

AL-GHAZALI'S
PATH TO SUFISM

his DELIVERANCE *from* ERROR
al-Munqidh min al-Dalal



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AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Deliverance from Error

(al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl)

Translated by Richard J. MCCARTHY, S.J., as

*In the Name of God
Most Gracious and Merciful*

I trust in the Living, Who dieth not!

1. The most eminent and ascetic Master, the Ornament of Religion and the Proof of Islam, Abū Hāmid Muhammad, son of Muhammad, son of Muhammad, al-Ghazālī, said:

Praise be to God, Whose praise should preface every writing and discourse! And God's blessing be upon Muhammad the Elect, divinely gifted with prophethood and apostleship, and upon his kin and companions, who guided men away from error!

2. *Now then:* You have asked me, my brother in religion, to communicate to you the aim and secrets of the sciences and the dangerous and intricate depths of the different doctrines and views. You want me to give you an account of my travail in disengaging the truth from amid the welter of the sects, despite the polarity of their means and methods. You also want to hear about my daring in mounting from the lowland of servile conformism to the highland of independent investigation: and first of all what profit I derived from the science of *kalām*; secondly what I found loathsome among the methods of the devotees of *ta'lim*, who restrict the attainment of truth to uncritical acceptance of the Imam's pronouncements; thirdly, the methods of philosophizing which I scouted; and finally, what pleased me in the way pursued by the practice of Sufism. You also wish to know the quintessential truth disclosed to me in the tortuous course of my inquiry into the views expressed by various men: and what led me to quit teaching in Baghdad, though I had many students there: and what induced me to resume teaching in Nishapur much later.

3. Convinced of the sincerity of your desire, I am losing no time in answering your request. Invoking God's help, and placing my trust in Him, and imploring His favor, and having recourse to Him, I say:

4. You should first of all know — God give you good guidance and gently lead you to the truth! — that the diversity of men in religions and creeds, plus the disagreement of the Community of Islam about doctrines, given the multiplicity of sects and the divergency of methods, is a deep sea in which most men founder and from which few only are saved. Each group alleges that it is the one saved, and “each faction is happy about its own beliefs.” This is the state of affairs which the truthful and most trustworthy Chief of God's envoys — God bless him! — ominously promised us when he said: “My Community will split into seventy-odd sects, of which one will be saved.” And what he promised has indeed come to pass!

5. In the bloom of my youth and the prime of my life, from the time I reached puberty before I was twenty until now, when I am over fifty, I have constantly been diving daringly into the depths of this profound sea and wading into its deep water like a bold man, not like a cautious coward. I would penetrate far into every murky mystery, pounce upon every problem, and dash into every mazy difficulty. I would scrutinize the creed of every sect and seek to lay bare the secrets of each faction's teaching with the aim of discriminating between the proponent of truth and the advocate of error, and between the faithful follower of tradition and the heterodox innovator. I would never take leave of an interiorist without wanting to learn about his interiorism, or of a literalist without wanting to know the substance of his literalism, or of a philosopher without seeking to become acquainted with the essence of his philosophy, or of a *mutakallim* without endeavoring to discover the aim of his discussion and polemic, or of a Sufi without eagerly trying to obtain knowledge of the secret of his serenity, or of a devout worshiper without looking into the source and

substance of his piety, or of an irreligious nihilist without attempting to find out his background and motivation in order to become aware of the reasons for his bold profession of nihilism and irreligion.

6. The thirst for grasping the real meaning of things was indeed my habit and wont from my early years and in the prime of my life. It was an instinctive, natural disposition placed in my makeup by God Most High, not something due to my own choosing and contriving. As a result, the fetters of servile conformism fell away from me, and inherited beliefs lost their hold on me, when I was still quite young. For I saw that the children of Christians always grew up embracing Christianity, and the children of Jews always grew up adhering to Judaism, and the children of Muslims always grew up following the religion of Islam. I also heard the tradition related from the Apostle of God — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — in which he said: “Every infant is born endowed with the *fitra*: then his parents make him Jew or Christian or Magian.” Consequently I felt an inner urge to seek the true meaning of the original *fitra*, and the true meaning of the beliefs arising through slavish aping of parents and teachers. I wanted to sift out these uncritical beliefs, the beginnings of which are suggestions imposed from without, since there are differences of opinion in the discernment of those that are true from those that are false.

7. So I began by saying to myself: “What I seek is knowledge of the true meaning of things. Of necessity, therefore, I must inquire into just what the true meaning of knowledge is.” Then it became clear to me that sure and certain knowledge is that in which the thing known is made so manifest that no doubt clings to it, nor is it accompanied by the possibility of error and deception, nor can the mind even suppose such a possibility. Furthermore, safety from error must accompany the certainty to such a degree that, if someone proposed to show it to be false — for example, a man who would turn a stone into gold and a stick into a snake — his feat would not induce any doubt or denial. For if I know that ten is more than three, and then someone were to say: “No, on the contrary, three is more than ten, as is proved by my turning this stick into a snake” — and if he were to do just that and I were to see him do it, I would not doubt my knowledge because of his feat. The only effect it would have on me would be to make me wonder how he could do such a thing. But there would be no doubt at all about what I knew!

8. I realized, then, that whatever I did not know in this way and was not certain of with this kind of certainty was unreliable and unsure knowledge, and that every knowledge unaccompanied by safety from error is not sure and certain knowledge.

The Avenues to Sophistry and Skepticism

9. I then scrutinized all my cognitions and found myself devoid of any knowledge answering the previous description except in the case of sense-data and the self-evident truths. So I said: “Now that despair has befallen me, the only hope I have of acquiring an insight into obscure matters is to start from things that are perfectly clear, namely sense-data and the self-evident truths. Hence I must first study these thoroughly in order to reach a sure answer to these questions: Is my reliance on sense-data and my safety from error in the case of self-evident truths of the same kind as that which I formerly had regarding the dicta of authority, and of the same kind as that which most men have regarding speculative matters? Or is it a verifiable safety containing no deception or danger?”

10. With great earnestness, therefore, I began to reflect on my sense-data to see if I could make myself doubt them. This protracted effort to induce doubt finally brought me to the point where my soul would not allow me to admit safety from error even in the case of my sense-data. Rather it began to be open to doubt about them and to say:

“Whence comes your reliance on sense-data? The strongest of the senses is the sense of sight. Now this looks at a shadow and sees it standing still and motionless and judges that motion must be denied. Then, due to experience and observation, an hour later it knows that the shadow is moving, and that it did not move in a sudden spurt, but so gradually and imperceptibly that it was never completely at rest. Sight also looks at a star and sees it as something small, the size of a dinar: then geometrical proofs demonstrate that it surpasses the earth in size. In the case of this and of similar instances of sense-data the sense-judge makes its judgments, but the reason-judge refutes it and repeatedly gives it the lie in an incontrovertible fashion.

11. Then I said: “My reliance on sense-data has also become untenable. Perhaps, therefore, I can rely only on those rational data which belong to the category of primary truths, such as our asserting that ‘Ten is more than three,’ and ‘One and the same thing cannot be simultaneously affirmed and denied,’ and ‘One and the same thing cannot be incipient and eternal, existent and nonexistent, necessary and impossible.”

12. Then sense-data spoke up: “What assurance have you that your reliance on rational data is not like your reliance on sense-data? Indeed, you used to have confidence in me. Then the reason-judge came along and gave me the lie. But were it not for the reason-judge, you would still accept me as true. So there may be, beyond the perception of reason, another judge. And if the latter revealed itself, it would give the lie to the judgments of reason, just as the reason-judge revealed itself and gave the lie to the judgments of sense. The mere fact of the nonappearance of that further perception does not prove the impossibility of its existence.”

13. For a brief space my soul hesitated about the answer to that objection, and sense-data reinforced their difficulty by an appeal to dreaming, saying: “Don’t you see that when you are asleep you believe certain things and imagine certain circumstances and believe they are fixed and lasting and entertain no doubts about that being their status? Then you wake up and know that all your imaginings and beliefs were groundless and unsubstantial. So while everything you believe through sensation or intellection in your waking state may be true in relation to that state, what assurance have you that you may not suddenly experience a state which would have the same relation to your waking state as the latter has to your dreaming, and your waking state would be dreaming in relation to that new and further state? If you found yourself in such a state, you would be sure that all your rational beliefs were unsubstantial fancies.

14. It may be that this state beyond reason is that which the Sufis claim is theirs. For they allege that, in the states they experience when they concentrate inwardly and suspend sensation, they see phenomena which are not in accord with the normal data of reason. Or it may be that this state is death. For the Apostle of God — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — said: ‘Men are asleep: then after they die they awake.’ So perhaps this present life is a sleep compared to the afterlife. Consequently, when a man dies, things will appear to him differently from the way he now sees them, and thereupon he will be told: ‘But We have removed from you your veil and today your sight is keen’ (50.21/22).”

15. When these thoughts occurred to me they penetrated my soul, and so I tried to deal with that objection. However, my effort was unsuccessful, since the objection could be refuted only by proof. But the only way to put together a proof was to combine primary cognitions. So if, as in my case, these were inadmissible, it was impossible to construct the proof. This malady was mysterious and it lasted for nearly two months. During that time I was a skeptic in fact, but not in utterance and doctrine. At length God Most High cured me of that sickness. My soul regained its

health and equilibrium and once again I accepted the self-evident data of reason and relied on them with safety and certainty. But that was not achieved by constructing a proof or putting together an argument. On the contrary, it was the effect of a light which God Most High cast into my breast. And that light is the key to most knowledge.

16. Therefore, whoever thinks that the unveiling of truth depends on precisely formulated proofs has indeed straitened the broad mercy of God. When the Apostle of God — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — was asked about “the dilation” in the Most High’s utterance: “So he whom God wishes to guide aright, He dilates his breast for submission to Himself (i.e., to embrace Islam)” (6.125), he said: “It is a light which God casts into the heart.” Then someone said: “And what is the sign of it?” He replied: “Withdrawal from the mansion of delusion and turning to the mansion of immortality.” And it is this of which the Apostle — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — said: “God Most High created men in darkness, then sprinkled on them some of His light.” From that light, then, the unveiling of truth must be sought. Moreover, that light gushes forth from the divine liberality at certain times, and one must be on the watch for it according to the saying of the Apostle — Peace be upon him! — “Your Lord, in the days of your lifetime, sends forth gusts of grace: do you then put yourselves in the way of them!”

17. The aim of this account is to emphasize that one should be most diligent in seeking the truth until he finally comes to seeking the unseekable. For primary truths are unseekable, because they are present in the mind; and when what is present is sought, it is lost and hides itself. But one who seeks the unseekable cannot subsequently be accused of negligence in seeking what is seekable.

The Categories of Those Who Seek the Truth

18. When God Most High, of His kindness and abundant generosity, had cured me of this sickness, I was of the view that the categories of those seeking the truth were limited to four groups:

1. The *Mutakallimūn*, who allege that they are men of independent judgment and reasoning.
2. The *Bātinītes*, who claim to be the unique possessors of *al-ta’līm* and the privileged recipients of knowledge acquired from the Infallible Imam.
3. The Philosophers, who maintain that they are the men of logic and apodeictic demonstration.
4. The Sufis, who claim to be the familiars of the Divine Presence and the men of mystic vision and illumination.

19. I then said to myself: “The truth cannot transcend these four categories, for these are the men who are following the paths of the quest for truth. Hence, if the truth eludes them, there remains no hope of ever attaining it. For there can be no desire to return to servile conformism once it has been abandoned, since a prerequisite for being a servile conformist is that one does not know himself to be such. But when a man recognizes that, the glass of his servile conformism is shattered — an irreparable fragmentation and a mess which cannot be mended by patching and piecing together: it can only be melted by fire and newly reshaped.

