do the very things that make them fearful. If they become ill they repent, but once healthy they frolic. When they are fit they are full 4.1.113

of themselves, but when tested they despair. Their ego compels them to follow its inclinations; they do not compel it to follow their conviction. They do not trust in the sustenance guaranteed them nor undertake the duties mandated of them. If they gain wealth they turn insolent, if they become poor they despair and weaken. They carry the twin burdens of sins and favors. They keep asking for more yet do not give thanks. Sycophants, they do for others what is not required, while squandering their own precious souls. They make grand requests yet fall short in their deeds. They fear death yet are slow to atone in the time they have. They consider others' sins excessive yet regard as insignificant the many more transgressions they themselves commit. They aggrandize their own deeds of obedience yet think similar acts contemptible in others. They calumniate others and flatter themselves. Idle talk with the rich is dearer to them than worshiping God with the poor. They judge others but not themselves. They expect others to obey them, yet they disobey. They expect full measure but do not pay equally.

- 4.2 *Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Umar al-Mu‘addal reported to us, saying: Abū l-Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Ghanī reported to us, saying: Abū Ṭālib al-Khashshāb reported to us, saying: Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yazīd reported to us, saying: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī reported to us, saying:*

Al-Ḥasan, son of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, said: My father counseled me before his death about thirty character traits, saying: Dear son, if you inculcate these qualities in your life in this world, God will protect you from the evils of this world and of the hereafter. What are they, father? I asked, and he replied as follows:

Be wary of three things, fear three, hope for three, abide by three, be ashamed of three, take refuge in three, be niggardly with three, focus on three, flee from three, and stay away from three—if you do, God will fashion for you a good character in this world and in the hereafter.

Be wary of pride, anger, and greed. Pride is one of the traits of evil people, and is a garment worthy of the Almighty alone;

even a tiny grain of pride placed in someone's heart by God will lead him into hellfire. Anger makes the mature imprudent and the learned unsteady, suppresses reason and exposes ignorance. And greed is one of Satan's traps, one of his terrible snares; he uses it to ensnare the learned, the intelligent, the knowledgeable, and the discerning.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, "Fear three."

Very well, my son. Fear God, fear anyone who doesn't fear God, and fear your tongue, for it is an enemy to your faith. If you fear these three, God will protect you from everything you fear.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, "Hope for three."

My son, hope for God's forgiveness for your sins, hope for a beautiful reward from him for your deeds, and hope for your prophet's intercession.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, "Abide by three."

Abide by the book of God, abide by the practice of your prophet, and abide by whatever accords with truth and the book of God.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, "Be ashamed of three."

Very well, my son. Be ashamed to have God see you all the time doing things he dislikes; be ashamed to have the noble and protecting scribal angels see you thus; and be ashamed to have the pious believers see you.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, "Take refuge in three."

Very well. Take refuge in God from the calamities that befall you; take refuge in repentance from your bad deeds; and take refuge in people of knowledge and refinement from the slips you make due to ignorance.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, "Be niggardly with three."

Very well. Be niggardly with your life, lest you waste it doing what works against you rather than for you; be niggardly with your religion, lest you give it up to anger; and be niggardly with your words, except for those words which work for you and not against you.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, “Focus on three.”

Very well, my son. Focus on knowing your appetitive soul, exposing its faults, and hating it; focus on piety; and focus on humbling yourself and concealing your eminence.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, “Flee from three.”

Very well, my son. Flee from untruth, flee from an oppressor even if he is your son or father, and flee from places of trial where your forbearance might be tested.

You have spoken truly, father. Now explain to me your words, “Stay away from three.”

Very well, my son. Stay away from following your desires, and from people who follow their desires; stay away from evil and its people; and stay away from fools, even if they court your friendship or are old and favored.

Go in peace.

- 4.3 *Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr ibn ‘Abd Allāh reported to me, from Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī, with a certificate to transmit, saying: Abū l-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Kawkabī the litterateur reported to us, saying: Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad ibn Ayyūb reported to us, saying: Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Abī Shaybah reported to us, saying: Ḍirār ibn Ṣurad reported to us, saying: ‘Aṣim ibn Ḥumayd reported to us, saying: Thābit ibn Abī Ṣafiyyah reported to us, from Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī, from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Jundub, from Kumayl ibn Ziyād, who said:*

The commander of the faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, took my hand and led me toward the wilderness. When he reached the desert, he sighed deeply, and said: Truly, Kumayl, hearts are like vessels, and

the best are those that best store knowledge. Take heed of what I am going to tell you:²⁸

There are three types of people: a person with divine learning; an apprentice who walks the path of salvation; and ignorant rabble—followers of every deceiving bleater, who sway with every wind, seeking neither illumination from the light of knowledge, nor support from a sturdy column.

Knowledge is better than wealth: Knowledge protects you, whereas you have to protect wealth. Wealth decreases with spending, whereas knowledge increases with it.

Knowledge is a faith to be followed. It helps you practice obedience to your lord in your lifetime, and leaves a beautiful legacy of remembrance after your death; whereas the benefits of wealth cease with its ceasing. And knowledge rules, while wealth is ruled over.

Those who hoard wealth are dead even as they live, whereas the learned remain as long as the world remains—their persons may be lost, but their teachings live on in people's hearts.

Truly, abundant knowledge is housed here (signaling to his breast), if only I could find a bearer for it!

But no, by God! I encounter sharp students who are not trustworthy, who use the instrument of religion for worldly benefit, who attempt to use God's own proofs to gain victory over his select, and his own favors to gainsay his book. I encounter others who have been guided to the bearers of truth, but have no real perception with which to revivify it; doubt is kindled in their hearts by the first appearance of misgivings. By God, neither is to be countenanced! There is a third type, enamored of carnal pleasures, easily led to the fulfilling of desires. Or yet another, captivated by the hoarding and collecting of wealth. Neither is mindful of religion. They are the closest thing to cattle. This is how knowledge dies, by the death of its bearers.

No, by God! There will always be men on this earth who uphold God's proof—whether visible and well-known or fearful and hidden—for God's proof can never be invalidated. How many, and

where? They are few in number, but great in God's regard. Through them God protects his proof, until they entrust it to others like them, sowing it in the hearts of their peers. Knowledge has brought them to real belief, enabling them to touch the spirit of certainty, and to deem easy what the profligate find difficult, to find comfort in what the ignorant find miserable. They live in this world in bodies whose spirits are linked to the highest abode. They are God's vicegerents on his earth, calling to his religion. Ah! Would that I could see them!

I seek God's forgiveness for me and for you, Kumayl. You may take your leave now.

4.4 'Alī's testament, delivered after the cursed Ibn Muljam struck him the death blow:

When the commander of the faithful was struck the death blow, his family and close companions gathered around him, and he said to them:

Praise God, who fixed the span of lives, destined the sustenance his servants receive, ordained a destiny for all things, and omitted nothing from the book. He said: «Wherever you may be, death will find you, even if you take shelter in fortified towers.»²⁹ He also said: «Say: Even if you had been sheltering in your homes, those who were destined to be slain would have gone forth to the places where they were to lie down in death.»³⁰ And he said to his prophet: «Command good, forbid evil, and bear patiently the troubles that assail you. Truly, this is part of resoluteness in tackling affairs.»³¹

The beloved of God,³² God's chosen from among his creatures, the epitome of truthfulness whose veracity we all accept, informed me about this day. He entrusted me with a testament regarding it, saying:

'Alī, I wonder how it will be with you when you remain alone among the dregs of humanity. You will call out and none will answer. You will defend the faith and none will come to your aid. Your companions will incline toward another, your advisors will become

your adversaries, those with you causing you more harm than your enemy. If you urge them to fight, they will block your attempts and avert their faces. If you exhort them to battle, they will turn their backs and hasten away. Secretly they will wish you gone, all because you undertake God's command and deter them from worldliness. Among them will be one whose ambition you have forestalled, who suppresses his rage and bides his time. And another whose family you have slain in battle, who awaits his vengeance and hopes that fate's vicissitudes and calamities' onslaughts will dispatch you on his behalf. Each will hold malice in his breast, inflamed by wrath. You will remain with them in this state, until, in the end, they will crush you with evil and slay you through deceit. They will call you the names they used on me: soothsayer, magician, fraud, liar. Bear all this patiently, for you have a model to follow in the person of God's messenger. This is what God commanded when he said: «In the person of God's messenger you have a worthy model to follow.»³³

God has commanded me to bring you close, 'Alī, and not keep you distant, to teach you and not disregard you, to keep you near and not be harsh with you.

This was the prophet's counsel to me and the testament he entrusted to me.

Now I offer my counsel to you, O you who have undertaken God's command, fought to defend the faith, and worked assiduously to secure the rights of the widowed and the needy. I counsel you to maintain your piety after I am gone. I warn you against the world and her adornments and splendors, for they are the cargo of deception. Shun the path of those who relied on the world, whose hearts were so blinded by heedlessness that they lost all mindfulness of the hereafter; God sent them something they had not reckoned with, and seized them suddenly in their blithe oblivion.³⁴

There have been people before you who remained true to their prophets and followed in their footsteps. If you embrace their guidance and pursue their practice you will not go astray. Indeed, God's prophet has given you God's book and his own family to lead you

after him. They have knowledge concerning what you should or should not do. They are the clear path, the shining light, the supports of the earth, and its just rulers. It is their light from which illumination is sought, and it is their guidance that is to be followed. They come from a tree whose origin is noble, whose roots are firm, whose branches are lofty, and whose fruit is sweet—grown in the solid earth of the holy sanctuary, irrigated by the water of nobility, cleansed of pollution and filth, and selected from the purest of families. Do not turn aside from them or you will be flung asunder. Do not move away from them or you will be torn to pieces. Cleave to them and you will gain guidance and direction. Adhere to the wishes of God’s messenger regarding them. For he informed you that “the two will not separate until they come to me at the celestial pool”—I mean God’s book and the prophet’s progeny.

I entrust you to God, who never abuses trust.

May God give you what you hope for, and protect you from what you fear.

Convey my greetings of peace to those who bear love for me, to their children, and to their children’s children.

May God safeguard you, and may he safeguard your prophet in you.

Go in peace.

- 4.5 ‘Alī’s counsel to al-Ḥasan, after the cursed Ibn Muljam struck him the death blow:

When Ibn Muljam had struck ‘Alī the death blow, al-Ḥasan came to him weeping, and ‘Alī asked him: What makes you weep, my son?

How can I not weep, al-Ḥasan replied, when you are in the first day of the hereafter, and the last day of this world?

My son, ‘Alī said to him, remember four things, and four more things. As long as you act upon them, nothing will harm you.

What are they, father? al-Ḥasan asked.

‘Ali replied: The best wealth is intelligence, the greatest poverty is foolishness, the loneliest alienation comes from conceit, and the noblest ancestry is good moral behavior.

Father, said al-Ḥasan, that makes four; what are the other four?

Dear son, ‘Ali replied, beware of befriending a fool, for he wants to benefit you but harms you instead. Beware of befriending a liar, for he brings near to you the distant and makes distant from you the near. Beware of befriending a miser, for he holds back from helping you when you most need him. And beware of befriending a depraved person, for he will sell you for a trifle.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr al-Tustarī reported, in one of the reports that he authorized me to transmit, saying: al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Sa‘īd ibn Ḥamdān informed me, saying: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Faḍl the grammarian narrated to us, saying: Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Quraysh al-Ḥukaymī narrated to us, saying: ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Abān narrated to us, saying: Sahl ibn Shu‘ayb al-Nahmī narrated to us, from ‘Abd al-A‘lā, from Nawf al-Bikālī,³⁵ who said: 4.6

I saw ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib on the eve of the fifteenth of Sha‘bān.³⁶ He gazed long at the stars, then said to me: Nawf, are you asleep? No, commander of the faithful, I replied, I see you. He then declared: 4.6.1

Blessed are those who reject worldliness and focus their desire on the hereafter. They take God’s earth for a carpet, its dust for a bed, its water for perfume, the Qur’an as their garment, and prayer as their robe. They cut their bonds with the world in the manner of the Messiah, son of Mary. God revealed to his servant, the Messiah: “Command the children of Israel that they should not enter any of my houses except with pure hearts, eyes cast down, and unsullied hands. I do not answer the prayer of any who has rendered an injustice to one of my creatures.”

Nawf, do not be a poet, tax collector, policeman, appraiser, drummer, or lute player. God’s prophet, David, stepped outside on just such a night, and said: The prayer of any who prays to God in

this hour will be answered, unless he is a poet, tax collector, policeman, appraiser, drummer, or lute player.

- 4.6.2 Servants of God! I counsel you to piety, to compete for that precious portion of God's reward, to fear the ominous day of judgment, and to work hard for the salvation of your souls—laboring to free them before they perish, and gathering good deeds unto them before they are taken away.

Take advantage of your days of health before illness besets you, and of youth before the arrival of old age. Hasten to repent before the onset of regret. Do not let the respite you have been granted lull you into prolonged heedlessness. The end of a man's life span destroys hope. The passing days are charged with disrupting your time span, and separating you from loved ones. Hasten to repent—may God have mercy on you!—before your turn arrives. Outpace your fellows in preparing for that disappearance from which there is no return. Rely on your substantial fear of God in covering the protracted distance. Many a heedless person, complacent in heedlessness and dallying in his time of respite, has cast hopes far afield and built towering fortresses. His prolonged hopes are interrupted by the approaching end of his life. His death takes him by surprise and cuts short his aspirations. After might and strength, honor and elevation, he becomes mortgaged to his pernicious deeds. He disappears and does not return, regrets too late and loses all he had gathered in his day. Another will enjoy it on the morrow, while he remains mortgaged to the earnings of his own labors, distracted from wife and children, not a single twisted thread of what he left behind helping him, finding no way to escape.

- 4.6.3 Servants of God! To what end all this restless movement through winding dunes and dark night? Where will you flee or escape, when death is here in pursuit, snatching up one soul after another, neither pitying the weak, nor showing mercy to the noble? The ever-renewing night and day urge your life on, and drive it forward in haste. All that is going to come is at hand. After that you will see the

wonder of wonders. Prepare your answer for the day of accounting. Make ready your provisions for the day of return.

May God protect us by our obedience to him. May he help us to do what will bring us close to him, and draw us nigh unto him. We come from him, and belong to him.

Servants of God, I counsel you to piety. Piety is salvation from every adversity and protection from every error. It is through piety that winners have won, aspirers have attained victory, fleers have been saved, and seekers have attained. It is by abandoning piety that the negligent have lost. «Truly, God is with those who practice piety, and those who perform good deeds.»³⁷ Fear God, yes, fear God, servants of God, before pens run dry, before days dwindle, before the time comes when you answer for your sins, before the time when you cry out from regret, and before the time of perdition and wretchedness, before the sudden and plain arrival of God's punishment!

I counsel you, servants of God, to piety, in consciousness of the one who has devised parables and appointed life spans for you, who has sharpened your ears to heed what is relevant, your eyes to see brightly, and your hearts to comprehend what astounds them. He has not created you in vain, nor given you an indefinite reprieve, nor kept the remembrance from you. Rather, he has generously bestowed upon you perfect favors, pared your excuses with cutting proofs, and gifted you the most beautiful gifts, and a vast supply of provisions. He has encompassed you in his reckoning, and prepared a recompense for the actions you take in times of happiness and sorrow.

O servants of God, be conscious of him. Be earnest in your seeking. Make haste to perform good deeds before your life span ends. Stop doing things which invite suspicion. Fear the destroyer of pleasures. Gather up your provisions—may God have mercy on you!—for the call has come to depart. Minimize your inclination toward the world, so that you leave it with goodly provisions from your present. Truly, there is a tough climb before you, and fearsome and

unknown waystations you must pass and where you must alight. You will attain either God's mercy—in which case you will have been saved from their hideousness and challenges—or a calamity from which there is no recovery.

4.7 'Alī's counsel to Ibn 'Abbās:

Ibn 'Abbās said: After the passing of the prophet, I benefited from nothing as much as I did from the following words the commander of the faithful, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, wrote to me:

In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful.

A man is gladdened by obtaining a thing he was not going to lose and saddened by the loss of a thing he was not going to obtain. If something of this world comes to you from God do not exult excessively. If he keeps something from you, do not grieve too much. Save your worries for what comes after death.

Go in peace.

CHAPTER 5

‘ALĪ’S QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS, AND ‘ALĪ’S ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

O people! If one of you asks a question, let him be scrupulous in asking. If one of you is asked a question, let him be conscientious in answering. By God, calamitous events and momentous affairs have descended upon you because of the failure of many who are asked, and the submissive acceptance of many who do the asking. 5.1

The prophet asked ‘Alī: 5.2

What is the first favor God bestowed upon you?

That he made me male not female, ‘Alī replied.

Then what?

That he guided me to Islam, and allowed me to recognize its true value, and that in his kindness he gave me you as a guide, O messenger of God.

Then what?

«If you count God’s bounty you will be not be able to tally it.»³⁸

‘Alī asked his son al-Ḥasan the following questions about the perfection of human qualities, and al-Ḥasan responded— 5.3

Dear son, what is well-directed action?

