RASĀʾIL AL-ḤIKMA
EPISTLES OF WISDOM

Complete English translation · 111 epistles

6 November 2026

All 111 epistles are presented here in English.

The text was prepared with AI assistance and edited through repeated Arabic-source fidelity and English-language review.

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About this English translation

This English text follows the printed Arabic of Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma, seventh edition (Beirut: Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa, 1986). The Arabic printing is the primary source; machine-readable Arabic has been used as a navigation aid, with difficult passages checked against printed pages. Silvestre de Sacy's nineteenth-century French study has been consulted selectively for comparison, not treated as a source to translate from.

The text was prepared with AI assistance and edited through repeated Arabic-source fidelity and English-language review. Historical theological propositions, exhortations and polemics remain the views of the medieval authors; they should not be mistaken for editorial endorsements.

A note on terms

tawḥīd names affirmation of divine unity and, here, a distinctive doctrine. **Qāʾim** is the one who rises or stands forth. A **Caller** (*dāʿī*) is a religious teacher or missionary; **Proof** (*ḥujja*) can mean an argument or a ranked office. **Speaker** (*nāṭiq*), **Foundation** (*asās*), **Preceder** (*sābiq*) and **Follower** (*tālī*) designate specialized religious ranks. Explanatory terms are aids to reading, not definitive resolutions of disputed doctrine.

EPISTLE 1 — COPY OF THE DECREE FOUND HANGING AT THE SHRINES DURING THE ABSENCE OF OUR LORD, IMAM AL-ḤĀKIM

نسخة السجل الذي وجد معلقا على المشاهد في غيبة مولانا الإمام الحاكم

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

The good end belongs to whoever awakens from the sleep of the heedless, leaves the ignorance of the ignorant, and attains certainty. Let him hasten to repent before God Most High and before His Guardian, His Proof to the worlds, His deputy upon earth and trustee over His creatures, the Commander of the Faithful. Let him seize the opportunity for salvation among the pure and God-fearing, neither denying the Day of Judgment nor disbelieving in what is unseen. Let him hold that the Hour is coming suddenly, beyond doubt, and that God does not waste the reward of those who do good.

There is no aggression except against the wrongdoers: the rebellious devils, wicked apostates, every contemptible habitual swearer, covenant-breakers and aggressors, corrupt tyrants, the people of opposition and hypocrisy, deniers of the Day of Judgment, those who have incurred wrath, and those who have gone astray. Praise belongs to God with the praise of the grateful, praise whose end shall never be exhausted throughout eternity.

May God bless the master of the messengers, Muḥammad, sent with the Qurʾān to all creation as bearer of good tidings and warner, and bless the rightly guided, guiding Imams from his progeny, noble recorders and witnesses over the worlds, who clarify to people the matters about which they disagree and question one another, guiding them to the great message and the straight path. May God's sublime and lofty peace rest upon them until the Day of Judgment.

Now then, people: you have already received admonitions, promises, and warnings from the Guardian of your affairs, the Imam of your age, the successor of your prophets, the Proof of your Creator, and His deputy, who bears witness over you in your stations. The grave sins you have committed have been met with excuse and warning sufficient to reach whoever hears, obeys, and follows guidance, struggles against his own passions, and prefers the hereafter to this world.

Yet you continue to swim in the valley of ignorance and to plunge and play in the wilderness of error, until you meet the day of which you were warned. No indeed, you shall know! Again, no indeed, you shall know! If only you knew with the knowledge of certainty.

You all know that God Most High has entrusted His Guardian and deputy on earth, the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—with outward and inward favors. The Imam of your age has shared these with your nobles and commoners, distinguished and ordinary alike, in the fullest measure possible through his generosity and kindness, according to what he judged proper. He did not withhold his abundant gifts.

He has graciously remitted for you, alongside that, the rightful due that God Most High obligated you in His Book to pay him from what your right hands possess, while refusing to take a share for himself in the affairs of this world, out of disdain for it and rejection of it, despite his power and ability, according to a matter decreed in divine wisdom, which he himself knows best.

You have now received, through his favor and abundant generosity, blessings the like of which no human being among your ancestors ever obtained, nor any nation before you among the Emigrants and Helpers of earlier ages. You did not obtain these from God's Guardian because of any entitlement or any deed performed by a man or woman among you, but only as his gift, kindness, compassion, and mercy toward you, and as a test to determine which of you is best in deeds. Thus you might recognize the worth of the favor, kindness, grace, and abundant generosity he bestowed upon you in his age beyond what he gave those who came before you.

Give abundant thanks to God and His Guardian for what he has granted you of his bounty. Perhaps you will be grateful and act in a manner pleasing to him, multiplying the good deeds of earlier nations in proportion to what God's Guardian has multiplied for you in his own age.

Among his great outward gifts are heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, marked horses, cattle, and other provisions, estates, landed holdings, and the varied goods of this world. He has raised both your distinguished and ordinary people to high degrees and lofty stations, that you might follow the paths of people of understanding. He honored you with the finest titles and granted you dominion in the east and west, over plain and mountain, land and sea. You are its kings, sultans, and revenue-collectors; necks are freed for you through the support of God's Guardian, and delegations and factions submit to you.

“If you tried to count God's blessings, you could not enumerate them.” You have enjoyed ease through the generosity of the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—without labor, and after this you hope for a good return.

Among his inward gifts is your adherence, in the outward ordering of your affairs, to allegiance to him, through which you gain honor in your worldly life and hope for salvation and success in the hereafter. You boast of your faith before God and His Guardian, but rather it is God who has favored you by guiding you to faith. You display obedience while clinging to disobedience. If you had remained upright upon the middle path, you would have been given abundant sweet water.

Among his inward gifts is his revival of the customs of Islam and faith, the religion approved by God, through which in his age you were exalted above all schools and religions. He separated you from idol-worshippers, exposed their abasement and deprivation, and demolished their churches and the visible monuments of their religions, which had stood since ancient times. The protected communities (al-dhimma) submitted to you willingly and unwillingly, and people entered God's religion in crowds. He built and strengthened congregational mosques, repaired and adorned places of worship, established prayer at its appointed times, almsgiving according to its rights and duties, pilgrimage and jihād, restored the Sacred House of God, and upheld the pillars of Islam.

He opened his treasuries, spent in God's path, protected pilgrims with his armies, dug wells, secured roads and regions, restored watering places, distributed charity to the people, covered nakedness, ended injustices, and removed from your nobles and commoners the taxes and dues that God Most High had imposed upon you as obligations. He divided the land among the people span by span and made it circulate among them over times and ages. He opened the doors of his Call to you and gave you access to the wisdom God had granted him, so that through it he might guide you to God's mercy and summon you to obey God, His Messenger, and His Guardians—peace upon them—and attain the stations of the righteous.

Yet you hated knowledge and wisdom, and were ungrateful for grace and favor. Yet you cast these gifts behind your backs and preferred worldly life to them, as the Children of Israel had done before you in the story of Moses—peace upon him. God's Guardian did not compel you.

He closed the gate of his Call to you, disclosed wisdom to you, and opened outside his palace a House of Knowledge containing every branch of religious science and its disciplines. He endowed it with books on what is lawful and unlawful, legal disputes and judgments, and what is contained in the scriptures of the ancients, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses—peace upon them both. He supplied paper, provisions, ink, and pens, so that you might acquire knowledge, gain insight, and be delivered from ignorance.

Previously you had struggled to obtain even a portion of this learning, but when it was offered you rejected it, neglected it, and turned away from it all. This only increased your flight. Passion drew you toward grave sins; you made yourselves capable of wrongdoing, rejected knowledge, displayed ignorance, and multiplied your offenses and corruption upon the earth until it nearly complained to God Most High of your oppression.

God's Guardian—peace upon him—continued to confront this, hoping that your distinguished people might be rescued or your ordinary people delivered from drunkenness and ignorance. But you only increased in tyranny, disobedience, and division.

You whisper among yourselves about falsehood, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger. The enemy of God and the enemy of the Commander of the Faithful has withdrawn his hand from corruption out of fear of the power of God's Guardian, and has accepted peace and a truce. Thus the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—has no enemy who openly fights him and no adversary who resists him. Everyone is afraid and trembling before his awe.

But you, the distinguished and ordinary people gathered in his presence, sheltered by his state and encompassed by his authority, and bound to obey him, have become treacherous and divided. You fight one another like the Romans and the Khazars, daring to offend God without fear or restraint. Neither God's religion nor reverence for your Imam nor certainty prevents you from shedding blood and violating the sanctity of households.

Ignorance has overcome you. You do not accord God His due reverence or acknowledge that the Imam of your age is one, and that Islam and faith have gathered you under obedience to God, His Messenger, and the allegiance of the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him. “To God we belong and to Him we return.” What calamity could be greater, and what could give your enemies more cause to rejoice at your expense?

People, you have injured yourselves and your religions, and through you God's Guardian, the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—has been injured. There is no strength or power except through God, the Most High, the Magnificent.

Do you heedless people feel secure against suffering what befell the Companions of the Thicket and the people of Tubbaʿ? Have you not heard God's words: “Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with ʿĀd, Iram of the pillars, who transgressed in the lands and spread much corruption therein, so your Lord poured upon them a scourge of punishment? Your Lord is ever watchful.” And His saying: “Did We not destroy the former peoples, then follow them with the later ones? Thus do We deal with the guilty.” The Book of God contains many such examples of what befell obstinate opponents, hypocrites, and those who spread corruption upon earth.

God Most High and His Guardian—the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—have become angry at the great excesses of all the people. For this reason he withdrew from among you. God, Possessor of Majesty and Generosity, said, “God would not punish them while you were among them.”

The displeasure of God's Guardian indicates the displeasure of the Lord—blessed and exalted is He. Among the signs of the Imam's anger are the closing of the gate of his Call, the suspension of his gatherings of wisdom, and the removal from his palace of the administrative offices of his friends and servants. He withheld his greetings from the people, although he had previously gone out to them from his presence. He forbade them to sit upon the benches beneath the porticoes of his sanctuary.

He stopped leading them in prayer at the festivals and during Ramaḍān. He forbade the muezzins to greet him at the time of the call to prayer or mention him then. He forbade people to call him “Our Lord” or to kiss the ground before him. He prohibited them from dismounting from their riding animals before him, though they had been required to do so.

He then wore wool in its various colors and rode a she-ass. He forbade the usual riding in his procession and refrained from enforcing the legal penalties upon the people of his age. Many other things were concealed from the world, and people remained heedless of them all. Satan had gained mastery over them and caused them to forget the remembrance of God: “Those are Satan's party; surely Satan's party are the losers.”

Thus God's Guardian, the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—left all creation neglected, plunging and playing in the wilderness and blindness they had preferred to guidance. He left them as Moses had left his people, until destruction nearly descended upon them without their knowledge.

He withdrew while they differed and doubted concerning him, wavering in their wrongdoing, neither obeying the truth nor returning to God's Guardian. God Most High said, “If they referred it to God, the Messenger, and those vested with authority among them, those who can draw sound conclusions would know it.”

People, the words of God Most High are the greatest admonition, and the warning in this exhortation makes plain your poverty and your need for the pardon of God Most High and of His Guardian, the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him. Through forgetfulness comes heedlessness; through heedlessness comes discord; through discord comes destruction.

God—blessed and exalted is He—said, “If, when they had wronged themselves, they had come to you and asked God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God accepting of repentance and merciful.” He also said, “God loves those who repent and those who purify themselves.” And God—blessed and exalted is He—said, “When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am near; I answer the call of the one who calls upon Me when he calls.”

Hasten, hasten, people! Stand in an open place upon the first road taken by the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—when he concealed himself before your very eyes. Gather there with your children and yourselves. Purify your hearts, devote yourselves sincerely to the Lord of the worlds, and repent to God with sincere repentance.

Seek every means of entreating Him to pardon you, forgive you, and show you mercy by returning His Guardian to you and inclining his heart toward you. He is mercy to you and to all His creation, as God—blessed and exalted is He—said to His Messenger: “We sent you only as a mercy to the worlds.”

Beware, beware that any one of you attempt to follow the traces of the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—or uncover news of him. Do not depart from the first road; remain there and entreat God, all of you, with your very spirits. When mercy overshadows you, God's Guardian will come forth before you by his own choice, satisfied with you and manifest among you.

Persist in this night and day before the inevitable event comes to pass, the striking calamity strikes, and the gate of mercy is closed, while punishment descends upon those who oppose and obstinately resist. Whoever has warned has discharged his responsibility, and whoever has advised you has protected himself and taken precautions. This address is directed to those among you who possess understanding, and its application concerns them. The will belongs to God—blessed and exalted is He—and success comes through Him.

Peace upon whoever follows guidance, fears the consequences of ruin, and believes the excellent words of his Lord.

Written by a servant of the government of the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him—in the month of Dhū al-Qaʿda, in the year 411 AH.

May God bless Muḥammad, master of the messengers and seal of the prophets, and bless his pure family. God suffices us and is the best Trustee.

Let the officials charged with this matter preserve this admonition to the God-fearing. Let no one prevent its copying or reading; may God benefit whoever is enabled to act according to what it contains of obedience to God and obedience to His Guardian, the Commander of the Faithful—peace upon him.

Forbidden, forbidden is it for anyone not to copy it and read it to the repentant in Jāmiʿ Asfal (the Lower Mosque). Forbidden, forbidden is it for anyone able to copy it to fall short of doing so.

Praise belongs to God alone.

EPISTLE 2 — THE DECREE PROHIBITING WINE

السجل المنهي فيه عن الخمر

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Praise be to God, who has strengthened Islam through His God-fearing friends, and entrusted the preservation of its ordinances to those whom He has appointed among the imams of His religion and His blessed trustees. May God bless our forefather Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets and Master of the Messengers, and may His blessings rest upon him and his pure family.

The Commander of the Faithful, concerning the affairs of religion and worldly life which God has entrusted to him and placed under his care, and in which He has made his word supreme and exalted, devotes his concern, judgment, and deliberation to their protection and preservation.

He seeks to prevent any defect from entering into either of them, to exalt their distinguishing signs, to maintain their established foundations, to preserve their order, and to attend to whatever might threaten their perfection and completeness through alteration or deterioration.

God, mighty and exalted, is the helper of the Commander of the Faithful in all that pleases Him, and grants him success in what brings him nearer to God and wins His favor, through His grace and power.

Among the matters most beneficial to Islam and the Muslims, and most conducive to reform through the preservation of the foundations of religion, is the prohibition of intoxicants among all the people, and the prevention of their approval of reprehensible practices.

For persistence in consuming intoxicants is the gathering place of evil deeds and the path leading to shameful actions and wicked conduct.

The Commander of the Faithful has therefore ordered, with God's assistance, that this proclamation be written and read aloud to both the distinguished and the common people, among his followers and subjects.

It forbids the drinking of anything intoxicating, whatever its kind, name, color, or taste. It forbids every beverage concerning which interpretations are offered to justify its consumption, if it intoxicates in either small or large quantities.

All must refrain from drinking it. The arguments, legal opinions, interpretations, and claims by which the ignorant attempt to justify such conduct are likewise rejected.

The Commander of the Faithful has prohibited all of this, without exception. He has forbidden intoxicants, their possession, their storage, and any involvement in their manufacture or pressing, so that the lands may be purified of their harmful effects.

He has placed responsibility for this matter upon the faithful among his followers and upon those bound to him by allegiance, obedience, and sincere counsel. He has charged them with investigating violations and reporting whatever they discover concerning them.

The Commander of the Faithful declares himself free before God, mighty and exalted, of the responsibility and harmful consequences arising from such violations, whether immediately or in the hereafter.

Let this decree therefore be made known as proceeding from the Commander of the Faithful, and let all his followers and the believers act according to it, together with everyone encompassed by the Call of Truth.

Let them hasten to obey it and beware of transgressing it.

For the Commander of the Faithful has threatened those who oppose this decree with painful punishment, severe chastisement, and disgraceful retribution.

God is sufficient for the Commander of the Faithful, and He is the best disposer of affairs.

Written in the month of Dhu al-Qaʿdah, in the year four hundred (400 AH).

Praise belongs to God alone, and may His blessings and peace rest upon our forefather Muhammad and his pure family.

EPISTLE 3 — THE ACCOUNT OF THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

خبر اليهود والنصارى

Concerning their question to our lord, the Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, Commander of the Faithful, may God's blessings rest upon him, about a matter of their religion to which they objected; and his answer, by which he defeated them in argument and silenced them, so that they departed vanquished. Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

A trustworthy person, whose account was accepted and whose report became widely known at the time, related that he had been present at one of the public appearances of the Master of the Age, our lord the Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him.

While he was standing at al-Qarafa, among the graves known as the Domes of the Birds, a group approached him and offered their greetings.

He stopped for them, as was his custom when someone greeted him.

They explained that they belonged to the protected communities, that they were Jews and Christians, and that they had a request.

He said, "State your request."

They replied, "We shall state it if you guarantee our personal safety."

He said, "A person asking for something has no need of a guarantee of safety."

They answered, "It is a difficult matter and a grave question."

He said, "Ask whatever you wish, even if it concerns sovereignty itself."

They replied:

"O Commander of the Faithful! This matter does not concern worldly affairs, but religion, and it is a matter of great consequence.

"If you grant us safety, we shall explain it and ask you about it. If you do not, we shall ask your pardon and depart in safety.

"Your justice and security have filled the East and the West, and your generosity and gifts have encompassed all creation."

He said:

"Ask whatever you wish. You are safe under the protection of God Most High, the protection of our forefather Muhammad, and our own protection. None of these guarantees shall be broken or interpreted away to your disadvantage."

They said:

"O Commander of the Faithful! Our question is dangerous and the matter is serious. You possess the sword and sovereignty. We do not doubt your guarantee, but we fear the foolish among the people."

He replied:

"Speak. You are safe from all the people and the entire community."

They said:

"O Commander of the Faithful! You know that the founder of the religious Law was Muhammad ibn Abd Allah, the Messenger sent to the Arabs, whose migration took place so many years ago."

They then stated the number of years between his migration and the year in which they were addressing the Imam.

"When he was sent to the Arabs and fought against the other nations, he did not compel us to enter his religion. He permitted us to choose whether to enter it or to pay the poll tax, without coercion. He required nothing beyond this.

"Likewise, those who succeeded him in the leadership of his religion and the administration of his Law did not impose upon us what you have imposed.

"You have demolished our churches and monasteries, torn apart the books revealed by our Lord to our messengers, containing the wisdom of what is lawful and unlawful and the rules of retribution.

"You have even permitted the Torah and Gospel to be used for wrapping bath oils and soap, and to be sold in the markets at the price of blank paper.

"Yet the founder of the religion and Law himself declared, in what was revealed to him from his Lord, that the Torah contains the wisdom of God.

"Furthermore, in several passages of the Book revealed to him, he exalted our messengers and the excellent men among their followers, just as they are honored in our own books.

"Much of the Qur'an revealed to him mentions Moses, Jesus, Joshua, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Zechariah, and John. All these are our prophets and the leaders of our religious laws.

"He also mentioned the virtuous among us, such as the successors of Moses and the disciples of Jesus.

"He praised our priests and monks, saying that among them are priests and monks, and that when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize.

"If we were to enumerate everything in the revealed Book concerning the excellence of our messengers and the greatness of our scriptures, we would find a great abundance of such passages.

"Furthermore, among the caliphs of his religion and the imams of his Law were your praiseworthy ancestors, as well as their enemies and yours, such as the Umayyads and Abbasids.

"These rulers exercised power over vast territories, and their names were proclaimed in every region reached by the religion of the Messenger.

"Yet they did not impose new obligations upon us or violate our agreements. They followed the example of the founder of their religion and Law, knowing that their Prophet had honored our messengers, scriptures, religion, and Law.

"How, then, O Commander of the Faithful, is it permissible for you to go beyond the judgment of the founder of the religion and Law, and beyond the actions of the caliphs and imams who governed the lands and the community before you?

"You are not yourself the founder of the Law! Rather, you are one of its imams and successors, charged with completing it and strengthening its foundations.

"You have declared this yourself in many of your public pronouncements, and those closest to you among your followers have made it widely known.

"Yet you have done to us what neither the founder of the Law nor any of his imams and successors did.

"This is the matter about which we have asked you, and the purpose for which we sought your protection.

"We wish to hear your answer.

"If what you have done is right and just, we shall believe it and acknowledge its truth. But if it concerns only sovereignty, government, and political power, we shall remain upon our religions without doubting our beliefs.

"We shall thereby remove uncertainty from the hearts of the weak among our people.

"We have come only to seek understanding, without doubting your justice, mercy, or fairness.

"Upon this condition we obtained your guarantee of safety. We have spoken what was upon our minds and discharged the obligation imposed upon us by our religions.

"The matter is now yours. If you speak, we shall listen, obey, and answer. If you permit us to leave without answering, we shall depart under the protection you have granted us."

He replied:

"Your guarantee of safety remains in force.

"As for your question, you have asked nothing except what people in your position have a right to ask. We shall answer you, God willing.

"But depart now and return to this place tomorrow night. Let each group, Jews and Christians, bring the most learned person they can find among their own community in this city, so that the answer may be given to them and the discussion conducted with them."

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The following night, the people returned to the same place. They stood before him, greeted him, and said:

"We have brought those whom the Commander of the Faithful requested."

They presented eleven men, having presented seven previously.

The Commander of the Faithful, may God's blessings rest upon him, asked:

"Are these the men you have chosen and brought forward?"

They all replied:

"Yes, O Commander of the Faithful."

He asked the assembled representatives:

"Have you agreed to speak on behalf of your religious communities and to represent them?"

They answered:

"Yes."

He asked:

"Do you know anyone in this city, belonging to your religion, who is more learned than you?"

They replied:

"No."

He asked:

"Do you know the Torah, the Gospel, and the accounts of the prophets?"

They answered:

"Yes."

He continued:

"Are you acquainted with the mission of the founder of the Law whose religion I uphold, whose Law I defend, and with his life and history?

"Do you know what took place between him and the leaders of your communities, the earlier Jews and Christians, concerning their arguments, questions, and disputes?

"Do you know who accepted his authority and who refused it, from the beginning of his mission until his death?"

They replied:

"We do not know everything concerning these matters, but we know most of what we are required to preserve and understand.

"The accounts of what occurred between him and our scholars, concerning the correctness of our religion and Law, are preserved among us in written records.

"Our learned men have inherited them from the learned men who preceded us, until they reached us. They shall continue to be transmitted to others after us, just as they were transmitted to us, until God inherits the earth and all who dwell upon it."

He said:

"Your companions asked me a question yesterday, after obtaining my guarantee of safety.

"I promised to answer them when their scholars appeared.

"You have now come, and your companions have acknowledged your knowledge and excellence. You have confirmed their judgment, and when I asked whether anyone in this city was more learned than you concerning the founder of the Islamic Law, his ancestry, followers, knowledge, and Law, you answered that there was no one.

"Now I shall question you. At the end of my questions, I shall answer what your companions asked me.

"My guarantee of safety remains in force for you and for them, on one condition.

"Whenever I ask you something concerning your religion and Law, or concerning the religion and Law of the founder of Islam, you must answer according to what is transmitted in your scriptures revealed to your prophets and recorded in the writings of your leaders, scholars, and religious authorities.

"Whatever you do not possess, do not know, and cannot find in a revealed book or the words of a wise messenger, you may reject and dispute with whatever arguments you would use against anyone else.

"But whatever you know and understand, you must not deny, for its evidence shall stand against you."

They answered:

"Yes."

He said:

"If you speak truthfully, my protection shall encompass you. But if you lie, my protection shall be withdrawn, and I shall punish you. Your punishment shall be the consequence of your falsehood.

"Do you agree?"

They answered:

"Yes."

He said:

"Have you heard that, at a certain time after the migration of the Messenger, the founder of the Islamic Law was approached by leaders and scholars of your two communities, Jews and Christians?"

He named several of their rabbis and monks, and then stopped.

They replied:

"Yes, O Commander of the Faithful. And so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so."

They completed the remaining names until they had enumerated them all.

He said:

"It is now established to my satisfaction that you have spoken truthfully, for you completed the names of the men whom I began to mention.

"Do you have any doubt or uncertainty concerning this?"

They answered:

"No."

He asked:

"When he summoned them into his presence, what did he say to them?"

They replied:

"Let the Commander of the Faithful speak, and we shall listen. Whatever we recognize, we shall acknowledge and accept. Whatever we do not recognize, and which is not preserved among us, we shall tell the Commander of the Faithful."

He said:

"The founder of the religion and Law said to them:

'Were you not awaiting my time and expecting my person, hoping for deliverance through my appearance?

'Yet when I appeared among you, proclaimed my mission, and made known the command of my Lord, you called me a liar, denied me, and acted hypocritically toward me.

'Some of you fought against me, while others departed from my vicinity through envy and hatred.

'Thus have rebellious nations acted in earlier times whenever someone like me appeared, following a custom established by the unjust, beginning with the accursed Iblis in his opposition to noble Adam.'

"Did he speak to them in this way?"

They answered:

"Yes."

He said:

"If you know that he spoke thus, what answer did they give him after hearing his words?"

They replied:

"We have already said that it is for the Commander of the Faithful to speak and for us to listen.

"We remain bound by the first condition you imposed upon us. Whatever we recognize, we shall acknowledge; whatever we do not recognize, we shall reject.

"Thus we shall preserve our religions by acknowledging the truth, and preserve our lives by adhering to the condition."

The Commander of the Faithful said:

"Their answer was this:

'You are not the one whose time we were awaiting, whose person we expected, or through whose appearance we hoped for deliverance.'

"He asked them:

'What proof do you have that I am not that person?'

"They replied:

'What has been transmitted to us, preserved in our books, and foretold by our prophets to their communities.'

"He asked:

'What is it? Explain it.'

"They answered:

'Three characteristics.

'The first is that his name is not your name. You yourself proclaimed this during your prophethood, made it known to your companions, and counted it among your merits.

'We therefore take the proof from your own words, when you related the saying of the Messiah:

"Bringing good news of a messenger who shall come after me, whose name is Ahmad."

'He permits for you good things and prohibits for you evil things, and removes from you your burden and the fetters that were upon you.

'Therefore, as we have said, you are not the person named in this prophecy. Your name is Muhammad, whereas the person you announced, according to your own statement and ours, is named Ahmad.

'The second characteristic is that four hundred years remain between the beginning of your mission and the appearance of the awaited one.

'Thus you differ from him both in name and in time.

'The third characteristic is that the awaited one shall call people to the unity of his Lord, without denying His attributes or likening Him to created things, and without imposing burdens upon our souls.

'This accords with what you yourself have mentioned in your revelation concerning the permission of good things, the prohibition of evil things, and the removal of our burdens and fetters.

'What proof, then, remains to you against us?

'Your name is not the name of the one awaited according to your own words. Your actions are not his actions, and your time is not his time.

'You differ from him in name, time, and action.

'If you merely call us to another religious Law, it is preferable and better for us to remain within our own Law.

'For according to what we know, the awaited one shall remove imposed religious obligations, bring evils to an end, remove misfortunes and doubts, and permit neither unbeliever nor hypocrite to prevail against him in his age.

'Yet most of your companions outwardly display hypocrisy toward you. They submit to your command only because of the strength of your sword.

'If that is so, why do you blame us for opposing you and refusing to obey you or enter your Law?'

The Commander of the Faithful asked the scholars:

"Was this what occurred?"

They answered:

"Yes. It occurred in this way, and all that you have said is true."

He asked:

"What answer did he give them?"

They replied:

"Let the Commander of the Faithful speak, as has been our custom. We shall listen and acknowledge the answer if we recognize it, and reject it if we do not."

He said:

"Since you know and recognize these matters, you must also know what happened next, God willing."

Then the Commander of the Faithful continued:

"His answer to them was this:

'I do not fight you merely because you refuse to enter my religion, call me a liar, or turn away from my command.

'You possess religious laws and scriptures, and you hold fast to them and proclaim them. I do not fight people of this description.

'Nor am I the one who abolishes the religious laws, for that matter does not belong to me.

'Rather, whenever I conquer by the sword a land inhabited by idol-worshippers and those who oppose the true religion, I have the right to require them to enter my religion and to fight them.

'As for those of you who live in a conquered city, I offer you the choice between entering my religion and following my command and Law, or paying the poll tax.

'Whoever pays the tax I permit to remain in his place. Whoever wishes to depart I allow to leave. Whoever fights against me on this account, I fight.

'As for you, I await the judgment of my Lord.'

"They replied:

'You have the right to do this. You have spoken nothing but truth, and we see nothing but truthfulness in your words.'

"He then said to them:

'Since this matter has been established between us, and since you have interpreted my position against me and denied the rank and excellence bestowed upon me by my Lord, and since you claim that the one you await has a known name, known actions, and an appointed time four hundred years after the beginning of my mission, let us write an agreement between us.

'Let this agreement contain all these matters, and let it stipulate that you shall pay me the poll tax throughout the period during which you claim another messenger will appear.

'If I am among the lying impostors, you shall be freed of the burden of supporting me, and sovereignty shall return to you when the one you await appears.

'But if he does not appear, and my authority remains established, my Law continues in force, and my judgment remains binding, then the leader of my religion, the one who upholds my mission, and the Imam who lives in that age shall have the right to call you to what I call you to today.

'If you answer him, submit to his command, and enter my Law and his obedience, you shall have submitted and attained safety.

'But if you refuse him as you have refused me, turn away from him, and act arrogantly, he shall have the right to enforce the condition you have imposed upon yourselves and to fight you.

'If you fight him, he shall kill you. No excuse shall be accepted from you.

'He shall have the right to suppress your religion, overthrow your Law by demolishing your places of worship, and render your books inoperative.

'No excuse shall remain by which you may defend yourselves, no falsehood upon which you may rely, and no devil upon whom you may depend.

