Epistle 32

On the Principles of Intellectual Existents According to the Pythagoreans

The First Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Chapter 1: Existing Things Correspond to the Nature of Number

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed our explanation of the causes of the differences among languages, speech, sounds, scripts, forms of writing, doctrines, beliefs, opinions, and religions, and with that epistle we concluded our discussion of the natural sciences.

We now begin the third division of our work, concerning the psychological and intellectual sciences, as we promised at the beginning of our book.

This first epistle concerns the principles of existing things according to the opinion of Pythagoras, the sage who was among the earliest to speak systematically concerning number and its nature.

He said:

The nature of existing things corresponds to the nature of number.

Whoever knows number, its rules, nature, genera, species, and properties may thereby understand the quantities and classes of existing things and why their numbers and arrangements are what they are.

The Creator Most High is the Originator, Cause, Creator, and Inventor of existing things and is truly One in every respect.

It would not accord with wisdom for all things to be one in every respect, nor for them to be completely unrelated to one another.

Rather, they are united through matter while differing through form.

Nor would it be fitting for everything to consist only of twos, threes, fours, fives, sixes, or any other single numerical pattern.

The most perfect arrangement is the actual diversity found among existing things.

Some realities occur in pairs. Examples include matter and form, substance and accident, cause and effect, simple and composite, subtle and dense, transparent and opaque, dark and luminous, moving and resting, high and low, hot and cold, moist and dry, light and heavy, harmful and beneficial, good and evil, correct and mistaken, true and false, male and female.

Thus God says:

“And of everything We created a pair, that perhaps you may remember.”

Other realities occur in groups of three, such as length, breadth, and depth; line, surface, and body; past, present, and future; possible, impossible, and necessary; and the three broad divisions of knowledge into mathematical, natural, and divine sciences.

Other realities occur in groups of four: heat, cold, moisture, and dryness; fire, air, water, and earth; yellow bile, blood, phlegm, and black bile; spring, summer, autumn, and winter; east, west, north, and south.

Likewise, the numerical orders include units, tens, hundreds, and thousands.

The same principle can be extended to fives, sixes, sevens, and higher numerical arrangements.

Different philosophical and religious groups sometimes became preoccupied with one numerical pattern.

Some emphasised dualities, Christians emphasised triads, natural philosophers frequently emphasised groups of four, others groups of five, and some Indian traditions groups of nine.

The Pythagoreans, however, attempted to give each numerical rank its proper due.

They therefore said that existing things correspond to the nature of number.

The One is the source and origin of number.

All even and odd numbers, whole numbers and fractions, arise through repetitions and combinations of unity.

Thus the One stands to number as the Creator stands to existing things.

Just as the One has no part, partner, or equal within number, so the Creator—exalted is He—has no partner, likeness, or equal.

Just as the One is present in every number and encompasses them all as their principle, the Creator encompasses every existent.

Just as every number receives its numerical existence through unity, every existent receives existence from God.

Just as number endures through the continued presence of unity, created things endure through the continued sustaining act of their Creator.

The Pythagoreans further compared the hierarchy of existence to the sequence of the first nine numbers.

As Two is the first number arising from One, so **Intellect** is the first existent proceeding from the Creator.

As Three follows Two, so **Soul** follows Intellect.

As Four follows Three, so **Prime Matter** follows Soul.

As Five follows Four, so **Nature** follows Prime Matter.

As Six follows Five, so **Body** follows Nature.

As Seven follows Six, so the **celestial spheres** follow Body.

As Eight follows Seven, so the **four elements** follow the spheres.

As Nine completes the sequence of the units, so the **generated beings**—minerals, plants, and animals—form the final rank of universal bodily existence.

Minerals correspond analogically to tens, plants to hundreds, and animals to thousands, while temperament or mixture corresponds again to unity.

The authors also compare spiritual realities to odd numbers, bodily realities to even numbers, celestial beings to whole numbers, and the world of generation and corruption to fractional numbers.

Chapter 2: Existence, Persistence, Completion, and Perfection

Know—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that existence precedes persistence, persistence precedes completion, and completion precedes perfection.

Every perfect thing is complete.

Every complete thing persists.

Every persistent thing exists.

But not every existent persists, not everything that persists is complete, and not everything complete is perfect.

The Creator—exalted are His names—is the Cause and Originator of all existing things, the One who preserves them, completes them, and perfects them.

The first effusion from Him is existence, then persistence, then completion, and finally perfection.

We have explained elsewhere the distinction between completion and perfection.

Chapter 3: Matter and Form as an Introduction to Intellectual Principles

Whoever wishes to investigate the principles of existing things and know them according to their realities should first examine the principles of sensible things.

Through them the intellect becomes trained and strengthened for contemplating intelligible principles.

Knowledge of sensible realities is nearer and easier for beginners.

Body is one of the sensible existents.

It is a substance composed of two simple intelligible principles: **matter and form**.

Matter is the substance receptive to form.

Form is that through which a thing is what it is.

Iron, for example, serves as matter for a knife, sword, saw, and other manufactured objects.

“Knife,” “sword,” and “axe” are names corresponding to forms, while the underlying iron remains one.

The same applies to wood, which can become a door, bed, chair, or another manufactured object.

Yet not every matter receives every form.

Wood does not receive the form of a shirt, nor cloth the form of a chair.

Nor does matter ordinarily receive later forms without first receiving intermediate ones.

Cotton first receives the form of thread, then woven cloth, and only afterward a garment.

Grain first becomes flour, then dough, then bread.

Thus matter receives forms in an ordered sequence.

Prime Matter first receives the form of body—that is, length, breadth, and depth—and through bodily extension becomes capable of receiving further forms such as roundness, triangularity, squareness, and other figures.

The term **matter** is used in four ways.

The first and nearest to sense is the matter used in crafts, such as wood, iron, and cotton.

The second is the matter of natural things: fire, air, water, and earth, from which the generated beings beneath the sphere of the Moon are formed.

The third is universal matter, namely absolute body, which embraces the celestial spheres and all generated beings.

The fourth is Prime Matter itself, a simple substance receptive to form.

The first form received by Prime Matter is length, breadth, and depth, through which it becomes absolute body.

Prime Matter is therefore one of the first intelligible principles.

Matter is the first effect of Soul; Soul the first effect of Intellect; Intellect the first effect of the Creator.

The Creator is the Cause of every existent, originating, ordering, completing, and perfecting all things according to the most noble sequence.

Intellect is a spiritual substance emanating from the Creator.

It is enduring, complete, and perfect.

Soul is a spiritual substance proceeding from Intellect.

It is enduring and complete but not yet perfect.

Prime Matter is a spiritual intelligible substance proceeding from Soul.

It endures but is neither complete nor perfect.

Chapter 4: How Intellect, Soul, and Matter Receive and Transmit Divine Effusion

Know that the cause of the existence of Intellect is the existence of the Creator and the effusion proceeding from Him.

The cause of the persistence of Intellect is the Creator's continual sustaining of it through existence and effusion.

The cause of the completion of Intellect is its reception of that effusion and of the virtues proceeding from the Creator.

The cause of the perfection of Intellect is that it pours the received effusion and virtues upon Soul.

Thus the persistence of Intellect becomes the cause of the existence of Soul.

The completion of Intellect becomes the cause of the persistence of Soul.

The perfection of Intellect becomes the cause of the completion of Soul.

The persistence of Soul becomes the cause of the existence of Prime Matter, and the completion of Soul becomes the cause of the persistence of Prime Matter.

When Soul becomes perfected, Matter becomes complete.

This, according to the epistle, is the ultimate purpose of Soul's connection with Matter.

For this reason the celestial sphere revolves and generated beings arise: so that Soul may perfect itself by bringing its virtues into manifestation within Matter, while Matter becomes completed through receiving those virtues.

Otherwise, the revolution of the celestial sphere would be purposeless.

Intellect receives the divine effusion and virtues all at once, without time, motion, or labour, because of its proximity to the Creator and the extreme spirituality of its substance.

Soul, however, receives from the Creator through the mediation of Intellect.

Its rank is therefore below Intellect.

It alternates between two orientations.

At one time it turns toward Intellect to receive goodness and virtue.

At another it turns toward Matter to communicate that goodness and virtue.

When it turns toward Intellect, it is occupied with reception and is not simultaneously occupied with bringing those gifts into Matter.

When it turns toward Matter, it becomes occupied with completing Matter and temporarily turns away from receiving from Intellect.

Matter itself is lower in rank and less receptive.

It does not actively seek the virtues of Soul.

Soul must therefore turn toward it with intense care and labour in order to reform and perfect it.

Were Soul not supported by Intellect through divine grace, it would be overwhelmed in the sea of Matter.

The text cites:

“Were it not for God's favour upon you and His mercy, not one of you would ever have been purified.”

Intellect, by contrast, suffers no fatigue in supporting Soul because Soul is itself a spiritual substance, readily receptive to its virtues.

Soul is living in itself, knowing in potentiality, active by nature, and capable of craftsmanship through bodily instruments.

Matter, because of its distance from the First Cause, possesses no knowledge or action in itself.

It merely receives.

Soul therefore finds rest only when it turns toward Intellect, attaches itself to it, and becomes united with it.

Chapter 5: Questions Concerning the First Principles

The epistle raises a series of fundamental questions.

How does existence flow through existing things?

How does persistence flow through things that persist?

How does permanence belong to enduring beings?

How do completion and perfection spread through things that are complete and perfect?

How does life exist within living beings?

How does knowledge exist within those who know?

How does power exist within those possessing power?

How does governance exist in rulers?

How does lordship appear in those who exercise authority?

Most fundamentally:

How does multiplicity proceed from pure unity?

The authors cite verses expressing these ideas poetically: the Creator illuminates the sensible world through luminous Intellect, eternally knows the world before its manifestation, and brings it forth with perfect craftsmanship.

Chapter 6: The Spiritual and Bodily Principles and Their Ranks

Know, O righteous and compassionate brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that the first thing God invented and brought into existence was a simple spiritual substance possessing the highest degree of completion, perfection, and virtue.

Within it were the forms of all things.

This is called the **Active Intellect**.

From this substance proceeded another beneath it in rank, called the **Universal Soul**.

From Soul proceeded another substance called **Prime Matter**.

Prime Matter received magnitude—length, breadth, and depth—and thereby became Absolute Body, or Second Matter.

Body then received the spherical form, which the authors regard as the noblest bodily shape.

From this came the world of the celestial spheres and planets.

The celestial spheres are arranged one within another.

At the lowest celestial level is the sphere of the Moon; above it are Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars, and the encompassing outermost sphere.

Beneath the lunar sphere are the four elements: fire, air, water, and earth.

Earth occupies the centre and is the densest bodily substance.

When these spheres had been arranged according to divine wisdom and began revolving, the four elements became mixed under the influence of the changing seasons, heat and cold, and celestial motions.

The subtle mixed with the dense, light with heavy, hot with cold, and moist with dry.

Over time there arose the three genera of generated beings: **minerals, plants, and animals**.

Minerals arise chiefly within the Earth, mountains, and seas from vapours, exhalations, and moistures.

Plants arise upon the surface of the Earth, and the watery quality predominates within them.

Animals possess sensation and locomotion, and the airy quality predominates within them.

Minerals are nobler in composition than the elements, plants nobler than minerals, animals nobler than plants, and the human being nobler in composition than the other animals.

The fiery quality is said to predominate more strongly in the human constitution.

All the meanings of the beings that preceded the human being are gathered within him.

He consists of a dense bodily body and a simple spiritual soul.

For this reason the sages called the human being **a small world** and the world **a great human being**.

Whoever truly knows himself—his bodily composition, the subtle arrangement of his form, the powers of the soul operating through him, and the crafts manifested through those powers—acquires a model through which he may reason concerning both sensible and intelligible realities.

Therefore, one who seeks knowledge of the realities of existing things should begin by knowing himself.

It is unseemly to claim knowledge of the realities of all things while remaining ignorant of one's own soul.

Chapter 7: The Two Powers of the Universal Soul

Know, O righteous and compassionate brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that the Universal Soul is a spiritual power proceeding from Intellect by permission of the Creator.

It possesses two principal powers that permeate all bodies from the outermost sphere down to the centre of the Earth, just as sunlight permeates the air.

One power is **knowing** and the other **active**.

Through its active power, Soul completes bodies by impressing upon them forms, shapes, configurations, adornment, beauty, and colours.

Through its knowing power, it perfects itself by bringing its virtues from potentiality into actuality.

These virtues include true sciences, beautiful character, sound opinions, righteous works, perfected crafts, and well-ordered occupations.

The degree to which these virtues appear within particular beings depends upon the receptivity and purity of their substances.

Chapter 8: The Soul Does Not Perish

Know that the substance of Soul does not perish, its powers are not annihilated, and its actions do not come to an end.

Its support comes continually from Intellect.

The divine support of Intellect is likewise unceasing.

The Creator's virtues do not perish, His gifts are not exhausted, and His effusion is without end.

He is the source of all goodness, the origin of blessing, the treasury of generosity, and the cause of every existent.

To Him belong praise, thanksgiving, and glorification.

Chapter 9: Particular Souls in the Celestial Spheres

Know that the Universal Soul possesses a rank above the encompassing celestial sphere.

Its powers permeate the whole of the celestial world, governing its individual bodies and manifesting their actions.

Within every celestial body there is a particular power assigned to it.

The power governing Saturn is called the **soul of Saturn**.

The power governing Jupiter is called the **soul of Jupiter**, and the same principle applies to all the planets and celestial bodies.

These particular spiritual powers are what the epistle identifies with the beings symbolised in the divine scriptures as **angels, the Highest Assembly, and the hosts of God**, who:

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

The philosophers likewise speak of particular souls and spiritual beings entrusted with preserving the cosmos and governing creatures through the motions of the celestial spheres, the courses of the stars, the succession of ages, changes in time, the regulation of the elements, and the nurture of plants and animals.

Chapter 10: The Soul of the World Beneath the Moon

Know that the Universal Soul also possesses a particular power permeating all bodies beneath the sphere of the Moon.

This power governs them, acts through them, and manifests its activities from them.

Philosophers and physicians call it **the Nature of Generation and Corruption**.

Religious law calls it an angel among the angels.

It is one soul with many powers diffused throughout the divisions of animals, plants, minerals, and the four elements, from the sphere of the Moon down to the centre of the Earth.

Every genus, species, and individual among these beings possesses a particular power of this universal soul appointed to govern it and manifest its proper actions.

That power is called the **particular soul** of that individual.

Chapter 11: The First Natural Powers in the Four Elements

The first powers of this Soul operating within fire, air, water, and earth are heat, cold, moisture, and dryness.

The first actions of these powers include motion and rest, heating, dissolving, freezing, evaporation, condensation, mixing, blending, composition, formation, shaping, colouring, and similar natural operations.

All these occur through the action of these powers within the elements, assisted by the celestial powers according to the cosmology of the epistle.

The heating of the element of fire is associated with the power of the Sun.

The stability of earth is associated with Saturn.

The flowing and dissolution of water is associated with Jupiter.

The subtilisation of air is associated with Mars.

The condensation of moist vapour is associated with Venus.

The mixing of dry and moist vapours is associated with Mercury.

The supply of moisture to generated beings is associated with the Moon.

Chapter 12: The Formation of Minerals

Know, O brother, that the first activity of these elemental powers in the generation of minerals is, according to the mineralogical theory of the epistle, the production of **mercury and sulphur**.

Moistures trapped within the Earth and vapours confined in subterranean cavities are heated during summer and by the heat of mineral regions.

They become subtle, rise upward, and gather upon the roofs of caves and cavities.

When winter cold follows, they thicken, condense, and drip downward again.

They mix with the earth and remain there over long periods while subterranean heat continually cooks, matures, and purifies them.

The watery moisture, mixed with earthy particles and gradually made heavy and dense, becomes mercury.

Earthy particles mixed with oily moisture and matured by heat become sulphur.

When mercury and sulphur later combine in differing proportions and under different conditions, the various mineral substances arise.

If the mercury is pure, the sulphur clean, their proportions balanced, and subterranean heat moderate and uninterrupted, the mixture eventually produces pure gold.

If cold intervenes before full maturation, silver results.

If excessive heat and dryness intervene, copper results.

Other imbalances in the amounts of mercury and sulphur or in heat and cold are said to produce tin, iron, lead, and the other mineral substances.

This is the mineral theory presented by the epistle.

Chapter 13: The Seven Powers of the Vegetative Soul and the Stages of Human Development

Know, O righteous and compassionate brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that the Creator has supported the vegetative soul with seven active powers: the attractive, retentive, digestive, expulsive, nutritive, formative, and growth-producing powers.

Each performs an activity different from the others.

The first activity of the vegetative soul in plants is the attraction of subtle materials from the four elements.

Through their roots, plants draw moisture from the soil.

The retentive power holds this material so that it does not flow away.

The digestive power matures and transforms it.

The expulsive power distributes it to the various regions of the plant.

The nutritive power assimilates it to the organs.

The growth-producing power increases them in length, breadth, and depth.

The formative power produces their particular shapes, colours, flowers, fruits, and seeds.

The process occurs gradually.

Material first nourishes the roots, then rises through trunks and branches, then becomes leaves, blossoms, and flowers, and finally is refined into the substance of seeds and fruit.

The denser parts become husks, shells, and stones, while the subtler portions become the pulp, oil, sweetness, colour, flavour, and fragrance.

When an animal eats plant material, the same general powers operate upon it within the animal body.

Food is digested in the stomach, refined in the intestines, carried toward the liver, transformed into the humours, distributed through the vessels, and assimilated into the organs.

From the most refined bodily material, according to the physiology of the epistle, semen is produced.

When it is transferred into the womb, the same natural powers govern the formation of the human body through successive stages.

The details of gestation have already been explained in the Epistle on the Fall of the Sperm-Drop.

Once the appointed period in the womb is complete, the sensitive animal power transfers the infant into the spaciousness of this world and begins a new phase of governance.

This continues until approximately four years of age.

Thereafter the articulate rational faculty begins its activity through naming sensible things.

A further stage continues until around fifteen years of age, when the discriminating rational power becomes established.

By approximately thirty years, the rational faculty capable of more complete discrimination has matured.

By forty, the insightful faculty of wisdom and understanding of intelligibles may become established.

The epistle then speaks of an angelic supporting power and a lawgiving or religious faculty directing the soul toward its return during the later stages of life.

If the soul reaches completion before separation from the body, a power of ascent carries it toward the Highest Assembly.

If it remains incomplete, the authors describe it as returning toward the lowest ranks and beginning anew the process of governance.

They cite:

“We certainly created the human being in the finest constitution; then We returned him to the lowest of the low, except those who believe and perform righteous deeds.”

And:

“As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it.”

And:

“Then you shall become old, while some of you die earlier and some are returned to the most decrepit age so that after having known, they know nothing.”

The authors then raise a question.

Were all things initially created in a state of complete perfection and afterward reduced and degraded?

Or were they created in extreme deficiency and then gradually increased, completed, and perfected?

Or are some things of the first kind and others of the second?

Chapter 14: The Divine Effusion and the Complete Hierarchy of Existence

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that God Most High is complete in existence, perfect in virtue, knowing all things before they come into being, and able to bring them into existence whenever He wills.

It would not accord with wisdom for those virtues to remain confined within Him without generosity or effusion.

Thus, by the necessity of divine wisdom, goodness and virtue pour forth from Him as light and radiance pour forth from the Sun.

This effusion is continuous and unbroken.

The first of it is called the **Active Intellect**.

It is a simple spiritual substance, pure light, possessing the highest completion, perfection, and virtue.

Within it are the forms of all things, just as the forms of objects of knowledge exist within the thought of a knower.

From the Active Intellect proceeds another effusion beneath it in rank, called the **Passive Intellect**, which the epistle identifies with the Universal Soul.

It is a simple spiritual substance receptive to forms and virtues from the Active Intellect according to order and proportion, just as a student receives instruction from a teacher.

From Soul proceeds another effusion beneath it called **Prime Matter**.

Prime Matter is a simple spiritual substance receptive to forms and shapes from Soul gradually through time.

The first form it receives is length, breadth, and depth, and through this it becomes absolute body, or Second Matter.

At this point the production of new independent substances ceases, because body stands below the rank of spiritual substances and is more remote from the First Cause.

Yet the divine effusion continues from the Creator to Intellect and from Intellect to Soul.

Soul therefore turns toward Body and impresses upon it forms, shapes, colours, beauties, and perfections according to the capacity and purity of bodily matter.

The first form Soul gives to Body is the spherical form, which the authors regard as the noblest of bodily shapes.

It then moves the spheres in circular motion, which they regard as the noblest form of motion.

The spheres are arranged one within another from the outermost encompassing sphere down to the centre of the Earth.

The whole cosmos thereby becomes one ordered world.

Earth is the densest and darkest body because of its distance from the encompassing sphere.

The encompassing sphere is the most subtle and luminous bodily reality because of its proximity to Prime Matter.

Prime Matter itself ranks below Intellect and Soul because it is remote from the Creator.

It is simple, spiritual, and intelligible but possesses neither knowledge nor activity in itself.

It merely receives the effects of Soul successively through time.

Soul is a simple spiritual substance knowing in potentiality and active by nature.

It receives the virtues of Intellect without temporal delay and acts upon Matter through movement and time.

Intellect is a simple spiritual substance still nobler than Soul.

It receives divine support, knows in actuality, and supports Soul without time.

The Creator, however, is the Originator of them all.

The Originator does not resemble what He originates.

The Creator does not resemble what He creates.

The Agent does not resemble the effect in any respect.

Blessed is God, Lord of the worlds and Most Merciful of the merciful.

Therefore awaken, O brother, from the sleep of heedlessness and the slumber of ignorance before the Trumpet is blown and you say:

“Alas for me, for what I neglected!”

Strive to be among the blessed, the Companions of the Right, rather than among the wretched, the Companions of the Left.

Hold fast to the firm rope of God and avoid the accursed devil.

Perhaps you may become one of those upon whom God has bestowed favour and not one of those who have incurred wrath or gone astray.

May God grant you, O righteous and compassionate brother, and all our brothers right guidance.

Indeed, He is compassionate toward His servants.

Here ends the Epistle on the Principles of Intellectual Existents According to the Pythagoreans.

Epistle 33

On the Intellectual Principles According to the Brethren of Purity

The Second Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Chapter 1: Why Philosophers Differ Concerning the Principles of Existing Things

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that philosophers, scholars, and sages have investigated the principles of existing things and the roots from which generated beings arise.

Different groups perceived different aspects of the matter.

The dualists became occupied with things occurring in pairs. Christians devoted attention to triads. Natural philosophers emphasised groups of four. Other groups concerned themselves with fives, sixes, sevens, or eights, while some Indian thinkers devoted particular attention to groups of nine.

Each group elaborated upon the numerical patterns it perceived and often neglected the others.

The Pythagorean sages, however, sought to give every numerical rank its proper due.

They therefore said:

Existing things correspond to the nature of number.

This is also the position adopted by our brethren—may God strengthen them—for they seek to place things in their proper places and arrange their true ranks according to the natural order and divine system.

Chapter 2: The Meaning of the Pythagorean Saying that Existing Things Correspond to Number

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that Pythagoras was a wise monotheist who devoted great attention to number: how it arises, its properties, ranks, and order.

He said that in understanding number and its emergence from the One preceding Two lies an indication of the unity of God—mighty and exalted is He.

Likewise, in understanding the properties, sequence, and arrangement of numbers lies an indication of the created beings of God and the order in which He has arranged them.

The science of number is rooted naturally in the soul.

It requires only modest reflection and recollection before its principles become evident.

Chapter 3: The Ranks of Existents Correspond to the Sequence of Numbers

Know, O brother, that when God—exalted is His praise—originated existing things and invented created beings, He arranged and ordered them in existence according to a sequence resembling the ranks of numbers proceeding from unity.

Their multiplicity thereby indicates His unity, while their arrangement and order indicate the perfection of His wisdom.

Their relation to their Creator resembles the relation of numbers to the One preceding Two, which is their root, principle, and source.

Because the Creator is truly One in every respect, the first created effect could not itself be one in exactly the same absolute sense.

It therefore possesses multiplicity in relation to the pure unity preceding it.

For this reason many sages expressed the first principles through pairs.

Some spoke of matter and form; others of light and darkness, substance and accident, good and evil, affirmation and negation, positive and negative, spiritual and bodily, tablet and pen, effusion and intellect, love and domination, motion and rest, existence and nonexistence, soul and spirit, generation and corruption, this world and the hereafter, cause and effect, beginning and return, contraction and expansion.