Well-directed action is repaying wrong with good, father, he replied.

And what is honor?

Being generous to your kin and enduring injustice.

What is good character?

Virtue. And probity is rectitude with regard to property.

What is refinement?

Compassion in little things and protecting the vulnerable.

What is blameworthiness?

Contempt for yourself and neglect of your bride's honor are blameworthy.

What is generosity?

Giving generously in times of hardship and ease.

What is stinginess?

Believing what you have spent to be a waste.

What is brotherly behavior?

Helping your brother both in times of adversity and security.

What is cowardice?

Being spirited against your friend and cowardly with your enemy.

What is booty?

Consciousness of God and indifference to the world—that is booty easily won.

What is forbearance?

Suppressing rage and controlling desire.

What is wealth?

Accepting what God has ordained for you, even if it is little. True wealth is the wealth of the soul.

What is poverty?

The appetitive soul's gluttony.

What is might?

The soul's well-directed action, and its combating the power of despair.

What is shame?

Being frightened by the truth.

What are the signs of faltering?

Playing with your beard and spitting excessively.

Whence comes boldness?

Brotherly harmony.

What is unnecessary and painful?

Speaking about things that do not concern you.

What is nobility?

Paying your dues and forgiving acts of injustice.

What is intelligence?

Your heart keeping safe everything with which you have entrusted it.

What is schism?

Striving to oust your leader and raising your voice at him.

What is loftiness?

Choosing goodness and avoiding meanness.

What is resolution?

Long deliberation, calmness in dealing with governors, and caution when dealing with people, by expecting the worst. This is resolution.

What is honor?

Brotherly harmony and protecting neighbors.

What is foolishness?

Following immoral people and keeping company with reprobates.

What is heedlessness?

Forsaking the mosque and submitting to malefactors.

What is deprivation?

Giving up your destined share when it has been presented to you.

Who is a real leader?

Whosoever is feckless about his own property, cares not about his own glory, refrains from cursing back when insulted, and is resolute in his clan's affairs. That is a real leader.

5.4 Alī was asked:³⁹

Who is knowledgeable?

The one who stays away from forbidden things, he replied.

Who is intelligent?

The one who rejects falsehood.

Who is a leader?

The one whose actions are good.

Who is happy?

The one who fears the promised reckoning.

Who is generous?

The one who gives to the needy.

Who is noble?

The one who shows justice to the weak.

Who is immature?

The one known for his arrogance.

Who is naive?

The one who trusts in his own longevity.

Who is condemned?

The one who is consigned to the angel Malik's care.⁴⁰

Zayd ibn Šūhān al-‘Abdī came to ‘Alī, asking:

5.5

O commander of the faithful, what kind of sovereignty is the most overwhelming and powerful?

Base desire, he replied.

Which vileness is vilest, he asked.

Greed for worldly things, he replied.

Which is the most painful loss?

Becoming a disbeliever and losing one's faith.

Which supplication goes astray?

The one for something that can never be.

Which act is the most meritorious?

Consciousness of God.

Which act brings the most success?

The quest for God's reward.

Who is the worst friend?

The one who tempts you into sin.

Who is the strongest of people?

The one who controls his anger.

Who is the nastiest wretch?

The one who sells his faith to please another.

Who is the most miserly?

The one who misappropriates property and uses it for unlawful ends.

Who is the smartest?

An errant man who sees the right path and turns toward it.

Who is the most mature?

The one who never flies into a rage.

Who is the most steadfast?

The one whom people cannot deceive, who does not yield to the temptations of this bejeweled world.

Who is the biggest fool?

The one who is seduced by this world, even though he sees what is in her and observes her fickle state.

Who will have the most grievous regrets?

The one who is deprived of this world and the hereafter. «That is truly the most manifest loss.»⁴¹

Who is the most blind?

The one who performs acts to please someone other than God, yet expects a reward from God.

What is the best form of contentment?

That of one who is satisfied with what God has given him.

Which is the severest calamity?

That which shakes your faith.

Which act does God like best?

Patient waiting for deliverance.

Who is the most virtuous person in God's sight?

The one who fears God, cultivates patience and piety, and rejects worldliness.

Which words are the most meritorious in God's sight?

Words spoken in remembrance of God, in supplication to him, and in prayer.

What is the truest assertion?

The testimony that "There is no god but God."

What kind of belief does God like best?

One that encompasses acceptance and restraint.

Who is the noblest of men?

The one who fights gallantly in battle, holds back his tongue from uttering falsehoods, commands good, and forbids wickedness.

‘Alī said: Ask before I am lost to you. Truly, my heart holds abundant knowledge—knowledge that my beloved, the messenger of God, imparted to me. 5.6

Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah ibn Ṣūḥān rose, saying, commander of the faithful, when will al-Dajjāl the antichrist appear?

Sit back down, Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah, ‘Alī replied, God knows your capacity.⁴² There are signs and events and happenings announcing the antichrist’s coming, which will occur in close succession in the course of a single year—as surely as one shoe follows the other. If you wish, I can inform you about those signs.

Yes, that is what I was asking about, commander of the faithful, replied Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah.

‘Alī then expounded: Keep count on your fingers, Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah: When people stop praying, when they squander trust, when they consider falsehood lawful, practice usury, and take bribes. When they build fortified structures, follow their whims, sell their faith for worldly things, and regard killing as unobjectionable. When they consider restraint weakness, and oppression a source of pride. When rulers become immoral, their viziers and counselors fraudulent, their Qur’an readers debauched. When injustice becomes manifest, and divorce and sudden death common. When copies of the Qur’an are decorated, mosques ornamented, and pulpits raised high, but hearts are in ruin, promises broken, lutes played, wine consumed, and adultery widespread. When the fraudster is trusted and the honest man is viewed with suspicion. When women participate in trade with their husbands, greedy for more, and females sit astride their saddles. When greetings of peace are reserved for associates.

When witnesses offer testimony without having been summoned.
When people wear hides of sheep to conceal hearts of wolves. On that day, hearts will be more bitter than myrrh, more putrid than a carcass. So run and make haste! Run and make haste! Struggle, struggle! What a good place to reside in Jerusalem will be when that day comes!

Then Aşbaugh ibn Nubātah rose, saying: commander of the faithful, what is the nature of the antichrist?

Aşbaugh, ‘Alī replied, the antichrist is Şayfī ibn ‘Ā’idh. Whosoever trusts him will know misfortune. Whosoever refuses him will know bliss. He will be killed at a plateau in the Levant known as the Plateau of Fīq at three in the afternoon at the hands of the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary. After that the «great devastation»⁴³ will come! The sun will rise darkly from the west. On that day, «no soul will be helped by believing, if it has not previously attained belief and has not earned a reward in its belief by performing good deeds.»⁴⁴ On that day, no repentance shall be accepted, no deed shall rise up to the gates of heaven, and no sustenance shall be sent down.

Then ‘Alī said: My beloved, the messenger of God, made me swear that I would not recount what is to happen after that.

- 5.7 A man came to ‘Alī and said: Commander of the faithful, tell me about destiny.

It is a deep sea, ‘Alī replied, do not dive into it.

Commander of the faithful, tell me about destiny.

It is God’s mystery that is concealed from you. Do not ask for it to be revealed.

Commander of the faithful, tell me about destiny.

O prober—has God created you for his purpose or for yours?

For his purpose, not mine.

Does he use you for his purpose or yours?

For his purpose, not mine.

O prober, do you not ask God for protection?

I do indeed.

From what do you ask his protection? A trial he has tested you with, or a trial that someone else has tested you with?

A trial that he has tested me with.

O prober, you say “There is no power and no strength save . . .”
save from whom?

Save from God most high and most great.

O prober, do you know what that means?

Teach me from the knowledge that God gave you, commander of the faithful.

It means that no person has the power to obey God or to disobey him except through power that God grants him.

O prober, do you have any purpose that you can enact alongside God’s purpose, or over and above God’s purpose? Or any purpose that you can enact apart from God? If you believe that you have a purpose that you can enact apart from God, then you have sufficed yourself with that and dispensed with God’s purpose. If you believe that you have a purpose that is over and above God’s purpose, then you have believed that your strength and your purpose can overpower God’s strength and God’s purpose. If you believe that you have a purpose that you enact alongside God’s purpose, then you have believed that you have partnership with God in the enactment of his purpose. O prober, truly, God makes you ill and cures you; the illness is from him, so too the cure. Do you understand?

Yes, the man replied.

Then ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib said: Now your brother has truly accepted Islam. Stand up and shake his hand.

He added: If a man from the Qadarites fell into my hands, I would grab the side of his neck and hack it until I cut it off. They are the Jews of this community, its Christians, its Magians.

- 5.8 A Jew came to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and asked: commander of the faithful, when did our lord come into existence?

‘Alī said to him: God was never brought into existence such that he should become existent. “When did he come into existence?” is said of a thing that was not in existence then afterward came into existence. He is existent without coming into existence, existent unceasingly. He has no before, for he is before the before, before the first limit. All limits end with him, for he is the limit of every limit.

- 5.9 A man asked ‘Alī to explain the dictum “There is no power or strength save from God.”

‘Alī replied: It means that we are not masters of anything in partnership with God; that we are not masters of anything against his will; and that we are not masters of anything without him being its real master—when we are, we are given it as a burden to carry, and when it is taken from us, the burden is lifted. Truly, God has commanded us to do things while giving us a choice, and prohibited us from doing things while giving us a warning. He has given us much in return for little. Our obedience does not burden him, and our disobedience does not threaten him.

- 5.10 A man came to the commander of the faithful and said: commander of the faithful, I am a poor man, with no money and no children.

‘Alī replied: Have you not heard God’s words in his book, «Ask your lord for forgiveness, for he is the most forgiving. He will send down the sky in torrents and provide you with wealth and progeny. He will give you gardens. He will give you rivers.»⁴⁵

Teach me how to ask God for forgiveness, said the man.

‘Alī answered: Say this:

I seek your forgiveness, God, for every sin that my body committed using the fortitude you gave it; for every sinful act my strength acquired using the favors you bestowed upon it; for every sinful thing my hand stretched out to grasp, fortified by your sustenance; for every sin I hesitated at but committed anyway, relying upon your patience, believing in your forgiveness, and trusting that you would not strike me in your wrath.

I seek your forgiveness, God, for every sin by which I betrayed my trust, or short-changed my soul, or transgressed upon my body, or gave precedence to my pleasures, or preference to my desires, and for the times when I answered roughly any who would try to stop me.

I seek your forgiveness, God, for every sin that you knew I would commit, but that I entered into of my own will, perpetrating it blithely, and coming to it through my own desires. I tried to deceive you, lord, but could not vanquish you. You disliked my disobedience, but had prior knowledge about me, and so were patient. You did not force me to sin, nor push me into it. No, you did me no injustice there. Forgive me, God. None can forgive sins but you.

‘Alī was asked:

5.11

What is the distance between the sky and the earth?

An answered prayer, he replied.

What is the distance between east and west?

The sun’s day-long trek.

This report goes back to al-Barā’ ibn ‘Āzib. He said: I went to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and said to him:

5.12

Commander of the faithful, I ask you in the name of God. Bestow upon me the loftiest part of the special knowledge that God’s messenger bestowed upon you, from that knowledge which Gabriel

bestowed upon him, from that knowledge with which the Merciful sent him.

‘Alī replied: If you had not asked in God’s name, I would not have revealed to you what I had intended to conceal until I am laid in my grave.

If you wish to call upon God by his greatest name, then recite the first six verses from “Iron.”⁴⁶ Then recite the last verse of “Resurrection,” from «He is God, there is no god but him» till the end of the surah.⁴⁷ When you are done reciting and are beginning your supplication, say: “O God, you who are such and such, do with me such and such.” By God, even were you to pray in this way for a wretch, he would be saved.

Al-Barā’ said: By God, I will never use this prayer to pray for worldly things.

Good, ‘Alī replied. This is the special knowledge God’s messenger bestowed upon me, and he instructed me to save this prayer for momentous affairs.

- 5.13 Abū ‘Aṭā’ said: The commander of the faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, came to us one day, troubled and sighing deeply, and said: How will you cope with a time that has almost come upon you, in which punishments for major crimes will be disregarded, and wealth will be the only thing for which people compete? A time in which God’s elite will be hunted down, and God’s enemies pledged allegiance to?

If that time comes upon us, we asked him, what should we do?

Be like the followers of Jesus, ‘Alī replied, who were hacked to pieces with saws and crucified on planks of wood for believing. Being killed for refusing to renounce God is better than being spared for capitulating.

- 5.14 ‘Abbād ibn Qays rose and asked ‘Alī: Commander of the faithful, tell us: What is faith? And what is Islam?

I shall tell you, Ibn Qays, ‘Alī replied. God created all things knowing about them. He then selected what he wanted, picking out what

he loved; what he loved was Islam, which he favored and made into a path for his servants. He derived its name from his name, for he is *al-Salām*, Peace, and his religion is Islam. He was pleased with this religion, and gifted it to the creatures he loved. He exalted it, made the paths to its watering holes smooth, and protected its ramparts from those who would attack it. No saboteur can ever sabotage it. He made it a source of might for whomsoever pledges allegiance to it, a place of safety for whomsoever enters into it, right guidance for whomsoever takes it as his leader, light for whomsoever seeks illumination by it, proof for whomsoever holds fast to it, an ornament for whomsoever exalts it, an aid for whomsoever treads its path, an honor for whomsoever recognizes it, an attestation for whomsoever speaks by its strength, a witness for whomsoever litigates with it, victory for whomsoever debates with it, knowledge for whomsoever retains it, comprehension for whomsoever relates its merits, wisdom for whomsoever judges by it, maturity for whomsoever gains intelligence from it, rationality for whomsoever ponders it, conviction for whomsoever understands it, comprehension for whomsoever reflects upon it, a lesson for whomsoever takes heed from it, a stout rope for whomsoever links himself to it, salvation for whomsoever is true to it, an affectionate bond for whomsoever does good deeds, closeness to God for whomsoever comes nigh unto him, comfort for whomsoever gives himself to him, clothing for the pious, sustenance for the believer, security for the devoted, and well-being for the truthful.

Islam is the foundation of truth, and truth is the road of right guidance. Clasp its hand results in a beautiful reward, and its brilliance bestows nobility. Its path is lit, its sun bright, its road illuminated, its lamp burning, its goal high, its course true, its jewels countless. It is ancient in the counting of years, an arena where the prize can be won, or a painful chastisement received. It is the objective of the truthful. Its proof is clear, its eminence great, and its champions noble.

Its path is faith, its provision piety, its road good deeds, its lamp chastity, its champions the pious, its end death, its racecourse this

world, its arena the day of resurrection, its prize paradise, and its punishment hellfire.

The blissful take refuge in faith. The wretched are debased by their continued disobedience to God even after Islam's proofs have been eloquently presented to them and the path of truth and the road of right guidance have become clearly visible. Whosoever rejects truth after all this—his shape will be made hideous on the day of loss and gain,⁴⁸ his arguments voided, that day when the blissful attain the garden.

Faith guides you to deeds, deeds guide you to piety, piety makes you heed death, and death will end this world. It is in this world that the hereafter can be attained, and it is on the day of resurrection that paradise will be brought close. People who are thrown into the fire will be in agony because they are barred from the garden. This reminder about people who are thrown into the fire is a warning that the pious will heed.

None who strive for piety perish, and none who live by it regret. It is by piety that victors are victorious, and by disobedience that losers lose. Let the pious take heed. There is no place for any creature on the day of resurrection other than before the just arbiter. Running swiftly in the racetrack toward the final pole, the finish line, pulled by the neck toward the caller, disturbed from the repose of graves, they will be handed over to the eternal distress that awaits each one of them. All means will be cut off for the wretched, who will be given over to severe punishment. There will be no return for them to the earth. Divested of good deeds, the people they preferred to obey rather than the Almighty will do nothing for them. And the blissful will win the kingdom of faith.

Faith, Ibn Qays, stands on four pillars: forbearance, conviction, justice, and struggle against evil.

Forbearance too stands on four pillars: Longing, fear, rejection of worldliness, and expectant waiting. Whosoever longs for the garden is diverted from indulging desires. Whosoever fears the fire retreats from the forbidden. Whosoever rejects worldliness makes

light of calamities. And whosoever awaits death hastens to perform good deeds.

Conviction also stands on four pillars: Perceptive sagacity, counsel offered by this world's lessons, interpretation of God's wisdom, and following the practice of the earlier prophets. Whosoever perceives with sagacity interprets God's wisdom. Whosoever interprets God's wisdom recognizes these lessons. Whosoever recognizes these lessons recognizes the path trodden by earlier prophets. And whosoever recognizes the path trodden by earlier prophets is like someone who has lived with them and who has been guided to the steadfast faith.