'He shall be victorious over you and shall eradicate you and all the unjust.

'This is the text of the agreement. Is it as we have stated?'

"They answered:

'Yes.'"

The Commander of the Faithful then said:

"This agreement continued to pass down after the founder of the religion and Law, from one truthful successor to a virtuous Imam, until it reached me. It is now in my possession.

"It was not permissible for him to break a condition he had established or a judgment he had made known, for he was recognized as Muhammad the Trustworthy even when he lived among the people of the Age of Ignorance.

"How could he revoke what he had granted you?

"Nor was it permissible for any of the imams of his religion or successors to his Law to revoke his command before the appointed period had expired. They were obliged to follow and submit to his judgment.

"But when authority came to me, and the years mentioned in the agreement expired during my age, and the appointed time was completed under my rule, I claimed from you what was due under his right.

"I called you to fulfill your condition and his condition, according to the obligation of fidelity and the judgment of the covenant.

"Is this how the matter has been transmitted to you?"

They answered:

"Yes. This is how it occurred."

He said:

"What argument, then, remains to you against him or against me after what we have explained?

"In what matter, according to your own claim, have I transgressed against you, when I have merely held you to your own condition?

"What you were awaiting I have now brought upon you.

"Yet I have treated you with great patience and justice, preserving your lives and possessions, and granting you time so that you might awaken from heedlessness and submit after the fulfillment of the covenant.

"What argument remains to you after what we have described?

"What right remains with you after what we have said?

"What excuse can you offer after what we have explained?

"Speak and ask. You shall be answered and treated fairly.

"But you have no further argument or proof."

They were defeated in argument, exposed as false, and overcome with regret, doubt, and disappointment.

He asked:

"What do you say?"

They all answered:

"By God, all of this is true and correct. We have no doubt or uncertainty concerning it.

"We have heard and understood.

"To God belongs the conclusive argument, Lord of the Worlds.

"May God bless His Prophet and his pure family."

Here ends the discourse in this section.

God is sufficient for us, and He is the best disposer of affairs.

Praise belongs to God alone, and from Him I seek assistance.

EPISTLE 4 — COPY OF WHAT THE QARMATIAN WROTE

نسخة ما كتبه القرمطي

To our lord al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, Commander of the Faithful, upon his arrival in Egypt.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

To proceed:

We have arrived with the Turks of Khurasan, Arabian horses, Indian swords, armor of David, Tibetan shields, and spears of al-Khatt.

Our mounts travel light. Surrender the lands, and you shall be safe in your life, your property, your family, and your children.

Peace.

His reply, peace be upon him:

As for what you have mentioned concerning the swiftness of your mounts, it is merely evidence of the deficiency of your judgment.

This is a matter decreed in a known Book.

For we have looked into the Hidden Book and the Concealed Knowledge, and have learned that this land of ours shall become graves for your bodies, while your wealth and your dwellings shall become our inheritance.

You must therefore know that calamity has surrounded you and destruction has descended upon you.

You have not come of your own accord. Rather, God has brought you here so that He might manifest a miracle through you and your companions.

I praise God for what He has granted me in taking possession of you after eight hours of the day had passed on Monday, when the excuses of the unjust shall no longer benefit them, and theirs shall be the curse and the evil abode.

Peace be upon whoever follows guidance, fears the consequences of destruction, and fears God in the life to come and in this present life.

He is sufficient for us, and that suffices.

To Him everyone who supplicates turns.

EPISTLE 5 — THE COVENANT OF THE GUARDIAN OF THE AGE

ميثاق ولي الزمان

I place my trust in our lord al-Hakim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, exalted above spouses and number.

So-and-so, son of so-and-so, makes this declaration, binding himself by it and calling his own soul to witness.

He does so while sound in mind and body, competent to act, willingly and without coercion or compulsion.

He declares that he has renounced all sects, doctrines, religions, and beliefs, in all their various forms and differences.

He acknowledges nothing other than obedience to our lord al-Hakim, exalted be his remembrance.

And obedience is worship.

He associates no one with him in worship, whether anyone who has passed away, anyone now present, or anyone yet to appear.

He has surrendered his soul, his body, his wealth, his children, and everything he possesses to our lord al-Hakim, exalted be his remembrance.

He accepts all his judgments, whether in his favor or against him, without objecting to or rejecting any of his actions, whether they displease him or bring him happiness.

If he should turn back from the religion of our lord al-Hakim, exalted be his remembrance, which he has pledged upon himself and to which he has called his soul as witness;

Or if he should direct this allegiance toward another;

Or if he should violate any of his commands;

Then he shall be disowned by the worshipped Creator, deprived of the benefit of instruction from all the spiritual ranks, and deserving of punishment from the Exalted Creator, exalted be his remembrance.

Whoever acknowledges that he has no deity to worship in heaven, nor any existing Imam upon the earth, except our lord al-Hakim, exalted be his remembrance, shall be among the victorious Unitarians.

Written in such-and-such month of such-and-such year, reckoned among the years of the servant of our lord, exalted be his remembrance, and his bondsman:

Hamza ibn Ali ibn Ahmad,

Guide of those who have responded,

Avenger against the polytheists and apostates,

By the sword of our lord, exalted be his remembrance, and the might of his sovereignty alone.

End.

EPISTLE 6 — THE BOOK KNOWN AS THE HIDDEN REFUTATION

الكتاب المعروف بالنقض الخفي

The book known as the Hidden Refutation, submitted to the Divine Presence.

I put my trust in our Lord, the Creator, the All-Knowing, the Most High, the Highest, the Judge of judges, who does not enter thoughts and imaginings. The letters of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful” are the Callers of His servant, the Imam.

My letter to you, community of Unitarians who worship our Lord—glorified is He—alone, Responders to the realities of the true essences, who look by the light of radiant lights, who renounce impossible, literalist sciences, who recognize the errant Iblises, and worship the One worshipped by creation, who rules through His own essence and is distinct from His originated beings. His essence is His divinity, and His originated beings are the Speakers, Foundations, their successors, and the Callers. Glorified is He above duality and exalted far above what the wrongdoers say.

Now then: before this epistle you heard of the abrogation of the religious law through the abolition of almsgiving for you, and that almsgiving constitutes the religious law in its entirety. In this epistle I shall explain its overturning pillar by pillar, outwardly and inwardly. What is intended for salvation lies beyond both of these.

You have heard that the concealed inward doctrine now in your hands will become outwardly manifest, while the outward doctrine will fade away, and the meaning of the reality of the pure inward doctrine will appear. This is its time and season: its explicit exposition is for the Unitarians, not the polytheists, until the sword appears and it becomes publicly manifest, willingly or by force. The poll tax will be taken from Muslims and polytheists as it is taken from the protected communities. That time is near, if our Lord wills; through Him comes success.

The first foundation upon which the law-bound communities stand is the testimony, “There is no god but God; Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.” By it blood has been protected, private parts guarded, and property preserved. The first testimony consists of two expressions, indicating the Preceder and the Follower. It has four divisions, indicating the two Origins and the two Foundations. It consists of seven pieces, indicating the seven Speakers, the seven Legatees, the seven days, seven heavens, seven earths, seven mountains, and seven spheres. There are many similar groups of seven. It contains twelve letters, indicating the twelve Proofs of the Foundation.

The second part of the profession, “Muḥammad is the Messenger of God,” contains three words, indicating three ranks: the Speaker, the Follower above him, and the Preceder above them all. It consists of six pieces, indicating six Speakers, and twelve letters, indicating twelve Proofs corresponding to those of the Foundation. Likewise the heavens have twelve zodiacal signs and seven governing bodies; the earths are seven, the regions are seven, and the islands of the Call are twelve.

The origin of both worlds, according to them, is one, the Cause of causes, which they identify as the Preceder, the source of stillness and coldness; the Follower is the source of heat and motion. The accursed Iblīs appeared from the Preceder before the Follower. He was subtle and spiritual, and had been obedient to his Creator, but he manifested rivalry and sought leadership. From his spirituality the accursed one formed a person standing opposite the Preceder. He manifested opposition and disputed with his Creator; his name was Ḥārith. Thereupon his Follower appeared from him, and the Preceder and the Follower became the origins of both worlds. From them emerged the Speaker and the Foundation. The Preceder manifested his coldness and stillness, the Follower his heat and movement, the Speaker his dryness, and the Foundation movement. Thus the four natures arose, and the seven spheres and twelve zodiacal signs were formed. Each group of three signs possesses a nature different from the other three groups, so that the world is governed by four natures.

The religious natures are likewise four, as already explained, while the Creator—glorified is He—is exalted above them all.

Each group of seven among the spheres has twenty-eight letters, so that those who understand may know that all these sevens point to one meaning and one indication. Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon have twenty-eight letters in their Arabic names. From the first sign of the year, Aries, signifying the Preceder, to the seventh sign, Libra, signifying the Speaker, there are seven signs: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, and Libra. Their Arabic names have twenty-eight letters. The governance of the world, its fortunate and unfortunate influences, derives from the Moon, which travels through twenty-eight stations and cannot move outside them.

From Muḥarram to Rajab, which resembles Muḥarram in excellence, there are seven months. Muḥarram signifies the Preceder, for it is the first month of the year. Rajab signifies the Follower and adjoins Shaʿbān and Ramaḍān; those two months signify the Speaker and Foundation. Muḥarram, signifying the Preceder, stands apart from the months, whereas Rajab is joined to the next two, just as the Follower is joined to the Speaker and Foundation. There are seven months from Muḥarram to Rajab. Similarly the Preceder has seven ranks: Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, Imagination, Speaker, and Foundation. Their Arabic names comprise twenty-eight letters.

Likewise the seven months—Muḥarram, Ṣafar, Rabīʿ, Rabīʿ, Jumādā, Jumādā, and Rajab—comprise twenty-eight letters.

The seven days—Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday—likewise have twenty-eight letters in Arabic. The seven Speakers—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, and Saʿīd—have twenty-eight letters. The seven Legatees—Seth, Shem, Ishmael, Joshua, Simon, ʿAlī, and Qaddāḥ—have twenty-eight letters.

The Qurʾān was revealed in seven kinds: abrogating and abrogated, decisive and ambiguous, narratives, reports, and parables. It was recited in seven modes. The circumambulation of the Kaʿba is sevenfold. A person's height is seven spans measured by his own hand, and his breadth likewise; the human face has seven openings. Many more such sevens exist than this epistle can contain. All indicate seven Imams, seven Speakers, and seven Legatees. All begin from one; and that one too is a servant, not the Worshipped One.

As He said, “Your creation and resurrection are only as a single soul.” This signifies the Preceder. The Speaker was made an indication of the Caller, for he precedes the Imam. Likewise the lām returns to the alif; the alif within the lām signifies the Imam. The second alif signifies the Follower; the lām signifies the Speaker, because the Speaker proceeds from the Follower and derives his substance from him. The third alif of “illā” is in the position of the Preceder, and as the fourth of the ranks indicates the Proof, Caller, and Authorized Instructor (al-maʾdhūn).

The alif within the lām has only one rank following it, the Follower. Likewise the Caller returns only to the Imam, and the Speaker returns to the Follower, who stands over all the ranks. In the word Allāh the alif and the two lāms joined to it correspond to the Speaker and Follower, while the final hāʾ occupies the rank of the Speaker's Foundation. Thus he said, “There is no god but God,” negating the other spiritual meanings and indicating his Foundation. He also instructed them to say, “Muḥammad is the Messenger of God,” which consists of three words, for he is third in relation to the Preceder. Its six parts signify that he is the sixth of the Speakers. Its twelve letters signify twelve outward Proofs corresponding to twelve inward Proofs. We examined the Preceder, Follower, Speaker, Foundation, Imam, and Proof, and found them all to be paired servants. We therefore knew that the Worshipped One is other than them.

Through the success our Lord—glorified is He—granted us, we learned that the final hāʾ, marking the completion of the name Allāh, stands with the two lāms and the alif after the Follower, the last and fourth of them, through whom power is completed. No rank has received the designation given to him: the Mahdī, upon whom this supreme name fell through the title “Father of the Qāʾim.” This name can belong only to the greatest and last of the ranks, just as the hāʾ is the end of “There is no god but God.”

Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—did not manifest that Mahdī until the completion and termination of Muḥammad's cycle. He was the last of the cycle of the four concealed ones, through whom their affair was sealed; when it ended, our Lord appeared to the world through sovereignty and humanity.

He indicated Himself through Himself, not through the Mahdī, and from him He manifested the reality. The Foundation was not the end of the ranks, nor did he possess the divine power possessed by the Mahdī, through whom our Lord the Qāʾim, al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance—appeared in his own age.

You know that ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib pledged allegiance to Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān, and dealt with Muʿāwiya on many occasions. In the end he could not overcome Muʿāwiya; rather, Muʿāwiya prevailed against him, his children, and his companions. ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib had more men, greater wealth, and stronger outward connections than the Mahdī. Yet the Mahdī manifested miracles and victory without wealth or men, such as ʿAlī could not perform.

Our Lord, the Qāʾim al-Ḥākim, ruling through His own essence and distinct from His creations—exalted be His remembrance—showed the world a divine power that no Speaker in his age and no Foundation in his time possessed. Abū Yazīd appeared; he was Ḥārith, the Iblīs of that age, and gathered his horsemen and foot soldiers, as the Qurʾān says. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—waited while some of the adherents of falsehood died, others disbelieved, others apostatized, and all were tested. As He said: “We shall certainly test you with something of fear and hunger and loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; give good tidings to the patient.”

All this afflicted the troops of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Then He went out against Iblīs and his soldiers in His visible person and human manifestation, and showed those who understood something of His divine power. Outwardly His followers were then few and weakened by their trials, whereas Iblīs had one hundred thousand households of soldiers, with many men in each. Within a single hour they were like the hollow trunks of fallen palm trees.

Abū Yazīd—may our Lord curse him—was Iblīs. Iblīs was a spirit who set himself in the station of his Creator and disputed with Him. He was the elephant mentioned in the gathering as one who was transformed, because he imitated the Eye of the Age, who is the Preceder. Likewise Iblīs placed a spirit in the station of the Preceder and disputed with him; this teaches us what Abū Yazīd represented. As Muḥammad said: “Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?”—meaning Abū Yazīd. “Did He not make their plotting go astray?”—meaning the Qāʾim. “He sent against them birds in flocks”—meaning servants of our Lord the Qāʾim—“pelting them with stones of baked clay”—meaning the support of our Lord the Qāʾim joined to their firm certainty—“and made them like eaten straw.”

These miracles are not disputed by opponent or ally, Speaker or Foundation. There are further miracles and signs that cannot be explained in the space available. I shall recount them in the Book of the Conduct, concerning the human manifestation of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in every age and time, if our Lord wills.

Thus the sincere knower sees that the ultimate indication proceeds from Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh to the Mahdī, who is the Imam, the completion of God's design, and a servant of our Lord the Qāʾim al-Ḥākim, ruling through His own essence and distinct from His creations. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

After the two testimonies, the Speaker established prayer in five periods, through himself and his Foundation. Many Muslims relate from the Speaker that he said, “Whoever intentionally abandons his prayer three times has disbelieved,” and, “Whoever intentionally abandons prayer three times may adopt whatever religion he wishes.” Yet we have seen many Muslims abandon prayer, including some who never prayed at all, without being called unbelievers. We therefore know that the situation differs from what the report states.

All Muslims agree that when a man leads others in prayer, his prayer is the congregation's prayer, his act their act, and his recitation their recitation. Even in an obligatory matter without which prayer is invalid, the congregation must repeat the prayer if the leader must repeat it. If one man who leads prayer stands in the place of his community, and his prayer

counts as theirs, what then of our Lord—glorified is He—who cannot be included in the categories of likeness? For many years He has neither led people in prayer, nor prayed over a funeral, nor sacrificed an animal at the festival, although sacrifice is joined to prayer in the saying, “Pray to your Lord and sacrifice.” This was established as an obligation.

By leaving it, our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has overturned both things: prayer and sacrifice. He destroys His enemy without these two practices, and He has granted leave to abandon them, for to Him belongs the end and from Him comes the beginning of all affairs. We therefore recognize their abrogation. The festival prayer and the Friday prayer in al-Azhar Mosque—the first mosque built in Cairo—have been suspended. Thus is outward prayer overturned.

As for the inward meaning, you heard in the gatherings that prayer is the established covenant, called ṣalāt because it is a connection (ṣila) between Responders and the Imam, meaning ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib. They cited the saying, “Prayer restrains from indecency and wrongdoing,” explaining that one who is connected to the covenant of ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib ceases to love Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.

But we have seen many people connected to the covenant of ʿAlī who nevertheless loved Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, went to Muʿāwiya, and abandoned ʿAlī. They also said that the covenant in our present age is prayer, for it connects people with our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and that “indecency and wrongdoing” signify Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.

Many people, too numerous to be counted except by the one who received their covenants, have entered the covenant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in our age. Yet they have not abandoned love of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, nor opposition to our Lord and disobedience to His commands. Thus we know that the meaning is other than what we heard in the gatherings. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has overturned the inward meaning we heard, because He permitted all those whom they call Nāṣibīs to express love for Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. A public decree was read before witnesses that anyone who wished to wear a signet on the right or left could do so without objection, both sides being equal before our Lord. You heard in the gathering that right and left signified outward and inward. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has made them equal in rank.

We therefore know that He has abolished the inward just as He abolished the outward. We looked to what would save us from both punishments, and deliver us swiftly from both religious laws, and entered the Garden of Delight He promised us, namely the Proof of the Qāʾim, which encompasses the other ranks.

Know, then, that the true prayer required at five times, whose abandonment three times by any person entails unbelief, is the connection with our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who has no partner, through five ranks: the Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, and Imagination. They are present in our age. This is the true prayer, apart from the outward and inward forms of prayer.

“Whoever dies without knowing the Imam of his age while he is living dies a death of ignorance”: this refers to knowing the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. “Living” means that the Imam is continually present in every age and time. “Indecency and wrongdoing” signify the two laws, outward and inward. Whoever has found our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is prevented by His tawḥīd from looking backward and waiting for the absent non-being.

The saying “Whoever intentionally abandons prayer three times has disbelieved” refers to the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—through three ranks: Dhū Maʿa, Dhū Maṣṣa, and the Wing, who exist and are manifest among the Unitarians in our age, though not among the polytheists.

I shall explain their persons, the persons of their ranks, and the persons indicated by “There is no god but God” and “Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds” in another book, through the support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

Our Lord al-Muʿizz—peace upon his remembrance—said, “I am the seventh of the two weeks, the one who stood over the two pledges, and no week comes after me.” He meant that he was present at the covenant of the Speaker and Foundation. The two sevens are the outward and inward, the two cycles of the religious laws. “No week after me”

means that no further seven of the religious law will be established after him. The affair returns to its Owner, our Lord al-Ḥākim, ruling through His own essence and distinct from His originated beings. Glorified and exalted is He above what the polytheists say.

Next comes almsgiving. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has abolished it for you altogether. You heard in the gatherings of inward wisdom that almsgiving signifies allegiance to ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib and the Imams of his descent, and repudiation of his enemies Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān. But our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—forbade the harming of any Nāṣibī, and a decree was publicly read forbidding the cursing of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.

It was also recited in the gathering that right and left signify the Speaker and Foundation; then the gathering declared that right and left are two paths of error, and that the middle is the path, the ultimate goal, and the middle way.

We therefore know that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has abolished the inward almsgiving centered upon ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib just as He abolished its outward form. True almsgiving is not what all the gatherings indicated. Rather, it is the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the cleansing and purification of your hearts from both conditions, abandoning what you formerly followed.

As He said, “You shall never attain righteousness until you spend what you love.” Righteousness means the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and spending what you love means abandoning the outward and inward. Spending something means parting with it, for what has been spent does not return to its owner.

The outward literalists say that spending means giving dinars and dirhams. Both, however, signify what we have said: the Speaker and Foundation. Whoever does not abandon the absent non-being of the Speaker and the partners of the Foundation will not attain the tawḥīd of our Lord al-Ḥākim, ruling through His own essence and distinct from His creations—exalted be His remembrance.

Fasting: the outward believers and all Muslims hold that the Speaker told them, “Fast when you see it, and break your fast when you see it”. They believe that one who breaks his fast for a single day of Ramaḍān while acknowledging that he has erred must fast two months and ten days as expiation. If he considers breaking that day's fast permissible, he has destroyed fasting in its entirety.

Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has overturned fasting in its entirety for many years, contradicting the report “Fast when you see it and break your fast when you see it.” He commanded us to break the fast on the day which all Muslims believe to be the final day of fasting, without which they do not accept the month's observance. No overturning of fasting could be greater or clearer to anyone who looks, reflects, and considers.

As for fasting's inward meaning, the earlier teachers said that fasting signifies silence, citing the words addressed to Mary, who was the Proof of the Master of her Age: “Eat, drink, and be comforted.” Eating signifies knowledge of the outward and drinking knowledge of the inward; comfort signifies increase. “If you see any human being”—meaning adherents of the outward—“say, ‘I have vowed a fast to the Compassionate,’” meaning restraint or silence; “today I shall speak to no human being,” meaning I shall not address anyone belonging to the outward law.

Likewise “Whoever among you witnesses the month, let him fast it” is interpreted as ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib; the month has thirty days, and ʿAlī has thirty ranks. Whoever knows him and his ranks must keep silent before everyone except trusted brethren.

Yet descriptions of ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib were recited in the gatherings which opponents could not accept. Many obstinate hypocrites left the gatherings and disclosed to the Nāṣibīs, Imāmīs, Zaydīs, Qaṭʿīs, and other opponents what they had heard. We therefore know that what was recited in the gatherings and what the teachers described as inward fasting and its silence has been overturned. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—caused people to break the outward fast and the inward one.

The true fast is different from the two fasts known to the two religious laws. It is the protection of your hearts through the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

No one attains His tawḥīd except by distinguishing thirty ranks and knowing them in both their spiritual and corporeal forms. They are the Word, Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, Imagination, Speaker, Foundation, Completer, Proof, Caller, seven Imams, and twelve Proofs. Together these amount to thirty ranks. Whoever knows these ranks and knows their symbols and their allusions, and knows that all of them are servants employed by our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and that our Lord is their Originator and Owner, transcendent above them, inside them yet outside them, knows that there is none among them except that His strength [or word]—exalted be His sovereignty—is within him. He is distinct from them through His own essence, glorified is He.

There is another explanation, better and higher. When the word tawḥīd is calculated by the lesser numerical reckoning of letters, it totals exactly thirty-two: tāʾ, four; wāw, six; ḥāʾ, eight; yāʾ, ten; dāl, four. Likewise the Will and Volition, the two highest hidden degrees; the Word, Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, and Imagination; seven Speakers, seven Foundations, seven Imams, and three caliphs: these complete thirty-two. At that point our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—manifested His greatest veil, the fourth of the caliphs, Saʿīd son of Aḥmad. Whoever knows these ranks spiritually and corporeally and understands the degree of each knows the tawḥīd of our Lord, the Qāʾim al-Ḥākim, ruling through His own essence and distinct from His creations—exalted be His remembrance.

Pilgrimage: He said, “Pilgrimage to the House is owed to God by people who can find a way to it.” The adherents of the outward law relate from the Speaker that pilgrimage means going to Mecca, standing at ʿArafāt, and fulfilling its prescribed conditions. Yet we have seen things contrary to His saying, “Whoever enters it shall be safe.” They say that the sacred precinct lies in Mecca and extends twelve miles in each direction. Yet we have witnessed killing, plunder of property, and theft even inside the Kaʿba within that precinct. This is contradiction and impossibility. All the conditions they perform in pilgrimage are kinds of madness: uncovering heads, exposing bodies, throwing pebbles, and chanting the response when no one has summoned them. These are madness.

Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—interrupted the pilgrimage for many years and withheld the Kaʿba's covering. To remove a thing's covering is to uncover and expose it, so that the world may understand that what is intended lies elsewhere and that the structure itself brings no benefit.

The teachers of inward knowledge said that the sacred precinct signifies the Call and extends twelve miles in each direction; similarly the Call has twelve Proofs. The House signifies the Speaker, the Stone signifies the Foundation, and seven circumambulations signify acknowledging him through seven cycles. Standing at ʿArafāt signifies knowing them through the Speaker's science. Minā signifies what the seeker wishes for, namely reaching the Speaker, Foundation, and their ranks, the explanation of which would take too long. All their indications concern the Speaker, Foundation, and their ranks. Beginning the circumambulation at the Black Stone and completing it there signifies that the Foundation receives from the Speaker and returns to him.

We have seen our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—abolish pilgrimage by allowing the manifestation of love for Abū Bakr and ʿUmar and the fading of the remembrance of ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib. We heard in the gatherings that the left signifies the Speaker and the right the Foundation. It was also related there: “Do not face the qibla”—meaning the Imam—“when urinating or defecating”—meaning the knowledge of outward and inward. What we heard in the gatherings is thus overturned: pilgrimage is something other than what they believed outwardly and inwardly.

As our Lord al-Manṣūr said in verse:

Come, let me show you the House, and you will know

That it is God's House, not what we imagined.

Is a house made of stones greater in sanctity,

Or the chosen Guide who appointed the House?

The House is the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the dwelling and refuge in which the Worshipped One is sought.

Thus the Unitarians, friends of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—have their spirits dwelling in it. The Lord of the House is our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in every age and time. As He said, “Let them worship the Lord of this House,” meaning our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—“who fed them against hunger,” meaning the outward, “and secured them against fear,” meaning fear of remaining with the Foundation, as the believers who associate others with God allege.

As He said, “Most of them do not believe in God without associating others with Him.” For they say that ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib is our Lord al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance—in our present age. We seek refuge in our Lord from doubt about Him, associating another with Him, and pairing Him with any of the ranks. Glorified and exalted is He above them all.

Jihād: through it Muḥammad established and manifested Islam, making it obligatory upon all Muslims. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has lifted it from the whole community, because its purpose was coercion; Muslims engaged in jihād and polytheistic believers fight you in your own homes and are enemies of the people of tawḥīd. Any jihād in which the Imam of the Age does not participate is abolished for the people.

As for what was recited in the gatherings and written by the teachers, that inward jihād means fighting the misguided, literalist Nāṣibīs, our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has forbidden hostility toward them and disputation with them. We therefore know that He has overturned both the outward and inward forms of jihād.

True jihād is seeking and striving for the tawḥīd and knowledge of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—without associating any of the ranks with Him, and repudiating the absent non-being.

Allegiance (wilāya): He said, “Obey God, obey the Messenger, and those vested with authority among you.” The adherents of the outward law and all Muslims say that allegiance belongs to Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and ʿAlī. It then passed to the Umayyads and returned to the Abbasids. Each time one of them occupied the caliphate, allegiance to him was obligatory upon all Muslims. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—overturned that allegiance, wrote the curse of the first and the last on every door, and exhumed them from their graves.

As for inward allegiance and knowledge of its reality, the gatherings and teachers' books taught that it meant declaring love for ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib and repudiating his enemies. They cited the saying, “Today I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favor upon you”—meaning the inward—“and approved Islam for you as religion,” meaning surrendering the affair to ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib.

Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—overturned this by having a decree read before the assembled witnesses: “Do not prostrate to the sun or moon,” meaning the Speaker and Foundation, “but prostrate to God who created them,” meaning the greatest Proof, who is Volition, “if it is Him you worship,” meaning the greatest Imam, worship being obedience. We therefore know that He overturned the inward allegiance centered upon ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib as well as its outward form.

The Imam is a servant of our Lord—great is His power—as He said, “We have enumerated everything in a manifest Imam.” The One who enumerated everything within the Imam is our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

The outward and inward ranks formerly belonging to the Speaker and Foundation have been assigned by our Lord to His servants and angels, such as “the possessor of the two presidencies,” “the possessor of the two guardianships,” “the possessor of the two majesties,” “the possessor of the two excellences,” and “the possessor of the two ranks”.

All these are indications pointing toward knowledge of Him and His tawḥīd. He wished to show the discerning rational person that every rank formerly assigned to the Speaker and Foundation has been granted to His servants, whereas He is exalted above names and attributes.

All the names people apply to Him, such as Imam, Master of the Age, Commander of the Faithful, and Our Lord, properly belong to His servants. He is higher and more exalted than anything that can be measured, delimited, or described. We employ such titles figuratively, not literally, from necessity rather than to establish attributes.

We say “Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance” because convention and established usage have put this expression upon the tongues of distinguished and ordinary people. If we spoke otherwise, they would not know whom we meant, and their hearts would be blind to it. Yet He—glorified is He—is unlike anything; He is the Most High, the Magnificent.

You, community of Responders and Unitarians who worship our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—must know our Lord alone, without partner; may His peace and mercy be upon us. Then know His ranks and seek His existence for His sake, not the absent non-being, knowledge of which brings no benefit and attachment to which is useless. Yet the world persists in associationism, error, pride, and ignorance. People look without seeing and hear without understanding. May the Lord strike them; they cannot escape His punishment.

Praise and thanks belong to our Lord alone, without partner. His peace is upon us, His greetings with us, and His blessings upon us and all His righteous servants. He suffices us and is the best Trustee. Praise belongs to our Lord in prosperity and adversity.

This book was submitted to the Divine Presence in the month of Ṣafar, year 408 AH, the first year of the manifestation of our Lord's servant and possession, the Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who has no partner and besides whom none is worshipped. Our Lord alone suffices us.

Compared against the exemplar and found correct.

EPISTLE 7 — THE BEGINNING OF TAWḤĪD FOR THE CALL OF TRUTH

الرسالة الموسومة ببدء التوحيد لدعوة الحق

I put my trust in our Lord, the Creator, the All-Knowing, the Most High, the Highest, the Judge of judges, who does not enter thoughts and imaginings. Exalted is His remembrance above the descriptions of those who describe and the comprehension of human beings. The letters of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful” signify the ranks of our Lord's servant, the Imam.

