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# “*The Intellect is the Essence of the Human*”: The Arabic Poem of the Intellect (*Qaṣīdat al-ʿAql*) by the Indian Fatimid-Ṭayyibī Dāʿī al-Muṭṭlaq Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin (1888–1965)

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## Abstract

The 177-verse Arabic Poem of the Intellect (*Qaṣīdat al-ʿAql*) composed by the Indian Fatimid-Ṭayyibī Dāʿī al-Muṭṭlaq Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin (d. 1385/1965) breaks new ground in substance and form. In form, the poem creatively amalgamates the genres of *qaṣīdah* (poem), *risālah* (treatise), and *waṣīyyah* (testament) to produce an eloquent and innovative hybrid text. In content, it uniquely combines a philosophical exposition on Islamic theology and ethics with a road map to living a Pure Life. After an opening frame that provides a philosophical foundation, the poem’s three large thematic sections draw on the Qur’an, the Prophet’s Hadith, and the sermons of Imam ʿAlī to describe principles of belief and approach, articles of character and deeds, and the grounding of both—abstract philosophy and concrete instructions—in love for and allegiance to the divine guides, the Imams and Dāʿīs, who are “God’s rope.” It has a gentle tone, preaching harmony between all people on earth, tranquility in one’s life, cheerfulness and positivity, and an atmosphere of love and caring. The closing section brings the poet directly into the frame of reference, stating that he, as the incumbent Dāʿī, is himself the manifestation of God’s rope in the current time, and those who

follow his guidance will return to Paradise. The present article provides a window into Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin's remarkable poem, translating and analyzing it against the backdrop of Fatimid and Ṭayyibī theological works and, briefly, the colonial and post-colonial fabric of early 20th century India, to explore a significant and largely unknown chapter of Arabic poetry.

### Keywords

Fatimid – Ṭayyibī – Ismāʿīlī – Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin – colonial India – intellect – Neoplatonism – Qaṣīdah – Waṣīyyah – Risālah – pure life – Islamic theology – Shiʿism

The Fatimid-Ṭayyibīs' rich heritage of prose and poetry offers myriad expositions of theology and numerous discourses of counsel, but the focus is usually on one or the other. Within this tradition, the 177-verse Arabic Poem of the Intellect (*Qaṣīdat al-ʿAql*) composed by the Indian Fatimid-Ṭayyibī Dāʿī al-Muṭlaq Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin (d. 1385/1965) is exceptional in combining esoteric doctrine and ethical preaching, with a detailed application of high philosophy to lived human experience. In addition to its intertwining of abstract and practical aspects of guidance, moreover, the poem is also unique on a literary plane in its creative amalgamation of the formal genres of *qaṣīdah* (poem), *risālah* (treatise), and *waṣīyyah* (testament). The present article analyzes Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin's Poem of the Intellect—against the backdrop of Fatimid and Ṭayyibī theological texts, and alongside the societal forces of early 20th-century India—to highlight the intricate interplay of these disciplinary aspects, and the delicate blend of these formal genres.

Scholars often characterize Fatimid-Ismaʿīlī philosophy as Neoplatonic,<sup>1</sup> referring to the philosophy expounded by the ninth- or tenth-century *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, or *Treatises of the Pure Brethren* (which Ṭayyibīs believe were authored by the progenitor of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs, Imam Aḥmad al-Mastūr), and to the works of Fatimid Dāʿīs including Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī

1 “Neoplatonism” is a term coined by mid-19th century German scholars to refer to a philosophical and religious system tracing its origins to the teachings of the Greek philosopher Plato (d. 347 BC), through the interpretation of the Egyptian philosopher Plotinus (d. 270 AD), essentially speaking of self-purification as a pathway for the human soul to return to its source in the realm of divinity. Medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theology engaged strongly with Neoplatonic ideas.

(d. after 361/971) and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020).<sup>2</sup> It is indeed correct to state that the Fatimid philosophy of the intellect contains echoes of this ancient Greek tradition, and the Fatimid-Ṭayyibīs themselves do not deny the affiliation—but they turn it on its head. They claim that their philosophy is the one true philosophy brought by the earliest Prophets and Imams and which continues through all time. They believe that this ancient prophetic philosophy is the source of Greek tradition, and also the source of their own Islamic-Qur’anic exposition. Verse 114 of Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem refers to this tenet, “Every religion contains at least one word from the people of truth carried over from ancient times.” Fatimid-Ṭayyibī philosophy focuses on the intellect as the original creation of the Creator, explaining the evolution of the Sound Intellect in this world, and its return to its original realm. This doctrine—termed in their works as the doctrine of The Origin and The Return (*al-mabda’ wa-l-ma’ād*)—unequivocally underpins Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s poem. Within this theological frame, however, the focus of the poem is entirely on how to live a Pure Life of virtue and piety in this world. And this philosophy, this teaching, is enshrined in limpid, deep Arabic verse.

Opening with the framing line, “The intellect is the essence of the human” (*al-‘aqlu fī l-insāni a’lā l-jawharī*),<sup>3</sup> Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem immediately goes on to speak of the primordial intellect’s origin in the realm of God’s first creation, and—after its fall to corporeality—its realization in the nether world as Sound Intellect (*‘aql salīm*). The poem explains that this realization takes place through the guidance of God’s chosen messenger, a living guide in every age, each of whom is the embodiment of pure intellect: The Prophet, his Legatee, and the Imams in their line. It declares that the divine messengers guide humans to develop Sound Intellect by living a Pure Life (*ḥayāh ṭayyibah*,

2 Aḥmad al-Mastūr, attrib., *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957; Windsor, UK: Mu’assasat Hindāwī, 2017; ed. and trans. as *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, gen. ed. Nader El-Bizri, Oxford: Oxford University Press with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008–. Secondary studies include Ian Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991); Paul Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Isma’ili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya’qūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Paul Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākim* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); Sayeh Meisami, *Knowledge and Power in the Philosophies of Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī and Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

3 The standard translation for the philosophical term *jawhar*—translated here as “essence”—is “substance.” We have used “essence” because its commonly understood meaning of “quintessence” or “core” lies within the semantic field of the technical philosophical meaning and is also clear to non-specialists, whereas “substance” to a lay reader would (incorrectly) signify physical matter.

v. 14, a Qur'anic term).<sup>4</sup> The poem charts this path in terms of true belief, right approach, virtuous character, and good action, a path that ultimately leads humans back to their original home in the realm of first creation, to the ether of pure intellect.

Most Ṭayyibī works remain unpublished, and Ṭayyibī poetry in India, including the prolific oeuvre of Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddīn, remains largely unscrutinized.<sup>5</sup> Saifuddīn composed the Intellect Poem toward the end of his life in 1382/1962, during his Golden Jubilee Celebrations, at which time it was published through chapbooks and public recitations in the Ṭayyibī community. It was also recited in Al-Azhar University, Cairo, in 1965, during an assembly awarding the 52nd Dā'ir Sayyidna Mohammed Burhanuddin (d. 2014) with its Honorary Doctorate, and the faculty and students of Al-Azhar responded with vocal appreciation. It has continued to be studied in Ṭayyibī seminaries, recited in their assemblies, and cited in their lectures, but it has not been more widely disseminated outside community settings before. The poem is published for the first time here in an academic venue, alongside what we hope is a lucid English translation, and an introduction to the tradition and the poet, accompanied by analysis of the poem's core message and commentary on its contents. Focusing primarily on the Intellect Poem itself, the analysis also draws on Saifuddīn's other poems and treatises, on the works of the Fatimid Chief Dā'ir al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078) which greatly influenced him,<sup>6</sup> and on expositions of Ṭayyibī doctrine in the present time that

4 Reference to Qur'an, Nahl 16:97: *مَنْ عَمَلْ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً*: "Any man or woman who performs good deeds, if they are believers, we shall grant them a Pure Life and reward them in accord with their best deeds."

5 The three studies on Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddīn's poetry published to-date are our own: Tahera Qutbuddin, "Karbala Mourning among the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī-Shī'a of India: Doctrinal and Performative Aspects of Sayyidnā Ṭāḥir Sayf al-Dīn's Arabic Marthiya, 'O King of Martyrs' (*Yā Sayyida l-Shuhadā'ī*)," *Shī' Studies Review* 5 (2021), 3–48; Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Teachings and Practice of Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddīn: Pluralist Communal Harmony with Committed Individual Faith," in *Taqreeb: Propagation of Harmonious Relations in Mughal, British and Independent India*, ed. M. Isharat Ali Molla (Kolkata, India: University of Calcutta Press, 2020), 10–18; Aziz Qutbuddin, "The Qaṣīdah-Autobiography of Syedna Taḥer Saifuddīn," MA dissertation (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005). A study of Saifuddīn's Ramadan treatises is by Aziz Qutbuddin, "Ṭaḥmīd: A Literary Genre? A Study of the Arabic Laudatory Preamble with a Focus on the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī Tradition," PhD thesis (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2009), 255–288.

6 Mu'ayyad's major works are *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadyyah*, 8 vols., vols. 1–4, ed. Ḥātim Ḥamīd al-Dīn (Bombay and Oxford: Leaders Press, 1975–2011); *al-Sīrah al-Mu'ayyadyyah*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī, 1949); and *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī, 1949), trans. Muhammad Adra and Kutub Kassam, titled *Mount of Knowledge, Sword of Eloquence* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2011). On Mu'ayyad's life

are inspired by Saifuddin’s teachings. The notes point out the poem’s abundant allusions to verses from the Qur’an, the Prophet Muḥammad’s hadith, and the words of Imam ‘Alī. Overall, the article delineates Saifuddin’s holistic Islamic philosophy of the intellect as seen in the poem, in both the metaphysical and the physical world, that prompts all humans to strive to regain the glory of the realm of original creation and pure intellect.

## 1 The Tradition: The Fatimid-Ṭayyibīs, Their Philosophy of the Intellect, and Their Tradition of *Da’wah* Poetry

The Ṭayyibīs are a community of Shi‘i Muslims based in India belonging to the Musta‘li-Ṭayyibī branch of the Fatimid-Isma‘īlīs.<sup>7</sup> They profess allegiance to the son of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Āmir (r. 495–524/1101–1130), Imam Ṭayyib (b. 524/1130), who they believe has gone into physical concealment, and to the concealed Imam in his line, whom they know by the name of his forebear as the Ṭayyib of the Age. The ancestors of the Indian Ṭayyibīs converted to Islam at the hand of missionaries sent from Cairo to India by the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Mustanṣir (r. 427–487/1036–1094) in the eleventh century.

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and full list of works, see T. Qutbuddin, “Al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE*, ed. K. Fleet, G. Kramer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, and E. Rowson (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 2:121–127; Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Da’wa Poetry: A Case of Commitment in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 14–100, 358–373 (with a fuller set of primary and secondary source references); Verena Klemm, *Memoirs of a Mission: The Ismaili Scholar, Statesman and Poet al-Mu‘ayyad fi’l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003). On Mu‘ayyad’s theology, see Tahera Qutbuddin, “Principles of Fatimid Symbolic Interpretation (*Ta’wīl*): An Analysis Based on the *Majālis Mu‘ayyadiyyah* of al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078),” in *Reason, Esotericism, and Authority in Shi‘i Islam*, eds. Edmund Hayes and Rodrigo Adem (Leiden: Brill), 151–189; T. Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Da’wa Poetry*, 105–15, 143–272; Daniel De Smet, “Al-Mu‘ayyad fi d-Dīn aš-Šīrāzī et la polémique ismaélienne contre les ‘Brahmanes’ d’Ibn ar-Rāwandī,” in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, eds. U. Vermeulen and Daniel de Smet (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 1:85–97.

- 7 For an overview of the history and doctrines of the Ṭayyibī Dā’ūdī Bohra, see Tahera Qutbuddin, “The Dā’ūdī Bohra Tayyibīs: Ideology, Literature, Learning, and Social Practice,” in *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, ed. Farhad Daftary (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 331–54; Tahera Qutbuddin, “Bohras,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE*, ed. K. Fleet, G. Kramer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, and E. Rowson (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 2:45–46 (a fuller set of primary and secondary source references is provided in these two articles); [Bazat-]Saifiyah Qutbuddin, (2011), “History of the Dā’ūdī Bohra Tayyibīs in Modern Times: The *Da’īs*, the *Da’wat* and the Community,” in *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, ed. Farhad Daftary (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 297–330; Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Like that of the Fatimids, their religious institution is termed *Da'wah*, from the Qur'anic verse, "The true *Da'wah* (call) belongs to God."<sup>8</sup> Their leader is believed to be Ṭayyib Imam's spiritually guided vicegerent, and he holds the rank of *Dā'ī* (one who calls to God); the full title is *al-Dā'ī al-Muṭlaq* (*Dā'ī* with full authority). In India, the community is often called "Bohra," a Gujarati word meaning "honest merchant," presumably referring to the profession of the earliest Hindu converts. In everyday communication they speak Gujarati, infused with an Arabic and Persian lexicon, called *Lisān al-Da'wah* or *Da'wat nī zabān* (language of the *Da'wah*), but their primary language of written scholarship has remained Arabic. Over the centuries, several Ṭayyibī denominations have branched out based mostly on their belief in the legitimacy of different lines of *Dā'īs*. Our poet was *Dā'ī* of the majority Ṭayyibī Bohra denomination called *Dā'ūdī Bohra*, and "Ṭayyibī" in the present publication refers to them. Today, they reside mostly in India and Pakistan, with a small indigenous community in Yemen and diaspora communities worldwide.

As mentioned earlier, the Ṭayyibīs have inherited a strong philosophical tradition that speaks of the original creation in the world of intellect and light, the fall into corporality, and then, for those who answer God's call, the return to the realm of first creation. They trace these doctrines to the teachings of Prophet Muḥammad and the expositions of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, whom they believe to be his Legatee and appointed successor. They continue to trace these doctrines through the aforementioned pre-Fatimid empire *Treatises of the Pure Brethren*. Fatimid *Dā'īs*, including Sijistānī, Kirmānī, and Mu'ayyad who were mentioned earlier, recorded these doctrines in texts of higher metaphysics using deliberately cryptic language; Mu'ayyad's student, the Central Asian Fatimid *Dā'ī* Nāṣir Khusraw (d. between 465/1072 and 471/1078), also composed important Persian works that reflected his master's hermeneutic, but these were not known in the Arabic-focused Ṭayyibī tradition.<sup>9</sup> Ṭayyibī *Dā'īs* in Yemen, including Sayyidna Dhū'ayb ibn Mūsā (r. 532–546/r. 1138–1151), Sayyidna

8 Qur'an, Ra'd 13:14: (لَهُ دَعْوَةُ الْحَقِّ).

9 Nāṣir's major works include *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'īn (Tehran and Paris, 1953), trans. Eric Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2012); *Vajh-i dān*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ghulām Riḍā A'vānī (Tehran: Anjuman-i Shāhanshāhī-yi Falsafah-yi Īrān, 1977); *Zād al-musāfirīn*, ed. M. Badhl al-Raḥmān (Berlin: Kaviani, 1923); and *Dīwān*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran: Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University/Tehran Branch, 1977). On Nāṣir's life and works, see Alice Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan. A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000). On his philosophy and philosophical poetry, see Alice Hunsberger, ed., *Pearls of Persia: The Philosophical Poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012); within it, especially relevant to the present article are Faqīr Muhammad Hunzai, "The Position of *Aql* in the Prose and Poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw," (*ibid.*, 3–27); Mehdi Aminrazavi, "Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetics of the Moral Journey and the Foundations of the

Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥāmidī (r. 546–557/1151–1162), Sayyidna Ḥātim ibn Ibrāhīm (r. 557–596/1162–1199), Sayyidna ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Walīd (r. 605–612/1209–1215), Sayyidna ‘Alī ibn Ḥanzalah (r. 612–626/1215–1229), and Sayyidna al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad (r. 627–667/1230–1268), transcribed Fatimid doctrines of the Intellect more explicitly and in more detail after Imam Ṭayyib’s concealment.<sup>10</sup>

A grandson of Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin and his namesake, the present Dā’ī Sayyidna Taḥer Fakhruddin expounds these doctrines to non-specialists in *Lisān al-Da’wah*, Arabic, and English in a public online forum. Following Fatimid-Ṭayyibī practice, his discourses are titled “Majalis (sing. Majlis) al-Hikma” (= *Majālis al-ḥikmah*) or Assemblies of Wisdom. In a Majlis titled “What is the origin of the Intellect?”, another titled “What is the philosophy of Dawatul Haqq?”, and yet one more titled “Do we have free will?”, Fakhruddin draws on the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī heritage, and explicitly on Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem, to discuss the intellect’s origin and nature, and the rationality of faith. Since Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem focuses on divine guidance and the importance of virtue, Fakhruddin’s Majlis titled “Why do humans need a divine guide?”, and another titled “Why is virtue compulsory?” also connect directly with the Poem of the Intellect.<sup>11</sup>

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Metaphysics of Morals” (ibid., 91–101). Nāṣir died during Mustanṣir’s Imamate, approximately twenty years before the 487/1094 Musta’li-Nizārī split.