Justice in its turn stands on four pillars: Deep comprehension, abundant knowledge, blossoms of wisdom, and flowerbeds of restraint. Whosoever comprehends, understands particulars from the generalities of knowledge. Whosoever knows the path of wondrous wisdoms is guided to the repositories of self-control and does not stray. And whosoever possesses restraint, eschews extremes in his affairs, and lives among people respected and loved.

And struggle against evil stands on four pillars: Enjoining good, forbidding evil, valor in battle, and abhorring the corrupt. Whosoever commands good strengthens the believers' resolve. Whosoever forbids evil cuts off the hypocrites' noses. Whosoever is valorous in battle has discharged his duty. And whosoever abhors the corrupt has been roused to anger for the sake of God—so God will be roused to anger on his behalf.

This is faith, Ibn Qays, and its columns and pillars. Do you understand?

Yes, I understand, commander of the faithful, Ibn Qays replied. May God guide you, for you have guided me.



CHAPTER 6

SAYINGS WITH UNUSUAL WORDS

- 6.1 ‘Alī used to teach his companions how to invoke blessings on the prophet, saying:

O God, unfold of lands unfolded, creator of heavens raised high, compeller of hearts, wretched or blissful—

Let your noblest blessings, your manifold graces, your merciful compassion, all be showered upon Muḥammad, your servant and messenger—who opened what was locked, came as a seal for what had come before, rightfully announced the truth, repelled the forces of evil, and crushed the assault of the errant, as he had been charged.

He undertook your command vigorously and obeyed you, rising to serve your pleasure, with no fetters on boldness, or weakness of resolve, comprehending your revelation, safeguarding your compact, and executing your command, until he had ignited the flame of truth for whomsoever sought a burning brand, and lit the torches signaling the road to paradise for people who had tied up their camels not knowing where to go. God’s favors bestow his means on his people.

It was through Muḥammad that hearts were guided after being steeped in sedition and sin. He directed them with brilliant signposts, blazing rules, and the luminous ways of Islam.

He is the trustee whom you entrusted with your message, custodian of your treasure of knowledge, your witness on judgment day,

your emissary sent as a blessing, your messenger sent with truth and as the embodiment of mercy.

O God, give him an expansive share of your justice. Reward him with a goodly recompense, multiplied manifold by your generosity. Grant him a pure and unmuddied recompense from the font of your flowing reward and abundant magnanimity.

O God, let his palace be lofty above all others. Give honor to his resting place and his station at your side. Perfect his light.⁴⁹ Reward him for being an exemplary messenger—one whose testimonial was accepted and whose words convinced, a man of just speech, decisive action, and magisterial evidence.

‘Alī said: For those to whom life’s lessons have spoken plainly, I give 6.2
my pledge: The fields sown by the pious will not wither. The roots
planted by them will not shrivel from thirst.

The most hateful of God’s creation in his eyes is a man who collects bits of religious knowledge, heedless of the black beasts of sedition, blind to the mysteries of stillness. People of the same ilk call him a scholar, but he has not spent even a full day in learning. He is hasty and thinks he has in abundance what he actually possesses little of. Yet true knowledge is far superior to anything he has amassed. When he has drunk his fill of stagnant water and increased his hoard without profit, he sits down to judge among the people, to elucidate what others have found perplexing. When an impenetrable case comes to him, he assembles jumbled thoughts from his own opinions and gives judgment. In cutting through uncertainties, his words are as weak as the spider’s gossamer thread.⁵⁰ For when he errs, he does not know whether he has erred or judged correctly. He stomps about in the gloom and rides the steed of ignorance. He does not excuse himself from a case which he does not understand, else he would be protected from erring. He has not bitten into knowledge with strong teeth, or else he would earn something good. He flings around hadith reports just as the wind scatters dry leaves.⁵¹ The lifeblood of the unjustly executed weeps from his injustice and

inheritances scream from his wrongdoings. Prohibited private parts are made lawful in his judgments. By God, he is not qualified to send forth with a legal pronouncement cases that come to water at his watering hole, nor is he deserving of the adulation lavished upon him.

Explanation of the unusual words in this passage:

By saying “does not wither [lā yahīju]” he means: “not dry up.” “Origin [al-sinkh]” means root: he puts them in a construct, since the words are different although they mean the same thing; he meant by this expression that whosoever performs a good deed for God, that deed will not be lost or damaged like unwatered plants, but rather will always remain fresh. “Black beasts of sedition [aghbāsh al-fitnah]”: the “darknesses of sedition.” “Stillness [al-hudnah]” is “tranquility”—he means that such a man does not know the evil inherent in sedition, nor the good inherent in tranquility. “He has not spent [lam yaghna],” i.e. a man who has not “devoted” a full day in learning. “Stagnant [ājīn]”: water that has changed state. “An impenetrable case [iḥdā l-mubhamāt]” is a matter that confounds him. The phrase “stomps in the gloom [khabbātu ‘ashawāt]” means that he “stomps about in the darkness.” The phrase “He has not bitten into knowledge with strong teeth [wa-lā ya’addu fī l-‘ilmi bi-ḍirsīn qāṭi’]” means “he has no expertise in it.” In “adulation lavished [limā qurriṣa bihī],” “adulation” is “praise.”

- 6.3 It has been narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās, who said: I saw the commander of the faithful, ‘Alī, at the Battle of Siffin—a white turban on his head, eyes shining like two oil lamps—rousing his followers to battle, until he reached me. I was with a contingent and he addressed us, saying:

Muslims! Clothe yourselves with fear of God, lower your voices, and envelop your bodies with calm. Put on full armor, carry light shields, and rattle your swords in their sheaths before you are called upon to draw them. Glower fiercely at the enemy, and throw your spears from the right and the left (or: aim at the upper part of the body, or: throw them forcefully—I have heard all these narrated). Fight with your blades, and leap forward so that they pierce your enemy. If spears fall short, use arrows. Approach death with gentle courage. Go for the pitched tent. Cut off its center pole, for Satan is

hiding in its flap, heaving his flanks, spreading out his arms. He has a hand in front ready to attack, and a foot at the back ready to flee.

Explanation of the unusual words in this passage:

“Olive oil [salīṭ]”: i.e. oil. “Rousing his followers to battle [yuḥammishu aṣḥābahū]” means he was “inciting and stirring them.” “Contingent [kathf]”: “battle group.” The phrase “lower your voices [wa-‘annū l-aṣwāt]” means “keep them controlled, keep them down.” “Full armor [lu‘am]” is the plural of la‘mah, meaning “breastplate.” “Shield [junan]” is a protective plate—he is saying, make them light. “Rattle your swords [aqliqū l-suyūf]”: i.e. loosen them before you need to draw them so they do not stick. “Blades [al-ḡubā]” is the plural of ḡubah, i.e., the sword’s edge. The phrase “Leap forward so that your swords pierce your enemy [wa-ṣilū l-suyūf bi- l-khuṭā]” means if they fall short of striking distance, go forward with them swiftly. The phrase “If spears fall short, use arrows [wa-l-rimāḥ bi-l-nabl]” means if your spears fall short of the enemy whom you are attempting to strike, hit them with arrows. The phrase “Approach with gentle courage [mishyah sujuh]” means “with ease.” “Tent [al-ruwāq]” is a pavilion fastened with ropes. “Flanks [al-ḥiḍnān]”: sides. The phrase “Glower fiercely [wa-l-ḥaḡū l-shaḡr]” means glancing with the side of the eye toward the enemy. “Aiming at the upper part of the body [al-ṭa’n al-yasr]” is that strike which is aimed at the face; “from the right and the left [al-shaḡr]” is from your wind and lee; and “forcefully [al-natr]” is a powerful strike.

‘Alī said: While no one lives forever, let whosoever wishes to live long rise early in the morning, abstain from too much sex, and wear a light robe. 6.4

He was asked, what do you mean by a light robe, commander of the faithful? He replied: Freedom from excessive debt.

By “robe,” he was alluding to the back, because it is worn over it. He is saying: “Let him lighten the burden on his back, and not weigh it down with debt.”

‘Alī saw a man in the sun, and said: Come out of it. It makes your breath foul and impacts your prowess. It makes you malodorous, fades your clothes, and brings buried diseases to the surface. 6.5

“Impacts your prowess [mujfirah]” means it suppresses desire for women. “Makes your breath foul [tutfil al-riḥ]”: i.e. makes it malodorous; the noun is al-tafal; a “foul-breathed woman [tafilah]” is one whose odor is bad. “Buried disease [al-dā’ al-dafīn]” is that disease which is hidden, that your natural immunity has suppressed. He means the sun aids it in combating your natural immunity and brings it out.

- 6.6 ‘Alī said: Fast catching up with you are long-lasting, colossal seditions, and scowling, debilitating trials.

“Long-lasting [al-mutamāḥilah]” indicates seditions that will drag on for years. “Colossal [al-ruduḥ]” is the plural of radāḥ, meaning that which is large; it is applied to a battalion if it is large, and to a woman if her buttocks are big. The word “scowling [mukliḥan]” means people are oppressed by its force; it is said: “The man scowled [kalaḥa],” and “Anxiety wore him down [aklaḥahū].” “Debilitating [al-muballih]” is used in phrases such as “The man was debilitated [ballaḥa],” when he stops working due to fatigue and is unable to move.

- 6.7 ‘Alī said: The Heavenly House is directly over the Ka‘bah, on high.⁵² ‘Alī’s phrase “directly over the Ka‘bah [nitāq al-Ka‘bah]” means “overlooking it from on high,” and comes from God’s words: «When we placed the mountain directly over them, from on high, as though it were a canopy . . .».⁵³

- 6.8 ‘Alī said: Seize wisdom no matter where you find it. A wise maxim may reside in the breast of the hypocrite, yet it quivers and trembles until it settles in the breast of its rightful owner.

People say: “He made the morsel in his mouth quiver and tremble [lajlaja],” when he turned it around and around and did not swallow it. ‘Alī meant that a hypocrite may know a wise maxim, but it remains agitated in his breast and does not settle, until an ordinary believer or religious scholar hears it and picks it up, such that it settles in his breast, taking comfort next to its kin, namely, other wise maxims.



CHAPTER 7

UNIQUE SAYINGS AND PITHY WORDS

Zayd ibn Aslam said: The commander of the faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, described the believer thus: 7.1

The believer is strong in his religion, bold yet gentle. He believes with conviction, studies matters of religious practice, performs deeds with knowledge, and receives guidance with enthusiasm. He is kind yet firm, sensible yet gentle. His private parts do not rule him, and his belly does not shame him. He wearies himself by constant chiding, while never causing others unease. He does not indulge in malicious gossip, nor behave arrogantly.

‘Alī said: The most wondrous part of the human being is the heart. 7.2
It has elements of wisdom, and others that are quite the opposite. If it is lifted by hope, ambition debases it; if ambition boils over, greed destroys it; and if disappointment takes hold, regret kills it. If aggravated, its rage runs rampant; and if made happy, it forgets to be circumspect. If fear takes hold, caution preoccupies it; and if safety is secured, heedlessness strips it away. If it gains property, the wealth makes it a tyrant; and if poverty touches it, it panics. If hunger emaciates it, weakness ensconces it; and if satiety is excessive, the surfeit oppresses it. Every deficiency harms it, and every excess injures it.

- 7.3 Whenever 'Alī looked at the new moon, he would say:⁵⁴

Obedient creature of God, revolving quickly and regularly through the stations of destiny, moving in the sphere of his steering, I place my faith in the one who illumined darkness and clarified ambiguity through you, who made you a sign of his dominion and a symbol of his authority. He humbled you by making you wax and wane, rise and set, illumine and eclipse. In all of this, you obey him and are quick to his will.

God be praised! How marvelous is his planning regarding you! How sublime is his craftsmanship regarding you! He made you a key for a new month, for a new situation.

May God render you a crescent of grace uneffaced by the passing days, and of purity undefiled by the passing years; a crescent of security from calamities, and safety from evil deeds; a crescent of felicity free of misfortune, of blessings free of adversity, of ease unmixed with hardship, and of good unpolluted by evil; a crescent of security and faith, bounty and virtue, safety and commitment.

O God, of all the people over whom this moon rises, place us among those who please you the most. Of all who gaze at it, place us among the purest. Of all who worship you under it, place us among the happiest.

O God, motivate us to repent, preserve us from misdeeds, move us to give thanks for your blessings, envelop us with health, and complete your favors upon us by perfecting our obedience to you. You are the best benefactor and the most praiseworthy.

- 7.4 'Alī said about the rights of a learned man: You owe it to a learned man that you not bombard him with questions, dog him for answers, press him when he is tired, hold him back by his robe when he rises, expose his secrets, nor tell him tales about people. Moreover, you should sit facing him, and greet him individually when you come to his class before addressing others present collectively. You should preserve his secrets and defend him in his absence. Abide by this, as long as he preserves God's commandments.

A learned man is like a date palm; you can expect a date to drop on you at any moment. A learned man is worthier than one who fasts, prays, and fights in the path of God. When a learned man dies, Islam sustains a breach not plugged till the day of resurrection. When a learned man dies, his bier is escorted by seventy-seven thousand of God's cherished angels.

'Ali said: O people! The first manifestation of sedition is the following of whims and the prescribing of innovating rules—whims and rules by which God's decree is disobeyed and men are aggrandized by other men. If the truth were sincerely adhered to and practiced, it would not be concealed from the intelligent. But a bit is taken from this, and a bit from that, mixed together and acted upon. At that moment, Satan gains complete mastery over his followers, and only «those for whom our blessings have been decreed»⁵⁵ will be saved. 7.5

THE REPORT OF THE CHURCH GONG 7.6

'Alī was passing by a Christian monastery accompanied by al-Ḥārith al-A'war, when they heard a monk ringing the gong. Ḥārith, do you know what this church gong is saying, 'Alī asked. God, his messenger, and his messenger's cousin know best, answered Ḥārith. The gong is describing the ruin of this world, 'Alī explained. It is saying:⁵⁶

Soon, yes, soon, and truly, truly
This world's sons, go slowly, slowly
This world has indeed deceived us
and seduced us and misled us
We don't see how much we've transgressed
in it, but we all will soon die
There is not a day that goes by
that does not assault our buttress
Weigh what comes then, weigh what comes
Weigh what comes then, weigh what comes

Weight for weight, yes, weight for weight
This world's dead, whole generations
Son of this world, gath'ring, gath'ring
Son of this world, guzzling, guzzling
There is not a day that goes by
That does not increase our burden
God in heaven has informed us
Intact bodies resurrected
We have foregone life unending
Settling in the house of death.

Do the Christians know their gong says this? Ḥārith asked. None can know it, 'Alī replied, except a prophet, his staunchest supporter, or his legatee. Indeed, my knowledge comes from the prophet, the prophet's from Gabriel, and Gabriel's from God.

7.7 STIPULATIONS SET BY 'ALĪ WHEN BUYING A HOUSE

Shurayḥ bought a house, wrote up a contract, and called witnesses to attest to the purchase. The news reached 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who asked: Shurayḥ, did you buy a house? Shurayḥ replied that he had. Did you have witnesses attest to the contract? Shurayḥ replied that he had. 'Alī responded: Beware of buying with money other than yours, of weighing out coins gained from unlawful sources. Soon there will come to you one who will not look at your testimonials nor ask for the written contract, but will rudely dislodge you from the house.⁵⁷ Then you will have lost both abodes: this world and the hereafter. If you—or anyone else who wants to buy a house—had come to me, I would have written up a different kind of contract, one in which I would have dissuaded the deluded seller as well as the buyer. What would you have written? Shurayḥ asked, and he replied: I would have written this:

In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful

This is what a humble servant has bought, from a soon-to-be-dead man who will be forced to depart the world. The humble

servant bought from the soon-to-be-dead man one of the houses of calamity, located in a soon-to-perish district, in the camp of the dead, and the assembly of the heedless.

There are four limits to this house: The first limit extends to calamity. The second limit extends to great catastrophe. The third limit extends to heedless acts. The fourth limit extends to Satan the deceiver and destructive desire. Into this side opens the door of this house, which this person soon to be expelled by death has bought from that person deceived by false hopes. The buyer of this house has not grasped the reality of the actions of the putrefactor of bodies, the crusher of despots such as Chosroes, Caesar, Sābūr, Tubbaʿ, and Ḥimyar. O how clear is the truth for one who has two eyes! Departure from this world is assured, if not today then tomorrow.

ʿAlī wrote in a letter to Rifāʿah:

7.8

The back of a believer and the back of a warrior's horse are not to be violated; nor wells, rivers, or fortresses.

The inviolable space between men and women is upheld by veils and screens.

The lawful and unlawful are distinct; there can be no pasturing in an unlawful field. The unlawful was not safe for past generations, and it is not safe for those yet to come.

Marriage between close blood relatives is unlawful.

Marrying more than four free women is unlawful.

The law is inviolable.

ʿAlī said: I would be ashamed before God if there were a transgression greater than my forgiveness, a fit of anger greater than my forbearance, a shame that my robe could not conceal, or a need that my generosity could not fill.

7.9

ʿAlī said: Blessings are connected to gratitude and gratitude is linked to further blessings. The two are tied together in a single tether. God will not cut off his blessings unless his servants sever their gratitude.