My letter to you, community of brethren who have responded to the Call of our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient—exalted is His remembrance above consort and child—who worship Him and no other, and who have escaped the snare of accursed Iblīs, the contemptible Opponent, his accursed spies, his erring helpers, and his party of devils. Iblīs has no authority over you, his soldiers have no place among you, and his ornamented deceptions have no importance for you. Rather, you are the angels brought near, who have mastered their own souls and restrained themselves from the actions of polytheists.

You are the bearers of the Throne of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. The Throne here means His true knowledge, which is difficult, exceedingly difficult, and cannot be borne except by a sent prophet, an angel brought near, or a believer whose heart our Lord has tested in faith in Him alone. Glorified and exalted is He above what they describe.

Now then: I praise to you our Lord, besides whom we have no lord. I command you and myself to thank Him for His favors and gifts, with the gratitude of one who deserves an increase in this life and the next. I advise you, according to what our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has instructed and commanded me, to discard beliefs that you are no longer required to hold and abandon what you lose nothing by lacking: the extinguished cycles of the past and the obsolete, lifeless religious laws. There was no Speaker among them who did not abrogate the religious law of those who came before him. When Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh, the sixth Speaker, appeared and proclaimed his message, he abrogated all the earlier religious laws and closed the paths. He said that whoever did not abandon the former religion of his fathers and ancestors should be killed and called an unbeliever, while whoever abandoned the law he formerly held and ceased looking back to it received the name of Islam, and in his peace/submission was free of blame. Muḥammad promised them Paradise forever.

The rational and sufficient explanation, the one that brings deliverance, is that the intended indication here is the worship of the Existent One rather than the absent non-being. A human being is the child of his day and hour. In existence lie his rest, worship, life, and the object toward which he points.

Our Lord al-Ḥākim, the Creator and All-Knowing, has abrogated Muḥammad's religious law in its entirety: outwardly for believers endowed with excellence and inwardly for discerning Unitarians.

One whose heart is illumined, whose understanding of affairs is victorious over created beings, and who does not openly practice unbelief under the cloak of hypocrisy, pays no attention to the blaze and exaltation of the religious law or to the splendor of embellished speech. He knows that these are a means of drawing unbelievers on toward their ruin and distinguishing Unitarians from them.

As He said, “So that God may distinguish the impure from the pure.” Although the impure and the pure—that is, the polytheist and the Unitarian—are not hidden from our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—He wished to show the Unitarians which among them would turn back upon his heels. Our Lord knows what is within breasts and what is to come.

A brief proof of the disappearance of the religious law can be given through one matter, for this epistle cannot contain a lengthy explanation. The book known as The Hidden Refutation establishes the abrogation of all seven pillars, outward

and inward, through the power and support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and there is no strength or power except through Him.

Indeed the abolition of almsgiving itself provides an answer to those who ask about the other pillars, for almsgiving is joined to prayer. ʿAbd al-Lāt son of ʿUthmān, surnamed Abū Bakr, attacked the Banū Ḥanīfa with the Emigrants and Helpers, killed the men of Banū Ḥanīfa, plundered their wealth, and took their women captive. ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib, the Foundation of the Speaker, bought from among the captives a woman known as al-Ḥanafiyya—whose name was Tuḥfa, the mother of his son Muḥammad.

He was asked, "ʿAlī, how can you consider it lawful to purchase a Muslim woman who testifies that there is no god but God and Muḥammad is God's Messenger, performs the five prayers, and fasts in Ramaḍān?"

ʿAlī replied, "What benefit are the two testimonies to her or her people, or all the works of the two religious laws, when they have not paid almsgiving? Almsgiving is the religious law in its entirety. Whoever does not pay it must be killed, and his property and family become lawful to us." He cited, "Woe to the polytheists who do not give almsgiving." Thus God removed them from Islam and made them polytheists.

You, community of believing Unitarians, have heard and know the decree that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—ordered read to you. He abolished almsgiving, tithes, fifths, and all other charitable dues for you forever. He did not abolish your duty to preserve one another's inviolability and protection. There can be no clearer rational and visible proof of the abrogation of the religious law. You shall hear the explanation of the abolition of all the pillars and the evident proofs of it, if our Lord wills; through Him comes success in every affair. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

Know that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has removed from you seven obligatory pillars belonging to the law-bound religion and imposed upon you seven religious qualities of tawḥīd:

First, and greatest, truthfulness of the tongue.

Second, protection of the brethren.

Third, abandonment of what you formerly followed and believed concerning the worship of absent non-being and falsehood.

Fourth, repudiation of the Iblises and tyranny.

Fifth, tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in every age, time, epoch, and season.

Sixth, contentment with His actions, whatever they may be.

Seventh, submission to His command in secret and amid events.

Let each of you know that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—sees you from where you do not see Him. Beware, beware that your hearts contradict what your tongues say to your brethren, for that is associationism itself, and associationism is a tremendous wrong. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will recompense you for all your affairs. Do good, command what is right, and know that our Lord does not let the reward of those who do good go to waste.

Know that all the names appearing in the Qurʾān refer to the Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, Imagination, Speaker, Foundation, Imam, Proof, and Caller: ten complete ranks. All of them pointed to ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib, who was the Foundation of the Speaker. They indicated him through the spiritual meaning.

ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib in turn pointed to the final goal and culmination, the Mahdī bi-llāh, Saʿīd son of Aḥmad. The Mahdī spoke with his own tongue and acknowledged in his own age and time that he was a servant and possession of our Lord, the Qāʾim, the All-Knowing al-Ḥākim. May His peace and mercy be upon us.

The Mahdī was an instrument and vessel of the true Call. Something had been deposited in him; the supreme Lord, manifesting Himself to His creatures in a form resembling theirs and according to their condition, took that deposit from him, so that they might perceive some of the power of His station and hear His words from the humanity of the visible form.

But the divinity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—His reality and essential nature, is the Cause-Maker of the Cause of Causes, eternal and everlasting. It is not perceived by imagination, known by understanding, or contained in thoughts and imaginings, nor in prose and verse. Glorified and exalted is He above what they describe.

Know also that all the ranks the earlier teachers arranged in their books and described as spiritual and corporeal were intended to signify the people of outward and inward knowledge. They spoke of higher and lower ranks: “higher” means those who rise above others through knowledge, and “lower” those who have not attained the perfection of true knowledge.

All are known persons existing in our present age, employed within the dominion of our Lord and acknowledging His lordship, worshipping His power willingly or unwillingly. As He said, “To God prostrates whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly.” “Heavens” and “earth” here signify the Speakers and Foundations.

He meant that all their followers acknowledge our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Among them are obedient believers who agree with Him, and among them are unbelieving, associating hypocrites.

To whom belong sovereignty and wisdom today, and on every day? The answer is: to our Lord al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance and mighty His name—besides whom none is worshipped.

Whoever accepts the guidance of the Guide of the world, the servant of our Lord al-Ḥākim, the Most High, is among the successful: those who have attained tawḥīd and escaped impiety, who need not fear the outward or grieve over the associationism of the inward, and who know the secrets of past cycles and of what is yet to come.

Whoever sinks into arrogance, possesses the soul of the wretched, and is overcome by brutish ignorance and obscenity, saying, “We found our fathers following a religion, and we follow in their footsteps,” gains only absent non-being. Such people have not acknowledged the Existent One and have no knowledge of the Unique Worshipped One. They wander among humanity without a worshipped God in heaven or an existing Imam on earth. They have worshipped idols and images, and so deserve lasting punishment from the All-Knowing Creator. Glorified and exalted is He above what they describe.

Community of Unitarians of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the time has come for the manifestation of realities, the exposure of associationism and falsehood, and the abrogation of religious laws and paths. Prepare yourselves to kill the fighters of error, to lead the Zanj in chains, to take women and children captive, and to slaughter their men, through the sword of our Lord the Most High, exalted in majesty and greatness. Glorified and exalted is He above what polytheists and ignorant people say.

This is a complete unveiling through the hand of His servant, the Qāʾim of the Age, who proclaims the explanation, guides to the reality of faith, and takes vengeance upon the polytheists and tyrants by the sword of our Lord and the strength of His authority alone. We seek help from no one else and rely upon none besides Him.

Praise and thanks belong to our Lord alone. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

This epistle was composed in the month of Ramaḍān, in the first year of the Qāʾim of the Age, year 408 AH. Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone; He suffices us and through Him we seek help in every affair.

EPISTLE 8 — THE COVENANT OF THE WOMEN

ميثاق النساء

I put my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim—glorified is He—whose sovereignty is exalted above the rule of imaginings and besides whom none is worshipped.

When I looked upon the community of spiritual ranks through His perfect light, and our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—appointed me Imam over His Call and His servants, I considered His saying: “Were it not for believing men and believing women whom you did not know, whom you might trample and thereby incur blame on their account unknowingly, so that God might admit into His mercy whom He wills—had they been separated, We would have punished the unbelievers among them with painful punishment.”

In what has preceded, the Speakers are the men and the Foundations their women. From another point of view, the Foundations are the men and the Proofs their women. From another point of view, the Proofs are the men and the Callers their women. From another, the Callers are the men and the Authorized Instructors (maʾdhūnūn) their women. From another, the Authorized Instructors are the men and the Mukāsirs their women. All of these are servants who exist in our present age and are employed in the service of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

The act of trampling here means the opening of knowledge of the reality. Were the men of reality not to teach the religious women, no Responders would emerge from among them, and they would remain among the adherents of the law-bound religions. The Speaker would then incur blame through them without knowing it. Through the men of reality teaching the religious women, the women pass from ignorance to knowledge and become among the angels brought near who have mastered themselves and refrained from the actions of polytheists, and among the cherubic bearers of the Throne. Here the Throne means the knowledge of the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—a difficult, exceedingly difficult knowledge borne only by a sent prophet or an angel brought near.

This is the meaning of the saying to the ranks, “You might trample them and incur blame on their account unknowingly.” It means that if you do not open to them the knowledge of the reality, which is the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—they will stop at the religious law of Interpretation and will not be guided to tawḥīd. Remaining at the law of Interpretation is a reproach to their Caller.

“So that God might admit into His mercy whom He wills” means that the Caller of Truth guides whomever he wishes, when he knows that the person is worthy of it.

As for the saying, “Had they been separated, We would have punished the unbelievers among them with painful punishment,” it means that if the Callers were to organize themselves outside the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance, change the Call to Him, transgress their assigned ranks, or speak what they had been forbidden to speak, the unbelievers among them would deserve painful punishment. These are those who cover over the word of tawḥīd with something else. The painful punishment means the renewal of the outward law within their hearts and their expulsion from their stations.

Just as the men of reality and the religious women must repudiate every fault and impurity, so believing men and pure believing women must renounce every defilement, uncleanness, blemish, and abomination. They must obey the Qāʾim of the Age and his spiritual ranks, including the Proofs and unrestricted Callers, and accept from the Authorized Instructors and Mukāsirs what draws them near to the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and brings them to His mercy and worship.

Women must avoid the speech of women who disbelieve in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and deny God. They must guard themselves against suspicions, desires, and the commission of indecencies and wrongful acts, so that

they may benefit from their faith and the goodness of their actions may become manifest in comparison with other women who associate partners with our Lord.

They must repudiate whatever introduces corruption into their religion or brings suspicion upon them and upon their brethren. All believing women must keep their hearts occupied with nothing but the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and obedience to the pure ranks of His religion, who have been appointed for those seeking knowledge. They must not give themselves over to desires or to the wishes of the transgressors.

I have written this epistle for you to read to all believing women, provided they are Unitarians of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who acknowledge His unity, know His eternal self-sufficiency, preserve what has been imposed upon them, guard their private parts except with their husbands, and obediently worship our Lord and their Lord, al-Ḥākim, who rules through His own essence and is distinct from His originated beings. His originated beings are the Speakers, Foundations, Imams, Proofs, and the ranks attached to them. All are servants employed in our present age under the sovereignty of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. There is no god but He, and He is distinct from them all.

Neither a Caller nor an unrestricted Authorized Instructor may read this epistle to a woman until he has examined her belief and religion and had the covenant written for her. Nor may he read it to a woman alone, or in a house containing no one else, lest they be alone together in private, even if both are trustworthy believers.

The Caller and Authorized Instructor must remove grounds for suspicion and evil opinion about himself and put an end to gossip. He must not read it to a woman by herself, but only when several women have assembled, at least three, with the women behind a curtain or veiled, their faces not uncovered. Her husband, if he is a Unitarian, or her father, son, brother, or another Unitarian who holds the appropriate responsibility toward her, should be present.

While reading, the Caller or Authorized Instructor must keep his eyes on the book he is reading, not on the women, and must not turn toward them or eavesdrop on them. The woman should not speak while the epistle is being read to her, laugh for joy, or weep from awe and fear, since her laughter, weeping, and speech may arouse desire in men.

Rather, she should listen to the reading with her ears, reflect upon it with her heart, and distinguish its meanings through her intellect, so that the reality of what she hears may become clear to her. If some part is difficult for her, she may ask the Caller about it. If he knows its meaning, he should answer her. Otherwise he should promise to inquire of someone above him. If he obtains the proof, he should communicate it to her. If not, he should ask the Qāʾim of the Age, if he has access to him, or otherwise the deputy whom the Qāʾim has appointed to stand in his place before the world.

When he learns the answer, he should communicate it to her if he considers her worthy of receiving it.

All Unitarian women must know that the first obligation upon them is knowledge of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and affirmation of His transcendence above all created beings. Next comes knowledge of the Qāʾim of the Age and distinguishing him from the other spiritual ranks. Then comes knowledge of the spiritual ranks by their names and stations, recognizing that the Qāʾim of the Age is first among them and that he appointed them. They obey him, hear from him, and refrain from what he forbids.

Once they know this, they must know that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has removed from them the seven obligatory pillars of the law-bound religion and imposed upon them seven religious qualities of tawḥīd:

First, and greatest, truthfulness of the tongue.

Second, protection of the brethren.

Third, abandonment of what you formerly followed and believed concerning the worship of absent non-being and falsehood.

Fourth, repudiation of the Iblises and tyranny.

Fifth, tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in every age, time, epoch, and season.

Sixth, contentment with His actions, whatever they may be.

Seventh, submission to His command in secret and amid events.

All Unitarian men and women must preserve these seven qualities, act according to them, and conceal them from those who are not entitled to them, after acquiring the knowledge mentioned above and removing all doubt about it.

If the women carry out what has been imposed upon them, preserve it, avoid the forbidden acts, and thank our Lord and their Lord for the favor of attaining His tawḥīd, knowing the spiritual ranks, obeying them all, and repudiating the errant Iblises, they will join the righteous, receive the reward of the angels brought near and the prophets sent forth, and escape the snare of accursed Iblīs.

Praise belongs to our Lord with the praise of those who give thanks. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

Completed.

EPISTLE 9 — THE EPISTLE OF COMMUNICATION AND THE ULTIMATE GOAL IN TAWHID

Risālat al-Balāgh wa-l-Nihāya fī al-Tawḥīd

To all Unitarians who renounce heresy

Composed by the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. He presented a copy to the Divine Presence with his own hand in the month of Muḥarram, the second of his blessed years. It was copied from the handwriting of the Qāʾim of the Age without distortion, substitution, addition, or omission.

I put my trust in our Lord, the Originator of every cause, the Originator of antiquity and eternity, the Abrogator of religious laws and communities—glorified and exalted is He above the sayings of the lowly.

You have heard, community of Unitarians of our Lord—glorified is He—who worship Him alone without another and seek His mercy, what I have recited to you concerning the abrogation of religious laws, the uniqueness of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His transcendence above all created innovations. For all things described, created, and fashioned are necessarily paired, each requiring the other; and all attributes, languages, and admired names apply to corporeal, material, spiritual, psychic, and luminous persons.

The two greatest names in the Qurʾān, according to the agreement of the adherents of religious laws and religions, are Allāh and al-Raḥmān, “God” and “the Compassionate.” These indicate the Caller of Revelation and the Caller of Interpretation; today both are silent.

This is proof of the abrogation of the two religious laws and the invalidation of the two parties, and of the manifestation of the Truth and the pure reality of the Imamate, made visible in the third path. All the Speakers, Foundations, Legatees, Imams, and those attached to them have pointed toward this path: the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. It is an end that cannot be attained. Rather, each of you affirms His unity according to the reach of his intellect, the extent of his ability, and the breadth of his aspiration and thought.

Now falsehood has reached its end; its fire is extinguished, its supports abolished, its pillar broken. Tawḥīd will forever be manifest over all religions, and the worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will prevail secretly and openly.

Beware, beware, community of believers, of doubting our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—or denying His spiritual ranks, disbelieving in Him, opposing His religious standards and soldiers, or associating another with Him. Glorified is He: He has no partner, and none besides Him is worshipped. Know that associationism enters by a hidden passage, through a subtle secret and channel. Not one of you is free from associating others with Him without knowing it, from disbelieving while concealing it, or from denying while showing contempt.

This includes one of you saying that our Lord—glorified is He—is the Master of the Age, Imam of the Age, Qāʾim of the Age, Friend of God, or Caliph of God; or speaking similarly of “al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh,” “peace be upon him,” or “God's blessings upon him,” without understanding the true meaning of these expressions in relation to the Divine Presence. Likewise, asking for money/wealth without necessity, seeking an increase of sustenance when one has enough, raising speech [or presenting a communication] without authorization, or giving information one has not been appointed to convey: these constitute associating others with Him, following custom, and harboring rebellious rancor.

You have heard, community of believers, what our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—made obligatory for you in the Epistle of the Covenant: seven qualities. The first and greatest is truthfulness of the tongue. Therefore do not be among the liars.

Do not be among those who said, “We have heard and obeyed,” yet by their unbelief implanted the Calf in their hearts. The Calf is the opponent of the Guardian of the Age, who stands over all the ranks and is the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. This opponent is called a calf because he is deficient in understanding, hasty in his undertaking, and possessed of a bellow. He imitates the Qāʾim of the Age without truth or proof.

Do not suppose that the opponent is an opponent of our Lord—glorified is He—for He has no likeness, equal, peer, or counterpart. Opposition exists only between things of like form or kind. Our Lord—glorified is His remembrance and exalted His name—is the Cause-Maker of the Cause of Causes, and none but He is worshipped.

He has no likeness among corporeal beings, no opponent among material beings, no equal among spiritual beings, no counterpart among psychic beings, and no station among luminous beings. Neither does a Speaker of legal obligation build for Him, nor does a harsh Foundation support Him and affiliate with Him.

Yet He has shown you something of His power and poured His grace upon you without your having earned any entitlement or possessed any claim against Him. Rather, He bestowed His kindness upon you, brought you near by His mercy, and addressed you face-to-face in human form, outwardly resembling you, so that you might perceive something of His humanity (nāsūt) according to your capacity for knowledge of the Station, and behold Him by the light of completion. Yet you neither perceived Him nor knew Him. Since you have failed to understand the humanity He displayed to you in a form accessible to you, and have not grasped the reality of His human actions, how could you comprehend His universal divinity, encompass His power, or reach the truth of His eternal nature?

Glorified and exalted is He far above the assertions of the polytheists and the limitations imposed by the heretics.

You have heard in outward reports that Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad said, “Faith is speech of the tongue, assent of the heart, and action of the limbs.” You have also heard, community of Unitarians, that Islam is the gate to faith and faith is the gate to tawḥīd, for tawḥīd is the ultimate goal, above which there is nothing. If Islam and faith, though both forms of obligation, cannot be completed without conditions and righteous works, how much more is required for the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the final goal and the steep ascent whose crossing frees the slave? That is, through the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—they are delivered from the empty constructions of the two religious laws, outward and inward.

Whoever claims to be a believing Unitarian yet does not act in a way that pleases our Lord—glorified is He—nor speak truthfully in all his statements, nor do good in all his actions, nor accept our Lord's decree, surrender all his affairs to Him, and rely on Him in prosperity and adversity, is merely a claimant in his words and disobedient in his deeds. He has adopted the name of tawḥīd while practicing association and rivalry, treating religion as diversion and play, inclining toward ease and license, and losing this world and the next. That is the manifest loss.

If you understood what I have required of you concerning truthfulness of the tongue, protection of the brethren, the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and submission to His command, truth would become distinct from falsehood, faith from denial, and unbelief from tawḥīd. In Arabic, faith means assent by tongue and heart, and the tongue expresses what is hidden within. Whoever is untruthful with his tongue is assuredly still more false and hypocritical in his heart.

Know that truthfulness is faith and tawḥīd in their completeness, while lying is associationism and error. Whoever lies to his believing brother lies to his Caller. Whoever lies to his Caller lies to his Imam. Whoever lies to his Imam lies to our Lord—glorified is He. Whoever lies to our Lord—glorified is He—has denied His favor and deserved His wrath.

Lying includes saying of your brother what is not true of him, distorting his words, permitting him something his Imam has forbidden, or saying about our Lord what it would not be permissible to say even of His servant. Such a person has denied grace and faith and openly shown apostasy and rebellion. Far be our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—from polytheistic expressions and false, unbelieving convictions. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

His servant speaks by the strength of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—cleaves open by His support, and binds together by His authority. Whoever opposes His servant, the Qāʾim of the Age, or lies about him has opposed the command of our Lord—glorified is He—and associated another with Him, even if he believes our Lord knows it and is exalted above everything. And whoever lies to his Imam or opposes one of the ranks of tawḥīd while claiming that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—does not know it has departed from the company of the Unitarians and become one of those who disbelieve in His grace and deny His power and majesty. Such a person denies that our Lord—glorified is He—knows the treachery of eyes and what breasts conceal. There is no secret conversation among three but He is their fourth, nor among five but He is their sixth, nor among fewer or more but He is with them. Glorified and exalted is He far above the comprehension of the worlds, the learned, the angels brought near, and all people.

Beware, beware, lest any of you say that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is the son of al-ʿAzīz or Abū ʿAlī. Our Lord—glorified is He—is Himself in every age and time; He appears in human form and visible appearance as He wills and wherever He wills. It is the cause within you that changes as your circumstances change and you take on another form. He—glorified is He—is not changed by the passing of ages, years, or months. What changes for your benefit is the name and attribute, nothing else. His acts pass from potentiality into actuality as He wills: each day He is engaged in an affair—that is, in every age He appears in another form, and one affair does not resemble another.

The light increases, and time is purified of its murk through the power of our Lord—glorified is He—the Originator of origination, Creator of kinds, and Revealer of the obedient Preceder and Follower. He is exalted above attributes and originated things. Directions cannot contain Him, and languages cannot describe Him. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

As for anyone who says and believes that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—handed over His power and transferred His majesty to Prince ʿAlī, and indicated that the spiritual significance belonged to him, such a person has associated another with our Lord—glorified is He—presumed to speak ahead of Him, rivaled Him in His sovereignty, and challenged His rule. How can anyone imagine the transfer of the Eternal of eternities, the Originator of the Cause of Causes, who governs all Speakers and Foundations, from one form to another, or imagine Him entering a garment, as though the Ever-Living who does not die could migrate? Glorified, glorified is the Originator of the angels and the spirit. Whoever among you holds this belief must turn away from it, renounce it, seek forgiveness from our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and sanctify His name.

He is forgiving to anyone who repents to Him and affirms His unity. Glorified is our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—above the encompassing of things; exalted is His authority above the judgments of tongues and imaginations. They do not anticipate His word, but act according to His command.

Let none of you wait for tomorrow or turn back toward yesterday. Yesterday has passed with all it contained; tomorrow you do not know whether you will reach; today is the time in which you are, and it is passing away. Today is a sign of the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who is present, existent, beneficial, and powerful to harm. No one may associate a son or a father with His worship, or point to a veil in which our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is concealed, unless and until He manifests His command and places His wisdom in whomever He wills.

Then none can reverse His decree or disobey His judgment in His earth and heaven. Glorified and exalted is He far above what the polytheists and heretics say.

Know that whoever has made lying habitual to his tongue has associated another with our Lord—glorified is He—for lying is the sign of the person of the accursed Iblīs. The word for lying, al-kadhib, is represented by three letters: kāf, dhāl, and bāʾ. In abjad arithmetic kāf is twenty, dhāl is four, and bāʾ is two; the total is twenty-six, referring to Iblīs and his wife and their twenty-four children who take their places. Whoever gives them allegiance has worshipped them; whoever worships the opponent is repudiated by the Guardian.

Truthfulness is a sign of the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Truthfulness and lying are alike in the number of letters, yet differ in form and meaning. Likewise, the opponent imitates the Guardian in his claims and outward display, but their true natures are different and can be distinguished by certainty.

Truthfulness, too, consists of three letters, as already stated: sīn, sixty; dāl, four; qāf, one hundred. Together these make one hundred and sixty-four. Of these, ninety-nine refer to the rank of the Imamate, as the Speaker said, “God has ninety-nine names; whoever enumerates them enters Paradise.” That is, the Imam of tawḥīd has ninety-nine Callers, and whoever knows them enters the true Call of the Imam, whose people are encompassed by its sufficiency.

Sixty letters indicate the sixty Callers of the two wings, and four indicate four higher ranks: Dhū Maʿa, Dhū Maṣṣa, the Word, and the Gate. Together they make one hundred and sixty-three religious ranks. One remains, indicating the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and knowledge of the humanity of the Station, the complete radiant light, the worshipped One of all creation, the visible form made manifest to human creatures, known among the people as al-Ḥākim. But what can make you understand the reality of al-Ḥākim?

He was not called al-Ḥākim in this form rather than in other forms without reason. One of His servants exercises judgment over all judges: Aḥmad ibn al-ʿAwwām, the judge of outward law. The discerning Unitarians must therefore uncover the meaning of this name, the reality of “the Judge” (al-Ḥākim), and the expression “al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh,” the Ruler by God's Command.

The Qurʾān says, “God calls to the Abode of Peace.” In outward appearance, the greatest caller is Khatkīn, a weak servant; in reality the greatest Caller is the Imam, the possession of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

What, then, is intended by “al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh,” and what is its reality? The Qurʾān admits seven meanings, and each name within it may apply to praiseworthy or blameworthy persons; but the true meaning and reality of the name is our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

“God” as a name signifies the Caller referred to in “God calls to the Abode of Peace.” “Peace” signifies the Imam, and the Abode is the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. “God” as the one named signifies the greatest Imam, who is frequently mentioned in the Qurʾān. “God” as the meaning signifies the Originator of both name and named: the divinity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—which cannot be comprehended and which encompasses the four religious natures while being exalted above them.

Here “God” signifies the universal divinity hidden from us. Yet our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is not absent from His humanity. That act is hidden from us, and that speech is His speech. Divinity does not depart from humanity; rather, you are unable to behold it and lack the capacity to encompass its reality.

By “the Judge” is meant the One who judges over all Speakers, Foundations, Imams, and Proofs, bringing them under His judgment and power. They are servants of His dominion and possessions of His Call. He is Judge by His own essence, and that essence is the reality of His divinity. Glorified is He: He judges by Himself, not on the authority of someone else who commands and forbids.

We offer an analogy in outward form, not in reality, for His reality cannot be reached by imagination or encompassed by understanding. We give this example according to the measure of our capacity so that the Responders may grasp something of the power of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

Consider a speaking, corporeal person who has a subtle spirit attached to a dense body. Through that intellect he governs things, and he himself knows the reach of his intellect. Other people do not know his intellect, its place, or its reality; they perceive of it only what he reveals. The intellect is the subtle spirit, but its manifestation occurs through the dense body. No one can say that intellect becomes visible without a body, because spirit is not perceived except through a body.

Likewise, we have known our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—through the outward manifestation of His humanity, in accordance with our own condition. He addressed us in a form like ours; otherwise we would neither have known nor perceived Him. He displayed to us His visible form and human station. Yet the sovereignty of His divinity is not perceived by the eye, nor known by asking how or where. He knows your secret thought before it stirs in your hearts. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

Therefore, community of Unitarians, practice truthfulness of the tongue, protect the brethren, accept and submit to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in every age and time, and refrain from objecting to anything He does. Even if He demanded that one of you kill his child, that person would be obliged to do so without inward reluctance, for someone who performs an act without accepting it receives no reward for it. Whoever accepts His actions and submits the affair to Him, without acting hypocritically toward the Imam of his age, belongs to the Unitarians, who have no fear from the outward law and do not grieve over the associationism of the inward law.

Beware, beware of polytheistic speech and unbelieving deeds. Do not lean upon a ruined house or sit beneath a defective corner; do not abandon the water that is present to seek bitter colocynth and a mirage that is absent. Otherwise all of you will perish from enduring hunger and complete thirst: that is, separation from the knowledge of Truth and a return to the outward forms of religious law. Seek refuge in our Lord from this—glorified is the Originator of origination, the Gatherer of the scattered, exalted above the heavens and exalted upon the earth.

Soon our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will manifest His sword through my hand, destroy the rebels, and expose the apostates as a spectacle and disgrace before all the world. From those who survive the sword, the poll tax will be collected in humiliation, and they will be made to wear distinctive marks against their will.

There will be three classes of distinctive dress and tax. The opponents [al-nawāṣib] will wear two lead pendants in their ears, weighing twenty dirhams; the end of the left sleeve will be dyed violet, and the annual tax will be two and a half dinars. These are described as the Jews of Muḥammad's community.

Those devoted to esoteric interpretation who remain attached to non-being will wear two iron pendants in their ears, weighing thirty dirhams; the end of the right sleeve will be dyed black, and the annual tax will be three and a half dinars. These are called the Christians of Muḥammad's community.

Those who have apostatized from the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will wear two pendants of black glass in their ears, weighing forty dirhams, a pointed cap made from fox skin, and the chest of their garment dyed a dull, leaden gray. Their annual tax will be five dinars. They are described as the hypocrites, the Magians of Muḥammad's community.