20. I therefore lost no time in following these different ways and making a thorough study of the views of these groups. I applied myself first to the science of *kalām*, secondly to the way of philosophy, thirdly to the teachings of the Bātinītes, and fourthly to the Way of the Sufis.

The Aim and Purport of the Science of Kalām

21. I began, then, with the science of *kalām*, which I summarized in the form of notes. I carefully studied the works of the most meticulous *mutakallimūn*, and I wrote

on the subject what I had a mind to write. Subsequently, however, I found it a science adequate for its own aim, but inadequate for mine. For its aim is simply to conserve the creed of the orthodox for the orthodox and to guard it from the confusion introduced by the innovators.

22. In the past God Most High and Praiseworthy communicated to His servants, by the tongue of His Apostle, a creed which is the truth, inasmuch as it is, for their religious and secular life, the sound basis as articulated in detail in the Qur'ān and the Traditions. Then Satan, through the sinister suggestions of the innovators, injected notions opposed to orthodoxy, with the result that the innovators became passionately addicted to these errors and all but ruined the true creed for its adherents. So God Most High raised up the group of the *mutakallimūn* and motivated them to champion orthodoxy by a systematic discussion designed to disclose the deceptions introduced by the contriving innovators contrary to the traditional orthodoxy. This gave rise to the science of *kalām* and its practitioners.

23. A group of the *mutakallimūn* did indeed perform the task assigned to them by God. They ably protected orthodoxy and defended the creed which had been readily accepted from the prophetic preaching and boldly counteracted the heretical innovations. But in so doing they relied on premises which they took over from their adversaries, being compelled to admit them either by uncritical acceptance, or because of the Community's consensus, or by simple acceptance deriving from the Qur'ān and the Traditions. Most of their polemic was devoted to bringing out the inconsistencies of their adversaries and criticizing them for the logically absurd consequences of what they conceded. This, however, is of little use in the case of one who admits nothing at all except the primary and self-evident truths. So *kalām* was not sufficient in my case, nor was it a remedy for the malady of which I was complaining.

24. To be sure, when the discipline of *kalām* acquired some status and had been much engaged in for some length of time, the *mutakallimūn* showed an earnest desire for attempting to defend orthodoxy by the study of the true natures of things. They plunged into the study of substances and accidents and their principles. But since that was not the aim of their own science, their discussion of the subject was not thoroughgoing; therefore it did not provide an effective means of dispelling entirely the darkness due to the bewilderment about the differences dividing men. I do not regard it as improbable that such may have been the result in the case of others. I do not even doubt that it has actually been the experience of a limited group of men, but in a way vitiated by servile conformism in some matters which are not among the primary truths. In any event, my present purpose is to tell the story of my own case, not to express disapproval of anyone who sought a cure in *kalām*. For healing remedies differ as the sickness differs, and many a remedy helps one sick man and harms another.

PHILOSOPHY

[*On the gist of philosophy: what is blameworthy in it, and what blameless; what doctrine lays its proponent open to the charge of unbelief, and what doctrine lays him open to the charge, not of unbelief, but of innovation; and an exposé of what the philosophers have stolen from the sayings of the men of truth and mingled with their own affirmations to promote the circulation of their own errors together with those truths; and how souls come to feel an antipathy for those truths; and how to extract the unadulterated truth from amid the counterfeit and spurious views found in the aggregate of the philosophers' teaching.*]

25. After finishing with the science of *kalām*, I then started on philosophy. I knew for sure that one cannot recognize what is unsound in any of the sciences unless he has such a grasp of the farthest reaches of that science that he is the equal of the most learned of those versed in the principles of that science; then he must even excel him and attain even greater eminence so that he becomes cognizant of the intricate

profundities which have remained beyond the ken of the acknowledged master of the science. Then, and then only, will it be possible that the unsoundness he alleges will be seen as really such.

26. I noted, however, that not a single Muslim divine had directed his attention and endeavor to that end. What the *mutakallimūn* had to say in their books, where they were engaged in refuting the philosophers, was nothing but abstruse, scattered remarks, patently inconsistent and false, which could not conceivably hoodwink an ordinary intelligent person, to say nothing of one familiar with the subtleties of the philosophical sciences.

27. I knew, of course, that undertaking to refute their doctrine before comprehending it and knowing it in depth would be a shot in the dark. So I girded myself for the task of learning that science by the mere perusal of their writings without seeking the help of a master and teacher. I devoted myself to that in the moments I had free from writing and lecturing on the legal sciences — and I was then burdened with the teaching and instruction of three hundred students in Baghdad. As it turned out, through mere reading in those embezzled moments, God Most High gave me an insight into the farthest reaches of the philosophers' sciences in less than two years. Then, having understood their doctrine, I continued to reflect assiduously on it for nearly a year, coming back to it constantly and repeatedly reexamining its intricacies and profundities. Finally I became so familiar with the measure of its deceit and deception, and its precision and delusion, that I had no doubt about my thorough grasp of it.

28. So hear now my account of the philosophers and my report of the substance of their sciences. For I observed that they fell into several categories and noted that their sciences included several divisions. But to all of them, despite the multiplicity of their categories, cleaves the stigma of unbelief and godlessness. Yet there is a marked difference between the older and the oldest of them and the more recent and the earlier in their distance from and closeness to the truth.

*The Categories of the Philosophers and the Fact That the Stigma of Unbelief Is
Common to All of Them*

29. Know that the philosophers, notwithstanding the multiplicity of their groups and the diversity of their doctrines, can be divided into three main divisions: Materialists, Naturalists, and Theists.

30. *The first category*, the Materialists, were a group of the most ancient philosophers who denied the existence of the omniscient and omnipotent Creator-Ruler. They alleged that the world has existed from eternity as it is, of itself and not by reason of a Maker. Animals have unceasingly come from seed, and seed from animals: thus it was, and thus it ever will be. These are the godless in the full sense of the term.

31. *The second category*, the Naturalists, were men who devoted much study to the world of nature and the marvels found in animals and plants; they also were much taken up with the dissection of animal organs. In these they saw such marvels of God Most High's making and such wonders of His wisdom that they were compelled, with that in mind, to acknowledge the existence of a wise Creator cognizant of the aims and purposes of all things. Indeed, no one can study the science of anatomy and the marvelous uses of the organs without acquiring this compelling knowledge of the perfect governance of Him Who shaped the structure of animals, and especially that of man.

32. However, it appeared to these philosophers, because they had studied nature so much, that the equilibrium of the mixture of humors had a great effect on the resulting constitution of the animal's powers. Hence they thought that man's rational power was also dependent on the mixture of his humors and that its corruption would follow the corruption of the mixture of his humors, and so that power would cease to exist. Once it ceased to exist, they alleged that bringing back the nonexistent would be unintelligible. So they adopted the view that the soul dies, never to return. Consequently they denied the afterlife and rejected the Garden and the Fire, the Assembly and the Recall, and the Resurrection and the Reckoning. So in their view there would be no future reward for obedience, and no punishment for disobedience. Therefore they lost all restraint and abandoned themselves to their passions like beasts. These were also godless men, because basic faith is belief in God and the Last Day — and these men denied the Last Day, even though they believed in God and His Attributes.

33. *The third category*, the Theists, were the later philosophers, such as Socrates, the master of Plato, and Plato, the master of Aristotle. It was Aristotle who systematized logic for the philosophers and refined the philosophical sciences, accurately formulating previously imprecise statements and bringing to maturity the crudities of their sciences. Taken altogether, these refuted the first two categories of the Materialists and the Naturalists. Indeed, by the arguments they advanced to lay bare the enormities of the latter, they relieved others of that task: "And God spared the believers from fighting (the unbelievers)" (33.25) by reason of the unbelievers' own infighting.

34. Then Aristotle refuted Plato and Socrates and the Theists who had preceded him in such thorough fashion that he disassociated himself from them all. Yet he, too, retained remnants of their vicious unbelief and innovation which he was unsuccessful in avoiding. So they all must be taxed with unbelief, as must their partisans among the Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī and their likes. None, however, of the Muslim philosophers engaged so much in transmitting Aristotle's lore as did the two men just mentioned. What others transmitted is not free from disorder and confusion and in studying it one's mind becomes so muddled that he fails to understand it — and how can the incomprehensible be rejected or accepted?

35. The sum of what we regard as the authentic philosophy of Aristotle, as transmitted by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, can be reduced to three parts: a part which must be branded as unbelief; a part which must be stigmatized as innovation; and a part which need not be repudiated at all. Let us now set this forth in detail.

The Divisions of the Philosophical Sciences

36. Know that the sciences of the philosophers, with reference to the aim we have in mind, include six divisions: mathematical, logical, physical, metaphysical, political, and moral.

37. *The mathematical sciences* deal with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. But nothing in them entails denial or affirmation of religious matters. On the contrary, they concern rigorously demonstrated facts which can in no wise be denied once they are known and understood. From them, however, two evils have been engendered.

38. *One of these* is that whoever takes up these mathematical sciences marvels at the fine precision of their details and the clarity of their proofs. Because of that, he forms a high opinion of the philosophers and assumes that all their sciences have the same lucidity and apodeictic solidity as this science of mathematics. Moreover, he will have heard the talk of the town about their unbelief, their negative attitude, and their disdain for the Law. Therefore he ceases to believe out of pure conformism,

asserting: “If religion were true, this would not have been unknown to these philosophers, given their precision in this science of mathematics.” Thus, when he learns through hearsay of their unbelief and rejection of religion, he concludes that it is right to reject and disavow religion. How many a man have I seen who strayed from the path of truth on this pretext and for no other reason!

39. One may say to such a man: “A person skilled in one field is not necessarily skilled in every field. Thus a man skilled in jurisprudence and *kalām* is not necessarily skilled in medicine, nor is a man who is ignorant of the speculative and rational sciences necessarily ignorant of the science of syntax. On the contrary, in each field there are men who have reached in it a certain degree of skill and preeminence, although they may be quite stupid and ignorant about other things. What the ancients had to say about mathematical topics was apodeictic, whereas their views on metaphysical questions were conjectural. But this is known only to an experienced man who has made a thorough study of the matter.”

40. When such an argument is urged against one who has become an unbeliever out of mere conformism, he finds it unacceptable. Rather, caprice’s sway, vain passion, and love of appearing to be clever prompt him to persist in his high opinion of the philosophers with regard to all their sciences. This, then, is a very serious evil, and because of it one should warn off anyone who would embark upon the study of those mathematical sciences. For even though they do not pertain to the domain of religion, yet, since they are among the primary elements of the philosophers’ sciences, the student of mathematics will be insidiously affected by the sinister mischief of the philosophers. Rare, therefore, are those who study mathematics without losing their religion and throwing off the restraint of piety.

41. *The second evil* likely to follow from the study of the mathematical sciences derives from the case of an ignorant friend of Islam who supposes that our religion must be championed by the rejection of every science ascribed to the philosophers. So he rejects all their sciences, claiming that they display ignorance and folly in them all. He even denies their statements about eclipses of the sun and the moon and asserts that their views are contrary to the revealed Law. When such an assertion reaches the ears of someone who knows those things through apodeictic demonstration, he does not doubt the validity of his proof, but rather believes that Islam is built on ignorance and the denial of apodeictic demonstration. So he becomes all the more enamored of philosophy and envenomed against Islam. Great indeed is the crime against religion committed by anyone who supposes that Islam is to be championed by the denial of these mathematical sciences. For the revealed Law nowhere undertakes to deny or affirm these sciences, and the latter nowhere address themselves to religious matters.