7.10

- 7.11 ‘Alī said: Four things kill the soul: Sinning incessantly, arguing with a fool, too much dallying with women, and keeping company with the dead.

He was asked: Who are the dead, commander of the faithful?
All those mired in luxury, he replied.

- 7.12 ‘Alī said: O people, whosoever knows his brother to be a decent man should not give ear to rumors about him. If a man’s behavior is virtuous, I have good hope for his intentions. Do not sow doubts in your heart about him; whosoever knows his brother to be a decent man and still gives ear to rumors about him unnecessarily casts his own heart into doubt. An archer may shoot, and his arrows may go astray—the injustice of this can destroy you.

The span of four fingers separates truth and falsehood (and he gestured with his four fingers, placing them between his eye and his ear). Truth is saying: “I saw with my eyes.” Falsehood is saying: “I heard with my ears.”

- 7.13 ‘Alī said: Whosoever turns his soul away from base ambitions perfects his character, whosoever perfects his character is praiseworthy, and the praiseworthy man is loved. God’s servants do not love a man unless God loves him. This love becomes a means for him to gain a decent living in this world and abundant reward when he returns to God. The bliss of a person for whom the two come together is perfected. The perfect wretch, on the other hand, is one whose state is the antithesis of this.

- 7.14 ‘Alī said: Possessing great wealth and having many children are not the mark of excellence; excellence is obtained through great knowledge and abundant kindness, and by vying with people in worshiping the lord. If you do good, praise God. If you do ill, ask him for forgiveness.

There is no good in this world except for two kinds of men: one who commits a sin but atones for it by repenting, and one who has-
tens to perform good deeds.

No deed is too small if it is performed with piety. How can something that is accepted ever be too small?

‘Alī said:

7.15

The most hateful creatures in God’s eyes are two:

7.15.1

The first is a man whom God has given up on and left to his own devices, who strays from the straight path. Enamored of heretical innovations, he prescribes them in fasting and prayer, and incites people who are taken in by him. Having lost the path of right guidance his predecessors followed, he leads his own followers astray in his lifetime and after his death. Without a doubt, he will bear the burden of their sins, while remaining ransomed to the consequences of his own transgressions.

The second is a man who collects bits of ignorance—fabrications and fictions—from the most ignorant of people. He sets these deceptive snares and false reports as his stock. He interprets the book according to his whim and bends the truth to his desires. He makes grave sins look attractive and minimizes major transgressions. Blithely unconscious of his creator, he does not keep silent when he does not know. Despite all these faults, he manages to seduce other wicked people into believing him. With their support, he makes fools of those who are human only in form.

Many a harsh, coarse man, blind and confused, calls others to his blindness, and sees true vision in not thinking. He says “I pause when I have doubts,” when in fact he has fallen headlong into the pit of doubt. He says “I stay away from heretical innovations,” when in fact he has made innovations his bedfellows. In people’s eyes he is a man—yes, his form is human, but his heart is bestial. He is a bovine animal, no, bovine animals are better than him.⁵⁸ He moves like the living, but death has taken control of his spirit.

7.15.2

This man oppresses others. He is heedless of the black beasts of sedition, ignorant of the mysteries of calm. People who are human only in form call him a scholar, but he has not spent even a full day in learning. He is hasty and thinks he possesses a lot. Yet

true knowledge is far superior to anything he has amassed. When he has drunk his fill of stagnant water and increased his store without profit, he sits down to judge among the people, to elucidate what others have found perplexing. When his opinion goes against another judge's view, he tells people the other is immoral. He does not follow his predecessors in his judgments. When an impenetrable case comes to him, he assembles jumbled thoughts from his own opinions then gives judgment. His words are as weak as the spider's gossamer thread.⁵⁹ For when he errs he does not know whether he has erred or judged correctly. He does not know that beyond the place he has reached there is yet another path. If he comes up with an analogy, comparing one case to another, he never doubts his own opinion. If a case becomes too dark for him to grasp, he hides this fact, for he knows he is ignorant, and does not want it said that he does not know. Then he boldly passes judgment.

This man is the key to darkness, one who mounts the steed of sophistry and stomps about in ignorance. He does not recuse himself from a case which he does not understand, else he would be protected from erring. He has not bitten into knowledge with strong teeth, or else he would earn something good. He flings around hadith reports just as the wind scatters dry leaves.⁶⁰ Inheritances weep from his injustice, the lifeblood of the unjustly executed screams from his wrongdoing, and prohibited private parts are made lawful in his judgments. By God, he is not qualified to send forth with a legal pronouncement cases that come to water at his watering hole, nor is he deserving of praise for his extravagant claims of perfect knowledge.

7.15.3 The most beloved person in God's eyes is one who, with God's help, keeps his base soul under control. He wears the garment of fear and dons the robe of grief. A man of conviction, he divests himself of doubt and awaits the approaching end of his life on earth, always mindful of this approaching end. The lamp of guidance shines forth from his heart. With its light, he brings the distant close and makes tribulations easier to bear. He thinks deeply and gains much, he

looks hard and acquires perception. When he finds sweet water, the path to it becomes smooth for him, and he drinks his fill. He now sees how to dispel every darkness, and knows the boundaries of every ambiguity.

He has removed the garment of desire and divested himself of aspirations. Putting aside the tumultuous aspirations that occupy most minds, he holds on to just one. Escaping the grip of blindness and the companionship of whim, he becomes himself a key to right guidance and a lock in the door of perdition. He seeks to open the door of knowledge, plunging into its sea and venturing into its depths. Its paths and beacons shine bright for him. Grasping the stoutest of handles and the strongest of ropes, he has the conviction of someone who sees all things as clearly as the light of the sun. Doing what he does for God, he follows the highest standards, sending back any who come to his watering hole with the right answers, and tracing every branch to its root. The land in which he lives is illumined by the radiance of his light, and is peaceful due to his justice. He removes misfortunes, elucidates ambiguities, and repulses calamities. He is a lamp in the darkness and a guide in the wilderness. He pursues every repository of good and seeks it wherever it may be found. Knowledge is his heart's yield and his soul's desire. This is what he aspires to and strives to attain. He is the one remaining sage, whom God has preserved for his religion and maintained as his proof. The true successor of God's prophets, he follows their path, calls to their religion, and conveys their proofs. Entrusting his reins to the holy book, he takes it as his leader, and lays down his saddle in the place where the book has deposited its precious belongings, abiding there. This is his life, while other people are turning away from the path,⁶¹ «erring in droves»,⁶² and milling about blindly in their confusion.

‘Alī said: There are seven categories of men:

7.16

The first category is false monarchs,⁶³ who call people to worship them. They do not demand that their subjects bow to them in

prayer or fast for them as a form of worship, but rather, they command their obedience. By obeying these pharaohs and disobeying God, people make them their lords and thereby reject God. The second category is tyrants; they practice usury, and trade unlawfully. The third category is the depraved; they have bolted from religion just as runaway camels bolt from the herd. The fourth category is the duplicitous; they worship nothing but silver and gold. The fifth category is fraudulent Qur'an reciters; they seek worldly things while wearing the garb of the pious. The sixth category is beggars; all they think about is filling their stomachs with food, not caring whether they acquire it lawfully or unlawfully. The seventh category is people whom God has praised, saying: «God's servants are those who tread lightly upon the earth; if the ignorant address them, they say "Peace!"»⁶⁴ By the one who made the seed sprout and created humans, these are the people «who will inherit paradise, living there forever.»⁶⁵

'Alī then turned toward Kumayl ibn Ziyād, and said: Seek them, Kumayl! Where should I seek them, commander of the faithful? Kumayl asked. You will find them at the ends of the earth, replied 'Alī, they have taken the earth as bedding, its water as perfume, the Qur'an as garment, and prayer as robe. Their eyes weep, their clothing is dusty, and they have severed all ties with this world. If they leave they are not missed, and if present they remain unknown. If they ask for a hand in marriage they are refused, and if they speak they are not heeded. Yet it is because of them that God turns away scourges, calamities, and trials from the world. It is because of them that God gives people water to drink, by sending rain from the sky, droplets from the clouds. They are the servants of God. Truly. Yes, truly.

- 7.17 'Alī said: People can be divided into seven categories, each category sustained by the others and needing the others. These categories are: God's soldiers; scribes who write for the elite or for the public; judges who dispense justice; government clerks; people who pay poll taxes and land taxes: "protected peoples,"⁶⁶ conquered peoples

who have converted to Islam; traders and artisans; and the lowest category, that of the poor and needy. God has prescribed a role for each, drawing the boundaries through the laws mandated in his book or in the practice of his prophet. This is a covenant from him, one that we preserve.

Soldiers serve with God's permission as protection for the general public as the ornament of governors, the might of religion, and the path to security and ease. The public is not sustained except through them. Soldiers in turn are not sustained except by the land tax that God has ordained to be used for their maintenance, through which they gain strength to fight their enemy, and upon which they depend to improve their living conditions and fulfill their basic needs. These two groups prosper only with the help of the third—judges, tax collectors, and clerks, who conduct the affairs of society, establish justice, collect taxes, and are honest stewards of the specific or general affairs assigned to them. All these groups are sustained by the traders and artisans who gather together the stuff of life, set up markets, and suffice the other groups in their daily needs with services that no one else can perform. Then comes the lowest category, that of the poor and needy. People in all other categories must help them.

Each group has rights that the governor should uphold to the best of his ability. The governor should not transgress the sphere of God's mandate for him. He should train his soul to cleave to truth and forbearance in all things light or burdensome.

'Alī said: You can be one or the other: Either you have a generous soul and spend freely on what is right—and if so, why hold back from giving where you should? Why relinquish your noble qualities? Or you are a man who is afflicted with refusal. O how quickly people will stop soliciting you when they realize it is of no use! 7.18

'Alī said: The believer owes the believer seven things: He should greet him when he sees him, answer him when he calls, visit him 7.19

when he is sick, follow his bier when he dies, wish for him what he wishes for himself, dislike for him what he dislikes for himself, and help him with money if he is in need.

7.20 ‘Alī said: People are of three types: A person who is resolute in rejecting worldliness, a person who is patient in fighting his passions, or a covetous person who is led by his desires. The person who rejects worldliness does not revel in what God has given him, nor wastes time regretting what he has not obtained. The patient man reins in the base soul that pulls him toward the world, and stops it from directing its gaze at worldly pleasures. But the covetous person answers his base soul when it calls him to the world and obeys it when it commands him to give the world preference. He sullies his honor by it, abases his character for it, and forfeits his afterlife for it.

7.21 ‘Alī said: Righteous struggle is of three types: The first to be overcome in this struggle is the hand, next the tongue, and next the heart. If the heart cannot recognize good or decry evil, it is upended and turned topsy-turvy.

7.22 ‘Alī said: There are three and two more, no sixth: An angel who flies on two wings; a prophet whom God has grasped by his two arms; and a man who strives to perform good deeds. A seeker who hopes for God’s forgiveness; and a sinner who will go to hell. The tracks to the right and the left lead into the wilderness. The true path is found by following the remnants of the book and the traces of prophecy. Whosoever makes false claims will perish and whosoever slanders will flounder. God has disciplined this community by the sword and the whip. The leader must not shrink from applying these punishments. So keep to your homes, and make peace among yourselves.

7.23 Regarding the oneness of God, ‘Alī said:

The first part of religion is knowledge of God. Knowledge of him is perfected by the declaration of his oneness. The declaration of his

oneness is perfected by sincere allegiance to him. Sincere allegiance to him is achieved by negating all attributes from him, by the testimony of every attribute that it is other than the thing described, the testimony of every described thing that it is other than the attribute, and the testimony of both of these that they have newly come into being and thus cannot be eternal. Whosoever describes God has circumscribed him. Whosoever circumscribes him has quantified him. And whosoever quantifies him has invalidated his eternity. Whosoever asks “How?” has sought a description of him. Whosoever asks “In what?” has confined him. Whosoever asks “On what?” has made another space empty of him. Whosoever asks “Where?” has defined him. Whosoever asks “Where to?” has made him cross over a path. God was knowledgeable when there was nothing to be known, powerful when there was nothing to wield power over, lord when there was no one to be lord over, creator when there was nothing created. This is our lord, blessed and elevated, beyond any description.

Another exposition by ‘Ali on God’s oneness: God is one without likeness, everlasting without having come into being, creating without effort, existent without locatability, describable only as ceaseless, known only as unbounded, remaining forever without having been assembled, unceasingly mighty, ancient in primeval existence. Hearts quiver from awe of him. Minds are struck with wonder when contemplating his majesty. Heads bow to his power. Hearts cannot plumb the depth of his essence. The imagination cannot adequately grasp the execution of his will. Learned scholars with their intellects and thinkers with their powers of prediction know nothing of the Almighty beyond what he has described of himself. 7.24

‘Ali said: All adversities move toward an inexorable culmination. Until then, the intelligent man should sleep. Attempts to stop hardships before they have run their course will only increase their harm. 7.25

- 7.26 ‘Alī said: Defend the believer as much as you are able, for God protects his back, holds his soul dear, and has prepared a reward for him. Whosoever oppresses the believer will have God as adversary. Do not make God your adversary.
- 7.27 ‘Alī said: By God, a group of people will enter the Garden of Eden first on the day of resurrection. These people did not pray or fast more than others, nor perform the hajj or ‘umrah pilgrimage to Mecca more often than others. The honor is due to the worth of their minds.
- 7.28 *Abū l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Malik ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Ibrāhīm reported to us, saying: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim ibn Fahd ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Īsā ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Bazzāz reported to us, saying: Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad ibn Muṭarrif ibn Sawwār al-Bustī reported to us, saying: Al-‘Abbās ibn al-Faḍl ibn Shādhān recounted to us, saying: Muḥammad ibn Ḥamīd and Ḥajjāj ibn Ḥamza ibn Suwayd al-‘Ijlī recounted to us, saying: Zayd ibn al-Ḥubāb recounted to us, saying: ‘Īsā ibn al-Ash’ath recounted to us, from Juwaybir, from al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from al-Nazzāl ibn Sabrah, from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who said:*

Begin your meal with a taste of salt and God will remove from you seventy varieties of harm.

Eat seven Medinese ‘*ajwah* dates daily. They will kill any worms in your stomach.

Eat twenty-one red raisins daily and you will not see any illness in your body.

Meat produces meat.

Tharīd porridge is the staple of the Arabs.

Laden trays distend the stomach and swell the buttocks.

The flesh of the cow brings disease, its fat cures, and its milk heals.

Animal fat removes its measure in disease from your body.

Fish emaciates.

There is nothing better for healing after childbirth than fresh dates.

Man strives with his luck, until the sword cuts with its edge.

While no one lives forever, whosoever wishes to live long should rise early in the morning, abstain from too much sex, and wear a light robe.

‘Ali was asked, What do you mean by a light robe, commander of the faithful? Freedom from excessive debt, he replied.



CHAPTER 8

PRAYERS AND SUPPLICATIONS

8.1 *Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr ibn Shikān al-Tustarī reported to me, authorizing me to transmit the report, saying: Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Ghurāb reported to us, saying: Judge Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad recounted to us, saying: Judge Mūsā ibn Ishāq recounted to us, saying: ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Shaybah recounted to us, saying: Muḥammad ibn Fuḍayl recounted to us, from ‘Abd Allāh al-Asadī, saying:*

The commander of the faithful ‘Alī would say in his supplications:

8.1.1 God, if I were not ignorant of my affairs I would not complain about my misfortunes. If I did not recollect my transgressions, I would not shed copious tears. God, wash away the traces of my misfortunes with my flowing tears, and grant me forgiveness for my many offences in lieu of my paltry good deeds.

8.1.2 God, if you are merciful only to those who are assiduous in obeying you, where will reprobates turn for sanctuary? If you accept only those who strive, where will transgressors take refuge? If you are generous only to those who perform beautiful deeds, what will wrongdoers do? If none but the pious win on the day of resurrection, where will sinners seek safe haven?

8.1.3 God, if only the innocent are allowed to cross the celestial bridge, what will happen to those who did not repent before their time ran out?