This tax will be taken from old men and young men, women and boys, and infants in their cradles. The pendants will be changed each year, and anyone who disobeys will be beheaded.

This tax will be brought in Egypt to the mosque of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, at the qibla; in Damascus to the mosque of Muʿāwiya; and in Baghdad to the congregational mosque of the city on the western side. Al-ʿAbbās will be seized with the seizure of a mighty, powerful one.

He will be paraded through all the lands until he reaches a city called Balkh in Khurāsān. There our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will be angry with him, the Word will reach its final limit, and the Book its appointed end. He will bark into a golden basin. This will be the day of the Event and of regret. Religious laws will be abolished in their entirety, the eternal doctrine will appear, and our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will be worshipped in all languages and be known by all names and attributes.

A proclamation will be made throughout the regions of the earth and the farthest reaches of the lands: “To whom belongs sovereignty today—and on every day?” The answer will be: “To our Lord al-Ḥākim, the Overpowering, the Mighty, the Compeller.” Glorified and exalted is He above what they describe.

Every soul will be recompensed for what it has earned, and none will be wronged.

Praise belongs to our Lord alone, without partner. Our Lord suffices us and is the best Helper and Supporter.

Its copy was written in the month of Muḥarram, the second of the years of the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance on the polytheists by the sword of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the strength of His authority alone.

The Epistle of Communication and the Ultimate Goal is complete, with the praise and grace of our Lord.

EPISTLE 10 — THE ULTIMATE GOAL AND THE ADMONITION

Al-Ghāya wa-l-Naṣīḥa

I put my trust in the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—and seek His aid in every affair.

From the servant of the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—and His dependent, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—and the strength of His authority alone. We seek help from none besides Him and worship none besides Him, among the first or the last. He is exalted above all Speakers, Foundations, and guiding Imams.

To all who answered the Call of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His worship, and claimed the rank of faith, then turned back and doubted the actions of the Master of the Age, desiring the opponents' abundance of money, children, houses, and women; heedless of the explanation required of them and ignorant of the time of concealment (al-istitār) and trial.

Have you sold religion for figs? Or were your breasts empty of truths and certainty? Have you returned to the first age of ignorance? Has the respite our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—grants the denying polytheists deceived you? Do you imagine that His light has gone out forever and the fire of His enemies has flared up and risen over the worlds? No! You are in a worse position, and our Lord knows best what you describe and what you conceal and believe.

If the whiteness of the foam and its elevation upon the face of clear water have pleased you, the foam's strength will disappear, its whiteness vanish, and its power and harshness pass away. The sweet, clear water will remain, giving life to those who drink it.

If the opponents' affairs and their rise in power have frightened or bewildered you because of what they did to the believers, and you imagined that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance and His name—was powerless against them and unable to overcome them, then you have disbelieved in His favor, denied His divinity and exalted station, and associated with Him Pharaoh, Hāmān, the Calf, and Satan. We seek refuge in our Lord from that and renounce all their beliefs.

You ought to have considered what came in the Qurʾān and reflected on its true meanings. He said to Muḥammad: “Say: Who is Lord of the heavens and the earth?” Here “Lord” means the Proof of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance; the heavens are the Speakers, and the earth is the Foundations. He continued: “Say: God,” meaning the true divinity of our Lord, who cannot be limited or described. “Say: Have you taken protectors besides Him?”—that is, gods—“who possess no benefit or harm even for themselves,” meaning neither outwardly nor inwardly. “Say: Are the blind and the seeing alike?”—that is, the person who associates another with our Lord and the one who affirms His unity. The polytheist is blind to the one he worships; the Unitarian has seen Him according to his capacity.

“Or are darkness and light alike?” The darknesses are the Imams of error, the light is the Imam of guidance, and the lights are the ranks of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. “Have they created a creation like His?” means, have they appointed ranks like those of our Lord? “So that the creations seem alike to them?” means, so that the Call of associationism resembles the Call of tawḥīd. “Say: God”—meaning our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—“is the Creator of everything, the One, the Overpowering.” He has no partner, destroys the domineering by His power, and overcomes them by His exalted station.

“He sent down water from the sky”: knowledge from the Imam. “The valleys flowed according to their measure”: the Proofs beneath him, the valleys whose measure the Imam of the Age established so that knowledge might flow through them to the Responders. “The torrent carried swelling foam”: the foam of outward religion, mixed into the knowledge of realities, which is the torrent of the Proof. “And from what they heat in the fire”: the common people of the outward law, through whom the religious law burns like a fire consuming bodies.

Do you not see that they came with fire to the door of the mosque and burned it? By this was intended the Proof of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who is the door of the world, and the manifestation of religious law against them. Yet when they burned the wooden mosque door, they found inside it a stone door on which fire had no effect and which could not be pierced through the wall. Their expectation failed and their efforts were lost. The door burned by fire indicates the outward form of faith and its first rank, the Caller of Consecration.

When they overcame it through the force of religious law—the consuming fire—the strong stone door appeared: the Imam of the Age. It is a narrow wicket, through which no one may pass unless he is one of its people, a trustworthy inhabitant or rightful possessor. Likewise, the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His worship are indicated by the narrow wicket: none confesses servitude and tawḥīd unless our Lord favors him with it.

“He heats upon it in the fire,” as already mentioned, “seeking adornment”—the ornament of outward religion—“or some article of use,” likewise. “Thus God sets forth truth”—the Imam—“and falsehood”—the opponent. “As for the foam, it passes away as scum”: outward religion. “But what benefits people”—tawḥīd—“remains on earth”: it remains with the Proof and the Unitarians who follow him. “Thus God sets forth parables” means that Callers are appointed, for in necessity the Caller represents the Imam by way of example, not in reality. This is why parables, or likenesses, were given to them.

“For those who answer their Lord”—that is, their Imam—“there is the best reward”: worship. “As for those who do not answer Him, even if they possessed everything on earth”—meaning even if they knew the knowledge of the Foundation—“and as much again”—the knowledge of the Speaker—“they would offer it as ransom”: to escape worshipping our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. “For them is an evil reckoning, and their refuge is Hell”: the Imam of error. “What an evil resting place.”

Therefore, community of Responders, “Do not be like those who divided and differed after clear proofs came to them”—the Call of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. “For them is a great punishment”: their return to the error and ornament of outward religion.

Community of Responders, know that soon you will be questioned, presented before your Imam, and required to account for the conditions of tawḥīd. “As for one of those brought near”—the Unitarians—“there shall be repose and sweet fragrance”: the Imam and his second. The Imam is the life and spirit of the believers; the Caller is their sweet fragrance, from whom they have smelled true knowledge. “And a garden of delight”: the Call of tawḥīd, for the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is everlasting delight.

“As for one of those who deny”—tawḥīd—“and go astray” from the realities of religion, “a welcome of boiling water” means the Call of outward religion, and “burning in Hellfire” means the heart's immersion in unbelief and associationism. “This indeed is the certain truth. So glorify the name of your mighty Lord”: the greatest Imam, Dhū Maʿa.

Community of Responders! I call you to repentance and to ask forgiveness for the doubts you entertained about your religion during the ordeal and concealment. If you repent and patiently endure the trial, that is better for those who are patient. These are the words: “I desire no sustenance from you, nor do I desire that you feed Me. God is the Provider, the Possessor of strength, the Firm.” And: “My people, I ask no reward of you for this; my reward belongs only to the One who originated me.” That is our Lord—exalted be His remembrance, His name, and His authority—al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, who in the reality of His divinity has taken neither consort nor child, who originated and brought forth everything and has power over all things.

“My people, ask forgiveness of your Lord, then repent to Him, and He will send the sky upon you in abundant rain”: He will reveal to you the Imam's knowledge across the ages without concealment or hiding. “He will add strength to your strength”: knowledge to your knowledge. “Do not turn away as criminals”: do not return to associationism. Whoever doubts Him has associated another with Him; whoever associates another with Him has no repentance, ever.

Every Responder to the Call of tawḥīd must join his words to his actions, fill his heart with acceptance and submission, and weave his household with justice and tawḥīd. Whoever enters tawḥīd for ease and license, professing it only with the tongue and without assent of the heart, will be exposed as a liar by the evidence of trial. Whoever turns back upon his heels will not harm our Lord at all. The grateful will be rewarded, and every soul will be recompensed for what it has earned; none will be wronged. The two parties resemble the blind and deaf on one side and the seeing and hearing on the other. Are they equal? Will you not remember?

Let no apostate from the religion of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—imagine that abandoning it will save him from the outward law, or that flight will deliver him from the children of harlots. If God touches you with harm, none can remove it but He; if He intends good for you, none can turn away His bounty. He bestows it on whichever of His servants He wills. He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.

Know that a Responder who apostatizes from the religion of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—because of what he has seen the Turks do to the believers and the respite our Lord has granted them must possess one of three blameworthy qualities.

First: his religion was adopted under compulsion, not from devotion; it was a trial rather than a genuine conviction. Such a person belongs among the hypocrites in the lowest depth of the Fire. He has renounced the Foundation and the Speaker, without acquiring knowledge of the Cleaver and Joiner (al-Fātiq al-Rātiq), nor attaining the Follower or the Preceder.

Second: a man embraced the doctrine and religion of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in hope of gaining wealth or obtaining status and honor. His greed left him upon the brink of a collapsing precipice. He is neither upright in outward conduct nor knowledgeable about the realities, and gains neither the perishing world nor the enduring hereafter.

Third: a man professed His worship and tawḥīd so long as he prospered and sought honor and comfort. When our Lord tried him with adversity, tested him by enemies and their numbers, and restricted his provision—that is, the knowledge of Truth—he said, “My Lord has humiliated me.”

He reflected upon what he believed and upon the grace of the One who originated him, and upon what he had pledged to his Imam and intermediary truthfulness of the tongue, protection of the brethren, acceptance of our Lord's actions however they occur, and submission to the command of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in secrecy and in events. Yet he abandoned his intermediary and Imam out of fear for his life and concern for his person and heart. He therefore joined those who believed, then disbelieved, then increased in unbelief, as though they had never professed Islam or believed in tawḥīd.

The clear Qurʾān says: “O you who believe, fear God”—that is, the divinity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—“and be with the truthful”: the Unitarians who profess submission sincerely, confirm it with the assent of their hearts, and perform good works.

He also said: “It was not fitting for the people of the city”—the Responders to the Call of Truth—“and those around them”—the people of esoteric interpretation who remain with the Foundation—“to stay behind the Messenger of God.” Here the Messenger is the greatest Imam, and “God” here is the divinity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who has gathered the messengers.

Proof that the true Messenger is the Imam is the Qurʾānic statement: “He”—meaning our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—“is the One who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth.” The religion of truth is the religion of the Responders, which guides the world to the true religion: the religion of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His worship. “That He may cause it to prevail over all religion, even if the polytheists dislike it”: those who take a god other than our Lord alongside Him.

You know that four hundred and ten years have passed since Muḥammad, and his religion has not prevailed over every religion. The Jews and Christians are more numerous than the Muslims; the peoples of India, Sind, Zanj, and Abyssinia are more numerous; and the Nubians, the Zaghāwa, and other peoples of the Sudan are more numerous; and the Turks and Slavs are more numerous. If the Messenger were Muḥammad, and the religions of all these peoples were included in his religion, Muslims ought to be the most numerous and dominant of mankind in earlier and later times. Since this is not the case, we know that the true Messenger is the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who guides to Him and is Imam by His command over His servants.

The religions of the polytheists comprise seventy-two sects, whose adherents associate others in worship with our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Our Lord will make His servant victorious over them and take vengeance on them and all the polytheists by the sword of the Commander of the Faithful, if our Lord grants success in all affairs. May the blessings and peace of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—rest upon His servant sent to you, His chosen one preferred above you, and upon all the believing men and women who follow him.

Then He said: “Nor should they prefer themselves to him, for no thirst shall afflict them—”

—that is, the cessation of knowledge among them and their longing for it—“nor fatigue”: hardship in religion—“nor hardship in God's path”: fear of enemies and the concealment from them of their Imam, who is the path to knowledge of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the road to His tawḥīd, and the Proof leading to His worship.

“Nor do they tread a place that angers the unbelievers”: they do not conquer or overcome one of the erring scribes without angering those who disbelieve in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. “Nor do they attain anything against an enemy without a righteous deed being written for them”: an increase in their certainty, which is the righteous deed. “God does not waste the reward of those who do good”: He does not waste the deeds of those who affirm His unity, and He grants them victory over all their enemies.

All the people on earth who worship idols, divining arrows, images, the sun, moon, or gods of fire have a sounder belief and a better end than someone who worships our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—out of greed and expectation, then, when hardship strikes him, apostatizes from His religion and turns backward. Each of those peoples of the age of ignorance has established a direction toward which they bow, making it an object of worship and claiming that it brings them near to the god hidden from them. They were right at least in indicating that there must be an existent object of worship to mediate between them and the hidden god and serve as a veil between them and Him.

Consider the meaning. Reason does not permit the veil of the worshipped One, the existent Station, to be something without knowledge or understanding. For the veil is the veiled one, and the concealed one is the veil; this is that, and that is this, without distinction. Yet those who oppose cannot perceive His being, since He does not resemble them in a manner they can apprehend.

Each of them looks toward Him according to his weakness, incapacity, and the extent of his intellect. Thus these people of the age of ignorance have, at any rate, an existent object of worship and an absent, nonexistent god toward whom they point, whose punishment they fear, and whose mercy and reward they hope for.

Those who apostatized from the religion of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—doubted Him and disliked His actions are apostates who belong neither to this group nor that. They are neither with Muslims, Christians, or Jews, nor with the Unitarians who worship the Existent One. They have lost both outward and inward paths and have not reached knowledge of what is to come. They have no god in heaven and no Imam on earth. That is the manifest loss.

He said: “Had a word not gone forth from your Lord, judgment would have been made between them concerning their differences”: this means the Imam and his Word. The Unitarian is distinguished from the polytheist, and the believer from the unbeliever, in adversity and prosperity, not merely in honor and ease. All people profess faith with their tongues while deceiving the Unitarians and evading them like foxes. They swear by God that they did not say it, utter the word of unbelief, and attempt what they cannot attain. They disbelieved after their Islam—that is, after their

submission—because they hoped to see the Unitarians destroyed. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—did not grant them their hope; He will abase the polytheists and aid the Unitarians.

Muḥammad said: “If your Lord had willed”—that is, the Lord of the worlds, the divinity of our Lord—glorified is He—“everyone on earth would have believed, all together”: all would have confessed the worship and tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and everyone attached to the Foundation would have believed in Him. Then he said: “Would you compel people until they become believers?” No soul believes except by God's permission: that is, through the hand of the Caller. He places defilement upon those who do not reason. Defilement means the spiritual opponent; whoever lacks knowledge of the Universal Intellect, Dhū Maʿa, belongs among those associated with the subtle spiritual opponent.

You should have reflected upon two reports transmitted from Muḥammad, the possessor of the religious law.

He said, “My love has mingled with the blood and flesh of my community, so that they prefer me to fathers and mothers.” A similar report about Iblīs says that he is a subtle spiritual being whose power enters the channels of blood until it reaches people's breasts.

If the possessor of the religious law is a subtle being whose love mixes with people's blood and flesh, and Iblīs is a subtle spiritual being whose power mingles with the blood of the world and whispers within their breasts, what difference is there between the Guardian and the opponent when the power of each is one? Had you distinguished and reflected upon the meanings of these statements, you would have distinguished the speech of the Messenger from that of Iblīs, and the actions of the Imam from those of the arrogant one (ghaṭrīs). You would have understood Saturday and Thursday, repudiated Pharaoh and the foul Hāmān, recognized the exalted station of Idrīs, and worshipped our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the Originator of the ḥinn, the jinn, the binn, and humankind.

The Messenger here is the Imam whose obedience is obligatory, below the greatest Imam. Iblīs is the one who imitates our Lord—glorified is He—claims a kindred nature, and asserts a covenant over the Muslims. The greatest Imam is Dhū Maʿa, so called because he received the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—without intermediary.

The arrogant one is Shantakīn al-Darazī, who presumptuously claimed the Unveiling without knowledge or certainty. He is the opponent whom you heard would emerge from beneath the Imam's garment, claim his rank, and bellow without possessing a state; then his fire would be extinguished.

Al-Darazī had been among the Responders until he became arrogant and insolent and emerged from beneath the garment. The garment is the Caller and the secret entrusted to him by the Imamate of Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, the Guide to the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—glorified and exalted is He. Out of envy and admiration for his own spirit, al-Darazī claimed the Imam's rank and spoke the words of Iblīs.

Al-Darazī first named his spirit “the Sword of Faith.” When I rejected this and explained to him that the title was impossible and false—for faith does not need a sword to aid it, whereas believers need the sword’s strength and support—he did not give up the title. Instead, he grew more disobedient. He manifested the conduct of an opponent and adopted a name of associationism. He said, “I am the master of the guides,” meaning, “I am better than my Imam, the Guide.” He was deceived by the counterfeit dinars and dirhams he used to mint and supposed that the affair of tawḥīd, like coinage, could tolerate fraud.

He refused to prostrate before the one whom our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—had appointed, guided, chosen, and made His deputy in religion, entrusted with His secret, and made the guide to His tawḥīd and worship. He arrogantly opposed the religion and raised the sword of the Speaker and Foundation together, seeking leadership and a pleasing title by revealing religious law in the world of the simple and the dense.

Pharaoh is al-Bardhaʿī, and Hāmān is ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥabbāl. For Pharaoh was the Caller of his time; when the Speaker delayed, he said, “I am your highest lord”—that is, “your greatest Imam.” Hāmān opened for him the gate of disobedience.

Idrīs is the one whom He raised to a high station: the elevation of his rank in knowledge until he became an Imam below the greatest Imam, from whom he received knowledge through Dhū Maʿa. He is the Qāʾim of the Age, Guide of the Responders, servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His chosen one without a corporeal intermediary.

Once you know this, you will know our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—as the Originator of the ḥinn, who are the Callers; the jinn, who are the Authorized Instructors; the binn, who are the Mukāsirs; and mankind, who are the Responders, in the meaning intended here.

Saturday indicates the Preceder: ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Luwātī, the Caller. Thursday indicates the Follower: Mubārak ibn ʿAlī, the Caller.

The people of esoteric interpretation claim that the Word is the Preceder and the Preceder is the Word, with no difference between them. They know nothing above it, for the three ranks—Dhū Maʿa, Dhū Maṣṣa, and the Wing—are hidden from the eyes of their hearts. They look toward them but do not see.

Community of Responders to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—I have conveyed guidance to you and called you to the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in seventy ages. In every age our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—made me appear among you in another form, under another name, and speaking another language. I know you, but you do not know me, nor do you know yourselves.

Now the cycles have revolved, and the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the Light of Lights are being made manifest to you. He has shown you what lay buried beneath the wall. Praise and thanks belong to our Lord alone. Do not deny the miracles and signs of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Do not turn toward yesterday, for yesterday has passed with what it held. Tomorrow you do not know whether you will reach; today you are in the time whose demands you must meet.

If people possessed intellects, they would have distinguished the miracles our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—permitted me to perform on the day of the mosque.

I sent twenty men to the judge carrying an epistle, a copy of which had been presented to the Divine Presence. The judge refused and acted arrogantly, becoming one of the unbelievers. About two hundred soldiers and civilians gathered against my young men and messengers, who were Unitarians of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Every one of the crowd carried some weapon. Only three men among my companions were killed, while seventeen Unitarians remained in the midst of two hundred unbelievers. Yet they could do nothing to them except look upon them with their own eyes, until my companions returned safely to me; the rebels were unable to seize them.

You have heard what happened at the house, which I made a miraculous sign for my companions. He said: “There was a sign for you in two groups that met: one fighting in God's path”—those struggling for the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—“and another unbelieving, whom they saw as twice their number with their own eyes. God strengthens with His victory whom He wills. In this is a lesson for those who have sight.”

If the Qurʾān speaks of a believer being aided against two unbelievers, what of its praise of the companions and its urging them to fight? It says: “O Prophet, urge the believers to battle. If twenty of you are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred unbelievers, for they are a people without understanding.”

Thus the Qurʾānic statement is confirmed: the lesser miracle is one man struggling against two, and the greater miracle is one man fighting ten. “In this is a lesson for those who have sight.” I am therefore most entitled to the complete and true miracles from which believers should draw lessons and upon which they should reflect.

At the mosque there gathered Turks wearing breastplates, mail, helmets, and armor, along with soldiers and civilians—more than twenty thousand men. They prepared to fight for an entire day with naphtha and fire, arrows and stones, and ladders for scaling the walls.

Those who remained with me that day numbered twelve people, including five elderly men and small boys who did not fight. We killed three polytheists and wounded an innumerable multitude of them, until the battle became long and arduous for the small Unitarian band. Lives were ebbing away and reaching the throat; they feared the numbers of the opponents, the rebels, and the ascendancy of the wicked hypocrites.

I reminded you, community of Unitarians: “Today I have perfected your religion for you” through struggle, “completed My favor upon you,” and approved submission to His command through struggle. Nothing strikes us except what God—our Lord—has prescribed for us; in Him let the believers put their trust.

Community of Unitarians, He said: “Fight the leaders of unbelief, for they have no faith [or binding oaths], so that they may desist.” “Fight a people who broke their pledges”—that is, their covenant—“and intended to expel the Messenger”—the Qāʾim of the Age—“and began against you the first time”: the assault at the mosque. Do not fear them; our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is more worthy of your fear if you are believers. “God will punish them by your hands, disgrace them, give you victory over them, and heal the breasts of believing people.”

Before I had finished speaking to them, the command of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—arrived, and He manifested His power to the worlds. Those in heaven and on earth were struck senseless, and the hypocrites turned back on their heels, retreating disappointed. Praise and thanks belong to our Lord for all eternity.

By God, by God, community of Responders, be patient and steadfast in hardship and adversity, severity and ease. Awaken one another, repent to Him with a repentance after which there is no return, and ask Him not to punish you for your evil intentions, to pardon your past sins, and to keep you firm in His worship and tawḥīd.

Hold fast to what I have commanded you in my writings: truthfulness of the tongue, protection of the brethren, acceptance of whatever our Lord does, and submission to His command secretly and openly. Then you will be among His righteous servants, who have no fear of outward religion and do not grieve under the conditions of inward religion. May He have mercy upon us, upon you, and upon all who believe in Him and affirm His unity.

Praise and thanks belong to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in prosperity and adversity, severity and ease. He is the Helper; reliance upon Him is the ultimate aim and hope.

Written in the month of Rabīʿ al-Ākhir, the second of the years of the servant and possession of our Lord, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of the Commander of the Faithful and the strength of His authority alone, without partner.

Completed with the praise of our Lord alone.

EPISTLE 11 — A BOOK CONTAINING THE TRUE MEANINGS OF THE APPARENT JESTING BEFORE OUR LORD

Kitāb fīhi Ḥaqāʾiq mā Yaẓhar Quddām Mawlānā Jalla Dhikruhu min al-Hazl

This is through the support granted to the Qāʾim of the Age, who manifests the Word and its explanation—peace be upon his remembrance. Praise belongs to our Lord alone and to the strength of His authority.

I put my trust in our Lord, the Most High, the Supreme, the Judge of judges, who does not enter thoughts or imaginings. Exalted is His remembrance above the descriptions of those who describe and the comprehension of creatures.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. The attributes of His servant, the Imam.

Praise and thanks belong to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. I seek His help in religion and worldly life, and to Him is the return: He who gives life and causes death, the Living who never dies, exalted in heaven and exalted upon earth, governing it. In Him I trust and seek aid; to Him is the final return, and He is the Helper.

May the blessings and peace of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—be upon the one He chose from His creation, selected from His servants, and made inheritors of their enemies' dwelling through His power and authority. He is the Judge, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Overpowering, and He has power over all things.

Now then, community of Unitarian brethren—may our Lord help you to obey Him—a note has reached me from certain Unitarian brethren, whose numbers may our Lord increase, whose deeds may He purify, and whose intentions may He improve. In it they report what is being said by those who have departed from religion—those who deny the realities of transcendence and interpret customary practices in ways resembling their corrupt deeds and the inclinations of their base religions. They speak about the actions of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and what takes place before Him, although these actions contain wisdom directed toward various ends. They cannot distinguish the ignorant world from the wise, and they count certain deeds as jesting.

They do not know that all the actions of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—are profound wisdom, whether serious or playful, and that He brings their wisdom forth and makes it manifest after a time.

Had they reflected upon the reports transmitted from Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Manāf ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, they would have understood the warning: Beware of associating others with God and denying Him by allowing doubts about His actions, whatever they may be, to arise in your hearts.

Do not criticize the Imam for an action of his, even if you saw him riding a reed, his garment tucked up behind him, playing knucklebones with children. Beneath that is profound wisdom for the world and a distinction between the wronged and the wrongdoer.

If such a statement applies to Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad and his descendants and ancestors, all of whom are servants of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—how much more does it apply to the actions of the One whom imaginings and thoughts cannot comprehend at all, and to His divine wisdom, whose symbols and signs point to the invalidation of religious ordinances, the destruction of buffaloes (al-jawāmīs), and the distinguishing of peacocks (al-ṭawāwīs)?

Praise belongs to our Lord for the grace He bestowed upon us without our deserving it. We ask His pardon and forgiveness for the ugly deeds and evil words that come from us. We seek refuge in Him from associationism and error. He is the Guardian of that and has power over it, the High, the Exalted.

If they looked at the actions of our Lord—exalted is His power—with the eyes of Truth and reflected upon His signs by radiant light, His divinity, eternal power and everlasting sovereignty would become apparent to them. They would escape the net of Iblīs and his erring troops. They would perceive the wisdom of our Lord's riding and actions, recognize the pure reality in His seriousness and jesting, and know the ranks of His spiritual hierarchy and what the

outward appearances of His affairs indicate. Exalted is His remembrance and His name, and none besides Him is worshipped.

I shall explain what He has manifested of His wisdom, unlike anything known of Him in every age and time. The common people speak of the actions of kings: growing the hair, wearing wool, and riding a donkey with a saddle decorated neither with gold nor silver.

These three practices have a single meaning in reality. Hair signifies the outward aspects of Revelation; wool signifies the outward aspects of Interpretation; donkeys signify the Speakers.

As He said to Muḥammad: “My son, establish prayer and give alms; command what is right and forbid what is wrong. That is among the matters requiring resolve. Do not turn your cheek away from people, and do not walk arrogantly on the earth. You will not pierce the earth or reach the mountains in height. All of that is something your Lord has warned against. Be moderate in your walking, and lower your voice, for the most repugnant of voices is the voice of donkeys.”

The common people believe this verse recounts the words of the wise Luqmān to his son. They lie and distort the statement. Rather, it is the speech of the Preceder, who is Salmān. The Speaker was called his son because of the rank of instruction and the transmission of spiritual substance. All the chiefs and Legatees are children of the Preceder, the first originated being, Salmān.

He said to Muḥammad, “Establish prayer,” pointing to the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His ranks and Callers. “Command what is right” means His tawḥīd. “Forbid what is wrong” means the Speaker's religious law and its ordinances and obligations. “That is among the matters requiring resolve” means the realities and the salvation of souls from the speech of the Speaker.

“Do not turn your cheek away from people”: the cheek is the face of the Preceder, and turning it aside means diminishing his excellence. “Do not walk exultantly on the earth”: exultation means negligence and playing with religion; here the earth is the right wing, the Caller to pure tawḥīd. “You will never pierce the earth” means you cannot invalidate the Call of tawḥīd. “Nor reach the mountains in height”: the mountains are the three sacred Proofs, and the fourth is the Preceder, whom the world worships apart from those three. Above them is the greatest Proof, whose true name is Dhū Maʿa, because his heart received tawḥīd and power from our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—without a human intermediary.

“Moderate your walking”: diminish and conceal your Call in the outward world, where it moves like a black ant upon black cloth on a dark night. This is associationism itself, like fire falling into dry tinder: its light is not perceived until destruction has occurred.

Likewise, love of religious law, listening to its ornaments, and attachment to its ordinances work through the limbs and flow through the veins. As the Speaker said with his tongue, through the power of Iblīs and his authority, its subtlety courses through the veins like blood until it takes hold of the heart and leads all the worlds astray.

The Speaker said, “My love has mingled with the blood and flesh of my community, so they prefer me to their fathers and mothers.” We have seen that the two reports have one meaning. In the Qurʾān He said, “Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind.” Here the Lord of mankind is the Follower, who in Muḥammad's age was al-Miqdād. “The King of mankind, the God of mankind, from the evil of the retreating whisperer”: the ornament of the Speaker, who whispers into the breasts of people—that is, Callers, Authorized Instructors, and Mukāsirs—so as to turn them away from the tawḥīd of our Lord al-Ḥākim, who rules by His own essence and is distinct from His originated beings. His essence is His true divinity, which cannot be perceived or sensed. Glorified and exalted is He.

“Lower your voice”: reduce and conceal your proclamation of religious law.

“The most repugnant of voices” means the Call of outward religion. “Is the voice of donkeys” means the worst, ugliest, and most detestable speech: the proclamation of the blameworthy religious laws in every age and time. From them arise resemblance, opposition, and the claim of shared kind.

The outward appearance of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in wearing wool and growing His hair indicates the outward ordinances that have been practiced and the attachment of the people of Interpretation to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and their worship of him. Riding a donkey signifies the manifestation of Truth over the laws of the Speakers. Saddles without gold or silver indicate the invalidation of the two laws of the Speaker and the Foundation. Iron decorations on the saddles signify the manifestation of the sword over all followers of religious laws and their invalidation.

There is also His outward use of the desert and His departure on that day from the underground passage to the garden, and from the garden into the world, without passing through the other gates.