- 10 For an overview of the literature of the Ṭayyibī Dā’ūdī Bohra, including the metaphysical literature, see T. Qutbuddin, “The Da’udi Bohra Tayyibis,” 338–345. For lists of books and authors of Ismā’īlī literature more generally, see al-Majdū’, *Fahrasat al-kutub wa-l-rasā’il*, ed. ‘Alī Naqī Munzawī (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Dānishgāh, 1966); Wladimir Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature. A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran: Ismaili Society, 1963); Ismail K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā’īlī Literature* (Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1977). For an overview of Arabic language and literature in India, see Tahera Qutbuddin, “Arabic in India: A Survey and Classification of its Uses, Compared with Persian,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127:3 (2007), 315–338.
- 11 Taḥer Fakhruddin, “What is the origin of the Intellect?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyow12WsGbk&list=PLoYKJ1IUTM6peAeZs6wWpfyHnAUQv1cbs&index=40> (March 26, 2020), last accessed May 1, 2023; Taḥer Fakhruddin, “What is the philosophy of Dawatul Haqq?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cx-ElonDNzQ&list=PLoYKJ1IUTM6peAeZs6wWpfyHnAUQv1cbs&index=38> (April 2, 2020), last accessed December 12, 2021; Taḥer Fakhruddin, “Do we have free will?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOMKZp-rgOI&list=PLoYKJ1IUTM6peAeZs6wWpfyHnAUQv1cbs&index=42> (March 12, 2020), last accessed May 1, 2023; Taḥer Fakhruddin, “Why do humans need a divine guide?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRLvobhgQlY&list=PLoYKJ1IUTM6peAeZs6wWpfyHnAUQv1cbs&index=34> (April 29, 2020), last accessed December 12, 2021; Taḥer Fakhruddin, “Why is virtue compulsory?”, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4aSn2gH\\_08&list=PLoYKJ1IUTM6peAeZs6wWpfyHnAUQv1cbs&index=25](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4aSn2gH_08&list=PLoYKJ1IUTM6peAeZs6wWpfyHnAUQv1cbs&index=25) (July 9, 2020), last accessed May 1, 2023.

Ṭayyibī poetry is “committed” poetry, which, following Mu‘ayyad’s tradition of “Fatimid *Da‘wah* poetry,” employs literary techniques to advance its cause.<sup>12</sup> Some long poems in *rajaz* meter are versifications of doctrine, but the Ṭayyibī poets’ larger oeuvre, though undoubtedly instructional, draws on aesthetic techniques of imagery and wordplay from the classical Arabic poetic tradition to propagate its philosophical and devotional aims. In India, we also see hybrid stanzaic forms develop through engagement with local Persianate-Urdu poetic traditions, and clear influence in performance and recitation.<sup>13</sup>

In philosophy, theme, and genre, Ṭayyibī poems are rooted in the *Da‘wah* poetry tradition, whose main proponents are the following: Ma‘dhūn al-Khaṭṭāb b. al-Ḥasan (d. 533/1138), Dā‘ī ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd (d. 612/1215), Dā‘ī Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468), and Ma‘dhūn ‘Abd Allāh Fakhr al-Dīn (d. 886/1481) in Yemen; and in India, Ma‘dhūn ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥakīm al-Dīn (d. 1142/1730), Dā‘ī ‘Abd-i ‘Alī Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1232/1817), Dā‘ī ‘Abd al-Qādir Najm al-Dīn (d. 1302/1885), Mukāsir ‘Abd-i ‘Alī ‘Imād al-Dīn (d. 1271/1854), scholar ‘Abd-i ‘Alī Muḥyi al-Dīn (d. 1326/1908), and his student, our poet, Dā‘ī Taher Saifuddin.<sup>14</sup> Each of these savants produced major *Dīwāns* of poetry,<sup>15</sup> and each has his own

12 On Mu‘ayyad’s tradition of Fatimid *Da‘wah* poetry, see T. Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Da‘wa Poetry*, passim. On the literary value of committed Fatimid poetry, and committed poetry in general, see *ibid.*, 1–11; and A. Hunsberger, “Editor’s Introduction: Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Philosophical Poetry,” in A. Hunsberger, ed., *Pearls of Persia*, xi–xxix. Studies of poetry and (Sufi) philosophy include Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Metaphysics, Logic and Poetry in the Orient,” in *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), 86–98; Sayeh Meisami, “Poetry as an Essential Tool of Philosophical Inquiry and Writing in Later Islamic Philosophy: The Case of Mullā Ṣadrā,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 43:4 (2020), 56–73.

13 Discussion of this hybridity in T. Qutbuddin, “Karbala Mourning,” 37–41.

14 Studies of Ṭayyibī poetry include T. Qutbuddin, “Al-Mu‘ayyad’s Poetry in the Ṭayyibī *Da‘wa*,” in *Al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Da‘wa Poetry*, 299–333; T. Qutbuddin, “Divine Guidance of the Yemeni Queen, Fatimid Ḥujja and Spiritual Mother of the Ṭayyibī Dā‘īs, al-Ḥurra al-Malika al-Ṣulayḥiyya: An Elegy by Sayyidunā al-Sulṭān al-Khaṭṭāb,” in *Arabic Literary Theory between Vocal Form and Eloquent Meaning*, ed. Nuha al-Shaar and Hany Rashwan, Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2024 (this study also includes analysis of verses composed by Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin as an addendum to Khaṭṭāb’s poem); Rabab Hamiduddin, “The Qaṣīdah of the Ṭayyibī *Da‘wah* and the *Dīwān* of Syedna ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Walīd,” PhD thesis (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2001); Abde-Ali K. Qutbuddin, “The Meaning of Love in the Poetry of Syedna Abdeali Saifuddin,” MA thesis (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1995); and Ismail K. Poonawala, *Al-Sulṭān al-Khaṭṭāb: Ḥayātuhu wa-shi‘ruhu* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1967), 7–95. Studies of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s poetry were listed in n. 5.

15 Khaṭṭāb’s *Dīwān* is published (*Al-Sulṭān al-Khaṭṭāb*, ed. I. Poonawala, 1967), and also, *Dīwān al-Dā‘ī ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Anf*, ed. ‘Amr b. Ma‘dīkarib Ḥusayn al-Hamdānī,



distinctive style and focus; in terms of their overall trajectory, however, Ṭayyibī poets voice the denomination’s doctrines and follow Mu’ayyad’s conventions.

## 2 The Poet: Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin (1888–1965)

Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin was the fifty-first Dā’ī al-Muṭṭlaq of the Ṭayyibī Dā’ūdī Bohra community. He was born in Surat in 1888, became Dā’ī al-Muṭṭlaq in 1915, moved to Mumbai in 1932, and died there in 1965.<sup>16</sup> His magnificent shrine in Mumbai, Raudat Tahera (al-Rawḍah al-Ṭāhirah), its pure white marble walls inscribed in goldleaf with the entire Qur’an, is now also the final resting place of his successor, Sayyidna Mohammed Burhanuddin (r. 1385–1435 / 1965–2014), and is visited daily by thousands of devotees. Son of the forty-ninth Dā’ī, Saifuddin came from a long line of Dā’īs and savants descended from Rājā Tārmal, vizier of the Rajput ruler of Gujarat Siddharāja Jayasimha (r. 1094–1143 AD). Tārmal, along with his brother Rājā Bhārmal and Siddharāja himself, was among the first converts to Fatimid Shi’ī Islam in the Indian subcontinent in the eleventh century AD. Tārmal’s son and Saifuddin’s forebear, Sayyidī Fakhr al-Dīn al-Shahīd (fl. twelfth century AD), was among the earliest local missionaries appointed by the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Mustanṣir in India.

Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin held the post of Dā’ī for half a century from 1915 until his death in 1965, and his tenure saw great advancements in social welfare and the education of men and women in the Ṭayyibī Bohra community. Well-known in India and Pakistan as a scholar, visionary, and creator of harmony among religious and denominational groups, he served five consecutive terms as the unanimously elected Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University until his demise. On his first visit to Aligarh in 1953, Dr Zakir Husain—then Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University and later the third President of India—said in his welcome speech that earlier Chancellors had been rulers with *sikkah* (coin)

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Bahrain: Mu’assasat Baḥrayn Ghadīr al-Ma’ārif, 2022. Manuscripts and facsimile editions of other *Dīwāns* are located in Ṭayyibī Da’wah libraries in Surat and Mumbai.

16 On Saifuddin’s career, and his relationships with political and religious leaders, with a large number of rare photographs, see Anon. *A Golden Panorama: Life and Works of His Holiness Dr. Syedna Taher Saifuddin* (Mumbai: Ṭayyibī Da’wa Publications, 1385/1965); S. Qutbuddin, “History of the Da’ūdī Bohra Tayyibis,” 301–305; Shawkat Toorawa, “Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed, online, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2012), last accessed December 12, 2021. A brief online Da’wa publication with historic photographs is <https://www.fatemidawat.com/teachings/our-exemplars/syedna-taher-saifuddin-betterment-of-humanity>.



FIGURE 1 Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin composing in the 1960's one of his *Rasā'il Ramaḍānīyyah* at his Mumbai residence, Saifee Mahal. Standing in attendance is his son, the 53rd Dā'ī al-Muṭlaq Sayyidna Khuzaima Qutbuddin (r. 1435–1437/2014–2016)

struck in their names, while this Chancellor, who ruled no worldly territory, possessed “a *sikkah* stamped on the hearts of the Muslims of India.”<sup>17</sup>

Saifuddin was a prolific author and poet.<sup>18</sup> He wrote more than forty Arabic books, the series titled *Rasā'il* (sing. *Risālah*) *Ramaḍānīyyah* (Ramaḍān treatises), one every year between 1335/1917 and 1384/1964.<sup>19</sup> They range from about one hundred pages in the earliest tracts to six hundred in the later ones. He also composed more than ten thousand verses of Arabic religious poetry, and

17 From a verbal account in multiple teaching sessions by Sayyidna Khuzaima Qutbuddin, noted by the authors. The speech does not appear to be published. Several photographs of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin with Dr Zakir Husain are published in *A Golden Panorama*, 80, 89, 98.

18 On Saifuddin's literary production, see T. Qutbuddin, “The Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis,” 342–343. On his *Risālahs*, see Aziz Qutbuddin, “Taḥmīd: A Literary Genre?” 254–287.

19 Taher Saifuddin, *Rasā'il Ramaḍānīyyah* (Ramaḍān treatises), 44 vols. (Surat and Mumbai: Leaders Press and Ṭayyibi Da'wa Publications, 1335–1384/1917–1964).

a handful of poems in Lisān al-Da‘wah.<sup>20</sup> The vast collection of his transcribed Lisān al-Da‘wah sermons through his fifty-plus years of preaching are also preserved in Da‘wah archives, as are transcripts of some Urdu speeches given to various Muslim communities. In his prose works, Saifuddin incorporated a large portion of the Ṭayyibī prose and poetic heritage, presenting excerpts prefaced with literary introductions in rhymed prose. In both prose and poetry, he elucidated doctrine, history, and law, offered counsel for living a godly life and preparing for the hereafter, and praised the Prophet Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, the Imams, the Dā‘īs, and other spiritual savants. His *Dīwān* also contains elegies for Imam Ḥusayn and for Saifuddin’s predecessors, as well as three very long poems, one that is autobiographical and describes the milestones of his tenure as Dā‘ī, another that praises the Imams and offers counsel, and the poem at hand, the Intellect Poem that he composed during the celebrations of his Golden Jubilee (*al-‘Id al-dhahabī*) commemorating fifty years of his tenure as Dā‘ī, toward the end of a long and fruitful career just three years before he died.<sup>21</sup>

As mentioned at the outset, Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin was greatly influenced in his thought and writing by al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī, Chief Dā‘ī of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Mustanṣir, and this influence manifests clearly in the Poem of the Intellect as we shall see shortly. Mu‘ayyad’s *Majālis Mu‘ayyadīyyah*, a set of eight hundred assemblies that he wrote and read out weekly to Fatimid devotees in Cairo, contain detailed expositions of Fatimid philosophical doctrines. Saifuddin himself explicated the entire corpus to Ṭayyibī audiences in weekly sessions, twice-over. Scholars in the community hailed Saifuddin as the second Mu‘ayyad, paying homage to his erudition and recognizing in his teachings a continuity from the original Mu‘ayyad.

Influenced by the style and language of the classical tradition of Arabic poetry, Saifuddin’s poems contain echoes of the poetry of Imru’ al-Qays (d. ca.

20 Published earlier in the *Risālah Ramaḍānīyyah* of their year of composition, Saifuddin’s Arabic poems were posthumously collected in his *Dīwān* under the title *Jawāhir al-balāghah al-ladunnīyyah (Dīwān)*, 2 vols. (Dubai: Ṭayyibī Da‘wah Publications, 1414/1993). Texts, translations, and audio links of some poems are published online at the community’s “Fatemi Dawat” website, <<https://www.fatemidawat.com/prayers/qasidas-marsiyas-and-salaams/>> cf. “Qaṣīdas,” “Nohas” and “Munajaats”). Published earlier as individual chapbooks, Saifuddin’s Lisān al-Da‘wah poems are anthologized in *Dhikrā shahādāt al-Ḥusayn* (Surat: Ṭayyibī Da‘wah Publications, Jāmi‘ah Sayfiyyah, 1404/1984), 64–70, 81–114, 186–196.

21 Autobiographical poem: (الحمد لله العلي القادر), composed 1382/1963, 121 verses, Saifuddin, *Jawāhir al-balāghah*, 1:384–393; detailed study in A. Qutbuddin, “The Qaṣīdah-Autobiography.” Praise poem that offers counsel: (آل طه الائمه الانتقيا), composed 1366/1947, 352 verses, Saifuddin, *Jawāhir al-balāghah*, 1:17–42.