42. The saying of Muhammad — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — “The sun and moon are two of the signs of God Most High: they are not eclipsed for the death or life of any man; so when you see an eclipse, fly in fear to the mention of God Most High,” contains nothing demanding the denial of the science of calculation which apprises us of the course of the sun and the moon and their conjunction and their opposition in a specific way. As for his (alleged) saying — Peace be upon him! — “But when God manifests Himself to a thing, it humbles itself before Him,” this addition is not found at all in sound tradition. This, then, is the judgment to be made on the character of mathematics and its evil consequences.

43. Nothing in *the logical sciences* has anything to do with religion by way of negation and affirmation. On the contrary, they are the study of the methods of proofs, of syllogisms, of the conditions governing the premises of apodeictic demonstration, of how these premises are to be combined, of the requisites for a sound definition, and of how the latter is to be drawn up. Knowledge is either a concept, and

the way to know it is the definition, or it is an assent, and the way to know it is the apodeictic demonstration. There is nothing in this which must be rejected. On the contrary, it is the sort of thing mentioned by the *mutakallimūn* and the partisans of reasoning in connection with the proofs they use. The philosophers differ from them only in modes of expression and technical terms and in a greater refinement in definitions and subdivisions. Their manner of discoursing on such things is exemplified by their saying: “If it is certain that every A is B, then it necessarily follows that some B is A” — for instance: If it is certain that every man is an animal, then it follows necessarily that some animal is a man. This they express by saying that a universal affirmative proposition is convertible to a particular affirmative proposition.

44. What has this to do with the important truths of our religion, that it should call for rejection and denial? When it is rejected, the only effect of such a rejection in the minds of logicians is a low opinion of the rejecter’s intelligence, and, what is worse, of his religion, which, he claims, rests on such rejection. To be sure, the philosophers themselves are guilty of a kind of injustice in the case of this science of logic. This is that in logic they bring together, for apodeictic demonstration, conditions known to lead undoubtedly to sure and certain knowledge. But when, in metaphysics, they finally come to discuss questions touching on religion, they cannot satisfy those conditions, but rather are extremely slipshod in applying them. Moreover, logic may be studied by one who will think it a fine thing and regard it as very clear. Consequently he will think that the instances of unbelief related of the philosophers are backed up by demonstrations such as those set forth in logic. Therefore he will rush into unbelief even before teaching the metaphysical sciences. Hence this evil may also befall the student of logic.

45. *The physical sciences* are a study of the world of the heavens and their stars and of the sublunar world’s simple bodies, such as water, air, earth, and fire, and composite bodies, such as animals, plants, and minerals. They also study the causes of their changing and being transformed and being mixed. That is like medicine’s study of the human body and its principal and subsidiary organs and the causes of the alteration of the mixtures of its humors. And just as religion does not require the repudiation of the science of medicine, so also it does not require the repudiation of the science of physics, except for certain specific questions which we have mentioned in our book *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Apart from these, it will be clear upon reflection that any other points on which the physicists must be opposed are subsumed in those we have alluded to. The basic point regarding all of them is for you to know that nature is totally subject to God Most High: it does not act of itself but is used as an instrument by its Creator. The sun, moon, stars, and the elements are subject to God’s command: none of them effects any act by and of itself.

46. It is in *the metaphysical sciences* that most of the philosophers’ errors are found. Owing to the fact that they could not carry out apodeictic demonstration according to the conditions they had postulated in logic, they differed a great deal about metaphysical questions. Aristotle’s doctrine on these matters, as transmitted by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, approximates the teachings of the Islamic philosophers. But the sum of their errors comes down to twenty heads, in three of which they must be taxed with unbelief, and in seventeen with innovation. It was to refute their doctrine on these twenty questions that we composed our book *The Incoherence*.

47. In the three questions first mentioned they were opposed to (the belief of) all Muslims, viz. in their affirming

(1) that men’s bodies will not be assembled on the Last Day, but only disembodied spirits will be rewarded and punished, and the rewards and punishments

will be spiritual, not corporal. They were indeed right in affirming the spiritual rewards and punishments, for these also are certain; but they falsely denied the corporal rewards and punishments and blasphemed the revealed Law in their stated views.

(2) The second question is their declaration: “God Most High knows universals, but not particulars.” This also is out-and-out unbelief. On the contrary, the truth is that “there does not escape Him the weight of an atom in the heavens or in the earth.” (34.3; cf. 10.62/61).

(3) The third question is their maintaining the eternity of the world, past and future.

No Muslim has ever professed any of their views on these questions.

48. On other matters — such as the denial of the divine attributes, and their assertion that God is knowing by His essence, not by a knowledge superadded to His essence, and similar views of theirs — their doctrine is close to that of the Mu‘tazilites. But there is no need to tax the Mu‘tazilites with unbelief because of such views. We have already mentioned that in our book *The Clear Criterion for Distinguishing between Islam and Godlessness*, as well as what shows the error of anyone who precipitously brands as unbelief everything that clashes with his own doctrine.

49. In *the political sciences* all that the philosophers have to say comes down to administrative maxims concerned with secular affairs and the government of rulers. They simply took these over from the scriptures revealed to the prophets by God Most High and from the maxims handed down from the predecessors of the prophets.

50. All they have to say about *the moral sciences* comes down to listing the qualities and habits of the soul, and recording their generic and specific kinds, and the way to cultivate the good ones and combat the bad. This they simply took over from the sayings of the Sufis. These were godly men who applied themselves assiduously to invoking God, resisting passion, and following the way leading to God Most High by shunning worldly pleasures. In the course of their spiritual combat the good habits of the soul and its shortcomings had been disclosed to them and also the defects that vitiate its actions. All this they set forth plainly. Then the philosophers took over these ideas and mixed them with their own doctrines, using the lustre afforded by them to promote the circulation of their own false teaching. There was indeed in their age, nay but there is in every age, a group of godly men of whom God Most High never leaves the world destitute. For they are the pillars of the earth, and by their blessings the divine mercy descends upon earthdwellers as is declared in the tradition from Muhammad — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — in which he says: “Because of them you receive rain, and thanks to them you receive sustenance, and among them were the Companions of the Cave.” Such godly men existed in ancient times as the Qur’ān declares (cf. Sura 18).

51. From the Islamic philosophers’ mixing the prophetic utterances and the sayings of the Sufis with their own writings two evils have sprung: one in the case of the man who accepts their ethical teaching, the other in the case of the man who rejects it.

52. The evil in the case of the man who rejects their ethical teaching is very serious. For some dim-witted persons suppose, since that borrowed prophetic and sufi doctrine has been set down in the philosophers’ writings and mixed with their false doctrine, that this doctrine must be eschewed and never cited and even disavowed whenever anyone cites it. This is their attitude because they have heard that doctrine in the first place only from the philosophers. So their weak minds straightway judge it

to be erroneous because the one who voices it is in error on other matters. This is like the case of a man who hears a Christian say: “There is no God but God; Jesus is the Apostle of God,” and then denies it, saying: “This is what the Christians say.” Such a man does not defer judgment while he ponders whether the Christian is an unbeliever because of that statement, or because of his denial of Muhammad’s prophethood — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! Hence, if he is an unbeliever only because of his denial of the latter, he should not be contradicted in matters other than what he disbelieves — I mean something which is true in itself, even though the Christian also holds it to be true.

53. This is the practice of those dim-witted men who know the truth by men, and not men by the truth. The intelligent man, on the contrary, follows the advice of the Master of the Intelligent, ‘Alī — God be pleased with him! — where he says: “Do not know the truth by men, but rather, know the truth and you will know its adherents.” The intelligent man, therefore, first knows the truth, then he considers what is actually said by someone. If it is true, he accepts it, whether the speaker be wrong or right in other matters. Indeed, such a man will often be intent on extracting what is true from the involved utterances of the erring, since he is aware that gold is usually found mixed with dirt. The money-changer suffers no harm if he puts his hand into the sack of the trickster and pulls out the genuine pure gold from among the false and counterfeit coins, so long as he can rely on his professional acumen. It is not the expert money-changer, but rather the inexperienced bumpkin who must be restrained from dealing with the trickster. Likewise, a clumsy and stupid person must be kept away from the seashore, not the proficient swimmer; and a child must be prevented from handling a snake, not the skilled snake charmer.

54. It is certainly true, since most men have an overweening opinion of their own competence and cleverness and think they are perfectly equipped intellectually to discern truth from error, that the door must be blocked to prevent the generality of men, as far as possible, from perusing the works of those addicted to error. For they will by no means be safe from the second evil which we shall presently mention, even if they do manage to escape the evil which we have just noted.

55. Some of the remarks found here and there in our works on the mysteries of the religious sciences were objected to by a group of men whose minds were not thoroughly grounded in those sciences and whose mental vision was not open to the ultimate aims of our teachings. They alleged that those remarks were taken from things said by the early philosophers. As a matter of fact, some of them were my own original ideas — and it is not farfetched that ideas should coincide, just as a horse’s hoof may fall on the print left by another; and some are found in the scriptures; and the sense of most is found in the writings of the Sufis.

56. However, assuming that they are found only in the writings of the philosophers, if what is said is reasonable in itself and corroborated by apodeictic proof and not contrary to the Qur’ān and the Sunna, then why should it be shunned and rejected? If we were to open this door and aim at forgoing every truth which had been first formulated by the mind of one in error, we would have to forgo much of what is true. We would also have to give up a lot of the verses of the Qur’ān and the traditions of the Apostle and the recitals of our pious forebears and the sayings of the sages and the Sufis. For the author of the book of “The Brethren of Purity” cites these in his own work, appealing to their authority and thereby enticing the minds of stupid men to embrace his false doctrine. That would be an invitation to those in error to wrest the truth from our hands by putting it into their own books.

57. The lowest level attained by an intelligent man is to be so different from the gullible man in the street that he feels no aversion to honey, even though he finds it in

a cupper's glass, but realizes that the cupping glass does not alter the nature of the honey. For the natural distaste for such honey is based on a popular misconception arising from the fact that the cupping glass is made for blood deemed impure. Consequently the man in the street supposes the blood is deemed impure because it is in the cupping glass and does not realize that it is deemed impure because of a property found in the blood itself. Hence, since this property does not exist in the honey, its being found in such a vessel does not impart to it that property nor does it necessitate its being deemed impure. This is an empty fancy, yet it is prevalent among most men. Thus, whenever you trace back a statement and attribute it to a speaker of whom they have a good opinion, they accept it, even though it be false; but whenever you attribute it to someone of whom they have a bad opinion, they reject it, even though it be true. Thus they always know the truth by men, not men by the truth — which is the *ne plus ultra* of error! This, then, is the evil due to total rejection of the philosophers' ethical teaching.

58. *The second evil* is that due to total acceptance of their ethical teaching. For one who studies their books, such as that of "The Brethren of Purity" and others, and sees the prophetic maxims and sufi sayings they interspersed with their own utterances, often approves of their writings and accepts them and forms a good opinion of them. Thereupon he may readily accept their errors mixed up with those borrowed truths because of a good opinion acquired about what he has seen and approved. That is a way of luring men into error.