No one has access to or knowledge of the underground passage and garden from which our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—emerges, except those who serve them or are among their intimates. This signifies the beginning of our Lord's manifestation in unity and His direct exercise of self-sufficiency through the two ranks that had been hidden from the world, except those who knew them through symbols and signs: Will and Volition.

As He said: “When He wills a thing, His command is only to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is. Glorified is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things, and to Him you return.” Will is Dhū Maʿa, and Volition is the rank that follows him. He also said: “You do not will unless God wills.” Only the Unitarians of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—know these two.

From the underground passage He emerges into the garden. Likewise knowledge proceeds from Dhū Maʿa to Dhū Maṣṣa, who is like a garden possessing trees and rivers.

Then He proceeds from both to al-Maqs. The first garden He encounters is that of Barjawān, called al-Ḥijāzī, but He does not enter it or circle it as He passes. This signifies the Eternal Word.

He then proceeds to the garden known as al-Dakka. It signifies the Preceder, who is the platform of the world and the source of their knowledge, since they know nothing above him. This garden lies beside the sea, and knowledge of Interpretation is likewise like a sea.

When the Responder to the covenant attains knowledge and recognition of the Preceder, he imagines he has reached the ultimate end and goal of worship. Yet the garden of al-Dakka, despite its splendor, adjoins a place of indecency and wrongdoing unlike the other gardens. This signifies that the knowledge of the Preceder is connected with the Speakers, who are sources of the perishing, literalist ordinances and base, obscene deeds.

Al-Maqs signifies the Speaker. The indecency and wrongdoing there signify his religious law. The corrupt women there signify the Callers to the outward forms of his law and the animal appetites practiced in obedience to him.

Then He—upon us be His peace and mercy—proceeds to al-Ṣināʿa, entering by one gate and leaving by another. Al-Ṣināʿa signifies the possessor of the religious law. The public is forbidden to enter and leave it because of its connection to the law. Our Lord's entry by one gate and departure by another signify the prohibition and suspension of that law.

Then He—upon us be His peace and mercy—circles the garden called al-Ḥijāzī. It signifies the Eternal Word, and circling it signifies reaching the Unveiling without a veil enclosing religion.

Then He—exalted is His authority—reaches the palaces: two great ruined palaces, signifying the invalidation and ruin of the two religious laws.

He—upon us be His peace and mercy—enters through the gate of the garden called al-Mukhtaṣṣ. It signifies the Follower, for the Follower possesses the knowledge of the Foundation and Interpretation. Much of the world inclines

toward him. He is the prime matter (hayūlā) of the material world. Some of the Shīʿa believe in and worship the Follower; others say the Follower is our Lord. This is unbelief and associationism.

The Follower is the one whose reality people have failed to know. The garden called al-Mukhtaṣṣ adjoins the garden called al-ʿAṣṣār. The latter signifies the Speaker, who presses the knowledge of the Follower, bringing out from it Truth and tawḥīd, but conceals it from the ignorant world and shows them the dregs, oil-cake suitable only for beasts.

The garden called al-ʿAṣṣār is ruined, lacking fruit, trees, fragrant herbs, and produce. The garden of al-Mukhtaṣṣ, by contrast, is flourishing with fruit, flowers, fragrant herbs, and trees. Water flows from it into a basin where beasts drink. The water is knowledge, the basin is the spiritual substance flowing from the Follower, and the beasts are the Speakers and Foundations. Likewise knowledge proceeds from the Follower to the Foundation in every age and time. The Preceder supplies the Speakers, from the Cleaver to the Joiner, and from the witnessing Preceder to the seeking visitor.

These two gardens stand between the mosques known as Masjid Tibr and Masjid Raydān. Masjid Raydān faces the garden of al-ʿAṣṣār; Masjid Tibr faces al-Mukhtaṣṣ. Masjid Tibr signifies the Speaker. Tibr means gold, and gold signifies the removal of his religious law. No congregational prayer has ever been performed in this mosque, indicating that neither the Speaker nor his followers are connected to tawḥīd.

Masjid Raydān signifies the Proof of the Unveiling, who rises with sword and force, calling to the tawḥīd that all the worlds deny.

As the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—spoke in the Qurʾān through the tongue of the sixth Speaker: “On the day when the Caller summons to something terrible and unfamiliar.” This signifies the worship and tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—which all Speakers, Foundations, and Imams of unbelief denied.

The servant of our Lord also said in his Book: “Fight the leaders of unbelief, for they have no faith, that they may desist.” That is, they have no faith consisting in knowledge of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Faith is assent, and the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is difficult: no sent prophet, perfected Legatee, just Imam, or angel brought near can bear it, but only a pure, discerning heart or a willing, responding Unitarian who worships none besides our Lord—exalted be His remembrance in the true reality of realities, abandoning the religions and paths he formerly followed and worshipping the Lord of the Foundation and Speaker, the Originator of the Follower and Preceder, the One who judges over all Speakers and religious laws, distinct from all created and originated beings. Every thing has an opposite before Him.

Opposite the falsehood represented by the garden of al-ʿAṣṣār, which signifies the Speaker, stands a truth that rises above it: Masjid Raydān, which signifies Dhū Maʿa. Opposite the truth represented by the garden of al-Mukhtaṣṣ, which signifies the Follower, stands the one who seeks to corrupt it: Masjid Tibr, the Speaker. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will aid His friends and destroy His enemies and perfect His light, though the polytheists attached to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the unbelievers attached to the Speaker and his non-being dislike it.

Raydān consists of five letters, indicating five ranks: psychic, luminous, spiritual, material, and corporeal. Dhū Maʿa is the Universal Psychic Intellect; Dhū Maṣṣa is the Spiritual Soul; the Right Divine Wing, the greatest Gate, is the Preceder; and the Follower is the mine of sciences, the mine of knowledge and its beginning.

Raydān may also be divided into two words, ray and dān. Ray signifies the things: the Proofs, Callers, Authorized Instructors, and Mukāsirs. As the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—said: “We have enumerated everything in a clear Imam.” The real things, the eternal religion, and everlasting tawḥīd are in the hands of Raydān on the Day of Religion, and he is the servant of our Lord and of all creation—exalted is His remembrance and name; none besides Him is worshipped.

Glorified and exalted is He above being a Judge of Religion, a Sultan, a Proof, Allāh, or al-Raḥmān in the sense applied to His servants, since all of them are His servants throughout the cycles, asking His forgiveness at night and before dawn, and worshipping Him willingly and unwillingly in public. Glorified is He above the comprehension of imaginings and thoughts, above being known by outward proclamation or hidden secrets, above inward or outward manifestation in the ways creatures imagine, for even part of His humanity cannot be comprehended, nor the power of His majestic Station or the grandeur of His divinity.

No mosque among the mosques had its dome fall and its entire structure collapse except Masjid Raydān. Our Lord—glorified and exalted is He—commanded that its dome be rebuilt and increased its length, breadth, and height. This signifies the demolition of outward religious law by the hand of His servant who dwells there, and the establishment by our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—of the Truth in open, unveiled form, and the beginning of the spiritual law in a simple, spiritual, Unitarian, divine world governed by Him. None besides Him alone is worshipped; none is associated with Him secretly or openly. Glorified and exalted is He far above what the polytheists say.

Then our Lord—upon us be His peace and mercy—appeared to us in human manifestation. His dismounting from the donkey and mounting another near the mosque gate signifies the change of religious law, the establishment of tawḥīd, and the manifestation of the spiritual law by the hand of His servant and possession, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord and the strength of His authority alone, without partner.

His standing still is only an outward appearance. Far be He above standing, walking, sitting, sleeping, or waking. “Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth”: that is, the Speakers and Foundations. “Who can intercede with Him except by His permission?” That is, who can authorize a Caller or an Authorized Instructor except by His will? “He knows what is before them and what is behind them”: from Adam to Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl. “They encompass nothing of His knowledge”: that is, His Proof, “except what He wills”: Volition, the greatest of the ranks.

“His Throne extends over the heavens and earth”: the Throne is the divine support reaching the higher ranks. “Their preservation does not weary Him”: the right wing and left wing. “He is the High, the Magnificent”: higher than all who were mentioned before and after, whom the polytheistic Shīʿa behold.

He stopped beside the milestone. The milestone signifies divine support, since milestones are used to find one's way along the road. Likewise support passes from the Worshipped One to the servant and returns to existence. His dismounting beside the mosque gate points to His servant, the Gate, who is a veil before His creation and calls them to Him through His support and command. Support is the exalted command that operates without human intermediary.

The gate signifies the Proof. His dismounting from one donkey and mounting another occurred at the time of the midday call to prayer; the midday prayer signifies the removal of outward religious law.

Your point of reliance should be the place where He changed mounts. It is called the Praiseworthy Station, the Existent Shrine, and the sweet spring from which people drink. It leads to the palace of our Lord al-Ḥākim in His own essence, the Praiseworthy Station facing the gate of a spiritual law and wise sciences. I shall explain these in another book, if our Lord grants success in all affairs. There is no power or strength except through Him; He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

Then our Lord—upon us be His peace and mercy—must, on each ride, return to the gardens known as al-Maqs. This signifies the manifestation of the third formation, emerging from the unbelief and associationism of the outward and inward paths: the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

His entering the palace by the very gate and underground passage from which He departed signifies the establishment of the command, the unveiling of the paths through written covenants, and the return of the affair to its origin: a spiritual reality without obligatory ordinances, satanic religious laws, or the ornaments of Hāmān. May our Lord protect us and

you from doubting Him or associating others with Him, through His grace and favor. He is the Guardian of that and has power over it.

As for His outward descent into Egypt and what we witnessed, the erring Satan—may our Lord curse him—took hold of the hearts of the literalist common people and their foolish, law-bound minds through the talk of the mounted attendants (al-rukkābiyya) in the presence of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Their foolish minds retained only the joking and playful words, not knowing that profound wisdom lay within them, though warnings avail them nothing.

His journey began at the three shrines. In them there is neither call to prayer, nor commencement, nor congregational prayer, except in the middle one, which is the straightest method and safest path. Whoever follows it is saved; whoever remains behind perishes and goes astray.

Then He—upon us be His peace and mercy—proceeds to Rāshida, where there are likewise three buildings of differing construction. The best, most knowledgeable, and most excellent is the middle mosque, where the preacher performs the Friday prayer and five prayers are offered according to the pillars of the days. It signifies the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the establishment of five higher ranks; it is the sign of the Proof of the Unveiling.

The two mosques beside it differ in construction and signify the Speaker and Foundation. In the ordering of the ranks, the Speaker is superior to the Foundation; but in the ordering of the inward teaching and its symbols, the Foundation is greater in importance for reasoning and explanation. When tawḥīd appeared, the power of both was removed.

The place is named Rāshida, “the Guided,” because through knowledge of the Proof, his guidance, and learning from him, the Responders are rightly guided and reach the ultimate goal of the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

Then He—upon us be His peace and mercy—circles this middle mosque in outward appearance, signifying support for His servant. In front of the mosque is a steep ascent, difficult for those who climb it. There is no road to al-Qarāfa except over this ascent. It signifies repudiation of the Iblises, possessors of the ornaments and ordinances of religious law. There is no salvation for the world except by repudiating them. The road up this ascent is extremely difficult, yet through it the slave is freed: that is, one is delivered from the two laws, outward and inward.

What they see of His stopping among the Sufis, listening to their songs, and watching their dancing signifies the religious law that has been practiced, which is ornament, diversion, and play. Its destruction has drawn near.

As for the well of al-Zaybaq (Mercury), it signifies the Speaker. At its top it is broad, but at its bottom it is narrow. Likewise entry into religious law is easy and broad, while escape from it is difficult and narrow. Yet whoever reflects upon this well, knows its secret, and grasps its meaning, and whose salvation our Lord wills, may emerge through its opening, which signifies the Foundation.

Everyone necessarily falls into religious law; our Lord saves from it through His mercy whomever He wills. As the Speaker said in the Qurʾān: “There is none of you who will not come to it”: religious law. “It is a decree binding upon your Lord”: the Preceder. “Then We shall save those who were God-fearing”: from the Speaker. “And leave the wrongdoers”: the people of outward law, “there on their knees”: perpetually bewildered and sorrowful.

Whoever escapes safely from this well takes some of the debris for his use. Likewise, whoever has been subject to religious law and to the knowledge and symbols of Interpretation, but escapes the doubts of both and understands what they were intended to signify, reaches tawḥīd and benefits in his religion and worldly life.

Whoever leaps into the well without knowledge or strength—the Preceder and Follower—will break his legs and crush his neck. This signifies that whoever cuts himself off from the Preceder and Follower, the two praiseworthy origins, and opposes them, loses this world and the next. That is the manifest loss.

The well of al-Ḥufra signifies the Foundation. Its punishment is harsher and escape from it more exhausting than escape from the well of al-Zaybaq, because whoever accepts the outward law, then reaches the inward teaching, comes to believe there is nothing above the Foundation, that he is the final goal and object of worship in everlasting punishment. Unless our Lord wills his salvation, he needs a Caller to attend to him, break and repair his belief, and bring him out of his unbelief and associationism.

The attendants' play with sticks and clubs before our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—signifies the disputations of the people of associationism and the common folk, their confusion among the people, and their manifestation of blameworthy religions. Their boldness in speaking before His Presence exposes their falsity.

Wrestling signifies the confrontation of Callers with one another. The killing of Suwayd and al-Ḥammām offered the world a lesson for anyone willing to learn and deliverance from associationism for anyone who reflected. They were the leaders in wrestling, each with a clan protecting him and with followers. They signify the Speaker and Foundation. Their deaths signify the suspension of the two laws of Revelation and Interpretation and the humiliation of the two parties, those of unbelief and heresy.

The attendants' references to female private parts and the male urethra signify the Speaker and Foundation.

When one says, “Show me your moon,” it means, “Uncover your Foundation.” It is the place from which urine comes forth, signifying associationism.

If a man uncovers his Foundation and brings out his heart—that is, renounces the worship of his Foundation—he is saved from punishment and returns from his former belief. Whoever doubts is destroyed, just as a person who neither urinates nor relieves himself is overcome by pain and perishes.

Fire here signifies the knowledge of Truth and its eternal establishment—exalted be His remembrance. It burns away what the two laws brought, just as the attendants burn one another's private parts with fire. This signifies the burning of the two laws' dominion and the expiration of their time, and the manifestation of the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—without doubt or association, without a corporeal Speaker, a material Foundation, a spiritual Preceder, or a psychic Follower. No hypocrite will retain influence, and no polytheist will retain a state.

Those in authority will be from among you, and those who administer reckoning will be from among you. The Unitarians of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will enjoy perpetual bliss, abundant favor, and enduring sovereignty, as the servants of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance and name, besides whom none is worshipped—said: “We shall remove whatever rancor is in their breasts”: Revelation and Interpretation. “As brothers”—in tawḥīd—“upon couches facing one another”: the true ranks of religion, the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and worship of Him alone without partner.

May our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—make us and you among those who look and see, and reflect upon and consider the actions of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. As He said: “Those who reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth”—the Speakers and Foundations—“Our Lord, You did not create this in vain; glorified are You, so protect us from the punishment of the Fire.” That is, far be it from You to leave us in the ignorance of outward law and the associationism of inward law; and protection from the Fire means deliverance from both religious laws.

Therefore, community of Unitarian brethren of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who worship Him alone and none besides Him, protect your brethren, submit to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and accept His decree in prosperity and adversity. Through the favor and strength of our Lord you will be saved from the punishment of religion and the misery of this world.

Praise and thanks belong to our Lord alone in prosperity and adversity. He suffices us and is the best Helper and Supporter.

The epistle is complete, with the praise of our Lord alone. It was accepted and approved.

EPISTLE 12 — THE STRAIGHT CONDUCT

Al-Sīra al-Mustaqīma

السيرة المستقيمة

I have put my trust in our Lord, the Creator, the All-Knowing, the Most High, the Judge of judges, who does not enter into thoughts and imaginings. Exalted is His remembrance above the descriptions of those who describe and the comprehension of mankind.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: the attributes of His servant, the Imam; the practices of the literalist Speakers, the doctrines of the outward adherents of religious law, and the embellishments of associationism.

They say that the Creator—glorified is He—created Adam from dust, personally undertook his creation, and shaped him with His hand in the likeness of Himself; they cite the Qurʾān in support of this. The Jews, drawing on the Torah, say that Adam was created and formed in the likeness of the God of the Children of Israel. But this is inconsistent with reason and with the realities. No one may accept it, because an image is a body, and whoever has a body has a form composed of parts. Adam and his children would then resemble the Creator—exalted is He above that. Where, then, would be the distinction between servant and Worshipped One, Creator and created, Provider and provided for? This is impossible and is associationism and error itself. The Qurʾān has already shown the falsity of their statement: “There is nothing like Him.” Yet they believe in part of the Book and disbelieve in another part.

As for their assertion that Adam had neither father nor mother, it is impossible for a speaking, corporeal being to exist except from a similar body, male and female. Natural earth produces only worms, snakes, scorpions, beetles, and creatures of that kind; it cannot produce a human being. If they maintain that Adam's excellence consisted in not coming from a man's loins, not entering a womb, and not being stained with blood, then Muhammad should likewise have been created from earth instead of coming from the loins of an unbeliever and being stained by the blood of an ignorant unbelieving woman.

The Muslims believe that Muhammad's parents were unbelievers and died as unbelievers, and that he cannot intercede for his community until he abandons his father and mother, repudiates them, and prefers his community to his parents, leaving them in Hell. This is ugly speech, manifestly false and worthless, incompatible with reason and unacceptable to anyone possessed of intellect.

There are three Adams: Adam of Universal Purity; before him [in the ranking] Adam the disobedient, who is partial; and below him Adam the forgetful, who is corporeal [jurmānī]. All three came from male and female, not from earth as the adherents of literalist ornamentation assert. Far be it from the Creator—glorified is He—to create His chosen representative from dust, one of the humblest things. If we interpret their statement literally, He should have created him from the most precious and exalted things: jewels, rubies, and emeralds. If they say that He created him from earth because earth is pure, stones are purer, since soil mixes with impurities while stones do not absorb them. Water is also purer than earth, which becomes soiled and cannot purify itself. Since earth alone is mentioned, we know that another reality was intended, not what people commonly suppose.

The literalists who associate others with God say that He named him Adam because he was made from the adīm, the surface of the earth.

Yet worms, snakes, scorpions, beetles, and similar creatures also come from the earth's surface, and none of them has been called Adam. Another group says that He named him Adam because his complexion was changed or darkened. This is an attack upon the Creator's sovereignty and a diminution of His attributes. How could He choose something and make its appearance discolored, when people regard a man's blackness as a defect? Glorified is the Creator of creatures above such deficiency. He exalted the station of His chosen one above defects, but these people have been blind to that and too proud to ask; nothing guides them except the sword.

Some deficient Ismāʿīlī Shīʿīs say that the Creator named the Opponent Iblīs because he had no father or mother. They have not distinguished the implications of what they say, since they themselves acknowledge that Adam had neither religious father nor religious mother, and that Christ had no father. By their reasoning, each of these would have to be called Iblīs, since each lacked a father. There would be no distinction between Opponent and Guardian. This is impossible, empty ornamentation, incompatible with reason, and unacceptable to an intelligent person.

I shall now set out in this Conduct what you need to know about Adam: his name, his father's name, and his city; the name of Iblīs, his father's name, and his city; and the full ranks of Adam, if our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—wills. Upon Him I rely; through His support I speak; through His strength I have prevailed; through His knowledge I have risen. He is the Most High, the All-Aware, the Mighty.

Know—may the Lord aid you in obedience to Him—that Adam of Universal Purity is Dhū Maʿa. He had served the Call to tawḥīd and the worship of our Lord, the Most High and All-Aware, in former ages before the cycle in which he was named Adam. In that cycle, however, he appeared among a world called the jinn, who worshipped non-being.

Adam of Purity was born in India, in a city called Adamīniyya. His name was Shaṭnīl, and his father's name Dānīl. In outward affairs he was a physician of bodies.

In reality, he was a physician of spirits through the sciences of tawḥīd. He left his homeland and reached Yemen, arriving in a city called Ṣarna, a name which in Arabic signifies “the Miracle.” When he entered and saw its inhabitants associating others with God, he called them to the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. They responded to him, and the city became divided into two parties: Unitarians and polytheists. The sage Shaṭnīl told the Unitarians, “Separate yourselves from the polytheists,” meaning, “Keep away from them.” They accepted his instruction and separated, whereupon the name of separation was applied to them.

Iblīs had been a Caller among the jinn and had once obeyed the Creator—glorified is He. His name was Ḥārith and his father's name Tirmāḥ. He came originally from Iṣfahān and lived in the city called the Miracle. The Greek name of Iṣfahān was, according to this account, Damīr. In that age there was no manifest Imam or effective Proof for creation, except that the lights had been gathered in Shaṭnīl son of Dānīl. He was said to have no father or mother because he was an Imam by his own rank. He was said to be “of earth” because he appeared from among the believers, who resemble earth. It was said that the Creator formed him “with His hand” because He originated him from pure light and supported him with universal support.

Light and support are likened to two hands, for radiant light and universal wisdom move the ranks, enabling them to escape doubt and associationism, just as hands move bodies and enable people to cleanse themselves of the impurities of urine and excrement.

When our Lord the Creator—glorified is He—sent him forth, He commanded the angels, meaning the Callers, to prostrate before Adam—that is, to obey him. All the ranks and Callers obeyed except Ḥārith son of Tirmāḥ of Iṣfahān. He refused and became proud. He looked upon Shaṭnīl son of Dānīl as though he were merely a Responder and claimed priority for his own service in the Call. He said, “I am better than he,” meaning higher in rank. “You created me from fire”—from the knowledge of realities and the light of the Call—“and created him from clay”—from the instruction given to the Responders.

The Responders are the soil of pure love. Water signifies true knowledge; when water is mixed with earth, it becomes clay suitable for building. Likewise, when a Responder acquires knowledge of realities, he reaches maturity and becomes fit for the Call. This is why Ḥārith said, “You created him from clay.”

As for the assertion that the Creator made Adam in His own image, its meaning is that He imposed obedience to Adam upon all the worlds just as obedience to Himself is required. Whoever obeys Adam obeys the Creator; whoever disobeys Adam disobeys our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—because Adam is His deputy and the means of

reaching Him. All the ranks and Callers obeyed except Ḥārith son of Tirmāḥ of Iṣfahān. He was expelled from the Call, which is the Garden, and dropped from the number of the ranks.

Shaṭnīl established his station and dispatched the Proofs and Callers, who spread abroad. He was called Adam, meaning the lord and Imam of the ranks. He was called the father of humanity because “humanity” here means the Unitarians: they had received the glad tidings of Adam, accepted tawḥīd from him, and thus became his children in religion. Likewise his spouse Eve was his Proof, called Ḥawwāʾ because she contained all the believers. She was called the mother of humanity because she was appointed to nurse them with true knowledge, educate them, and raise them from degree to degree until they reached the rank of proclamation.

When Adam's ranks were complete, his Call had spread, the believers had multiplied, and Ḥārith son of Tirmāḥ openly opposed him, the city divided into two parties, Unitarians and polytheists. Shaṭnīl ordered the believers to repudiate the others—Iblīs and his party of jinn. Whenever a Unitarian met his brother, he asked, “Have you fled from Iblīs and his party?” The other answered, “I have forsaken them.” Thus the city of Ṣarna came to be called Hajar, for its people had forsaken Iblīs and his companions.

A merchant or scholar from al-Aḥsāʾ named Ṣarṣar came to the city while its people were traveling there to trade. One of the Callers entrusted him with the covenant immediately and brought him to Adam, who was Shaṭnīl. Adam sent him out as a Caller to al-Aḥsāʾ and its districts. He departed at once and took the covenant from many people in al-Aḥsāʾ and its districts. He enjoined upon them the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—acknowledgment of Shaṭnīl and his Imamate, and repudiation of Iblīs and his companions.

He told them, “When you enter Hajar, scowl and wrinkle your noses before its inhabitants, for a man named Ḥārith son of Tirmāḥ of Iṣfahān lives there with many followers. They have opposed the command of our Lord, the All-Knowing Creator, and denied the excellence of the Imam. Do not address its people with any knowledge except those who attend the gathering of the sage Shaṭnīl with you.”

They accepted what the Caller Ṣarṣar taught them concerning worship and this “shortening,” and so were called Qarāmiṭa (Qarmaṭians) down to our own time. In Persia and Khurāsān the name came to be used of anyone known for tawḥīd: people say, “This man is a Qarmaṭian,” and for this reason they call his doctrine Qarmaṭian Ismāʿīlism.

Abū Ṭāhir, Abū Saʿīd, and other Qarmaṭians were Callers of our Lord the Creator, worshipping Him, fearing Him, bowing before His majesty and greatness, and declaring Him transcendent above all His creatures. The Lord endowed them with leadership, and they accomplished deeds of open manifestation that no other Callers had accomplished. They killed more of the polytheists than other Callers could. Yet our Lord—glorified is He—did not make the full Unveiling easy at their hands, because His knowledge, power, greatness, and will encompassed what would happen after them: the loss of tawḥīd, error, pursuit of the sons of al-ʿAbbās and their appetites, and descent into misguidance.

The time of the Unveiling has now come near; the hour of the sword, abasement, and violent destruction of the hypocrites approaches. The people of al-Aḥsāʾ, Hajar, and Persia must return to their former tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—bow before His majesty, declare Him above all creatures, and support tawḥīd as their forefathers once did. I shall establish the Call among them, reunite the friends and servants, and subdue every obstinate tyrant with the sword of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—until no polytheist, unbeliever, or hypocrite against Him remains in the two sanctuaries. Religion shall be one, without opponent or adversary, through the power of our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, exalted above consort and child, and through the might of His authority. There is no power or strength except through Him. Upon Him I rely, through Him I am sufficient, and to Him is the return. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

Let us return to Adam and his ranks. Adam of Purity was born in India, in Adamīniyya, and appeared from Ṣarna. His first Proof came from Baṣra and was named Akhūj. His second Proof came from a city called Sarmana and was named Sharaḥ. When Adam met him and took the covenant from him as required, he said, “I wish to make you the Foundation

of my ranks; choose whether you accept." Sharaḥ replied, "If you wish it, I wish it." Adam made him the Foundation of the ranks and named him Shīth (Seth). Thus he became a son in religion, not a son by nature.

The third Proof was Yūshaʿ son of ʿImrān; the fourth, Dāwūd son of Hirmis; the fifth, ʿĪsā son of Lamkh; the sixth, ʿĀbid son of Sarḥān; the seventh, ʿAzrawīl son of Salmūn; the eighth, Hilīl son of Bādis; the ninth, Dānīl son of Harzaṭāf; the tenth, ʿAyyāsh son of Hābīl; the eleventh, Aflāṭūn son of Qaysūn; and the twelfth, Qaydār son of Lamak. These twelve were the ranks of his religious dispensation and the angels of his Call. His dispensation contained no obligations of outward religious law, no worship of calf or buffalo, no bonds of grim ritualism, and no associationism of the nightmare. Rather, it was a subtle dispensation of tawḥīd.

In our own age we have returned through the hand of the Adam of your age, Ḥamza ibn Aḥmad of Purity, just as "We repeat the first creation as We began it." Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is the One who does this, the Powerful and Overpowering.

As for the second Adam, of whom the Qurʾān says "he disobeyed his Lord," that is Akhnūkh (Enoch), who was a Proof of Adam of Purity. The Adam of whom it was said that he forgot and that no firm resolve was found in him is Sharaḥ, called Shīth.

Shaṭnīl chose these two from all his ranks and appointed them to stand in his place in the Call. Each was called Adam, because he made them fathers of the Unitarians and Imams for those below them. He was the one who placed them in the Garden. Akhnūkh occupied the position of the male and Shīth that of the female. He instructed Akhnūkh orally and renewed the covenant with Shīth: they must worship none besides our Lord, the All-Knowing Creator—exalted be His remembrance—associate no one with Him, and not disobey their Imam Shaṭnīl, who was the means of reaching the Creator.

In the time of Shaṭnīl, our Lord—upon us be His peace and mercy—was outwardly known, in His human manifestation and among mankind, as al-Bār (the Creator). Hence the Persians say Bār-Khudāy, meaning God. Thus they called our Lord al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance—Bār-Khudāy. Its meaning is the greatest God, the God of gods. People pronounce this without understanding, and some even regard it as unbelief while still saying it from habit, willingly or unwillingly. As it is said, "To God prostrates everyone in the heavens and on earth, willingly or unwillingly."

Our Lord the Creator—glorified is He—said to Akhnūkh, "Dwell, you and your spouse Sharaḥ, in the Garden," meaning the Call of tawḥīd. "Eat from it," meaning attain the exalted station, "but do not approach this tree, lest you become wrongdoers": do not claim Shaṭnīl's rank and excellence, lest you become covenant-breakers. "Then Satan caused them to slip from it," that is, from the covenant, and expelled them from the rank they had held with him.

Satan was not Iblīs. He had previously been an Authorized Instructor under Iblīs and had joined him in opposition to Shaṭnīl. His name was Habal, which is why the Arabs call an idol Hubal, and why they say of a man that he is a great fool.

The serpent was a Caller under Akhnūkh, named Ubīl. The peacock was an Authorized Instructor in the Call, named Ṭāwiyūkh.

Habal continued to visit Ubīl the Caller and Ṭāwiyūkh, telling them, "I have advice for our master Akhnūkh and his brother Sharaḥ; it will benefit them." Eventually they brought him before Akhnūkh and his companion Sharaḥ. When he entered and stood before them, he fell down in prostration. Akhnūkh said, "Have you perhaps returned from your unbelief and from the hypocrisy you practiced against the Imam, your assistance to Iblīs and his party, and your guilt toward these two?"

Habal replied, "No! By your right and the right of the Creator, I have come only to advise you both. I am jealous on your behalf because your Satan has wronged you and you have incurred his anger. I heard our Lord the Creator—glorified is He—say that the Imamate belongs to Akhnūkh, and that Sharaḥ is his deputy in the Call."