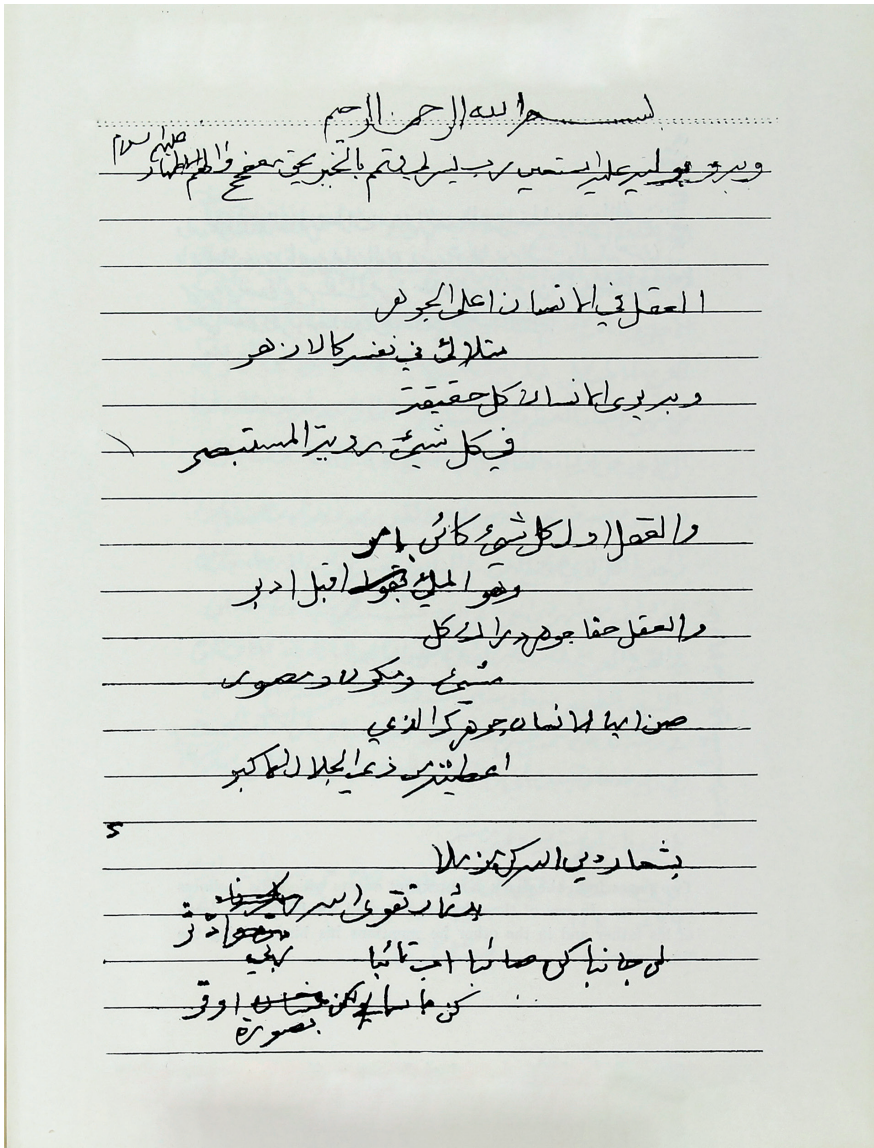


FIGURE 2 First draft and original composition of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin's Intellect Poem in his own hand, from the Ṭayyibi Da'wah archives. Facsimile published in *A Golden Panorama*, 147

550 AD), al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965), al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015), and Abū Tammām’s (d. 231/845) thematic anthology of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah*. Steeped in the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī Da’wah poetry tradition, they propagate its deep philosophy and values.

### 3 The Poem of the Intellect: Text and Translation

The following is the full text and translation of the poem:<sup>22</sup>

The intellect is the loftiest essence  
of the human—it gleams in his  
soul like the moon.<sup>23</sup>

1

الْعَقْلُ فِي الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْلَى الْجَوْهَرِ  
مُتَلَالِيٌّ فِي نَفْسِهِ كَالْأَزْهَرِ

The intellect is the first thing to  
be created—it is the addressee of  
God’s command: “Come forward,”  
“Go back.”<sup>24</sup>

2

الْعَقْلُ أَوَّلُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ كَانِ  
وَهُوَ الْمَلِيءُ بِأَمْرِ أَقْبَلَ أَدْبَرَ

The intellect comprehended itself,  
by itself, in the first beginning—its  
origin is virtuous, its source pure.

3

الْعَقْلُ عَاقِلٌ ذَاتَهُ مِنْ ذَاتِهِ  
فِي الْبَدْءِ زَاكِي الْأَصْلِ صَافِي الْعُنْصُرِ

The intellect is an essence that  
comprehends all generated things,  
all created beings, and all crafted  
forms.

4

الْعَقْلُ حَقًّا جَوْهَرٌ دَرَاكُ كُلِّ  
لِ شَيْءٍ مُشَيِّئٍ وَمُكَوِّنٍ وَمُصَوِّرٍ

22 The text of the poem is inscribed from Saifuddin, *Jawāhir al-balāghah*, 1:400–412.

23 “The moon” renders Ar. *al-azhar*.

24 Hadith reference: “The first thing God created was the intellect. He said to it ‘Come forward!’ and it came forward. He said to it ‘Go back!’ and it went back. Then he said, ‘I swear upon my might and my grandeur, I have not created any creature grander than you. Through you, I reward. Through you, I punish. (أَوَّلُ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَقْلَ فَقَالَ لَهُ أَقْبَلْ فَأَقْبَلَ) (ثم قال له أدبر فأدبر ثم قال وعزتي وجلالي ما خلقت خلقاً أجلك منك بك أئيب وبك أعاقب *al-Majālis al-Mu’ayyadiyah*, 1:4, Majlis 1.

Using his intellect, the human can see the reality in all things with full perception.

5 وَبِهِ يَرَى الْإِنْسَانَ كُلَّ حَقِيقَةٍ  
فِي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ رُؤْيَا الْمُسْتَبْصِرِ

The intellect is an elixir inside the human that transforms his copper base into red gold.

6 الْعَقْلُ فِي الْإِنْسَانِ كَالْإِكْسِيرِ يَجِي  
عَلَّ مِسَّهُ مِثْلَ النَّضَارِ الْأَحْمَرِ

The intellect in the human needs the light that shines forth from the luminous station.<sup>25</sup>

7 الْعَقْلُ فِي الْإِنْسَانِ مُحْتَاجٌ إِلَى  
نُورٍ يَنْبُرُ مِنَ الْمَقَامِ الْأَزْهَرِ

Just like the eye which cannot see unless light which dispels darkness aids it.

8 كَالْعَيْنِ مَا لَمْ يَقْتَرِنَهَا النُّورُ مِنْ  
ضَوْءٍ يَنْوِرُ ظُلْمَةً لَمْ تَبْصُرِ

With the radiance of the sun of revelation—may its light keep shining!—illumine your intellect, O human.

9 بِضِيَاءِ شَمْسِ الْوَحْيِ أَشْرَقَ نُورُهَا  
يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ عَقْلَكَ نُورِ

The intellect is the best of everything when it is free of unjust impulses.

10 الْعَقْلُ أَفْضَلُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ إِنْ يَكُنْ  
عَقْلًا سَلِيمًا مِنْ عَوَادٍ تَعْتَرِي

But if desire takes over, it drives the intellect toward a watering-hole where all things perish, either in their coming or their going.

11 إِنْ يَغْلِبِ الْعَقْلَ الْهَوَى قَادَ الْهَوَى  
عَقْلًا هَوَى فِي مَوْرِدٍ أَوْ مَصْدَرٍ

Like color: in grey light, colored objects appear grey to the eye.

12 كَاللَّوْنِ إِنْ شَابَ الضِّيَاءُ تَغَيَّرَتْ  
أَلْوَانُ كُلِّ مُلَوَّنٍ لِلْبَصْرِ

The intellect can be beset by so many blights—arrogance, coercion, and tyranny.

13 لِلْعَقْلِ آفَاتٌ كَثِيرَاتٌ كَمَثْ  
لِ تَكْبُرٍ وَتَجْبُرٍ وَتَسْيِطِرٍ

25 This verse and the next two echo Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadīyyah*, 1:101, Majlis 23.

If you wish to live a Pure Life,<sup>26</sup>  
make your intellect commander of  
your affairs.

14 إِنْ شِئْتَ أَنْ تَحْيِيَ حَيَوَةً طَيِّبَةً  
فَسَلِّمْ عَقْلَكَ فِي أُمُورِكَ أَمْرًا

If you recognize your soul, you  
will recognize your Lord,<sup>27</sup> the one  
beyond the reach of all thinkers.

15 وَإِذَا عَرَفْتَ النَّفْسَ تَعْرِفَ رَبَّكَ الَّذِي  
بِذِجَلٍّ عَنِ إِدْرَاكِ كُلِّ مُفَكِّرٍ

If you gain power over something  
humans before you did not control,  
know the majesty of the one who  
gave you that power.

16 وَلَئِنْ قَدَّرْتَ عَلَى الَّذِي لَمْ يَقْدِرِ  
الْإِنْسَانُ قَبْلَكَ فَادْرِ شَانَ الْمُقَدِّرِ

If you soar through the world  
with your intellect, recognize the  
splendor of the one who made  
the world, who runs the world.

17 إِنْ طَرُتَ فِي الدُّنْيَا بِعَقْلِكَ فَانْتَبِهْ  
وَأَعْرِفْ جَلَالَ مُقَدِّرِ وَمُدَبِّرِ

If you contemplate creation, you  
will recognize the Creator, the  
lofty one ensconced in the highest  
gallery.

18 إِنْ أَنْتَ تَنْظُرُ فِي الْخَلَائِقِ تَعْرِفِ  
الْخَلَّاقَ مُرْتَفِعًا بِأَعْلَى الْمَنْظَرِ

If you meditate upon the power of  
the atom, you will learn the power  
of the one who gave it that power.

19 إِنْ تَتَفَكَّرُ فِي قُوَّةِ ذَرِيَّةٍ  
بِالْعَقْلِ تَعْرِفُ قُدْرَةَ الْمُقَدِّرِ

If you recognize this, then  
acknowledge the power of your  
highest lord, and distance yourself  
from those who deny him.

20 وَإِذَا عَرَفْتَ فَكُنْ لِقُدْرَةِ رَبِّكَ  
الْأَعْلَى مُقَرًّا وَابْتَعِدْ عَنِ مُنْكَرِ

Glory to the Creator of all things,  
who is not himself a thing! Do not  
ever deny his power.

21 سُبْحَانَ خَالِقِ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لَمْ يَكُنْ  
شَيْئًا فَقُدْرَتَهُ فَلَا تَسْتَنْكِرِ

26 Reference to Qur'an, Nahj 16:97.

27 Hadith reference: “The person who recognizes his soul, recognizes his lord” (من عرف نفسه عرف ربه). Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadīyah*, 1:394, Majlis 81, and cited with explanation in *ibid.*, 3:99–100, Majlis 23.

Glory to the lord who granted you  
this marvelous intellect! Recognize  
him, do not ever deny him.

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّ وَأَهْبِ لَكَ مِثْلَ هـ 22  
ذَا الْعَقْلِ فَأَعْرِفْهُ إِذَا لَا تُنْكِرْ

Gain strength through the intellect  
he has bestowed on you, and with  
the intellectual strength earned  
by his creatures through their  
realization of his existence.

وَبِعَقْلِكَ الْمُوهُوبِ وَالْمَكْسُوبِ فِي 23  
الْمَخْلُوقِ بِاسْتِدْلَالِهِ فَاسْتَظْهِرْ

Know that the power of the  
Creator of all things is the fulcrum  
of existence for all things.

وَأَعْلَمَ بِأَنَّ مَحَلَّ قُدْرَةِ خَالِقِ 24  
الْأَشْيَاءِ فِيهَا كُلِّهَا كَالْمَحْوَرِ

Reflect upon their mystery and  
master their wonders. Do not be  
shaken, do not lose interest, do not  
become impatient.

أَمِينٌ وَاتَّقِنْ فِي عَجَائِبِ سِرِّهَا 25  
لَا تَضْطَرِبْ لَا تَمَلَنَّ لَا تَضْجِرْ

Illumine your soul with the light  
of knowledge. Seek it assiduously.  
Cut open the truths of creation and  
examine them.<sup>28</sup>

نُورَ بِنُورِ الْعِلْمِ نَفْسَكَ وَاتَّدِبْ 26  
وَعَنِ الْحَقَائِقِ فِي الْخَلَائِقِ فَأَبْقِرْ

Know that even the intact intellect  
is perplexed by the Creator's  
grandeur.

وَأَعْرِفْ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَقْلُ الْكُلِّ فِي 27  
عَظُمُوتِهِ وَهِيَ حَلِيفٌ تَحْبِرْ

Understand the value of the  
intellect bestowed on you,  
O human. Direct your deepest care  
toward your soul.

وَلِعَقْلِكَ الْمُوهُوبِ فَأَعْقِلْ أَيُّهَا 28  
الْإِنْسَانُ إِتِقَانًا لِنَفْسِكَ فَانظُرْ

28 Reference to Hadith in which the Prophet says to his Companion [Jābir b. 'Abdallāh al-Anṣārī]: "You will live until you see the son of the son of my [grand]son [al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī]. When you see him, convey to him my greeting, and say to him: O Slayer of knowledge, cut it open (يا باقر العلم أبقره)." Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, 2:454, Majlis 72.



The man who does not recognize his worth perishes.<sup>29</sup> He has failed to appreciate his potential.

29 هَلَكَ أَمْرُهُ لَمْ يَعْرِفِ الْقَدْرَ الَّذِي  
يَحْتَوِيهِ فَهُوَ لِقَدْرِهِ لَمْ يَقْدِرْ

Praise your Creator, O human, and thank him, for he has shaped you as an upright human.<sup>30</sup>

30 فَاحْمَدِ إِيَّاهُ أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذْ  
سَوَّاكَ إِنْسَانًا سَوِيًّا وَاشْكُرْ

How many blessings and favors has he granted you! Thank him and remember.<sup>31</sup>

31 وَلَكُمْ وَكَمْ نِعَمٍ وَالْآءِ لَهُ  
أَعْطَاكَ فَاشْكُرْهَا جَمِيعًا وَادْكُرْ

His grace flows continuously, just as the sun's rays flow through the ages.

32 الْفَيْضُ جَارٍ دَائِمًا سَارٍ كَمَا  
يَسْرِي شِعَاعُ الشَّمْسِ طَوْلَ الْأَعْصُرِ

If a system follows the system of God's creation, it will stay on the smooth path.

33 إِنَّ النِّظَامَ إِذَا يُطَابِقُ فِطْرَةَ  
اللَّهِ اسْتَقَامَ عَلَى الطَّرِيقِ الْأَيْسَرِ

If a system goes against the system of God's creation, its foundations will be assaulted by destructive winds.

34 وَإِذَا يَكُونُ مُنَافِيًا لِلْفِطْرَةِ  
اعْتَوَرَتْ مَبَانِيهِ رِيَّاحٌ تَفْطِرُ

Religious life and worldly life are twins, if you would but view them with a perceptive eye.

35 الدِّينُ وَالدُّنْيَا هُمَا كَالْتَوَّامِيَّ  
نِ إِذَا نَظَرْتَهُمَا بَعَيْنٍ تَبْصُرُ

If you conduct your worldly affairs in accord with God's religion, they will become radiant as Jupiter.

36 لَوْ كَانَتْ الدُّنْيَا تُصَرِّفُ حَالَهَا  
بِمَثَالَةِ الدِّينِ أَزْدَهَتْ كَالْمُشْتَرِي

29 Reference to 'Alī's aphorism: "The man who does not recognize his own worth will perish" (هلك أمره لم يعرف قدره). Al-Sharif al-Raḍī, compiler *Nahj al-balāghah*, ed. and trans. Tahera Qutbuddin, *The Measure of Eloquence: The Words and Wisdom of 'Alī* (forthcoming 2023), no. 3.135.

30 Reference to Qur'an, Infitār 82:7.

31 Reference to Qur'an, A'rāf 7:69.

God's servants will then enjoy  
a good life in which their world  
blooms like a verdant garden.

37 وَلِعَاشَ فِي الدُّنْيَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ فِي  
رَوْضٍ مِنَ الْعَيْشِ الْمُرْفَةِ أَخْضَرَ

If harmony prevails in the world,  
all lives will be pure and happy.

38 إِنَّ الْوَامَ لَوْ أَسْتَوَى بَيْنَ الْوَرَى  
لَصَفَتْ مَعَائِشُهُمْ وَلَمْ يُتَكَدَّرْ

The Commander of the Faithful  
'Alī, famously known as Ḥaydar,  
said the following about the world:<sup>32</sup>

39 قَدْ قَالَ فِي الدُّنْيَا أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ  
نَ عَلِيٍّ الْأَعْلَى الشَّهِيرُ بِحَيْدَرٍ

It is an abode of truth for those  
who are truthful. It is an abode of  
well-being for those who discern.

40 هِيَ دَارُ صِدْقٍ لِلْأَوْلَى صَدَقُوا كَذًا-  
لِكَ دَارُ عَافِيَةٍ لِدِي فَهُمْ سَرِي

It is a mosque for God's loved  
ones, those who are pious, who  
prostrate before him and praise  
him constantly.