Likewise, many natural conditions exist in opposing pairs: moving and still, apparent and hidden, high and low, outer and inner, subtle and dense, hot and cold, moist and dry, increase and deficiency, inert and growing, speaking and silent, male and female.

The conditions of animals and plants likewise include life and death, sleep and waking, illness and health, pain and pleasure, hardship and ease, joy and sorrow, corruption and soundness, harm and benefit, good and evil, happiness and misfortune, advance and retreat.

Religious and legal matters also occur in oppositions: command and prohibition, promise and warning, encouragement and deterrence, obedience and disobedience, praise and blame, punishment and reward, lawful and unlawful, correctness and error, beautiful and ugly, truth and falsehood.

Yet divine wisdom did not restrict all created things to pairs.

Some exist in groups of three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and still greater numbers.

The universal existents themselves, however, are said to possess **nine principal ranks**.

These are: the Creator, Intellect, Soul, Matter, Nature, Body, the celestial sphere, the elements, and generated beings.

Chapter 4: The Nine Universal Ranks of Existence

Know that the Creator—exalted is His praise—is the first of existents, just as One precedes all numbers.

As numbers arise from unity, so existing things receive existence from the Creator.

As Two is the first number following One, so **Intellect** is the first existent originated by the Creator.

The epistle distinguishes within intellect what is innate and what is acquired, and treats this duality as an indication of its rank.

As Three follows Two, so **Soul** follows Intellect.

The soul appears in three broad forms: vegetative, animal, and rational.

As Four follows Three, so **Matter** follows Soul.

Matter is spoken of in four ways: the matter of crafts, natural matter, universal matter, and Prime Matter.

As Five follows Four, so **Nature** follows Matter.

The authors distinguish one celestial nature together with four elemental natures beneath it.

As Six follows Five, so **Body** follows Nature, and body possesses six directions.

As Seven follows Six, so the **celestial sphere** follows Body and is associated with the seven governing planets.

As Eight follows Seven, so the **elements** follow the celestial sphere and possess eight compounded qualities: earth is cold and dry, water cold and moist, air hot and moist, and fire hot and dry.

As Nine follows Eight and completes the sequence of the units, so the **generated beings** form the final rank of universal existents.

These generated beings comprise three principal genera, each subdivided into three: minerals, plants, and animals.

The authors also enumerate many triads.

Matter, form, and the composite; substance, accident, and the compound formed from them; spiritual, bodily, and the union of the two; line, surface, and body; length, breadth, and depth; past, present, and future; motion from the centre, toward the centre, and around the centre; complete, excessive, and deficient numbers; possible, necessary, and impossible; minerals, plants, and animals.

Likewise, they enumerate groups of four: fire, air, water, and earth; heat, cold, moisture, and dryness; the four humours; the four principal winds; east, west, north, and south; the four seasons; and four broad stages of human life.

Their general principle is that for every numerical structure there are classes of existents reflecting it.

Chapter 5: Numerical Patterns Throughout the Cosmos

The authors then extend the comparison to higher numbers.

They identify numerous groups of six in astronomy and natural philosophy.

The twelve zodiacal signs may be divided into six male and six female, six diurnal and six nocturnal, six northern and six southern, six of straight ascension and six of oblique ascension.

The planets also possess various sixfold conditions according to their positions and relations.

Bodily existence likewise has six spatial directions.

The number Six is treated with special respect because, in ancient arithmetic, it is the first **perfect number**, its proper divisors adding exactly to itself.

Groups of seven, eight, and nine are also found throughout created things.

The authors say they need not repeat the sevenfold arrangements at length because other scholars had already written extensively concerning them.

Likewise, eightfold structures have been treated in the Epistle on Music.

Ninefold structures had attracted particular attention among certain Indian scholars.

The authors then discuss groups of five.

Among the heavens are the five planets that undergo retrogradation and direct motion—Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury—unlike the Sun and Moon in the astronomical system used by the epistle.

There are five broad natural bodies if the celestial body is counted together with fire, air, water, and earth.

The epistle gives five broad classes of animal locomotion and form, including human beings, birds, swimming creatures, walking animals, and creeping creatures.

There are the five senses: hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch.

Plants are described through five principal parts: root, branches or veins, leaves, flowers, and fruit.

The authors also connect fivefold structures with geometry, music, prophetic history, the days of the week bearing numerical names, and religious observances.

Such numerical patterns, they argue, point toward an underlying order in creation rather than accidental arrangement.

They further connect these patterns symbolically with angelic ranks and scriptural indications.

The ultimate point is to clarify the saying of the Pythagoreans that existing things correspond to the nature of number.

Chapter 6: The Structure of the World and Its Spherical Form

Know, O brother, that when God Most High originated existing things and arranged created beings, He gathered them within a single encompassing celestial sphere surrounding them from every direction.

The world is therefore ordered as a unified whole.

The encompassing sphere is spherical, hollow, and circular.

The remaining celestial spheres are contained within it, one surrounding another, like the layers of an onion or the nested shells of an egg.

The epistle describes **eleven principal spheres or regions**, with the Sun occupying a middle position.

Above the Sun are the spheres of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars, and the outermost encompassing sphere.

Below it are Venus, Mercury, the Moon, the sphere of air, and finally the Earth at the centre.

Earth itself is not hollow as the celestial spheres are, though it contains many caverns, caves, and voids.

The stars are also described as spherical solid bodies.

Why did divine wisdom choose the spherical form?

Because, according to the authors, the sphere is the most excellent of bodily shapes.

It contains the greatest volume relative to its boundary, moves most readily, has equal radii from its centre, can rotate around its centre without changing place, and encounters other bodies at minimal points of contact.

The circular motion of the celestial spheres and planets likewise reflects the excellence of this form.

The epistle describes the celestial system according to the astronomy of its period: each of the seven planets moves through smaller circles and deferents, while the encompassing sphere revolves around the Earth once in twenty-four hours.

If the Earth, celestial spheres, and planets were not spherical, the authors argue, such regular circular movement could not be maintained.

Circularity also appears throughout the lower world.

The Earth together with its seas and mountains forms one globe surrounded by air.

River waters flow toward the seas, become mixed with them, rise again as vapour, form clouds, fall as rain upon mountains and plains, and return through rivers to the sea.

This cycle resembles a revolving wheel.

Plants, animals, and minerals likewise arise from the elements, develop, reach completion, decay, and return again to the material from which new generated beings arise.

The same circular tendency appears in fruits, seeds, leaves, bodily openings, vessels, tools, wheels, wells, pots, bowls, rings, crowns, turbans, and numerous human artefacts.

The prevalence of circular form is therefore taken as another sign of the harmony and wisdom of the cosmic order.

Here ends the Epistle on the Intellectual Principles.

It is followed by the Epistle on the Meaning of the Philosophers' Saying that the World Is a Great Human Being.

Epistle 34

On the Meaning of the Philosophers' Saying that the World Is a Great Human Being

The Third Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Chapter 1: Why the World Is Called a Great Human Being

Know, O righteous and compassionate brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed our explanation of the ranks of the intellectual principles according to the view of the Brethren of Purity.

There we explained at length that existence precedes persistence, persistence precedes completion, and completion precedes perfection.

We now wish in this epistle to explain the meaning of the philosophers' saying that **the world is a great human being**.

Know that when the philosophers say that the world is a great human being and that the human being is a small world, their statement requires explanation so that its true meaning may become clear.

The world possesses a **body and a soul**.

By its body they mean the encompassing celestial sphere together with everything contained within it among substances and accidents.

The relation of the entire body of the world, with all its simple, composite, and generated parts, resembles the body of a single human being or animal with all the differently shaped organs composing it.

The relation of the world's soul, together with all the powers diffused throughout its body and governing the genera, species, and individuals of existing things, resembles the relation of the soul of a single human being or animal whose powers permeate every organ and joint of the body and govern each organ and each sensory faculty.

The text cites:

"Your creation and your resurrection are only as that of a single soul."

When we say **Universal Body**, we mean the body of the whole world.

When we say **Universal Soul**, we mean the soul of the whole world.

When we say **Universal Intellect**, we mean the divine power supporting and strengthening the Universal Soul.

When we say **Universal Nature**, we mean the power of the Universal Soul permeating all bodies, moving them, governing them, and manifesting its actions through and from them.

When we say **matter**, we mean the substance which, through length, breadth, and depth, becomes absolute body.

When we speak of **simple bodies**, we mean the celestial spheres, stars, and the four elements: fire, air, water, and earth.

When we speak of **simple souls**, we mean the powers of the Universal Soul governing these bodies and diffused throughout them.

In our epistles we also call these powers **spiritual angels**.

When we speak of **generated bodies**, we mean the various animals, plants, and minerals.

When we speak of **animal, vegetative, and mineral souls**, we mean the powers of the simple souls governing these generated bodies, permeating them and manifesting actions through them.

When we speak of **particular bodies**, we mean individual animals, plants, minerals, and the various artefacts produced through human and animal activity.

When we speak of **particular souls**, we mean those particular psychic powers diffused throughout individual bodies beneath the sphere of the Moon, each governing its own individual organism.

Thus the governance of the entire world, with all the bodies contained within it and all the differences of form, shape, and accident among them, resembles the organization of a single human body.

And the diffusion of the powers of the World Soul throughout all the parts of the cosmos resembles the diffusion of the powers of one human soul throughout all the organs and joints of a single body.

Chapter 2: Analogies for the Order of the Great World

Know, O righteous and compassionate brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that the world which we have called a great human being contains within its parts and processes many examples through which the organization of the smaller human world may be understood.

We shall mention some of these so that the matter may become easier for students.

The beings of the world may first be compared with a **tree**.

A tree has roots, a trunk, branches, smaller shoots, leaves, blossoms, and fruit.

In the same way, existing things arise from principles, those principles from still prior principles, until they ultimately return to a single root encompassing them all.

From another perspective, the world resembles the logical structure of **genus and species**.

There is a highest genus beneath which stand subordinate genera; beneath them stand species; beneath those species stand individual beings differing in form, shape, condition, and accident.

Their full number is known only to God.

From another perspective, the genera, species, and individuals of beings resemble a great tribe containing peoples, clans, branches, households, and related families.

From another perspective, the whole world resembles **one religious law** containing many obligations; those obligations contain various practices; those practices contain differing rulings; those rulings possess different boundaries and applications; yet all are gathered within one religion.

Its adherents may follow different schools, each school possessing different doctrines and each doctrine containing numerous statements.

From another perspective, the cosmic order resembles the workshop of a **single craftsman**.

Within the workshop are many tools and instruments of different forms.

The craftsman performs many kinds of actions through those instruments and produces artefacts differing in shape, form, and appearance.

Yet the power of the one craftsman permeates them all, and his governance extends over each according to its proper function.

So too the power of the Universal Soul permeates the spheres, stars, elements, minerals, plants, and animals and manifests different activities through each.

From another perspective, the corporeal beings of the world in relation to the Universal Soul resemble a **great house** containing rooms and storehouses.

Within those storehouses are vessels, instruments, furnishings, and possessions belonging to the master of the house.

There are also family members, servants, and attendants.

The master's governance extends through them all, each according to its proper place.

From another perspective, the world resembles a **great city** surrounded by walls.

Inside are districts, inns, streets, roads, marketplaces, houses, rooms, and storehouses filled with wealth, goods, furnishings, tools, and necessities.

All are ruled by one king.

The king has armies, subjects, servants, courtiers, officials, and followers.

His authority passes through the commanders of his army, the nobles of the city, and the leading inhabitants.

Their authority passes in turn through those beneath them until every level of the city is reached.

The king governs the city and its people through an ordered hierarchy, attending to the affairs of each, small and great, first and last.

Likewise, the governance of the Universal Soul extends through all parts of the world: celestial spheres, stars, elements, generated beings, composite things, and human artefacts.

Its authority also extends through different ranks of souls.

The Universal Soul resembles the highest genus.

The simple souls resemble species beneath it.

Generic souls stand beneath these, then specific souls, and finally individual particular souls.

They are arranged one beneath another like the orders of number.

The Universal Soul resembles unity.

The simple souls resemble units.

Generic souls resemble tens.

Specific souls resemble hundreds.

Particular individual souls resemble thousands.

Particular souls govern particular bodies.

Specific souls support particular ones, generic souls support specific ones, simple souls support generic ones, and the Universal Soul—the soul of the world—supports all simple souls.

The Universal Intellect supports the Universal Soul.

The Creator—exalted is His praise—supports the Universal Intellect.

He is the Originator and Governor of them all without mixture, bodily contact, or direct material involvement.

Blessed is God, the best of creators.

As a city contains men and women, old and young, adults and children, good and wicked, learned and ignorant, reformers and corrupters, and people differing in temperament, character, opinion, action, and habit, so the great world contains many souls of different conditions.

Some are knowing, good, and virtuous.

Some are knowing but evil and base.

Some are ignorant and evil.

Others are ignorant without being malicious.

The knowing, virtuous souls correspond to the classes of angels, righteous believers, and learned beings among jinn and humankind.

Knowing but wicked souls correspond to rebellious devils, sorcerers among the jinn, and tyrannical deceivers among human beings.

Ignorant and wicked souls correspond to predatory beasts and evil ignorant people.

Ignorant but harmless souls correspond to gentle animals such as sheep, pigeons, and others of their kind.

Chapter 3: Bodies as Prisons, Paths, and Stages for Souls

The bodies of some animals are **prisons and dungeons** for their souls.

Other bodies are like bridges or paths over which souls pass.

Others are like a barrier until the day of resurrection.

Still others are like the Heights upon which souls remain standing.

We have explained these meanings elsewhere.

Just as a city contains mosques, churches, synagogues, assemblies for scholars and religious people, gatherings, festivals, and acts of worship, so in the expanses of the celestial spheres and the vastness of the heavens there are, according to the epistle, assemblies of angels, glorifications, praises, and prayers.

God says:

“They glorify Him night and day and never grow weary.”

And:

“You will see the angels surrounding the Throne, glorifying their Lord with praise.”

As a city has prisons and dungeons guarded by officials, so the great world has for wicked souls Hell, fire, and an abyss guarded by severe and mighty angels.

The epistle identifies this symbolically with the **world of generation and corruption**.

Yet not every soul that enters the world of generation and corruption is imprisoned there.

Not everyone who enters a prison is necessarily a prisoner.

One may enter a prison in order to free those held within it, just as one may enter an enemy land in order to rescue captives.

The prophetic souls, according to the authors, entered the world of generation and corruption in order to rescue souls imprisoned by nature, submerged in the sea of matter, and held captive by bodily appetites.

Just as a prisoner who follows the person entering to release him may leave the prison and become free, so one who follows the prophets in their revealed laws, practices, and paths may escape the prison of nature and leave the world of generation and corruption.

The text then cites traditions concerning groups being brought forth from the Fire and connects this with the Qur'anic saying:

“There is none of you who will not come to it; this is with your Lord a decree determined. Then We shall save those who were God-conscious and leave the wrongdoers there on their knees.”

As cities possess gardens, open spaces, rivers, orchards, and places of pleasure, so the celestial world contains spaciousness, gardens, repose, fragrance, blessing, and divine satisfaction, as described in the Torah, Gospel, and Qur'an.

Understand these indications, O brother, and awaken from the sleep of heedlessness and the slumber of ignorance.

The text recalls the report that the souls of martyrs are in green birds moving through the gardens by day and resting beneath the Throne by night.

It connects this imagery with:

“Do not think those who are killed in the way of God to be dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, provided for, rejoicing in what God has given them of His bounty.”

The world is also compared with a city containing craftsmen and labourers who receive wages, merchants and sellers using weights and measures, litigants and disputes, judges and witnesses, and laws through which cases are decided.

As judges regularly sit to settle disputes, so the authors compare cosmic judgement with periodic presentations of particular souls before the Universal Soul.

They introduce here their own cosmological doctrine of long cycles and speak of a cycle of seven thousand years between great presentations.

The purpose of this imagery is to describe judgement as a cosmic act of order and proportion in which no soul is wronged even by the weight of a mustard seed.

The epistle compares the Day of Judgement with the day on which prisoners are brought out before an authority.

Some are declared innocent and released.

Some undergo punishment and are afterward released.

Others remain imprisoned until another judgement.

So, they say, souls are presented, records are opened, scribes appear, those deserving recompense receive their portion, and different souls rise or fall according to their condition.

God has made the structures and judgements of worldly life symbols by which the realities of resurrection may be understood.

Therefore:

“Take heed, O people of insight.”

The authors then explain why scripture speaks of **balances, weighing, counting, and measuring** on the Day of Reckoning.

Justice between human beings is ordinarily made evident through number, measure, weight, and proportion.

These are all forms of balance by which quantities are distinguished.

Thus the Qur'an says:

“We shall establish the balances of justice for the Day of Resurrection.”

The authors argue that the weighing of deeds need not mean that good and evil actions are material bodies placed upon an ordinary physical scale.

Many non-bodily qualities are measured through appropriate instruments.

Poetic metre is a balance for poetry, showing whether a verse is proportionate, excessive, or deficient.

Astronomical instruments measure time.

The measuring rod determines length and shortness, distance and nearness.

A ruler and compass distinguish straightness and curvature.

Weights distinguish heaviness, lightness, increase, and deficiency.

Thus good and evil actions may also possess a “balance” through which their proportions are known.

The authors conclude by saying that their virtuous brethren are among those concerned with this science of balance and invite the rest of their brethren toward it.

Here the principal recension states: “The epistle is complete.”

Manuscript Appendix

The following material is explicitly marked in this manuscript as an addition not found in other copies and possibly taken from earlier epistles.

Appendix Chapter 1: The Circular Structure of the Cosmos

Know, O righteous and compassionate brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that the whole world is one sphere divided into eleven layers.

Nine of these are hollow, transparent celestial spheres.

Their stars are also spherical, luminous bodies, and their motions are circular.

The encompassing sphere together with everything contained within it revolves around the Earth in one complete revolution every twenty-four hours according to the astronomy of the epistle.

Each planet likewise moves in its own sphere or circular path within a known period.

Whenever a revolution is completed, another begins again.

Beneath the sphere of the Moon are two broad spherical regions.

One comprises fire and air; the other comprises water and earth.

These regions are also spherical, and the end of one is connected with the beginning of another.

The Earth together with all its mountains and seas forms a single sphere.

Mountain ranges and rivers upon the Earth's surface may be understood as portions of arcs upon the circumference of that sphere, while seas resemble sections of a spherical surface.

Appendix Chapter 2: Circularity in Generated Beings

When generated beings are examined carefully, the authors say, many of their forms and processes likewise tend toward circularity.

Many trees, fruits, seeds, blossoms, and leaves possess rounded forms.

Many human artefacts likewise incline toward circles or rounded shapes.

The conditions of generated beings also move in cycles.

Winter passes into spring, spring into summer, summer into autumn, and autumn again into winter.

Night and day revolve around the globe.

The waters of rivers and seas move in a cycle like a turning wheel.

Vapours rise from seas and rivers, become clouds, are driven by winds toward mountains and wilderness, fall as rain, gather into streams and rivers, and return again to the sea.

The same occurs with plants.

Plants arise from the elements and eventually return to them.

They draw subtle material from earth, water, air, and heat.

Their leaves and fruit are eaten by animals, transformed into flesh, blood, and waste, and finally returned to the Earth, where they again become nourishment for plants.

Animal bodies likewise decay and return to the soil.

Plants arise from that soil, and animals are nourished again through plants.

Thus the process resembles a revolving wheel.

Human life also forms such a cycle.

The human being begins as a sperm-drop, grows, becomes complete, reaches maturity, and eventually produces another sperm-drop through which another human body begins.

He begins weak, grows strong, reaches full maturity, and then declines again into weakness and old age.

The text invokes the Qur'anic descriptions of human development from earth, sperm, clot, flesh, bones, and bodily form, followed by childhood, maturity, old age, and death.

Appendix Chapter 3: The Continuous Ranks of Minerals, Plants, Animals, Humans, and Angels

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that the beings beneath the sphere of the Moon likewise possess an ordered hierarchy in existence and persistence.

Their lower and higher limits are connected with one another, much as the ranks of numbers and celestial spheres are linked.

The minerals are connected at their lower end with earth and water and at their upper end with plants.

Plants are connected at their upper end with animals.

Animals are connected at their upper end with humanity.

Humanity is connected at its highest end with the angelic rank.

The angels themselves possess ranks and stations whose limits likewise connect one with another.

Among minerals, gypsum or similar earthy substances stand near ordinary soil, while salt stands near water.

At the opposite boundary, truffles, mushrooms, and similar growths occupy an intermediate position between mineral and plant.

They arise in the earth like minerals but grow from moist ground during the spring like plants.

Among plants, the lowest rank nearest the mineral world is represented by the green covering that appears upon moist earth, rocks, and stones.

It resembles little more than dust made green by rain and night moisture.

Its proximity to truffles and similar growths illustrates the transition from the mineral to the vegetative rank.

Appendix Chapter 4: The Palm Tree and Other Plants Approaching Animal Life

The palm tree represents the highest rank of plant life nearest the animal kingdom.

The authors call it an **animal-like plant** because some of its conditions differ from ordinary vegetation.

Male and female palms are distinct individuals, and fertilisation passes from the male to the female in a manner resembling generation among animals.

If the head of a palm is cut off, the tree dries and dies, a condition that the authors compare with animals.

Thus its body remains plant-like while some of its activities resemble those of an animal soul.

The epistle also mentions a parasitic plant that wraps itself around other plants and draws nourishment from them rather than being firmly rooted in the earth.

Its activity resembles an animal feeding upon vegetation.

These examples are used to show that the highest plant forms approach the lowest animal forms.

Appendix Chapter 5: The Lowest Animal and the Gradual Rise Toward Humanity

Just as the lowest plants connect with minerals, the lowest animals connect with the highest plants.

The authors identify a simple shell-dwelling creature possessing only the sense of touch as among the lowest animals.

It lives within a tube or shell fixed to coastal rocks or riverbanks.

It extends part of itself outward in search of nourishment.

When it encounters moisture or softness it moves toward it, but when it encounters roughness or hardness it withdraws into its enclosure.

It possesses neither hearing, sight, smell, nor taste according to the text, but only touch.

Other simple creatures living in mud and deep water are treated similarly.

Divine wisdom, the authors argue, gives each creature only the organs needed to obtain benefit and repel harm.

There would be no wisdom in burdening an animal with organs it did not require.

The authors even attribute to plants a primitive analogue of touch, pointing to roots growing toward moisture and away from dry rock and shoots bending toward open space or light.

Yet plants do not experience pain in the same way animals do, because they possess no means of fleeing or defending themselves.

Animal sensation is therefore linked with locomotion and the ability to avoid injury.

At the upper end of animal existence, many different species approach humanity from different directions.

No single animal gathers all the traits nearest to humanity.

The ape resembles the human bodily form and imitates human actions.

The horse possesses noble character, discipline, courage, endurance, and loyalty.

The elephant shows intelligence and can understand commands and prohibitions.

Parrots, nightingales, and other birds approach human capacities through varied sounds and melodies.

Bees display remarkable craftsmanship and organisation.

Every domesticated animal that lives closely with human beings possesses, according to the authors, some quality bringing its soul nearer to the human rank.

Appendix Chapter 6: The Lowest Rank of Humanity

Know, O brother, that the lowest rank of humanity nearest the animal kingdom consists of those who know only sensible things and recognise no good beyond bodily goods.

They seek nothing except the welfare of their bodies.

They desire only this world and wish to remain in it forever even though they know that this is impossible.

They desire only eating and drinking like beasts.

They compete in sexual pleasure like pigs and donkeys.

They devote themselves to accumulating possessions beyond what they need, like ants gathering stores.

They hide away things from which they receive no benefit, like certain birds that collect useless objects.

They know no ornament beyond coloured clothing, like peacocks.

They quarrel over worldly goods like dogs fighting over carrion.

Their bodily form may be human, but their psychic actions remain animal or vegetative.

The human rank becomes truly human only as the soul rises beyond exclusive concern for sensible and bodily things toward knowledge, virtue, intellect, and spiritual realities.

Appendix Chapter 7: Final Exhortation

Know, O brother, what you have learned, and act according to what has been entrusted to you.

May God protect you, O righteous and compassionate brother, from the impulses of the accursed devil.

May He grant you, us, and all our brothers success through His generosity.

Here ends the Epistle on the Meaning of the Philosophers' Saying that the World Is a Great Human Being.

It is followed by the Epistle on Intellect and the Intelligible.