Akhnūkh made him swear an oath. He swore that his words were true and his actions sincere advice. Then the wickedness of Akhnūkh's own soul and his retreat into misery led him to forget the covenant he had undertaken. Akhnūkh claimed a rank to which he had no right. Their nakedness became apparent to them: that is, the defective ornamentation of speech from the two religious laws, which are like urine and excrement, while their two proponents are like the front and rear private parts. They began to cover themselves with leaves of the Garden. This did not help them. A proclamation went out among the Responders that Akhnūkh had disobeyed Adam, his Imam, that Habal the Satan had led him astray, and that both had been removed from their former rank.

They spent many years weeping over what they had done and begging the Imam to pardon them. This is what is said in the Qurʾān: “Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us—”

“—and have mercy on us, we shall surely be among the losers,” meaning losers in religion. Shaṭnīl had mercy on them and asked the Creator—exalted be His remembrance—to pardon them. He pardoned them through the intercession of the rank of faith and the greatness of Shaṭnīl's station. This is the meaning of the words, “Adam received words from his Lord, and He turned toward him in mercy.” The Arabic word kalimāt (“words”) consists of five letters, and Shaṭnīl also consists of five letters. In the Imam five stations were gathered: the rank of corporeal beings, the rank of material beings, the rank of spiritual beings, the rank of psychic beings, and the rank of luminous beings. He restored the two to their former station and drew them near.

Our Lord the Creator—glorified is He—continued to show mercy to the people of that age until their intentions changed and they inclined toward the polytheists. Then the Creator—exalted be His remembrance—became angry with them, withdrew His favor, and manifested Nūḥ (Noah) son of Lamak with a religious law unlike the one they had known. Noah called them to worship non-being and affirm the unity of an idol. Whoever accepted him and entered his law he called victorious; whoever refused he called an unbeliever. He imitated Adam of Purity by appointing ranks and establishing a Call. His Foundation was Sām (Shem), with twelve Proofs before him, calling people to worship non-being and obey him.

Noah's law remained until Ibrāhīm (Abraham) son of Āzar appeared; Āzar's name was Akhūkh. Abraham replaced Noah's law with his own, appointed Ismāʿīl (Ishmael) as the Foundation of his Call, and appointed twelve Proofs and thirty Callers to invite people to worship non-being, affirm the unity of an idol, and obey Abraham. Whoever accepted him was called a believer; whoever refused was called an unbeliever.

His Call remained among his community until Mūsā (Moses) son of ʿImrān appeared. Moses replaced Abraham's law with his own, appointed Hārūn (Aaron) as his Foundation and twelve Proofs who invited people to worship one who cannot be seen, affirm the unity of one who cannot be known, and obey Moses.

His Call remained until ʿĪsā (Jesus), son of Yūsuf, appeared, replacing Moses's law with his own. He manifested his Call, appointed Shimʿūn al-Ṣafā as his Foundation, and twelve Proofs stood before him: these were the disciples, who called people to worship and affirm the unity of non-being and to obey Jesus. He was the son of the Universal Father—that is, the Proof of the Qāʾim, exalted be His remembrance—but they did not understand his words and symbols. Whoever accepted him he called a believer; whoever did not he called an unbeliever.

His law remained in all lands until Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh appeared with his prophecy and rose among the worlds with his mission. He abrogated all the preceding religious laws with his own, demolished their structures with his proof, and replaced their Calls with his Call. He appointed ʿAlī son of ʿAbd Manāf as his Foundation. twelve Proofs: the one surnamed Abū Bakr, whose name was ʿAbd al-Lāt; ʿUmar; ʿUthmān; Ṭalḥa; al-Zubayr; Saʿd; Saʿīd; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf al-Zuhrī; and ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Jarrāḥ al-Anṣārī. Muʿāwiya son of Ṣakhr had been a Proof before ʿAlī was appointed Foundation. When Muḥammad appointed ʿAlī, he removed Muʿāwiya from his rank. That is why Muʿāwiya claimed the caliphate after ʿUthmān: he had previously been the fourth among them.

When ʿAlī son of ʿAbd Manāf was appointed Foundation, Muʿāwiya refused to accept him, saying, “Muḥammad appointed me before he appointed you to the Call.” Whoever accepted Muḥammad's law and abandoned the religion of

his parents and ancestors he called a submissive Muslim, a believing, God-fearing man. Whoever refused to abandon his ancestral religion he called an unbeliever, hypocrite, and wretch.

He employed the sword against them, took their children and descendants captive, and sold them in markets and streets. Their ancestral religions did not benefit them. Yet every community had a messenger from whom it received its religion, and all acknowledged that they had such messengers. He did not accept their former religions, but demanded that they acknowledge and obey him, and imposed the poll tax upon them in humiliation.

This claim, however, properly belongs only to the Master of the Resurrection, the servant of our Lord al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance for he repudiates their religions as laws of associationism and unbelief and rises against them with the sword and the power of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. The adherents of obligatory religious laws, by contrast, all acknowledge one another's actions: each living teacher says that the preceding teacher was his brother, sent by God, and spoke by God's command.

How could one of them then invalidate his brother's law after testifying that it came from God, kill its followers, take their children captive, and call them unbelievers? Such action would amount to transgression, unbelief, and speech without God's approval. Seeing that their affairs are contradictory and their deeds reject reason and truth, we know that they have borrowed the claims of the Master of the Resurrection and sought for themselves his reports and signs. They are one in what they say, although their outward forms differ.

Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh's law continued to pass through the hands of his community until his cycle ended and another Speaker appeared: Muḥammad son of Ismāʿīl, who sealed and completed the religious laws. As Jaʿfar son of Muḥammad said, “Our beginning runs through our end, and through him God sealed our affair.” This means that no further law imposing obligations would come after it. There were three, the fourth of whom was Saʿīd son of Aḥmad al-Mahdī in the cycle of Muḥammad son of Ismāʿīl, and three caliphs before them; thus there were seven, completing the cycle of Muḥammad son of Ismāʿīl. The last was ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī, a servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Then our Lord called Himself al-Qāʾim, a name also belonging to His servant.

He called Himself al-Qāʾim because of what His servant said in the Qurʾān: “God bears witness”—that is, Muḥammad bears witness—“that there is no god but He,” referring to the divinity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. “The angels” are the Proofs; “those endowed with knowledge” are the Callers; “upholding justice” means raised above all Speakers, Legatees, and Imams through tawḥīd, which is justice. “There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.” He is al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance—the One who stands over every soul and what it has earned, the One who gives honor, the Mighty.

He is al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance—appearing to us in whatever form He wills, however He wills. “The religion before God is Islam”: that is, people submit their affairs to the Lord—glorified is He—and accept His decree. They are truly submitted to Him, believers in Him, and sincere Unitarians in worship.

Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—was named al-Qāʾim because He first appeared to the world with kingship and human manifestation during the age of the law-bound, associationist Speakers. He rose over the worlds with strength and power, established His justice for the Unitarians, and set in place the foundations of His tawḥīd, completing the building in this age according to His will.

If someone asks, “Why was our Lord—glorified is He—called by the name of His servant, and what is the wisdom of that?” we answer through His support: all the names by which people name the Creator in the Qurʾān and elsewhere belong, in their ordinary use, to His servants and ranks. The greatest name for them in the Qurʾān is Allāh. Its outward aspect is created written strokes; its inward aspect is visible ranks who receive sustenance. Outwardly it is a name, inwardly it is the named being; the Worshipped One is distinct from both. He is the true meaning, the divinity of our Lord—glorified is He above their descriptions.

Since servants cannot perceive the tawḥīd of their Creator except according to their own condition and through their human forms, wisdom and justice required that He be named by their names so that they might grasp something of His realities. Yet in the title al-Qāʾim there is a subtle meaning unknown to the world. No Unitarian should call our Lord simply Qāʾim al-Zamān (Qāʾim of the Age), for His title is al-Qāʾim, with the definite article al-. Nor may he call His servant al-Qāʾim; he must omit al- and say Qāʾim al-Zamān. The word Qāʾim consists of four letters, as does Allāh; the name Allāh designates the Caller, and in reality the Imam. Imām likewise has four letters. The Caller, Imam, and the designation Allāh all refer to servants of our Lord, al-Qāʾim, the All-Knowing, al-Ḥākim exalted be His remembrance. The additional alif and lām in our Lord's name, which must not be added to the servant's title, express His transcendence above likeness: the letters can be read as lā, “no,” meaning that He has no likeness among created beings and no partner in power and perfection. His servant is called Qāʾim because he upholds the ranks of tawḥīd; he possesses neither power nor perfection of his own but needs the support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the strength of His perfection. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

The word al-Qāʾim consists of six letters and denotes the Worshipped One; Qāʾim has four and denotes a servant. Between the Arabic words ʿabd (“servant”) and maʿbūd (“worshipped”) there are also two additional letters, for the former has three and the latter five. The extra letters are mīm and wāw. Mīm has the numerical value forty and wāw six. This indicates the forty-six ranks of the Imamate and tawḥīd belonging to our Lord al-Qāʾim, the All-Knowing al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance—not to His servant, who is appointed over those ranks. They are the Intellect, the Soul, the Word, the Preceder, the twelve Proofs, the Follower counted among those ranks, and thirty Callers. Together they make forty-six ranks. All belong to our Lord al-Qāʾim al-Ḥākim, the Most High.

He establishes strength for these ranks, that is, He is their Imam. This is the cause and wisdom of our Lord's title al-Qāʾim, though His remembrance is exalted far above names and attributes.

Now the cycles have revolved; all that existed in past ages has been invalidated. Of the fire of associationist religious law nothing remains but flame and sparks; soon its heat will be extinguished and its traces vanish. The manifestation of the central point has begun through the tawḥīd of our Lord the Creator, the Compelling King, the Mighty and Forgiving, the Giver of honor and Overpowering, al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, exalted above consort and child. Exalted is His remembrance and mighty His name; none besides Him is worshipped.

Praise and thanks belong to our Lord for the manifestation of the Light of Lights and the emergence of what lay buried beneath the wall. He has favored us and you by manifesting directly in humanity and appearing to you in visible form, through which you remember something of His human manifestation. I do not speak of His essence, self, form, meaning, attributes, veil, station, or face except under necessity, according to the hearers' capacities, what they can understand, what their intellects can contain, and what their thoughts can entertain.

Were we to speak otherwise, they would not understand the words, nor would the explanation benefit them. In truth, our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—does not enter thoughts and imaginings, does not mingle with an inward essence or appear as creatures do. From Him everything began and to Him everything returns. “Each day He is engaged in an affair”; one affair does not distract Him from another. He is exalted above being encompassed by cycles and times. No creature can grasp His actions, comprehend the full extent of His sovereignty, or attain even the tenth part of a tenth part of a tenth part of the truth of His conduct and proof.

If people reflected upon the signs of Him they see in the world, and upon the manifest tokens before their eyes, the direct sight of them would suffice instead of seeking an absent non-being by hearsay or relying upon the writing of histories and biographies. They witness actions from Him which could not be the actions of a human being and which have never been reported in chronicles.

If I tried in this Conduct to recount all the signs and tokens our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has manifested, no parchment could contain them and no pen could write them, as the Qurʾān says: “If all the trees on earth were pens and

the sea, with seven more seas supplying it, were ink, God's words would not be exhausted.” Here “God” refers to the human manifestation of our Lord—glorified is He.

I shall, however, mention in this Conduct a few instances, small in number but of great benefit to whoever reflects upon them, affirms His unity, and worships our Lord—glorified is He, whose sovereignty is above the rule of imaginings. I shall speak briefly of what our Lord—glorified is He—did concerning Barjawān and Ibn ʿAmmār.

I shall set out what the common people report outwardly, according to the limits of their understanding. They say that a young boy became king while Barjawān ruled all the eastern territories and Ibn ʿAmmār ruled all the western territories. Our Lord—glorified is He—commanded that they be killed, and they were killed like dogs. He did not fear military disorder or disturbance, though no other earthly king would dare to act in such a way.

He then ordered the killing of the kings and tyrants of Kutāma without fearing their offspring and companions. At midnight He walked among their descendants without sword or knife. I myself witnessed this during the time of the accursed Abū Rakwa, al-Walīd son of Hishām, when he had kindled his rebellion and the soldiers' hearts trembled in their beds at the destruction of armies and killing of men. Our Lord—great is His power—would go out at midnight to the desert of al-Jubb and meet Ḥassān son of ʿAyyān al-Kalbī with five hundred horsemen, standing among them without weapons or equipment until each had asked the other about his needs.

He also entered the desert of al-Jubb outwardly with no one but the mounted attendants and muezzins accompanying Him.

The same occurred during the rebellion of Mufarrij son of Daghfal son of Jarrāḥ, his brother and sons, Badr son of Rabīʿa, and the Arabs generally. The people of the Ḥijāz were with their ruler, al-Ḥusayn son of Jaʿfar al-Ḥusaynī, who rebelled in Mecca, went on to al-Ramla, and joined Ibn Jarrāḥ and his sons.

There was no soldier or civilian at the court who did not expect every day and night that al-Ḥusayn son of Jaʿfar al-Ḥusaynī would come with Mufarrij son of Daghfal and his sons to seize Cairo. Yet our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—rode out each day and night, left Cairo after nightfall, and entered the desert of al-Jubb toward the mountain, the very place where the common people supposed Mufarrij son of Jarrāḥ would arrive. Al-Ḥusaynī did not return to Mecca until enmity broke out between him and Ibn Jarrāḥ, and Ibn Jarrāḥ sought to kill him. Afterward Mufarrij son of Daghfal son of Jarrāḥ perished. All the kings of the earth would have been incapable of such conduct.

Another astonishing proof of His great power and sovereignty is that you witness acts of our Lord—glorified is He—which cannot belong to any human being, whether Speaker, Foundation, Imam, or Proof. Yet these things have only increased your blindness and lack of insight.

The sun is naturally hot and dry, not by religious obligation. It is one of the inanimate bodies, possessing neither intellect nor discernment. Its nature is to dry things and alter their colors. Yet it is our Lord's custom—exalted be His remembrance—to ride during the hottest season and walk in burning heat, as well as in winter. When a strong southern wind blows in spring and thick dust rises, people suffer from wind and dust even inside their homes.

Our Lord—glorified is He—then rides outwardly to the desert of al-Jubb and returns. Everyone in the procession has eyes streaming with tears from the dust and wind, struggles to speak clearly, and suffers hardship and fatigue beyond endurance.

But our Lord—glorified is He—returns in the same condition in which He left the sacred precinct. No one has ever seen His face darkened by the terrible dust storm or burning winds, nor any sign of fatigue upon Him. The others' faces become dark, their tongues dry up, and their souls almost reach their throats from exhaustion. No one can say that he saw Him drink water, eat food, or attend to urination or defecation. Far be it from Him—glorified is He. Although many people accompany Him in His processions, He conceals such things from their sight, and none has witnessed them.

Nor can anyone who has been present with our Lord—glorified is He—in places not open to everyone say that he saw Him suffering fatigue, eating, or drinking. Far be it from Him, exalted far above what the polytheists say. No king or other person can do this.

Consider also what the polytheists allege about illness in His body—an allegation which He brought about to make their hearts sick. Outwardly He rides in a litter carried by four of the opposing polytheists, and it passes through the midst of rebels, covenant-breakers, and hypocrites. He has killed the chiefs of the troops, and most of the populace are His enemies in religion, apart from a small group of Unitarians who believe in Him and accept His decree. Kings normally distrust even their own troops and sons, fearing treachery. How then could someone whom people suppose to be ill and unable to walk, and who has killed the tyrants and kings of the earth, pass among his enemies in a litter?

The deeds I have recounted in this Conduct are not the deeds of any ordinary human being. Yet they are not great things for our Lord—glorified is He. I have mentioned them so that you might draw lessons and reflect. Their significance is that they are the acts of One who has power over all things, who created them, knows what is hidden, and judges over the people of earth and heaven. Indeed He is more exalted and greater still—glorified and exalted far above what the unbelievers say and the polytheists describe. Even less than this would suffice as an example for one who learns and a thought for one who reflects.

Whoever abandons the ancestral religion he formerly followed and follows the Straight Conduct, which he has witnessed with his own eyes, is saved, reaches the ultimate goal, and becomes one of the highest angels. Whoever stops at the outward religious law and what the Calf and Buffalo have legislated obtains from religion nothing but refuse. Neither its outward appearance nor its foundations will benefit him; he destroys his spirit, soul, and senses.

Hear, community of believers, what I have commanded you: practice truthfulness and protection of the brethren; command what is right, which is tawḥīd; reject what is wrong, which is associating another with our Lord—exalted be His remembrance; maintain the bonds of religious kinship; lower your gaze and guard your chastity. Accept the acts of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and surrender your affairs to Him. Then you will be delivered from the punishment of outward religion, saved from the associationism of inward religion, and raised to the highest stations.

If you worship Him, you work for the benefit of your own souls. If you disbelieve in Him, shame and punishment will fall upon you sooner or later. Our Lord—glorified is He—does not wrong His servants.

Praise and thanks belong to our Lord alone in prosperity and adversity, severity and ease. He suffices us and is the best Helper and Supporter.

The composition of this Conduct was completed through the support of our Lord—glorified is He and great is His power—in Jumādā al-Ūlā, the second year of the manifestation of the servant and possession of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the strength of His authority. He is the best Helper and Supporter. Praise and thanks belong to our Lord alone.

Completed.

EPISTLE 13 — THE UNVEILING OF REALITIES

Al-Mawsūma bi-Kashf al-Ḥaqāʾiq

الموسومة بكشف الحقائق

I put my trust in our Lord, the All-Knowing Creator, who does not enter thoughts or imaginings, whom months and years cannot encompass, who is exalted above the Speaker, Foundation, and Imam, a Judge whose description surpasses all judges.

Praise belongs to the Meaning of meanings, the Lord of the named and of the name; thanks belong to the Most High, Creator of spirit and body, Originator of single and paired beings in antiquity, Sender of sustenance and Revealer of the apportioned share, Lord of the two easts and two wests, God of the two origins and two branches, the One toward whom prayer was directed at the two qiblas, for whom the Call was undertaken throughout the worlds, to whom the ranks of the Callers pointed, and whom all Unitarians worshipped in both conditions. Glorified and exalted is He above likeness to creatures and servants.

Know, community of Unitarians—may the Mighty, Compelling Creator have mercy on you—that all the believers and the earlier teachers were perplexed about the Preceder and his Opponent, the Follower and his Opponent.

Some said that the Preceder is the final goal and ultimate end, and that he alone is worshipped in every age. This is unbelief itself.

Others said that the Preceder is the light of the Creator, a light that thoughts and imaginings cannot perceive. This is associationism itself: they make both the Creator and His servant imperceptible, leaving no distinction between Worshipped One and servant. Such a thing is impossible and constitutes associationism and error.

Others said that the Word is above the Preceder but that the Word and Preceder are identical, with no difference between them. Reason cannot accept that male and female are the same, or that a prince is a chamberlain and a chamberlain a prince, or that sun is moon and moon is sun, night day and day night, heaven earth and earth heaven. Such claims are impossible.

They all agree that the Preceder is the source of stillness and coldness and the Follower the source of heat and movement. Thus they have made the Preceder the world of non-being, which cannot be seen, and the Follower the world of existence. In doing so they diminish the Preceder. How could this be admissible when they also call the Follower the greater world? Their argument would make the Follower superior to the Preceder, for heat and movement are the nature of life and existence, while stillness and coldness are the nature of death and non-being, and life and existence are better than death and non-being.

Reason cannot accept that the one who comes later is superior to the one who precedes him, the one provided for to the provider, or the subordinate to the superior. Glorified is our Lord, the Most High, above their descriptions. Yet these people spoke according to their capacities and the reach of their age, and attached themselves to the limits of their time and place.

Now the cycles have turned, what was hidden of the doctrine of the righteous has appeared, and what lay concealed beneath the wall has been explained to the world. The circle has returned to its central point. Through the support of our Lord the Creator, al-Ḥākim the Overpowering, the Most High and Compelling—exalted above the sayings of unbelievers—I have composed this book and named it The Unveiling of Realities. I shall mention in it whatever the Creator—glorified is He—grants me of His support, according to what the age requires, not according to any merit or prior claim of yours. It is His generosity and mercy toward you and the fulfillment of what He promised through the ranks of His Call and the servants of His dominion of unity. Praise and thanks belong to Him alone.

I say, through the will and support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—that the Creator—glorified is He—manifested from His radiant light a complete, pure form: this is Will, through which all things were constituted. As He said, “When He wills a thing, His command is only to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.” That form was called Intellect. The Intellect was complete in light and power, perfect in action and form. The five natures were gathered in it, and it contained knowledge of everything that will exist without end.

He appointed it Imam of the community, present in every age and time, and it is the true Preceder. It was named Preceder because its creation and form preceded all the ranks in the tawḥīd of the Creator—glorified is He. It can be perceived by the senses, eats and drinks, contrary to those who say that it cannot be perceived through thought or imagination. It was the first being originated by the Most High, possessed of stillness yet capable of motion, the original central point and matter of the five natures, subtle and transparent, governing all the worlds and those above them.

He made it the glory and honor of all worlds in religion and worldly life. Their stations depend on how much they draw from its light and drink from its sweet, pure sea. Our Lord the Most High—glorified is He—said to the Cause of origination, the Universal Intellect, “Approach,” meaning, “Approach My servants and My tawḥīd.” It approached in hearing and obedience. He said, “Turn away,” meaning, “Turn away from all who associate another with Me and worship someone besides Me.” It turned away from them. Our Lord the Most High said, “By My might, My majesty, and My exaltation above all heights, no one shall enter My Garden”—meaning My reward—“except through you and love of you; and no one shall burn in My Fire”—meaning the outward forms of the law-bound religions, which are hot and dry—“except by abandoning you—

“—and acting hypocritically toward you. Whoever obeys you obeys Me, and whoever disobeys you disobeys Me. Through you the highest stations are reached. I have made you the means to My mercy for all My servants who obey Me.”

When the Intellect heard this from the Most High Creator—glorified is He—it looked at itself and saw no likeness, no opponent capable of resisting it, and no equal able to rival it. It admired itself and imagined it would never need anyone, that no adversary could rise against it, and that it could stand alone throughout all the cycles. Then, through the decree of our Lord the Most High—glorified is He—disobedience arose from its obedience, darkness from its light, arrogance from its humility, and ignorance from its forbearance. These became four blameworthy natures opposed to the four praiseworthy natures of the Intellect: the heat of reason, the strength of light, the stillness of humility, and the coolness of forbearance, together with the pliant matter that enters the natures yet remains distinct from them.

Opposite each of these faculties there arose an opposing religious force, hostile to the Intellect and disobedient to its command and prohibition. It considered itself the Intellect's likeness and equal, though it had been originated from it without an intermediary.

The Intellect understood that this was a trial imposed by its Originator, the Most High, because it had viewed itself as perfect and powerful. It then acknowledged its weakness and incapacity, sought forgiveness for its sin, and implored our Lord the Most High for help against the Opponent. It said, “There is no god but our Lord,” meaning that none is complete in power and sovereignty except the Most High, the God of gods, who has no adversary, equal, or likeness.

It asked Him to appoint a helper against the opposing adversary and a deputy to stand in its place among those in agreement, so that it need not address the Opponent or be troubled by a rival. From that longing and supplication, the Most High originated the Soul of the ranks, named it Dhū Maṣṣa, and made it a Follower in the Intellect's service, listening and obeying its command. He gave it half the movement and action. Thus the Soul was in the position of a female, the Intellect in that of a male. For this reason the male was assigned the portion of two females. All the ranks are their children. The Intellect alone was made male and the Soul female. The Word is above the one whom the earlier teachers called Preceder; the Soul is above the Word; the Intellect is above all, and is truly their spirit. It is the Preceder in antiquity and light in darkness.

The earlier teachers called the fourth of the ranks “Preceder” because he preceded others in the spiritual laws and manifested them. Thus they said that each Speaker has a law and stands in the place of the Preceder, meaning that the outward law stands in place of the spiritual law of the Preceder of the lower ranks. But the true Preceder is the Intellect, which precedes all spiritual and corporeal predecessors: its creation and light preceded everything.

In another book we shall set out the names our Lord—glorified is He—gave His human manifestation, by which He appeared to the world from the time He entrusted the Universal Intellect with its office until the manifestation of Adam of Purity and the angels' appearance to him. This comprises seventy cycles, between each cycle and the next seventy weeks, between each week and the next seventy years, each year being a thousand years by your reckoning.

We shall also give the name of the Intellect and of the Opponent in every cycle and the names by which the people of each cycle were known, as the people of our present cycle are called human beings [al-ins]. We shall explain what you need, if our Lord wills; through Him comes success in all affairs.

In this book, however, we shall discuss the first cycle, the manifestation of the Intellect, so that you may know its reality, embrace pure tawḥīd, and understand that our Lord—glorified is He—never withdraws His light and veil from the world, and that all the ranks of His religion are present in every age, time, epoch, and season for anyone seeking the salvation of his spirit, who does not worship absent non-being or prostrate before idols.

Let us return to the spiritual Opponent and his emergence from the light of the Universal Intellect, and to the Soul's emergence between the light of the Intellect and the darkness of the Opponent. To the extent that the Soul possesses the Intellect's light, it understands the Intellect's words and benefits from its order. To the extent that it possesses the Opponent's darkness, it can dispute with his soldiers and followers, recognize his cunning and subtle tricks, and see through his flattery.

The Opponent, who is Ḥārith, is subtle and transparent, his power coursing like blood, because his origin was in the Intellect's light. Yet he is darkness beside the Intellect's light, though light beside other beings; corporeal beside the Intellect's spirituality, though spiritual beside other beings; dense beside the Intellect's subtlety, though subtle and transparent beside the density of the worlds.

The Intellect may be compared to a subtle flame cast into wood. It burns the wood, then the flame returns to its element while the wood becomes charcoal. Charcoal is dense compared with the subtle flame, but subtle compared with the wood. If you leave charcoal for a while, its body darkens and its color fades; when you put wood on it, it ignites again and returns to its former appearance. Only when it goes out by itself or is extinguished with abundant water does the fire cease.

Likewise, the spiritual Opponent is subtle and transparent because he originated from the Intellect, yet dense because he disobeyed its command. When he gains control of believers' hearts, he corrupts them through the power he originally derived from the Intellect, just as fire remains hidden in charcoal. If a Responder is weak and lacks the strength of knowledge, the Opponent corrupts him as embers consume wood until both become useless ash. If the Responder has firm certainty and a strong proof in religion, he extinguishes the Opponent's fire with the water of realities, and the Opponent has no power over him.

The Intellect stood behind the Opponent and the Soul before him. The Opponent evaded them to right and left, so the Intellect needed a helper at its right and the Soul a helper at its left, to enclose the Opponent between them. From the Intellect came the Word, and from the Soul came the Preceder. The Word stood on the right and the Preceder on the left. The Opponent became bewildered among Intellect, Soul, Word, and Preceder and tried to escape beneath them. He was named Ḥārith because he was bewildered (ḥāra) within himself. He was subsequently named Iblīs because he originated from the Intellect against its will, emerging from it unwillingly. Thus he was said to have no father: a son does not pass from a man's loins to a woman's womb without the man's will and movement.

A child in religion likewise cannot arise without a Caller's initiative. Since the Intellect had neither religious will nor natural desire in the Opponent's formation, the Opponent was called fatherless and a child of opposition. An illegitimate child is the adversary of legitimate children. Likewise the children of illicit union are enemies of the Unitarians, the children of the Intellect and Soul. Jaʿfar son of Muḥammad testified of them: “The believer is the brother of the believer through his mother and father”; their father is light, meaning the Intellect, and their mother mercy, meaning the Soul.

We explained in The Straight Conduct that Adam of Purity was the Intellect, named Shaṭnīl, and Iblīs was named Ḥārith. We referred to them at the time of their human manifestation, after seventy complete cycles. We also said that Ḥārith is written with four letters, and we calculated its letters: ḥāʾ is eight, alif one, and the remaining letters six, leaving nine. The word “nine,” when written in Arabic, consists of four letters: tāʾ, sīn, ʿayn, tāʾ marbūṭa. When the names Ḥārith and Iblīs are calculated, four letters remain, for the remainder of Ḥārith is nine and that of Iblīs seven; after subtracting ten, four letters remain alike.

We calculated the name lengthwise, crosswise, combined, and separately, and found four letters. The final letter of Ḥārith was identified with the first letter of “nine,” indicating the law of the Speaker and its ornamentation in every age. The first of the Speakers is their last, appearing in cycles through repetition, just as the Guardian stands in every age. That is why the adherents of the religious laws love all their enemies yet do not love a single Unitarian. There is no proof clearer than this.

Returning to the Intellect, we find that the Arabic words for Intellect (ʿaql) and Soul (nafs) each have three letters, though they differ in the greater numerical reckoning. Ignorant Shīʿīs look upon Intellect and Soul merely as ranks of the Call and suppose them equal in station. Yet the Intellect is male and the Soul is in the position of female; the male bestows knowledge and the female receives it. When we calculate the name of the Intellect by the greater abjad reckoning, we find two hundred, and the Soul one hundred and thirty. The Intellect thus exceeds the Soul by seventy degrees: the ranks of Imamate and tawḥīd.

I shall count them for you through the will of our Lord—glorified is He—so that you do not associate any creature with Him. First is the Soul and the spreading of its Proofs through the islands, with seven Callers for the seven regions; this is what was meant by “over it are nineteen.” Next comes the Word and its twelve Proofs and seven Callers for the seven regions, for the Word has a counterpart in the Soul. Then come the Preceder and his twelve Proofs, and the Follower and his twelve Proofs, the latter possessing what the Preceder possesses. Then comes the unrestricted Caller, with his Authorized Instructors and Mukāsirs. Together they make seventy ranks. From them branch all higher and lower ranks. All derive from the Intellect, the Imam supported by our Lord—glorified and exalted is He.