41 هِيَ مَسْجِدٌ لِأَجَبَةِ اللَّهِ التَّقَا-  
ةِ السَّاجِدِينَ أُولِي النَّاءِ الْأَكْثَرِ

It is a place of prayer for the  
noble, pure angels, who possess a  
splendid stature.

42 وَكَذَا مُصَلًى لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ الْكِرَا-  
مِ الطَّاهِرِينَ ذَوِي الْمَقَامِ الْأَبْهَرِ

It is the place where revelation  
from the lord of the high heavens,  
lord of the earth and seas,  
descends.

43 هِيَ مَهْبَطٌ لِلْوَحْيِ مِنْ رَبِّ السَّمِ-  
وَاتِ الْعُلَى رَبِّ الثَّرَى وَالْأَبْجَرِ

For God's elect, it has become  
a place to transact and earn the  
abode of bliss.

44 وَلَاؤِلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ أَصْحَتْ مَتَجَرًّا  
رَبْحُوا بِهَا رِيحَ النَّعِيمِ الْأَنْضَرِ

O human, stand up, exert effort,  
be energetic, and tighten your  
drawstring for both transactions.

45 يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ فَانْهَضْ وَاجْتَهِدْ  
وَأَنْشِطْ بِهَا لِلْمَتَجَرِّينِ وَشَمِّرْ

32 Vv. 40–44 paraphrase 'Alī's sermon. Source references for 'Alī's sermon are provided later in the analysis in note 98.

- Don the robes of God's religion. Wear the mantle of God-consciousness.<sup>33</sup> 46  
 بِشَعَارِ دِينِ اللَّهِ كُنْ مُرْمَلًا  
 بِدَثَارِ تَقْوَى اللَّهِ جَلَّ أَذْرٌ
- Religion in this world is like the soul in the body. Understand this well, test it and scrutinize. 47  
 الدِّينُ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَمِثْلِ الرُّوحِ فِي الْجَسْمِ  
 احْتَبِرْ ذَا مُتَقِنًا وَتَحَبَّرْ
- The world is your home. You live here. Bring to it the honor of the highest station, for a home's honor derives from the one who resides therein. 48  
 دُنْيَاكَ دَارُكَ مَا تَعِيشُ فَآتِهَا  
 شَرَفَ الْعُلَى فَالذَّارُ بِالْمُتَدِيرِ
- Use the world's services, do not become the world's servant, and you will receive respect and esteem among people. 49  
 اسْتَخْدِمِ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا تَكُ خَادِمًا  
 الدُّنْيَا تُوقِّرُ فِي الْوَرَى وَتَعَزِّرُ
- Following the religion of right guidance means cultivating the prosperity of this world and the hereafter. Stand up and cultivate both! 50  
 وَعِمَارَةُ الدُّنْيَا كَذَا الْآخِرَى مَعًا  
 دِينَ الْهُدَى لهُمَا مَعًا قُمْ فَاعْمُرْ
- If you are a leader, cultivate God's lands for God's servants. Do not tyrannize.<sup>34</sup> 51  
 وَأَعْمُرْ بِلَادَ اللَّهِ أَجَلَ عِبَادِهِ  
 بِالرِّفْقِ إِنْ تَرَأَسَ وَلَا تَسْتَعْمِرْ
- Fear only God, who is great of majesty, both in your private and public actions.<sup>35</sup> 52  
 لَا نَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ  
 إِنْ نُخِفَ مَا تَأْتِيهِ أَوْ أَنْ تَجْهَرَ

33 Reference to Qur'an, Muzzammil 73:1, Muddaththir 74:1. This is an example of a Qur'anic reference that is interpretive and exegetical (*tafsir*), a common feature in Saifuddin's poetry and prose.

34 Or: subjugate, or: colonize (Arabic: *wa-lā tasta'mir*).

35 Reference to 'Ali's sermon. Raḍī, no. 3,120.

- Wear the robe of high virtue.  
Don the cloak of lofty  
character.
- 53 بِالْمَكْرُمَاتِ الْعَالِيَاتِ تَرْدِينَ  
وَالْمَفْخَرَاتِ السَّامِيَاتِ تَأَزَّرَ
- Walk with dignity and  
calm. Do not swagger in  
arrogance.<sup>36</sup>
- 54 لَا تَمْشِ إِلَّا بِالسَّكِينَةِ دَائِمًا  
لَا تَمْشِ مَشِيَّةَ مَارِجٍ مُتَبَخَّرٍ
- Be modest in your walk and  
lower your voice.<sup>37</sup> Preserve the  
face of your dignity, and do not  
grovel in front of people with your  
cheek in the mud.
- 55 فِي مَشِيكَ أَقْصِدْ صَوْتِكَ أَغْضُضْ وَجْهَكَ  
أَحْفَظْهُ وَخَدَكَ لِلْوَرَى لَا تُصْعِرْ
- Be gentle, practice sound  
judgment, return to God in  
repentance, and always smile—but  
with dignity.
- 56 لَنْ جَانِبًا كُنْ صَابِئًا أَبْ تَائِبًا  
كُنْ بَاسِمًا لَكِنْ بِصُورَةٍ أَوْقِرْ
- Greet everyone with a happy  
face, and they will appreciate and  
respect you.
- 57 بِالْبِشْرِ لَاقِ النَّاسَ كُلَّهُمْ تَعِشْ  
فِيهِمْ مَعِيشَةً مُكْرِمًا وَمَوْقِرًا
- Sow seeds of love in people's hearts  
with virtue and affection.
- 58 وَبُدُّورٍ حَبِّ فِي قُلُوبِ النَّاسِ يَأْ  
خُلُقِ الْعَظِيمِ وَبِالْمُودَةِ فَابْدُرْ
- Be the best groomed. Be the  
best informed. Gather excellent  
qualities. Adorn the pulpit. Be an  
expert merchant.
- 59 رُقٍ مَنظَرًا فُقٍ مُخْبِرًا حُزٍّ مَفْخَرًا  
زَنْ مَنبَرًا كُنْ مَاهِرًا فِي الْمَتَجَرِّ
- Spend your wealth wisely, with  
economy and planning. Do not be  
a wasteful spendthrift, nor a tight-  
fisted miser.
- 60 أَنْفَقْ قَوَامًا قَاصِدًا وَمُدِيرًا  
لَا مِثْلَ مَرَّةٍ مُسْرِفٍ أَوْ مُقْتِرٍ

36 Reference to Qur'an, Luqmān 31:19.

37 Reference to Qur'an, Isrā' 17:37.

Spend your wealth to help people, and you will earn their approval and gratitude. 61

أَمْأَلٌ أَنْفَقَهُ لِنَفْعِ الْخَلْقِ يَا  
ذَا اللبِّ حُسْنَ الذِّكْرِ مِنْهُمْ تَشْتَرُ

Give gifts with an open, happy heart, all for the sake of God's pleasure. Do not seek gain through your gifts.<sup>38</sup> 62

أَعْطِ الْعَطَاءَ بِطَيْبِ نَفْسِكَ مُفَضَّلًا  
لِلَّهِ لَا تَمُنُّ وَلَا تَسْتَكْبِرُ

Give to whoever asks, as much as you are able. Answer the cries of the destitute and the helpless. 63

أَسْعِفْ بِوَسْعِكَ سُؤْلَ كُلِّ مُؤْمِلٍ  
وَأَغِثْ صَرِيحَ الْمُسْتَضَامِ الْمَعْسِرِ

Foster charity and kindness. Intend good for all. 64

وَصَنَائِعَ الْمَعْرُوفِ وَالْفَضْلِ أَصْطَنِعْ  
لِلنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِ كُلَّ خَيْرٍ أَضْمِرْ

If any ask for protection, protect them. If any ask for help, help them. 65

إِنْ يَسْتَجِرْ بِكَ مُسْتَجِيرٌ فَآجِمِهِ  
إِنْ يَسْتَعِثْ بِكَ مُسْتَعِيثٌ فَانصُرْ

If someone who has wronged you acknowledges his fault, forgive him. If someone who has made a mistake offers an excuse, excuse him. 66

إِنْ يَعْتَرِفْ مِنْ مُذْنِبٍ فَاصْفَحْ لَهُ  
إِنْ يَعْتَذِرُ مِنْ ذِي خَطَاءٍ فَاعْذُرْ

In mature behavior, be like a deeply entrenched mountain. In giving gifts, be like a pouring raincloud. 67

وَإِذَا حَلَمْتَ فَكُنْ كَطُودٍ رَاسِخٍ  
وَإِذَا وَهَبْتَ فَكُنْ كَغَيْمٍ مُمَطِّرٍ

Do not lie. Do not perjure. Do not break an oath. Do not betray. Do not cheat. Do not deceive. 68

لَا تَكْذِبَنَّ لَا تَحْنَنَّ لَا تَنْكُرَنَّ  
لَا تَخْفِرَنَّ لَا تَغْشَنَّ لَا تَغْدِرَنَّ

38 Reference to Qur'an, Muddaththir 74:6.

Do not transgress limits. Do not break through doors. Do not climb over walls.

69 أَلَدَّ لَا تَعْدِينَ وَأَبَابَ لَا  
تَتَخَطَّئْنَ وَالسُّورَ لَا تَسُورَنَّ

Traverse the straight path with steady deliberation. Ask God to protect your feet from slipping.

70 وَعَلَى الصِّرَاطِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ ثَبِّتْنَا  
وَتَعَوَّذًا مِنْ زَلَّةِ الْقَدَمِ أَعْبُرْ

Soothe people with soft words and apply balm to their wounds. Face bitter hardships bravely for the sake of God.

71 وَأَسُوا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ وَأَسُوا جُرْحَهُمْ  
فِي اللَّهِ قَاسُوا كُلَّ صَعْبٍ مُمْقِرٍ

With knowledge and good deeds, procure the comfort of a Sound Intellect,<sup>39</sup> one that possesses comprehension and discernment.

72 بِالْعِلْمِ وَالْعَمَلِ أَسْتَفِيدُوا رَاحَةَ  
الْعَقْلِ السَّلِيمِ الْعَارِفِ الْمُبْتَصِّرِ

Whoever harms another incurs harm. Beware of hurting God's creatures.<sup>40</sup>

73 مَنْ يُؤْلِمِ الْمَخْلُوقَ يُؤْلَمُ فَأَخْشَ مِنْ  
إِيلَامِ مَخْلُوقٍ بِشَيْءٍ وَأَحْذَرِ

If a mendicant comes to you, give him something with a smile, and do not repulse.<sup>41</sup>

74 أَمَا إِذَا مَا سَأَلُ يَأْتِي فَهَبْ  
هُ مَا تَيَسَّرَ بِاسْمًا لَا تَنْهَرِ

As for the favors of the Almighty, speak of them. As for the orphan, do not treat him with harshness.<sup>42</sup>

75 أَمَا بِنِعْمَةِ ذِي الْجَلَالِ فَحَدِّثْ  
أُمَّ الْيَتِيمِ فَيْتَمَهُ لَا تَقْفَرْ

39 Reference to Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī's book, *Rāḥat al-'aql* (Comfort for the Intellect), MS Ṭayyibī Da'wah library.

40 The term used, "creatures" (*makhlūq*), is broad, going beyond just humans to all of God's creation, including, presumably animals, plants, and the environment.

41 Reference to Qur'an, Duḥā 93: 10.

42 Reference to Qur'an, Duḥā 93: 9, 11.

- 76 Make beneficial knowledge the vizier of your belief. Make mature behavior the vizier of your knowledge.<sup>43</sup> إِسْتَوْرِرَ الْإِيمَانَ عَلِمًا نَافِعًا  
وَالْعِلْمَ وَالْعِلْمَ بِالْحِلْمِ الْعَظِيمِ
- 77 With deep thought, reflection, and vision, acquire knowledge that benefits. وَتَعَلَّمَ الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي هُوَ نَافِعٌ  
بِتَفَكُّرٍ وَتَدَبُّرٍ وَتَصَوُّرٍ
- 78 Acquire knowledge with thoroughness, learn it assiduously, act upon it, and then disseminate it.<sup>44</sup> الْعِلْمَ فَاسْتَمِعْنَهُ أَتَقِنَ حِفْظَهُ  
وَأَعْمَلْ بِهِ إِذَا الْحِجَى ثُمَّ أَنْشُرْ
- 79 Distance yourself from black ignorance. Do not let its filth touch you. Illumine yourself with the light of beneficial knowledge. مِنْ ظُلْمَةِ الْجَهْلِ ابْتَعِدْ مِتْرَهَا  
وَوِنُورِ عِلْمٍ نَافِعٍ فَتَنُورْ
- 80 Be bold in acquiring virtues and lofty characteristics. Hold back from vices and places of perishing. وَأَجْسُرْ عَلَى جَمْعِ الْمَفَاحِرِ وَالْعُلَى  
وَعَلَى الْمَخَازِيِ وَالرَّدَى لَا تَجْسُرْ
- 81 Do not deem any deed you perform to be great. Do not deem any sin you incur a trifle. عَمَلًا مِنْ الْخَيْرَاتِ لَا تَسْتَكْبِرْ  
عَمَلًا مِنْ الْعِصْيَانِ لَا تَسْتَصْغِرْ

43 Reference to Hadith: “The best vizier of belief is knowledge. The best vizier of knowledge is mature behavior. The best vizier of mature behavior is kindness. The best vizier of kindness is gentleness. (نعم وزير الايمان العلم. ونعم وزير العلم الحلم. ونعم وزير الحلم الرفق. ونعم وزير). (الرفق اللين Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin, *Risalah Ramadāniyyah: Zahr al-riyāḍ al-azaliyyah* (Bombay: Leaders Press, 1338/1920), 41.

44 Reference to Hadith: “Four things are mandatory for every person who possesses thought and intellect from my community—listening to knowledge, remembering it, acting upon it, and disseminating it.” (أربعة تلزم كل ذي حجي وعقل من أمّتي... استماع العلم وحفظه والعمل به). (Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, 2 vols., ed. Asaf Fyze (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā’), 1:79.

If an evil is in front, do not go forward. If a good is in front, do not hold back.

82 وَلَيْتَ يَكُنْ شَرٌّ فَلَا يَتَقَدَّمَنَّ  
وَلَيْتَ يَكُنْ خَيْرٌ فَلَا يَتَأَخَّرَ

O seeker of good, come forward with eagerness. O seeker of evil, go back and desist.<sup>45</sup>

83 يَا طَالِبًا لِلْخَيْرِ أَقْبِلْ نَاشِطًا  
يَا طَالِبًا لِلشَّرِّ أَدِرْ أَقْصِرْ

Wake up and earn noble traits. Seekers of elevation keep vigil in the nights.<sup>46</sup>

84 وَانْبَهْ لِكَسْبِ مَكَارِمِ الْأَخْلَاقِ مَنْ  
طَلَبَ الْمَعَالِي فِي اللَّيَالِي يَسْهَرِ

Wish for others what you wish for yourself. Choose the path of virtue in all that you do.<sup>47</sup>

85 أَحِبِّ لِعَٰلِمٍ مَا تُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِكَ أَسَدًا  
تَبَصَّرْ وَأَفْضَلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ فَآخِزْ

Be gentle, compassionate, and kind to all living beings. Never turn into a raging tiger.

86 وَتَرَفَّقَنَّ وَتَرَافَقَنَّ وَتَلَطَّفَنَّ  
مَعَ كُلِّ ذِي رُوحٍ وَلَا تَتَمَرَّ

Acquire virtues, excellent virtues, whose fragrance wafts through the world like redolent musk.

87 وَتَخَلَّقَنَّ وَتَخَلَّقَنَّ خُلُقًا عَظِيمًا نَشْرَهُ  
بَيْنَ الْوَرَى يَذُكُو كِمِسْكِ أَذْفَرِ

45 Reference to words by Imam Bāqir and Imam Ṣādiq: (عنهما) وعنه وعن أبي عبد الله صلوات الله عليهما) انهما قال: اذا كانت ليلة الجمعة امر الله عز وجل ملكا فنادى من اول الليل الى آخره، وينادى في كل ليلة غير ليلة الجمعة من ثلث الليل الآخر: هل من سائل فاعطيه، هل من تائب فاتوب عليه، هل من مستغفر فاغفر له). Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, 1:180.