Epistle 35

On Intellect and the Intelligible

The Fourth Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Introduction: Intellect, Intelligibles, and the Ways of Knowing

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed our explanation of the philosophers' saying that the world is a great human being, and we have presented the examples, indications, and analogies appropriate to that subject.

We have also already discussed the intellectual principles and explained how existing things are originated and creatures brought into being.

Likewise, in the Epistle on the Senses and the Sensible, we explained that sensible things are bodily accidents existing within corporeal matter, and that the soul apprehends them through its sensitive power by means of bodily sensory organs.

Sensation occurs when the temperament of a sensory organ is altered through direct contact with its sensible object, while perception is the sensitive power's awareness of that alteration.

In this epistle, entitled **On Intellect and the Intelligible**, we wish to explain that intelligible things are likewise forms—but spiritual forms.

The soul beholds them within itself and contemplates them within its own substance after first encountering their counterparts in matter through the senses, provided that it awakens from the sleep of heedlessness and the slumber of ignorance, looks with the eye of insight toward the light of Intellect, becomes illuminated by its radiance, and adorns itself with its splendour.

Know, O brother, that the term **intellect** is used in two meanings.

The first is that intended by philosophers when they speak of the first existent originated by the Creator—mighty and exalted is He. This Intellect is a simple spiritual substance encompassing all things through a spiritual mode of comprehension.

The second is what ordinary people mean when they speak of a power belonging to the human soul whose activities are thinking, deliberation, speech, discrimination, craftsmanship, and similar actions.

It is this second meaning that we principally wish to discuss here.

We shall explain its divisions, describe its actions, and show how it apprehends the forms of objects of knowledge within its own essence and substance.

Because the human intellect is one power among the powers of the human soul, while the human soul itself is a power of the Universal Soul, and the Universal Soul is an effusion from the Universal Intellect, which is the first effusion proceeding from the Creator, we must first explain what is meant by existence, nonexistence, and the ways through which things are known.

The word **existent** is connected with the act of finding or apprehending.

Every human being who "finds" something comes to know it through one of three paths: through one of the sensory powers; through one of the rational powers such as thought, deliberation, discrimination, understanding, sound intuition, and clarity of mind; or through necessary demonstration and inferential proof.

Human beings possess no other ordinary path toward objects of knowledge beyond these three.

Nonexistence, correspondingly, may mean that something is absent from sensory apprehension, absent from intellectual conception, or incapable of being established by demonstration.

The knowledge of the Creator Most High, however, is not acquired through any of these three methods.

It is higher and nobler than all of them.

God is not described as one who merely "finds" existing things, but as the One who brings them into existence, originates them, invents them, preserves them, completes them, and perfects them.

Human knowledge of God comes through two broad paths.

One is general and natural.

All people—learned and ignorant, righteous and wicked, believer and unbeliever—turn toward God in times of severe distress, call upon Him, and seek His aid.

Even animals, the text says, raise their heads toward heaven during years of drought as though seeking rain.

This universal disposition indicates an innate recognition of divine existence.

The second path is particular and belongs to those who describe God through purification, transcendence, unity, and demonstration.

This is especially associated with prophets, saints, sages, virtuous people, and the righteous.

Know further that all existing things brought into existence by the Creator fall under categories such as substance and accident, matter and form, cause and effect, bodily and spiritual, simple and composite, or combinations of these.

Because these expressions are subtle and have caused many scholars to become confused, we must clarify them.

All existing things are forms and determinate realities poured forth by the Creator upon Intellect, which was the first existent He brought into being.

Intellect is a simple spiritual substance containing the forms of all existing things without those forms becoming crowded or confused within it, just as the images of things to be manufactured may exist within the mind of a craftsman before being brought into matter.

Intellect pours these forms upon the Universal Soul all at once and without time, like the Sun pouring light upon air.

Soul receives these forms and in turn pours them upon Matter gradually through time, just as the Moon receives light from the Sun and transmits it according to different conditions, or as a student receives instruction from a teacher little by little.

All forms of beings therefore follow one another in origination and persistence from the First Cause, the Creator, just as even and odd numbers proceed in ordered succession from the One preceding Two.

Names such as matter, substance, accident, simple, composite, spiritual, bodily, cause, and effect do not necessarily designate completely different realities in every case.

They often indicate different relations of one form to another, just as the same number may be called half, double, a third, or a quarter according to the number with which it is compared.

Consider a shirt.

The shirt is a bodily artefact apprehended through the senses.

Its form is imposed upon cloth, while cloth serves as its matter.

The cloth itself is a form imposed upon thread, and thread is its matter.

Thread is a form in cotton, and cotton is its matter.

Cotton is a form arising in plant substance.

Plant substance is itself a form within the natural elements—fire, air, water, and earth.

Each of those elements is in turn a form within Absolute Body.

Absolute Body is a form impressed upon Prime Matter.

Prime Matter is a spiritual form proceeding from Universal Soul.

Universal Soul is a spiritual form proceeding from Universal Intellect.

Universal Intellect is the first existent brought into being by the Creator.

Thus all existing things are forms connected in a chain of origination and persistence until they terminate in the First Originator, God—mighty and exalted is He.

A form may be essential and constitutive for one thing while accidental and completing for another.

The stitching of cloth, for example, is essential to the shirt, because without it the shirt ceases to exist as a shirt.

But that same stitching is accidental in relation to the cloth, because the cloth remains even if the stitching is removed.

Likewise weaving is essential to cloth but accidental to thread.

Twisting is essential to thread but accidental to cotton.

The same pattern continues downward through plant, elemental, bodily, material, psychic, and intellectual levels.

The image is analogous to number.

Ten ceases to be ten when one unit is removed, yet Nine remains.

Nine ceases to be Nine when another unit is removed, while Eight remains.

This continues until Two, the first number, is reached.

If one is removed from Two, Two ceases to exist as Two.

But the One preceding Two cannot be diminished, because its form belongs to itself and it is the root and origin of number.

Thus all things begin from God and return to Him, just as number proceeds from unity and resolves back toward unity.

Chapter 1: Bodily and Spiritual Existents

Know, O brother, that all existing things are of two kinds: **bodily and spiritual**.

Bodily existents are apprehended by the senses.

Spiritual existents are apprehended by the intellect and conceived through thought.

Bodily things fall into three broad classes: celestial bodies, the natural elements, and generated beings.

Spiritual existents likewise fall into three broad classes.

The first is **Prime Matter**, a simple intelligible substance that receives all forms.

The second is **Soul**, a simple substance that is knowing and active.

The third is **Intellect**, a simple substance apprehending the realities of things.

The Creator—mighty and exalted is He—is described as neither bodily nor spiritual.

He is the Cause of both.

Just as unity itself is neither even nor odd but is the cause from which even and odd numbers arise, so God transcends the classes of things He originates.

Every bodily existent possesses four causes: an efficient cause, a material cause, a formal cause, and a final cause.

Consider a bed.

Its efficient cause is the carpenter, its material cause is wood, its formal cause is the particular shape imposed upon the wood, and its final cause is the purpose for which it is made, namely sitting or lying upon it.

The same applies to a knife.

Its efficient cause is the smith, its material cause iron, its formal cause the shape of the knife, and its final cause cutting meat, rope, or some other thing.

Every particular bodily object can similarly be analysed according to these four causes.

Absolute Body also possesses corresponding causes.

Its material cause is the simple substance that receives length, breadth, and depth and thereby becomes body.

Its efficient cause is the Creator.

Its formal cause is Intellect, because length, breadth, and depth are intelligible forms.

Its final cause is Soul, for Matter was created for the sake of Soul, so that Soul might act within it and through it, completing Matter while itself becoming perfected.

This is the ultimate purpose of the union between Soul and Matter, as we explained in the Epistle on the Principles.

Prime Matter, being a simple spiritual substance, has three causes.

Its efficient cause is the Creator, its formal cause Intellect, and its final cause Soul.

Soul has two causes.

The Creator is its efficient cause, while Intellect is its formal cause, pouring upon Soul the virtues, goodness, and effusion received from God.

Intellect possesses only one cause, its efficient cause—the Creator—who poured upon it existence, persistence, completion, and perfection all at once and without time.

When we say that God is the efficient cause of Intellect, we mean that He originated it without an intermediary.

The authors connect this with the scriptural saying:

"Our command is but one, like the blink of an eye—or nearer."

And:

"They ask you concerning the Spirit. Say: the Spirit is from the command of my Lord, and you have been given only a little knowledge."

And:

"His are the creation and the command."

In this interpretation, **creation** concerns bodily realities, while **command** concerns spiritual substances.

Many people of learning, the epistle says, have supposed that there are only two broad realities: God on the one hand, and body together with bodily accidents on the other.

They therefore possess little understanding of spiritual substances and forms abstracted from matter.

For this reason they attribute the actions, crafts, sciences, and forms of wisdom appearing through human beings directly to bodies composed of flesh and blood, or to what they imagine to be bodily accidents such as life, power, and knowledge.

They do not recognise that another substance accompanies the body, moves it, and manifests actions through it.

When faced with natural actions that cannot readily be attributed to conscious animals—such as fire burning, food being transformed within the bodies of animals, or other operations of nature—some attribute them directly to God, others to "nature" without knowing what nature is, while still others propose various chains of causes.

This has produced long disputes.

The sages firmly rooted in knowledge, however, recognised through the purity of their souls and the illumination of their intellects other substances that are not bodily.

These are knowing in potentiality, permeate bodies through their subtlety, and act within them through governance.

They are described as the hosts of God and the inner essence of creation.

The sages therefore attributed natural actions to these spiritual powers while declaring the Creator transcendent above direct bodily operations except insofar as wisdom, governance, and providence ultimately derive from Him.

How did they come to know spiritual substances?

They began by considering body and the accidents inhering within it.

Body simply as body is neither active nor self-moving.

It is passive matter receptive to forms and accidents.

Accidents likewise possess no independent activity, since they exist only through bodies and are therefore even more dependent than bodies themselves.

Life, power, knowledge, and similar properties should therefore not be understood merely as bodily accidents.

Rather, according to the authors, they are spiritual properties present in certain bodies because of the soul's association with them.

When the soul departs, these properties disappear.

It therefore becomes evident that living bodies are accompanied by non-bodily substances responsible for the actions manifested through them.

These substances are called **souls**.

The sages then observed that souls differ in excellence because they receive support and virtue from another principle superior to them.

They therefore recognised a substance nobler than Soul and called it **Intellect**.

Intellect itself recognises that it is governed and has a Creator and Wise Maker.

By stripping that Creator of every deficient attribute, the sages came to the hierarchy of spiritual principles already described: Prime Matter, Soul, Intellect, and the Creator.

The Universal Soul is therefore a spiritual substance proceeding from Intellect.

In relation to Intellect, it resembles matter receiving the forms, virtues, and goodness poured upon it.

In relation to Body, however, Soul resembles a craftsman who gives body shapes and forms and thereby brings it toward completion.

The Universal Soul contains all forms, just as Universal Body contains all bodily shapes.

But forms do not crowd or obstruct one another within Soul because Soul is subtle, spiritual, living, knowing, and active.

Bodily shapes, by contrast, interfere with one another because body is dense, coarse, lifeless, ignorant, and passive.

Chapter 2: The Soul's Association with the Body Has a Purpose

Know that Soul is, in itself, a substance.

Its association with body is accidental and exists for a particular purpose.

A purpose is that which exists beforehand in the intention of the agent.

When the intended purpose is reached, the action comes to an end.

Thus the soul is not joined to the body without reason.

Its bodily association serves an end, and when that end has been fulfilled, the relation need not continue.

Chapter 3: The Human Soul and Its Five Higher Faculties

Having discussed the Universal Soul and Universal Intellect, we now wish to discuss the human soul, for it is one of the powers of the Universal Soul.

We shall also discuss human intellect, which is one of the powers of the human soul, and describe the actions and faculties of the soul, since the soul is a spiritual substance.

Spiritual substances cannot be apprehended through the bodily senses.

They are known through the actions that proceed from them according to their powers.

We must therefore describe the number and diversity of the soul's faculties, the varieties of their activities, the marvels of its crafts, the strangeness of its sciences, the refinement of its character, and the differences among its opinions.

The human soul possesses powers too numerous for anyone but God to count fully.

Through every power it performs in one bodily organ an action different from the action performed through another.

We have described portions of these powers in the Epistle on the Composition of the Body, the Epistle on the Senses and the Sensible, and the Epistle on the Human Being as a Small World.

We explained there that the relation of the sensory powers to the soul resembles the relation of intelligence-gatherers to a king.

Each is appointed over a particular region of the kingdom and brings the king reports from that region.

The soul also possesses five higher faculties whose relation to it resembles the relation of intimate companions and officials to a king.

These are the **thinking faculty, imaginative faculty, retentive faculty, speaking faculty, and productive or crafting faculty**.

The thinking faculty, whose seat is placed in the middle of the brain in the physiology of the epistle, is like the king among these powers.

The remaining faculties resemble its soldiers, helpers, servants, and subjects.

They act according to its direction in producing bodily movements, crafts, and actions.

Its location is described as occupying the noblest bodily organ and the most distinguished place within it, just as a king's residence occupies the noblest city in the kingdom and the most honoured place within that city.

The activities of these five powers are nobler than those of the other faculties.

The imaginative faculty, located in the front of the brain, gathers reports from the senses and conveys them to the thinking faculty.

Its relation to thought is like the relation of an intelligence officer to a king.

The retentive faculty, associated with the rear of the brain, preserves what has been received.

Its relation to thought is like the king's treasurer preserving his stores and records.

The speaking faculty, operating through the tongue, resembles a chamberlain and interpreter who communicates the king's intentions to others.

The productive or crafting faculty, operating through the hands and fingers, resembles a minister assisting the king in administering the kingdom and governing the subjects.

Chapter 4: The Actions Proper to the Thinking Faculty

Know, O brother, that when the imaginative faculty delivers representations of sensible things to the thinking faculty after receiving them from the sensory powers, and when the

sensible objects themselves are no longer present to the senses, their images remain spiritually represented within the thought of the soul.

The substance of the soul then stands to these representations as matter stands to form.

Consider a person entering a city.

He walks through its marketplaces and neighbourhoods, observes its roads, sees its inhabitants, notices their appearances, hears their speech, and learns something of their character.

After leaving the city, all these sensible objects disappear from direct perception.

Yet whenever he thinks of that city, he imagines it almost as though he were seeing it again in person.

Even after a long period, remembrance may reproduce what he encountered there.

Thought, therefore, is nothing other than the soul turning toward itself.

The imagined representation of the city is the form of what had previously been perceived impressed upon the substance of the soul, like the imprint of a seal upon wax.

The same applies to all sensible things perceived from the first use of the senses until the soul abandons those bodily instruments at death.

Once representations of sensible things have entered the soul, the first action of the thinking faculty is to examine them one by one so that it may know their meanings, quantities, qualities, properties, benefits, and harms.

When these things have become known, the thinking faculty entrusts them to the retentive faculty until they are needed.

When a human being later wishes to communicate his knowledge to another person or answer someone who asks about what he has conceived and understood, the thinking faculty employs the speaking faculty to act as its representative.

This resembles a king employing a chamberlain or interpreter to speak on his behalf.

The thinking faculty also performs many other actions upon the knowledge preserved within the soul.

We have discussed portions of these in the Epistle on Logic, the Epistle on Music, and the Epistle on the Human Being as a Small World, according to what was appropriate to each subject.

All sciences cannot be gathered into a single bodily book.

The soul, however, can gather many sciences, many crafts, different character traits, and varying opinions because it is itself a **spiritual book**.

Forms of knowledge do not crowd one another within it as bodily forms do within physical matter.

Black and white cannot occupy the same bodily place at the same time.

Sweetness and bitterness cannot simultaneously dominate one tasting body in the same respect.

Roundness and squareness cannot be the same bodily shape simultaneously.

Opposed bodily forms displace or destroy one another.

Within the substance of the soul, however, representations do not crowd one another.

Many may be gathered together as lines converge upon a single point at the centre of a circle or as the forms of many visible things of different kinds may appear together within a mirror or within the small pupil of an eye.

Chapter 5: Speech, Writing, and the Higher Actions of Thought

Know that when the thinking faculty calls upon the speaking faculty to communicate on its behalf, the speaking faculty combines letters of the alphabet into expressions possessing different tones and forms.

These expressions constitute speech.

The speaking faculty then places within those expressions the meanings represented before the thinking faculty and passes them to the bodily power of articulation.

The latter sends them outward into the air in the different sounds and languages used by human beings, so that the air may carry them toward the ears of those nearby.

Words formed from letters resemble **bodies composed of different organs**, while the meanings contained within them resemble their **souls**.

Every expression without meaning resembles a body without a soul.

Every meaning within the thought of the soul for which no expression has been found resembles a soul without a body.

We have already explained in the Epistle on the Senses and the Sensible how air carries the forms of sounds and preserves their configuration until they reach hearing.

Because sounds remain in the air only long enough for hearing to receive them and then disappear, divine wisdom provided another means by which they could be preserved: **writing**.

The thinking faculty, seeing that spoken words could not remain permanently within flowing air, devised another method and employed the productive faculty.

Through the pen, this faculty forms written letters imitating the meanings expressed through spoken letters.

These are combined into writing and deposited upon tablets and scrolls.

Knowledge may therefore remain as a benefit passed from earlier generations to later ones, as a trace of those who came before for those who come afterward, as communication from the absent to those present, and from the present to those absent.

The epistle regards this as one of God's great favours to humanity.

It cites:

“Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught the human being what he did not know.”

The productive faculty possesses actions too numerous to enumerate.

We have described some in the Epistle on Crafts.

Likewise, the speaking faculty employs innumerable languages, expressions, and melodies, some of which were discussed in the Epistle on the Differences among Languages and in the Epistle on Music.

The thinking faculty possesses even more extensive actions.

Some belong to it alone, while others it performs together with the remaining faculties.

All crafts are shared between thought and the productive faculty.

Speech and language are shared between thought and the speaking faculty.

The retrieval of stored representations is shared between thought and the retentive faculty.

Actions belonging more particularly to thought include **thinking, deliberation, conception, reflection, composition, analysis, collection, and analogy**.

The text also assigns to it physiognomic inference, augury, divination, inspiration, inner prompting, reception of revelation, and the interpretation of dreams.

Through thought, hidden problems of the sciences are extracted.

Through deliberation, kingdoms are administered and affairs governed.

Through conception, the realities of things are apprehended.

Through reflection, past events are understood.

Through composition, the various crafts are produced.

Through analysis, simple substances and first principles are known.

Through collection, species and genera are identified.

Through analogy, things absent in time or place are inferred.

Through physiognomy, hidden qualities of temperaments are sought.

Through augury, events are interpreted.

Through astrological divination, future occurrences are inferred according to celestial signs within the cosmology of the authors.

Through dreams, warnings and glad tidings are understood.

Through inner prompting, inspiration, and revelation come knowledge of revealed laws, composition of divine books, and interpretation of their hidden meanings.

Such meanings, the text says, are touched only by those purified from the stains of nature—the spiritual People of the House.

We explained in the Epistle on the Divine Law that establishing revealed laws and composing divine books represent the highest human rank attainable through divine support.

This is the noblest craft manifested through human beings, exemplified by the revealed laws associated with the Torah, Gospel, Psalms, and Qur'an.

Know, O brother, that the Creator—exalted is His majesty—made bodily sensible things into examples and indications pointing toward spiritual and intelligible realities.

He made the paths of the senses into steps and ladders through which the soul may ascend toward knowledge of intelligible things.

These intelligibles are the highest goal toward which the soul strives.

If, therefore, you wish to reach the noblest objects of desire and the highest goals, namely intelligible realities, strive first to know sensible things.

Through them you may rise to knowledge of spiritual things.

We have explained many examples of this throughout our natural-science epistles.

Knowledge of bodily sensible things represents the **poverty and need of the soul**.

Knowledge of spiritual intelligibles represents its **wealth and bliss**.

The soul needs the body, its senses, and its bodily instruments in order to apprehend corporeal things.

But once spiritual forms have been acquired through the mediation of the bodily senses, the soul apprehends them through its own substance.

It then becomes independent of bodily instruments and no longer requires bodily teaching for those things it has truly acquired.

Therefore strive, O brother, to acquire eternal wealth through this bodily structure and its instruments while you are still able to use them—before life is exhausted, the appointed period ends, the bodily structure decays, and its existence comes to an end.

Beware above all lest your soul remain poor and deficient, still requiring some bodily structure in order to complete what it failed to accomplish.

Then you would be among those who say:

“If only we were returned, we would act differently from what we used to do.”

Such souls remain in the barrier until the day they are raised.

How could they even perceive when they will be raised while they remain distracted, heedless, absorbed in bodily desires, corporeal pleasures, natural adornment, and deceptive hopes concerning this condemned worldly life?

God says:

“The life of this world is only play, amusement, adornment, mutual boasting among you, and rivalry in wealth and children.”

And He compares it with rain whose vegetation pleases its cultivators before it withers and disappears, concluding that:

“The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception.”

The epistle also recalls the story of Qārūn, who came forth before his people in his splendour.

Those desiring worldly life wished that they possessed what he had been given, believing him to have received a mighty fortune.

But those endowed with knowledge said:

“Woe to you! God's reward is better for one who believes.”

By this they meant the hereafter, which the epistle calls the true life—the world of spirits, consisting entirely of repose, fragrance, greeting, and divine satisfaction.

The text also criticises those who know only sensible things and are heedless of intelligible realities.

They are described as being satisfied with worldly life and resting securely in it while remaining heedless of the signs of the world to come and the abode of blessing and peace.

The souls of the virtuous ascend toward that world after separation from their bodies.

The epistle interprets:

“To Him ascends the good word”

as referring to the spirit of the believer, while:

“and righteous action raises it”

refers to the virtuous action that strengthens and elevates the soul's aspiration toward that higher world.

Therefore strive for the sake of the soul and bring its virtues to completion.

For you are human through the soul, not through the body.

Do not be deceived by the adornments of this lowly world.

Follow sound opinions and refine the soul.

May God grant us, you, and all our brothers right guidance.

May He guide us and you along the path of righteousness.

Indeed, He is compassionate toward His servants.

Here ends the Epistle on Intellect and the Intelligible.

It is followed by the Epistle on Cycles and Revolutions.

Epistle 36

On Cycles and Revolutions

The Fifth Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Introduction: Celestial Cycles, Revolutions, and Conjunctions

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed the Epistle on Intellect and the Intelligible, in which we explained the true nature of the substances of souls and how intelligible forms are gathered within the receptive intellect.

Earlier, in the Epistle on the Nature of Nature, we explained the manner in which the upper celestial individuals influence the lower individuals generated beneath the sphere of the Moon, which is the world of generation and corruption.

There we also explained what the ancients meant by the spiritual powers of the planets, and what the lawgiver meant by the various classes of angels and the diffusion of their powers throughout the world and the manifestation of their actions in existing bodies.

We now wish to explain the **cycles, revolutions, and conjunctions of the celestial individuals**.

The celestial sphere and the bodies within it possess many cycles around the four elements, which constitute the world of generation and corruption.

Only God knows their complete number.

These cycles possess revolutions, while the planets within them form conjunctions.

In every cycle, revolution, and conjunction there arise events in the world of generation and corruption whose genera are too numerous for anyone but God to enumerate.

We shall therefore mention only a concise portion as an example and indication of the rest.

There are **five kinds of celestial cycles**.

The first are the revolutions of the wandering planets within their epicycles.

The second are the revolutions of the centres of their epicycles within their deferent spheres.

The third are the revolutions of those deferent spheres through the zodiac.

The fourth are the revolutions of the fixed stars through the zodiac.

The fifth is the revolution of the outermost encompassing sphere around the four elements.

A **revolution** in the narrower sense is the renewal of a celestial cycle through the body's return once again to its former position.

A **conjunction** is the meeting of planets within the degrees and minutes of the zodiac.

The authors divide these conjunctions into six genera comprising 120 types: twenty-one two-planet conjunctions, thirty-five three-planet conjunctions, thirty-five four-planet conjunctions, twenty-one five-planet conjunctions, seven six-planet conjunctions, and one conjunction involving all seven.

When these 120 types are multiplied by the 360 degrees of the zodiac, the result is 43,200 individual conjunctional possibilities.

The authors also speak of four great cycles measured in thousands of years: seven thousand years, twelve thousand years, fifty-one thousand years, and 360,000 years.

Some celestial cycles recur only after extremely long periods, while others recur after very short ones.

Among the longest is the revolution of the fixed stars through the zodiac, which the epistle assigns a period of thirty-six thousand years.