59. Because of this evil the perusal of the philosophers' books must be prevented on the score of the deceit and danger they contain. Just as an unskilled swimmer must be kept away from slippery river banks, so men must be kept from perusing those books. And just as children must be kept from handling snakes, so the ears of men must be protected from the farrago of those sayings. And just as the snake charmer must not handle a snake in the presence of his little boy, since he knows that the boy will imitate him thinking he is like his father, but rather must caution his boy against that by being cautious himself in the boy's presence, so also the man of deep learning must comport himself. Furthermore, when a skilled snake charmer takes a snake and separates the antidote from the poison and draws forth the antidote and renders the poison harmless, he is not free to withhold the antidote from anyone in need of it. So, too, when the money changer skilled in picking out coins puts his hand in the trickster's sack and takes out the genuine pure gold and discards the spurious and counterfeit coins, he is not free to withhold the good and acceptable coins from anyone who needs them. The same holds good for the true scholar.

60. Moreover, a man in need of the antidote whose soul feels a great loathing for it, because he knows that it has been extracted from the snake which is the seat of the poison, must be properly instructed. Likewise, when a poor man in dire need of money is averse to accepting gold drawn from the trickster's sack he must be reminded that his aversion is pure ignorance which will cause him to be deprived of the benefit he seeks. He certainly ought to be informed that the proximity of the counterfeit to the genuine coins does not make the genuine coins counterfeit, just as it does not make the counterfeit coins genuine. In precisely the same way, therefore, the close proximity of the true to the false does not make the true false, as it does not make the false true.

This, then, is as much as we wish to say about the evil and mischief of philosophy.

61. When I had finished with the science of philosophy — having mastered and understood it and pinpointed its errors — I knew that philosophy also was inadequate to satisfy my aim fully. I also realized that reason alone is incapable of fully grasping all problems or of getting to the heart of all difficulties. Meanwhile the Ta‘limites had come into prominence and their talk of an arcane knowledge of the meaning of things derived from the infallible Imam, Master of the Truth, had been bruited about. It occurred to me that I ought to inquire into their views to find out exactly what their position was. Then it happened that a peremptory order reached me from His Highness the Caliph to write a book which would reveal the true meaning of their doctrine. I could not contravene that order, and it became an external incentive added to my original interior motive. So I began to seek out their writings and to collect their views. I had already been struck by some of their novel utterances, the brainchildren of our own contemporaries, views which were not consonant with the program handed down from their predecessors.

62. I therefore collected and marshalled those utterances, combining thoroughness and accuracy, and answered them at great length. The result was that one of the Sunnites found fault with me for overstating their argument. He said: “This is an effort on their behalf. For they would have been unable to defend their doctrine by such specious arguments had it not been for your pinpointing and marshalling them.” This criticism is justified in a way. Long ago Ahmad ibn Hanbal found fault with al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī — God have mercy on them both! — for his writing books in refutation of the Mu‘tazilites. Al-Hārith said: “Refuting innovation is a duty.” Ahmad replied: “Yes, but you have first reported their specious argument and then answered it. What assurance have you that a man may not read the specious argument and it will stick in his mind, but he will pay no attention to the answer, or he will study the answer without understanding its real import?”

63. Ahmad ibn Hanbal’s remark is true. But it concerned a specious argument that had not become widespread and notorious. However, once such an argument becomes widespread, replying to it becomes imperative: and replying is possible only after setting the argument forth. To be sure, one should not burden oneself with a difficulty with which they have not bothered. Nor did I do that. On the contrary, I had heard such argument from one of my associates who frequented my company after he had affiliated himself with them and professed their doctrine. He told me they used to laugh at the works of those who wrote in refutation of them, since those writers had still not grasped their argument. He then cited that argument, relating it in their own words. So I could not personally be content with having it thought that I was unaware of their basic argument, and for that reason I presented it; nor did I want it thought of me that, even though I had heard the argument, I had not grasped it, and for that reason I reported it systematically. My aim was to give the fullest account possible of their specious argumentation and then to prove its error to the hilt.

64. To put it briefly: there is no substance to their views and no force in their argument. Indeed, had it not been for the maladroit defense put forward by the ignorant friend of truth, that innovation, given its weakness, would never have attained its present position. But intense fanaticism led the defenders of the truth to prolong the debate with them over the premises of their argument and to contradict them in everything they said. Thus they fought the Ta‘limites over their claim that there must be authoritative teaching and an authoritative teacher, and also in their claim that not every teacher is suitable, but that there must be an infallible teacher. Their argument showing the need of authoritative teaching and an authoritative teacher was loud and clear, whereas the counter-argument of their opponents was weak. Because of that many were seduced into thinking that it was due to the strength of the Ta‘limites’ doctrine and the weakness of their opponents’ doctrine, not

understanding that it was really due to the dim-wittedness of the defender of the truth and his ignorance of how to go about it. In fact, the right way to proceed is to acknowledge the need for an authoritative teacher who must also be infallible. But our infallible teacher is Muhammad — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! If they say: “He is dead”, we say: “And your teacher is absent!” And when they say: “Our teacher has indeed taught his emissaries and scattered them throughout the countries, and he expects them to return to consult him if they disagree on some point or encounter some difficulty,” we say: “Our teacher has taught his emissaries and scattered them throughout the countries, and he has perfected this teaching, since God Most High said: ‘Today I have perfected for you your religion and have accorded you My full favor’ (5.5/3). And once the teaching has been perfected, the death of the teacher works no harm, just as his absence works no harm.”

65. There remains their argument: “How do you judge about a case you have not heard of? By the text? But you have not heard it. Or by personal effort and forming your own opinion? But this is the most likely place for disagreement!” We reply: “We do as Mu‘ādh did when the Apostle of God — Peace be upon him! — dispatched him to Yemen, viz. we judge by the text, if the text exists, and by personal effort in its absence.” In fact we do as their emissaries do when they are in lands farthest away from the Imām. For they cannot judge by the text, since limited texts cannot exhaust unlimited cases; nor can they return to the Imam’s town in each individual case, for by the time they would have covered the distance and returned, the petitioner might well have died and their return would be useless.

66. A man, then, who has a problem about the *qibla* has no recourse but to perform his Prayer in accordance with his personal judgment. For if he were to journey to the Imām’s town to learn about the *qibla*, the time for the Prayer would elapse. Hence the Prayer performed facing a direction other than the *qibla* is lawful when based on conjecture. It is said: “The man who errs in personal judgment will receive one reward, and the man who is right will receive a double reward.” So it is in all cases involving personal effort. It is also true in the case of paying the legal alms to a poor man. For by his personal judgment one may judge the man to be poor, whereas he is really rich, but not outwardly because he hides his wealth. A man so judging will not be blamed for it, even though he has erred, because he is blameworthy only for what gives rise to his personal opinion. If our opponent says: “His adversary’s opinion is as good as his,” we reply: “he is commanded to follow his own personal opinion, just as the man exercising personal judgment about the *qibla* must follow his own opinion, even though others disagree with him.” He may then say: “The servile conformist follows the opinion of Abū Hanīfa or al-Shāfi‘ī — God’s mercy on both of them! — or of someone else.” I reply: “How should a servile conformist who is confused about the *qibla* act when those exercising personal judgment disagree about it?” He will then say: “It is up to him to exercise personal judgment in finding the man best qualified and most knowledgeable about the indications of the *qibla*, and then he must follow that personal judgment.” The same is true regarding the various schools.

67. The prophets and religious leaders referred men to the exercise of personal judgment, and necessarily so, despite their knowledge that men might err. The Apostle of God — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — even said: “I judge by externals, but God undertakes to judge the hearts of men.” This means: “I judge according to the most probable opinion resulting from the witnesses’ statements, but they may err about the matter.” The prophets had no way to be safe from error in such cases involving personal judgment; how, then, can anyone else aspire to such safety?

68. At this point the Ta'limites raise two difficulties. *One of them* is their statement: "Even though what you say may be true in cases of *fiqh* [law] involving personal judgment, it is not true regarding the basic articles of belief. For one who errs in these is inexcusable. How, then, can one find a way to safety from error in these matters?" I reply: "The basic articles of belief are contained in the Book and the Sunna, and what is beyond that is a matter of detail. Anyone engaged in dispute about a further matter of detail will find the truth about it by weighing it in "the correct balance," viz. the scales mentioned by God Most High in His Book. These are the five which I have mentioned in *The Book of the Correct Balance*.

69. The adversary may say: "Your opponents disagree with you about that balance." I reply: "It is inconceivable that anyone understand that balance and then disagree about it. For the Ta'limites will not disagree about it, because I have deduced it from the Qur'ān and learned it therefrom. Nor will the logicians disagree about it, because it accords with the conditions they lay down in logic without clashing with them. Nor will the *mutakallim* disagree about it, because it agrees with his statements on the proofs of speculative matters by which the truth in *kalām* questions becomes known."

70. My adversary may say: "If you have such a balance at your disposal, then why do you not remove the disagreement existing among men?" I reply: "Were they to hearken to me, I would remove the disagreement among them! Moreover, I have mentioned the way to remove disagreement in *The Book of the Correct Balance*: so study it that you may know that it is true and would definitely abolish disagreement if only men would hearken! But they — all of them! — will not hearken! Or rather, some did hearken to me, and I did remove the disagreement existing among them. Furthermore, your Imam wants to banish disagreement from among them, despite their failure to hearken: why, then, has he not done this up to now? And why did 'Ali — God be pleased with him! — not do that, since he was the first and greatest of the Imams? Does the Imām indeed claim that he can forcibly induce men to hearken? If so, then why has he not done that up to now? And to what day has he deferred it? And has anything resulted among men from the Imam's claim but increasing disagreement and the growing number of men at variance? Surely it was to be feared that disagreement would result in a kind of hurt that would finally end in bloodshed, devastation of towns, orphaning of children, brigandage, and plundering of property. And indeed, as a result of the "blessings" of your doing away with disagreement, there has happened in the world a disagreement, the like of which has never been known!"

71. He may say: "You have claimed that you can remove the disagreement existing among men. But he who stands perplexed between conflicting views and opposing differences is not bound to listen to you rather than to your adversary. Most of the adversaries disagree with you, and there is no difference between you and them!" This is their *second difficulty*, and I reply: "First of all this objection may be retorted against you. For when *you* invite the perplexed person to listen to you, he may say: 'Why are you any better than those who oppose you — and most scholars disagree with you?' I wonder how you would answer! Would you answer by saying: 'My Imām has been explicitly designated'? But who will believe you in your claim of explicit designation, since he has not heard the explicit designation from the Apostle? All he hears is your claim, accompanied as it is by the scholars' agreement on your forgery and lying.

72. "But grant that he concedes to you the explicit designation of your Imām. If he is then perplexed about the basis of prophethood and says: 'Admitted that your Imām adduces the miracle of Jesus — Peace be upon him!' and avers: 'The proof of my veracity is that I shall bring back to life your dead father.' Then he actually does so

and declares to me that he is in the right. Yet how do I know his veracity? For not all men recognized the veracity of Jesus — Peace be upon him! — by virtue of this miracle. On the contrary, the matter was beset with certain difficulties which could be answered only by subtle intellectual reasoning. But in your view intellectual reasoning is not to be trusted. Moreover, one cannot know that a miracle proves a prophet's veracity unless he also knows magic and how to distinguish between it and a miracle, and unless he knows that God is not leading His servants astray — and the problem of "leading astray" and the difficulty of formulating an accurate answer to it are notorious.' How, then, would you refuse all that, since your Imam is no worthier of being followed than his opponent?"

73. Then he will go back to the rational proofs of which he disapproves, and his adversary will adduce similar, and even clearer, proofs. And thus this difficulty has indeed been retorted against them in such a powerful way that, were they to unite, from first to last, to give some answer to it, they would be unable to do so.