46 Reference to verse of poetry by al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820): "According to your efforts, you will earn high qualities. Whoever seeks elevation keeps vigil in the nights." بقدر الكد تكسب). (المعالي - ومن طلب العلاء سهر الليالي). Shāfi'ī, *Dīwān al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī*, ed. 'Umar Fārūq al-Ṭabbā' (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam, 1995), 97.

47 Reference to 'Alī's aphorism: "Wish for others what you would wish for yourself, and dislike for them what you dislike for yourself" (أحبِّ لعالمٍ ما تحبُّ لنفسك وأكره له ما تكره لها). Al-Qāḍī al-Quḍā'ī, *Dustūr ma'ālīm al-ḥikam wa-ma'thūr makārim al-shīyam*, ed. and trans. Tahera Qutbuddin as *A Treasury of Virtues: Sayings, Sermons, and Teachings of 'Alī* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), no. 4.1.10.



Perfume yourself with the fragrance of a pure character.  
Anoint yourself with a bouquet of lofty qualities.

بِعَبِيرِ أَخْلَاقٍ زَكَّتْ فَتَضَمَّنْ 88  
وَوِطِيبِ سِيْمَاءٍ سَمَّتْ فَتَعَطَّرْ

Be humble, never haughty, or arrogant, or proud.

وَتَوَاضَعَنَّ لَا تَشْمَخَنَّ يَوْمًا وَلَا 89  
تَسْتَكْبِرَنَّ أَبَدًا وَلَا تَتَكَبَّرَنَّ

God raises the station of those who humble themselves. He lowers all those who are proud and overbearing.<sup>48</sup>

فَاللَّهُ رَافِعٌ قَدْرٍ مَنْ يَتَوَاضَعُوهُ- 90  
نَ وَخَافِضٌ الْمُتَكَبِّرِ الْمُتَجَبِّرِ

Do not break the heart of a friend, a companion. Accompany him, associate with him, be one who proves worthy when tested.

لَا تَكْسِرَنَّ قَلْبَ أَمْرٍ لَكَ صَاحِبٍ 91  
صَاحِبُهُ رَافِقُهُ بِطِيبِ الْمَكْسِرِ

Do not delay in fulfilling a pledge when you have set a day.<sup>49</sup> Do not break a guarantee of security you have sworn to uphold.

لَا تُخْلِفِ الْمِعَادَ إِنْ وَقَّتَهُ 92  
وَلِذِمَّةٍ أَعْطَيْتَهَا لَا تَخْفِرِ

Do not frolic in fruitless pursuits, O friend of intelligence. Do not turn away from truth for it shines as bright as day.

لَا تَلُحْ بِالْبَطْلَانِ يَا خِدْنَ النَّهْيِ 93  
لَا تَلُوْ عَنْ حَقِّ كَصَبِيحِ مُسْفِرِ

Forbid people from wrongdoing, O possessor of discernment. Command good always.<sup>50</sup>

أَنَّهُ الْوَرَى يَا ذَا الْحِجِّي عَنْ مُنْكَرٍ 94  
وَكَذَلِكَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ دَابًّا فَأْمُرِ

48 Reference to Hadith: “God exalts those who are humble before him, and he humbles those who are arrogant.” (من تواضع لله رفعه الله ومن تكبر وضعه الله). Al-Qāḍī al-Qudā’ī, *Kitāb al-Shihāb*, ed. and trans. Tahera Qutbuddin as *Light in the Heavens: Sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), no. 2.2.

49 Reference to Qur’an, Āl ‘Imrān 3:9.

50 Reference to Qur’an, Luqmān, 31:17.

Speak words that are sound and salutary. Do not mock, or ridicule, or prattle.

95 وَأَنْطِقْ بِكَلِمَةٍ كَلِّ خَيْرٍ نَافِعٍ  
لَا تَهَزَّعَنَّ لَا تَسَخَّرَنَّ لَا تَهْدِرَنَّ

Disdain crime, all types of it. Purify yourself of sin, all kinds of it.

96 وَعَنْ الْمَأْثِمِ كُلِّهَا فَتَنِّهَنَّ  
وَمِنَ الذُّنُوبِ جَمِيعِهَا فَطَهَّرَنَّ

Give thanks for God's continuous gifts. Endure any hardships that befall you with patience.

97 وَعَلَى تَوَالِي أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ أَشْكُرَنَّ  
وَعَلَى النَّوَائِبِ إِنْ أَصَابَتْكَ أَصْبِرَنَّ

A dwelling is either prosperous or a wasteland. Cause it to prosper, then, by careful planning and execution.

98 أَلرِّبْعِ إِمَّا عَامِرٌ أَوْ غَامِرٌ  
فَاعْمُرْهُ بِالتَّدْبِيرِ بَعْدَ تَدْبِيرِ

If a righteous man fights for truth, his fighting will waft ambergris.

99 إِنْ جَادَدَ الْمَرْءُ الْمُحِقُّ مُوقَفًا  
فَتَقَّتْ لَهُ رِيحُ الْجِلَادِ بِعَبْرٍ

O human, if you are someone who shapes things, then believe in the best shaper of all.<sup>51</sup>

100 إِنْ أَنْتَ يَا إِنْسَانُ كُنْتَ مُصَوِّرًا  
فَأَقِرَّ بِإِيمَانًا بِخَيْرِ مُصَوِّرٍ

Sell him your life and your property, O human, and buy from him the everlasting garden.<sup>52</sup>

101 بِأَيْعُهُ نَفْسَكَ ثُمَّ مَالَكَ أَيَّهَا أَلْ  
إِنْسَانُ مِنْهُ جَنَّةٌ الْخُلْدِ أَشْتَرِ

O human, fulfil your vow.<sup>53</sup> Purify your robe.<sup>54</sup> Glorify your Lord.<sup>55</sup>

102 يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ عَهْدَكَ أَوْفِهِ  
وَالثَّوْبَ طَهِّرْهُ وَرَبِّكَ كَبِّرْ

51 Reference to Qur'an, Taghābun 64:3, Ghāfir 40:64.

52 Reference to Qur'an, Tawbah 9:111.

53 Reference to Qur'an, Baqarah 2:40.

54 Reference to Qur'an, Muddaththir 74:4.

55 Reference to Qur'an, Muddaththir 74:3.

From all things, take what is pure and good. Leave off what is turbid.

103 مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مَا صَفَى وَزَكَّى نَخَذْ

مَا كَانَ فِي الْأَشْيَاءِ ذَا كَدْرٍ ذَرِ

Trust in God, seek his aid, request his protection, take refuge in him, solicit his succor, and ask him for victory.

104 بِاللَّهِ ثِقْ وَبِهِ اسْتَعِثْ وَبِهِ اسْتَجِرْ

وَبِهِ اعْتَصِمْ وَبِهِ اسْتَعِذْ وَأَسْتَنْصِرْ

Man is compelled in every situation he faces in this world, all the while wearing the garment of one who is free to choose.

105 الْمَرْءُ فِي دُنْيَاهُ مُجْبُورٌ عَلَى

عَلَاتِهِ لَكِنَّ بِيْزِيٍّ مُخَيَّرٌ

In religion, however, he is indeed free to choose. Choose for your soul what is good for it.<sup>56</sup>

106 لَكِنَّمَا فِي الدِّينِ ذَلِكَ مُخَيَّرٌ

فَاخْتَرْ لِنَفْسِكَ خَيْرَهَا وَتَخَيَّرْ

O human, whenever Satan tries to seduce you, seek God's protection, and refuse to be seduced.<sup>57</sup>

107 يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَاذَا عَرَكَ

الشَّيْطَانُ بِاللَّهِ اسْتَعِذْ لَا تُغْرَرْ

Drunkenness numbs the intelligent person's intellect. O intelligent one, do not approach an intoxicating drink.

108 الْسُّكْرُ يُذْهِلُ عَقْلَ ذِي عَقْلٍ فَلَا

تَقْرُبْ أَيًّا ذَا الْعَقْلِ شُرْبَ الْمُسْكَرِ

O insightful one, if you wish to live long in ease and plenty, do not gamble.

109 وَلَئِنْ تَرِدْ يَا ذَا النَّهْيِ طُولَ الْمَدَى

بُسْرًا فَلَا تَكُ لَاعِبًا بِالْمَيْسِرِ

Do not transact except in things that are lawful and pure. Do not cheat, do not hoard, and do not speculate.

110 لَا تَتَّجِرْ إِلَّا حَالًا طَيِّبًا

لَا تَخْتَدِعْ لَا تَحْتَكِرْ لَا تَقْمِرْ

56 Cf. Fakhruddin, “Do we have free will?”

57 Reference to Qur'an, Nahl 16:98.

If you seek a thing using its travelled paths, you will obtain it with ease.

111 وَلَئِنْ أَخَذْتَ الشَّيْءَ مِنْ طُرُقٍ لَهُ  
مَسْلُوكَةٍ فِي أَخْذِهِ يَتيسَّرُ

If you seek a thing without following its beaten paths, you will find it difficult to obtain.

112 وَلَئِنْ أَخَذْتَ الشَّيْءَ لَا مِنْ طُرُقِهِ  
يَصعبُ تَآوُلُهُ عَلَيْكَ وَيَعسرُ

If something you wish for eludes you, do not grieve, do not be distressed.

113 وَإِذَا يَفُوتُكَ مَا تُرَجِيهِ فَلَا  
تَأْسَفْ عَلَى مَا فَاتَ لَا تَحسُرْ

Every religion contains at least one word from the people of truth, carried over from ancient times.

114 مَا مِلَّةٌ إِلَّا وَفِيهَا كَلِمَةٌ  
مِنْ أَهْلِ حَقِّ مِنْ قَدِيمِ الْأَدْهِرِ

Whoever seeks clear truth with pure intent and strives for it, finds it, and finds success.

115 مَنْ يَطْلُبُ الْحَقَّ الْمُبِينَ بِنِيَّةٍ  
صَدَقَتْ وَيَسعُ لَهُ يَنلُهُ وَيظفرُ

God commands his servant to be just, kind, and generous to deserving relatives.<sup>58</sup>

116 اللَّهُ يَأْمُرُ عَبْدَهُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ  
وَإِلَّا يَتَاءَ ذَا الْقُرْبَى الْحَرِيِّ

God forbids lewdness, treachery, and abominations.<sup>59</sup>

117 اللَّهُ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ يَنْهَى عَنِ  
الْفَحْشَاءِ ثُمَّ الْبَغْيِ بَعْدَ الْمُنْكَرِ

The age is corrupt, or so they say. In fact, if you test this thesis, it is not correct.

118 إِنَّ الزَّمَانَ بِهِ فَسَادٌ هَكَذَا  
قَالُوا وَلَيْسَ كَذَلِكَ عِنْدَ الْمَخْبِرِ

Rather, the condition of the age has changed due to the tyranny and changing condition of its people.<sup>60</sup>

119 لَكِنَّ أَحْوَالَ الزَّمَانِ تَغَيَّرَتْ  
بِتَعَسُّفٍ فِي أَهْلِهِ وَتَغْيِيرُ

58 Reference to Qur'an, Nahl 16:90.

59 Reference to Qur'an, 'Ankabūt 29:45.

60 Reference to Qur'an, Ra'd 13:11.

Speak right, speak true, and do not fear the censurer. Do not lie, do not make up stories.

120 قُلْ قَوْلَ حَقٍّ قَوْلَ صِدْقٍ لَا تَخَفْ  
مَنْ يَلُومُكَ لَا تَمَنَّ لَا تَفْتَرْ

Act in a way that will please God and benefit humans. Be energetic, not lazy.

121 وَأَعْمَلْ بِمَا يُرِضِي الْإِلَهَ وَيَنْفَعُ  
الْإِنْسَانَ وَأَنْشِطْ وَأَنْتَدِبْ لَا تَفْتَرْ

If you possess knowledge and eloquence, and if your people wish it, then climb atop the pulpit.

122 إِنْ كُنْتَ ذَا عِلْمٍ وَحِلْفٍ بِلَاغَةٍ  
وَالْقَوْمُ تَرَعَبُ فَارْقُ فَارْقَ فِرْقَ الْمُنْبَرِ

Reiterate for them words of pure counsel. Persuade their souls to implement them.

123 كَرِّرْ كَلَامَ نَصِيحَةٍ مَمْحُوضَةٍ  
لَهُمْ وَأَنْفُسَهُمْ عَلَيْهَا قَرِّرْ

Behave in one way both in private and in public. What you conceal should be what you manifest.

124 كُنْ وَاحِدًا فِي السِّرِّ وَالْإِعْلَانِ إِنْ  
أَبْطَأْتَ شَيْئًا مِثْلَهُ فَلْتَظْهِرْ

Be brave and heroic, valiant and faultless. Do not oppress, do not be cowardly, do not rush headlong into danger.

125 كُنْ بَاسِلًا بَطَلًا كَيًّا كَامِلًا  
لَا تَعُدْ لَا تَجْبُنْ وَلَا تَهَوِّرْ

Give preference to others over yourself, even if you are in a state of poverty. Do not misappropriate everything to your benefit.

126 آثِرْ عَلَى النَّفْسِ الْأَنَامَ وَلَوْ بِهَا  
حَفَّتْ خَصَاصَتُهَا وَلَا تَسْتَأْثِرْ

Give the mandatory rites their full due. Do not be remiss or fall short.

127 أَوْفِ الْفَرَائِضَ حَقَّهَا وَلَا تُكُنْ  
فِي أَمْرِهَا بِمُقْصِرٍ أَوْ مُقْصِرٍ

Pray the ritual prayer; whoever wishes to pray the ritual prayer for the Merciful Lord must also perform ablutions.

128 أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَمَنْ أَرَادَ إِقَامَةَ  
الصَّلَاةِ لِلرَّحْمَنِ فَلْيَتَطَهَّرْ

O human, believe in God with sincerity. Before this, reject the false Ṭāghūt.<sup>61</sup>

129 بِاللَّهِ آمِنْ مُخْلِصًا يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ بِالطَّاغُوتِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَكْفُرْ

As for God, fear him. As for his creatures, benefit them. As for your soul, shape its form with the declaration of God's unity.

130 اللَّهُ فَاتَّقِ خَلْقَهُ فَانْفَعِهِمْ  
وَبِصُورَةٍ وَالتَّوْحِيدِ نَفْسَكَ صَوِّرْ

In God's eyes, Islam is the true faith.<sup>62</sup> He gave it the most suitable name.

131 الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ جَلَّ جَلَّاهُ الْإِسْلَامُ سَمَاهُ بِاسْمِ أَجْدَرِ

For if one truly ponders its essence, it encompasses peace, commitment, and submission.<sup>63</sup>

132 فَالسَّلَامُ وَالْإِسْلَامُ وَالتَّسْلِيمُ فِي مَغْزَاهُ بِالتَّحْقِيقِ عِنْدَ تَفَكُّرِ

The foundation of Islam's pillars is in the Sound Intellect—master their knowledge, learn them well.<sup>64</sup>

133 أُسَّتْ عَلَى الْعَقْلِ السَّلِيمِ دَعَائِمُ الْإِسْلَامِ اتَّقِنَ عِلْمَهَا وَتَمَهَّرْ

Islam's beauties are manifest throughout the world. When the sun appears, it cannot be concealed.

134 وَمَحَاسِنُ الْإِسْلَامِ فِي الدُّنْيَا بَدَتْ كَالشَّمْسِ عِنْدَ ظُهُورِهَا لَمْ تُسْتَرِ

61 Reference to Qur'an, Baqarah 2:256.

62 Reference to Qur'an, Āl 'Imrān 3:19.

63 The three-letter root from which all three words derive—*sil*m (peace), *islām* (commitment), and *taslīm* (submission)—is the same: SLM.