Among the shortest is the revolution of the outermost sphere around the four elements, occurring once every twenty-four hours.

God says:

“Each swims in an orbit.”

Other cycles fall between these two extremes.

The epistle also describes the conjunction of all the wandering planets at the beginning of Aries as recurring, according to the astronomical tables it follows, once in 360,000 years.

This is called one “day” of the great world.

At the opposite end are monthly conjunctions, such as the Moon meeting the other wandering planets.

The text then gives a series of shorter planetary cycles according to the astronomy of its time: lunar cycles measured in days and weeks, annual cycles of the Sun and certain planets, longer periods for Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, and still longer great conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn.

The authors treat all these periods as part of one interconnected system of celestial time.

Having described the quantities of these motions and conjunctions, they turn to the events believed to follow from them in the world beneath the Moon.

All such events, they say, arise under the celestial motions and planetary relations by permission of God Most High.

Some effects are obvious to everyone, while others are subtle and require reflection, observation, and experience.

As a general principle, every event in this world that comes into being rapidly, remains only briefly, and quickly passes away is associated with a rapid celestial motion whose cycle is short and frequently renewed.

Every event that develops slowly, persists for a long time, and decays gradually is associated with a slower and longer celestial motion whose recurrence is more distant.

We have already mentioned aspects of this principle in the Epistles on Minerals, Plants, and Animals.

The most obvious example is the daily revolution of the encompassing sphere.

From this motion arise night and day.

When the Sun rises over a region of the Earth, the air becomes illuminated, the face of the Earth brightens, most animals awaken from sleep and begin moving after stillness.

Birds and other creatures begin producing sounds after the silence of night.

Animals spread out in search of their livelihoods, many plants open their flowers, fragrances spread, and human beings leave their homes for markets, occupations, and daily needs.

When the Sun sets, the air becomes dark, the face of the Earth is covered by night, many animals retreat to their shelters, people leave their work and markets, and sleep, drowsiness, quiet, and stillness take the place of movement, activity, and noise.

Seen by day, the world appears almost like an awake, moving, sensing animal.

Seen by night, it appears almost like one asleep or dead because of its stillness and quiet.

As long as this celestial motion remains ordered, this alternation remains ordered.

If the motion ceased, the associated order would also cease.

For this reason the authors regard daily celestial revolution as one of God's greatest favours.

They cite the Qur’anic challenge asking people to consider what would happen if God made night permanent until the Day of Resurrection or made day permanent without interruption.

The authors also connect the daily cycle with the coming into being of extremely short-lived plants and animals.

Certain delicate growths become moist and fresh through the night dew and then dry under the midday Sun.

Some weak insects and creatures generated in decaying matter survive only short periods before heat or cold destroys them.

The general principle is that beings arising through very short and rapidly repeated cycles tend to have short natural lives.

Their forms nevertheless remain preserved in matter through continual generation, even though individual members perish.

When the Universal Soul reaches the ultimate purpose of its activity, however, the authors say, celestial motion itself will cease, because every purposeful action ceases once its end has been attained.

Chapter 1: Lunar and Other Short Cycles

Know, O brother, that the revolution of the celestial sphere is among the noblest of actions, and therefore the end intended by its mover must likewise be among the noblest of ends, as we explained in the Epistle on Resurrection and the Rising.

Among the short and rapidly renewed celestial motions is the motion associated with the Moon's epicycle, which the epistle describes as completing a significant phase roughly every fourteen days.

During one half of this cycle, the illuminated face of the Moon increasingly turns toward the Earth.

The authors associate this period with increase, growth, swelling, and the rapid development of things beginning to come into existence.

They mention the increase of moisture, tides, dew, and developing forms among animals, plants, and minerals.

During the second half of the month the illuminated face of the Moon turns away from the Earth, and the authors associate this phase with withering, decrease, maturation, drying, and the completion of things that have already reached their full development.

Certain mineral formations, plants, and animals are said to complete their development within such lunar periods.

The epistle cites the Qur’anic image of the Moon passing through appointed stations until it returns like an old curved palm stalk.

The authors then relate the natural lifespan of some creatures to the remaining celestial arc after their formation is complete.

They apply this principle especially to birds, silkworms, bees, and other creatures whose development may be measured in days or weeks.

The same model is extended to human gestation.

At the fall of the sperm-drop, the Sun necessarily occupies some degree of the zodiac.

By the beginning of the ninth month, it has travelled through eight signs, or 240 degrees, leaving 120 degrees before returning to its original position.

The authors again correlate these remaining 120 degrees with the natural human lifespan of 120 years.

This repeats the scheme developed at greater length in the Epistle on the Fall of the Sperm-Drop.

The same rule is applied analogically to other animals.

The duration of gestation or formation corresponds to part of a celestial cycle, while the remainder of the cycle is taken as an indication of the creature's natural lifespan.

Every generated thing beneath the sphere of the Moon possesses four broad conditions: the beginning of existence, increase and growth toward completion, a period of stability followed by decline, and finally destruction and nonexistence.

The authors compare these four conditions with four stages of celestial motion: ascent from perigee, ascent toward apogee, descent from apogee, and return toward perigee.

Another rapidly renewed motion is assigned to Mercury.

In the astronomical model of the epistle, Mercury moves through changing conditions—direct, retrograde, rising, setting, high, low, stationary, and other states.

The authors associate these changes with short-lived events among plants, minerals, animals, and particular human occupations.

Certain crops such as sesame, millet, and barley are connected with such periods.

Some mineral transformations are also linked with them.

Certain animals, especially creatures completing their development over a few months, are treated in the same manner.

The epistle then connects changes in Mercury's condition with events affecting children, scribes, administrators, secretaries, craftsmen, merchants, and others traditionally associated with Mercury in astrology.

When Mercury is unfavourably placed, the text associates it with illness, removal from office, imprisonment, loss, delay, concealment, and hardship.

When direct and favourably placed, it is associated with release, health, renewed activity, advancement, and improvement of circumstances.

When stationary or retrograde, the authors connect it with hesitation, doubt, delay, confusion, and decline in status.

These claims belong to the astrological system of the epistle.

The text also discusses the varying conditions of the Sun, Venus, and Mercury as they move through northern and southern signs, signs of different elemental qualities, exaltations and depressions, apogees and perigees, direct and retrograde relations, conjunctions, separations, and different angular positions.

All these varying celestial relations are treated as signs associated with changing conditions in the terrestrial world.

Chapter 2: Annual and Longer Cycles and the Four Seasons

Know, O brother, that among the events arising through these celestial motions are the great annual changes of the seasons.

When the Sun enters Aries at the spring equinox, day and night become equal.

The air becomes moderate, breezes become pleasant, snow melts, valleys flow, rivers swell, springs emerge, moisture rises through the branches of trees, grass appears, crops lengthen, flowers open, trees leaf, blossoms emerge, and the face of the Earth becomes green.

Animals multiply, livestock give birth, udders fill with milk, and creatures spread through the land.

Human beings also rejoice in the mildness of the air.

The authors compare the Earth in spring to a young woman adorning herself before those who behold her.

When the Sun reaches Cancer, the length of day reaches its maximum and the night its minimum.

Spring departs and summer begins.

Heat intensifies, the air becomes hot, waters diminish, grass dries, grain matures, harvest arrives, fruits ripen, livestock become well fed, and food becomes abundant for people, birds, and grazing animals.

The world is compared to a mature bride in the fullness of beauty and abundance.

When the Sun enters Libra, day and night again become equal.

The night then begins increasing while the day decreases.

Summer departs and autumn begins.

The air cools, northern winds arise, waters diminish, rivers and springs recede, plants dry, fruits come to an end, harvests are gathered and stored, insects die or retreat, migrating creatures seek warmer regions, and people prepare provisions and clothing for winter.

The authors compare the world at this stage to a middle-aged woman whose youth has begun to pass away.

When the Sun enters Capricorn, the night reaches its maximum length and the day its minimum.

Autumn departs and winter begins.

Cold intensifies, the air becomes harsh, leaves fall, many plants die, animals retreat into caves and underground shelters, clouds increase, the sky darkens, livestock grow thin, bodily strength weakens, and movement becomes difficult.

The world is then compared to an old woman approaching death.

Through these analogies the authors show how celestial cycles correspond, in their system, with changes in the lower world.

They next discuss longer planetary periods.

The cycles of Saturn and Jupiter are associated with changes affecting older people, rulers, judges, scholars, landowners, merchants, and others traditionally linked with those planets.

Venus and Mars are connected with other classes and conditions.

The authors repeatedly stress that these are not isolated or absolute causes but signs within a larger system whose effects depend upon many relations.

The revolution of Jupiter through its deferent sphere, occurring over a much longer period, is associated with broad improvements in climate, settlement, agriculture, abundance, and prosperity.

A cycle of Mars is linked with the maturation of certain minerals and plants, strengthening of certain animals, emergence of political powers, military activity, revolts, changes in administration, warfare, and changes in rulership.

Yet the authors insist that the ultimate purpose of these motions is not destruction but the completion and perfection of generated beings.

The harms that sometimes occur are treated as secondary and relatively small compared with the larger benefits.

They compare this with the Sun.

Its light and heat exist for the general benefit of the world, yet excessive heat may kill weak plants or animals.

Rain exists to revive lands and nourish crops, yet excessive rain may destroy a field or flood a town.

The accidental harm is small relative to the universal benefit.

The same principle is applied to Mars, Saturn, and other planets traditionally called malefic.

The authors reject the simplistic claim that Saturn, Mars, or the lunar nodes are wholly evil, or that Venus, the Moon, or Jupiter are wholly good.

Excess of any planetary quality may produce corruption.

Excessive heat, cold, dryness, or moisture can all become destructive.

The authors therefore understand “benefic” and “malefic” relatively, according to balance and excess.

The longer cycle of Saturn is associated with the completion of certain minerals, maturation of certain long-lived plants, the full maturity of human beings, construction of towns, and transfer of political authority between peoples.

Still longer are the motions of the fixed stars and the apogees, perigees, and nodes of the wandering planets.

The epistle assigns these cycles enormous spans of time.

Through them, it says, inhabited regions may shift from one quarter of the Earth to another, seas may become dry land, dry regions may become seas, and climates and settlements may be transformed over long ages.

Having discussed the events associated with cycles, the authors turn finally to the great conjunctions and their alleged indications.

Chapter 3: The Seven Classes of Events Indicated by Conjunctions

Know that the events inferred by astrologers from celestial configurations fall into **seven broad classes**.

The first concerns **religions and dynasties**.

These are associated with the greatest conjunctions, which the text says occur roughly once in a thousand years.

The second concerns the transfer of political rule from one nation to another, one land to another, or one ruling house to another.

These are associated with conjunctions occurring roughly once every 240 years.

The third concerns changes of individual rulers, together with the wars and disturbances accompanying them.

These are associated with conjunctions occurring approximately every twenty years.

The fourth concerns annual conditions such as high and low prices, abundance and scarcity, epidemics, mortality, famine, diseases, accidents, and safety.

These are inferred from the celestial configuration at the revolution of the year and form the basis, in the astrological practice described by the source, of annual calendars.

The fifth concerns events from month to month and day to day.

These are inferred from lunar conjunctions and oppositions and from the calendrical configurations derived from them.

The sixth concerns the individual nativities of human beings and the annual revolutions of their birth charts.

These are judged according to the celestial configuration at birth and its subsequent annual transformations.

The seventh concerns hidden and particular matters such as lost objects, theft, concealed intentions, and questions asked at a specific time.

These are inferred from the ascendant and celestial configuration at the moment of the question.

The epistle then explains that over very long periods the positions of the fixed stars, planetary apogees, and nodes change relative to the zodiac.

Because of these changes, the rays of the stars fall differently upon the regions of the Earth.

The relative lengths of night and day, the balance of winter and summer, and the degrees of heat and cold therefore change from one region to another.

These changes become, according to the authors, causes for alterations in climates, habitability, political power, settlement, and the prosperity or decline of lands.

Certain conjunctions are interpreted as indicating periods of disorder: interruption of prophetic revelation, scarcity of scholars, death of the virtuous, injustice of rulers, corruption of morals, division of opinions, lack of rain, decline of agriculture, destruction of animals, and ruin of towns.

Other conjunctions are interpreted as indicating periods of balance and prosperity: renewed prophecy, abundance of righteous people, just rulers, rainfall, fertility of the Earth, multiplication of animals, and flourishing cities and villages.

Yet the authors end by subordinating the whole astrological system to divine command and moral causation.

All such events occur by the command of their Creator, and the fortunes of communities are also connected with the deeds of their inhabitants, whether good or evil.

Therefore awaken, O brother, from the sleep of heedlessness and the slumber of ignorance.

Know with certainty that beyond this sensible world there is another world and other realities—the world of spirits, the dwelling of angels, cherubim, and spiritual beings appointed over the preservation and governance of this world according to their ranks.

May God strengthen us and you with a spirit from Him and grant all our brothers right guidance.

Indeed, He is compassionate toward His servants.

Here ends the Epistle on Cycles and Revolutions.

It is followed by the Epistle on the Nature of Love.

Epistle 37

On the Nature of Love

The Sixth Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Introduction: What Love Is and Where It Begins

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed the Epistle on Cycles and Revolutions, in which we explained the conditions of celestial conjunctions according to the method followed by our noble brethren.

We now wish in this epistle to explain the **nature of passionate love**, the love of souls, what has been called a psychic illness or a divine madness, what its reality is, and from where it begins.

Know that the sages have spoken extensively concerning the different branches of the sciences, the paths of knowledge, and the wonders of wisdom in mathematics, natural philosophy, philosophy generally, and divine science.

Some of these sciences and forms of knowledge are subtler than others.

We have composed an epistle concerning each of them, serving as an introduction and set of preliminary principles so that they may be easier for students to approach and beginners to acquire.

In this epistle we shall mention part of what sages and philosophers have said concerning love: what it is, how many kinds it has, how it develops, where it begins, what causes bring it into existence, what circumstances call it forth, and what its ultimate purpose is.

For love is something existing throughout the world and firmly implanted within the nature of souls.

It does not disappear so long as created beings continue to exist.

Some sages have spoken of love only to condemn it. They have described the evils associated with lovers and called love a vice.

Others have said that love is a **virtue of the soul**, praising it, recounting the noble qualities of lovers, and presenting its causes as something beautiful.

Others failed to understand its hidden secrets, causes, and subtle meanings and therefore claimed that it is a psychic illness.

Some called it a **divine madness**.

Others claimed that it is simply the preoccupation of an empty soul.

Still others called it the occupation of idle people whose aspirations have nothing else to occupy them.

By my life, love certainly empties the soul of nearly every concern except concern for the beloved.

It causes continual remembrance of the beloved, constant thought about him or her, agitation of the heart, bewilderment, and preoccupation with everything connected with the beloved.

Yet this does not mean that love is merely the occupation of idlers.

Those who make such a claim know only matters obvious to the senses.

They know little of the subtle realities perceived through purity of mind, sound discrimination, prolonged reflection, intense investigation, and careful contemplation.

Those who said love is a psychic illness did so because they saw what happens to lovers: sleepless nights, bodily emaciation, hollow eyes, rapid pulse, deep sighs, and symptoms resembling those of the sick.

They therefore supposed it to be an illness of the soul.

Those who called it divine madness did so because they found no medicine or drink capable of curing lovers of their condition.

Their remedies were reduced to prayers to God, acts of charity, offerings at temples, invocations of priests, and similar practices.

The epistle recalls the verses attributed to ʿUrwa ibn Ḥizām, slain by love, who says that he offered himself to the diviners of Yamāma and Najd in the hope that they might cure him, but after exhausting every charm and remedy they could only say:

“May God cure you—for, by God, we possess no power over what your breast contains.”

The authors also say that some Greek sages and physicians, when ordinary treatment failed and they despaired of curing a patient, would carry him to the temple of Jupiter, give charity on his behalf, pray to God, offer sacrifice, and ask the priests to pray for healing.

If the patient recovered, they called the condition a divine illness or divine madness.

Some philosophers, however, defined love as **excessive affection and an intense inclination toward one kind of existent rather than others, toward one individual rather than the rest, or toward one thing above other things**, accompanied by excessive remembrance and concern for it.

If this is the definition, the authors say, almost no human being is completely free of love.

For virtually everyone inclines strongly toward one thing rather than another.

Many physicians and sages call such extreme preoccupation **melancholy**, and medical writers had discussed its causes and treatment extensively.

But this epistle wishes especially to discuss what ordinary people call love—that is, passionate attachment to another individual of the same species, whether male or female.

Some sages have said that love is an overpowering inclination within the soul toward a corresponding temperament within another body and toward a form resembling it within the same species.

Others have said:

Love is the intensity of longing for union.

This is the most subtle and convincing of the definitions given.

Whatever degree of closeness the lover attains, he always longs for something still closer.

The lover embraces the beloved and yet the soul still longs.

He kisses, hoping the burning passion will disappear, but desire only grows stronger.

It is as though the heart can find no cure except that the two spirits themselves become mingled.

The authors regard this statement as the most refined explanation of love.

But because union is a psychic inclination and a spiritual influence, its explanation requires discussion of the different kinds of souls, the things they love, and the causes and circumstances of their love.

The authors distinguish between **causes** and **occasions**: causes are implanted within the nature of the soul itself, while occasions arise outside it.

Embodied souls are of three general kinds, and their objects of love likewise fall into three classes.

The **vegetative-appetitive soul** loves food, drink, and sexual union.

The **animal-irascible soul** loves domination, victory, and leadership.

The **rational soul** loves knowledge and the acquisition of virtues.

No human being is entirely free from these three forms of desire.

Some are dominated by one, while others possess a portion of all three.

The authors connect the dominance of these inclinations with bodily temperament and, according to their astrological scheme, with planetary configurations at birth.

Those dominated by the Moon, Venus, or Saturn are described as inclined toward food, drink, accumulation, and storage.

Those dominated by Mars, Venus, or the Moon are described as inclined toward sexual desire.

Those dominated by the Sun and Mars incline toward domination, victory, and leadership.

Those dominated by the Sun, Mercury, and Jupiter incline toward knowledge, virtue, and justice.

The Epistle on the Fall of the Sperm-Drop explained, according to this cosmology, how planetary influences become established in the constitution of the fetus, while the Epistle on Character explained how dispositions already latent within a temperament may be strengthened or opposed through habit and education.

We now return to the philosophers' statement that love is the intensity of longing for union.

True union belongs primarily to **spiritual realities and states of the soul**.

Bodily things cannot literally become one in this sense.

They can stand beside one another, touch, intermingle, or mix, but spiritual union belongs to another order.

The beginning of love is often a **single glance or turning of attention toward another person**.

This first glance is like a seed sown in the ground, a branch planted, or a sperm-drop placed within a womb.

Repeated glances and encounters become the nourishment flowing toward that beginning until love grows, just as a seed becomes a tree or a sperm-drop becomes a fetus.

The lover first desires simply to draw near to the beloved.

When that becomes possible, he desires privacy and companionship.

When these are attained, he desires embracing and kissing.

When that too becomes possible, he wishes for the greatest bodily closeness attainable.

Yet through all these stages longing does not diminish.

Rather, it grows.

The epistle then gives a physiological explanation according to the medical understanding of its period.

The vital spirit is described as a moist vapour arising from bodily moisture and blood and spreading throughout the body, through which bodily life is maintained.

Its material is continually renewed through inhaled air, which cools the innate heat of the heart.

When lovers embrace and kiss, each receives some of the other's moisture.

The authors imagine that this mingles with bodily fluids, passes through the stomach and liver, mixes with the blood, spreads through the vessels, and eventually becomes incorporated into the flesh and other bodily tissues.

Similarly, when lovers breathe into one another's faces, traces of each person's vital breath mix with the surrounding air.

When that air is inhaled, some reaches the front of the brain and some passes through the lungs toward the heart and, according to the physiology of the text, spreads with the arterial pulse throughout the body.

Thus something dissolved from each body becomes mingled with the other.

The authors use this medical image to explain why bodily closeness can strengthen affection over time.

Since the soul manifests its actions and character through the temperament of the body, while bodily organs serve it like the tools of a skilled craftsman, such repeated physical and psychological interactions help love grow and become firmly established.

Why, however, does one person love one particular individual rather than another?

The authors answer according to their astrological framework: certain correspondences exist between the celestial configurations of the two births.

Their ascendants may share a sign, their signs may possess the same planetary ruler, their signs may correspond through a triplicity or another relation, their rising times may be harmonious, or similar astrological correspondences may exist.

Likewise, when love changes after having remained stable for a long time, the authors attribute this to changes in the celestial configurations associated with the annual revolutions of the two nativities.

All generated things beneath the sphere of the Moon are, in this system, connected with celestial movements.

Chapter 1: Why Different People Love Different Things

Know, O brother, that many people imagine that love occurs only toward things that are objectively beautiful.

This is not so.

It has been said:

“How many things are regarded as beautiful though they possess no beauty.”

The cause lies in the correspondences existing between lover and beloved, and these are too numerous for anyone but God to enumerate.

They arise from proportions among the parts of composite things.

Every sensory faculty possesses a particular relation to its proper sensible object.

Sight longs for colours and forms, but regards as beautiful only those possessing the proportion most harmonious with it.

Hearing longs for sounds and melodies, but delights especially in those whose proportions are most harmonious, as we explained in the Epistle on Music.

The same applies to the remaining senses.

Each desires the objects appropriate to it and takes pleasure in those whose proportions best agree with its own temperament.

Because the constitutions of sensory organs and sensible objects differ greatly and continually change, people's judgements of pleasure and beauty likewise differ.

One person delights in a particular food, drink, sound, fragrance, or other sensible object while another dislikes it and may even find it painful.

The same individual may enjoy something at one time and dislike it at another.

All this results from changes in bodily composition and temperament and from the correspondences and incompatibilities arising between them.

Know, O brother, that divine wisdom and providential care have linked the extremities of existing things to one another through a single bond and arranged them into one order.

Some beings are causes, others effects; some are prior and others secondary.

Within the nature of effects there has therefore been implanted an inclination and longing toward their causes.

Within causes there has likewise been placed mercy, tenderness, and compassion toward their effects.

This can be seen in the tenderness of parents toward their children, older people toward the young, and stronger beings toward the weak, because the weak require assistance from the strong and the young depend upon their elders.

The epistle gives the reply of a wise leader when asked which of his children he loved most:

“The youngest until he grows, the sick one until he recovers, and the absent one until he returns.”

Chapter 2: Love as an Instrument of Education and the Preservation of Species

Know further that when children no longer require the direct nurturing of fathers and mothers, they still require teachers to instruct them in knowledge so that they may attain completion and perfection.

The text argues that this need for education helps explain the affection adults may feel toward youths: it can become an incentive to discipline, educate, refine, and bring them toward the intended perfection.

The authors say that such attachments are found especially among peoples strongly devoted to sciences, crafts, literature, and intellectual discipline, mentioning Persians, Iraqis, Syrians, Byzantines, and others.

They contrast these with peoples they regarded as less engaged in such forms of formal education.

This comparison reflects the cultural assumptions and stereotypes of the authors' own period.

The love of women for men and of males for females is treated differently.

This attraction exists throughout most animal species possessing sexual reproduction.

It was implanted within their natures so that males and females would unite and reproduce.

Its purpose is continuation of the lineage and preservation of the form of the species in matter, since individual bodies are continually passing away.

Thus sexual attraction ultimately serves the persistence of the species beyond the mortality of individuals.

Chapter 3: The Kinds of Beloved Things and the Wisdom Contained in Love

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that love assumes many forms and the things loved are too numerous for anyone but God to count.

We shall mention some so that they may serve as indications of the rest.

Animals love mating and sexual union because through them their offspring and species continue.

Mothers and fathers love their children and feel tenderness toward the young because the young greatly need the care of their elders.

Rulers love rulership and strive to obtain it.

They care for those under their authority, preserve them, and desire praise, gratitude, and recognition.

These inclinations appear almost as though they were naturally planted in them.

Craftspeople love manifesting their crafts.

They desire to complete and perfect their work and to see their products brought into finished form.

Merchants love commerce.

Those desiring worldly goods seek to gather, store, preserve, develop, and improve possessions.

Although this desire may serve the individual, it also benefits others and future generations through the preservation and circulation of goods.

Scholars and sages love discovering sciences, arranging disciplines, teaching intellectual exercises, investigating obscure matters, and recording knowledge in books so that it may pass from one community to another and one generation to the next.

This love benefits the life of souls, improves character, and contributes to the welfare of both religion and worldly life.

Human beings also love goodness and beneficence and the praise associated with them.