God, if those who profess your oneness transgress and you veil from them your protective gaze, your wrath will fling them into the pit of catastrophes alongside those who assign partners to you. God, by Islam's grace, bestow on us your treasured gifts. Purify with your forgiveness what our crimes have sullied. 8.1.4

God, have mercy on our exile when the bellies of our tombs embrace us, when the solid roofs of our new homes hem us in with crushing darkness, when we are laid to rest on our sides in the grave, when we are made to sleep alone in the narrowest of beds, when the fates prostrate us in the vilest of prostrations, when we take up residence in an abode which appears inhabited, but which is a true deadland. 8.1.5

God, when we come to you naked, our heads covered with the earth of the grave, faces pale from the dirt of the tomb, eyes lowered from the terrors of the resurrection, bellies hungry from prolonged standing, private parts uncovered and visible to all eyes, backs burdened with the heavy weight of sins, when we are too preoccupied with our own travails to think of our spouses and children—do not multiply our suffering by turning away your noble face from us, or by seizing from us the gift of our hope in you. 8.1.6

God, my eyes have not been moved to weeping, they have not been liberal with streaming tears, and have not exhibited the grief of a wailing, bereaved mother, except because of their prior avoidance of you and scorn for your religion, and because of the consequences of their trials. Power to alleviate their suffering, generous one, rests with you alone. 8.1.7

God, harmonize my honeyed tongue's eloquent speech with the lack of worldliness taught to my heart by its guiding counselor. 8.1.8

God, you commanded us to perform good deeds but are worthier of performing good deeds than we. You commanded us to give to petitioners, but you are the best of those petitioned. 8.1.9

God, how could despair make us hold back from asking you for what we have always asked, when our hope in you has clothed us with an all-protective armor? 8.1.10

- 8.1.11 God, when we read in the Qur'an that «severe of punishment»⁶⁷ is one of your attributes we are afraid, and when we read that «forgiving, merciful»⁶⁸ is among them we rejoice. We are constantly between two states: Your wrath does not allow us to be reassured, and your mercy does not allow us to lose hope.
- 8.1.12 God, even if our efforts are too little for us to deserve your kindly gaze, yet your mercy does not fall short of defending us from your punishment.
- 8.1.13 God, how can our hearts take pleasure in this world, how can our affairs in it prosper, our joy in it be pure, or our delusions lead us to play and frolic, when our graves beckon to us with the approaching end of our lives? God, how can we take joy in an abode where the pit into which it will pitch us is already dug, and its deceptions' snares toss us into fate's hands? In a world that makes us swallow gulp after gulp of its bitter draught, and whose lessons prove to us that our lives too will be cut off? God, it is to you we turn from the trickeries of its deception. It is you we ask for help in crossing its bridge. It is from you that our bodies seek aid in battling its temptations. It is you whose support we entreat in stripping off the robes of its perplexities. It is you who will remove the hard shell of ignorance with which it has covered our hearts.
- 8.1.14 God, how can our homes protect us from calamities, when each home conceals within its walls an arrow from death's quiver.
- 8.1.15 God, we shall not panic at being removed from the familiarity of our homes if you grant us the companionship of the pious in our next dwelling. God, separation from brothers and relatives will not hurt us if you bring us close to you, O giver of bounties!
- 8.1.16 God, have mercy on me when all traces of me have become erased from this world, when any recollection of me has been wiped from the memories of its people, when I am entirely forgotten. God, I am advanced in age, my bones have become brittle, my skin fragile, time has taken its toll on me, the end of my life has drawn near, and my days have run out. My desires are gone, but my sins remain. My beauties

are obliterated, my body has decayed, my joints have disintegrated, and my limbs have fallen apart. God, have mercy on me!

God, sins have silenced me. My words have come to an end. I have no argument and no excuse. I acknowledge my crime and confess my wickedness. I am a prisoner of my sins, pledged to my heinous deeds, someone who has rushed headlong into iniquity. I am bewildered about my purpose, cut off from all. God, shower your blessings on Muḥammad and his progeny, and cover me in your mercy.⁶⁹ Forgive me. 8.1.17

God, even if my deeds are tiny next to what is due to you, my hope has grown large in the shelter of my confidence in you. God, how could I return from your presence disappointed and deprived? Never! I fully expect that your generosity will send me back laden with the favor of your mercy. I do not let hopeless despair crush my expectations of your goodness, so do not quash my confidence in you. I place all my hopes in you. 8.1.18

God, if you have mercy on us, we shall weep at our shortcomings in rendering you the obedience you deserve. If you deprive us of your mercy, we shall weep at the loss of the shelter we sought in you. 8.1.19

God, my offence is great for I have challenged you. My sin is grave and you will hold me accountable. But when I weigh the multitude of my sins against the immensity of your forgiveness, I find the balance in favor of your pardon. 8.1.20

God, when my errors distance me from your gracious kindness, conviction in your generous affection brings me comfort. 8.1.21

God, when heedlessness lulls me to sleep instead of preparing for my meeting with you, awareness of your generous favors rouses me. 8.1.22

God, even if my mind has deserted me in setting right my affairs, my conviction that you are concerned for my well-being has not. 8.1.23

God, I have come to you in deep sorrow, robed in destitution and poverty. The degradation that my need has prompted has placed me before you as the humblest of the humble. 8.1.24

- 8.1.25 God, you are generous, so be generous to me, one of your mendicants. Be munificent with your gifts, and place me among the people who receive them.
- 8.1.26 God, I stand this morning as a mendicant at your favor's door, having turned away from all but you. Your beautiful kindness cannot dismiss a mournful beggar, one who must wait upon your command.
- 8.1.27 God, I stand at the bridge of dangers, on trial for immoral deeds and unheeded lessons. If you do not lighten my burden and help me cross I will perish.
- 8.1.28 God, have you created me as one of the wretched, who weeps long and hard? Or as one of the blissful, awaiting fulfillment of hopes?
- 8.1.29 God, if you had not guided me to Islam I would never have been guided. If you had not loosened my tongue in prayer to you I would never have prayed. If you had not blessed me with belief in you I would never have believed. If you had not acquainted me with the sweetness of your favors I would never have known them. If you had not elucidated for me the terrors of your punishment I would never have sought protection.
- 8.1.30 God, my lack of deeds has kept me from being at the forefront with the pious, yet my trust in you has placed me upon the path of the upright.
- 8.1.31 God, how can you debase between the layers of your fire a soul you have honored with belief? God, how can you scorch with its blazing flames a tongue you have clothed with your oneness's spotless robes?
- 8.1.32 God, every distressed person turns to you for succor. Every sorrowful soul puts his hopes in you.
- 8.1.33 God, worshipers hear of your bountiful reward and bow down. Sinners hear of your vast mercy and are comforted. Strayers hear of your generosity and turn back. Offenders hear of your vast forgiveness and have hope. Throngs of wrongdoers from among your servants crowd your door, and a clamorous uproar of prayer arises in your lands. Each person comes with a wish that has driven him

to you in his need. Each comes with a heart, lord, that fear's palpitations have left bewildered. You are the one petitioned, at whose door entreaty's face is never blackened, whose seeker destruction's sword never turns away.

God, if I have missed the honorable path of looking out for my soul, I have found the safe path of seeking refuge in you. 8.1.34

God, if my soul has found me blithely bent on doing things that will destroy it, I have delighted it now by praying to you to save it. 8.1.35

God, if I have oppressed my soul by consigning it to sorrowful regret in the hereafter, I have also shown it justice by describing to it your mercy and the reasons why you will be kind. 8.1.36

God, the paucity of my provisions cuts me off from journeying to you, but I augment them now with stores of copious tears. 8.1.37

God, when I think of your mercy, my entreaty's eyes smile. When I think of your wrath, my supplication's eyes weep. God, I pray to you, never having prayed to any but you. I place my hopes in you, never having placed my hopes in any but you. God, how do I silence my solicitation's tongue, when I am frightened, not knowing what my end will be? 8.1.38

God, you know my body's dependence on your sustenance in this life. You know that I cannot do without your care in paradise after my death. God, you who have graciously granted me sustenance now, do not forbid it to me tomorrow, on the day I am most in need of it. 8.1.39

God, if you punish me, it is because I am your servant whom you have created for your purpose and punished. If you have mercy on me, it is because I am your servant whom you have found sinful yet saved. 8.1.40

God, there is no way to avoid sinning except by your grace. There is no way to do good except through your will. How can I bring forth something your will has stripped away? How can I stop sinning if your grace does not extend to me? 8.1.41

God, you taught me to ask for heaven before I knew of it; thus my soul learned of it and asked for it. Will you teach your supplicants 8.1.42

to ask for your grace yet forbid it to them? You are generous, praise-worthy in all that you do, mighty and generous one. God, if I am unworthy of being granted the mercy I ask you for, it is still worthy of your generosity that you bestow your grace upon sinners.

8.1.43 God, my soul stands before you, securely shaded by its beautiful trust in you. Do with me, then, what is worthy of you and cover me with your mercy!

8.1.44 God, I have neared the end of my life without having performed deeds that would bring me close to you. But I have proffered a confession of my sins as intercessor for forgiveness. If you forgive, there is none worthier of it than you. If you punish, there is none fairer in judgment than you.

8.1.45 God, you have been kind to me all the days of my life. Do not cut off your kindness to me after I die.

8.1.46 God, why should I despair of your kindly gaze after my death, when you have shown me nothing but good during my life?

8.1.47 God, my sins frighten me, but I know that my love for you gives me protection. Discharge my affairs in the manner of which you are worthy. Assist with your grace one whose ignorance is total. God from whom nothing is hidden: Bless Muḥammad and the progeny of Muḥammad, and forgive me the sins I have concealed from people.

8.1.48 God, I proffer you my excuses, having no recourse if you do not accept them. Accept my apology, O kindest of all forgivers.

8.1.49 God, if you had wanted to debase me, you would not have guided me. If you had wanted to dishonor me, you would not have preserved me. So keep me in the faith to which you have guided me, and continue to conceal my faults.

8.1.50 God, if not for the many sins I have committed, I would not fear your punishment. If not for your generosity, I would not hope for your reward. You are the most generous of all in fulfilling the desires of the hopeful. You are the most merciful of all whose mercy is petitioned by sinners seeking pardon.

8.1.51 God, my soul encourages me to hope for forgiveness from you. Honor my hope, for its heralds have given glad tidings of your

pardon and bounty. You are generous, so forgive my soul's wicked iniquities.

God, my good deeds have placed me between your bounty and generosity, and my bad deeds between your pardon and forgiveness. My hope is strong that between these two and those two, a man who has done both good and bad will not perish. 8.1.52

God, my faith testifies to your oneness, my tongue speaks of your glory, and the Qur'an tells me to believe in your munificent bounties. How could my hope not take joy in your beautiful promise? 8.1.53

God, your bounties come to me one after another, demonstrating your kindly regard. How could I be wretched? God, even if your wrath looks at me with a view to destroy, your mercy neither slumbers nor is neglectful of saving me from it. 8.1.54

God, my sin exposes me to your punishment, yet my hope draws me in to your reward. 8.1.55

God, if you forgive, it is because of your grace. If you punish, it is because of your justice. O gracious one, no grace is besought but yours, no justice is feared but yours. Bless Muḥammad and the progeny of Muḥammad, and bestow upon me your grace. Do not push me to the full limits of your justice. 8.1.56

God, you have created a body for me, placing in it instruments with which I obey or disobey you, through which I anger or please you. You placed in my body a base soul that calls me toward animal desires, housed me in a place filled with calamities, and said to me: "Stay back!" It is from you, then, that I seek protection against sinning. It is in you that I seek refuge. I ask your guidance in doing what will please you. I supplicate to you. My supplication does not tire you. 8.1.57

God, if I knew of an apology or defense more effective than confession I would have come to you with it. I confess my sins, so pardon them. Do not send me back empty-handed. 8.1.58

God, I see myself lying in the tomb: My family who came to bury me have left; friends call to me from the rim of the grave; relatives who had enmity for me in life look down on me, now prostrate. 8.1.59

Now that the earth is my pillow, my degradation is not concealed to any who look, nor my helplessness in finding a way out. You say: “Angels, look! Here is a man whose relatives have distanced themselves from him. His kinfolk have rejected him and sent him far away. All those in whom he had placed his hopes have cast him off. He has come close to me, a stranger in the grave. In the worldly abode he was conscious of me, and today he is hopeful of my kindly regard.” At that time, you, God, will proffer me your beautiful hospitality. You will be more compassionate to me than my family and my relatives.

8.1.60 God, you have concealed my sins in this world and not revealed them. Do not shame me on the day I meet you before all the people of the world. Conceal my sins there too, merciful one.

8.1.61 God, even if my sins filled up the space between the sky and the earth, pierced the stars and reached the very ends of the earth, despair would not stop me from anticipating your forgiveness, and hopelessness would not prevent me from awaiting your acceptance.

8.1.62 God, my soul has come to you craving forgiveness, asking with the tongue of hope for favors it does not deserve. So grant it the pardon it beseeches. Bestow upon it what it seeks. You are the most generous of the generous. You fulfill the hopes of those who place their hopes in you.

8.1.63 God, I have committed many sins and you know them. I have oppressed my soul and you know it. Take me as your servant, whether obedient and honored, or disobedient but forgiven.

8.1.64 God, I pray to you with the prayer you taught me, so do not deny me the favors you have made known to me. It is your bounty that has guided me to beautiful prayer, and it will only be complete if you reserve for me your cherished reward.

8.1.65 God, I await your pardon like other wrongdoers, not despairing of the mercy anticipated by the pious. God, your generosity has given life to my hopes, and your acceptance has received my deeds. Bless Muḥammad and his progeny, and tell me I will meet

you soon. Raise my hopes in your reward. God, you are the generous one at whose door no hope is disappointed, no petition invalidated.

God, even if I were lowly and did not deserve your grace— and indeed I have not earned it—you are worthy of bestowing it upon me. The generous do not bestow their bounty only on the deserving. 8.1.66

God, my destitution will not be mended except with your largesse. My hope will not prosper except through your grace. 8.1.67

God, I beseech your aid in doing what will bring me closer to you. I ask you to preserve me from doing what would turn me away from you. 8.1.68

God, the undertaking dearest to my soul, the one that will bring it the most benefit, is the task to which you have guided it, to which you, by your mercy, have directed it. Task my soul to it then, for you are more merciful toward it than I. 8.1.69

God, I place my hope in you, yet fear you. I fear you, yet hope for your reward. Because I fear, save me from the evil I dread. Because I hope, give me the good I crave. 8.1.70

God, I await your pardon like other wrongdoers, without despairing of the mercy anticipated by the pious. 8.1.71

God, I stretch out to you a hand chained by its sins. Yet I look at you with an eye daubed with the collyrium of hope. It is only fitting that when someone calls out to you in humble repentance, you answer with kindly generosity. 8.1.72

God, even if my sins expose me to your punishment, my hope draws me close to your reward. God, I do not let hopeless despair crush my expectations of your goodness, so do not quash my confidence in you. I place my hope in you. 8.1.73

God, even if my days have run out with me neglecting to do as much good as you would have wished, I have still spent my years in faith. 8.1.74

God, if I have missed the honorable path of looking out for my soul, I have found the safe path of seeking refuge in you. 8.1.75

8.1.76 God, how narrow is the path for one who does not have you as a guide! And how rough the journey for one who does not have you as companion!

8.1.77 God, my tears pour down when I recollect my transgressions. How could it be otherwise when I do not know what my end will be? Or to what destination my journey will take me? I see that my soul has deceived me, my days have betrayed me, and now death's wings are fluttering over my head, its eyes closely observing me. What is my excuse, then, when I have heard the warning loud and clear with my own ears? I have hope that the one who clothed me in the garments of well-being when I was among the living will not strip me of them when I am dead, for he is generous and kind. I have hope that the one who took care of me with his bounties during the days of my life will envelop me with his forgiveness at my death.

O consoler of the stranger! Comfort me in my grave when I am lonely and terrified. O companion to every person who has no other, have mercy on me when I am left in my grave alone. O knower of secrets and concealed things, O remover of harm and troubles, how will you regard me when I am among those who live inside the earth? What will you do with me in the abode of lonely terror and decay? You have been kind to me during the days of my life. O most bestowing giver, O most giving bestower, your favors to me are abundant; I cannot count them. My hands are too straitened to offer you adequate recompense, but I offer you praise for your bounties and gratitude for your trials.

O best of those to whom a caller calls, O worthiest of those in whom an aspirer places his hopes, I seek intercession with you through the covenant of Islam. I rely on you through the sanctity of the Qur'an. I seek closeness to you through Muḥammad. So bless Muḥammad and the progeny of Muḥammad, and acknowledge my covenant, through which I hope for the fulfillment of my petition. Make me act in obedience to you. End my days in goodness, free me from the fire, and give me a home in heaven. Do not shame me by

revealing my secrets in life or in death. Pardon the sins I have committed against you. Convince those among your servants whom I have wronged to accept my regrets. Place me among those with whom you are pleased, saving me from the fire. Look into all the things I have prayed to you for in this world and the next. O compassionate one, O liberal one, O mighty and munificent one, O living one, O sustaining one, O master of creation and command, may you be blessed. O most beautiful creator. O merciful one, O generous one, O powerful one, bless Muḥammad and his pure progeny.

Peace, God's mercy and his grace upon him and upon them. Verily God is praiseworthy, noble.

Ḥamzah ibn 'Abd Allāh reported to us, saying: al-Ḥusayn ibn Khālawayh reported to us, saying: Ibn Durayd recounted to us, saying: al-Sakan ibn Sa'īd recounted to us, from Muḥammad ibn 'Abbād al-Kalbī, from his father, saying: Ḥawtharah ibn al-Hirmās recounted a report to us when he was a very old man. He remembered the delegation of the Dārim tribe that came to the commander of the faithful 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and described in full the report of 'Alī's prayer for rain, saying: 8.2

A man among us from the Ḥisl clan stood up and said:

May the rain-stars be generous to you, commander of the faithful! May reverence be abundant for you! May God's favors be granted us through you! May calamities be lifted by your grace! Scattered groups of people from Dārim have come to you, journeying through vast wildernesses on tall, strong camels, to complain to you of the hardships of their privation, and the sufferings brought on by this year of drought. They come to attain closeness to God through you, to beseech him for rain by the grace of your luminous presence, and to fend off this calamity by following your practice.