74. This trouble has arisen simply from a group of ineffectual men who disputed with them, not by using the method of retort, but by attempting to give a direct answer. The latter calls for lengthy discussion and does not quickly reach minds, nor is it suitable for silencing adversaries.

75. Some may say: "This is the argument by retort: but is there a reasoned answer to their claim?" I reply: "Certainly! The answer to it is that, were the perplexed person to say that he is perplexed, without specifying the problem about which he is perplexed, one should say to him: 'You are like a sick man who says that he is sick, but does not specify his illness, and yet requests a remedy for it.'" He should be told that there exists no cure for sickness in general, but only for a specific sickness such as a headache or an attack of diarrhoea or some thing else. Likewise, then, the perplexed person must specify what perplexes him. If he specifies the problem, you then inform him of the truth about it by weighing the matter with the five scales. No one understands these without also acknowledging that this is the true balance and that one can have confidence in whatever is weighed in it. So let this balance be understood, then one will also understand the soundness of weighing with it, just as the student of arithmetic understands arithmetic itself as well as the fact that his arithmetic teacher knows arithmetic and teaches it correctly. I have already explained all that in *The Book of the Correct Balance* in the compass of twenty folia: so let it be studied there.

76. My present aim is not to show the wrongness of their doctrine, for I have already done that: (1) in my book *al-Mustazhiri*; (2) in my book *The Proof of the Truth*, an answer to some of their arguments proposed to me in Baghdad; (3) in my book *The Detailed Exposition of the Disagreement*, which contains twelve sections, and is a reply to arguments proposed to me in Hamadhān; (4) in my book *al-Durj al-marqūm bil-jadāwīl*, which deals with some feeble arguments of theirs proposed to me in Tūs; (5) in my book *The Correct Balance*, an independent work aimed at explaining the scale for weighing knowledge and showing that he who fully understands it has no need of an infallible Imām.

77. Rather, my main point here is that the Ta'limites have no cure which saves anyone from the darkneses of conflicting opinions. On the contrary, despite their inability to establish a sound proof of the designation of the Imām, for some time we went along with them and assented to their assertion of the need for authoritative teaching and an infallible teacher, and we agreed that he was the one specified. Then we questioned them about the lore they had learned from this infallible one and proposed to them some problems. These they did not understand, to say nothing of attempting to solve them! Then, when they were unable to do so, they referred to the

hidden Imām and said: “There is no alternative to making the journey to him.” The amazing thing is that they waste their life in seeking the authoritative teacher and in boasting of having found him, yet they have learned nothing at all from him! They are like a man smeared with filth who wearies himself looking for water: then, when he finds it, he does not use it, but remains smeared with foulness!

78. Among them was one who claimed to know some of their lore. But the substance of what he mentioned was a bit of the feeble philosophy of Pythagoras. The latter was one of the early ancients, and his doctrine is the feeblest of all philosophical doctrines. Aristotle had already refuted him and had even regarded his teaching as weak and contemptible. Yet this is what is followed in the book of the Brethren of Purity, and it is really the refuse of philosophy. One can only marvel at a man who spends a weary lifetime in the quest for knowledge and then is content with such flaccid and thin stuff! Yet he thinks he has attained the utmost reaches of knowledge!

79. These also we have tested thoroughly and probed inside and out. The substance of their doctrine comes down to deceiving the common folk and the dim-witted by showing the need for the authoritative teacher, and to disputing men’s denial of the need for authoritative teaching by strong and effective argument. So it goes until someone tries to help them about the need for the authoritative teacher by saying: “Give us some of his lore and acquaint us with some of his teaching!” Then the disputant pauses and says: “Now that you have conceded to me that much, do you seek him for yourself! For my aim was to tell you only this much.” For he knows that, were he to add anything more, he would be put to shame and would be unable to solve the simplest problem. Nay, but he would be unable to understand it, let alone give an answer to it!

This, then, is the true nature of their situation. So try them, and you will hate them! Thus, when we had had experience of them, we also washed our hands of them!

Discussion of the Ways of the Sufis

80. When I had finished with all those kinds of lore, I brought my mind to bear on the way of the Sufis. I knew that their particular Way is consummated [realized] only by knowledge and by activity [by the union of theory and practice]. The aim of their knowledge is to lop off the obstacles present in the soul and to rid oneself of its reprehensible habits and vicious qualities in order to attain thereby a heart empty of all save God and adorned with the constant remembrance of God.

81. Theory was easier for me than practice. Therefore I began to learn their lore from the perusal of their books, such as *The Food of Hearts* by Abū Tālib al-Makkī (God’s mercy be upon him!) and the writings of al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī, and the miscellaneous items handed down from al-Junayd and al-Shiblī and Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī (God hallow their spirits) and others of their masters. As a result I came to know the core of their theoretical aims and I learned all that could be learned of their way by study and hearing.

82. Then it became clear to me that their most distinctive characteristic is something that can be attained, not by study, but rather by fruitional experience and the state of ecstasy and “the exchange of qualities.” How great a difference there is between your *knowing* the definitions and causes and conditions of health and satiety and your *being* healthy and sated! And how great a difference there is between your knowing the definition of drunkenness — viz., that it is a term denoting a state resulting from the predominance of vapors which rise from the stomach to the centers of thought — and your actually being drunk! Indeed, a drunken man, while he is drunk, does not know the definition and concept of drunkenness and has no

knowledge of it. But a physician knows the definition and the elements of drunkenness, though he is experiencing no actual drunkenness. So also, when a physician is ill, he knows the definition and causes of health and the remedies which procure it, though he is then actually bereft of health. Similarly, too, there is a difference between your knowing the true nature and conditions and causes of asceticism and your actually practicing asceticism and personally shunning the things of this world.

83. I knew with certainty that the Sufis were masters of states, not purveyors of words, and that I had learned all I could by way of theory. There remained, then, only what was attainable, not by hearing and study, but by fruitional experience and actually engaging in the way. From the sciences which I had practiced and the methods which I had followed in my inquiry into the two kinds of knowledge, revealed and rational, I had already acquired a sure and certain faith in God Most High, in the prophetic mediation of revelation, and in the Last Day. These three fundamentals of our Faith had become deeply rooted in my soul, not because of any specific, precisely formulated proofs, but because of reasons and circumstances and experiences too many to list in detail.

84. It had already become clear to me that my only hope of attaining beatitude in the afterlife lay in piety and restraining my soul from passion. The beginning of all that, I knew, was to sever my heart's attachment to the world by withdrawing from this abode of delusion and turning to the mansion of immortality and devoting myself with total ardor to God Most High. That, I knew, could be achieved only by shunning fame and fortune and fleeing from my preoccupations and attachments.

85. Next I attentively considered my circumstances, and I saw that I was immersed in attachments which had encompassed me from all sides. I also considered my activities — the best of them being public and private instruction — and that in them I was applying myself to sciences unimportant and useless in this pilgrimage to the hereafter. Then I reflected on my intention in my public teaching, and I saw that it was not directed purely to God, but rather was instigated and motivated by the quest for fame and widespread prestige. So I became certain that I was on the brink of a crumbling bank and already on the verge of falling into the Fire, unless I set about mending my ways.

86. I therefore reflected unceasingly on this for some time, while I still had freedom of choice. One day I would firmly resolve to leave Baghdad and disengage myself from those circumstances, and another day I would revoke my resolution. I would put one foot forward, and the other backward. In the morning I would have a sincere desire to seek the things of the afterlife: but by evening the hosts of passion would assail it and render it lukewarm. Mundane desires began tugging me with their chains to remain as I was, while the herald of faith was crying out: "Away! Up and away! Only a little is left of your life, and a long journey lies before you! All the theory and practice in which you are engrossed is eyeservice and fakery! If you do not prepare now for the afterlife, when will you do so? And if you do not sever these attachments now, then when will you sever them?"

87. At such thoughts the call would reassert itself and I would make an irrevocable decision to run off and escape. Then Satan would return to the attack and say: "This is a passing state: beware, then, of yielding to it! For it will quickly vanish. Once you have given in to it and given up your present renown and splendid position free from vexation and renounced your secure situation untroubled by the contention of your adversaries, your soul might again look longingly at all that — but it would not be easy to return to it!"

88. Thus I incessantly vacillated between the contending pull of worldly desires and the appeals of the afterlife for about six months, starting with Rajab of the year 488 (July, 1095 A.D.). In this month the matter passed from choice to compulsion. For God put a lock upon my tongue so that I was impeded from public teaching. I struggled with myself to teach for a single day, to gratify the hearts of the students who were frequenting my lectures, but my tongue would not utter a single word: I was completely unable to say anything. As a result that impediment of my speech caused a sadness in my heart accompanied by an inability to digest; food and drink became unpalatable to me so that I could neither swallow broth easily nor digest a mouthful of solid food. That led to such a weakening of my powers that the physicians lost hope of treating me and said: “This is something which has settled in his heart and crept from it into his humors; there is no way to treat it unless his heart be eased of the anxiety which has visited it.”

89. Then, when I perceived my powerlessness, and when my capacity to make a choice had completely collapsed, I had recourse to God Most High as does a hard pressed man who has no way out of his difficulty. And I was answered by Him Who “answers the needy man when he calls on Him” (27.63/62), and He made it easy for my heart to turn away from fame and fortune, family, children, and associates. I announced that I had resolved to leave for Mecca, all the while planning secretly to travel to Syria. This I did as a precaution, lest the Caliph and the group of my associates might learn of my resolve to settle in Damascus. Therefore I made clever use of subtle stratagems about leaving Baghdad, while firmly resolved never to return to it. I was much talked about by the religious leaders of the Iraqis, since none among them could allow that giving up my career had a religious motive. For they thought that my post was the highest dignity in our religion — and “that was the farthest limit they had attained in learning!” (53.31/30).

90. Thereupon people got involved in devising explanations of my conduct. Those at some distance from Iraq thought I was acting so because I was afraid of the authorities. But those close to the authorities, who saw their attachment and devotion to me, and how I shunned them and paid no attention to what they said, were saying: “This is something supernal: its only cause is an evil eye which has afflicted Muslims and the coterie of the learned!”

91. I departed from Baghdad after I had distributed what wealth I had, laying by only the amount needed for my support and the sustenance of my children. My excuse for that was that the money of Iraq was earmarked for the welfare of the people, because it was a pious bequest in favor of Muslims. Nowhere in the world have I seen a more beneficial arrangement regarding money which the scholar can use for his family.

92. Then I entered Damascus and resided there for nearly two years. My only occupation was seclusion and solitude and spiritual exercise and combat with a view to devoting myself to the purification of my soul and the cultivation of virtues and cleansing my heart for the remembrance of God Most High, in the way I had learned from the writings of the Sufis. I used to pray in seclusion for a time in the Mosque, mounting to its minaret for the whole day and shutting myself in. Then I traveled from Damascus to Jerusalem, where I would go daily into the Dome of the Rock and shut myself in. Then I was inwardly moved by an urge to perform the duty of the pilgrimage and to draw succor from the blessings of Mecca and Medina and the visit to the tomb of the Apostle of God — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — after finishing my visit to the Friend of God — God’s blessings and peace be upon him! So I traveled to the Hijāz.

93. Then certain concerns and the appeals of my children drew me to my native land; so I came back to it after being the person most unlikely to return to it. There I also chose seclusion out of a desire for solitude and the purification of my heart for the remembrance of God. But current events and important family matters and gaining the necessities for daily living had an effect on the way to realize my desire and troubled the serenity of my solitude, and the pure state of ecstasy occurred only intermittently. But nonetheless I did not cease to aspire to it. Obstacles would keep me away from it, but I would return to it.