The authors regard this as naturally rooted within humanity because it encourages noble character.

Another kind is the love between individuals of the same species, which people especially call **passionate love**.

Lovers describe their own states and those of their beloveds, recounting thoughts, worries, sorrows, joy, delight, activity, noble character, praiseworthy conduct, blameworthy character, and base conditions.

The authors therefore argue that if love did not exist within creation, many virtues would have remained hidden and would never have been made manifest in poetry, conduct, or human relationships.

Likewise many vices would not have been exposed and recognised.

Love is therefore, in their account, not merely a weakness but a phenomenon through which virtues and faults become visible.

It can be understood as a remarkable wisdom placed within creation and as part of divine providence for the welfare of created beings.

Know also that the beloved objects of souls differ according to the **ranks of those souls in knowledge and understanding**.

The appetitive soul is not suited to loving rulership, domination, or intellectual sciences.

The animal soul does not by itself love wisdom and the acquisition of intellectual virtues.

The angelic soul is not appropriately occupied with love of bodily forms; rather, it inclines toward ascent into the celestial kingdom and movement through the vastness of the heavenly world.

A soul ordinarily loves and desires what corresponds to its own rank and resembles it.

Children and intellectually immature people love games and decorated images because such things correspond to the condition of their souls.

When they grow in intellect, education, and discipline, their aspirations rise.

They then become occupied with things they regard as more real than childhood toys: beautiful forms and ornament present in the living bodies of animals and human beings.

These become the beloved objects of many rational adults.

But when souls become trained in divine sciences and higher forms of knowledge, they may rise again beyond decorated bodily forms composed of flesh and blood toward something nobler: the beautiful, radiant, complete, and perfect forms of souls perceived by saved rational souls within the spiritual world.

Many people lack the ability to conceive these spiritual beauties.

Because their understanding is limited and their knowledge of them weak, they remain satisfied with corporeal forms and bodily figures composed of flesh, blood, and bodily fluids.

They become settled in such forms and wish to remain with them forever.

The text associates this with the Qur'anic description of those who are satisfied with worldly life and remain heedless of divine signs.

Know, O brother, that love of **persistence and everlasting continuation in the most perfect possible condition** is implanted within beings and within the constitution of souls.

The most complete state of the appetitive soul would be to exist forever while continually obtaining its desires and enjoying its pleasures without obstruction or disturbance.

The most complete state of the animal-irascible soul would be to exist forever in a position of leadership and dominance over others, able to overcome and retaliate against whatever harms it without obstruction.

The most complete state of the rational soul, however, would be to exist forever while perceiving the realities of things, contemplating them, delighting in them, and remaining joyful without hindrance or disturbance.

Rational souls take pleasure in sciences and knowledge because the forms of known things within their substance complete them, perfect their virtues, and bring them toward their highest goal and noblest end before their Creator.

The text associates this state with:

“In a seat of truth, in the presence of a Sovereign, All-Powerful.”

Such a condition does not properly belong to the appetitive or irascible soul.

It belongs to the rational soul when it awakens from the sleep of heedlessness and the slumber of ignorance, when the eye of insight opens, when it beholds its own world and knows its origin and return.

At that point it longs for its Creator.

It yearns and inclines toward Him as a lover longs for the beloved.

The authors connect this with:

“Those who believe are stronger in love for God.”

That is, stronger in their love for Him than for every other beloved.

Whenever a soul truly loves something, it longs for it, inclines toward it, seeks it, and directs itself toward it wherever it may be, scarcely turning toward anything else.

Every lover of a created thing, once he reaches it and obtains what he desired, must eventually encounter separation, boredom, change, or loss.

The sweetness fades, delight diminishes, and the former intensity of longing subsides.

The exception, according to the epistle, is the love of God by believers and righteous servants who long for Him.

For them, every new stage brings greater nearness and increase without final limit.

The authors contrast created objects of love with a mirage seen by a thirsty person who approaches expecting water and finds nothing there.

True divine love, however, culminates not in disappointment but in finding God.

The text recalls the report in which Moses asks:

“My Lord, where shall I find You?”

and receives the answer:

“With those whose hearts are broken for My sake.”

It also cites:

“Worship God as though you see Him; and if you do not see Him, He sees you.”

The “vision” of God by His friends is not, the authors insist, like seeing bodily individuals, forms, genera, species, substances, accidents, or objects occupying places and directions.

It is a nobler mode beyond bodily description.

They describe it symbolically as:

light through light, for Light, in light, from Light.

They then invoke the verse:

“God is the Light of the heavens and the Earth. The likeness of His light is as a niche containing a lamp; the lamp is in a glass, the glass as though it were a radiant star, lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western.”

The authors interpret “neither eastern nor western” as pointing beyond material form and bodily matter.

The **ultimate purpose of love**, then, is not simply bodily union.

The presence of love within souls, their attraction to beautiful bodies, their delight in bodily ornament, and their longing for beloved forms all serve as a means of awakening them from heedlessness and training them to rise.

Love leads the soul from sensible bodily things toward intelligible psychic realities, from corporeal beauty toward spiritual beauty.

It reminds the soul of the nobility of its own substance, the excellence of the world from which it comes, and the goodness of its return.

The beauties, ornaments, colours, and desirable forms appearing upon bodily surfaces are, according to the epistle, images impressed by the Universal Soul upon matter.

When particular souls behold these beauties, they are attracted toward them.

Through looking, contemplating, reflecting, and considering them, those beautiful forms gradually become represented within the souls themselves.

When the external bodily objects later disappear from the senses, their beloved forms remain spiritually present within the soul.

The soul then possesses inwardly what it had once sought externally.

A person who once passionately loved another human being provides an example.

Years later the beloved may have aged, changed, or lost the bodily beauty once possessed.

Yet if the lover turns inward toward the image preserved within memory, the original beauty can still appear exactly as it once did.

The outward body has changed, but the inward form remains.

The intelligent person can therefore understand that what was truly loved was not ultimately the changing matter of the body, but the **form of beauty represented through it**.

That form is now engraved upon the soul itself.

By understanding this, the soul may become independent, no longer needing the bodily object to possess the beauty it once sought.

It then finds within its own substance what it had formerly pursued outside itself.

The epistle regards this recognition as a release from some of the misery suffered by lovers attached exclusively to bodily forms—the fear of separation, longing during absence, anxiety during presence, and grief at inevitable change.

Chapter 4: From Bodily Love to Love of the First Beloved

Know further that if a person is afflicted with passionate attachment to another individual, endures all these trials and terrors, yet still fails to awaken from heedlessness, recover, or learn from the experience, and afterward becomes similarly attached to a second individual, then his soul remains submerged in blindness and intoxicated by ignorance.

Human beings may be divided in this respect into ordinary people and the elect.

Ordinary people, when they see a beautiful artefact or an adorned person, feel longing toward that object itself.

They desire to look upon it, approach it, and contemplate it.

The elect—the sages—when they see an expertly fashioned work or a beautifully adorned being, experience longing toward its **wise Maker, knowing Originator, and merciful Fashioner**.

Their attachment passes through the created beauty toward its source.

They then seek to resemble that source according to their capacity by imitating wisdom in their crafts, conduct, words, deeds, knowledge, and actions.

Deficient souls possess low aspirations.

They love only the adornment of worldly life and wish only for everlasting residence within it because they know nothing beyond it and cannot conceive any other condition.

The noble and disciplined soul, however, refuses to make worldly life its final object.

It becomes detached from it and desires the hereafter.

It longs to join beings of its own spiritual kind among the angels and desires ascent into the celestial kingdom and movement through the vastness of the heavens.

According to the epistle, this cannot occur until the soul separates from the body under the conditions explained in the Epistle on Resurrection and the Rising.

The souls of sages therefore strive through their actions, knowledge, and character to resemble the **Universal Celestial Soul** and long to join it.

The Universal Soul itself, according to the authors, imitates the Creator through its administration of the celestial spheres, its motion of the planets, and its generation of beings.

It performs these activities in obedience and worship, and through longing for its Creator.

For this reason the sages said:

God is the First Beloved, and the celestial sphere revolves through longing for Him.

The sphere seeks continued existence and everlasting duration in the most complete and perfect condition possible.

The Universal Soul is moved to turn the celestial spheres and direct the planets by its desire to manifest within the lower world the beauties, virtues, pleasures, and joys existing in the spiritual world—realities whose full excellence human language cannot describe.

The authors connect this with the divine promise of:

“whatever souls desire and whatever delights the eyes.”

All beauty, virtue, and goodness ultimately arise from the divine effusion.

They flow from God to the Universal Intellect, from Universal Intellect to Universal Soul, and from Universal Soul into Matter as the forms particular souls behold upon bodies throughout the corporeal world, from the outermost celestial sphere down to the centre of the Earth.

The diffusion of this light and beauty from beginning to end resembles the light of a full moon.

Moonlight spreads through the air, yet the light appearing upon the Moon comes from the Sun.

The light of the Sun and stars is, in the metaphysical symbolism of the epistle, from the illumination of Universal Soul.

The illumination of Universal Soul comes from Universal Intellect.

The illumination of Universal Intellect comes from the effusion of the Creator.

Thus God says:

“God is the Light of the heavens and the Earth.”

From all that has been said, it becomes clear that **God is the First Beloved**.

All existing things long for Him, direct themselves toward Him, and ultimately return to Him.

Through Him they possess existence, subsistence, persistence, duration, completion, and perfection.

He alone is pure existence and possesses eternal persistence, everlasting duration, completion, and unceasing perfection.

Exalted is God far above what the unjust and ignorant attribute to Him.

May God bring you, O brother, to completion and perfect your light, just as He has promised His friends and chosen servants:

“On the day when you see the believing men and believing women, their light proceeding before them and on their right, they will say: Our Lord, perfect our light for us and forgive us; indeed You have power over all things.”

May God guide us, you, and all our noble brothers toward the path of correctness.

May He direct us all along the way of right guidance.

Indeed, He is compassionate toward His servants.

Here ends the Epistle on the Nature of Love.

It is followed by the Epistle on Resurrection and the Rising.

Epistle 38

On Resurrection and the Rising

The Seventh Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Introduction: Knowledge of the Soul Is the Key to Resurrection

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed our explanation of the nature of love, the love of souls, and that which is nobler, more beautiful, more complete, more perfect, and more enduring than bodily love.

We now wish in this epistle to explain the nature of **resurrection and the rising**, and the manner of spiritual ascent.

Know—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that the sciences are many, and all are noble. Knowledge of them brings honour; seeking them brings deliverance from destruction; attaining them gives life to souls and rest to hearts; learning them is guidance and right direction, release from the darkness of ignorance, and a means of rectifying both religion and worldly life.

Yet some sciences are nobler than others, and those who possess them likewise differ in rank.

Among the most excellent of the learned are those devoted to religion and piety who possess certainty and insight concerning the hereafter, not merely imitation and transmitted report.

Knowledge of the reality of the hereafter and of the return is veiled from Iblīs and his offspring, from those who deny what lies beyond bodily sight, and also from those who imitate religious teachings without understanding the reality of what they affirm concerning resurrection, rising, gathering, reckoning, the Balance, the Path, return, reward, and punishment.

This science is, according to the epistle, **the kernel of wisdom and a secret of the friends of God**.

We shall therefore indicate a portion of it through symbols, parables, and allusions for those who seek God and desire the abode of the hereafter.

Its reality is subtle and difficult to express.

It cannot easily be conceived by ordinary imagination except by purified souls, pure spirits, attentive hearts, and listening ears.

Before discussing resurrection, however, we must speak of the soul and spirit, their reality and condition.

For knowledge of the hereafter depends upon knowledge of resurrection, knowledge of resurrection depends upon knowledge of the soul, and knowledge of the soul requires distinguishing it from the body.

Some theologians dispute the existence of the soul or remain ignorant of its true substance.

For this reason we shall first indicate its existence from revelation and prophetic reports, and afterward through philosophical and rational arguments for those who are not satisfied by transmitted authority alone.

The sages and philosophers have spoken extensively concerning souls and urged their students and children to seek knowledge of the soul and its substance.

For through knowledge of the soul one reaches knowledge of spiritual realities: the beginning and return, the Creator Most High, the angels, and especially resurrection, the rising after death, gathering, reckoning, reward for those who do good, and punishment for those who do evil.

Whoever does not know his own soul, his own essence, or the difference between soul and body devotes nearly all his concern to bodily welfare: pleasant living, enjoyment of worldly blessings, and the desire to remain here forever.

He forgets the return and the reality of the hereafter.

But when a human being knows himself and recognises the true substance of his soul, his concern turns increasingly toward the soul itself.

He reflects upon its condition after death, becomes certain of the return, prepares for departure from the world, takes provisions for the hereafter, hastens toward good works and repentance, and avoids evil, wrongdoing, and disobedience.

When he does so, fear of death decreases.

He may even desire the meeting with God.

This, the authors say, is characteristic of the friends of God and His righteous servants.

The Qur'an challenges those claiming special friendship with God to desire death if they are truthful.

The friends of God desire death because they remember what God has promised them of greeting, peace, honour, and nearness.

The text cites:

“Their greeting on the day they meet Him will be: Peace.”

And:

“Do not think those slain in the way of God to be dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision, rejoicing in what God has given them of His bounty.”

Every rational person knows, the authors say, that the bodies of such people have decayed in the earth.

Thus the honour, life, greeting, and provision spoken of must belong to their purified souls and spirits.

The epistle also cites:

“O tranquil soul, return to your Lord, well pleased and pleasing. Enter among My servants and enter My Paradise.”

And:

“By the soul and Him who proportioned it, then inspired it with its wickedness and its piety: successful is the one who purifies it, and failed is the one who corrupts it.”

And:

“God takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that have not died during their sleep.”

Such verses are used to distinguish the soul from the body.

The body is composed of flesh, blood, veins, nerves, bones, and similar things.

Its beginning lies in the sperm-drop, menstrual blood, milk, food, and drink.

Its end is death, after which it decays and becomes earth, until God recreates it if He wills.

The soul or spirit, by contrast, is described as a celestial, luminous substance: living, knowing, naturally active, sensitive, and perceptive.

It does not perish with the body.

It remains either in pleasure or pain.

The souls of believers, the friends of God, and righteous servants ascend after death toward the kingdom of heaven and the spacious celestial world, where they remain in repose and light until the great resurrection.

The souls of unbelievers, sinners, and evil people remain in blindness and ignorance, afflicted, sorrowful, fearful, and troubled until the Day of Resurrection.

The epistle cites passages concerning Pharaoh's people being exposed to the Fire morning and evening before the final Hour, and other verses concerning souls being taken at death and recompensed.

These, the authors argue, indicate that souls persist after bodily death.

Whoever is fair to his own intellect, cares about what comes after death, prepares for departure, and takes provision for the journey should find this sufficient as an initial indication.

Those who deny resurrection often demand to know its precise manner before they have first understood themselves: what the soul is, why it is joined to the body at one time and leaves it at another, from where it came, and where it returns after separation.

These are subtle and difficult sciences.

Beginners in philosophy can initially approach them only through trust in truthful prophetic reports received through revelation and divine inspiration.

Those who demand philosophical demonstration require purified souls, clear hearts, attentive hearing, good character, freedom from sectarian fanaticism, and prior training in arithmetic, geometry, logic, natural philosophy, and finally divine science.

The Meaning of Resurrection

Know, O brother, that **qiyāma**, “rising,” derives from standing up.

The authors interpret it spiritually as the rising of the soul after it has fallen into its affliction.

Resurrection is its awakening from the sleep of heedlessness and the slumber of ignorance.

Every intelligent person who reflects upon the world—its generation and corruption, constant change and transformation, and especially life and death—recognises that he must inevitably die and follow those who passed before him.

He therefore naturally wishes to know the reality of the hereafter with certainty.

People hold two broad positions concerning the hereafter.

One group denies it.

They compare human beings with plants and non-rational animals.

Plants arise, grow, reach completion, decay, and disappear, while others like them arise afterward.

Animals are born, grow, reach maturity, die, decay, and are replaced by others.

Those who deny resurrection apply the same model to humanity and say that nothing destroys them except time.

The Qur'an rejects this claim, saying that they possess no knowledge of what they attribute to "time."

Those who affirm the hereafter are themselves of two kinds.

Some affirm it with their tongues without clearly conceiving it in their hearts or intellectually understanding its reality.

Their affirmation consists of faith, submission, and trust in the prophets.

Others both affirm it and possess an intellectual conception of it.

God praises both, though knowledge raises one group above the other.

Knowledge is the conception of a thing according to its reality.

Faith is affirmation and belief in truthful reports concerning a thing even when its reality has not yet been fully conceived.

The prophets and their closest friends are described as those who report concerning the hereafter while also conceiving and knowing its reality.

Believers accept their reports.

Know, O brother, that sound opinions and correct beliefs assist souls in awakening from heedlessness and ignorance, bringing them to life from the death of sin, rescuing them from the fires of the abyss—the world of generation and corruption—and leading them toward the bliss of the gardens in the true abode of life, the celestial world and the spacious heavens.

Among the saving beliefs is the conviction that the world is originated and created, held within the power of its Creator, continually dependent upon Him for existence and preservation, and unable to remain for even an instant without His sustaining effusion.

If God withheld His preservation for a moment, the heavens would dissolve, the celestial spheres perish, the stars fall, the elements vanish, creatures be destroyed, and the world disappear.

The authors cite:

"God holds the heavens and the Earth lest they cease; and if they ceased, none after Him could hold them."

A person who truly holds this belief remains inwardly attached to his Lord, relying upon Him, entrusting his affairs to Him, and asking Him for his needs.

This becomes life for the soul and tranquillity for the heart.

Another saving belief is that from the moment a human being is formed as a sperm-drop in a secure resting place, he is continually travelling toward his Lord.

His Creator transfers him from one condition to another, from deficiency toward greater completion and from lower ranks toward higher ones, until he finally meets his Lord.

Thus the key to knowledge of the hereafter is **self-knowledge**.

Whoever knows only the body desires to preserve the body and remain in worldly life.

Whoever truly knows the soul turns his concern toward its purification, its return, preparation for death, certainty concerning the meeting with God, and reduction of fear before bodily separation.

The Qur'an uses many names for the final reality: the Day of Resurrection, the Day they are raised, the Day of Religion, the Day of Separation, the Day of Reckoning, the Approaching Day, the Day of Calling, the Day of Mutual Loss and Gain, the Day of Gathering, the Day they emerge, and the Hour.

The authors say that the realities symbolised by these names are subtle, and that people grasp them according to their capacities.

Just as rain descends from heaven and different valleys receive water according to their size, revelation descends and hearts receive its meanings according to their intellectual capacity and purity.

The “heart” intended here, the authors insist, is not simply the cone-shaped piece of flesh in the chest.

It is the **soul**.

The word **resurrection** itself has three meanings.

First, it may mean **sending**, as when God “raises” or sends prophets.

Second, it may mean the **raising of dead bodies from graves and their reconstitution from the earth**, as promised to those who deny bodily resurrection.

Third, it may mean the **awakening of ignorant souls from the death of ignorance and the sleep of heedlessness**, as when scripture speaks of one who was dead and was given life and light.

The authors argue that one who cannot even conceive bodily resurrection should not first be addressed concerning the subtler resurrection of souls.

Bodily resurrection is easier for the imagination.

The resurrection of souls belongs to the sciences of the elect and is grasped especially by those trained in divine knowledge.

Thus revelation promises bodily resurrection to deniers according to the level they can understand, while it promises believers the life and awakening of their souls.

The epistle urges the reader not to remain satisfied merely with waiting for bodies to rise, but to become one of those who hope for the resurrection and life of souls and their arrival in their spiritual world and enduring abode.

Chapter 1: On the Resurrection of Bodies

Know, O brother, that the rising of bodies from decayed graves and their standing again from the earth occurs when the souls and spirits formerly attached to them are restored to them.

Then the bodies revive after their stillness, become alive, move, sense, are gathered, reckoned with, and recompensed.

For the purpose of resurrection is recompense and requital.

Yet the authors immediately distinguish this bodily resurrection from the higher resurrection of the soul.

For a purified soul already delivered from bodily corruption, a renewed descent into gross bodies may itself resemble death through ignorance, imprisonment in nature, drowning in the sea of matter, and return to bodily darkness.

The **resurrection of souls**, by contrast, is awakening from heedlessness, rising from ignorance, becoming alive through the spirit of knowledge, emerging from the darkness of natural bodies, escaping the sea of matter and captivity of nature, ascending through the ranks of the spiritual world, and returning to the soul's luminous and living abode.

The authors cite:

“Indeed, the abode of the hereafter is truly life, if only they knew.”

If the abode itself is life, they ask, what must the condition of its inhabitants be?

Their state corresponds to:

“Therein is whatever souls desire and whatever delights the eyes, and therein you shall remain forever.”

All sciences are noble, but the noblest knowledge accessible to responsible rational beings is knowledge of God, His unity, and the attributes properly belonging to Him.

After this comes knowledge of the substance of the soul and of its conditions in past, present, and future.

Then comes knowledge of the resurrection, the rising, the return, and the life to come.

Human beings differ greatly in the way they conceive these things.

Some think the human being is nothing other than the visible body and therefore imagine resurrection only as the reconstruction of that same body from dispersed earthly parts.

Others recognise the presence of a non-bodily substance called soul or spirit and imagine resurrection as the return of that soul to the same body or to another body capable of replacing it, followed by judgement and recompense.

The authors call this position better and closer to the truth.

Beyond these stands another level of understanding.

Those who possess greater knowledge hold that the reason souls and spirits are associated with bodies for a period in worldly life is so that their substances may become upright, their forms perfected, and their latent capacities brought from potentiality into actuality.

Through sensible experience, intellectual conception, education, intellectual discipline, natural and divine sciences, reflection, experience, governance, and ethical training, the soul awakens from heedlessness and ignorance.

Its inner eye opens.

It beholds its spiritual world and recognises that this bodily world is a place of exile, trial, and affliction.

It sees itself immersed in the sea of matter, captive to nature, and surrounded by the burning appetites of bodily life.

The text then presents worldly existence almost as captivity beneath **five rulers**.

The first is the revolving celestial world and its changing conditions: night and day, summer and winter, wind and storm, rain, thunder, famine, abundance, disease, war, fear, hope, grief, and continual alteration until death.

The second is bodily **nature**, which imposes hunger, thirst, sexual desire, sickness, pain, and innumerable needs.

Human beings spend their days seeking benefits for unstable bodies and repelling harms from them.

The third is **religious law** with its commands, prohibitions, disciplines, obligations, and restraints.

Fasting brings hunger, standing in prayer tires the body, purification may require cold water, almsgiving opposes avarice, pilgrimage and struggle impose hardship, and unlawful pleasures must be abandoned.

Yet the authors do not condemn religious law; rather, they portray its disciplines as part of the training required for liberation from the lower self.

The fourth ruler is **political authority**, especially when unjust.

Human beings require society and cooperation for worldly life, and society requires governing authority to restrain oppression and settle disputes.

Yet rulers may also impose burdens, service, fear, journeys, warfare, rivalry, taxation, and hardship.

The fifth ruler is **bodily necessity itself**: the need for food, drink, clothing, shelter, transport, tools, money, agriculture, commerce, manufacture, calculation, storage, and protection of possessions.

Most of worldly labour is undertaken to preserve this perishable bodily structure.

Such, the authors say, is the condition of most human beings in worldly life.

Whoever nevertheless wishes to remain here forever does so either because he does not believe in the hereafter or because he imagines that death means pure nonexistence.

Love of persistence and hatred of annihilation are naturally implanted in beings, so such a person can at least be understood.

But one who has truly conceived the hereafter, the return, its excellence, joy, pleasure, and enduring life has no excuse for preferring permanent residence in a world filled with these afflictions.

Therefore strive, O brother, to know the true nature of the hereafter and the reality of the return so that your soul may be led toward it after separation.

If the soul remains blind in this world, it will be more blind in the hereafter and farther from the path.

The believer who truly comes to understand the return awakens from heedlessness and becomes alive through knowledge.

The epistle gives the example of a believer who, when asked how he had begun his day, replied:

“I have begun it as a true believer.”

Asked what the reality of his faith was, he answered that it was as though he already saw the Resurrection established, the Throne manifest, creatures standing for reckoning, the people of Paradise in bliss, and the people of Hell in punishment.

Such people are described symbolically as **the People of the Heights**, recognising both groups by their signs.

Among the marks of God's awakened friends is that places, times, changing circumstances, praise, and blame cease to dominate their inner state.

Every place becomes for them a mosque.