64 In the Fatimid-Ṭayyibi tradition, these are seven (two more than the Sunnī five) "pillars" of Islam: (1) belief in one God and Muḥammad as His Messenger, and allegiance to 'Alī, the imāms, and the *dā'īs* (*walāyah*), (2) ritual purity (*tahārah*), (3) ritual prayer five times a day (*ṣalāh*), (4) annual alms-levy (*zakāh*), (5) fasting during Ramaḍān (*ṣawm*), (6) pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), and (7) struggle against evil (*jihād*). Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, 1:2, from Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir.

The Shari‘ah is based on the rational intellect. Learn this from the most knowledgeable philosopher.<sup>65</sup>

135 الشَّرْعُ مَوْضُوعٌ عَلَى الْعَقْلِ اسْتَفِدَّ  
ذَا مِنْ عِلْمٍ فَيْلَسُوفٍ أَمَّهَرِ

If the intellect adheres to the conditions that have been placed on the essence of its origin, it becomes true essence.

136 فَالْعَقْلُ إِنْ يَلْزِمَ شَرَائِطَهُ الَّتِي  
أَشْرَطَتْ بِجَوْهَرِ أَصْلِهِ يَبْجُوهُرُ

Man’s intellect is in a state of potentiality. If it trains with knowledge, it emerges into actuality.

137 الْعَقْلُ كَانَ بِقُوَّةٍ فِي الْمَرْءِ إِنْ  
يَرْتَضُ يَتَعَلَّمُ بِفِعْلٍ يَظْهَرُ

O human, safeguard the essence that your Great Lord has gifted you.

138 صُنْ أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ جَوْهَرَكَ الَّذِي  
أَعْطَيْتَهُ مِنْ رَبِّكَ الْمُتَكَبِّرِ

Remember the Creator of all the worlds—blessed be his names!—and remain rapt in his remembrance.

139 وَادْكُرْ إِلَهَ الْعَالَمِينَ تَبَارَكَتْ  
أَسْمَاءُهُ وَبِذِكْرِهِ فَاسْتَهْتِرْ

Praise him, thank him, chant the litany of his highest name<sup>66</sup>—lofty be its greatness!—and ask for forgiveness.

140 وَاحْمَدُهُ وَأَشْكُرْهُ وَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِهِ الِ  
أَعْلَى تَعَالَى شَانَهُ وَأَسْتَغْفِرْ

The Qur’an contains true knowledge, a treasure of priceless jewels.

141 إِنَّ الْقُرْآنَ حَاوَى عَلَى كَنْزٍ مِنْ الِ  
عِلْمِ الْحَقِيقِيِّ النَّفِيسِ الْجَوْهَرِ

65 Reference to al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī and his expositions in *al-Majālis al-Mu‘ayyadiyyah*, 11–9, Majlis 1–2, and passim.

66 Reference to Qur’an, A’lā 87:1.

God—lofty be his greatness!—has made the Qur'an simple to grasp for one who would take heed.<sup>67</sup>

142 قَدْ يَسَّرَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى شَأْنَهُ أَلْ  
قُرْآنَ ذِكْرِي لِأَمْرِي مُتَذَكِّرٍ

There is nothing wet and nothing dry except that it is contained in the luminous Book.<sup>68</sup>

143 لَا شَيْءٌ مِنْ رَطْبٍ وَلَا مِنْ يَابِسٍ  
إِلَّا وَذَلِكَ فِي الْكِتَابِ الْأَنْوَرِ

If you wish to learn the meaning of a revealed verse from the Remembrance, [the Qur'an], then seek the children of the Remembrance, and ask for its meaning.<sup>69</sup>

144 وَلَئِنْ تَرَدُّ تَفْسِيرِ ذِكْرٍ مَنْزِلٍ  
فَأَقْبِدْ بَنِي الذِّكْرِ الرِّضَى وَاسْتَفْسِرْ

Do not scatter pearls of knowledge before people who do not acknowledge their splendor.

145 دَرَرَ الْمَعَارِفِ بَيْنَ أَيْدِي عُصْبَةٍ  
لَا يَعْرِفُونَ بِهَاهَا لَا تَنْثُرُ

Whoever engages in a transaction urged by the Remembrance,<sup>70</sup> will always earn a profit, and never incur loss.

146 مَنْ يَتَّجِرْ بِتِجَارَةِ مَدْوُوبَةٍ  
فِي الذِّكْرِ يَرْبِحْ دَائِمًا لَمْ يَخْسَرْ

Always thank God for his favors, and you will gain more and more of his bounties.

147 اللَّهُ فَاشْكُرْهُ عَلَى نِعَمَاتِهِ  
أَبَدًا مَزِيدَ الْفَضْلِ مِنْهُ تَمْتَرُ

67 Reference to Qur'an, Dukhān 44:58.

68 Reference to Qur'an, An'am 6:59.

69 Reference to Qur'an, Nahl 16:43: "Ask the family of the Remembrance (*ahl al-Dhikr*) if you do not know (فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ)." The "Remembrance" (*al-Dhikr*) is one of the names of the Qur'an. In Fatimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine, the deeper meaning of "the Remembrance" is the Prophet Muḥammad himself (cf. Qur'an, Ṭalāq 65:10–11: "We have sent to you a Remembrance, a Messenger (قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ ذِكْرًا رَسُولًا)," and "children of the Remembrance (*banī al-Dhikr*)"—like "family of the Remembrance (*ahl al-Dhikr*)"—refers to the Imāms in his line. See detailed exposition in Mu'ayyad, Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadīyyah*, 1:400–402, Majlis 82, 4:73–74, 154, 231, Majlis 13, 27, 40, and passim. The interpretation is made explicit in the present poem in v. 149.

70 The Remembrance, as mentioned above, is one of the names of the Qur'an.



O my people, hold fast to God’s rope and do not disperse, and you shall win resounding victory.<sup>71</sup>

يَا قَوْمَنَا اَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ لَآ  
تَتَفَرَّقُوا تَحْظُوا بِبَصْرِ اَقْدَرِ

The Remembrance is linked with the “family of the Remembrance”—descendants of the pure messenger from Baḥḥā.<sup>72</sup>

اَلِ الدِّكْرِ مَقْرُونٌ بِاَهْلِ الدِّكْرِ هُمُ  
اَلِ الرَّسُولِ الْاَبْطَحِيِّ الْاَطْهَرِ

They are stars in the sky of Mukhtār’s prophecy,<sup>73</sup> bright star rising after bright star.

وَهُمُ الْفِرَاقِدُ فِي سَمَاءِ نُبُوَّةِ اَلِ  
مُخْتَارٍ يَطْلَعُ نَيْرٌ عَنْ نَيْرٍ

Prophet Ṭāhā Muṣṭafā is the best of people. The lord of the throne has gifted him the pool of Kawthar.<sup>74</sup>

طَهَ النَّبِيُّ الْمُصْطَفَى خَيْرُ الْوَرَى  
اَعْطَاهُ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ حَوْضَ الْكَوْثَرِ

Muṣṭafā is the city, *medina*, of knowledge. Its gate, *bāb*, is the master of the world, conqueror of Khaybar.<sup>75</sup>

اَلْمُصْطَفَى لِلْعِلْمِ كَانَ مَدِينَةً  
وَالْبَابُ مَوْلَى الْخَلْقِ فَاتْحُ خَيْرِ

71 Qur’an, Āl ‘Imrān 3:103. The true meaning of “God’s rope” in Fatimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine is the unbroken chain of divine guides, who lead humankind to God and godliness. The next lines are a representation of that “rope.” Explained further below in section 5.2.3.

72 Baḥḥā—lit. large area of flat land—is another name for Mecca.

73 Reference to the Prophet Muḥammad. Mukhtār (lit. the chosen one) is one of his names.

74 Reference to Qur’an, Kawthar 108:1. Ṭāhā (Qur’an, Ṭāhā 20:1) and Muṣṭafā are two additional names of the Prophet Muḥammad. In Ṭayyibī doctrine, Kawthar is an esoteric reference to Muḥammad’s Legatee, ‘Alī. This verse paraphrases the opening line of Saifuddin’s own earlier well-known poem in praise of the Prophet, طه النبي المصطفى خير (الورى – أعطاه ذو العرش العظيم الكوثر): “Prophet Ṭāhā Muṣṭafā is the best of creation. The lord of the throne has gifted him Kawthar.” Saifuddin, *Jawāhir al-balāghah*, 347.

75 Reference to Hadith: “I am the city of knowledge and ‘Alī is its gateway.” (أنا مدينة العلم) (وعلى بابها), cited by al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār fi fīqāḍ al-a’immah al-aḥḥār* (Qum: Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1991), 1:89; cited also by several canonical Sunni sources, including al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī l-Ḥalabī, 1937), no. 3720.

Medina's honor is lofty because it is the resting place of that *medina*. The *bāb*'s grave has bestowed honor to the earth of Ghari.<sup>76</sup>

153 شَرَفَ الْمَدِينَةَ بِالْمَدِينَةِ شَايخُ  
وَالْبَابُ شَرَفَ رَمْسَهُ أَرْضَ الْغَرِيِّ

Their sons, sons of Fāṭimah al-Batūl, are Imams whose virtues cannot be counted.

154 وَبَنُوهُمَا أَبْنَاءُ فَاطِمَةَ الْبَتُولِ  
لِأُمَّةٍ شَانَاتُهُمْ لَمْ تُحْصَرَ

They are the people of the robe, the robe of purity.<sup>77</sup> Whoever supports them is purified from all forms of filth.

155 أَهْلُ الْكِسَاءِ كِسَاءٌ تَطْهِّرُ فَنَنْ  
وَالْأَهْمُ مِنْ كُلِّ رِجْسٍ يَطْهَرُ

They are Imams who have suckled the milk of revelation.<sup>78</sup> Trustees of the lord of the throne. Intercessors on the day of resurrection.

156 رُضَعَاءُ دَرِّ الْوَحْيِ هُمْ أُمْنَاءُ رَبِّ  
الْعَرْشِ هُمْ شُفَعَاءُ يَوْمِ الْمَحْشَرِ

They are the truthful ones (*ṣādiqūn*) whose truthfulness is attested by all the people. Their purity (*ṣafā*) symbolizes [the Ḥajj rites of] Ṣafā and Mash'ar.

157 الصَّادِقُونَ بِصِدْقِهِمْ شَهِدَ الْوَرَى  
وَصَفَاهُمْ رَمَزُ الصَّفَا وَالْمَشْعَرِ

People call the Prophet Muṣṭafā's hadith "elevated" when they narrate it on the authority of [Muḥammad] al-Bāqir or Ja'far [al-Ṣādiq].<sup>79</sup>

158 سَمُوا حَدِيثَ الْمُصْطَفَى الْمَرْفُوعَ لَوْ  
يُرْوَاهُ عَنْ بَاقِرٍ أَوْ جَعْفَرٍ

76 Ghari is the ancient name for the city of Najaf, home to 'Alī's shrine.

77 Reference to Qur'an, Aḥzāb 33:33. The report about the occasion of revelation of this verse, and the Prophet's enveloping himself, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn in the "robe of purity" is explained in Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, 1:35, 37.

78 Reference to their mother, the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimah. Cf. Saifuddin, *Jawāhir al-balāghah*, 2:230 in a praise poem for her son, the Prophet's grandson, al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī: "You have suckled from Fāṭimah Zahrā' the milk of revelation."

79 I.e., they do not cite the narrators between these Imam's and the Prophet, because they trust the authority of these Imams entirely.

They are the arks of salvation.  
Whoever embarks upon them is  
saved from the raging, stormy sea  
of primordial matter.<sup>80</sup>

159 سَفُنُ النِّجَاةِ مَنْ اسْتَوَى فِيهَا نَجَى  
مَنْ بَحَرَ طُوفَانَ الْهَيُولَى الْأَزْخَرِ

They are the Fatimids,  
magnanimous chieftains.  
How many rivers of beneficial  
knowledge did they make flow!

160 الْفَاطِمِيُّونَ السُّرَى كَمُ بَحَرُوا  
مِنْ كُلِّ عِلْمٍ نَافِعٍ مِنْ أَنْهَرِ

Each Imam is a guide for the  
people in his age, following on  
from the Hāshimite Prophet,  
the Warner.<sup>81</sup>

161 مِنْ كُلِّ هَادٍ لِلْوَرَى فِي عَصْرِهِ  
بَعْدَ النَّبِيِّ الْهَاشِمِيِّ الْمُنْذِرِ

The Imams have appointed  
*Dā'īs* with full authority, who are  
overflowing, unending seas of  
true knowledge.

162 وَلَهُمْ دُعَاةٌ مُطْلِقُونَ زَوَاخِرُ الْ  
عِلْمِ الْحَقِيقِيِّ الَّتِي لَمْ تُجْزَرْ

Each *Dā'ī* is a philosopher skilled  
in running the *Da'wah*, his virtue  
is great.

163 مِنْ كُلِّ دَاعٍ فَيَلْسُوفٍ مَاهِرٍ  
بِسِيَاسَةِ حَسَنَتِ عَظِيمِ الْمَفْخَرِ

He is an exemplar for the  
learned and the choicest among  
them. He is the most honorable  
manifestation for the radiance of  
the light of knowledge.

164 هُوَ قُدْوَةٌ الْعُلَمَاءِ صَفْوَةٌ جَمَعَهُمْ  
وَلِضْوَةٌ نُورِ الْعِلْمِ أَكْرَمُ مَظْهَرِ

I am the Imams' *Dā'ī* who walks  
their rightly guided, luminous, and  
well-trodden path.

165 إِنِّي أَنَا دَاعِيهِمُ السَّارِي عَلَى  
مَنْحَاهُمْ الْأَهْدَى الْأَعْرَى الْأَشْهَرِ

80 Reference to Hadith: “My kin are like Noah’s Ark—those who climb aboard are saved, those who waver are drowned” (مثل أهل بيتي مثل سفينة نوح من ركب فيها نجي ومن تخلف عنها). Quḍā’ī, *Kitāb al-Shihāb*, no. 11.1. (غرق).

81 Reference to Qur’an, Ra’d 13:7.

I am Taher Saifuddin, who calls  
(*dā'ir*) God's creatures toward  
abundant good.

166 أَنَا سَيْفٌ دِينٍ طَاهِرٌ دَاعٍ نِلْدَ

قِي اللَّهِ بِالنَّحِيرِ الْكَثِيرِ الْأَوْفَرِ

And toward comprehensive  
security in the cradle of wellbeing,  
and toward a fruitful life.

167 وَبِأَنَّ يَدُومُوا فِي أَمَانٍ شَامِلٍ

فِي مَهْدٍ عَافِيَةٍ وَعَيْشٍ مُغْضِرٍ

I have tested the conditions  
of the age, experiencing them  
through time with deliberation  
and patience.

168 جَرَّبْتُ أَحْوَالَ الزَّمَانِ مُمَارِسًا

طُولَ الْمُدَى بِتَثْبِثٍ وَتَصَبُّرٍ

High waves of the storm of  
deviation clashed and billowed like  
mountains, yet I was not perplexed.

169 أَمْوَاجُ طُوفَانِ الْفَسَادِ تَلَاطَمَتْ

مِثْلَ الْجِبَالِ طَمَّتْ فَلَمْ أَتَحَيَّرْ

Rather, I remained firm in my  
perfect certainty of victory from  
the Great God.

170 لَكِنِّ بَقِيْتُ عَلَى يَقِينٍ كَامِلٍ

بِالنَّصْرِ مِنْ عِنْدِ إِلَهِ الْأَكْبَرِ

I have offered sincere service to the  
descendants of the Prophet, who is  
the best giver of glad tidings.

171 أَدَيْتُ كُلَّ نَصِيحَةٍ مَوْجُوبَةٍ

لِبَيْتِ نَبِيِّ جَاءَ خَيْرٌ مُبَشِّرٍ

This poem contains compelling  
insights, arising from the  
experiences of one who was given  
command, and a long life, through  
a long age.