Then Abū Surādiq went forward and spoke to him, ending with the following words: You are the spring of days, the succor of the world, a lamp in the darkness, the last resort of the indigent, a noble chieftain, and a magnanimous leader. There is no haven other than you, no refuge apart from you.

The commander of the faithful responded: God be praised! Blessings and peace upon the best of God's creation. Peace upon the chosen ones among God's servants. Qanbar, call out: "Gather for the prayer!"⁷⁰ Wearing a yellow head covering,⁷¹ he rose like the moon in its fullness, blinding any who looked upon him, and headed for the mosque. He offered the ritual-prayer, then drew close to the prophet's grave, and whispered some words that I did not quite hear. After that, he stood up to beseech God for rain, entreating him thus:

O God, lord of the seven spheres and the interlinked heavens, creator of all creation, giver of sustenance, knower of secrets, remover of misfortunes, answerer of prayers, acceptor of good deeds, forgiver of sins, steadier of stumblers. You send down your grace from on high in the seven skies, a grace that descends with your knowledge from your mercy's treasures and the shelters of your kindness upon those among your servants, the inhabitants of your lands, those who are thankful for your favors as well as those who are ungrateful for your gifts. You send it to them because of your own compassion and benevolence. You are the ultimate support for those who seek aid, the best refuge for those who would escape from calamity.

Your servants have come to you at the grave of your prophet, seeking to come close to you through your servant, complaining to you about a crisis that you know more about than anyone else.

O God, we beseech you in your own name, for there is nothing greater than you. We beseech you by the greatness borne upon your throne, a greatness that permeates the heavens and earth, a greatness that fills the land and the sea. We ask you to bless Muḥammad, seal of the prophets, the best of generations past and generations yet to come.

O God, remover of hardships, repealer of constraints. Remove from your servants this sign of yours which has enveloped them, this retribution of yours which has tested them sorely. None can remove hardship but you. You are most kind, most merciful.



CHAPTER 9

VERSE

Niṭawayh, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Arafah 9.1
al-Azdī al-Naḥwī, transmitted the following poetry by the com-
mander of the faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib:⁷²

Praise God! My lord is the eternal creator,
no partner shares his kingdom.
He apprised the disbelievers of their outcome
and will reward the believers as promised.
Our defeat is a lesson for us,
perhaps right will yet take the place of error.
God will give victory to his servants, victory comes from him;
he will make an example of the disbelievers for denying the truth.
Woe to you! If you speak boastingly of our brothers
whom Mount Uḥud took unto herself,
then remember Ṭalḥah whom we left dead on the ground,
swords glinting fire between us.
Remember ‘Uthmān killed by our spears,
whose wife tore her shift to shreds.
With nine others, the banner between them,
who went to drink at the pools of death.
The best of Fihri and the noblest too,
proud-nosed, high-born, numerous.

With a swift spearthrust, Muḥammad the Good killed Ubayy
 and left him writhing under a canopy of dust.
 Vultures and hyenas fight over him,
 one carries away a choice piece, another bides his time.
 Those whom you killed when you came upon us without warning
 went on to earn reward and bliss.
 For them, the delight of paradise,
 a place neither too hot nor too cold.
 May God bless them whenever their names are mentioned,
 fighters in so many true battles.
 They were loyal to God's messenger, men of restraint,
 their noses proudly high-bridged, among them Ḥamzah
 the Lion.
 Muṣ'ab was also a lion protecting the prophet,
 until a bloodsmeared jackal washed himself in his gore.⁷³
 Our dead are not like your dead—
 God delivered yours into the fires of hell, its gates well-guarded.

- 9.2.1 The following are 'Alī's verses upon his slaying of 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wadd.⁷⁴ 'Amr fell when 'Alī slew him and his private parts were exposed. 'Alī moved away, saying:

Can horsemen attack me like this?
 Tell my friends about me and them.
 Today my fury prevents me from fleeing.
 I am resolved, my aim unswerving.
 I awoke this morning anticipating battle,
 in my scabbard a sharp sword the color of salt.
 Ibn 'Abd swore an oath, bracing for battle, and I made a vow
 —who is the liar among us?—
 that we would neither flee nor hold back.
 We met. We exchanged blows.
 I turned away when I saw him fall,
 a great palm tree tumbling to the ground between the knolls.

I held back and did not plunder his garments.
 Had I been slain he would have stripped me of mine.
 He fought for the stone idol, a foolish choice,
 while I fought in righteousness for Muḥammad's lord.
 Do not think that God will disgrace his religion or his prophet,
 O gathering of confederates.

'Amr's sister came on the scene to find her brother slain. Who killed 9.2.2
 him? she asked. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, she was told. A noble equal! she
 exclaimed, and recited:

If 'Amr's slayer had been any other man,
 I would have wept till my soul left my body.
 But his slayer is 'Alī,
 and the one long known as the city's champion is not to be
 faulted for being felled by him.

With regard to his slaying of 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wadd, 'Alī also recited: 9.2.3

Three lined up against Islam,
 one has been taken out.⁷⁵
 Abū 'Amr Hubayrah fled and did not return,
 only an experienced warrior would have come back.
 Sharp Indian swords and keen hunting spears prevented them
 from facing us on the morning we met in battle.

'Alī also recited: 9.2.4

Honoring him, our swords struck those who strayed from him,
 they perceived neither the straight path nor his guidance.
 When we recognized his guidance, we took the road of obedience to
 the Merciful,
 the road of truth and piety.
 We fought for God's messenger when they attacked.
 The Muslims, people of perspicacity, turned to him.

'Alī recited the following verses about the Battle of Uḥud: 9.3

I see the polytheists, treacherous,
 persistent in their errant and sinful ways.
 They say: "We went home on the morning of that frightful battle
 with spears that had drunk blood."
 Treacherous in their fighting, they boast of slaying Ḥamzah;
 he resides now in the highest station.
 Let them remember that Ḥamzah killed 'Utbah in the Battle of Badr,
 he slew many, and fought without weakness;
 And let them remember that I prostrated Ṭalḥah, their ram,
 in plain sight on the field. God be praised!

9.4 'Alī recited:⁷⁶

I know, and one who is just knows.
 I have true conviction.
 I do not stray from the clear verses of wisdom
 coming from a God who is kind, most kind.
 A message that believers pore over,
 a message that Muḥammad was chosen to deliver.
 Muḥammad became mighty among us,
 mighty at home and in battle.
 You hotheads who threaten him
 when he has not oppressed or done violence to anyone:
 Do you not fear the great punishment?
 You should know that one protected by God is not like the one
 who is fearful,
 Not prostrated—yet—under his sword
 like Ka'b.
 The morning he came bringing mischief,
 then stomped away like an injured camel.
 God sent down Gabriel with instructions to kill him,
 in a heavenly revelation to his servant.
 Many an eye spent the night weeping over him,
 bursting forth whenever Ka'b's death was mentioned.

The al-Naḍīr tribe said to Muḥammad, “Leave us be for a while
for we are not done mourning.”
But he expelled them all, saying “Be gone!
Scatter in groups and bands, willing or not.”
He sent al-Naḍīr into exile
—they had been living in a beautifully decorated place—
To Adhri‘āt
on their weak, mangy, emaciated camels.

‘Alī said:⁷⁷

9.5

Don’t you see that God has shown his messenger great generosity,
the generosity of a powerful, munificent God?
Consigning disbelievers to a place of humiliation,
where they taste the ignominy of captivity and death.
The evening found God’s messenger mighty in victory—
God’s messenger was sent in justice.
He brought the Furqān⁷⁸ revealed by God,
its verses clear for people of intelligence.
Some believed in it with conviction,
and, God be praised, by evening they were united.
Others denied it, their hearts strayed,
so the lord of the throne increased their corruption.
The messenger needed only God to oppose their evil in the Battle
of Badr,
and God sufficed a people roused to righteous anger, whose acts
were most beautiful.
In their hands, light and gleaming swords,
used in battle after long polishing and sharpening.
They left there hotheaded youths prostrate,
and generous men in their prime.
Mourning women spent the night spilling tears,
in drops and in torrents.

Mourners wail for ‘Utbah the Errant and his son.

They wail for Shaybah. They wail for Abu Jahl.

They wail for the one-legged man, for the son of the nose-cut one.⁷⁹

Mothers stripped of sons, their hearts burning, their bereavement plain.

Many Meccans took up residence in the wells of Badr,
noble men, generous in war and drought.

But error called to them and they answered,

—but error’s ropes are frayed and falling apart.

By afternoon they were residents of hell,

too preoccupied with their own troubles to make mischief or
to hate.

9.6 ‘Alī said in an elegy for the prophet:

The crier brought the news at night,

alarming and disconcerting me when he started shouting it out.

When I saw what news he brought, I said to him:

“If your news is of a death, then anyone’s but the messenger
of God!”

But what I feared was true, and he did not care

that my friend had been for me brightness and beauty.

By God, I shall not forget you, Muḥammad,

as long as caravans carry me, as long as I cross dry rivers.

Whenever I reach a twisting ravine in the earth

I find traces of Muḥammad, new and old.

He was a swift courser: bold horsemen scattered from his charge,

as though a ferocious beast were bearing down upon them.

A lion among lions, he protected his lair by the awe he inspired,

and rapacious lions fled from him.

Strong, bold, and robust. He was Death itself—

whether the enemy came to him on the morning of battle or he
to them.

Let horsemen weep for God’s messenger as they sally on a raid,
steeds raising dust like enveloping mist.

Let the front lines weep for God's messenger when blows fall,
when skulls are fractured, and armies destroyed.

‘Alī said about a group of heretics whom he had killed and burned:⁸⁰ 9.7

When I saw it was evil
I kindled the fire and called to Qanbar.

‘Alī said:⁸¹ 9.8

Whose is the black banner, dappled with shadows?
When the call “Take it forward, Ḥuḍayn” is given, he sallies forth.
He takes it to water at the front line,
and fate's pools return it dripping death and blood.
May God reward the fighters who encountered death on that day,
a noble day, a gallant day,
A day of sweet report and noble character,
the voices of men raised in battlecries—
I speak of the tribe of Rabī‘ah,
brave and mighty when it meets battalions.

‘Alī recited: 9.9

I see this world has many ills,
its dweller sickens, then he dies.
Good friends meet then separate—
but short of death, all this is small.
I lose a friend and then one more,
sure proof that none on Earth abide.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr al-Tustarī reported to me, with a license to transmit the report, saying: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khalīl reported to us, saying: Al-Ḥusayn ibn Ibrāhīm recounted to us, saying: Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rajā’ recounted to us, saying: Hārūn ibn Muḥammad recounted to us, saying: Qa’nab ibn al-Muḥriz recounted to us, saying: Al-Aṣma‘ī recounted to us, saying: Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ 9.10

al-Muqri', recounted to us, saying: Al-Dhayyāl ibn Ḥarmalah recounted to me, saying:

'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib would go morning and evening to the messenger's grave, weep, heartbroken, and exclaim, "O messenger of God! How beautiful is forbearance, except in your loss! How ugly is weeping, except over you!" Then he would recite:

My eyes brim over when misfortunes descend,
but the real reason for my tears is you.
Whenever I remember that you are gone,
my eyes overflow and tears come pouring again.

Then he would place his face on the grave, and rub it until it was covered in earth. He would weep and lament and recount the difficulties that had assailed him after Muḥammad's death, and recite:

One who inhales the fragrance of Muḥammad's grave
inhales musk and ambergris forever.
I have been burdened with hardships;
if the day was likewise burdened, it would turn into night.

- 9.11 *Abū 'Abd Allāh also reported to me, saying: Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'īd reported to us, saying: Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jawharī recounted to us, saying: Zakariyyā ibn Yahyā reported to us, from al-Aṣma'ī, from Salamah ibn Bilāl, from Mujālid, from al-Sha'bī, saying:*

'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib said to a man whom he wanted to warn against another's company:

Do not befriend the fool.
Beware of him, beware!
Many a fool has led into death
the wise man who took him as brother.
The measure of a man
is the man he walks with.
Each entity finds in another such,
its true measure and like.

When the two meet, one heart finds in the other
the proof he seeks.
The eye need not look into the eye
when lips have spoken.

Al-Tustarī also recounted the following report to me, with a license to transmit, saying: Abū l-Faḍl Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ziyād al-Qarqūbī reported to us, saying: Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jārūd al-Raqqī reported to us, saying: Sulaymān ibn Sayf reported to us, saying: Al-Aṣma‘ī reported to us, from al-‘Alā’ ibn Jarīr, from his father, from al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays, saying: 9.12

I entered the presence of the commander of the faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, while he was praying the noon prayer, and said: O commander of the faithful, how long will you strive like this, striving at night and in the daytime! He gestured that I should sit. When he had finished the prayer, he said: Listen and understand. Then he recited:

Bear the hardships of morning journeys patiently,
and set out at daybreak in search of your desire.
Do not give up. Do not let setbacks grieve you.
Weakness and vexation destroy any chance of victory.
My experience comes from the passage of days,
I’ve seen that forbearance brings the best outcome.
One who strives to achieve a goal,
with forbearance, achieves success.

He also reported to me, saying: the following verses by the commander of the faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, were recited to us: 9.13

I turn a deaf ear to words that would rouse me to anger;
I am restrained, for restraint is worthier of me.
I leave off speaking even sweet words,
to guard against being answered by offensive ones.
If I bring upon myself the quarrel of an impetuous fool,
then I am a fool.

Do not be deceived by men's appearance,
though ornamented or duplicitiously charming.
Many a youth stuns with his looks,
but has several tongues and numerous faces.
You see him sleeping when it is time for virtuous deeds,
and fully awake for sordid doings.

9.14 *Al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā al-Qammāh reported to us, saying: Al-Ḥasan ibn Ismā'īl al-Ḍarrāb reported to us, saying: 'Alī ibn 'Umar recounted to us, saying: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Anbārī recounted to me, saying: Muḥammad ibn Sahl recounted to us, saying: 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Balawī recounted to us, saying: 'Umārah ibn Yazīd recounted to us, saying: Mālik recounted to us, from al-Zuhrī, from 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Sa'd, from Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, who said:*

I heard 'Alī recite the following verses, as the messenger of God listened:

I am Muḥammad's brother. My lineage is incontestable:
I was brought up with him; his two grandsons are my sons;
My grandfather and his grandfather are one;
and Fāṭimah is my wife. All true.
I believed in him when the world
was in the throes of error, polytheism, and adversity.
All praise and gratitude are due to God. He has no partner.
He is kind to his servants, and eternal, without end.

You have spoken true, 'Alī, the prophet responded.

God be praised!

With his help, we have reached the end of the *Treasury*.

All praise is due to him for his immeasurable favors.

May God shower his blessings upon our leader, his prophet Muḥammad,
and upon Muḥammad's pure progeny. Peace upon them all.

God is our sufficiency. He is the best guardian.

NOTES

- 1 Q Baqarah 2:269.
- 2 Q Shūrā 42:11.
- 3 These marks are missing from our manuscripts.
- 4 This is a pun on the word *fāḥishah*, which has both the specific connotation of adultery and the general meaning of abomination.
- 5 Q Hūd 11:45 and Tīn 95:8.
- 6 Or: Whosoever associates with the learned gains dignity, and whosoever associates with the base becomes despicable.
- 7 It is reported that the prophet would tie a belt tightly around his waist to alleviate pangs of hunger; some add that he would put stones in it. See e.g. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, report no. 2040; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* 3:44.
- 8 The Qur'an narrates that when Moses left Egypt, and crossed the desert to arrive at the Midian oasis, he found Jethro's daughters attempting to water their flocks, and he helped them. Then he went to rest in the shade, and said, «My lord, I am in need of whatever good you send down to me.» (Q Qaṣaṣ 28:24). The exegetes add that Moses was so emaciated from his long journey that the green color of the desert plants he had been eating could be seen through the skin of his stomach. (See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*.)
- 9 Q Naml 27:44 and Qaṣaṣ 28:16.
- 10 Q Hūd 11:47.
- 11 Q Anbiyā' 21:87.
- 12 Q Āl 'Imrān 3:185.
- 13 Q Mu'minūn 23:86.
- 14 Q Kahf 18:45.