Every direction becomes a qibla, for:

“Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God.”

Their movements become worship and their stillness obedience.

Praise and blame cease to control them.

They stand for justice as witnesses to truth.

They do not wish evil for any creature, enemy or friend, opponent or companion.

The epistle then presents a dialogue between two people.

One is described as having been rescued from the Fire of hatred and false doctrine.

The other remains inwardly tormented.

The afflicted man says that he curses those who oppose his religious faction night and day and finds relief in doing so.

The saved man asks whether these curses actually harm the opponents.

He answers that he does not know, but that cursing gives his heart relief.

The saved man replies that this very pleasure reveals his sickness.

His soul is tormented, and the relief of hatred is only temporary release from pain.

He is imprisoned within a layer of Hell—the fire kindled within the heart—until he is delivered from it.

The saved man, by contrast, says that he recognises himself as surrounded by blessings from God beyond counting.

He is content with what God has allotted, patient under divine judgement, wishes no evil upon creation, hides no deceit or malice, and entrusts his religion and condition to his Lord.

His soul is at rest, his heart spacious, and creation is safe from him.

Chapter 2: The Layers of Hell

Know that Hell possesses many levels.

The epistle interprets these as differing passions, corrupt opinions, and accumulated forms of ignorance within which souls are imprisoned.

Their hearts are tormented by many kinds of pain.

One generation passes away and another succeeds it, inheriting the same doctrines and hostilities from teachers and predecessors.

Each faction curses those opposing it, and all share in suffering.

Thus the condition described by scripture—communities entering the Fire and cursing one another—is also reflected in worldly hatred and sectarian hostility.

The authors urge the reader to seek refuge in God from such a condition.

They then return to a philosophical question.

If the craftsman who constructed the human body is identical with the soul now using it, why does the soul not remember how it built the body?

Why must anatomists learn the structure of the body by dissecting it after death?

If another principle built the body, what is the relation between that builder and the soul currently using it?

Is the embodied soul the student, child, or developing offspring of a higher formative power—formerly ignorant and merely potential, but gradually becoming rational, mature, and wise?

The authors leave the reader to reflect upon these questions as indications toward a deeper understanding of soul, nature, and divine craftsmanship.

Chapter 3: The Parable of the King and His Sons

The epistle concludes with an elaborate symbolic account.

A mighty king, possessing vast authority, extensive dominion, armies, and servants, had a succession of sons.

Each son resembled him in some respect.

The first was given authority over part of the kingdom and commanded to govern well.

He was permitted many blessings but forbidden one rank before its proper time.

A former servant envied him and persuaded him to reach prematurely for what had been forbidden.

The son was deceived, fell from his rank, recognised his fault, and wandered in hardship.

Remembering his former blessing, he grieved, wept, and fell asleep.

He was carried back to his father, who ordered that he remain asleep until **Friday**.

A second son was then born.

He was patient, dignified, and grateful.

When he governed, his subjects resisted and harmed him.

He endured them, then complained to his father, who punished many of the rebels.

The son grieved at their suffering and also fell asleep.

His father again ordered that he remain asleep until Friday.

A third son was born.

He was virtuous, learned, eloquent, and skilled in argument.

He called the people, commanded and prohibited them, but they refused to obey.

He built a sanctuary for his father, made offerings, established rites, and called people to witness what they had not witnessed and hear what they had not heard.

Then he too slept and was carried to his father until Friday.

His call, however, remained in the ears of later souls, who inherited its forms even when they no longer understood their inner meanings.

A fourth son was strong, courageous, bold, and resolute.

When his subjects resisted him, he fought them, defeated them, scattered their forces, and broke their unity.

Yet he remained alone, calling people who no longer answered him.

He grieved and slept until Friday.

A fifth son was gentle, guided, and compassionate.

Only a few followed him.

His enemies attacked him and stripped him of a garment his mother had made for him.

He appealed to his father, who supported him with a spirit from himself and promised that justice would be completed at the appointed time.

Then came preparation for the sixth day.

The king commanded the stars to choose gifts for another son who would descend into the world of generation and corruption and awaken his sleeping brothers.

Each celestial body contributed from its symbolic virtues.

The Sun gave majesty, leadership, sovereignty, honour, splendour, praise, generosity, and authority.

Saturn gave patience, dignity, steadfastness, depth of reflection, lofty aspiration, trustworthiness, thought, and deliberation.

Jupiter gave religion, piety, goodness, justice, equity, truth, fidelity, honour, and nobility.

Mars gave determination, courage, bravery, energy, victory, generosity, and vigilance.

Venus gave beauty, completeness, compassion, mercy, adornment, cleanliness, love, affection, joy, and pleasure.

Mercury gave eloquence, speech, discrimination, intelligence, subtlety, reading, melody, knowledge, and wisdom.

The Moon promised to nurse and raise him and gave light, splendour, growth, movement through lands, travel, fulfilment of hopes, transmission of news, and knowledge of appointed times.

The celestial spheres turned, the spiritual powers became active, and the inhabitants of heaven rejoiced.

The **Lord of Resurrection** descended into the world of generation on the Night of Destiny before dawn in order to blow the Trumpet.

The symbolic child remained for a period in the womb and then in nursing until he grew, developed, and became complete.

He became the most complete among his brothers: refined, learned, wise, a mighty ruler, a just imam, and a sent prophet.

His father appointed him over his own kingdom and the kingdoms of his brothers.

He overcame those who opposed him and honoured those who followed him.

After a period of authority he became ill, passed into another abode, later awakened partially, then drank of the cup of worldly hopes and desires, became intoxicated by them, entered the cave of his father, and slept beside his brothers.

When the appointed time approached and the cycle of sleep reached its end, their father called:

Has the time not come for you to awaken from your sleep, rise from your heedlessness, remember what you have forgotten concerning your beginning, and return from your journeys toward your final destination?

For every beginning has an end.

Every life has a termination.

Every death and every sleeper has an awakening.

The six days of creation are reaching completion, and tomorrow is **Friday**, the day of gathering.

The symbolic sleepers awaken like the Companions of the Cave after their long sleep and begin asking one another how long they remained there.

The epistle connects the entire parable with scriptural symbols of the prophets, planetary powers, the days of creation, the Cave, the Trumpet, the Resurrection, the Gathering, and the final judgement.

Its details are intentionally veiled.

The reader is explicitly warned:

Understand, O brother, these indications and signs, and reason from them toward their counterparts. Do not disclose the secrets.

Awaken from the sleep of heedlessness and the slumber of ignorance before the Trumpet is blown and before the caller summons people to the gathering.

Hasten toward the remembrance of God and leave worldly commerce behind when the call comes.

Take provision from this world, for you are a traveller.

The best provision is God-consciousness.

Do not seek corruption upon the Earth.

Successful is the one who purifies the soul, and failed is the one who corrupts it.

May God guide us, you, and all our brothers toward the path of correctness.

Indeed, He is compassionate toward His servants.

Here ends the Epistle on Resurrection and the Rising.

It is followed by the Eighth Epistle, On the Number and Kinds of Motions.

Epistle 39

On the Number and Kinds of Motions

The Eighth Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Introduction: The Nature of Motion and Rest

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed the Epistle on Resurrection and the Rising.

Earlier we explained the nature of bodies and the number of their kinds. We also showed that bodies are never free from either motion or rest, and in our natural and divine epistles we explained that the principle which moves bodies and causes them to rest is Soul.

We now wish in this epistle to explain the nature of motions, the number of their kinds, and the directions toward and within which moving bodies move.

We begin by asking: **What are motion and rest?**

Scholars and sages have differed concerning their reality.

Some affirmed both, while others denied that either possesses a true independent reality. Some maintained that motion can arise only from a living and powerful being. Others said that motion itself is life.

To recount all their disagreements and proofs would require a lengthy discussion.

We shall therefore say that **motion is a spiritual form which Soul places within bodies, through which bodies become moving**.

Soul places motion within bodies in the same manner that it places within them shapes, patterns, forms, and colours, by which bodies become figured, decorated, formed, and coloured.

Soul is therefore the mover, while bodies are what are moved or brought to rest.

Moving is an action of Soul.

Motion is the form impressed by Soul upon a body through which the body becomes moving.

Causing rest is likewise one of Soul's actions.

A human being, for example, moves his hand at one time and holds it still at another.

Having explained motion and rest, we shall now describe their kinds.

Bodily motion is of **six kinds**:

generation, corruption, increase, decrease, alteration, and locomotion.

We shall begin with locomotion because it is the clearest to the senses.

Locomotion itself is of three kinds:

straight, circular, and a combination of straight and circular motion.

Straight motion is of two kinds: from the centre toward the circumference, and from the circumference toward the centre, meaning either the centre and circumference of the world or some analogous centre and surrounding boundary.

Circular motion is motion around a centre.

The moving things discussed in this epistle may be grouped into twelve broad classes, among them the celestial spheres, the wandering planets, what are called comets, meteors, winds, atmospheric phenomena, clouds, rain, waters, terrestrial movements, mineral generation, plants, and animals.

All their directions, however numerous and varied, reduce ultimately to motion from a centre, toward a centre, around a centre, or obliquely between these.

Chapter 1: The Motions of the Heavens, Winds, Atmosphere, and Earth

The motions of the nine celestial spheres are all around the Earth, because, according to the cosmology of this epistle, the Earth is their centre and the centre of the entire world.

The fixed stars likewise revolve around the centre of the world.

The seven wandering planets move around the centres of their epicycles.

Their epicycles in turn revolve around the centres of larger deferent spheres, while those deferents may themselves revolve around centres displaced from the centre of the Earth.

The authors refer the detailed geometrical demonstrations to the *Almagest*.

The motions observed among the planets—progression through the zodiac, latitude, inclination, retrogradation, direct motion, and similar phenomena—have already been explained elsewhere in the corpus through examples.

The epistle counts numerous separate celestial motions, including motions attributed to each wandering planet, the fixed stars, and the zodiacal sphere.

What are popularly called **comets**, the authors say, are not stars in the strict sense but luminous phenomena arising beneath the sphere of the Moon in the region of ether.

Their apparent motions differ.

At times they move westward with the revolution of the encompassing sphere; at other times they appear to move eastward along the zodiac or obliquely in longitude and latitude.

Meteors arise lower still, between the ether and the extremely cold atmospheric region, while lightning occurs in the lower atmospheric sphere.

Such phenomena, within the cosmology of the epistle, belong to the world of generation and corruption.

The movements of winds are reduced to six principal directions.

Wind itself is described as nothing but the **undulation of air**, for air is a subtle sea between heaven and Earth.

When air moves from east to west, it receives one name; in the opposite direction, another.

Likewise there are northward and southward winds, upward and downward movements, with oblique winds forming further subdivisions.

The authors also connect atmospheric motion with stellar rays, the twenty-eight lunar mansions, and the Moon's relations with the planets, according to their astronomical and astrological system.

Meteors likewise move through the principal directions or obliquely according to the force propelling them.

They may appear faster than the stars, not because their actual motion is necessarily greater, but because they are far nearer to us.

Clouds move according to the winds that drive them from seas, marshes, and rivers toward lands, deserts, and mountains.

Rain falls from the atmosphere toward Earth and sea, either vertically or obliquely.

The Earth is said to possess three kinds of motion in the theories discussed by the authors: earthquakes, collapses or subsidences, and a supposed rocking or swaying.

Earthquakes are explained through vapours imprisoned beneath the ground seeking release.

The epistle compares this to a feverish body trembling when internal vapours and heat agitate it.

Sometimes the surface of the Earth splits and trapped air, smoke, or vapour escapes suddenly.

The ground may then collapse into the resulting cavities, like a roof falling into the floor of a house.

Some sages also claimed that the Earth sways slowly from south to north and back again, though people do not perceive this because of its immense size.

Different explanations are reported, including seasonal heating associated with the Sun.

Other sages reject the theory, arguing that if the Earth truly rocked in this way, the observed positions of fixed stars, the height of the pole, and the position of the equator should change seasonally, which they do not.

The epistle therefore presents the disagreement rather than simply suppressing it.

Chapter 2: The Earth and the Continual Motion of the Lower World

Know that the Earth, together with its mountains, seas, inhabited regions, and wildernesses, is a spherical body standing at the centre of the world according to the astronomy of the text.

Its surface is not perfectly smooth, nor is its interior solid throughout.

It contains mountains, hills, valleys, cavities, caves, hollows, passages, hidden spaces, waters, moistures, oily and sulphurous vapours, and materials from which mineral substances are formed.

These vapours, smokes, and moistures are continually undergoing alteration, transformation, generation, and corruption.

The surface of the Earth is likewise filled with continual motion.

There are seas, rivers, valleys, streams, marshes, ponds, inlets, and channels through which water continually passes.

The waves of the sea move night and day without rest.

Winds continually change.

Clouds, rain, fog, and vapours continually arise and disappear.

Rain is always falling somewhere upon the Earth, whether east, west, north, or south.

Night and day, winter and summer, are likewise always passing over different regions.

Generation and corruption among plants, animals, and minerals never cease.

Mating, reproduction, sensation, motion, sleeping, waking, life, and death continue perpetually among created beings.

There is scarcely a span of Earth in which one does not find, in some degree, mineral, plant, or animal existence.

Their genera, species, individuals, forms, shapes, natures, temperaments, character traits, colours, and sounds are known fully only to God, who created, formed, and governed them as He willed.

When you consider, O brother, all these motions and moving things, you will perceive that the world and all its parts resemble **one city, one animal, or one human being**, never entirely free from motion or rest, whether in the whole or in some part.

We explained elsewhere that the movements of the elements and generated beings follow from the celestial motions.

The motions of the planets arise from the revolutions of the spheres.

The one who governs and moves the spheres is the **Universal Celestial Soul**.

This Universal Soul is identified symbolically with a mighty angel among the angels brought near to God and with the spiritual power alluded to in scriptural passages concerning the Spirit and the angels standing in ranks.

God has entrusted it, according to the epistle, with the revolution of the spheres, movement of the planets, and administration of what lies beneath the Moon among elements, minerals, plants, and animals.

This spiritual principle is nobler, stronger, and higher than all bodily creatures.

And just as it can move celestial bodies, it can cause them to rest, for causing rest is easier than producing motion.

The motions of animals are innumerable in their directions, forms, and configurations.

Only God could enumerate them all.

We therefore turn to the movements of the human body as an example through which the movements of other animals may be understood.

Chapter 3: Natural and Voluntary Movements of the Human Body

The movements of the bodily organs are of two kinds: **natural and voluntary**.

Natural movements include the pulse of the arteries and the movements of the chest, heart, lungs, and throat in breathing.

These occur both in sleep and waking without deliberate choice.

Voluntary movements include standing, sitting, going, coming, crafts, actions, speech, and gestures.

According to the enumeration of the epistle, these amount to more than one hundred and twenty separate bodily motions.

Among them are the opening and closing of the eyelids.

The eyes move upward, downward, right, and left through nerves extending from the brain and muscles connected with the eyes.

A human being directs the eye through these muscles as a rider directs a horse with the reins.

The tongue moves in several directions in chewing food, moving it beneath the teeth for cutting, breaking, crushing, and grinding.

During speech the tongue performs other motions in articulating letters.

The authors identify fourteen Arabic letters in whose articulation the tongue plays a principal role and distinguish them from other letters whose places of articulation lie elsewhere.

Such letters arise when the soul sends forth exhaled air and the tongue interrupts and shapes it at its proper points of articulation.

The lips likewise open and close.

The nostrils move during inhalation of air and odours.

The oesophagus moves in swallowing food and drink and carrying them toward the stomach.

The lower jaw moves in different directions.

The head and neck move in several directions.

The hands, forearms, upper arms, shoulders, fingers, thighs, knees, feet, toes, and other joints possess their own voluntary movements.

The detailed enumeration is lengthy, but the principle is clear: the body possesses a great variety of movements because the soul uses its organs as instruments and tools.

The human body is therefore like a complex workshop.

Its many motions are not self-originating in dead matter but manifestations of the powers of the soul acting through bodily organs.

Chapter 4: Motion as Evidence Against the Eternity of the World

Know that our purpose in recounting the motions of the world, the movements of its universal and particular parts, and their many transformations is to show the weakness of the claim that the world is eternal.

For differing movements indicate differing states.

Whatever possesses changing states cannot, in the sense used by the authors, be absolutely eternal.

The truly eternal is that which remains in one condition without alteration, transformation, or acquisition of a new state.

Nothing of this kind exists except God, the One and Unique.

Those who claimed the eternity of the world imagined it to be essentially still and unchanging.

But the world is not as they imagined.

Its universal and particular parts display countless motions that sound reason cannot deny: movements of the planets, revolutions of the spheres, transformations of the elements, generation of composite beings, and the many other changes described above.

Even the encompassing sphere, though remaining in its place and not travelling from one region to another, is continually moving in its parts through rotation.

Every celestial sphere revolves about its own centre without pausing for even the blink of an eye.

The same is true of the planets.

The epistle stresses the enormous speed of celestial motion according to the astronomy of its age.

Every motion within a moving thing serves as a cause for some further effect.

If the motion ceases, that effect ceases.

A millstone turns because an animal or water drives it.

When the animal stops or the water is cut off, the mill ceases turning and the grinding stops.

A waterwheel likewise ceases drawing water when the power moving it stops.

Ships cease moving when wind or current fails.

When the limbs of an animal cease their vital movement, the animal dies.

When the pulse and breathing cease, bodily life ends.

By analogy, if the motions of the seven planets through the zodiac ceased, the processes of generation and corruption beneath the Moon would also cease within the cosmological framework of the epistle.

If the encompassing sphere ceased rotating, the planets would stop, night and day would no longer alternate, winter and summer would cease, generation and corruption would stop, cosmic order would dissolve, created beings would perish, and the Universal Soul would separate from the Universal Body.

That would be the **Great Resurrection**.

For the world is a great human being.

When the soul of the world separates from its Universal Body, the great human being dies and its great resurrection occurs.

Likewise, when an individual human soul leaves its body, the small human world dies and its own resurrection has begun.

Thus the text distinguishes a **great resurrection** and a **small resurrection**, recalling the saying:

“Whoever dies, his resurrection has begun.”

Chapter 5: Rational Premises Showing that the World Is Created

Know that by “the world” the sages mean the encompassing sphere and everything it contains: the other celestial spheres, planets, zodiac, four elements, and generated beings—animals, plants, and minerals.

All these things are bodies.

A body is that which possesses length, breadth, and depth.

The “thing” receiving these dimensions points toward matter; length, breadth, and depth point toward form, through which matter becomes corporeal.

Some bodies move continuously, such as celestial spheres and planets.

Some remain stationary as wholes while their parts move, as the authors describe the elemental regions.

Other bodies, especially animals and plants, move at one time and rest at another.

All such moving and resting bodies require a mover and a principle of rest.

The celestial spheres are spherical bodies enclosing one another, smaller within greater, ending with the ninth encompassing sphere.

They possess circular motions differing in speed and direction.

The planets likewise possess distinct motions.

These differing motions, shapes, speeds, directions, and states indicate, according to the argument of the epistle, **intention, construction, arrangement, and a wise, powerful, knowing agent**.

The same applies to the four elements and the generated beings.

The diversity and transformation of their conditions indicate that they are the work of a Wise Maker.

This leads the authors to qualify simplistic astrology.

If the planets themselves are compelled and governed, then they are not independent ultimate agents.

Their effects are subordinate to the power which moves and governs them.

The true agent is therefore not the compelled celestial body but the higher principle by whose power it acts.

The signs of craftsmanship are manifest throughout the created world even when the Craftsman Himself is hidden from bodily sight.

A person may see the marks of construction in an artefact without yet knowing who constructed it, when, from what material, by what method, whether through one craftsman or several, or for what purpose.

Yet the existence of order and workmanship itself indicates intention, a maker, and wisdom.

Ignorance of the Maker becomes a veil between the observer and God.

The epistle interprets scriptural language concerning people being “veiled from their Lord” as referring to this ignorance and lack of knowledge.

The friends of God, His chosen servants, and enlightened sages, by contrast, perceive the Creator through the eye of insight in all their states and activities.

Nothing in the signs of His creation is absent from them.

The text cites:

“God bears witness that there is no god but He, and so do the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining justice.”

And:

“Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God.”

And:

“He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.”

And:

“We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”

When the friends of God truly understand such verses, their hearts are expanded, their inner sight illuminated, and the veil lifted.

The epistle recalls the saying attributed to the “Lion of God”:

“If the veil were removed, I would not increase in certainty.”

That is, his present certainty concerning God was already as firm as it would be in the hereafter.

Chapter 6: How the World Exists from God

Know that the existence of the world from the Creator is not like the existence of a house from a builder or a written book from a scribe.

Once the builder has finished, the house stands independently of him.

Once the scribe has finished writing, the book remains even if the scribe departs.

The relation of the world to God is instead compared with **speech in relation to a speaker**.

Speech exists only while the speaker produces it.

When he ceases speaking, the speech ceases.

It is also compared with the light of a lamp in the surrounding air.

As long as the lamp remains lit, its light remains.

Or with sunlight in the atmosphere: when the Sun is absent, the particular illumination disappears.

Or with heat proceeding from fire: when the fire is extinguished, its heat ceases.

Or with number proceeding from unity, as explained in the Epistle on Arithmetic.

Speech is not a physical piece of the speaker.

It is an act produced by him.

Likewise the light shining in the air is not a detached bodily piece of the Sun but an effusion from it.

Heat spreading from fire is not a piece broken off from the fire but a quality proceeding from it.

The same analogy is applied to the world's existence from God.

The world is not a part of God.

It is an effusion of generosity, an act He brings forth, and an effect of His wisdom and mercy.

Yet the authors warn against interpreting this analogy as though the world proceeded from God by blind natural necessity in the way sunlight necessarily proceeds from the Sun.

The Creator is **voluntary in His action**.

He can act and can refrain from action.

The appropriate analogy is therefore also that of a speaker who can speak when he wills and remain silent when he wills.

God's origination is an act of free power.

The text cites:

“God holds the heavens and the Earth lest they cease; and if they ceased, none after Him could hold them.”

And:

“Every day He is upon some affair.”

Having explained how the world depends upon God for its existence, the authors next explain how its present order will one day come to an end.

Chapter 7: Why the Present Cosmic Order Must Eventually Cease

Know that a voluntary agent is one who possesses the power either to act or to refrain from acting whenever he wills.

Every wise voluntary agent possesses an end or purpose in his action.

A purpose is an intention existing in the knowledge of the craftsman before his work is manifested.

It is for the sake of that purpose that he acts.

When he reaches it, the action ends.

Further, if a wise craftsman knows with certainty that his purpose can never be attained, he does not undertake a futile action.

The mover of the celestial spheres and planets is, according to the authors, a wise, powerful, voluntary agent.

From these premises they conclude that the present motion of the cosmos cannot continue without end in exactly its current form.

If the mover will eventually reach the purpose for which the spheres are moved, then upon reaching it the motion ceases.

If the purpose has not yet been reached, motion continues toward it.

If the mover knew the purpose could never be reached, such activity would be incompatible with wisdom.

Therefore, once the intended end is fulfilled, celestial motion ceases.

When the spheres stop revolving, the planets cease moving through the zodiac.

The alternation of night and day and winter and summer ceases.

Temporal order as presently experienced comes to an end.

Generation and corruption among minerals, plants, and animals stop.

The present cosmic arrangement dissolves.

This is what the authors identify with the **Great Resurrection**, the passing away of the current heavens and Earth.

The condition of the spiritual world and the continued existence of souls was discussed in the preceding Epistle on Resurrection and the Rising.

Chapter 8: The Harm of Believing the World Eternal and Uncreated

Know that one who believes the world to be eternal and uncreated—or even merely assumes it so—risks allowing his soul to remain asleep in heedlessness and die in ignorance.

For if he regards the world as beginningless and self-sufficient, it may never occur to him to ask how it was made, who its Maker is, when it was originated, from what it was fashioned, how it was formed, why it was brought into being, or what purpose was intended by it.

These questions and their answers can awaken the soul from heedlessness and give it life through knowledge.

If the questions never arise, no answers are sought.

If no answers are sought, knowledge is not attained.

The soul then remains asleep, blind to reflection upon what it witnesses, deaf to instruction, and dead within layers of ignorance.

A person may then occupy himself almost entirely with food, drink, sexual pleasure, bodily appetite, and physical enjoyment because he remains ignorant of his own soul.

Persisting in this condition until death, he leaves worldly life unwillingly and sorrowfully.