172 هُدَيْتُ فَوَائِدَ تَجْرِبَاتٍ أَحْكَمَتْ

لِمُؤَمَّرٍ طُولَ الزَّمَانِ مُعَمَّرٍ

It is the fruit of knowledge whose  
rivers flow amply from the spring  
of right guidance.

173 وَنَتَائِجُ الْعِلْمِ الَّذِي أَنهَارُهُ

مِنْ فَيْضِ يَنْبُوعِ الْهُدَى الْمُتَعَجَّرِ

It contains good words that will  
benefit people. Utter them if you  
can or write them down.

174 كَلِمَاتٌ خَيْرٌ نَافِعَاتٌ لِلرَّوِيِّ

فَأَنْطِقْ بِهَا إِنْ تَسْتَطِيعُ أَوْ فَاسْطِرْ

Store treasures of love of the Prophet and his radiant, well-content descendants, for your religion, your worldly life, and your afterlife.

حُبِّ النَّبِيِّ وَاللَّهِ الْغُرِّ الرَّضِيِّ 175  
لِلدِّينِ وَالْدُّنْيَا وَلِلْعَاقِبَةِ أَذْخِرُ

Perform good deeds as much as you can, and you will be given the gardens of paradise and beautiful, colored carpets.<sup>82</sup>

وَأَعْمَلْ مِنَ الْحَسَنَاتِ مَا تَسْطِيعُهُ 176  
تُعْطَى الْجَنَّاتِ مَعَ الْحِسَانِ الْعَبْقَرِيِّ

May God shower blessings on the Prophet and his pure descendants, the people of the house, the most honorable assembly.

صَلَّى الْإِلَهَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ وَاللَّهِ أَلِ 177  
أَطْهَارِ أَهْلِ الْبَيْتِ أَكْرَمِ مَعْشَرِ

#### 4 Analysis of the Poem’s Philosophical Content and Literary Form

##### 4.1 *The Poem’s Core Message*

The term “intellect” (*‘aql*) has layers of meaning in Fatimid-Ṭayyibī metaphysical tradition. The term is used 28 times through the 177 lines of Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddīn’s Intellect Poem, often occupying the position of first—and thus accentuated—word in a line. Initially in the poem, it refers to the primordial intellect, but through the bulk of the poem, it refers to the human intellect. In some places, it refers to both or either, emphasizing the fact that the human intellect is a trace of the primordial intellect.

If we parse Saifuddīn’s uses of the word, the poem’s core philosophy reveals itself: The primordial intellect is pure and self-aware, perfect, complete, and divine (vv. 2–3, 27). The human intellect—while currently far below the station of the primordial intellect—has the potential to achieve full realization and eternal bliss (vv. 136–37). If sound, it is itself the highest essence (v. 1), an elixir that has the potential to transform a human intellect’s copper base into red gold and enable its return to original perfection (v. 6). All this is achieved

82 Reference to Qur’an, Raḥmān 55:76.

through the Imam's guidance (v. 7), which teaches it to lead a Pure Life (vv. 10, 14), comprehend the meaning of religion, train it through knowledge, and safeguard its essence (vv. 133–35). It is interesting to note that 28—the number of times the word *ʿaql* is used in the poem—is the same number of letters in the Islamic creed of faith, *Lā ilāha illā llāh*, “There is no god but God.” In the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī tradition, these denote the 28 rank-holders who guide humans to God.<sup>83</sup> But though the human intellect has the potential to become angelic, it could also go the opposite way, to perdition. It is susceptible to blights of arrogance, coercion, and tyranny (v. 13). If base desires take over, they drive the intellect toward a watering-hole where all things perish (v. 11). It could, for example, be numbed by alcohol (v. 108), portrayed as an enemy of rationality and a serious impediment to the human intellect's movement from potentiality to actuality.

In light of this parsing of the uses of the poem's core word, “intellect,” we can paraphrase Sayyidna Taḥer Saifuddin's central message in his Poem of the Intellect as follows: You, O human, have the potential to rehabilitate your human intellect and return to the realm of the primordial intellect, which is your original home. If you cultivate Sound Intellect by following the guidance of the divinely guided Imam, himself a pure intellect, if you lead the Pure Life that he teaches you to live, with the right approach and actions, by cultivating virtues and rejecting vices, if you do this, as I have taught you to do in this poem, you will earn salvation.

As we have seen, Saifuddin's Poem of the Intellect refers to some of the higher mysteries of Fatimid-Ṭayyibī metaphysics. Its framing and much of its philosophical content echoes the Fatimid Chief Dāʿī Muʿayyad's *Majālis*: for example, several verses echo Muʿayyad's assertions about the creation of the first intellect.<sup>84</sup> However, being a public exposition rather than a closely guarded text of the higher truths (*ḥaqāʾiq*), the poem refers to these mysteries briefly in veiled, mystical language, while focusing more explicitly and lengthily on the practical application of the Imam's divine guidance, and of the human intellect's realization of its potential of good through that guidance. Thus, the larger part of the poem—frequently citing the Qurʾan, the hadith of

83 See Muʿayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʿayyadīyah*, 1:38–42, Majlis 10. This may have happened naturally, as result of poetic inspiration combined with long experience and profound knowledge of the tradition. If so, it offers even more meaning.

84 Saifuddin, Intellect Poem, vv. 2, 3 and 27. Muʿayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʿayyadīyah*, 1:4, Majlis 1.

the Prophet Muḥammad, and the sayings of Imam ‘Alī—is devoted to counsel about how to lead a Pure Life.

To turn this last point around, however, the Pure Life that Saifuddin advocates, the practical application of the Imam’s guidance that he emphasizes, is grounded in the vital role ascribed to the human intellect. As he says in verse 135, “The Shari‘ah is based on the rational intellect.<sup>85</sup> Learn this from the most knowledgeable philosopher.” The larger part of the poem may be devoted to practical applications, but it directly follows from the philosophical framing. It is important to note the absolute primacy of reason in Saifuddin’s philosophy. This may be obvious from even a cursory look at the poem, from the opening line itself, but it is essential to mark the stark difference between this philosophy and between the approaches of many other Muslim denominations through the centuries that subtly sideline or even explicitly de-emphasize reason. For Saifuddin, intellectualism is not an elitist enterprise. Rather, it is the life force for all humans. For him, it is not separate from action and belief. Rather, it is the driving force for all action and belief. In the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī view expounded by this poem, the whole point of human existence is to get back to the realm of pure intellect, and the way to do that is to develop Sound Intellect through the guidance of the Imam, who is himself pure intellect.

With the goal of rehabilitation and return for all God’s creation, the poem takes a positive and broadminded attitude toward human life, and indeed, for all of creation, animate and inanimate. Saifuddin, following Imam ‘Alī’s famous sermon (v. 39 ff., details follow in section 5.2.2), praises the world as “an abode of truth” (v. 40), as the place where humans are given a chance to earn eternal life. Presenting religion and worldly life as twins (v. 35), he declares that for those who live a Pure Life on this earth, the earth turns into Jupiter (v. 36), the star of auspiciousness in the astrological system of the Fatimid-Ṭayyibīs. Saifuddin promotes harmony between all people on earth, tranquility in one’s life, cheerfulness and positivity, and an atmosphere of love and caring. It is significant to observe that he is reiterating these timeless Islamic and humanitarian values in the wake of the oppression of colonialism, and the

85 This verse and vv. 4, 5 echo Mu‘ayyad’s assertions that religion is grounded in reason (Mu‘ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu‘ayyadīyyah*, 1:1–9, Majlis 1 and 2). For an analysis of the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine that the Shari‘ah is based on reason, and its rationality is understood through the symbolic “*ta’wīl*” explication of the Imams, see T. Qutbuddin, “Principles of Fatimid Symbolic Interpretation (*Ta’wīl*),” 163–165, and passim. The most important Fatimid text expounding the *ta’wīl* of the Shari‘ah is al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Ta’wīl al-Da‘ā’im*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-A‘zamī. 2 vols., Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1982.

ravages of World War II. His poem attempts to show the way to an uplifting mode of life for his Muslim community, and for humanity as a whole.

Significantly, although the poem exalts the intellect, even the human intellect (vv. 1–6, and *passim*), it also reminds the reader that it is Almighty God who has bestowed on him this most precious gift. Verse 22 declaims: “Glory to the lord who granted you this marvelous intellect! Recognize him, do not ever deny him.” It reminds him that the human intellect is dependent on the sun of revelation to function well (vv. 7–9), that it is beset by arrogance, coercion, and tyranny (v. 13), and that true intellectual strength is earned by recognizing God (v. 23).

#### 4.2 *The Text as a Generic Hybrid between Qaṣīdah Poem, Formal Testament, and Theological Treatise*

The Intellect Poem is a hybrid text, showcasing a unique adaptation of three well-known genres, the *qaṣīdah* poem, the formal testament (*waṣīyyah*) and theological treatise (*risālah*).<sup>86</sup> In terms of formal literary features, it is a standard two-hemistich *qaṣīdah* poem with monorhyme and monometer, in the traditional and common Arabic *kāmil* meter: *mutafā’ilun mutafā’ilun mutafā’ilun*,<sup>87</sup> with an R rhyme. But it is not simply a discourse versified in meter and rhyme, such as Ibn Mālik’s medieval grammar text, the thousand-verse *Alfiyyah*. Rather, it imaginatively combines core features of these three genres to produce a unique literary work that is recited and performed in community gatherings, studied and cited in academies of learning, and implemented in action on the ground (complete audio recitation: <https://soundcloud.com/aziz-qutbuddin/the-intellect-poem>).<sup>88</sup> The Intellect Poem, together with Saifuddin’s experimentations with hybrid Arabic and Indian metrical forms, showcases his mastery of, and originality in, the Arabic literary tradition.<sup>89</sup>

86 This hybridity extends to another of Saifuddin’s poems, also composed in 1962, that creatively combines and adapts the features of *qaṣīdah* with autobiography (*ṣīrah*). See details in A. Qutbuddin, “The Qaṣīdah-Autobiography,” 12–29.

87 In the terminology of the Western Classical tradition, the metrical feet may be expressed in the following sequence of long (×) and short (–) syllables: < – – × – × / – – × – × / – – × – × >.

88 On Ṭayyibī recitation practices, see A. Qutbuddin, “The Qaṣīdah-Autobiography,” 9–10; T. Qutbuddin, “Karbala Mourning,” 39–43.

89 On hybridity in Saifuddin’s poetry, see T. Qutbuddin, “Karbala Mourning,” 39–43.



In the context of the *risālah* or treatise tradition, the Intellect Poem offers a clear thesis and persuades its audience to pursue a Pure Life.<sup>90</sup> It establishes the foundation of this life in the author’s philosophy of the intellect, and the origins and purpose of creation. Towards the conclusion, the poet presents this way of life as the path to salvation (vv. 175–176). The poem is thus a concise repository of a metaphysical theory of creation, existence, and purpose, and it is a practical, persuasive manual for leading a moral and purposeful life.

In the context of the *waṣīyah* or testament tradition, the Intellect Poem draws on the Qur’an, hadith of the Prophet, and sayings of the Imams, and counsels the reader to inculcate virtues and reject vices; it catalogs a detailed list which we have discussed in the Summary Distillation that follows shortly. In this context too, Saifuddin brings in an expression of self as a sincere and experienced guide, and, in his role as the Imam’s appointed representative, as the manifestation of God’s rope among the people in the present day. As he says in verse 172, “This poem contains compelling insights, arising from the experiences of one who was given command, and a long life, through a long age.”

In the context of the *qaṣīdah* or formal poetry tradition, in addition to maintaining its formal features, the Intellect Poem harnesses three of the *qaṣīdah* tradition’s major conventions to its philosophical and homiletic aims: metaphorical language, remembrance of the beloved (*dhikr al-ḥabīb*), and a journey (*raḥīl*). Harnessing the *qaṣīdah* tradition’s emphasis on metaphorical language, the Intellect Poem evokes the higher mysteries of Fatimid-Ṭayyibī metaphysics through allusion (*kināyah*), metaphor (*isti’ārah*), and simile (*tashbīh*), which are important characteristics of the *qaṣīdah*;<sup>91</sup> here, they are meant to be understood fully only by the initiated. Harnessing the *qaṣīdah* tradition’s remembrance of the beloved, the Intellect Poem urges the reader to remember the Creator, to ponder His words which themselves constitute the Wise Remembrance (*al-Dhikr al-Ḥakīm*), and to seek their meaning from

90 For details of the *risālah*’s thesis delineation and goal of persuasion, see A. Qutbuddin, “Taḥmīd: A Literary Genre?” 58–59.

91 These rhetorical devices are present in all genres of Arabic literature, not just in the *qaṣīdah*, but only in literary genres; they are absent from purely didactic poems like versified grammars and theology treatises. Our brief analysis demonstrates that in addition to having an instructional purpose, Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem, is also a literary text. A deeper analysis of the poem’s stylistic features is called for, although it is beyond the scope of the present paper.

God's chosen saints, the Imams who are the "family of the Remembrance" (vv. 139–149). Harnessing the *qaṣīdah* tradition's theme of journey, the Intellect Poem charts a journey—with the Imam as guide—from this world, where the intellect has fallen, back to its original home in the primordial realm, where it was first created. The traditional Arabic *qaṣīdah* is set in the particular context of desert-based, nomadic-life pre-Islamic conventions; the Intellect Poem echoes the main idea of these conventions without engaging with its particular motifs. It reimagines those traditional components to serve its own goals. Framed by the allusion to the creation of the primordial intellect, we see the poem moving to the flowering of the human intellect in this world. Here, through right approach, right action, and the guidance of the divine guide, the human intellect—a trace from the primordial intellect—evolves into a Sound Intellect, leads a Pure Life, and comes full circle to achieve salvation and reintegrate into the world of the primordial intellect. This transformative rehabilitation is expressed in many verses, perhaps in none so clearly as in the following two: "If the intellect adheres to the conditions that have been placed on the essence of its origin, it becomes true essence. Man's intellect is in a state of potentiality. If it trains with knowledge, it emerges into actuality" (vv. 136–137). These two verses echo and amplify the poem's opening line, "The intellect is the loftiest essence of the human—it gleams in his soul like the moon."

## 5 Contents: Summary and Commentary

Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin's Poem of the Intellect may be divided into the following sections:

- The first, framing section provides a philosophical foundation for the poem (vv. 1–14).
- This is followed by three broad thematic sections describing fundamentals of a Pure Life: abstract principles of true belief and right approach (vv. 15–50), specific points of virtuous character and good actions (vv. 51–147), and the grounding of both the abstract and the specific in love for the Imams and Dā'īs who are the divine guides and the "rope of God" (vv. 148–164).
- The poem's closing section provides an expression of self and a declaration that leading a Pure Life, as he has outlined—with virtues, good deeds, and love and allegiance for the Imams and Dā'īs—will lead to salvation (vv. 165–177, end).

In the following pages, we extract and annotate the main points of Saifuddin's Intellect Poem.

5.1 *Framing Section (vv. 1–14): The Sound Human Intellect and Its Divine Guide*

The opening line of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem—“The intellect is the essence of the human” (v. 1)—signals the humanistic focus of a text grounded in metaphysics. In Saifuddin’s philosophy, the intellect is “the first thing to be created” (v. 2). The human intellect—in the words of the Fatimid Dā’ī Mu’ayyad, “a small trace from the world of first creation”<sup>92</sup>—is a powerful instrument that, for all its potency, is dependent in order to function on illumination from the Imam, the divinely-guided guide, who is “the luminous station (*al-maqa‘am al-azhar*)” (v. 7) and “the sun of revelation (*shams al-wahy*)” (v. 9). Also echoing Mu’ayyad’s exposition, Saifuddin uses the analogy of the eye, which, even if perfect in ocular physiology, still needs light from the outside to see (v. 8).<sup>93</sup> In a dark room, a person with perfect eyesight and a blind person are equal in their inability to see. To see, you need healthy eyes and outside light. Similarly, for your intellect to function, you need a healthy intellect and illumination from the divine guides.