- 15 Q Najm 53:31.
- 16 Q Hūd 11:15–16.
- 17 Q Ḥadīd 57:20.
- 18 Grammatically modified version of Q Shu‘arā’ 26:128–9.
- 19 Q Fuṣṣilat 41:15.
- 20 Q Qaṣaṣ 28:58.
- 21 Q Ṭā Hā 20:111.
- 22 Q Mu‘minūn 23:100.
- 23 Grammatically modified version of Q Infiṭār 82:4.
- 24 Q ‘Ādiyāt 100:10.
- 25 Slightly modified version of Q Yūnus 10:30.
- 26 Q Najm 53:31.
- 27 It is considered virtuous to pray the dawn prayer early.
- 28 See Bayard Taylor, “The Wisdom of Ali,” *Poems of the Orient*.
- 29 Q Nisā’ 4:78.
- 30 Q Āl ‘Imrān 3:154.
- 31 Q Luqmān 31:17.
- 32 Referring to the prophet Muḥammad.
- 33 Q Aḥzāb 33:21.
- 34 Modified version of Q Zumar 39:47, and grammatically modified version of A‘rāf 7:95.
- 35 Vocalizing “Bikālī” following Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāghah* 10:76–77.
- 36 This is the middle of the lunar month of Sha‘bān, thus a night with a full moon, and one considered particularly holy, to be dedicated to prayer.
- 37 Q Naḥl 16:128.
- 38 Q Ibrāhīm 14:34.
- 39 In the Arabic, the answers rhyme with the questions.
- 40 Mālik is the name of the gatekeeping angel of hell.
- 41 Q Ḥajj 22:11 and Zumar 39:15.
- 42 I.e. there are only some things he is permitted to know about the anti-christ. The meaning “God knows where you will stand on the day of judgment” is also possible.
- 43 Q Nāzi‘āt 79:34.

- 44 Q An‘ām 6:158.
- 45 Q Nūḥ 71:10–12.
- 46 These verses are: «Everything in the heavens and the earth extols God; he is the mighty, the wise. The kingdom of the heavens and the earth belongs to him, he gives life and he gives death, and he has power over all things. He is the first and the last, the manifest and the hidden, and he has knowledge of all things. He is the one who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then he sat upon the throne; he knows what enters into the earth and what comes out of it; what descends from the sky and what rises up to it; he is with you wherever you may go; and God sees all that you do. His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and all things return to him. He makes the night give way to day, he makes the day give way to night, and he knows all that is in your hearts.» Q Ḥadīd 57:1–6.
- 47 These verses are: «He knows the unseen and the visible, he is the merciful and the compassionate. He is God other than whom there is no god, the king, the holy, peace, the preserver, the guardian, the almighty, the subjugator, the exalted—glorified be he above the partners they ascribe unto him. He is God, the creator, the originator, the one who gives shape. His are the most beautiful names, and he is the almighty, the wise.» Q Ḥashr 59:22–24.
- 48 Modified version of Q Taghābun 64:9.
- 49 Modified version of Q Taḥrīm 66:8.
- 50 Echoes Q ‘Ankabūt 29:41.
- 51 Modified version of Q Kahf 18:45.
- 52 The “Heavenly House” (*al-bayt al-ma‘mūr*), lit. “the much-frequented house,” is considered to be the heavenly prototype for the Ka‘bah.
- 53 Q A‘rāf 7:171.
- 54 In *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, this prayer is ascribed to ‘Alī’s eponymous grandson, ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn, better known as Zayn al-‘Ābidīn. See William Chittick, *The Psalms of Islam*, no. 43, pp. 140–42.
- 55 Q Anbiyā’ 21:101.
- 56 The Arabic text of the gong’s “words” is rhythmic, to match what would be the beats of the gong. The rhythm is manifest in a set of

equal beats (dong dong dong dong, dong dong dong dong / dong dong dong dong, dong dong dong dong); eight long syllables per hemistich, which is not a bona fide poetic meter in the Arabic Khalilian system. The lines rhyme in a *muzdawijah* fashion, in the pattern xx, yy, zz. My translation follows approximately the same beat as the Arabic, and also applies an ad hoc loose rhyme.

- 57 I.e. death.
- 58 A reference to Q A'rāf 7:179 and Furqān 25:44.
- 59 Echoes Q 'Ankabūt 29:41.
- 60 Modified version of Q Kahf 18:45.
- 61 Grammatically modified version of Q Mu'minūn 23:74.
- 62 Q Dhāriyāt 51:11.
- 63 Lit. "pharaohs."
- 64 Q Furqān 25:63.
- 65 Q Mu'minūn 23:11.
- 66 Christians, Jews, Sabians, and others. See "protected peoples" in the Glossary.
- 67 Q Baqarah 2:196, 211, Āl 'Imrān 3:11, Mā'idah 5:2, and many other places. The two epithets occur together in 5:98.
- 68 Q Yūnus 10:107 and many other places.
- 69 It is virtuous to preface any kind of prayer with blessings on the prophet (*ṣalawāt*); the belief is that since God will certainly respond to the prayer asking him to bless the prophet, he will surely answer any prayers that are offered with it.
- 70 According to Ibn Sa'd (s.v. *dhikr al-adhān*), this call to gather was the original call to prayer. See Qutbuddin, "Khuṭba," p. 208, for details.
- 71 Notice the pun: the word used for yellow here is *muzabraq*, a derivative of whose root, *zibriqān*, the full moon, is perhaps evoked retroactively with the next phrase comparing 'Alī to the full moon using the more common word *badr*.
- 72 These poems were composed after the Battle of Uḥud in 3/625.
- 73 In addition to "jackal," *tha'lab* also means "spear point." Here, the word puns on both meanings: the jackal (one of the disbelievers) killing the lion (Muṣ'ab), and the spear-point piercing his body.

- 74 'Alī slew 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wadd in the Battle of the Trench (al-Khandaq), also called the Battle of the Confederates (al-Aḥzāb), in which the Meccans and their allies attacked Muḥammad in Medina 5/627.
- 75 Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (20:279), explains that the three who lined up against Islam were the two pagan tribes of Quraysh and Ghaṭafān, and the Medinan Jewish tribe of Qurayzah. The one “taken out” was Quraysh, when 'Alī slew 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wadd and Nawfal ibn 'Abdallāh. Al-Jubūrī, *Dīwān 'Alī* (p. 189, note * [sic]), explains it differently, saying three individuals lined up against Islam, namely 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wadd, who was killed, and two others, who escaped.
- 76 A reference to the prophet's expulsion of the Jewish tribe of al-Naḍir from Medina in 3/625.
- 77 Likely composed following the Battle of Badr in 2/624.
- 78 Among the Qur'an's many designations for itself is the Book of Demarcation (*al-Furqān*), something that explains the difference between right and wrong.
- 79 The reference is unclear.
- 80 According to al-Kaydarī, 'Alī recited this verse after ordering the burning of a group who persisted in ascribing divinity to him (*Dīwān 'Alī*, pp. 231–32).
- 81 Likely composed following the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 36/657.
- 82 Al-Khwārizmī has a different chain of transmission.
- 83 The *One Hundred Proverbs* may be part of the lost sections of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's literary anthology *al-Manẓūm wa-l-manthūr*. I thank Shawkat Toorawa this suggestion.
- 84 The veil is the body; removing the veil is a reference to death.
- 85 This is one of the more cryptic utterances of the *100 Proverbs*. Literally it reads “As for him whose lower parts are weak, his higher parts will be hard,” which has been interpreted in radically different ways. My translation follows the anonymous commentary of the Tokyo MS, f. 462. In contrast, Waṭwāt (*Maṭlūb kull ṭālib*, p. 41) says: “Whosoever is not aided by lesser folk (*al-ṣighār*), will be crushed by powerful ones (*al-kibār*).” Offering yet another interpretation, al-Baḥrānī (*Sharḥ*, pp. 169–70) says: “Whosoever has soft buttocks

(i.e. performs acts of homosexuality) will have a rough mouth (i.e. no shame).”

- 86 Al-Waṭwāt (*Maṭlūb kull ṭālib*, p. 57) explains this as follows: “One who is too soft is disrespected by his subordinates and protégés, and they do not obey or esteem him.” Al-Baḥrānī (*Sharḥ*, pp. 91–93) has a different interpretation: “If you are humble and kind, you will be strong and have many supporters.”

GLOSSARY OF NAMES AND TERMS

I provide here contextual explanations of key terms mentioned in this volume, and brief biographical information about the following people: individuals mentioned in the reports in the *Treasury*; principal transmitters of these reports, comprising ‘Alī’s direct interlocutors and al-Quḍā’ī’s principal recurring sources; the two scholars mentioned in the *One Hundred Proverbs*; and key persons mentioned in my Introduction and A Note on the Text.

‘Abbād ibn Qays (fl. first/seventh c.) is one of ‘Alī’s interlocutors in the *Treasury* (5.14). Perhaps ‘Abbād ibn Qays is a transcription error for Qays ibn ‘Abbād (d. after 80/699) from the second generation of Muslims, a resident of Basra, who is said to have narrated hadith from ‘Alī. Alternatively, ‘Abbād may be a mistranscription for al-Aḥnaf, al-Ash‘ath, or ‘Abd Allāh, all sons of Qays.

‘Abd Allāh ibn Sinān al-Asadī (d. between 75/694 and 83/702) was a second generation Muslim of the clan of Banū Khuzaymah and a resident of Kufa. He was with ‘Alī at Ṣiffīn. He narrated ‘Alī’s words as well as prophetic hadith transmitted by ‘Alī, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd, and Muḡhīrah ibn Shu‘bah.

Abū ‘Aṭā’ (fl. first/seventh c.) is an interlocutor of ‘Alī in the *Treasury* (5.13) whom I have not been able to identify.

Abū Jahl (d. 2/624) was a fierce enemy of Muḡammad, polemically called Abū Jahl (“Father of Ignorance”). He belonged to Makhzūm, a clan of the Quraysh. He was killed by the Muslims at the Battle of Badr.

Abū Surādiq (fl. first/seventh c.) was a man from the clan of Dārim who, according to the *Treasury* (8.2), was part of the delegation that came to ‘Alī in Medina asking him to beseech God for rain.

Adhri'āt is a town in southwestern Syria, known today as Dar'ah (Deraa).

In the early days of Islam, Adhri'āt was the center of an important Jewish colony. Several members of the Medinan Jewish tribe of al-Naḍir took refuge there upon their expulsion from Medina in 3/625. *al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays* (d. 73/692) was a chieftain of the tribe of Tamīm from the clan of Banū Sa'd and a resident of Basra. He remained neutral in the Battle of the Camel but fought with 'Alī at Ṣiffīn.

Ā'ishah (d. 58/678) was the wife of the prophet Muḥammad, from whom she narrated many hadith, and the daughter of Abū Bakr, the first Sunni caliph. She fought 'Alī in 36/656 at the Battle of the Camel, so named because she rode a camel onto the battlefield.

'ajwah is a special kind of date grown in Medina. A hadith ascribed to the Prophet says “*'Ajwah* dates are from paradise.”

'Alid refers to a descendant of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, or a thing connected with him.

'Amr ibn 'Abd Wadd (d. 5/626) was a famous pagan warrior whom 'Alī slew in single combat at the Battle of the Trench. He belonged to the clan of Banū 'Āmir ibn Lu'ayy.

Aṣḥbagh ibn Nubātah (d. early second/seventh c.) was a close companion of 'Alī and a prolific transmitter of his words, including the famous testament to Mālik al-Ashtar. An account of the killing of al-Ḥusayn at Karbala is also ascribed to him. He belonged to the tribe of Tamīm, was a resident of Kufa, and fought alongside 'Alī at Ṣiffīn.

Badr is the name of a group of wells near Medina, site of the first major battle between the Muslims and the Meccan pagans in 2/624, in which the Muslims were victorious.

al-Barā' ibn Āzib (d. 72/691) was a companion of the Prophet from among the Helpers (Anṣār), of the Medinan tribe of Aws. He was a prolific transmitter of hadith and a military commander during the early Muslim conquests. He moved to Kufa and died there. He is said to have fought alongside 'Alī at the Battle of the Camel, Ṣiffīn, and Nahrawān.

Caesar (Ar. Qayṣar) is the title of the Byzantine emperor who ruled over the Eastern Roman Empire with his capital at Constantinople when

Muḥammad began preaching Islam. In Islamic tradition, the term became a symbol of power and wealth.

Chosroes is the Greek form of the Persian name Khusraw (Ar. Kistrā), the given name of several Persian emperors who ruled in the late Sassanid period, shortly before the coming of Islam, including Khusraw Anūshirwān (r. AD 531–79) and Khusraw Aparwīz (r. AD 591–628). In Islamic tradition, the term became a symbol of power and wealth.

dāʿī is a Qurʾanic term literally meaning “one who calls” to God. For the Ṭayyibīs, the *dāʿī* is their highest spiritual authority during the concealment of the Imām.

Dajjāl the antichrist, is according to Islamic tradition an evil, one-eyed man, who will appear at the end of time, signaling the approach of judgment day. He will gather an army to conquer the world, and will initially be successful. After forty days, or forty years, he will be vanquished, and killed by the Messiah: Jesus in the Sunni tradition, the divinely guided redeemer (Mahdī) in the Shia tradition.

Dārim was a clan from the tribe of Tamīm in the line of Zayd Manāt. Their area of residence was northeast of Medina, roughly in the center of the Arabian Peninsula.

David (fl. tenth c. BC, Ar. Dāʿūd) is the biblical King David and a prophet in the Islamic tradition. He is mentioned several times in the Qurʾan as someone granted kingship, wisdom, and justice. Several prophetic hadith stress David’s fervor in prayer and fasting.

al-Dhayyāl ibn Ḥarmalah (fl. late first /seventh–eighth c.) of the Asad tribe, was a resident of Kufa who transmitted hadith from ‘Alī’s close companion Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh.

Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ (d. 11/632) was ‘Alī’s wife and Muḥammad’s youngest daughter, about whom he is reported to have said, “Fāṭimah is the mistress of the women of paradise.” She had four children with ‘Alī: al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, Zaynab, and Umm Kulthūm, all of whom played key roles in the political and religious life of early Islam.

Fatimids are an Ismāʿīlī Shia dynasty tracing descent from the prophet Muḥammad, and from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭimah, Muḥammad’s daughter. The Fatimids, whose seat was first in North Africa, then

Egypt, ruled over a large part of the Islamic empire in the tenth and eleventh centuries. They built the city of Cairo in 358/969.

Fīq is a town in the Levant between Damascus and Tiberias, also called Afīq.

Fīhr is a clan of the Meccan Quraysh tribe.

Furqān is one of the names by which the Qur'an refers to itself, meaning "The Demarcation" between good and evil.

Gabriel (Ar. Jibrīl or Jibra'il) is the archangel who, in Islamic tradition, served as God's messenger in bringing revelation to prophets, including the Qur'anic revelation to Muḥammad.

hadīth are words or deeds attributed to Muhammad, sometimes translated as "traditions" of the Prophet.

al-Ḥārith al-Hamdānī (d. 65/685) a resident of Kufa, was a staunch supporter of 'Alī, and a learned man. He belonged to the Ḥūth clan of the Hamdān tribe. A famous set of verses addressing him by name is attributed to 'Alī.

Ḥamzah ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 3/624) was the Prophet's uncle, lauded by Muslims as the Lion of God, who fought at the Battle of Badr, slaying several Meccan warriors in single combat. He was killed the following year at the Battle of Uḥud. Muḥammad is reported to have grieved deeply for him, and to have recited the funeral prayer for him 72 times.

al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī (d. 49/669) was the oldest son of 'Alī and Fāṭimah, and for the Shia, the Imām after his father. The Prophet is reported to have said, "Al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn are the leaders of the youth of paradise." Al-Ḥasan was active in 'Alī's service. After his father's death in 40/661, he received the pledge of the caliphate in Kufa. He abdicated six months later, and, eschewing active politics, returned to Medina. According to some sources, he was poisoned by Mu'āwiyah.

Ḥawtharah ibn al-Hirmās is reported in the *Treasury* (8.2) to have witnessed the delegation from the Dārim tribe to 'Alī in Medina.

Ḥimyar is the name of an Arab tribe based in Yemen which wielded political hegemony in southern Arabia between AD 100 and 590. The center of their kingdom was Saphar on the plateau south of modern Yarīm. From there, they gradually conquered the ancient Southern Arabian

kingdoms of Qatabān, Saba', and Ḥaḍramawt. In the mid-fourth century, Judaism and Christianity began to spread in these regions. Repeated ruptures of the dam of Ma'rib attest to a general decline starting in the sixth century. In AD 597, South Arabia became a province of the Sassanid empire.

Ḥisl is a clan of Dārim, as it appears in the *Treasury* (8.2); there are a number of clans belonging to other tribes also called Ḥisl.

Hubayrah ibn Abī Wahb (d. after 8/630) was a Meccan pagan from the Makhzūm clan of Quraysh, who was married to 'Alī's sister Umm Hānī' and had two children with her. He was one of six horsemen who stormed the trench outside Medina in the Battle of the Trench (Khandaq). It is reported that when Muḥammad conquered Mecca, Hubayrah fled to Najrān and died there.

Ḥuḍayn ibn al-Mundhir (d. after 96/715) was a resident of Basra, a chief-tain of the Rabi'ah tribe, and standard-bearer for 'Alī's side at Ṣiffīn.