By contrast, one who believes the world to be originated, fashioned intentionally, and the act of a Wise Agent is moved toward wonder, thought, reflection, investigation, insight, and subtle questions concerning the noble sciences.

He asks:

Who is the Craftsman who made the world?

When did He make it?

From what did He fashion it?

How did He form it?

Why did He act after not acting in that particular way?

What did He intend through His act?

Through such questions and their answers, the soul awakens from the death of ignorance.

The eye of insight opens.

If understanding is granted through divine inspiration, the authors associate this with revelation and prophecy.

If the matters remain difficult, one should sit with sages and investigate them together.

By understanding what the sages have explained, the soul becomes similar to theirs, awakens from heedlessness, lives the life of the learned, and participates in the happiness of the blessed.

Chapter 9: The Highest Happiness of the Friends of God

Know that every existent possesses some share of happiness, whether great or small.

Its happiness consists in remaining in existence as long as possible and in the best and most complete condition appropriate to it.

Yet the highest happiness, most perfect end, and loftiest station belong to the friends of God, His chosen servants and people of His love.

Their condition rests upon three things.

The first is **knowledge of their Lord**.

The second is **directing the aspiration of their souls toward Him**.

The third is **seeking His good pleasure through their effort and actions**.

Their knowledge of their Lord includes understanding that every particular soul is a power flowing from the Universal Soul.

The Universal Soul in turn flows from the Universal Intellect.

The Universal Intellect is a light flowing from the existence of the Creator.

God Most High is the **Light of lights, pure existence, the treasury of generosity, and the giver of virtues, goods, and happiness**.

He remains eternally and everlastingly.

Particular souls are rays, lights, and illuminations flowing from the Universal Soul throughout the world and permeating bodies from the outermost celestial sphere down to the centre of the Earth.

This is described as the foundation of the friends of God's knowledge of their Lord.

As for directing their aspiration toward Him, this consists in reflecting throughout the night and at the ends of the day upon the marvels of His workmanship, the wonders of His inventions, the varieties of His creatures, and the transformations of their conditions.

Through these signs they seek the path toward their Maker and Originator.

They love Him and long for Him because of the abundance of His beneficence toward them and all created beings.

Hearts are naturally disposed to love one who does good to them.

As for seeking His good pleasure through deeds, this means accepting the counsels and commands brought by the prophets and messengers—peace be upon them—and acting according to them.

Night and day they do not forget their Lord.

Whether standing, sitting, travelling, returning, eating, drinking, or engaged in any action, they remain attentive to Him.

In all their deeds they act as though they behold their Lord with the eye of the heart, without doubt or uncertainty.

The epistle recalls the Prophet's definition of excellence:

“That you worship God as though you see Him; and if you do not see Him, He sees you.”

God does not allow the reward of those who do good to be lost.

May God grant us, you, and all our brothers success upon the path of correctness.

May He guide us all along the way of right guidance.

Indeed, He is compassionate toward His servants.

Here ends the Epistle on the Number and Kinds of Motions.

It is followed by the Ninth Epistle, On Causes and Effects.

Epistle 40

On Causes and Effects

The Ninth Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Introduction: Wisdom and the Search for Causes

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed our explanation of the number and kinds of motions and the ways in which they differ.

There we indicated that the world is originated and fashioned.

We now wish in this epistle to explain **causes and effects**.

The blessings of God upon His servants are immense and inexhaustible, and His gifts too numerous to count. Yet some gifts surpass others in abundance and excellence.

Among the greatest gifts with which God has distinguished some of His servants is **profound wisdom**, as He says:

“Whoever is given wisdom has certainly been given abundant good.”

The authors especially associate such wisdom with knowledge of revelation, interpretation of its verses, and understanding the subtle meanings and hidden indications accessible to purified souls.

They criticise those who interpret scriptural expressions in crudely corporeal ways—for example, taking divine “sitting,” “seeing,” “hearing,” “speaking,” or “descending” as though God possessed bodily organs or changed from place to place.

The deepest meanings of revelation, they say, are known to God and those firmly rooted in knowledge.

The Greek word “philosopher,” according to the epistle, means **lover or possessor of wisdom**, while philosophy itself is wisdom.

A true sage is one whose actions are well ordered, craft perfected, statements truthful, character beautiful, opinions sound, deeds pure, and knowledge directed toward the realities of things.

Such knowledge investigates the genera and species of things, their properties, and the causes governing them.

The principal philosophical questions are nine:

Does it exist?
What is it?
Why is it?
How much is it?
What kind of thing is it?
How is it?
Where is it?
When is it?
Who is it?

Each question requires its own kind of answer.

Of these, the most difficult is **"Why?"**, because it asks for causes.

Causes are numerous, subtle, and often hidden.

Whoever seeks to know the realities of things and speak of their causes must first understand these nine forms of inquiry and know how to answer each appropriately.

Knowledge of the **how** should precede knowledge of the **why**.

One who does not understand how things are ordered and arranged should not be trusted when claiming knowledge of their causes; he may merely be repeating what he has heard from others.

The seeker of realities should therefore begin with principles, laws, genera, and universals, and only afterward descend toward branches, species, and individuals.

The key to all this is understanding the origination of the world: how the Creator brought it into being, how He ordered existing things, why they possess their present arrangement, and for what purpose they exist.

When rational people hear scholars speak of the world's origination and philosophers describe how God brought it into existence after it had not existed, they naturally wish to know:

How did He make it?

When did He make it?

Why did He make it then rather than before?

The difficulty arises because ordinary human craft always uses pre-existing matter, in some place, during some time, through movements, instruments, and tools.

Divine origination is not like this.

God brought matter, place, time, motion, instruments, tools, and accidents themselves from nonexistence into existence.

For that reason the imagination finds the origination of the world difficult to conceive.

Chapter 1: Number as an Analogy for Creation

Know that God knew the doubts and confusion that would arise in rational minds when they attempted to conceive the origination of the world.

He therefore placed within their souls another path, easier and more accessible: the contemplation of **number and its emergence from the One preceding Two**.

The nature of number provides an analogy through which the mind may approach the relation between the Creator and existing things.

The sages and scholars are heirs of the prophets, while the prophets are messengers between God and creation, communicating meanings according to the languages and capacities of different peoples.

After prophets depart, sages and scholars continue part of their function by teaching religion, the path of the hereafter, and the welfare of worldly life.

Whoever accepts sound instruction and acts upon it follows a path of deliverance; whoever rejects wisdom places himself in danger.

Do not therefore oppose sages merely out of pride.

If you can, become one of them.

Do not be satisfied with a low rank in knowledge and wisdom, for knowledge brings nearness to God.

The sages state a universal principle:

Nature does nothing in vain.

That is, nothing existing is entirely without benefit or purpose.

Every existent either brings some benefit or prevents some harm.

Anyone claiming wisdom should therefore be prepared, when asked about an existent, to explain its cause, purpose, benefit, and the wisdom contained in its existence—or else honestly say:

God and His Messenger know best.

There is no shame in saying, “I do not know.”

Anyone wishing to investigate causes properly should possess a heart free from excessive worldly preoccupation, a purified soul, subtle understanding, sound intellect, good character, and freedom from deceit and corrupt prejudice.

He should also be trained in the mathematical sciences, logic, natural philosophy, and finally divine science.

The science of causes belongs to the highest forms of knowledge and leads toward the rank of the angels and the higher celestial assembly.

Chapter 2: Existing Things as Forms Flowing from the Creator

Know that things are determinate realities and forms brought forth by the Creator.

Their relation to Him may be compared with the relation of numbers to the One.

The forms of all things were known by God before their manifestation.

Yet God's knowledge is not like the knowledge of a craftsman who first sees something outside himself and then forms an image of it internally.

Human artisans acquire the forms of their crafts by observing the works of teachers or natural objects.

Human intellects acquire intelligible forms by observing sensible things.

God's knowledge is not acquired from anything outside Him.

His knowledge proceeds from His own essence, just as number proceeds from the One.

The One is the origin and source of number.

Likewise God is the origin and cause of existents.

Were the One removed, number would vanish; but the One itself does not vanish when the other numbers are removed.

So too, if the Creator were absent, nothing could exist; yet the disappearance of created things does not imply any diminution of Him.

Some existents are nearer to Him in rank than others.

Intellect stands nearest, corresponding analogically to Two after One; then Soul, then Matter, and the remaining ranks of existence follow in ordered succession.

Every complete existent pours forth something of itself upon what lies beneath it.

Fire pours heat upon surrounding bodies.

Water imparts moisture.

The Sun pours light upon the heavens and air.

Soul pours life upon bodies.

Such examples illustrate, imperfectly, the principle of effusion from higher realities to lower ones.

Chapter 3: Continuous Effusion and the Dependence of the World upon God

Know that as long as an effusion continues uninterruptedly from its source, what receives that effusion remains.

When the effusion ceases, the recipient loses what depended upon it.

The light of repeated lightning illuminates the air only while flashes continue.

The Sun continually pours light into the atmosphere; if something blocks the Sun, that particular illumination disappears.

Likewise bodily life remains as long as the soul remains joined to the body.

When the soul departs, bodily life immediately ceases.

So too the existence and persistence of the world depend continually upon the Creator's generosity and sustaining effusion.

Many people imagine that the world's relation to God resembles a house's relation to its builder: once the builder has finished, the house continues by itself.

This is not the intended meaning.

A house is assembled from pre-existing materials—earth, water, stone, bricks, plaster, timber, and other things.

Divine origination is not composition from materials already standing independently.

The entire system—matter, place, time, motion, form, and instrument—depends upon divine origination and preservation.

The world therefore stands in continual need of its Creator.

Chapter 4: Why Natural Things Appear Gradually

Know that some created realities appear all at once while others appear gradually.

Natural things are brought forth through successive stages over long periods of time.

Absolute body receives forms according to order.

The celestial spheres are arranged, the elements differentiated, and generated beings emerge through mixtures and transformations.

Minerals, plants, animals, and human bodies do not appear fully complete at once.

They grow from deficiency toward completion.

A seed becomes a plant.

A sperm-drop becomes an embryo and afterward an animal.

The authors argue that the gradual appearance of forms is not due to weakness in the Creator.

It is due to the receptivity of matter and to the ordered sequence through which lower things become capable of receiving higher forms.

One who cannot understand how familiar things such as flesh, bones, fruit, colour, taste, and living organs arise gradually from blood, semen, food, and elemental matter is even less capable of imagining the origination of the celestial spheres and the order of the heavens.

Chapter 5: The Return of the Universal Soul

Know that the Universal Soul will eventually return toward its spiritual world, its luminous station, and the condition it possessed before its attachment to Universal Body.

The authors connect this with:

“As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it.”

This return does not occur until long ages and cycles have passed.

When Soul withdraws from Universal Body, the bodily world is ruined.

The celestial sphere ceases turning, the planets cease their courses, the elements cease mixing, plants, animals, and minerals disappear, and body loses the forms, figures, and adornments impressed upon it.

The relation between Soul and Body is compared with a wise student who receives knowledge, virtue, and refinement from a teacher.

After becoming filled with knowledge, the student develops a desire to teach someone else.

He finds a pupil capable of receiving instruction and turns toward him with care, pouring into him what he himself has received.

Once that pupil has been educated and perfected, the teacher turns again toward higher pursuits, devotion, contemplation, and the desire to join those who preceded him.

So too prophets and sages educate lower souls in imitation of the divine generosity through which wisdom and virtue flow down the hierarchy of existence.

Chapter 6: The Hidden Treasure and the Misunderstanding of the Eternity of the World

The epistle recounts a saying in which a prophet asks God:

“My Lord, why did You create creatures after they had not been created?”

The answer is given symbolically:

“I was a hidden treasure of goodness and virtues and was not known, so I wished to be known.”

The meaning, the authors explain, is not that God needed creation.

Rather, without creatures, the divine goodness and virtues manifested through the wonders of creation would not be displayed to created intellects.

The reader is warned against misunderstanding subtle philosophical expressions.

Poor understanding produces poor judgement of the sages.

Many people accuse philosophers of teaching that the world is eternal because they hear statements such as:

“The world was not created in time or in place.”

But the intended meaning, according to the epistle, is that **time and place themselves belong to the created cosmic order**.

Time is the number or measure of celestial motion.

Place is connected with bodily surfaces.

Before the celestial world exists, one cannot meaningfully posit cosmic time or place in the same sense.

Similarly, when sages say that “substance is substance through itself” and “accident is accident through itself,” they do not mean that these realities have no Creator.

They mean that their essential difference does not require an additional infinite chain of further differentiating qualities.

Blackness differs from whiteness through what each is in itself; otherwise one would ask for another cause of the difference, then another behind that, without end.

The ultimate distinction between created forms comes from the way God originated them.

The chapter also discusses **inability**.

A craftsman may fail because his power is weak, his knowledge deficient, his tools absent, the time or place unsuitable, or the matter incapable of receiving the intended form.

Cold iron cannot be twisted like hemp into a long rope.

Air does not retain writing like a tablet because of its flowing nature.

A carpenter cannot make a ladder reaching the heavens merely because sufficient timber does not exist.

A sage cannot teach advanced wisdom to a small child because the child's capacity is not yet prepared.

In such cases the limitation lies in the receptive matter, not necessarily in the agent.

The authors apply this distinction to theological puzzles concerning divine omnipotence.

Statements such as “Can God make one thing simultaneously standing and sitting?” or “Can He make another God equal to Himself?” are treated as failures in the object conceived rather than failures of divine power.

The impossibility lies in the contradiction or nonexistence of the supposed object.

Chapter 7: The Four Causes and Four Classes of Effects

Know that a **cause** is that whose existence provides the reason for the existence of another thing.

An **effect** is that whose existence depends upon some cause.

Causes are of four kinds:

efficient, material, formal, and final.

Effects likewise fall into broad classes corresponding to produced things.

Some are human artefacts.

Some are natural products such as minerals, plants, and animals.

Some belong to the psychic or celestial order, such as spheres, stars, and elemental structures.

Others belong to the spiritual order, such as matter, abstract form, Soul, and Intellect.

Craft is the bringing outward of a form existing within the craftsman's soul and impressing it upon matter.

Every wise craftsman acts for some purpose.

The **purpose** or final cause is an end conceived beforehand in knowledge or intention, for the sake of which the action is undertaken.

When the intended end is reached, the action ceases.

Every artefact possesses four causes.

A bed, for example, has the carpenter as efficient cause, wood as material cause, its constructed configuration as formal cause, and sitting or lying upon it as final cause.

A human craftsman requires six things in making: matter, place, time, bodily tools such as hands and feet, external instruments such as axe and saw, and movements.

A natural agent needs fewer conditions.

A psychic agent requires fewer still.

The Creator needs none of them, because His act is the origination of the very things upon which lower crafts depend.

Every human craftsman strives to perfect his craft, but obstacles may arise through unsuitable matter, missing tools, weakness, forgetfulness, insufficient skill, or other deficiencies.

God is exalted above all such limitations.

Chapter 8: Universals and Particulars

Know that all existents are either **universal or particular**.

God arranges universal realities from the noblest downward, as explained in the Epistle on Principles.

Particular beings, by contrast, develop from lower and deficient states toward more complete ones.

A single question may have several valid answers, but not every answer is appropriate for every person.

There are answers suited to the elect and others suited to ordinary people.

If an ordinary person asks:

“Why did God create the world after it did not exist?”

one may answer:

Because the creation of the world contains wisdom and goodness, and the action of wisdom belongs to the Wise.

If asked:

“Why did He create it at that time rather than another?”

one may answer:

Because His prior knowledge was that it would be created at that time.

Were it otherwise, the act would not correspond to divine knowledge.

If asked:

“Why did He create it in this form rather than another?”

one may answer:

Because this arrangement is the most wise and perfect.

If someone claims that another arrangement would be superior, let him demonstrate what it would be.

The sages say that, considered as a whole, the world is arranged with unsurpassed wisdom.

Individual defects do not refute the perfection of the universal order.

A particular person may be born lame or paralysed because of secondary natural and celestial causes, but the human form considered universally remains fashioned in the finest constitution.

Human intellect cannot encompass the complete causes of every individual event.

The hidden causes of particulars are too subtle and numerous.

Chapter 9: Why the World Has Its Present Order

If it is asked:

“Why did God create the world?”

the answer is: because He is Wise, and its creation is wisdom.

If asked why at that particular time, the answer concerns divine knowledge.

If asked why in this particular form, the answer is that this arrangement is wiser and more perfect.

If asked how He created it from beginning to end, the authors refer to the earlier epistles on principles and on the world, where the sequence of existents is compared to the ordered emergence of number from the One.

God has two worlds in the language of the epistle.

One is the **bodily world**: the encompassing sphere, the other spheres, the planets, elements, and generated beings.

The other is the **spiritual world**: Intellect, Soul, and spiritual forms that do not possess bodily length, breadth, and depth.

The spiritual world encompasses the celestial world just as the celestial world encompasses the elemental world beneath the Moon.

The heavens were made spherical because the sphere is regarded as the noblest bodily form, and circular motion the noblest motion.

The zodiac was divided into twelve signs.

The epistle interprets other astronomical numbers—nine celestial spheres, seven planets, two luminaries, benefic and malefic planets, nodes, fixed and mutable signs—as parts of a harmonious numerical order.

These are not presented merely as physical facts but as symbols through which the wise may contemplate the relation of worldly life to the hereafter.

The Moon, constantly waxing and waning, is compared with worldly conditions that begin deficient, grow toward completion, then decline and disappear.

The Sun, more constant in splendour, is compared with the stability of the hereafter.

Venus, the “lesser benefic,” is associated with worldly delights, beauty, pleasure, music, luxury, and those things ordinary people call happiness.

Jupiter, the “greater benefic,” is associated with good character, religion, justice, worship, contemplation of the return, and virtues connected with the hereafter.

Saturn symbolises worldly hardship—poverty, illness, humiliation, sorrow, and affliction.

Mars symbolises destructive moral states such as violence, lawlessness, shedding blood, violation of sanctities, haste, and neglect of consequences.

Mercury, because of its variable relations with other planets, symbolises the mixture of worldly and otherworldly concerns.

Mutable, fixed, and double-bodied zodiacal signs are similarly interpreted symbolically.

The lunar nodes, invisible in substance yet manifest in their astronomical effects, are compared with subtle invisible substances whose actions are visible—angels, jinn, devils, and souls.

The eclipses of the Sun and Moon are presented as signs disproving any notion that the luminaries are gods, since true divinity cannot be subject to eclipse.

Chapter 10: Pain, Appetite, and Why Animals Eat One Another

Know that God placed within animal nature several causes of bodily preservation, including hunger, thirst, diverse appetites, and pleasure.

Hunger and thirst drive animals toward food and drink so that lost bodily material may be replaced.

Appetite directs each creature toward nourishment corresponding to its temperament.

Pleasure encourages it to take what is required.

Pain, injury, and fear were likewise placed within animal souls so that they would protect their bodies from harm until the appointed term.

Bodies cannot themselves seek benefit or repel injury, so the soul must be driven to preserve them.

The question then arises:

Why do some animals eat others?

The authors acknowledge that this problem troubled many thinkers.

Some concluded that predation could not come from a wise and merciful principle and therefore posited separate principles of good and evil.

Others attributed it to the stars.

Some believers in transmigration said animals suffer because of sins committed in previous lives.

Others said the phenomenon occurs accidentally, while still others simply confessed that they did not know its wisdom.

The Brethren argue that such confusion results from examining only a particular harm rather than the **universal order**.

The actions of divine providence aim primarily at universal benefit and general welfare, even when some individual harm occurs incidentally.

They compare this with legal punishment.

Retaliatory justice may involve death for one individual yet preserve the lives of many.

The cutting of a thief's hand harms that individual yet is intended, according to the legal theory of the authors, to protect society.

Sunlight and rain benefit whole regions even though they may accidentally harm particular individuals, crops, or animals.

Likewise prophets and righteous people endure hardship in establishing religious law, but those temporary sufferings are considered small relative to the benefit transmitted to countless later generations.

Chapter 11: Why Pain Is Given to Animals

The difficulty concerning animals eating one another arises mainly because slaughter, injury, and death produce pain.

People do not object in the same way to animals eating plants because plants are not understood in this text to experience pain in the same manner.

Pain was not implanted in animals as punishment for previous sins, as the proponents of transmigration claimed.

Its primary purpose is to encourage animals to protect their bodies.

Without pain and fear, souls would neglect the bodies entrusted to them and expose them to destruction before their natural term and completion.

Pain therefore has a preservative function.

The authors also argue that the bodies of dead animals become useful material for the living.

If animal corpses accumulated indefinitely without being consumed or decomposed, the face of the Earth, seas, and rivers would eventually fill with rotting bodies, corrupting air and water and producing destruction for living creatures.

Thus what appears as local harm may participate in a broader cycle preserving the whole.

The intention in eating or slaughter, they argue, is not pain as such but nourishment, preservation, and prevention of greater harm.

Chapter 12: Lower Beings Serve Higher Ones

Know that when God originated existing things, He divided them into universals and particulars and arranged them according to ordered ranks.

Among universal realities, the nobler serves as cause for the existence, persistence, completion, and perfection of what lies beneath it.

Among particulars, however, the lower and more deficient may serve the higher.

Plants are lower than animals.

Plant bodies therefore become nourishment for animal bodies, while the vegetative power serves animal life.

The animal soul is lower in rank than the rational human soul and therefore certain animal powers and bodies are made serviceable to humanity.

Likewise, among animals, less complete forms may serve those possessing more complete constitutions.

The authors regard this hierarchy as part of the wisdom governing nourishment and survival.

Material bodies continually dissolve and require replacement.

Food sustains individuals long enough for their faculties to become complete and for reproduction to preserve the species.

Life is loved because it resembles persistence, while death resembles annihilation.

Persistence is naturally beloved throughout creation because existence itself ultimately derives from the eternally abiding Creator.

For this reason the sages call God **the First Beloved**, toward whom all creatures ultimately incline.

Animals also hate death because dying ordinarily brings pain and fear.

They do not possess full awareness that their souls may continue without their bodies; if they possessed such awareness prematurely, the authors speculate, they might abandon their bodies before their natural purposes were completed.

Chapter 13: Perfected Souls Assist Imperfect Souls

Know that complete and perfected souls, after leaving bodies, remain occupied with strengthening and supporting incomplete embodied souls so that the latter may reach completion.

At the same time, the perfected souls themselves rise toward still higher states.

“And to your Lord is the final end.”

This resembles a compassionate father or teacher instructing children and pupils.

The pupils are brought from the darkness of ignorance into knowledge, while teachers themselves perfect what lies within their souls by bringing knowledge, wisdom, and craftsmanship from potentiality into actuality through teaching.

In this way they imitate, according to human capacity, the divine act of bringing potential realities toward manifestation.

The authors repeat their definition of wisdom:

Wisdom is becoming like God according to the measure of human capacity.

This resemblance consists not in essence but in possessing true knowledge, perfected craftsmanship, good actions, beautiful character, correct opinions, pure dealings, and continual beneficence toward others.

The chapter then reviews three views concerning the human being.

Some say the human being is nothing but the visible bodily structure composed of flesh, blood, bones, and similar materials.

Others say the human being is the composite of body and spiritual soul.

Still others say that the human being in truth is the rational soul, while the body is merely like its garment or covering.

Likewise philosophers hold three broad views concerning the soul.

Some say it is a subtle invisible body.

Others say it is an incorporeal spiritual substance surviving bodily death.

Others say it is merely an accident produced by bodily mixture and therefore perishes when the body decays.

The Brethren reject this last corporealist position.

Chapter 14: Self-Knowledge and the Reality of the Soul

Know that among the noblest sciences is **knowledge of the human being himself**.

It is shameful for one who claims knowledge of the realities of things to remain ignorant of his own essence.

Such a person resembles one who feeds others while hungry, clothes others while naked, or guides others while himself lost.

A human being should therefore begin with himself.

True self-knowledge requires inquiry from three perspectives.

The first is the body considered apart from the soul.

The second is the soul considered apart from the body.

The third is the composite of soul and body together.

The body is composed of flesh, bone, veins, nerves, and similar corporeal parts possessing length, breadth, and depth.

It is directly apprehended through the senses.

The soul, however, is described as a celestial spiritual substance, living through itself, knowing and perceptive in potentiality, naturally active, and never wholly at rest as long as it exists.

The composite human being is the visible and speaking individual who perceives, asks, answers, knows, and acts while alive.

At death these outward activities disappear because death is the separation of soul from body.

Many thinkers who acknowledge the soul nevertheless imagine it to be produced merely from bodily temperament.

The authors reject this.