Moreover, the intellect is the best of creation only if it is sound (*‘aql salīm*—the actual term is used and explained later in v. 72 and v. 133). An intellect is sound when it remains in its pure form, the form in which God created it, without being corrupted by injustice and malice (v. 10). These impure drivers are equated in the next verse with animalistic passions, which, if given the reins, lead it to its death (v. 11). Saifuddin presents the example of impure light which corrupts perception—in grey light, all objects appear grey (v. 12). Moreover, he says the intellect can also be corrupted by blights such as arrogance, coercion, and tyranny (v. 13). For a human to live a Pure Life—mentioned explicitly in the verse—it is necessary for his Sound Intellect, guided by the Imam, to be in the seat of control (v. 14).

5.2 *Body of the Poem: Components of a Pure Life (Ḥayāh Ṭayyibah) (vv. 15–165)*

Echoing the Qur’anic expression, Saifuddin uses the term, a Pure Life (*ḥayāh ṭayyibah*), to encompass the life governed by Sound Intellect (*‘aql salīm*) (v. 14).<sup>94</sup> As mentioned, he characterizes it as one that (1) encompasses true belief and right approach, (2) as well as virtuous character and good actions,

92 Fakhruddin, “What is the origin of the Intellect?” citing Mu’ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu’ayyadīyah*, 1:168, Majlis 36: (معلوم ان الانسان بحظ نفسه التي هي اثر من آثار النفس) (الكلية ...).

93 Mu’ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu’ayyadīyah*, 1:101, Majlis 23.

94 Qur’an, Nahḥ 16:97.

and (3) most importantly (and the core of right belief and right approach), it stems from a human's love and obedience for the Imams and Dā'īs. The body of the Intellect Poem explains details of these three aspects.

### 5.2.1 True Belief and Right Approach (vv. 15–50)

According to Saifuddin, the basis of a Pure Life is belief in the Creator. Several verses are devoted to addressing aspects of this fundamental doctrine, which may be listed as follows (vv. 15–29):

- If you know yourself, you will know your Lord, who is beyond comprehension (v. 15), echoing a hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad, cited often by Mu'ayyad.<sup>95</sup>
- If you have the capacity to achieve what humans before you were not able to achieve, then acknowledge the greatness of the one who gave you this ability (vv. 16–17).
- God's creation is God's sign—ponder creation and you will recognize the Creator (vv. 17–25).
- Illumine your soul with the light of knowledge, go deep in your search for the Higher Truths (v. 26).
- Know that even the intact intellect is perplexed by the Creator's grandeur (v. 27).
- Know the value of your own intellect and cultivate your soul (vv. 28–29).

The establishment of the monotheistic creed, and the injunction to seek knowledge about the Creator, segues into the next section on the right approach to leading a Pure Life, characterized by five broad points (vv. 30–50).

- Express gratitude for the Creator who gave you human form, showered you with blessings, whose sun continues to give forth its lifegiving rays to the physical world, and whose grace (*fayḍ*) continues to flow to the spiritual world (vv. 30–32). Heading this segment, the injunction to *ḥamd*—praise and gratitude for God—is a common starting point for Islamic addresses, written and verbal, following the example of the opening line of the Qur'an, "Praise be to God, lord of all the worlds (*al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabbi l-'ālamīn*)."
- Follow the "natural way" (*fiṭrah*) of creation, i.e., human instincts to eat, drink, have sex, and live joyfully, in accordance with the Shari'ah. The system that follows this natural way will work smoothly, while the one that goes against it will fail (vv. 33–34). Saifuddin encourages the reader to understand that this world that we live in is part of God's plan, and that

95 Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, 1:394, Majlis 81, and cited with explanation in *ibid.*, 3: 99–100, Majlis 23.

- religion and worldly life are “like twins” (v. 35). When your natural instincts are governed by God’s Law, when you live your life according to the precepts of God’s religion, when you follow the guidance of God’s vicegerent, your life will be “as radiant as Jupiter,” an auspicious planet in the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī system of belief.<sup>96</sup> You will be happy and content and fulfilled (vv. 36–38).
- Practice “harmony” (*wi’ām*, v. 38) with your fellow humans—living amicably and affectionately with others, family, community, brethren in faith, fellow citizens, and all the world.<sup>97</sup>
  - View your life in this world as an opportunity to gain eternal life. This set of lines (vv. 39–44) explicitly paraphrases a famous sermon by ‘Alī, which praises the world as “an abode of truth ... and well-being” for the truthful and discerning, “a mosque for God’s loved ones,” “a place of prayer for ... the angels,” “a place where [God’s] revelation ... descends,” and “a place where God’s elect transact ... and profit.”<sup>98</sup>
  - Strive with enthusiasm for advancement in both realms (v. 45) through god-fearing piety (v. 46), by viewing faith as the spirit energizing your worldly life (v. 47), by taking control and choosing to live a noble life (v. 48), by “using the world’s services and not becoming its servant” (v. 49), and by “cultivating the prosperity of this world and the hereafter” (v. 50).
- These injunctions toward the right approach transitions into the next section, which contains specifics of how one should lead one’s life.

96 Mu’ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu’ayyadīyah*, 1:109, Majlis 25.

97 On Saifuddin’s relations with Muslim and Hindu leaders in India and his teachings of communal harmony, see Abde-Ali Qutbuddin, “The Vision of the Dawoodi Bohra Muslim Leader Syedna Taher Saifuddin and His Relations with Prime Minister Nehru and Education Minister Azad,” in *Taqreeb: Propagation of Harmonious Relations in Mughal, British and Independent India*, ed. M. Isharat Ali Molla (Kolkata, India: University of Calcutta Press, 2020), 19–28.

98 This is one of ‘Alī’s most widely cited sermons, including Raḍī, no. 3.120; Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1985), 2:190–191; Ya’qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya’qūbī*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), 2:208; Ibn Shu’bah al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-‘uqūl ‘an āl al-rasūl: Waṣāyā wa-ḥikam wa-mawā’iẓ Rasūl Allāh wa-ahl baytihi* (Beirut: Dār al-Murtaḍā, 1428/2007), 186–188. See analysis and further sources in Tahera Qutbuddin, “Alī’s Contemplations on this World and the Hereafter in the Context of His Life and Times,” in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, eds. Alireza Korangy, Wheeler M. Thackston, Roy P. Mottahedeh, and William Granara (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 343–348.

### 5.2.2 Virtuous Character and Good Actions (vv. 51–147)

In essence, and following the approach taken by its guiding sources, piety and virtue are seen as two sides of the same coin.<sup>99</sup> This is the largest segment of the poem, and it contains a wide range of counsels for inculcating virtue and doing good, for humans individually and on a societal plane, grounded in the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī vision of Islam. We have not listed them here for fear of being prolix, and because they are clearly discernible to the reader in the text of the poem provided in this article. As mentioned before, these counsels draw deeply on the Qurʾan, as well as on the hadith of the Prophet, and the teachings of Imam ʿAlī. They also combine injunctions to religious piety with directions to humanitarian virtue.<sup>100</sup> Among these counsels, some are larger, framing guidelines, and others are smaller, specific instructions, and they encompass a list of virtues, behaviors, and insights that altogether guide the human to lead a Pure Life.

Largely in the form of imperative injunctions, “do this,” “do not do that,” this entire segment is constructed as a conglomeration of commands and prohibitions, an implementation of the Qurʾanic injunction to “Command good and forbid evil” (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*).<sup>101</sup> Indeed, verse 94 expressly brings in the Qurʾanic injunction, “Forbid people from wrongdoing, O possessor of discernment. Command good always.”

The last few verses in this segment—on Islam, the Shariʿah, the Qurʾan, and giving praise to God—transition into the final segment that comes full circle to reiterate the importance of the divine guide in actualizing the human intellect to its heavenly potential.

### 5.2.3 Love for the Imams and Dāʿīs: The Rope of God (vv. 148–164)

In this 29-verse closing segment of the Intellect Poem, Saifuddin expounds the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī theory of divine guidance for humankind through the person of a divinely guided guide in every age.<sup>102</sup> Beginning with the Qurʾan’s

99 On ʿAlī’s view of piety and virtue being intrinsically linked, see Tahera Qutbuddin, “Piety and Virtue in Early Islam: Two Sermons by Imam Ali,” in *Self-Transcendence and Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, in the series *Studies in Ethics and Moral Theory*, eds. Jennifer Frey and Candace Vogler (London & New York: Routledge, 2018), 125–153.

100 For a summary exposition with synthesis of these sources, see Fakhruddin, “Why is virtue compulsory?”

101 Reference to Qurʾan, Luqmān, 31:17.

102 For a summary exposition with synthesis of these sources, see Fakhruddin, “Why do humans need a divine guide?”; Taher Fakhruddin, “How do you recognize the

injunction to “hold fast to God’s rope” (v. 148), he builds on that to explain the true meaning of God’s rope, in the unbroken chain of divine guides.<sup>103</sup> In the prophetic cycle of the sixth major Prophet, Muḥammad, this rope begins with him (vv. 149–151). He is the “city of knowledge” whose “gate” is the Conqueror of Khaybar, ‘Alī (vv. 152–153), citing Muḥammad’s hadith.<sup>104</sup> God’s rope then continues in the descendants of Muḥammad, ‘Alī, and Fāṭimah, Imams who are the “People of the Cloak” of Purity (vv. 154–155, citing the Qur’an),<sup>105</sup> who have “suckled the milk of revelation” (v. 156), who are truthful and pure (v. 157), who narrate the Prophet’s hadith on the authority of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d.ca. 732) and Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 765) (v. 158), who are “arks of salvation” (v. 159), noble “Fatimids” who made rivers of knowledge flow (v. 160), each Imam “a guide for the people after the Warner,” Muḥammad (v. 161), citing the Qur’an.<sup>106</sup> During the Imam’s concealment, God’s rope continues unbroken through the Imam’s Dā‘īs, who, given the Imam’s full authority and knowledge, fulfill his function of guidance (vv. 162–164).

### 5.3 Closing Section (vv. 165–77, end): Expression of Self and Promise of Salvation

The closing section of the poem brings the poet directly into the frame of reference. God’s rope is manifest in the present day, says Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin, through his own person. In the next several verses, he speaks of his service for the Imam and his guidance for the flock. He describes himself as the Dā‘ī (caller)—naming himself, “I am Taher Saifuddin”—who “calls God’s creatures toward abundant good, toward comprehensive security in the cradle of well-being, and toward a fruitful life” (vv. 165–67). He declares that he has “tested the conditions of the age, experiencing them through time with deliberation and patience” (v. 168). He asserts that “High waves of the storm of deviation clashed and billowed like mountains” but he was not perplexed (v. 169). He has certainty that he will be victorious (v. 170). He iterates his sincere service for the Prophet’s descendants (v. 171). He segues into a characterization of the poem as containing “compelling insights,” from long experience, the “fruit of

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divinely-ordained leader? And who is he?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6vK5r-CjHQ> (May 27, 2020), last accessed on May 1, 2023.

103 Qur’an, Āl ‘Imrān 3:103. On the unbroken chain of the Imamate, and the Imam’s necessary presence in the world, see T. Qutbuddin’s remarks on Mu‘ayyad’s poetry, *Al-Mu‘ayyad al-Šhīrāzī and Fatimid Da‘wa Poetry*, 149–72.

104 Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akḥbār*, 1:89.

105 Qur’an, Alḥzāb 33:33.

106 Qur’an, Ra’d 13:7.

[rightly-guided] knowledge” and “good words that will benefit people,” and enjoins his followers to “speak them or write them down” (vv. 172–174). In the penultimate two lines (vv. 175–176), the poet reiterates his injunction to love the Prophet and his descendants, and to perform good deeds, and this—the actuality of the Pure Life—he declares, will earn you Paradise. The final verse brings formal closure with blessings invoked on the Prophet and his family (v. 177).

## 6 Concluding Remarks

Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s life spanned a period of enormous social change in India—colonialism, modernism, the struggle for independence, and the partitioning of the country into India and Pakistan—with its attendant upheavals in lifestyle and thinking. In verse 51 of the Intellect Poem, he exhorts “do not tyrannize (or: subjugate, or: colonize),” using a verbal form of *isti‘mār*, a word referring in modern standard Arabic to colonialism. The appeal to the intellect, followed by the remarkable catalog of virtues in this poem may be read as an attempt to reassert time-honored values in the face of the onslaught of modernity and change.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, it forms a continuous aspect of Saifuddin’s philosophy, one that stayed with him during the course of his tenure as Dā’ī—the Dā’ī being seen in Ṭayyibī doctrine as one who safeguards the faith—from the beginning to the end of his stewardship.

Two reports, one a verbal answer, and another a line of poetry, illustrate this point. In 1917, just a year and a half into his tenure, Saifuddin paid a lengthy five-month visit—by train, bullock cart, and horseback—to various towns and villages in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. The Nawab of Bhavnagar’s Dīwān (a title similar to vizier), considered an astute and worldly-wise man, paid the young 28-year-old Sayyidna a visit, and thought to guide him, saying, “We should keep our religion in step with our times.” Sayyidna spontaneously answered, “No! We should keep our times in step with our religion.” The Dīwān remarked to the Sayyidna’s followers as he left, “I had come to give a gift of counsel, instead I leave having received a gift of counsel.”<sup>108</sup> This approach characterized Saifuddin’s entire tenure as Dā’ī.

107 We thank Stefan Sperl for this observation.

108 From a verbal account in a 2005 teaching session by Sayyidna Khuzaima Qutbuddin, noted by Aziz Qutbuddin.



Toward the end of his life—in 1961, a year before he composed the Intellect Poem—Saifuddin declared the following, in a similar vein, in one of his Supplication Poems (*Munājāt*):<sup>109</sup>

يَقُولُونَ لِي بَدِّلْ وَلَا سَتُ مُبَدِّلًا \* فَإِنِّي بِمَا عَاهَدْتُ رَبِّي عَامِلٌ

They say to me, change! But I am not one who will ever make changes.  
I shall persevere in safeguarding what I have pledged to my lord to safeguard.

In the Intellect Poem, Saifuddin refers to the “high waves of the storm of deviation, like mountains” (v. 169) which he resisted and fought back. Perhaps the poem aims to instill in its listeners that same confidence, that same fortitude, in the face of such waves. Like other modern “Neoplatonic” poems collected by Stefan Sperl and Yorgos Dedes in their excellent volume on the subject, this poem also reacts to a sense of rupture or crisis brought about by the modern age.<sup>110</sup>

But this point needs nuancing. Saifuddin is not advocating a total rejection of modernism, of changes in terms of social empowerment and equity. In fact, during his era, great advancements were made in many aspects of the community’s social life, including his strong push for education, especially the education of girls and women, at a time when this was far from the norm in India. He also harnessed the use of modern technology, for example, the use of the microphone to amplify his sermons, which, though it may seem mundane to us now, was new at the time and not always considered acceptable.<sup>111</sup> Hailed by many as a forward-looking visionary, he moved the community’s headquarters from Surat, which had earlier been an important metropolis but was becoming more of a backwater in his time, to Mumbai (then called Bombay), which was the up-and-coming financial hub of India, thus forcefully turning the trajectory of the community toward constructive and open engagement with modernity. As Saifuddin says in verse 49, “Use the world’s services, do not

109 Saifuddin, *Jawāhir al-balāghah*, 2:178. Reference to Qur’an, Fāṭir 35:43 (فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا) (وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَحْوِيلًا).

110 Cf. Stefan Sperl and Yorgos Dedes, eds., *Faces of the Infinite—Neoplatonism and Poetry at the Confluence of Africa, Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), passim.

111 On the community leadership’s continuing embrace of modern technology in the era of Saifuddin’s successor, Sayyidna Mohammed Burhanuddin (r. 1385–1435 /1965–2014), see Blank, passim.

become the world's servant." All in all, the poem is not proposing a dogmatic clinging to an outdated way of life. Rather, it advocates the safeguarding of the immutable principles and values of Islam, of living a Pure Life of virtue and piety in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet, 'Alī, Imams, and Dā'īs, while embracing positive aspects of modernism that are compatible with those principles and values.

### Acknowledgment

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