94. For ten years I remained in that condition. In the course of those periods of solitude things impossible to enumerate or detail in depth were disclosed to me. This much I shall mention, that profit may be derived from it: I knew with certainty that the Sufis are those who uniquely follow the way to God Most High, their mode of life is the best of all, their way the most direct of ways, and their ethic the purest. Indeed, were one to combine the insight of the intellectuals, the wisdom of the wise, and the lore of scholars versed in the mysteries of revelation in order to change a single item of Sufi conduct and ethic and to replace it with something better, no way to do so would be found! For all their motions and quiescences, exterior and interior, are learned from the light of the niche of prophecy. And beyond the light of prophecy there is no light on earth from which illumination can be obtained.

95. In general, how can men describe such a way as this? Its purity — the first of its requirements — is the total purification of the heart from everything other than God Most High. Its key, which is analogous to the beginning of the Prayer, is the utter absorption of the heart in the remembrance of God. Its end is being completely lost in God. But the latter is its end with reference to its initial stages which just barely fall under the power of choice and personal acquisition. But these are really the beginning of the Way, and everything prior to it is like an antechamber for him who follows the path to it.

96. From the very start of the Way revelations and visions begin, so that, even when awake, the Sufis see the angels and the spirits of the prophets and hear voices coming from them and learn useful things from them. Then their “state” ascends from the vision of forms and likenesses to stages beyond the narrow range of words: so if anyone tries to express them, his words contain evident error against which he cannot guard himself. But speaking in general, the matter comes ultimately to a closeness to God which one group almost conceives of as “indwelling,” and another as “union,” and another as “reaching”: but all that is wrong. We have already shown why it is wrong in our book *The Noblest Aim*. But really one intimately possessed by that state ought not to go beyond saying:

There was what was of what I do not mention:
So think well of it, and ask for no account!

97. Generally speaking, anyone who is granted nothing of that through fruitional experience grasps, of the reality of prophecy, only the name. The charisma of the “saints” are in reality the first stages passed through by the prophets. Such was the initial state of the Apostle of God — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — when he went to Mount Hirā’, where he would be alone with his Lord and perform acts of worship, so that the Arabs of the desert said: “Muhammad indeed passionately loves his Lord!”

98. This is a state which one following the way leading to it will verify by fruitional experience. But one to whom such experience is not granted can acquire certain knowledge of that state through experience of others and hearsay, if he frequents the company of the Sufis so as to have a sure understanding of that from observing the circumstances accompanying their ecstatic states. Whoever associates

with them will derive this faith from them, for they are the men whose associate is never wretched. But whoever is not favored with their company must learn the certain possibility of such mystical states through the evidence of apodeictic demonstration in the way we have mentioned in “The Book of the Marvels of the Heart,” one of the books of *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*.

99. Ascertainment by apodeictic proof leads to *knowledge*. Intimate experience of that very state is *fruitful experience*. Favorable acceptance of it based on hearsay and experience of others is *faith*. These, then, are three degrees, or levels, of knowledge — “God raises in degrees those of you who believe and those to whom knowledge is given” (58.12/11).

100. In addition to the men with such levels of knowledge there are a number of ignorant men who deny its very foundation and are astonished at such words. They listen and scoff, saying: “Extraordinary! How they rave!” Of such as these God Most High said: “And among them (infidels) are those who listen to you, then, when they have left you, they say to those who have been given knowledge: ‘What did he just say?’ Those are men whose hearts God has sealed and who follow their own vain desires” (47.18/16) — so God renders them deaf and blinds their eyes.

101. What became clear to me of necessity from practicing their Way was the true nature and special character of prophecy. So attention must be called to its basis because of the urgent need for it.

The True Nature of Prophecy and the Need All Men Have for It

102. Know that man’s essence, in his original condition, is created in blank simplicity without any information about the “worlds” of God Most High. These “worlds” are so many that only God Most High can number them, as He has said: “No one knows the hosts of your Lord but He” (74.34/31). Man gets his information about the “worlds” by means of perception. Each one of his kinds of perception is created in order that man may get to know thereby a “world” of the existents — and by “worlds” we mean the categories of existing things.

103. The first thing created in man is the sense of touch: by this he perceives certain classes of existents such as heat and cold, wetness and dryness, smoothness and roughness, etc. But touch is definitely unable to perceive colors and sounds: indeed, these are, as it were, nonexistent with respect to touch.

104. Next the sense of sight is created for man, by which he perceives colors and shapes: this is the most extensive of the “worlds” of the sensibles.

105. Then the sense of hearing is opened, so that man hears sounds and tones.

106. Next the sense of taste is created for man; and so on until he passes beyond the “world” of the sensibles. Then, when he is about seven years old, *discernment* is created for him. This is another of the stages of man’s existence; in it he perceives things beyond the “world” of the sensibles, none of which are found in the “world” of sensation.

107. Then man ascends to another stage, and *intellect* is created for him, so that he perceives the necessary, the possible, the impossible, and things not found in the previous stages.

108. Beyond the stage of intellect there is another stage. In this another eye is opened, by which man sees the hidden, and what will take place in the future, and other things, from which the intellect is as far removed as the power of discernment is from the perception of intelligibles and the power of sensation is from things perceived by discernment. And just as one able only to discern, if presented with the

things perceptible to the intellect, would reject them and consider them outlandish, so some men endowed with intellect have rejected the things perceptible to the prophetic power and considered them wildly improbable. That is the very essence of ignorance! For such a man has no supporting reason except it is a stage he himself has not attained and for him it does not exist: so he supposes that it does not exist in itself.

109. Now if a man born blind did not know about colors and shapes from constant report and hearsay, and were to be told about them abruptly, he would neither understand them nor acknowledge their existence. But God Most High has brought the matter within the purview of His creatures by giving them a sample of the special character of the prophetic power: sleeping. For the sleeper perceives the unknown that will take place, either plainly, or in the guise of an image the meaning of which is disclosed by interpretation.

110. If a man had had no personal experience of dreaming and someone were to tell him: "There are some men who fall down unconscious as though they were dead, and their perception, hearing, and sight leave them, and they then perceive what is 'hidden'," he would deny it and give apodeictic proof of its impossibility by saying: "The sensory powers are the causes of perception. Therefore one who does not perceive such things when his powers are present and functioning a fortiori will not perceive them when his powers are suspended."

111. This is a kind of analogy which is belied by factual experience and observation. Just as the intellect is one of man's stages in which he receives an "eye" by which he "sees" various species of intelligibles from which the senses are far removed, the prophetic power is an expression signifying a stage in which man receives an "eye" possessed of a light, and in its light the unknown and other phenomena not normally perceived by the intellect become visible.

112. Doubt about prophecy touches either its possibility, or its actual existence, or its belonging to a specific individual.

113. The proof of its *possibility* is its existence. And the proof of its *existence* is the existence in the world of knowledge which could not conceivably be obtained by the intellect alone — such as the knowledge of medicine and of astronomy. For whoever examines such knowledge knows of necessity that it can be obtained only by a divine inspiration and a special help from God Most High, and that there is no empirical way to it. Thus among astronomical phenomena there is a phenomenon which occurs only every thousand years. How, then, could knowledge of that be obtained empirically? The same is true of the properties of medicaments.

114. From this proof it is clearly within the bounds of possibility that a way exists to grasp these things which the intellect does not normally grasp. This is what is meant by prophecy. Not that prophecy signifies such knowledge only. Rather, the perception of this kind of thing which is outside the things normally perceived by the intellect is one of the properties of prophecy. It also has many other properties; what we have mentioned is a drop from its sea. We have mentioned it only because you have in your own experience an example of it, viz., the things you perceive while asleep. You also have knowledge of the same sort in medicine and astronomy. These, too, belong to the category of the prophets' apologetic miracles — the blessing and peace of God be upon them! But men endowed with intellect have no way at all of attaining such knowledge by intellectual resources alone.

115. The properties of prophecy beyond those just mentioned can be perceived only by fruitional experience as a result of following the way of Sufism. For you have understood that only because of an example you have been given, viz., sleep; were it not for this, you would not assent to that. If, then, the prophet has a special quality of

which you have no example and which you in no wise understand, how can you find it credible? Assent comes only after understanding. But the example needed occurs in the first stages of the way of Sufism. Then, through this example, one obtains a kind of fruitional experience commensurate with the progress made plus a kind of assent to what has not been attained based on analogy with what has been attained. So this single property we have mentioned is enough ground for you to believe in the basis of prophecy.

116. If it occurs to you to doubt whether a particular individual is a prophet or not, certainty will be gained only by becoming acquainted with his circumstances, either through personal observation or from impeccable tradition and hearsay. For when you are familiar with medicine and jurisprudence, you can recognize jurists and physicians by observing their circumstances, and also by hearing their dicta, even if you have not seen them yourself. Moreover, you are quite capable of knowing that al-Shāfi‘ī (God’s mercy be upon him!) was a jurist and that Galen was a physician — and that with a knowledge based on fact, not on uncritical acceptance of someone’s say-so — by your learning something about jurisprudence and medicine and then perusing their writings and works: thus you will acquire a necessary knowledge of their scientific status.

117. Likewise, when you understand the meaning of prophecy and devote much study to the Qur’ān and the traditions, you will acquire the necessary knowledge of the fact that Muhammad — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — had attained the loftiest level of prophecy. Then back that up by sampling what he said about the acts of worship and their effect on the purification of hearts. Consider, for example, how right he was — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! — in his saying: “Whoever acts according to what he knows, God will make him heir to what he does not know”; and how right he was in his saying: “Whoever aids an unjust man, God gives the latter dominion over him”; and how right he was in his saying: “Whoever reaches the point where all his cares are a single care, God Most High will save him from all cares in this life and the next.” When you have had that experience in a thousand, two thousand, and many thousands of instances, you will have acquired a necessary knowledge which will be indisputable.

118. Therefore, seek sure and certain knowledge of prophecy in this way, not from the changing of the staff into a serpent and the splitting of the moon. For if you consider that sort of thing alone, without adding the many, indeed innumerable, circumstances accompanying it, you might think it was a case of magic and deception, and that it was a “leading astray” coming from God Most High, because “He leads astray whom He will and rightly guides whom He will” (16.95/93), and the problems connected with apologetic miracles would confront you.

119. Furthermore, if your faith were based on a carefully ordered argument about the way the apologetic miracle affords proof of prophecy, your faith would be broken by an equally well-ordered argument showing how difficulty and doubt may affect that mode of proof. Therefore, let such preternatural events be one of the proofs and concomitants that make up your total reflection on the matter. As a result, you will acquire such necessary knowledge that you will be unable to cite its specific basis. It would be like the case of a man to whom many men report an unimpeachable tradition. He cannot aver that his sure and certain knowledge is derived from the statement of one specific individual. Rather, he does not know whence it comes: but it is neither outside the group testimony, nor is it due to pinpointing individuals. This, then, is the strong belief based on knowledge. Fruitional experience, on the other hand, is comparable to actual seeing and handling: this is found only in the way of the Sufis.

120. This much, then, of the real meaning of prophecy is sufficient for my present purpose. Now I shall mention the reason why it is needed.