What is generated from body should itself be bodily, yet soul is not body.

Nor can it be a mere bodily accident.

A body considered simply as body is neither necessarily moving nor necessarily still.

Some bodies move continuously, others sometimes move and sometimes rest.

Therefore something distinct must move and still them.

An accident cannot be the true active principle because an accident does not subsist through itself.

The mover must be more powerful and noble than what it moves.

The rational soul perceives, knows, produces crafts, speaks, reasons, contemplates celestial structures, natural compounds, minerals, plants, animals, their properties, benefits, and harms.

To call such a knowing and active reality merely a bodily mixture or powerless accident, the authors argue, leaves its actions unexplained.

Whoever remains ignorant of his own soul is poorly placed to claim knowledge of hidden cosmic causes.

They recall the saying:

“Whoever knows himself knows his Lord.”

And the verses:

“Within yourselves—will you not then see?”

and:

“The human being is a witness against himself.”

Chapter 15: Why Plants, Animals, and Human Communities Differ

If asked why plants possess such different leaves, fruits, forms, colours, flavours, fragrances, and natures, the answer is that this multiplicity provides benefit for the many kinds of animals whose constitutions and needs differ.

If asked why affection, familiarity, and companionship are implanted in some animals, the answer is that these qualities draw them toward cooperation and mutual aid.

If asked why other animals possess aversion, wildness, and hostility, the answer is that these qualities cause them to spread out over different regions rather than crowd into one place, thereby preserving them from certain dangers and allowing room for livelihood.

Human beings, by contrast, gather in cities and villages because their needs are so numerous that no individual can live comfortably without cooperation.

If asked why human languages, colours, character traits, and bodily forms differ although all descend from one father, the authors answer that their bodies inhabit different regions with different soils, climates, air, celestial configurations, customs, and opinions.

Such differences stimulate inquiry, learning, discipline, and the refinement of souls.

They awaken human beings from heedlessness and ignorance and move them toward completion.

Chapter 16: Numerical Order in Creation and Revelation

Know that whoever wishes to understand the realities of things should investigate their causes and the reasons why created things possess their particular arrangements.

The firmly rooted scholars and divinely guided sages say that when God originated existents, He arranged them according to ordered numerical ranks and proportions.

Different classes of beings therefore appear in specific numbers corresponding with other classes either quantitatively or qualitatively.

This serves as a sign to rational observers.

By comparing the visible order of created things with more hidden realities, they may understand that all arise from one Wise Maker.

Such correspondences appear in astronomy, the elements, plants, animal bodies, religious obligations, language, and revelation.

The authors pay particular attention to the isolated letters appearing at the beginnings of certain Qur'anic chapters.

Of the twenty-eight Arabic letters, only fourteen occur in these combinations.

Sometimes one letter appears, sometimes two, three, four, or five, but never more than five.

Scholars have offered many explanations.

Some say they are divine oaths.

Others treat individual letters as abbreviations of names.

Some interpret them through numerical values.

Others say they are among the secrets of the Qur'an known only to God.

Still others hold that those firmly rooted in knowledge may also receive understanding of them through divine teaching.

Different explanations satisfy different kinds of people.

Some rational minds do not remain content with received interpretations but seek demonstrations, causes, and deeper correspondences.

For such people, the authors offer a numerical approach.

Chapter 17: The Fourteen Letters and the Number Twenty-Eight

Why, the authors ask, were fourteen letters selected from the twenty-eight Arabic letters, and why do the opening combinations never exceed five letters?

To approach this, they recommend considering other groups of five found in religion and nature: the five daily prayers, certain fivefold religious obligations, five senses, five wandering planets possessing retrograde and direct motion, fivefold proportions in musical and geometrical theory, and other pentadic structures.

The same method is then applied to **twenty-eight**.

The twenty-eight Arabic letters divide into two groups of fourteen in several grammatical and graphic classifications.

The authors compare this with other groups of twenty-eight divided into equal halves.

They mention twenty-eight joints of the two hands, divided fourteen and fourteen; twenty-eight vertebral or structural divisions attributed to human and animal anatomy; fourteen principal feathers in each wing of certain birds; fourteen divisions in each half of other bodily structures; and the twenty-eight lunar mansions, fourteen associated with northern signs and fourteen with southern ones.

Arabic letters also divide into fourteen before which the definite article's *lām* is assimilated and fourteen before which it is not.

Likewise the script may be classified into dotted and undotted letters in corresponding numerical groups.

The authors see such correspondences as evidence that the Arabic script itself was ordered according to wisdom and proportion.

They then return to the fourteen isolated Qur'anic letters, saying that their full secret should not be disclosed to everyone.

Only purified and specially prepared souls, they say, are suited to receive such meanings.

The number twenty-eight itself is praised because it is a **perfect number**.

Perfect numbers are those whose proper divisors add up exactly to the number itself.

The epistle mentions Six among the units, Twenty-Eight among the tens, Four Hundred and Ninety-Six among the hundreds, and Eight Thousand One Hundred and Twenty among the thousands.

Such numbers are rare.

The text further connects arithmetic patterns with the seven planets, twelve zodiacal signs, twenty-eight lunar mansions, the twelve months, bodily structures, religious practices, and other numerical correspondences throughout creation.

The purpose of these examples is not arithmetic for its own sake.

They are intended to show that the many classes of things—pairs, triads, groups of four, five, six, seven, twelve, twenty-eight, and others—correspond in ways that indicate ordered wisdom.

Thus, says the epistle, the intelligent observer may recognise that the world is not the product of chance but the work of a generous and wise Maker.

God says:

“Indeed in that is a lesson for those who possess insight.”

May God grant us, you, and all our brothers success upon the path of correctness.

May He guide us and you along the way of right guidance.

Indeed, He is compassionate toward His servants.

Here ends the Epistle on Causes and Effects.

It is followed by the Epistle on Definitions and Descriptions.

Epistle 41

On Definitions and Descriptions

The Tenth and Final Epistle of the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences

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

Praise be to God, and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen. Is God better, or that which they associate with Him?

Introduction: Knowledge of Things Through Their Definitions

Know, O brother—may God strengthen you and us with a spirit from Him—that we have completed our explanation of causes and effects, in which we presented the sayings of the sages according to the customary method of our brethren.

We now wish in this epistle to explain **definitions and descriptions**.

The prophets—peace be upon them—are the messengers of God between Him and His creation.

The learned are the heirs of the prophets, and the sages are the most excellent among the learned.

It has been said that a sage possesses seven praiseworthy qualities: his actions are well ordered, his crafts perfected, his statements truthful, his character beautiful, his opinions sound, his deeds pure, and his knowledge true.

Know that knowledge of the realities of things consists in knowledge of their definitions and descriptions.

Things are either **composite or simple**.

Composite things are known when the things from which they are composed are known.

Simple things are known through the properties peculiar to them.

For example, if you are asked, “What is mud?” you may answer: water and earth mixed together.

If asked, “What is oxymel?”: vinegar and honey mixed.

“What is a bed?”: wood combined with a certain form.

“What is speech?”: expressions and meanings joined together.

“What is melody?”: high and low tones harmoniously combined.

“What is an animal?”: soul and body conjoined.

The realities of composite things are therefore expressed by mentioning the things of which they are composed.

Simple things are known through their distinguishing properties.

If asked, **What is matter?**, say: a simple substance receptive to form.

What is form? It is the quiddity of a thing, through which it possesses its name, action, and constitution.

What is substance? That which subsists in itself and receives qualities.

What is a quality? An accident inhering in a substance without being a part of it.

What is a thing? A meaning that may be known and about which something may be stated.

What is an existent? That which is apprehended by one of the senses, conceived by the intellect, or established by proof.

What is the nonexistent? What stands opposite to these modes of existence.

What is existence? “Is.”

What is nonexistence? “Is not.”

What is eternal? That which was never nonexistent.

What is originated? That which another brought into being.

What is origination? The bringing-into-being performed by an originator.

What is a cause? That which is the reason for the existence of another thing.

What is an effect? That whose existence depends upon one of the causes.

What is a knower? One who conceives a thing according to its reality.

What is knowledge? The form of the known thing within the soul of the knower.

What is living? That which moves through itself.

What is powerful? That for whom action is not impossible whenever it wills.

What is action? An effect proceeding from an agent.

What is meant by "the Creator"? The Cause of every thing, the reason for every existent, the Originator of originated beings, the Inventor of generated things, the One who perfects, completes, and brings each thing toward the furthest end appropriate to it.

What is power? The possibility of bringing an action into existence.

What is craft? The craftsman's bringing forth what exists in his thought and placing it in matter.

What is an artefact? Something composed of matter and form.

What is the Active Intellect? The first originated being brought into existence by God: a simple luminous substance containing the forms of all things.

What is Soul? A simple spiritual substance, living, knowing, and active; one of the forms proceeding from the Active Intellect.

What is will? A direction of the estimative faculty toward bringing about one of two possible alternatives.

What is the human intellect? The discriminating power proper to individual human beings and not possessed by the other animals in the same form.

What is genus? A property applying to a group agreeing in form and united by a single meaning.

What is an individual? A complete entity indicated in distinction from others by its actions and form.

What is a specific property? A relatively stable characteristic belonging especially to one thing rather than another.

What is light? A visible substance shining through itself and by which other things become visible.

What is darkness? The absence of light from something capable of receiving light.

What is day? The illumination of the Sun.

What is night? The shadow of the Earth.

What is heat? The agitation of the parts of matter.

What is cold? The congealing of the parts of matter.

What is moisture? The flowing of the parts of matter.

What is dryness? Their cohesion.

What is colour? The flashing or manifestation of rays from bodies.

What is odour? Vapours possessing qualities that are released from composite bodies.

What is sound? A striking in the air produced through collision between bodies.

The bodily motions are six: generation, corruption, increase, decrease, alteration, and locomotion.

Generation is matter's receiving a form and emerging from nonexistence.

Corruption is the stripping away of form from matter.

Increase is the separation or expansion of a thing's limits.

Decrease is their drawing nearer.

Alteration is the replacement of one quality by another in the same subject.

Locomotion is departure from one place to another.

What is place? Every location in which something situated can be situated; it is connected with the boundaries of body.

What is time? The number of the motions of the celestial sphere and the repetition of night and day.

What is the celestial sphere? A transparent spherical body encompassing the world.

What is the world? The totality of originated existents contained within the celestial sphere.

What are stars? Luminous spherical bodies appearing fixed in known positions or moving according to their celestial courses.

What is body? That which possesses length, breadth, and depth.

What is a transparent body? A body through which what lies beyond it can be seen.

What is fire? A luminous hot body that disperses things, separates their parts, and restores them toward their simpler states.

What is air? A subtle, light, flowing, transparent body moving rapidly through the six directions: above, below, east, west, north, and south.

What is water? A flowing body surrounding the Earth.

What is earth? A dense body, the densest among bodies, standing at the centre of the world according to the cosmology of the epistle.

The directions are six: east, west, north, south, above, and below.

East is where the Sun rises.West is where it sets.

North is associated with the circuit of the Pole Star. South with the region of Suhayl.

Above is toward the surrounding celestial sphere. Below is toward the Earth.

What is mud? Water and earth.

What is foam? Water and air.

What is vapour? Water and fire.

What is smoke? Fire and earth.

What is lightning? Fire and air.

What are minerals? Things in which the earthy element predominates.

What are plants? Things in which the watery element predominates.

What are animals? Things in which the airy element predominates.

What is the human being? A being in whose constitution the fiery element is especially prominent.

What are angels? Beings in whom the nature of the celestial sphere predominates.

What are jinn? Beings in whom the fiery and airy natures predominate.

What are devils? Beings in whom the earthy and fiery natures predominate.

What are winds? The undulation and flowing of air toward one of the directions.

What is active Nature? A power of the Universal Celestial Soul diffused throughout the elements.

What is ether? The hot air lying immediately beneath the sphere of the Moon.

What is the lower breeze or temperate air? The moderate air nearest the surface of the Earth.

What is the intensely cold region? The air above the temperate lower atmosphere and beneath the ether, described as extremely cold.

What is a ray? The light of the Sun, Moon, or wandering stars passing through the air toward the centre of the Earth.

What is reflection of a ray? The return of these lights from the surfaces of Earth, seas, rivers, and mountains into the air.

What is vapour? Moist watery particles rising into the air with reflected rays from the surfaces of waters.

What is smoke? Subtle earthy particles rising into the air with heat.

What are cloud and dense cloud? Watery and earthy particles gathered in the air; the thin formation is called cloud, and the piled-up formation dense cloud.

What is rain? Watery particles that unite, become heavy, and return toward the Earth.

What is lightning? Fire ignited by the friction of smoky particles within cloud.

What is thunder? The sound moving within the cloud and seeking a way out.

What is a thunderbolt? A violent sound arising when imprisoned wind escapes suddenly together with lightning.

What is fog? Moist vapour rising from the surface of the Earth after rainfall.

What is a halo? A circle formed above cloud through the reflection of the rays of the Sun, Moon, or stars.

What is the rainbow? Half the circumference of such a circle when it forms upright in the lower atmosphere.

Its principal visible colours are said to be four: red above, yellow beneath it, green below the yellow, and blue below the green.

What is snow? Fine drops frozen within clouds and descending gently.

What is hail? Drops that freeze in the air after leaving the cloud.

What is a flood? Water flowing through valleys because of abundant rainfall.

What is the swelling of rivers? Increase of water from springs and torrents descending from mountains and valleys.

Rivers generally begin from springs near mountain summits, foothills, or raised ground and flow toward marshes, ponds, and lowlands.

What is an earthquake? The motion of a region of the Earth caused by winds trapped within its interior.

What is subsidence? The collapse of the Earth's surface into cavities beneath it after the trapped winds escape.

What are mountains? The pegs of the Earth and barriers affecting winds and seas.

What are islands? Regions of land surrounded by sea.

What are deserts? Lands without vegetation or buildings.

What are marshlands? Regions containing both water and vegetation.

What are ponds? Places in which rainwater gathers.

What is the Earth? A spherical body standing, by God's permission, in the surrounding air together with its mountains and seas.

What is air? That which surrounds the Earth from every direction.

What is the celestial sphere? That which surrounds the air in the same manner.

What is the centre of the Earth? A point in the middle of its depth.

What are seas? Great basins upon the surface of the Earth collecting water.

The increase of the sea comes from rivers and valleys pouring their waters into it.

The rise and fall of the Persian Gulf are attributed in the epistle to the Moon: when the Moon rises, it is said to stimulate the swelling of the waters, producing the tide; when it sets, the waters return toward equilibrium and ebb appears.

The causes of the salinity and heaviness of seawater as compared with rain, river, and much well-water were discussed in another epistle.

The four natural qualities are heat, cold, moisture, and dryness.

The four elements are fire, air, water, and earth.

The four humours are yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm.

The generated beings are minerals, plants, and animals.

What are minerals? Substances generated mainly in the depths of the Earth and treated by the authors as nearest to the inanimate rank.

What are plants? Growths appearing upon the surface of the Earth as herbs, trees, and similar forms.

What are animals? Sensate, self-moving bodies composed of an animal soul and a mortal body.

Some animals are generated in wombs, some from eggs, and others, according to the natural philosophy of the period, from other material processes.

What is will? A directing of the estimative faculty toward something whose occurrence or contrary is possible.

What is power? The possibility of performing an action voluntarily.

What is choice? The estimative acceptance of one of two possibilities.

What is ignorance? Conceiving a thing in a form other than its true form.

What is belief? Fixing the possibility of a thing upon affirmation.

What is estimation? One of the powers of the animal soul through which things are imagined and judged.

What is faith? Assent to what is reported by a trustworthy informant.

What is submission? Acceptance without objection.

What is religion? The obedience of a community to a leader from whom recompense is expected.

What is unbelief? Covering or concealment.

What is associationism? Affirming two principles of lordship.

What is denial? Rejecting the truth.

What is disobedience? Departing from obedience.

What is obedience? Submitting to the command of one who commands and the prohibition of one who forbids.

What is the return? The return of the particular soul toward the Universal Soul.

What is reward? The repose, pleasure, joy, and gladness that each soul experiences after separation from the body.

What is punishment? The fear, sorrow, and pain experienced after separation from bodies, each soul receiving according to what it acquired of good or evil.

What is recognised good? An action established by acceptable custom and not prohibited by revealed law or prophetic practice.

What is reprehensible evil? An action not sanctioned by sound custom, revealed law, or prophetic practice.

What is a worker's wage? The recompense owed to each worker according to the work performed.

Chapter 1: Shape and Colour

Shape is a **bodily form**, while colour is a **spiritual form**.

Both exist throughout things when they are properly considered.

Bodies possess shape through their boundaries and dimensions.

Colour belongs to the sensible manifestation appearing upon their surfaces.

In generated beings, heat and moisture play active roles in growth and formation according to the natural philosophy of the epistle.

Moisture serves as matter receptive to transformation, while heat acts upon and fashions it.

When appropriate balance exists, growth proceeds.

If moisture dominates excessively, putrefaction may arise.

If moisture is deficient and dryness dominates, growth is obstructed.

Seeds at the beginning of germination are warm and moist.

Their moisture moderates the active heat and permits softness and growth.

The chapter compares the action of heat in living things with the coagulation and transformation of milk and with other natural processes in which active heat shapes receptive moisture.

Heat naturally tends toward upward movement.

In animal bodies, the heart is described as the noblest bodily organ and as the origin of important vessels.

From it proceed principal channels toward upper and lower regions.

Plants likewise extend in two primary directions: roots descend to draw material from earth and water, while the stem and branches rise upward so that the plant may be nourished and produce leaves and fruit.

The chapter repeatedly treats one originating principle branching into paired or multiple effects as an image of unity producing ordered multiplicity.

Chapter 2: Number, Ratio, and Geometry

Know that number is one of the mathematical sciences of wisdom.

The unity conceived within the One is the origin and source of number, and unity itself has no part.

Number is a multiplicity of gathered units.

It is a form impressed within the soul of one who counts through repetition of unity.

Counted things are the objects to which number is applied.

Arithmetic is the joining and separating of numbers, while calculated things are those whose quantities have been determined.

Numbers are even or odd.

An **even number** is one possessing an integral half.

An **odd number** exceeds an even number by one.

Numbers are also whole or fractional.

Whole numbers are expressed through the basic number words and their combinations.

Fractions are expressed through names such as half, third, quarter, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth, together with combinations derived from them.

Number begins from One and, in the account of this epistle, its fundamental generative pattern is especially illustrated through the first four numbers.

The remaining numerical structures are composed from basic relations already explained in the Epistle on Arithmetic.

Numbers possess four principal orders: units, tens, hundreds, and thousands.

They may also be arranged in many patterns: natural sequence, successive evens, successive odds, products and compounds, square numbers, cube numbers, and other classes.

Each numerical type possesses its own mode of generation and special properties.

Ratio is the relation of one magnitude or number to another.

A continuous proportion is one in which the relation of the first to the second is as that of the second to the third.

A discontinuous proportion is one in which the relation of the first to the second is as that of the third to the fourth.

Multiplication is the repeated increase of one number according to the units contained in another.

Division is the reverse of multiplication.

A **root** is the number multiplied by itself.

A **square** is the product resulting from that multiplication.

A **cube** is produced by multiplying the square by its root.

Geometry is the science of dimensions and magnitudes.

Dimensions are three: length, breadth, and depth.

Magnitudes are three: lines, surfaces, and bodies.

A line possesses one dimension.

A surface possesses two.

A body possesses three.

Lines are straight, curved, or composed from both.

Surfaces may be flat, concave, or convex.

Bodies have many forms according to the number and shapes of their surfaces.

The epistle mentions among them the sphere, hemisphere, quarter-sphere, tetrahedral or “fiery” form, cube or “earthly” form, octahedral or “airy” form, icosahedral or “watery” form, and the twelve-faced form associated with the celestial sphere.

Surfaces are also distinguished by their sides and angles.

The main classes include triangle, quadrilateral, circle, and polygons of many angles.

A triangle is enclosed by three lines and possesses three angles.

A quadrilateral by four lines and four angles.

A circle is a surface bounded by one line around a central point, all straight lines drawn from that point to the circumference being equal.

Polygons include pentagons, hexagons, heptagons, and higher forms.

Angles are right, acute, or obtuse.

A right angle has another equal angle beside it.

An acute angle is smaller than a right angle.

An obtuse angle is larger.

Chapter 3: Plants, Animals, Human Beings, Speech, and the Hereafter

A **plant** is every body that takes nourishment and grows.

An **animal** is every body possessing sensation and self-motion.

A **human being** is a living, rational, mortal being composed of a rational soul and a mortal body.

The body is described as a substance possessing length, breadth, and depth.

Sound is a striking produced in air through the collision of bodies.

An **utterance** is every articulated sound possessing letters or syllables.

Speech is an utterance indicating a meaning.

If asked, **What is truthfulness?**, say: affirming of a subject a quality that truly belongs to it, or denying of it a quality that does not belong to it.

Falsehood is the opposite.

Truth and falsehood belong especially to statements.

Correctness and error belong to inward judgements.

Good and evil belong to actions.

Truth and falsity also apply to judgements.

Benefit and harm belong to sensible things and their effects.

What is this world? The period during which the soul remains joined to the body until their separation called death.

What is death? The soul's ceasing to employ the body.

The epistle also describes death as the soul remaining after separation from the body and becoming free within its own world.

What is the hereafter? A second development after death.

What is Paradise? The world of spirits.

What is Hell? The world of bodies.

Paradise may also mean the higher rank, and Hell the lower rank.

The “paradise” of the vegetative soul is the attainment of the animal form.

The paradise of the animal soul is the human form.

The paradise of the human soul is the angelic form.

The angelic ranks themselves differ in degrees and stations before God, some being nearer than others.

What is resurrection? The awakening of souls from the sleep of heedlessness and the slumber of ignorance.

What is sleep? The soul's occupation with something other than direct bodily awareness while its general care for the body remains.

What is the Rising? The soul's rising from its grave, namely the body in which it had been confined, and its turning away from that bodily attachment.

What is the Gathering? The gathering of particular souls toward the Universal Soul and their spiritual union with one another.

The authors compare spiritual union with the blending of high and low musical tones into harmony.

They also describe it as the agreement of particular souls with the Universal Soul according to what they accomplished while joined to bodies.

What is the Path? The straight road leading toward God Most High.

Chapter 4: Colours, Tastes, and the Soul's Journey

The basic colours listed by the epistle are white, black, red, yellow, green, blue, and dusky or darkened colour.

White things appear white for several causes.

In some, light is held within them because moisture predominates, as in milk.

In others, light passes through many pores, as in salt.

In others, light is held within congealed moisture, as in silver.

Light seen through transparent bodies appears white unless something intervenes to modify it.

Yellow appears when the purity of light is impeded.

Fire, for example, appears yellow because its heat affects the organ of sight.

White things may also yellow when heated or cooked.

Redness may arise from putrefactive processes involving abundant moisture or from dissolving processes involving intense heat.

The Sun may appear red through the abundance of vapours rising between it and the eye.

Ripening flowers and fruits may likewise redden through the action of heat.

Green arises when earthy moisture modifies light and prevents it from reaching vision in pure form.

Blackness is explained as earthy moisture preventing light from reaching the eye, or preventing the visual power from reaching light.

The epistle remarks that black gathers the sight while white disperses it.

The remaining colours lie between these two extremes, their effects depending upon the relative dominance of the causes producing them.

Tastes are said to be nine: astringent, constricting, sour, sweet, salty, bitter, pungent, bland or fresh, and fatty.

Sweetness makes the tongue smooth.

Bitterness roughens and separates its parts.

Pungency intensifies this effect.

Saltiness separates and dries.

Astringency gathers and constricts.

Sourness separates while also constricting.

Know, O brother, that from the moment you were created as a sperm-drop in the womb and your soul became bound to it, you have been journeying toward your Lord.

Every day you move from one state lower and less complete to another more complete, perfect, and noble; from one deficient rank toward another higher and more excellent; from one station toward a loftier station—until you meet your Lord.

Then He will bring your reckoning to completion, while your soul remains with Him joyful, delighted, and rejoicing forever, in the company of the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous.

What excellent companions they are.

May God grant us, you, and all our brothers success upon the path of correctness.

May He guide us all along the way of right guidance.

Indeed, He is compassionate toward His servants.

Here ends the Third Division of the Book of the Brethren of Purity and Friends of Loyalty, concerning the Psychological and Intellectual Sciences.

It is followed by the Fourth Division, concerning the Divine and Revealed Sciences.

Its first epistle is On Opinions and Religions.