Ḥunayn is the name of a valley between Mecca and al-Ṭā'if, site of a major battle fought between Muḥammad and his followers against the tribe of Hawāzin and its subtribe of Thaḳīf in 8/630, soon after the conquest of Mecca, which ended in a decisive victory for the Muslims.

al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī (d. 61/680) was the second son of 'Alī and Fāṭimah, and Imām after his older brother, al-Ḥasan. Al-Ḥusayn was martyred in 61/680, when Umayyad forces killed him, his male family members, and his companions, in the plain of Karbala. His shrine is an important pilgrimage site for the Shia who also commemorate the day of his martyrdom, called 'Āshūrā'.

Ibn 'Abbas, 'Abd Allāh (d. 68/687) was the son of Muḥammad's uncle 'Abbās, and one of the greatest scholars of the first generation of Muslims. Many hadith are attributed to his transmission. He supported 'Alī's claim after the death of the Prophet, and was a close advisor to 'Alī during his caliphate; he also served as governor of Basra.

Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, Abū l-Faḍl Aḥmad (d. 280/893) was a Baghdadian litterateur and historian whose works include a partially extant anthology of prose and poetry (*al-Manthūr wa-l-manẓūm*) and one volume of a significant work of history (*Kitāb Baghdād*).

Ibn Durayd (d. 312/933) was a lexicographer, linguist, and grammarian.

He was born in Basra, and lived in Oman, Nishapur, and Baghdad. His major books include a lexicon titled *Jamharat al-lughah*, a grammar work titled *Kitāb al-Ishtiqāq*, and an anthology of wise sayings titled *al-Mujtanā*.

Ibn Muljam (or *Ibn Muljim*) (d. 40/661) of the Kindah tribe was the Khārijite who assassinated ‘Alī. He was executed by ‘Alī’s son, al-Ḥasan.

Imām literally “leader,” refers either to the supreme leader of the Muslim community, or to an exemplary scholar or prayer-leader. In Shia doctrine, the term denotes a man descended from the prophet Muḥammad and his legatee ‘Alī, who inherits their role of spiritual and temporal leadership, who is divinely guided, and is the sole legitimate leader of the Muslim community.

Ismā‘īlīs are a denomination of Shia Muslims, who, after Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), maintain the continuity of the imamate through his son Ismā‘īl. The Fatimid dynasty of North Africa and Egypt claimed descent from his line. After the death of the Fatimid Imām-Caliph al-Mustanṣir in 487/1094, the Ismā‘īlīs split into two further denominations, Nizārī and Mustalawī (the latter known through their Ṭayyibī branch).

Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh (d. ca. 78/697) was a companion of the Prophet and one of the Helpers (Anṣār). A resident of Medina from the tribe of Khazraj, he pledged allegiance to Muḥammad at ‘Aqabah before the Emigration. Jābir was a prolific narrator of hadith and of ‘Alī’s words. He was a staunch supporter of ‘Alī, and fought with him at Ṣiffīn. He died in Medina in his nineties.

Jesus (Ar. ‘Īsā) is a prophet in Islam, referred to in 15 different surahs and 93 verses in the Qur’an, as the son of Mary, the Messiah (al-Masīḥ), the Word (*kalimah*), and the Spirit (*rūḥ*).

Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf (d. 4/625) was an opponent of Muḥammad in Medina and leader of the Banū l-Naḍīr, a Jewish tribe. Ka‘b was killed by the Muslims on Muḥammad’s orders, shortly before the expulsion of the Banū l-Naḍīr from Medina.

Khārijites literally “Seceders,” are so named because they seceded from ‘Alī’s following subsequent to the Arbitration at Ṣiffīn. Condemning

the Arbitration, and ‘Alī too, with the dictum “Judgment belongs to God alone” (*lā ḥukma illā li-llāh*), they attacked and slew any who disagreed with this doctrine. ‘Alī fought and defeated them at the Battle of Nahrawān in 38/658. Most Khārijite factions eventually died out and they survive today as the milder Ibāḍī denomination in Oman and North Africa.

Kumayl ibn Ziyād (d. 82/701) was a close companion of ‘Alī who fought with him at Ṣiffīn, and served during his caliphate as governor of Hit, a frontier town in the north of Iraq. He narrated ‘Alī’s words, and the famous “Kumayl’s Prayer” is one he is said to have learned from ‘Alī. The Umayyad governor of Kufa al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf executed him along with several other vocal supporters of ‘Alī.

Magians (Ar. Majūs) are followers of the ancient Iranian dualist religions associated with fire worship. The Magians are referred to in the Qur’an in a list of six forms of religion, including believers (= Muslims), Jews, Christians, Sabians, and polytheists (Q Ḥajj 22:17). Some legal schools consider them “people of the book” (i.e. followers of a divinely revealed scripture), as followers of Zoroaster.

Moses (Ar. Mūsā) is a prophet in Islam, mentioned by name 136 times in the Qur’an, more than any other prophet.

Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680) a major enemy of ‘Alī, became the first Umayyad caliph. Second cousin of the third Sunni caliph ‘Uthmān and governor of Syria under ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān, he refused to accept ‘Alī as caliph and fought him with the people of Syria at the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 37/657. After ‘Alī’s death in 40/661, Mu‘āwiyah became the undisputed ruler of the Islamic lands, ruling from his seat at Damascus until his death.

Muḥammad (d. 11/632) was the prophet of Islam, often referred to as God’s messenger (*rasūl Allāh*). He is also referred to in the *Treasury* by two of his other names, Aḥmad and Muṣṭafā.

Muṣ‘ab ibn ‘Umayr or *Muṣ‘ab al-khayr* (d. 3/624) was one of the earliest Muslims. A Meccan from the Prophet’s tribe of Quraysh, he was part of the migration to Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia). He returned to join Muḥammad, and was standard-bearer in the Battles of Badr and also Uḥud, where he was killed.

Mu'tazilah is the name of a rationalist school of Islamic theology which used the dialectical methods of Greek philosophy. Its subscribers called themselves "people of unity and justice," meaning they were strictly non-anthropomorphic proponents of God's oneness, and advocates for his justice and thus for human free will.

al-Naḍīr were a Jewish tribe who were expelled from Medina by the Prophet in 3/625 for breaking their covenant with the Muslims and plotting with the Meccans against him. They took refuge with their co-religionists in the northern oasis of Khaybar and the Syrian town of Adhri'āt.

Nawf ibn Faḍāl al-Bikālī (fl. first/seventh c.) was a companion of 'Alī. He was a member of the Banū Bikāl, a clan of the Yemenite Ḥimyar tribe.

al-Nazzāl ibn Sabrah (fl. first/seventh c.) of the Hilāl tribe and a resident of Kufa, was an associate of 'Alī who transmitted his teachings as well as prophetic hadith. He is reckoned among the companions of the Prophet.

Niḡawayh (d. 323/935) was a philologist, grammarian, historian, a scholar of hadith, and a Zāhirite jurist.

protected peoples (Ar. *ahl al-dhimma*) are members of the revealed religions to whom the medieval Islamic state provided "protected" status.

Qadarites (Qadariyyah or Libertarians) are an early Islamic, proto-Mu'tazilite, theological school advocating human free will. The name is derived from the word *qadar*, meaning "power," used to denote the capacity of humans to choose between good and evil. The competing school is that of the Jabriyyah, or Predestinarians.

qāḍī means judge.

Qanbar ibn Ḥamdān (d. latter half of first/late seventh or early eighth c.) was 'Alī's servant, also reported to have carried out his legal penalties. He was with him during the Battle of Ṣiffīn, and is said to have collected his orations after he died. The Umayyad governor of Kufa, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī (d. 95/714), tortured and executed him along with several other supporters of 'Alī.

al-Rabī'ah were a large tribe, many members of which were residents of Basra in 'Alī's time. They formed one of the largest blocs in 'Alī's army: four thousand fought in the Battle of the Camel, and they comprised the entire left wing at Šiffīn.

Rifā'ah ibn Shaddād al-Bajalī (d. 66/685) was a second-generation Muslim, a chieftain of the Bajīlah tribe, and a resident of Kufa, who served as 'Alī's judge in Ahwaz. He fought on 'Alī's side in the Battles of the Camel and Šiffīn, where he was standard-bearer and orator of his tribe. After the Karbala tragedy, he became one of the Kufan Penitents who lamented their passivity in preventing the killing of al-Ḥusayn. He later participated in al-Mukhtār's revolt against the Umayyads, during which he was killed.

Rightly Guided Caliphs are, according to the Sunnis, the first four successors of the prophet Muḥammad, namely Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī.

Sābūr is the Arabic form of Persian "Shāpūr," the name of several powerful Sassanid emperors. These include Shāpūr I, son of Ardashīr Pāpakān (r. AD 239 or 241 to 270 or 273), who is said to have founded the city of Jundishāpūr, and Shāpūr II, son of Hormizd II (r. AD 309–79), who is known for his military might.

Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 35/655) was a prominent early companion of the Prophet, who came from Persia. A hadith ascribed to Muḥammad says "Salmān is one of us, the People of the House." He was also a close companion and staunch supporter of 'Alī. Governor of Ctesiphon in 'Umar's reign, he died and was buried there.

Ša'sa'ah ibn Šuḥān al-'Abdī (d. ca. 56/676) was a devoted supporter of 'Alī who fought with him in all his battles and attempted to persuade the Khārijites to return to 'Alī in the negotiations leading to the Battle of Nahrawān. He was a poet and orator, and chieftain of his tribe of 'Abd al-Qays. After 'Alī's death, he is reported to have discoursed eloquently and boldly on 'Alī's merits in Mu'āwiyah's court. In some reports, Mu'āwiyah exiled him to Bahrain, the traditional homeland of the 'Abd al-Qays, where he died.

Ṣayfī ibn ʿĀ'idh is said in the *Treasury* (5.6) to be the antichrist (Dajjāl).

It was also the name of a Meccan pagan who had indirect connections to the Prophet: brother of the former husband of Muḥammad's wife Khadījah, and grandfather of the Prophet's trading partner in his early Meccan years.

al-Sha'bī, *ʿĀmir ibn Sharāḥīl* (d. between 103/721 and 110/728) was a resident of Kufa, and a famous early legal expert, exegete, and transmitter of hadith. He was from the Sha'b clan of the tribe of Hamdān, and said to be descended from a chieftain of Yemen.

Shāfiʿī is the name of one of the four major Sunni schools of law, so called after its founder of the same name al-Shāfiʿī (d. 206/855). Shāfiʿis are currently found mostly in Egypt and southeast Asia.

sharīf literally "a man of noble birth," commonly denotes descent from the prophet Muḥammad through his grandsons al-Ḥasan or al-Ḥusayn, typically the former; the term *sayyid* is generally used to denote the latter.

Shaybah ibn Rabīʿah (d. 2/623) was part of the Meccan opposition against Muḥammad. He was killed at the Battle of Badr.

Shurayḥ ibn al-Ḥārith (d. ca. 80/699) was a judge during the caliphates of ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, and Muʿāwiyah. He was also a jurist, hadith scholar, and litterateur. ʿAlī chastised Shurayḥ more than once during his tenure, as in the report in the *Treasury* (7.7).

Shia literally means "followers" and is the shortened form of Shīʿat ʿAlī or "followers of ʿAlī." The Shia believe that the Prophet through divine revelation appointed ʿAlī to lead the Muslim community after him as Imām, and that, as such, ʿAlī was the rightful successor to Muḥammad in both his temporal and spiritual roles. Three major branches of the Shia evolved, subscribing to different lines of Imāms: Twelver (or Imāmī), Ismāʿīlī, and Zaydī.

Ṣiffīn is a place in north central Syria on the north bank of the Euphrates, and the site of a major battle in 37/657 fought by ʿAlī and his Iraqi force against Muʿāwiyah leading a Syrian army. The battle ended in arbitration.

Solomon (fl. tenth c. BC, Ar. Sulaymān) is the biblical king of Israel, son and successor of King David. He is revered as a prophet in the Islamic tradition. He is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an, particularly in connection with his knowledge of the language of the birds, and his command over the jinn and the winds.

sunnah literally meaning "well-trodden path to a watering hole," refers to the accepted practice of pious forbears, and when used without qualifiers, usually to Muḥammad's practice.

Sunni means "emulator of the Prophet's practice." The Sunnis believe that Muḥammad died without appointing an heir, and that the community accepted Abū Bakr as his successor. They venerate the first four leaders of the community as the "Rightly Guided Caliphs." The term Sunni emerged from the earlier, mainly political appellation, "people adhering to the sunnah and the majority group."

surah is a chapter of the Qur'an. There are 114 surahs in the Qur'an of varying lengths, between 3 to 286 verses.

Ṭalḥah ibn Abī Ṭalḥah (d. 3/624) of the Qurashite clan of 'Abd al-Dār was part of the Meccan opposition to Muḥammad. He was the Meccans' standard-bearer during the Battle of Uḥud, where he was slain by the Prophet's uncle Ḥamzah, and where two of his brothers and four of his sons were also killed.

Ṭayyibī is the appellation of a denomination of Shia Muslims from the Fatimid-Isma'īlī branch, who believe the twenty-first Imām, al-Ṭayyib, went into concealment in 524/1130, and that the imamate continues, father to son, in his line. During his concealment, the Imām is represented among his followers by a continuous chain of dā'īs, presently based in India.

tharīd is a savory porridge made of bread and broth.

Ṭūbā is the name of a tree in paradise, referred to in a Qur'anic verse promising «Ṭūbā and a good return» to «those who believe and perform good deeds.» (Q Ra'd 13:29). For some exegetes it is an Indian or Ethiopian term for paradise itself, for others an abstract notion of "bliss" or "bounty."

Tubba' was, according to the lexicographers, the royal title of the kings of the second Ḥimyarite kingdom (ca. AD 300–525). The “people of Tubba” (*qawm Tubba'*) are an extinct community mentioned twice in the Qur'an, which states that they—among several other pre-Islamic groups—were punished because they refused to believe in God and obey God's prophets (Q Dukhān 44:37 and Q Qāf 50:13).

al-Tustarī, Abū 'Abd Allāh (d. ca. 400/1010) was a Cairene hadith scholar and one of al-Quḍā'i's sources for prophetic hadith and for 'Alī's words. (Not to be confused with Sahl al-Tustarī, the Shia scholar and mystic.)

Twelver Shia are a denomination of Shia Muslims, who, after Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), maintain the continuity of the imamate through his son Mūsā al-Kādhim. Their twelfth Imām is the awaited redeemer, Muḥammad al-Mahdī. Currently, they are concentrated in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Bahrain.

Ubayy ibn Khalaf (d. 3/624) was a bitter enemy of Muḥammad. On the night Muḥammad migrated to Medina, Ubayy was one of the Meccans who tried to assassinate him. During the Battle of Uḥud, the Prophet is said to have killed Ubayy with his own hand.

Uḥud is the name of a mountain outside Medina, site of the second major battle between the Muslims and the Meccans in 3/625, in which the Muslims suffered heavy losses.

Umayyads are the first dynasty to rule the Islamic world, beginning with Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, who became caliph following 'Alī's death in 40/661. From their seat in Damascus, they ruled till 132/750, when they were overthrown by the Abbasids.

'Utbah ibn Rabi'ah (d. 2/623) was one of the leaders of the Meccan opposition against Muḥammad. He was killed at the Battle of Badr by the Prophet's uncle Ḥamzah. His daughter Hind (wife of Abū Sufyān and mother of Mu'āwiyah) avenged her father's death by having a slave murder Ḥamzah at Uḥud.

'Uthmān ibn Abī Ṭalḥah (d. 3/624) of the 'Abd al-Dār clan, was part of the Meccan opposition to Muḥammad. He was slain by the Prophet's uncle Ḥamzah during the Battle of Uḥud, as were his two brothers and four nephews.

waṣī means “legatee.” The Sunnis and the Shia both refer to ‘Alī as Muḥammad’s *waṣī*, the one to whom Muḥammad entrusted the execution of his legacy. According to the Shia, this title endorses ‘Alī’s rightful succession to the Prophet’s role as spiritual and temporal guide for the Muslim community.

Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 136/754) was a second-generation Muslim and a resident of Medina, who is reported to have taught hadith and jurisprudence in the Prophet’s mosque. His company was reportedly sought by the Shia Imām, Zayn al-‘Abidīn.

Zayd ibn Ṣūhān al-‘Abdī (d. 36/656) was referred to by the Prophet as “Zayd the Good” (Zayd al-khayr). When one of his hands was severed in an early battle, the Prophet is reported to have said that his hand preceded him to paradise. Like his brother Ṣaṣa’ah, Zayd was a staunch supporter of ‘Alī. He was killed fighting in the Battle of the Camel.

Zaydīs are a denomination of Shia Muslims, who, after Zayn al-‘Abidīn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. 95/712), uphold the imamate of his son Zayd (d. 142/740), and after him of any ‘Alid who combines religious learning with a will to wield the sword. They are concentrated today in Yemen.

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