The Reason for Resuming Teaching After Having Given It Up

A. *Doctors of Hearts*

121. For nearly ten years I assiduously cultivated seclusion and solitude. During that time several points became clear to me of necessity for reasons I cannot enumerate — at one time by fruitional experience, at another time by knowledge based on apodeictic proof, and again by acceptance founded on faith. These points were: that man is formed of a body and a heart — and by the “heart” I mean the essence of man’s spirit which is the seat of the knowledge of God, not the flesh which man has in common with corpse and beast; that his body may have a health which will result in its happiness, and a malady in which lies its ruin; that his heart, likewise, may have a health and soundness — and only he will be saved “who comes to God with a sound heart” (26.89), and it may have a malady which will lead to his everlasting perdition in the next life, as God Most High has said: “In their hearts is a malady” (2.9/10); that ignorance of God is the heart’s deadly poison, disobedience to God its incapacitating malady, knowledge of God Most High its quickening antidote, and obedience to Him by resisting passion its healing remedy; that the only way to treat the heart by removing its malady and regaining its health lies in the use of remedies, just as that is the only way to treat the body.

122. Remedies for the body effectively procure health because of a property in them which men endowed with intellect cannot perceive by virtue of their intellectual resources, but rather it must be the object of blind obedience to the physicians who learned it from the prophets, who, because of the special attribute of prophecy, came to know the special properties of things. In a similar fashion it became necessarily evident to me that the reason for the effectiveness of the remedies of the acts of worship, with their prescriptions and determined quantities ordained by the prophets, cannot be perceived by means of the intellectual resources of men endowed with intellect. On the contrary, they must be the object of blind obedience to the prophets who perceived those qualities by the light of prophecy, not by intellectual resources.

123. Moreover, just as medicaments are composed of mixtures of elements differing in kind and quantity, some of them being double others in weight and quantity, and just as the difference of their quantities is not without a profound significance pertaining to the kind of the properties, so, likewise, the acts of worship, which are the remedies of hearts, are composed of actions differing in kind and quantity, so that a prostration is the double of a bowing, and the morning prayer is half as long as the afternoon prayer. This difference is not without a profound significance which pertains to the kind of the properties knowable only by the light of the prophecy. Very stupid and ignorant would be the man who would wish to discover in them a wisdom by means of reason, or who would suppose that they had been mentioned by chance, and not because of a profound divine significance in them which requires them to be such because of the special property in them. And just as in medicaments there are basic elements which are their chief ingredients and additional substances which are their complements, each of them having a special effect on the workings of their basic elements, so, likewise, supererogatory prayers and customary practices are complements for perfecting the effects of the principal elements of the acts of worship.

124. In general, then, the prophets (Peace be upon them!) are the physicians for treating the maladies of hearts. By its activity reason is useful simply to acquaint us with this fact, to bear witness to prophecy by giving assent to its reality, to certify its

own blindness to perceiving what the “eye” of prophecy perceives, and to take us by our hands and turn us over to the prophets as blind men are handed over to guides and as troubled sick men are handed over to sympathetic physicians. To this point reason can proceed and advance, but it is far removed from anything beyond that except for understanding what the physician prescribes. These, then, are the insights we gained with a necessity analogous to direct vision during the period of our solitude and seclusion.

B. *The Slackness of Faith*

125. Then we saw the lukewarmness of men’s beliefs in the basis of prophecy, and consequently, in the reality of prophecy and in action in accord with the data of prophecy. We also ascertained that this was widespread among men. I then reflected on the reasons for men’s lukewarmness and the weakness of their faith, and found them to be four in number:

1. A reason stemming from those engrossed in the science of philosophy.
2. A reason stemming from those absorbed in the way of Sufism.
3. A reason stemming from those attached to the claim of authoritative teaching.
4. A reason stemming from the behavior of those popularly regarded as preeminent in learning.

126. For a period of time I next addressed myself successively to individuals, questioning those who were remiss in fulfilling the Law. I would ask a man about his specious reason for that and inquire into his belief and his inner convictions, asking him: “Why are you so remiss? If you believe in the afterlife, but do not prepare yourself for it and barter it for this life — why, this is stupidity! You would not ordinarily barter two things for one. How, then, can you barter what is unending for a limited number of days? And if you do not believe, then you are an infidel! So act wisely in the quest for faith and look into the cause of your hidden unbelief! For this is your real inner conviction and the cause of your outward boldness, even though you do not openly express it, because you want to bedeck yourself with the trappings of faith and to be respected for paying lip service to the law!”

127. One man would reply: “If this were a matter one was bound to observe, then the learned would be those most properly bound to do it. But of those most renowned among the learned, so-and-so does not perform the prescribed Prayer, and such a one drinks wine, and another devours the assets of religious endowments and the property of orphans, and another feathers his nest with the lavish largesse of the Sultan without being wary of what is illicit, and another accepts bribes for judgment and testimony, and so on in many similar instances!”

128. A second man would claim to be an adept in the science of Sufism and allege that he had attained a degree beyond the need for formal worship. And a third would offer as his excuse one of the specious reasons advanced by the licentious. These are the erring who profess the way of Sufism.

129. A fourth respondent would have had contact with the Ta‘līmites. So he would declare: “The truth is doubtful, the way to it hard, there is much disagreement about it, and no one view is preferable to any other. Moreover, rational proofs contradict one another so that no reliance can be placed on the opinion of independent thinkers. But the advocate of authoritative teaching makes categorical pronouncements without needing any proof. How, then, can we give up the certain because of the uncertain?”

130. A fifth man would say: “I do not do this out of servile conformism, but I have studied the science of philosophy and I have grasped the real meaning of prophecy. I know that it comes down to what is wise and beneficial and that the aim of its religious prescriptions is to control the common people and to curb them from internecine strife and contention and from unrestrained indulgence in their passions.

Hence I am not one of the ignorant masses and therefore subject to commandment. Rather, I am one of the wise, following the way of wisdom and well versed in it, and in my wisdom I can get along without servile conformism!" This is the limit reached by the faith of those who have studied the philosophy of the theistic philosophers: that is known from the books of Ibn Sīnā and Abū Nasr al-Fārābī.

131. These are the men who bedeck themselves with the trappings of Islam. Often you may see one of them reciting the Qur'ān and attending the Assemblies and public prayers and paying great lip service to the Sharī'a. But despite that he does not give up his winebibbing and various kinds of depravity and debauchery. If he is asked: "If prophecy is not authentic, why do you pray?" he may reply: "It is an askesis of the body and the custom of the local people and a way to preserve fortune and family." And he may say: "The Sharī'a is authentic and prophecy is genuine." Then one should say: "Why, then, do you drink wine?" And he may say: "Wine was prohibited simply because it causes enmity and hatred. But I, by my wisdom, can guard against that. My only aim in drinking is to stimulate my mind."

132. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā went so far as to write in a testament of his that he made a pact with God to do certain things, and that he would extol the ordinances of the Law and would not be remiss in performing the religious acts of worship, nor would he drink for pleasure, but only for medicinal purposes and to promote his health. So the furthest he got respecting purity of faith and the obligation of acts of worship was to make an exception for winebibbing on the score of promoting his health! Such is the faith of those philosophers who pretend to have faith! Many, indeed, have been deceived by them, and their deception has been intensified by the weak arguments of those who opposed the philosophers. For their opposition was to repudiate the sciences of geometry and logic and others which, for the philosophers, are true of necessity, according to the reasoned explanation we have set forth previously.

C. *My Return to Teaching*

133. I saw, then, that for such reasons as these the faith of the various classes of men had become so weak. Also, I considered myself so skilled a practitioner in exposing such sophistries that exposing them was easier for me than downing a mouthful of water, because I had studied deeply their sciences and methods — I mean the methods of the Sufis and the philosophers and the Ta'ālimites and the distinguished ulema. It then flashed into my mind that engaging in that activity was a matter destined and inevitable at such a time: "What will solitude and seclusion avail you when the disease has become endemic, the physicians are sick, and men are on the brink of perdition?" Then I said to myself: "When will you devote yourself completely to laying bare this affliction and to battling against this dreadful darkness? It is a time of tepidity and an era of error. But even if you were to engage in calling men from their evil ways to the truth, all the men of this age would be hostile to you: how, then, would you stand up against them? And how could you put up with them? For that could be done only at a favorable time and under a godly and irresistible Sultan."

134. Thus I sought a compromise between myself and God Most High which would permit me to remain in seclusion, alleging as an excuse my inability to expound the truth with competent argument. But God Most High determined to move the Sultan of the time to act on his own, and not because of any external instigation. He peremptorily ordered me to hasten to Nishapur to face the threat of this tepidity. Indeed, so peremptory was his order that, had I persisted in refusing to comply, it would have ended in my disgrace.

135. Then it occurred to me that "the reason for excusing yourself has lost its force. Hence your motive for clinging to seclusion ought not to be laziness and ease and self-

aggrandizement and protecting yourself from the harm caused by men. Why, indeed, should you try to find license for such conduct in the difficulty of struggling against men? For God — praised and exalted He — says: ‘A. L. M. Do men think they will be left to say “We believe” without being subject to tribulation? Indeed We have already tried those who were before them (and assuredly God knows those who speak truly, and assuredly He knows the liars)’ (29.1-2/1-3). He also says — Mighty and Glorious He! — to His Apostle, who is the dearest of His creatures: ‘Apostles before you have already been given the lie, and they endured the false charge and the injury done them until Our help came to them. Now there is no one who can change the words of God, and there has already reached you some report about those We sent.’ (6.34).”

136. “The Mighty and Glorious also says: ‘In the name of the merciful Lord of mercy: Y.S. By the wise Qur’ān, you are indeed of those we have sent on a straight way, sent down by the sending of the Mighty, the Merciful, to warn a people whose fathers were not warned, so that they are heedless. True indeed what has been said against most of them, for they do not believe. Assuredly We have placed on their necks iron collars, chin high, so that their heads are held up. We have also put a barrier before them and a barrier behind them, and We have blinded them so that they do not see. All the same to you whether you warn them or do not warn them — they will not believe. You warn only him who follows the Remembrance and fears the Lord of mercy in the unseen’ (36.1-10/1-11).”

137. Subsequently I consulted on that matter a number of those skilled in discerning hearts and visions and they were of one mind in advising me to abandon my seclusion and to emerge from my religious retirement. In addition to that, certain godly men had many recurrent dreams attesting that this move of mine would be a source of good and a right procedure, and that it had been decreed by God — Praised be He! — for the beginning of this century. For God — Praised be He! — has indeed promised to revivify His religion at the beginning of each century. So my hope was strengthened and I became quite optimistic because of these testimonies.

138. God Most High facilitated my move to Nīshāpūr to undertake this serious task in the month of Dhu’l-Qa’da, 499 (July, 1106 A.D.). My departure from Baghdad had been in Dhu’l-Qa’da, 488 (November, 1095 A.D.). So the period of my seclusion amounted to eleven years. This move to Nīshāpūr was decreed by God Most High, and it was one of the marvels of His foreordinations, not a glimmer of which was in my mind during that period of seclusion, just as the possibility of my leaving Baghdad and giving up my position there had never occurred to my mind. But God Most High is the changer of minds and states, and “the heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the Lord of mercy.”

139. I know well that, even though I have returned to teaching, I have not really returned. For returning is coming back to what was. Formerly I used to impart the knowledge by which glory is gained for glory’s sake, and to invite men to it by my words and deeds, and *that* was my aim and my intention. But now I invite men to the knowledge by which glory is renounced and its lowly rank recognized. This is now my intention, my aim, my desire. God knows that to be true of me. I now earnestly desire to reform myself and others, but I do not know whether I shall attain my desire or be cut off by death short of my goal. Yet I believe with a faith as certain as direct vision that there is no might for me and no power save in God, the Sublime, the Mighty; and that it was not I who moved, but He moved me; and that I did not act, but He acted through me. I ask Him, then, to reform me first, then to use me as an instrument of reform; to guide me, then to use me as an instrument of guidance; to

show me the true as true, and to grant me the grace to follow it; and to show me the false as false, and to grant me the grace to eschew it!