He removes from them whom He wills and raises in rank whom He wills, through the support and will of our Lord the Most High. As the Qurʾān says: “When He wills a thing, His command is only to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is. Glorified is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things, and to Him you return.”

These seventy ranks are the links of the chain of which the Qurʾān says: “Seize him and bind him”: this means the Opponent of the Imam when he reaches his limit and completes his respite; seize him with rational proofs and bind him with the covenant. This is the slaughter concerning which it is said that the Qāʾim will slaughter Iblīs. “Then expose him to the Fire”: that is, the profound sciences of the Qāʾim of the Age, before which scholars and men of understanding gather, fall silent, and become bewildered. “Then insert him into a chain seventy cubits long”: this means the covenant of the Qāʾim of the Age, a chain linked together, consisting of seventy men in the Call of tawḥīd.

“For he did not believe in God the Mighty”: this means the spiritual Opponent, who refused to acknowledge the Imamate and excellence of Shaṭnīl.

The ranks of the Qāʾim of the Age are compared to a chain because the Call is ordered, link joined to link. If a person moves the chain at its beginning, its middle and end move; if he moves it at its end, its middle and beginning move; and if he moves it in the middle, both ends move. Likewise a Responder who enters tawḥīd through an Authorized Instructor is in the position of one who enters through a Caller; and one who responds through a Caller is in the position of one

who responds through a Proof. All call to one thing: the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord the Most High, who is exalted above their descriptions.

The outward adherents of religious laws tell a story that a chain hung from heaven to the mosque of Jerusalem. When two adversaries had a dispute, they approached the chain and the truthful party attempted to grasp it. If he was truthful, the chain came near; if he lied, it moved away. It remained so until one man deceived another and took hold of it, whereupon the chain rose into heaven and was never seen again. They know its outward appearance but not its meaning. They did not ask the masters of realities, so they lost their way, their insight became blind to true light, and they lived though spiritually dead, gathered though scattered. They lost outward and inward knowledge and did not reach the Originator of secrets. That is the manifest loss. So much for their account.

Know—may our Lord guide you to Him—that the true heaven is the Intellect, the earth is the Soul, and the chain is the knowledge of the Intellect, continually and openly bestowed upon the Soul. The hand here is the Caller, and the two litigants are the Responder and his Opponent. The Unitarians are distinguished from the polytheists by the Imam's knowledge, indications, and signs. If someone claims to be a Responder, they ask him to identify the ranks and their sciences. If his Caller testifies that he possesses knowledge, they protect him and admit him to the deepest sciences.

Matters remained so until a hypocrite used deceit to join through a Caller and learned all the ranks and their sciences. He then returned to hypocrisy and unbelief, and the Responders discovered his fraud and cunning. The Intellect withdrew its knowledge from him and concealed it from all who acted hypocritically toward it.

This is the true chain and its meaning, not the story of the ignorant literalists. If their outward account were correct, what wisdom would there be in chaining someone who is already in Hell, surrounded by its guardians, unable to leave the Fire even without bonds? If they say that God intended to threaten the people of Hell and magnify their punishment, their argument fails because the chain is said to be seventy cubits long. For sheer exaggeration it should have been a thousand cubits. The precise number seventy shows that the intended meaning is seventy persons possessing religious knowledge of tawḥīd. No one may overstep their ranks, add to them, or subtract from them; they are exactly seventy.

Let us return to the Intellect and its beginning. The Most High Creator—glorified is He—originated the Intellect, which is the Imam.

There was then neither heaven of the Speakers nor heaven of the elements;

neither psychic earth nor natural earth;

neither luminous Throne nor corporeal throne;

neither seat of tawḥīd nor outspread royal seat;

neither higher sovereignty in the Call nor imagined descriptive sovereignty;

neither universal Tablet of Preservation nor any fashioned tablet;

neither Pen moving by the Compeller's power nor pen sharpened in created hands;

neither religious sun of the spheres nor cosmic sun of the natures;

neither moon shining with reality nor moon rising as a crescent;

neither stars guiding the worlds nor fiery stars in the sky;

neither cloud-borne moving mountains nor solid earthly mountains;

neither seas filled with knowledge nor overflowing natural seas;

neither Garden pleasing through covenants nor garden visible to spectators;

neither fire whose light in hearts is intellective nor eternal primordial fire of spirits.

At its manifestation there were no days or people, months or years, deficiency or completion, senses or imaginings, time or place, epoch or season, night or day, cultivated land or wilderness, seas or deserts, or revolving sphere. There was none besides our Lord, the Creator, the Most High, the Compeller—glorified and exalted above their descriptions.

Through the support of our Lord—glorified is He—I say that He is not subject to names, attributes, or languages. I do not say that He is ancient or eternal, for antiquity and eternity are themselves created, and our Lord the Most High is their Creator and Originator, a divine reality not perceived by imagination or the senses, nor known by opinion or analogy. He has no known place that would confine Him while other places were empty of Him; nor does He occupy every place in the manner of one lacking freedom of action. He is not “first,” which would require a last, nor “last,” which would require a first; not “outward,” which would require an inward, nor “inward,” which would necessarily be hidden by an outward aspect. Every such designation requires its opposite.

Nor do I say that He has a soul or spirit, for that would liken Him to creatures and subject Him to increase and decrease. I do not call Him a person, body, shape, image, substance, or accident, because each of these designations necessarily entails the six directions: above, below, right, left, behind, and before. Anything described by likeness needs another likeness, and each set of six would need another six, continuing without numerical end. Our Lord the Most High is exalted above numbers, pairs, and single things. I do not call Him a thing, lest He become subject to destruction; nor “not a thing,” lest He become a missing non-being. He is not “upon everything,” which would make Him supported by it.

He is not “within something,” which would make it encompass Him; nor attached to something, which would make Him dependent upon it. He does not stand, sit, sleep, or keep vigil. He has no likeness; He does not depart, arrive, or pass by. He is neither subtle nor dense, strong nor weak. Our Lord—glorified is He—is exalted above all names, attributes, kinds, languages, and things.

Only by necessity of speech, not as a statement of His reality, do I call Him the Creator and Originator of all things, who formed them from the light from which He originated universal and particular things, and to whose majesty and sovereignty everything returns. His divine reality is not perceived except through an imagined form, not through a visible reality.

Yet He has shown us the veil within which He is veiled and the station from which He speaks, making it present and visible so that He may be worshipped, out of mercy and compassion for His creatures. In every age worship is directed toward that station which we see and behold, whose words we hear and with which we converse.

If someone asks, “How can we hear the Creator speak through a human being, or see His reality in a form?” we reply through our Lord's support: you Muslims, Jews, and Christians all believe that God spoke to Moses son of ʿImrān through a dry tree and addressed him from an unhearing mountain. You call Moses the one who conversed with God because he heard the voice from the tree and mountain, and you do not reject one another's belief.

You say that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is a king among the kings of the earth, a man endowed with intellect. Our Lord has innumerable excellences, and no tree or stone can be compared with Him. It is therefore far more fitting that the Creator should speak through His tongue, manifest His power to the worlds through Him, and be veiled from them within Him. When we hear the speech of our Lord, we say, “The Creator said such and such,” just as Moses, hearing the tree, said, “God said such and such to me.” This is a rational proof none of you can deny.

The community agrees that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has intellect, while a tree and stone have neither understanding nor the power to reason about God. One who understands and reasons is more fitting to convey God's speech and action than one who understands nothing. If a tree can be His veil, a reasoning being is more fitting to be

His veil than an unreasoning one. How could the Creator be veiled in a tree and speak from it to Moses, only for the tree to burn and His veil to disappear? Glorified is the Worshipped God above the descriptions of the polytheists. Our Lord al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance—cannot be comprehended or described, and His veil appears in every age under differing forms and names. As the Qurʾān says, “Each day He is engaged in an affair,” and one affair does not distract Him from another.

He is the Powerful, the Overpowering, the Most High, the Magnificent.

Through the support of our Lord—glorified is He—I say that the word Allāh, when represented by a scribe's pen on a tablet, is created and not the Creator. The name cannot be represented in writing without four instruments: inkpot, ink, pen, and paper, with the writer as a fifth. The written word Allāh has four letters; when their letter-names are spelled out, there are eleven letters: alif three, two lāms six, and hāʾ two. The writer completes the twelve letters.

The writer cannot write Allāh until he possesses mature intellect, discernment, senses, and five fingers with which to write, along with inkpot, ink, pen, paper, the four elemental natures from which things are composed, and the matter of the natures that is within them yet distinct from them without embodiment.

These make twenty-nine before the name Allāh is represented on the tablet. The alif within the name is hidden within it, while twenty-eight letters are manifest: the letters of the Arabic alphabet. Thus there are twenty-eight visible instruments apart from the Intellect, which is exalted above the worlds.

The letters alif, bāʾ, tāʾ, and thāʾ resemble one another in some respects, except that alif is written vertically while bāʾ, tāʾ, and thāʾ are written horizontally. Alif signifies the Intellect, the Imam: it stands upright without a dot above or mark below. Bāʾ signifies the Soul, the Proof, with one dot beneath it because between Soul and Intellect stands one rank, the spiritual Opponent. Its dot is placed below because the Opponent disobeyed the command of his Creator. Had he been obedient, the dot would have been above.

The Opponent arose first, and his party became more numerous than that of the Soul. Tāʾ signifies the Word, with two dots above it indicating the two ranks higher than it. Thāʾ signifies the right wing, the Preceder, the fourth rank; its three dots signify the three ranks above it. These letters are written horizontally, indicating their obedience and receptivity toward the Imam, the Intellect.

The three ranks above the Preceder have many names spoken by the common people without understanding their meanings: Destiny, the Powerful, Power, Will, Volition, the Word, Might, Sovereignty, and Greatness. Earlier teachers knew nothing above the Preceder except the Word, and they said that the Word was identical with him, as we explained at the beginning of this book. I ask our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—not to punish them for falling short of explaining the realities, and I ask Him to bring their understanding to completion through His grace and mercy.

Let us return to the letters and their meanings in order. Jīm (ج), ḥāʾ (ح), and khāʾ (خ) have the same basic written form but differ greatly in reality. Jīm signifies the outward religious law of the Speaker. The dot beneath it signifies the Foundation's law, hidden beneath the outward law. Khāʾ signifies the Foundation's law, which is Interpretation; its dot above signifies the Speaker's law, which stands higher than the Foundation's law. Jīm and khāʾ are the right and left sides: as it was said in the eighth gathering, right and left are two paths of misguidance, and salvation lies in the middle road. Ḥāʾ signifies the law of the Qāʾim of the Age, a spiritual law without obligatory rites.

The Proof of the Qāʾim of the Age speaks and establishes the spiritual law before the Qāʾim appears. At his appearance, the Proof's name has three letters and the name Qāʾim of the Age has four. The two names begin with jīm and ḥāʾ. Iblīs was called Ḥārith because he became bewildered between the two ḥāʾs, the letters of the Qāʾim and his Proof. He was also named Ḥārith because he imitated them and claimed their stations. Jīm is named so because it gathers (jamaʿa) the laws and ornaments of all Speakers. Khāʾ is so named because it is the Speaker's deputy (khalīfa) and ally. Ḥāʾ is so named because it encompasses (iḥtawā) the knowledge of jīm and khāʾ, the Speaker and Foundation. In abjad reckoning, ḥāʾ is eight.

Likewise the Qāʾim of the Age encompasses the knowledge of the eight bearers of the Throne, as the Qurʾān says: “Eight will bear the Throne of your Lord on that day.” This means the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord the Most High.

The letters mīm, wāw, rāʾ, zāy, and nūn likewise share related written forms. Mīm is rounded at the back, wāw at the front, while nūn keeps its form but has a dot above it.

Mīm signifies Muḥammad, wāw his Legatee, and their written shapes indicate their religious laws. Mīm's curve is at the back, just as the Speaker's law is outward; wāw's curve is at the front, just as the Foundation's law is inward. Were it not for the two forms of mīm and wāw, they could not be distinguished; likewise, without the outward law and inward Interpretation, Muḥammad and ʿAlī would not have been designated Speaker and Foundation.

Nūn signifies the law of the Qāʾim of the Age, which has neither outward nor inward form. Its dot above signifies the Qāʾim's manifestation through force and the sword. Mīm also signifies the name of the Guide. The Guide appears at the end of the letters of the name Allāh, just as the Guide appeared at the end and completion of the cycles. Alif signifies his appearance through support and the sword, because alif signifies the Intellect, lām the Soul, and bāʾ the world's response to the Call. The Guide's name signifies the Guide; they worship our Lord al-Ḥākim—glorified is He—and call upon Him, “O God of the first and the last!”

Then the world becomes simple and spiritual, and the doctrine divine and radiant. All whom I have mentioned are servants of our Lord al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance. He is the Existent Worshipped One, whom tongues cannot describe or hearts comprehend, the One unlike single things, the Unique unlike individual beings, the Self-Sufficient, Originator and Restorer of everything. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

Praise belongs to our Lord alone. He suffices us and is the best Helper and Supporter.

Written in Ramadan, the second year of the Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord alone and the strength of His authority.

The epistle is complete, through the praise and favor of our Lord.

EPISTLE 14 — THE CAUSE OF CAUSES AND THE TREASURE FOR ONE WHO IS CERTAIN AND RESPONDS

Al-Risāla al-Mawsūma bi-Sabab al-Asbāb wa-l-Kanz li-Man Ayqana wa-Istajāb

I put my trust in our Lord, the All-Knowing Creator, the Most High, the Judge of judges, who does not enter thoughts or imaginings, whose remembrance is exalted above the descriptions of those who describe and the comprehension of mankind. The ranks of His Call are the letters of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”

Praise belongs to our Lord, who has no equal in heaven, none on earth who fully knows Him, no counselor, none in the worlds who can overpower Him, and none whose greatness gives him power over Him.

From His complete radiant light He originated the Universal Intellect; from the Intellect's light He originated the true Soul; from the Soul's light He originated the Word; from the Word's light He originated the Preceder; from the Preceder's light He originated the Follower; and from the Follower's light He originated the earth and everything upon it, the revolving spheres, the twelve signs, the four natures, and the matter which is the fifth nature.

All the created things that the common people call heaven are the spheres. They serve the earth and its inhabitants through the light within them and the manifestation of the humanity of our Lord the Most High through them, and the miracles of His divinity upon them. He is exalted above attributes and languages, glorified far above their descriptions.

Now then, compassionate brother: your letter has reached us, asking for true knowledge and reporting the claims of the foolish transgressor. The knowledge of tawḥīd is not like the knowledge of philosophers and abstraction, nor is it arranged as the Callers and servants have arranged it. The peerless pearl is not like solid stone, nor is absolute Oneness like the one who bestows benefit. Nor can an imperceptible world be compared with a cause possessing knowledge.

Rather, true knowledge comes through support from the eternal Originator to His servant, the Cause of Causes. The Originator is the One; the Cause is the one who imparts knowledge to all the worlds: Callers, Authorized Instructors (maʾdhūnūn), Mukāsirs, and Responders, by the knowledge and the mercy and wisdom with which our Lord—glorified is He—has supported him. He is the one present in every age, the Cause, the teacher and instructor of the worlds.

All other people resemble children in a school. Every child owes greater obedience to his father than to his teacher, and the father has a greater claim over him; yet the child learns more from the teacher, because the father has entrusted his education to the teacher and has relieved himself of speaking to and disciplining him. The father possesses the ultimate authority, but the teacher strikes the child, teaches him good, and forbids him evil. The schoolteacher is the cause of the children's learning, their punishment, and their mercy: he disciplines whom he wishes and treats kindly whom he wishes.

Yet there are four blameworthy things the teacher may not do to a child: he may not abuse the child with obscene insults, strike him so as to break a limb, sexually violate him, or kill him. If he does any of these four, the father becomes his adversary. A teacher may apologize if an insult escaped him by mistake, provided he does not repeat it. He may also make amends if he errs in striking a child and breaks a limb: he must have the limb set and support the child from his own property until recovery. But he may not excuse sexual violation of the child; and if he kills the child, he has no defense, unless the father freely chooses to pardon him.

Likewise the Imam of the Age, servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is the instructor of the world and its educator through true knowledge. Our Lord—glorified is He—has entrusted to him all the religious affairs of His servants and made him their Cause, through whom come their reward and punishment. Our Lord is the Existent Worshipped One, exalted above likeness, resemblance, direct discourse, education, and the imparting of knowledge.

All the affairs of the Callers, Authorized Instructors, Mukāsirs, and Responders return to the Imam in every age. He removes whom he wishes, appoints whom he wishes, and gives each his due portion of true knowledge according to what our Lord enables him to know.

He must not reveal religion to a Responder and then conceal its completion from him. If he must conceal it temporarily out of necessity, he must disclose it at another time and bring the Responder to the ultimate goal. Nor may he entrust a Responder's instruction and upbringing to an incompetent Caller who will break his limb, so to speak. If he does this without first discovering the Caller's deficiency and later recognizes it, he must remove the Caller and appoint another, so as to mend the Responder's injury.

The Imam may not invite a Responder to worship himself; that is comparable to sexual violation of the child, for which there is no repentance. Nor may he direct a Responder to worship any creature or affirm the unity of anyone in the worlds; that is the true equivalent of killing the child, for which there is no repentance unless our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—wills.

The Imam is like a prince, the other ranks like soldiers, and the Responders like subjects. Obedience to him is obligatory because our Lord—glorified is He—appointed him their leader and Imam so that through him they might reach knowledge of the Creator of all creatures, the Originator of all, exalted above their descriptions.

I understand what you have said of yourself: that you desire to increase my honor, particularly the honor of service and to improve the manner of discourse in it. You say that I wrote at the head of my letters the expressions “station of the Cause of Causes” and “attributes of the Cause,” and you ask their meanings. You say that the Cause of Causes indicates the Preceder in every age, present in the world, and you bring to this the legends of earlier teachers. You say that this Cause, the Preceder, cannot be perceived through imagination, altered by time, or described by tongues, though he is originated from Intellect, sense, and imagination.

You further say that the combination of these things proves only the existence of a knowing Cause, not a being with speech and hearing as some have claimed, not a person visible to the eye, and not a being enclosed in a known place. You have attributed to me words I did not say; I ask our Lord not to hold you accountable.

You also say that I wrote at the head of my letters that there is the Cause of Causes, another cause above it, and our Lord al-Ḥākim—great is His power—alongside them as their Maker. You ask what I would say if a hostile, intrusive opponent or a bastard asked about the Cause of Causes, the cause above it, and its attributes. Your formulation is unsound.

Through the will of our Lord I shall explain an answer that makes the realities clear to you, according to what this age requires—not because you or anyone in the worlds deserves it, but through the generosity and compassion of our Lord.

You mention that your letter seeks two things: first, to overcome the Opponent; second, not to drive believers' hearts away. You say that the aim in every circumstance, for all the worlds, is to affirm the unity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—alone.

You say you possess many clear rational and legal arguments with which to overcome anyone who speaks against you and establish that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is a mighty, powerful, overpowering God. You report an opponent's challenge: “If you affirm that the Cause cannot be perceived, described, or encompassed by sight or place, your claim that it is near, approachable, and able to address people collapses.”

“If, on the other hand, you admit limits, attributes, sight, and comprehension, your doctrine collapses and you make it resemble created beings, for these belong to creatures.”

You ask me to teach you the foundation upon which to build your doctrine. If the foundation is that a Cause exists in heaven and our Lord al-Ḥākim—great is His power—is the Maker of that Cause, you wish to hear and obey without

exceeding the bounds. If there is a meaning hidden from you, you ask me to explain it. Yet you have gone so far as to compose letters and books and attribute them to me, seeking thereby the honor of service.

I shall explain what you have asked and answer it chapter by chapter through the will and support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. The Holy Spirit reaches me in the blink of an eye, without spiritual or corporeal intermediary. Praise and thanks belong to Him alone.

Know—may our Lord help you obey Him, keep you from disobedience, and aid you in understanding His Call—that I had not wished to answer these questions or burden you with them. You did not ask as a Caller asks his Imam; rather, you displayed your own knowledge and excellence in the realities. That was a mistake. I returned to what our Lord, the All-Knowing Creator, the Most High and Compelling—exalted be His remembrance—has given me of knowledge and forbearance and entrusted to me of teaching and disciplining the world. I understood that yours was an unintentional mistake, a slip that escaped you.

I have therefore written this book through the support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the Creator of lords, explaining in it various sciences and proper conduct. I have made it a treasure for the people of tawḥīd and for those who respond, and named it The Cause of Causes. When you read it, distinguish its meanings with your intellect, ascend through the subtle stages and gates of wisdom, and declare our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, exalted above all names, attributes, kinds, and languages. Thank Him as fully as your capacity allows, and do not speak according to private opinion and analogy. Whoever speaks by opinion and measures knowledge by desire was cast out of the Call and removed from the number of the ranks. May our Lord protect you and all sincere believing Unitarians from that.

The first chapter concerns your statement that you seek my honor, particularly the honor of service. Know—may our Lord aid you in obedience—that neither you nor anyone in all the worlds has control over outward or inward affairs. The outward honor you wish for me consists of wealth, horses, camels, dignity, reputation, and authority over the rich and those in error. You have no power to bring any of this about, nor strength to accomplish it; you can only speak of it. The same is true of everyone else: they cannot secure honor even for themselves, much less for one above them in outward and inward station. Such an offer could properly be made only by a superior to one below him, never by an inferior to his superior.

As for inward honor, you wish to give me the manifestation of true sciences, the substance of higher wisdom, and victory over the adherents of literalist religious laws. But you have no power over this either, nor can anyone speak of it except through the support that our Lord—glorified is He—bestows upon me in every age without corporeal, spiritual, or psychic intermediary.

I may explain to people their doctrines and correct their statements, and no one in all the worlds may deny my authority, because our Lord—glorified is He—chose me and originated me from His radiant light before place or possibility, humans or jinn existed. This was seventy cycles before He created Adam of human manifestation; between each cycle and the next are seventy weeks, between each week and the next seventy years, and each year is a thousand years by your reckoning.

In every one of those ages I called the worlds to the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord the Most High—glorified is He—in different forms and languages. Some responded to His tawḥīd and worship; others recoiled from His signs, denied His favor, worshipped idols, and associated others with His lordship, thereby deserving painful punishment for their associationism.

At the end of this book I shall explain the names by which our Lord the Most High—glorified is He—appeared in each cycle to people according to their corporeal condition, while His divinity is exalted above names, attributes, kinds, and languages. I shall also explain my name in each cycle, the names by which the people of the cycles knew their leaders, and the name of the spiritual Opponent known as Iblīs in each cycle. You will then learn what no Muslim or adherent of the earlier religious laws has known, and gain knowledge that guides you to the realities and prevents you from

following paths of destruction. You will know that I have power to grant honor to you and others in outward worldly life and inward religion, while you cannot grant honor to me except by your tongue or the intention of your heart.

Here is a second chapter—may our Lord protect you from its danger. It concerns those among the common people who say that I invented this affair from myself, composed its knowledge through my own essence and strength, and that our Lord al-Ḥākim—great is His power—does not know of it or approve it. A person encounters words his intellect cannot comprehend, says, “I have an opinion, and mine is better than his; I could compose words better arranged than his,” and thinks he should teach me something I do not know so that I might thank him. This is associationism in the Imamate itself.

I warn you and all sincere Unitarians against this. When you or anyone else reads my book or hears words of mine which the intellect cannot accept, ask about them as an incapable person seeking benefit and eager to learn. Acknowledge that you do not understand. Such a question is praiseworthy and its speaker deserves thanks. You will benefit from me in every circumstance, and I shall answer you through the will of our Lord—glorified is He.

As for your statement that I wrote at the heads of my letters “station of the Cause of Causes” and “attributes of the Cause”: you remembered part of the written heading without understanding it, forgot another part, and failed to examine the arrangement of the writing and what I placed on its lines. Those lines signify known ranks; the writer may neither remove a line nor add one. If I had wished their meanings to be obvious to everyone, I would have written them on one line from the beginning to the end of the letter. Instead I placed them in the middle, for they belong neither to the outward nor to the inward. Right and left are opposed to one another; the middle is the road to salvation and the attainment of the ultimate goal: the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

The four lines of the heading are as follows:

First: “I put my trust in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.”

Second: “Through Him I seek help in all affairs.”

Third: “The station [or position] of the Cause of Causes.”

Fourth: “The attributes of the Cause: In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”

By the first line, “I put my trust in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance,” I intend His divinity, which cannot be perceived by imagination or entered by thought or understanding. There is no one in all the worlds except that He is with them while they do not perceive Him. “He knows the treachery of eyes and what breasts conceal.” His remembrance is too exalted to be described or comprehended. Whoever relies upon Him finds Him sufficient for all his needs. No one in all the worlds can truthfully say that he relied upon Him and that He failed to provide what he needed—glorified and exalted above the claims of polytheists and falsehoods of unbelievers. If one relied upon Him according to the measure of true trust, He would suffice for every need and compel the worlds toward His pleasure. But people trust Him with their tongues while their hearts fear the polytheists. They regard the world as an object of worship and worship a cursed idol. By such deeds they deserve punishment without understanding.

In the second line, “Through Him I seek help in all affairs,” I intend the human manifestation of the veil within which He is concealed, the station from which He speaks, the human form we see. If someone asks, “How can the Creator—glorified is He—be veiled within a human being and speak from him when you say that He cannot be perceived?” we answer that the adherents of every religious community, including the protected communities, agree that the Creator cannot be perceived. Yet they say He dwells in heaven, is established upon the Throne, and was veiled within an unreasoning tree from which He spoke to Moses son of ʿImrān. Moses heard the voice from the tree: “O Moses, I am God.” When Moses heard speech from the tree or mountain, he said, “God said such and such to me,” and no one rejected his claim.

We therefore have a stronger right to say that the Creator—glorified is He—is veiled within a speaking, knowing, chosen person, and that His deputy and chosen one is a more fitting vehicle for divine speech than a dry tree, stone, or idol. This is a clear rational proof that the Opponent cannot refute.

In the third line, “The station of the Cause of Causes,” I am elaborating the statement “I put my trust in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.” I explain the station so that no one misunderstands it as you have. For example, when you say, “I put my trust in the prince concerning my need,” the word “prince” is indefinite. You then clarify, “the commander of the army,” and everyone knows whom you mean.

Likewise the Cause of Causes is the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who governs the affairs of the ranks. The ranks are the causes of the world's religious maladies, because people become confused about them, elevate them beyond their stations, or diminish them. They become sick at heart.

The ranks are also afflicted concerning the Imam of the Age: some doubt him and diminish his station, while others exaggerate his status and make him the Universal Worshipped One. Thus he is a cause of illness to those bewildered about him, whose religions have become sick through him. Whoever grants him his rightful station, acknowledges his Imamate, and recognizes that he is a servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—with no power or strength except through Him, is freed from the true religious illnesses that lead to eternal death. Our Lord—glorified is He—is with this Cause, meaning that He governs and originates it and has power over it and all the ranks.

In the fourth line, “The attributes of the Cause: In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,” the words designate the attributes of the Cause just mentioned, namely the Imam. The line comes last in the heading because the expression bism Allāh has seven letters, indicating seven Callers appointed over the seven regions. The words al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm have letters, indicating the spreading Callers appointed over the islands. They also indicate the seven celestial spheres and twelve zodiacal signs, all of which exist in our Lord's age and serve under the Imam's command. They are called his attributes because people say, “This is so-and-so's Caller,” or “He is one of so-and-so's companions.” Thus the ranks are his attributes, represented by the letters of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”

This is why I wrote “attributes of the Cause” in the fourth line: the Imam's ranks are indicated by that formula. These Callers invite people to the tawḥīd of our Lord—great is His power—while He is the Originator of them all, without likeness, form, or counterpart. He does what He wills, as He wills, when He wills, and none may object to Him. He is the Most High without beginning or end, glorified above their descriptions.

The third chapter concerns your statement in your letter that the Cause signifies the Preceder in every age, present in the world, yet imperceptible to thought, unaltered by time, indescribable by tongues, and originated from intellect, sense, and imagination. You say that these things together prove only a knowing Cause, without speech, hearing, visible person, or known location.

Know—may our Lord aid you—that all this consists of the fables of earlier teachers, the deception they practiced upon Responders, and the truths they concealed from Unitarians. You have built your statement upon the books of unbelieving philosophers and associationist logicians. They did not know the Cause and its relations, so they pointed to the celestial spheres and the natures, making the fifth nature the cause and originator of things. It exists within the four natures and outside them, because the natures were formed through its power. It is the matter of the whole, outside their non-being yet present in all their actions, and is not characterized by heat, coldness, dryness, or moisture.

For this reason they ascribed power and creation to it and called it the limitless Cause, capable of everything. This is faith mixed with unbelief, tawḥīd adorned with associationism, and wisdom overlaid by ignorance. Whatever is called a cause must have something above it that originates it. If they were right to call the fifth nature a cause, they were wrong to call it the Cause of Causes, thereby associating it with our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. For the fifth nature is the matter of the four natures from which the seven spheres were constituted.

The elements, the terrestrial sources, and the things arising from the earth are formed from them. Earth therefore becomes a cause of the cause to which they all pointed. Earth is the great foundation and mine of every glory, yet earth is the foam of water, and water is its life and the life of its inhabitants. Water springs from the mountain of Volition, Volition gushes forth from Will. As He said, “When He wills a thing, His command is only to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is. Glorified is He in whose hand is the dominion of everything—”

“—and to Him you return.” Will is the Cause of Causes: the Universal Intellect, the Pen, the letter qāf, Decree, the alif at the beginning and the alif at the end. Thus the philosophers' doctrine concerning these inanimate things, which possess neither intellect nor discernment, is invalid.