D. *Remedies for the Tepid*

140. Now we return to the reasons we have mentioned for the weakness of some men's faith. We shall mention the way to guide them aright and to deliver them from their mortal perils.

(1) The treatment for those who claim to be perplexed because of what they have heard from the Ta'limites is what we have mentioned in our book *The Correct Balance*. We shall not unduly prolong the discussion by mentioning it in this epistle.

(2) As for the flights of fancy of the licentious libertines, we have listed their specious arguments in seven categories and laid them bare in our book *The Alchemy of Happiness*.

(3) For the man whose faith has become corrupt through philosophy to the point that he rejects the very principle of prophecy we have already mentioned the true nature of prophecy and its existence of necessity, adducing the proof drawn from the existence of the knowledge of the special properties of medicaments and of the knowledge about the stars, etc. Indeed, we presented that prefatory discussion precisely for that reason. Moreover, we set forth the proof drawn from the special properties of medicine and the stars simply because that pertains to the philosophers' own science. For to each man versed in a particular science — e.g. astronomy, medicine, physics, magic, talismans — we expound the proof of prophecy drawn from his own science.

141. He who pays lip service to the existence of prophecy, but equates the prescriptions of revelation with human wisdom, really disbelieves in prophecy. He believes only in a sage with a special star of destiny whose ascendancy demands that he be followed. This has nothing at all to do with prophecy. On the contrary, faith in prophecy is to acknowledge the affirmation of a stage beyond reason: in it an eye is opened by which a special perception of certain perceptibles is had; from the perception of these reason is excluded, just as hearing is from the perception of colors, and sight from the perception of sounds, and all the senses from the perception of intelligibles. If the man in question does not allow the possibility of this, well we have already given apodeictic proof, not only of its possibility, but also of its actual existence. But if he does allow it, then he has indeed affirmed that there really are things called properties which in no wise fall within the ambit of reason's activity; on the contrary, reason would almost certainly deny them and judge them to be impossible.

142. Thus, for example, a *daniq*'s weight of opium is a lethal poison, since it congeals the blood in the veins because of its excessive coldness. Now the man claiming to know physics asserts that compounds which congeal do so only because of the two elements of water and earth — for these are the two cold elements. It is also well known that the internal congealing power of several kilos of water and earth is not as great as that of the opium mentioned. So if a physicist were to be told of this, without having experienced it himself, he would say: "Such a thing is absurd! The proof of its absurdity is that opium contains fiery and airy components, and the fiery and the airy do not intensify it with respect to coldness. Even if we suppose that opium were all water and earth, this would not necessitate such excessive congealing power. Therefore, if two hot elements are joined to it, a fortiori it will not necessitate that effect."

143. And he supposes this to be an apodeictic proof! But most of the philosophers' "apodeictic proofs" concerning matters physical and metaphysical are built on this sort of argument. For they conceived things to be in accord with their own experience and comprehension, while presuming the impossibility of what was unfamiliar to them. Indeed, were it not for the familiar fact of true vision in dreams, the claim of anyone asserting that he knew the unseen while his senses were dormant would be rejected by men with such minds.

144. Furthermore, suppose one were to say to such a man: "Can there exist in this world a thing the size of a grain, which, if put in a town, would devour that town in its entirety, and then would devour itself, so that nothing would be felt of the town and its contents, nor would this thing itself be left?" He would surely answer: "Such a thing is absurd and belongs to the realm of fairy tales!" Yet this is the case with fire, which anyone who had never seen fire would deny if he heard about it. Most denials of the wonders of the afterlife belong to this category.

145. So we would say to the natural philosopher: "You have already been compelled to say that opium has a special property of congealing which is inconsistent with what is understood in physics. Why, then, can there not be in the revealed ordinances certain properties of healing and purifying hearts, which are beyond the grasp of wisdom based on reason, nay more, that can be discerned only by the eye of prophecy?" Why they even acknowledge properties more marvelous than this in the things experienced in the treatment of a pregnant woman for whom parturition is difficult by using this figure:

4	9	2	D	T	B
3	5	7	J	H	Z
8	1	6	H	A	W

This is written on two pieces of cloth never touched by water. The pregnant woman keeps her eye fixed on them and puts them under her feet, and forthwith the child hastens to come out. They have acknowledged this to be possible and have cited it in their work on *The Marvels of Special Properties*. This figure contains nine squares with specific numbers written in them in such a way that the sum of the numbers in any one line, read straight or diagonally, is fifteen.

146. How in the world, then, can a man who believes such a thing be too narrow-minded to believe that the prescription of two *rak'as* for the morning prayer, and of four for the noon prayer, and of three for the sunset prayer, is because of special properties, unknowable by philosophical reasoning, which have their cause in the difference of the times involved. These properties are perceived only by the light of prophecy.

147. Astonishingly enough, were we to change the mode of expression to that of the astrologers, the natural philosophers would readily understand the difference of these times. Thus we would say: "Does not the judgment concerning the star of destiny differ because of the sun's being at its zenith, or ascending, or descending, so that the astrologers base on this their forecasts of diversity of treatment and disparity in life spans and times of death?" Yet there is no real difference between the sun's setting and its being at its zenith, or between sunset and the sun's being in its descendancy. So what reason can there be for believing such things except that a man hears them put in the jargon of an astrologer whose false forecasts he may have experienced a hundred times? Yet again and again he believes him, so much so that, were the astrologer to tell him: "When the sun is at its zenith, and a certain star is in opposition to it, and such a constellation is in the ascendancy, if you put on a new garment at that time, you will be slain in that garment," he then would not put on the garment at that

time, even though he might then suffer intense cold, and even though he might have heard it from an astrologer whose false forecasts he had known many times!

148. When one is broad-minded enough to accept such marvels and is compelled to admit that they are special properties, the knowledge of which is an apologetic miracle for some prophets, how in the world can he deny that the same is true of what he hears said by a truthful prophet, confirmed by miracles, who has never been known to lie? For if a philosopher denies the possibility of such special properties in the numbers of *rak'as*, the throwing of the stones, the number of the principal ceremonies of the pilgrimage, and the other prescriptions of revelation, he will not find any difference at all between these and the special properties of the medicaments and the stars.

149. He may say: "I have already had some experience of the stars and of medicine, and I have found some of that to be true. Hence belief in it has become firmly fixed in my mind and I have ceased to regard it as improbable and to shy away from it. But I have had no experience of what you have mentioned: how, then, can I know that it exists and is verifiable, even though I admit its possibility?" I would answer: "You do not limit yourself to believing what you have experienced. On the contrary, you have listened to the reports of experienced men and have unquestioningly accepted their statements. Listen, therefore, to the utterances of the prophets: for they have indeed experienced and seen what is true in all that revelation has brought us. Follow in their path, and you will perceive some of that by direct vision."

150. Furthermore I would say: "Even if you have had no such experience, your reason peremptorily judges it necessary to believe and follow the experienced. Let us suppose the case of a man of mature mind who has never experienced sickness, and then he falls sick. He has a sympathetic father skilled in medicine, whose claim to be versed in medicine the sick man has been hearing ever since he reached the age of reason. His father compounds a remedy for him and says: 'This is good for your sickness and it will heal you of your malady.' What, then, does the sick man's reason require, if the remedy be bitter and foul-tasting? That he should take it? Or that he should disbelieve and say: 'I do not understand this medicine's suitability for obtaining a cure, since I have had no experience of it'? Undoubtedly you would regard him as stupid if he acted thus."

151. "So, too, men of insight regard you as stupid in your hesitation to believe. If you then say: 'How can I know the compassion of the Prophet — God's blessing and peace be upon him! — and his knowledge of this spiritual medicine?' I would say: 'And how did you know the compassion of your father, seeing that it is not something perceptible to the senses? Rather, through the indications of his various attitudes and the evidences of his actions in his daily comings and goings you came to know it with a necessary and unquestionable knowledge.'"

152. Anyone who reflects on the sayings of the Apostle — God's blessing and peace be upon him! — and on the reports that have come down about his concern for guiding men rightly and his subtlety and delicacy in drawing people by the various forms of gentleness and kindness to the improvement of their morals and the patching up of discord and, in general, to whatever is best for their religious and temporal affairs, obtains a necessary knowledge of the fact that the compassion of the Apostle for his Community was greater than a father's compassion for his son.

153. Moreover, when one considers the marvelous deeds manifested at his hands, and the wonders of the unseen reported in the Qur'an and the traditions, and what he mentioned about the distant future — which in the event turned out just as he had said — he knows with necessary knowledge that the Apostle had reached the stage which is beyond reason and that the eye had been opened for him to which are unveiled the unseen and the special properties and things which reason does not

perceive. This, then, is the way to acquire the necessary knowledge of giving credence to the Prophet — God’s blessing and peace be upon him! So try it yourself and meditate on the Qur’ān and study the traditions — then you will know that by seeing with your own eyes.

154. What we have said is enough to warn the devotees of philosophy. We have mentioned it because of the urgent need for it at this time.

155. (4) As for the fourth reason, viz. the weakness of faith due to the scandalous conduct of the learned, there are three remedies for this sickness. One of them is for you to say: “The learned man who, you allege, devours what is illicit, knows that such illicit things are forbidden just as well as you know that wine and pork and usury — to say nothing of backbiting, lying, and slander — are forbidden. Now you know that, yet you do such things, not because of the lack of your belief that it is disobedience, but rather because of your desire which gets the better of you. Well his desire is like yours, and it has indeed got the better of him. So his technical knowledge of subtle questions beyond this prohibition, by which he is distinguished from you, does not necessarily involve a more severe warning against this or that specific illicit action. How many a man who believes in medicine cannot abstain from fruit and cold water, even though he has been warned against them by his physician! But that does not prove that they are not injurious, or that faith in medicine is unsound. This, therefore, is the way to construe the faults of the learned.”

156. The second remedy is that the man in the street be told: “You ought to believe that the learned man has acquired his learning as a provision for himself in the afterlife and supposes that his learning will save him and will be an intercessor for him. So in view of that he may be negligent in his actions because of the merit of his learning. And though it be possible that his learning will be additional evidence against him, yet he thinks it possible that it will procure him a higher rank in heaven. This may be the case, for, even though he has given up good works, he can adduce his learning in his favor. But you, common man that you are, if you pattern yourself on him and give up good works without having any learning, you will perish because of your evildoing, and there will be no intercessor for you!”

157. The third remedy, and this is the real one, is that the true man of learning commits a sin only by way of a slip, but will in no wise stubbornly persist in his sins. For true learning is that which leads to the knowledge that sin is a deadly poison and that the afterlife is better than this life. And anyone who knows that will not barter the better for something inferior. This knowledge is not the fruit of the various types of knowledge with which most men busy themselves. Hence the knowledge they acquire only makes them bolder in disobeying God Most High. True knowledge, on the other hand, increases its possessor’s reverence, fear, and hope, and this stands between him and the commission of sins, save for those slips from which, in moments of weakness, no man is free. But this is not a sign of weak faith, for the believer is tried but continually repentant, and he is far from stubborn impenitence.

158. This is what I wanted to mention concerning the criticism of philosophy and ta’līmism and their shortcomings and of the failings of those who reject them in an unsuitable way. We beg almighty God to count us among the men of His predilection and choice whom He directs to the truth and guides, whom He so inspires with remembrance of Him that they never forget Him, whom He so preserves from their own evil that they prefer none to Him, and whom He so attaches to Himself (12.54) that they serve none but Him alone!

And God’s blessing be upon Muhammad, best of men, and upon his Community, best of communities!