The celestial spheres resemble mills and waterwheels, which possess neither understanding nor discernment. You pour grain into the mill, and it does not know; flour and dust pass through its parts, and it does not know. A waterwheel irrigates one place without knowing and leaves another dry without knowing. The machine has no intellect.

The ox-driver is like the fifth nature: he is neither the animal nor the machine, yet his craft and management are within them and distinct from them. Still, the ox-driver is close to the beasts in his limited knowledge, or like a craftsman who understands only his particular work. His intellect extends only to what his aspiration and upbringing have taught him. He is the cause of that waterwheel, but he is not the Cause of Causes. If he were removed from the craft he knows and placed in another, he would be bewildered.

Likewise the spheres that are disposed toward auspicious influences cannot produce inauspicious influences at their auspicious times, nor can the inauspicious produce the auspicious in their times. The fifth nature itself cannot act independently of the spheres. A wheel that turns a mill cannot perform the work of a different wheel; what rises by day cannot necessarily rise by night, nor what rises in summer in winter. Their incapacity is evident: all have a stronger cause above them. They serve human beings and are used by them in higher and lower affairs.

We thus know that Adam of Universal Purity is the Cause of Causes. He passes from one form to another as his Master, our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, exalted above consort and child, wills. The Cause of Causes is present in every age and exists at every time, but he is a servant under command. How then could you, or anyone in the worlds, say that he cannot be perceived—

“—through thought, is not altered by times, and cannot be described by tongues”? You have acknowledged that he is created, yet these are attributes of the Creator. Every created thing can be perceived; whatever can be perceived may be seen and witnessed. Indeed, by saying that he was formed from intellect, sense, and imagination, you have shown that he can be perceived by intellect. All these are created and perceptible.

You also called this Cause the Preceder in every age. Yet nothing may properly be called the Preceder of all things if there is another created being above it. You yourself placed the Intellect above it, so the Intellect has a better claim to priority than the being it precedes; then come sense and imagination in the order you proposed.

How can you believe that the Preceder has no speaking or hearing essence and no visible person, while still testifying to his precedence? If you testify without seeing, you testify to what you do not know. If you testify without encompassing it, that is impossible, for one cannot testify to what one has not comprehended.

If you testify through your intellect, then you have perceived it and encompassed it in your heart: it is created and perceptible. If you say that you testified to it only through signs seen in the world, as a necessary inference and not direct knowledge of reality, then you have associated another with the Intellect and its Creator. Moreover, you cannot say this after placing intellect, sense, and imagination above the Cause. All are creations of our Lord the Most High, al-Ḥākim over the people of earth and heaven, exalted above adversary, equal, and likeness.

Know—may our Lord aid you in obedience—that the seven celestial spheres, signified by the seven letters of bism Allāh, indicate the seven Callers appointed over the seven regions. The twelve zodiacal signs, indicated by al-Raḥmān

al-Raḥīm, signify the Callers of the twelve islands. They correspond to the four natures because their hands hold the four religious natures: the knowledge of the Speaker, Foundation, Imam, and Proof.

The fifth nature, matter, indicates the Follower. All derive from earth, which signifies the Preceder. Earth is the foam of water, and water signifies the higher Word. Water arises from Volition, which signifies the Universal Soul. Volition was created by the Intellect, which is Will and the Cause of Causes. Each rank is a cause for the next. Some people diminish the ranks and others exaggerate their excellence, so they corrupt their religion through these ranks. Shaṭnīl the Sage is the greatest Imam, appearing in every age, guiding people in every form.

He is a cause for them because if they doubt him they fall into unbelief and their religion becomes sick forever, unless he accepts their repentance; he is forgiving and merciful.

All these ranks we have mentioned are gathered in our present age at the Presence of our Lord al-Ḥākim—glorified is He—the One above them all, their Originator and Fashioner. He is exalted above them all.

Everything in the Qurʾān and other scriptures, everything of explanation revealed to my heart, and all exalted names apply to His servant, the Imam, according to the world's capacities, what their minds can contain, and what their tongues can express. We call Him our Lord the Most High because people know nothing higher, though we cannot perceive even a portion of His human manifestation. His divinity does not enter thoughts or imaginings and cannot be known through outward or inward categories. He is al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, exalted above consort and child, far above what the unbelievers believe and the polytheists say.

The first part is complete; the second follows, if our Lord wills. Through Him comes success in all affairs. Our Lord suffices us and is the best Helper and Supporter.

EPISTLE 15 — THE CRUSHING REFUTATION OF THE TRANSGRESSOR: REPLY TO THE NUṢAYRĪ

Al-Risāla al-Dāmigha li-l-Fāsiq, al-Radd ʿalā al-Nuṣayrī

I put my trust in our Lord, the Most High Creator—glorified is He.

Now then—may our Lord aid you with His support—a book has reached me, composed by one of the Nuṣayrīs who disbelieve in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—associate another with Him, lie about Him, lead believing men and women astray, and seek animal appetites and the license of base nature. His religion is one of lowly wickedness. May our Lord's curse and the curse of those who worship Iblīs and his party fall upon him.

He named his work The Book of Realities and the Unveiling of the Veiled. Whoever accepts his book worships Iblīs, believes in transmigration of souls, permits sexual access without lawful restraint, and treats lying and slander as lawful. Yet he attributes this doctrine to the true Unitarians. Far be such wrongs from the religion of our Lord—great and exalted is He—and far be such obscenities from the Unitarians.

Far be it from the servants of our Lord—glorified is He—that base animal desires and statements of associationism should be attributed to them. Our Lord—glorified is He—knows the treachery of eyes and what breasts conceal. He recompenses every soul for what it has earned, and none is wronged.

After reading his book, I felt obliged to take precautions on your behalf, community of brethren, and protect your religion. I therefore wrote this epistle to refute what that transgressing Nuṣayrī composed—may our Lord curse him—so that no doubt might enter your faith and no accusation fall upon you.

Beware, beware, community of believing women, that any one of you look upon a man, whether believer or opponent, except with the eyes with which she looks upon her son or father. Let each of you seek the salvation of her spirit through knowledge of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Let each know that our Lord, whose name is mighty and besides whom none is worshipped, sees her wherever she may be and in whatever condition she may find herself.

You know that a woman is ashamed before her female neighbor and conceals herself from her male neighbor if she is in an improper condition. How much more should she be mindful of One from whom nothing is hidden, in secret or in public—glorified and exalted above what the polytheists say.

We seek refuge in our Lord from His wrath and punishment and repudiate all who oppose His tawḥīd and have not drunk from its water. You believing women must know our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—acknowledge His unity and truthfulness, and worship none besides Him or acknowledge any other in any age or time.

Let none of you look back or attach herself to those who passed in former cycles or to religious laws and ages that have disappeared. Nothing is required of you but obedience to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His tawḥīd, acceptance of His ranks, and guarding your private parts except for your husbands.

Let each of you know that everyone who passed away and received names and attributes—Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, Imagination, Speaker, Foundation, Imam, Proof, Caller—were all servants of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and exist among us in our present age. Likewise Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and others are present among us.

Knowledge must be directed toward the servant of our Lord who exists now, and repudiation toward the Opponents who exist among us, so that none of you needs to look backward, whether to a Guardian or an Opponent. Do not believe that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is the Imam: the Imam is His servant and possession, unable to repel harm or obtain benefit except through our Lord's power. Our Lord is exalted above names, attributes, and pairs, far above the assertions of polytheists and falsehoods of unbelievers.

The first thing this transgressing Nuṣayrī said—may our Lord curse him—was that everything forbidden, including killing, theft, lying, slander, adultery, and sexual acts between males, is permitted to the man or woman who knows our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

He has lied about Revelation and Interpretation and distorted both. No one is permitted to steal another's property, nor is lying given license in religion, for lying is the root of unbelief and associationism, while truthfulness belongs to faith as the head belongs to the body. No one approves of killing except someone who denies the favor of our Lord and associates another with Him.

He also said that a believer must not withhold his wealth or standing from his brother, must make his household available to his believing brother, and must not object to what takes place between them; otherwise, his faith is incomplete.

He has lied—may God curse him—and stolen the first part of this statement from the Gatherings of Wisdom: “He must not withhold his wealth or status from his brother.” He uses it to cover his unbelief and lies. A man who has no protective concern for his family is no believer, but a Khurramite, seeking ease and license, following his appetites and error. Sexual intercourse is not part of religion and cannot be attributed to tawḥīd, unless “intercourse” is used figuratively for the joining of true knowledge, the opening of wisdom by one authorized to speak and supported by true wisdom.

He further says that a believing woman must not withhold sexual access from her believing brother, but must offer herself to him whenever he wishes; that inward marriage cannot be complete without outward intercourse; and he attributes this to the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

He has lied about our Lord—mighty is His name—associated another with Him, spoken impiously of Him, and distorted the statements of His Unitarian friends. May the curse of Jews, Christians, and Magians fall upon him and those who believe him. This transgressor sought to bring accusations upon your persons and corruption into your religions. If you, community of Unitarian women, examined the misleading religions, the realities would become apparent to you; you would refrain from lust and prostitution and reflect upon the inward, interpretive gatherings.

None of the intermediaries of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—ever asked women for outward sexual relations or claimed that what they heard in instruction could not be completed without physical contact. Know that this transgressing Nuṣayrī—may our Lord curse him—sought nothing but the corruption of the religion of our Lord and the believers. The religion of our Lord can never be corrupted, but this man sought animal desire, which benefits neither religion nor worldly life and instead causes harm. Such desire is compounded of the four natures found in animals. Whoever prefers it to religion is worse than donkey or cow. As it is said, “They are only like cattle; indeed, they are further astray.”

Whoever restrains the self from animal appetites is better than the angels brought near.

As for his argument that physical intercourse increases one's standing in religion and that the inward cannot be completed without it, he lies. If a believing, knowledgeable Unitarian man lived a hundred years without ever marrying and without committing anything forbidden, his religious station would not be diminished. Likewise, if a believing, knowledgeable Unitarian woman worshipped our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—as she ought, lived a hundred years without marrying, and died a virgin, her religion would not be diminished. Conversely, if an unbelieving man and woman had intercourse day and night, it would not benefit them or save them from punishment. All this transgressing Nuṣayrī says is impossible and false.

He says: “Woe, all woe, to a believing woman who denies her brother sexual access. The female organ signifies the outward, and penetration signifies the inward meaning and the disputation with outward believers. The forbidden act of adultery is really speaking to someone unworthy of hearing; whoever knows the inward meaning is released from outward restrictions.”

He has lied about the clear teaching of our Lord, distorted it, led believers astray, and corrupted chaste believing women. Knowing the inward meaning of a thing does not require abandoning its outward practice. Some outward practices must be maintained even if one knows seventy interpretations of them.

One example is purification. Its inward meaning is repudiation of the Iblises, purification of your hearts from love of them, and attachment to the Imam. But no rational person would approve of someone who knows this inward meaning entering the latrine, urinating or defecating, and leaving without washing his private parts, body, or face, rinsing his mouth, or cleansing his nose, claiming that he has understood the inward meaning. If he abandons outward cleanliness, his body becomes dirty, his odor foul, and he is called impure. Rather, someone who knows the inward meaning should increase bodily cleanliness, for purification is a practice whose outward and inward forms are both praiseworthy.

Likewise, suppose a man knows the inward meaning of clothing and garments: prudent concealment, observing the law among its adherents, and treating them gently. If he then removes his clothing, throws it away, and walks naked in the markets, he is called mad, has abandoned decency, and has exposed his nakedness. In the same way, one who knows the inward meaning of adultery may not commit its outward act, thereby bringing disgrace, hostility among brethren, and public condemnation upon himself.

Beware, community of believing women, of corrupting your religion through something that benefits neither this world nor the next. Any man who approaches a believing woman without fulfilling the conditions required by truth and the spiritual law acts hypocritically toward our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—for he violates religion and demolishes tawḥīd. We seek refuge in our Lord from that and repudiate all who believe it. A woman who has a husband has obligations toward him.

I shall explain the conditions binding upon you in the book entitled The Spiritual Law, concerning the subtle, simple, and dense. I shall explain to you and all believing men and women what is required from beginning to end and its purpose, if our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—wills. Through Him I seek help in all affairs. Your conditions, speech, manner of addressing one another, congratulations, condolences, and written petitions to the sacred Presence must differ from those of the common literalists and the polytheists attached to books of Interpretation, who worship non-being without knowledge or insight.

There is no difference between those people and those who worship idols, the sun, or the moon. You must instead be among the exalted Unitarians of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who exists in every age and time, exalted beyond description.

As for the transgressing Nuṣayrī's claim—may our Lord curse him—that he has unveiled the Beloved for you, meaning tawḥīd, he lies. He has unveiled unbelief, manifested it, explained associationism, and adopted it, choosing the worst and foulest of paths. He has spoken in secret and public words from which we seek refuge in our Lord.

In his book he says that our Lord is the pure Spirit of whom the Qurʾān says: “They ask you about the Spirit. Say: the Spirit is of my Lord's command.” He also says that our Lord—exalted far above this—is the one who fashions the human being in its mother's womb at the time of intercourse.

No Jew would approve such a claim concerning a stone he reveres, nor a Christian concerning what he holds sacred. I would not attribute even to one of our Lord's servants the work of shaping creatures in their mothers' wombs, or say that he is present during intercourse and watches the formation of embryos. Formation results from the celestial spheres and their four natures, and the spheres are inanimate bodies without intellect.

Human beings take shape in their mothers' wombs and develop sensation, growth, discernment in eating and drinking, and recognition of mother and father through natural intellect. Dogs, monkeys, pigs, and all animals and wild creatures develop in similar fashion.

Some animals show greater intelligence than human beings. A carrier pigeon can be trained along a route once, then released twenty days' journey away and return to its nest in a single day. Yet some descendants of Adam may be taught a single word a thousand times, though it would bring them benefit and salvation, and still not understand it; with others, one struggles without their learning.

Some animals grow larger and are keener in sensation than human beings, such as elephants, camels, horses, and mules. We therefore know that physical forms arise from the male seed, the warmth of the womb, and the influences of the spheres, with the power of the natures governing the embryo. Formation does not occur at the instant of intercourse, as this transgressing Nuṣayrī alleges and attributes to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. The seed remains in the womb for a day and becomes blood, then changes from one state to another until the natures produce a fully formed creature.

Likewise a hen incubates an egg, and from it develops another creature like the hen. More remarkable still, he says, are beetles, scorpions, worms, ants, and similar creatures, which he believes arise without male seed or the warmth of a womb, from the natures and inanimate matter.

Thus we know that such physical formation is not attributed to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—or to His religious servants. True spiritual fashioning and creation, however, belong to His servants who instruct others in religion. As it is said, “God's handiwork—and who is better than God in handiwork?” Here “God” means the Caller, whose handiwork is the people of outward religion, whom he transforms toward Interpretation and inward knowledge. Whoever fashions something has created it.

Christ likewise said, “Whoever is not born from his mother's womb twice cannot attain the Kingdom of the heavens” and knowledge of the earths. He meant birth in religion and knowledge of the Speakers and Foundations. The Speaker said, “I and ʿAlī are the fathers of the believers,” meaning the outward and inward.

This spiritual creation and formation belong to our Lord's servants who call to tawḥīd. Our Lord—great and exalted is He—does not enter numbers or become counted among units, for numbers, single things, pairs, beginnings, and endings all proceed from Him and return to Him. Glorified is He above what they associate with Him.

As for the Nuṣayrī's assertion that the souls of opponents and enemies return in dogs, monkeys, and pigs, then eventually in iron that is heated and beaten with a hammer; that others return among birds and owls; and others into the wombs of animals that produce young he has lied about our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and uttered a tremendous falsehood. Reason and the justice of our Lord—glorified is He—cannot accept that an intelligent man who disobeyed Him should be punished in the form of a dog or pig, unable to understand his former human existence or remember his wrongdoing, or be turned into iron to be heated and beaten. Where would wisdom and justice be in that? Wise punishment must be experienced by a man who understands the suffering, so that it disciplines him and provides a way to repentance.

Punishment that falls upon a human being is removal from a higher to a lower religious rank, diminution of livelihood, and blindness of heart in religion and worldly life. Likewise there is passage from one “shirt” to another in this order. Reward, while one remains in one's shirt, is an increase in rank through knowledge, ascent from one degree to another through stages, until one reaches the rank of Mukāsir; wealth increases and one advances through religious degrees until reaching the Imamate.

These are the souls of the people of inward knowledge and their rewards; the previous examples concern the souls of the Opponents and their punishments. Whoever understands this knows the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Good works among brethren benefit a person and receive reward now and later. One fears our Lord's punishment now and later, performs good deeds, and avoids evil. Whoever believes in transmigration in the manner of the Nuṣayrīs who attribute divinity to ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib and worship him loses this world and the next. That is the manifest loss.

As for the claim that the polytheists are the so-called Nāṣibīs who associate Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and ʿAlī he lies and his argument is false. If that were associationism, ʿAlī himself accepted it when he pledged allegiance to Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān. They also report that ʿAlī struck his shoe and twenty thousand men of Nahrawān died. A person with such power would not be incapable of refusing allegiance. We therefore say that he accepted it, and Muḥammad appointed their positions alongside him.

Earlier Shīʿīs agreed that the Foundation is the Speaker's counterpart, likeness, and partner in inward knowledge. The Speaker said that associationism is hidden and imperceptible, like the movement of a black ant upon black cloth in a dark night. We thus know that associationism is something other than what this transgressing Nuṣayrī claims.

When he mentions ʿAlī, he says, “Upon us be his peace and mercy”; when he mentions our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—he says only, “Upon us be his peace.” He seeks mercy from an absent non-being and denies the Existent One who judges through His own essence and is distinct from His creations. No unbelief is greater than this. A knowledgeable Unitarian understands that the unforgivable associationism is to place ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib alongside our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

The Nuṣayrī says, “ʿAlī is our existent Lord, and our Lord is ʿAlī; there is no difference between them.” This is the unbelief he has adopted: worship of ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib. Existence belongs to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Speaker, Legatee, Imam, and Proof are all servants of our Lord in every age, supported by Him alone without partner.

He further claims that Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh is the greatest veil through whom our Lord al-Ḥākim appeared, and that anyone who disbelieves this book belongs to the companions of Hāmān, Satan, and Iblīs and has become blind in the heart.

The transgressing Nuṣayrī has lied in all this. He knows neither religion nor the veil. Muḥammad was the veil of ʿAlī son of Abī Ṭālib, not the veil of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Such a claim belongs to one weak in intellect and religion. A veil conceals a thing; it is not the thing's outward manifestation.

The one through whom our Lord—mighty is His name—manifested Himself as He wills, without anyone's right to object, is called the Proof of the Qāʾim, the Mahdī. Through him He called creation from Himself to Himself, giving the servants glad tidings in a visible form and addressing humanity. Our Lord cannot be encompassed by thoughts and imaginings, for the worlds cannot behold His totality or comprehend His description. Exalted is He far above what the polytheists say.

As for Iblīs, Hāmān, and Satan, the Nuṣayrī has erred in his conjectures and analogies, speaking according to opinion and pursuing animal appetite. He intended these names to refer to Abū Bakr al-Taymī, ʿUmar al-ʿAdawī, and ʿUthmān al-Umawī. But the Qurʾān says, “Wine, gambling, standing stones, and divining arrows are abominations of Satan's work; avoid them.” Four things are mentioned together, not three, and all four are attributed to Satan. Satan must therefore stand above them in the causal hierarchy, for work is a product, the maker fashions it, and the fashioner is its creator, as explained earlier.

Human bodies are produced from male seed, womb heat, and the natures of the spheres. True religious creation comes from the words of the teacher, the hearing of the learner, and the learner's rational acceptance. He becomes a mature Responder, is appointed to a rank, and thus becomes a fully formed creation. People say, “This man is the work of so-and-so,” meaning that he is his creation.

These four things constitute a religious order. Their leader is their Satan, who opposed the reality of tawḥīd, departed from truth, and resisted our Lord. Upon him and his companions falls our Lord's wrath, and they are far from Him in body and in heart. Thus you know, community of pure believing men and women, that this transgressing Nuṣayrī has known neither our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—nor Iblīs nor Satan. Through ignorance he has worshipped Iblīs and affirmed his unity out of ignorance and denied our Lord and His favor. We seek refuge in our Lord from

doubting Him, associating another with Him, or disbelieving in Him. Our Lord alone has no partner among corporeal, material, spiritual, psychic, or luminous beings. Glorified and exalted is He above attributes.

Beware, community of believing men and women, of indulging whims, obscenities, animal appetites, and forbidden practices. Know our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who judges by His own essence and is distinct from His creations. Know His Guardian and the ranks of tawḥīd, and accept from them what pleases our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Worship Him completely and no one besides Him—not the Speakers, Legatees, Imams, Proofs, or Callers who preceded you, for all are His servants.

Hear and obey what the servant and chosen one of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord and the might of His authority—has commanded you. “The Hour has drawn near and the moon has split.” I have called you to a strange and difficult thing: the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. What was concealed has appeared; I have explained what lies within breasts and brought forth what lies within graves.

Our Lord knows you well. Peace be upon believing men and women, and upon the men and women who affirm the unity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Praise and thanks belong to our Lord alone. He suffices us and is the best Helper and Supporter.

The epistle is complete. Peace.

EPISTLE 16 — ACCEPTANCE AND SUBMISSION

Al-Risāla al-Mawsūma bi-l-Riḍā wa-l-Taslīm ilā Kāffat al-Muwaḥḥidīn wa-ilā Jamīʿ Man Shakka fī Mawlānā wa-fī Walīhi Qāʾim al-Zamān

Addressed to all Unitarians and all who doubted our Lord or His Guardian, the Qāʾim of the Age. Closing notice: Rabīʿ al-Ākhir, second year of Ḥamza's service.

From the servant of our Lord—glorified is His power and exalted His divinity. When he saw that the Responders' affairs contradicted the conditions and instructions he had laid upon them concerning acceptance and submission to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance and mighty His name, besides whom none is worshipped—he wrote to them this book, through the reading of which they may be set right, if our Lord wills. Through Him comes success in all affairs. This is an exact copy, letter for letter.

If our Lord—glorified is He—intends good for them, they shall prosper in religion and worldly life. If He intends evil for them, none can reverse His decree or repel His judgment. He is the Most High, the Magnificent.

I put my trust in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Through Him I seek help in all affairs. The Cause-Maker of the Cause of Causes. The attributes of the Cause: In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Praise belongs to the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, the Eternal, who is above the Cause of Causes, exalted without likeness or equal. He did not beget from the First Intellect and was not born from the complete and excellent Soul. Nothing in the worlds or stations is equal to Him. He judges through His own essence and is distinct from His originated and fashioned beings. I praise Him in prosperity and adversity and thank Him in hardship and ease.

I have surrendered my natural body, which our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—manifested from four natures; my soul, through which my body grows; my heart and what dwells within it of pure spirit, universal intellect, spiritual wisdom, material knowledge, corporeal understanding, and the matter of forms through which our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is known; my flesh, blood, hair, skin, and all my limbs—to the most generous God, the reality of the greatest Lord, the Most High, exalted above antiquity.

I accept for my spirit everything our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has accepted for me. Glorified is He—how great His station and exalted His sovereignty! No human can perceive His reality; none with sight can comprehend the essence of His knowledge. He does whatever He wills, however He wills, and none may object to His judgment. He is the Existent Worshipped One, exalted above the claims of polytheists and unbelievers. “He knows what lies before them and behind them, and they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He wills. His Throne extends over the heavens and earth; preserving them does not weary Him. He is the Most High, the Magnificent.”

Now then, community of Responders: I have heard of the weakness that has afflicted your bodies and the doubt concerning the Master of your Age, because you witnessed the rejection of the Truth and the spread of associationism among creatures. You formed evil suspicions about our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and concealed a people who were doomed. Do you not know that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—builds and demolishes, and overturns things unlike those He builds? Through His wisdom He opens things and afterward bestows upon each of His acts a wisdom corresponding to His divinity, though you are heedless of it. His wisdom becomes apparent to you only after a time. He distinguishes the truthfulness of believing Unitarians from the lies of polytheists, the counterfeit claims of pretenders, and what unbelievers hide in their breasts, so that whoever perishes may perish upon clear proof and whoever lives may live upon clear proof.

Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has power over all things. His light is never extinguished, nor are the veils protecting His friends stripped away. He does not demolish anything without building something better, stronger, and higher in its place. He never abandons the world without purpose.

People say, “God never closes a door of provision without opening other doors.” The door here is the Proof of the world, their teacher, through whom they enter tawḥīd and knowledge of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. “God” here signifies the divinity of our Lord—glorified is He. Our Lord does not permanently conceal His servant, the Guide to His worship, from His servants while the Guide is active, except when He intends to manifest him before the other servants, support him with power, and prepare the earth through his hand until no hypocrite remains standing against the force of our Lord and no polytheist escapes His scourge.

You have heard in the Gatherings of Wisdom, community of Responders, that when the Qāʾim of Truth appears, he will break the cross, kill the pig, turn swords into sickles, and make houses into dwellings. Then rain will fall from heaven, plants will spring from the earth, and the earth will be filled with justice and equity as it had been filled with oppression and wrong.

Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has supported me so that I have done all this, and you have witnessed it with your own eyes. The cross signifies the Speaker, who has twelve ranks, as does every Speaker. Jesus son of Yūsuf, the fifth Speaker, said to his disciples “I ascend to my Father and your Father; gird your waists, carry your crosses, and follow me.” By the cross he meant himself and his twelve ranks. I have broken your law-bound religious dispensation through the true sciences of tawḥīd.

The pig signifies the spiritual Opponent, who likened his spirit to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. I summoned him, and he accepted, acknowledging servitude to me out of necessity, not conviction.

The swords signify the support our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—gave me for reaping the hypocrites and rebels through His power.

The houses are the Preceder, Follower, Speaker, and Foundation, in whom the world has placed spiritual meanings. I have explained to you and all Unitarians that they are servants and stations, just as people speak of the stations of the moon and celestial sphere.

Rain from heaven signifies the true knowledge with which our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has supported me. The earth's vegetation signifies the Responders' hearing and acceptance of that knowledge. The earth being filled with justice and equity means the Caller's open proclamation of the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. Its former oppression and wrong mean the ornamentation of the two religious laws.

You have heard what was recited in the Gatherings of Wisdom concerning the Imam's trial, his concealment, and his movement from place to place—a movement of concealment, not of transformation or change of essence. The Imam is the servant and possession of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord and the strength of His authority.

This trial will bring the destruction of rebels and opponents. It is a trial through which our Lord tests you because He has bestowed upon you favors never granted to anyone in the cycles and revealed to you in His tawḥīd and worship what He revealed in no earlier age. He honored you in the time of His servant, the Guide, as He honored no one in the regions. Neither police chief nor governor nor mounted troops had power over you except in ways beneficial to you. Then the hypocrites killed three of your brethren, and our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—commanded the killing of a hundred of them, although the Qurʾān says only, “A life for a life.” Yet you did not give thanks for this or worship Him as He deserved. Your intentions were not sincere in His unity.

You did not accept what I commanded you in my books: truthfulness of the tongue, protection of the brethren, acceptance of the actions of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and submission to His command. Instead you dealt with me deceitfully concerning His worship and tawḥīd, doubted His promises, and feared created beings rather than fearing His punishment and hoping for His mercy and reward.

You altered the guidance I gave you, denied the favor and sufficiency you had enjoyed, and our Lord replaced your pure water with scalding water and mirage, and your safety with fear and punishment. “We did not wrong them; rather, they wronged themselves.” “God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves, and when God wills evil for a people none can reverse His decree.”

You heard in the gathering that some “seek understanding for other than God, learn knowledge without acting upon it, wear sheepskins while their hearts are wolves' hearts, have tongues sweeter than honey and deeds more bitter than colocynth. Are you deceived by Me, or daring against Me? I have sworn to test you with a trial that leaves even the forbearing among you bewildered.”

The forbearing one here signifies the Caller in our present trial, and the address was directed to you. Sheepskins signify the outward appearance of believers adopted without reality or proof. Hearts signify Imams; wolves' hearts mean Imams of error. Tongues signify Proofs. Deeds more bitter than colocynth signify the spiritual Opponent, whom our Lord has banished from His mercy.

This trial resembles the furnace in which silver is refined. Fire burns away the copper mixed with it and leaves pure silver, which receives another designation when it is refined. Likewise, when a Responder who harbors doubt undergoes this trial, his counterfeit nature is exposed and what was concealed within him becomes manifest. But a believer mature in religion, truthful in speech and upright in action, grows more certain and faithful as the age's trials increase, just as pure white silver becomes more refined the longer it is subjected to the furnace. Thus a Unitarian accepts whatever trial our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—decrees and patiently submits to His judgment.

One of them says, “If you cut me into pieces in your trial, the trial would only increase my love.” Such a person is among the successful. As the Qurʾān says, “We shall surely test you with something of fear”—fear in religion—“and hunger”—the starvation of spirits deprived of true knowledge—“and loss of wealth”—the books mentioned—“and lives”—the ranks of tawḥīd—

“—and fruits,” meaning the benefits of knowledge. “Give glad tidings to the patient,” meaning the Unitarians, “who, when disaster strikes them” in religion, say, “We belong to God,” meaning we surrender our affairs to Him, “and to Him we return,” meaning to strength and victory, certainly and necessarily, through the will and power of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

I had already promised and warned you of the trial that has afflicted you and cautioned you against the deeds for which you would deserve punishment. First I warned you about Anūshtakīn al-Darazī, al-Bardhaʿī, and their companions, and the corrupt deeds they practiced. I explained to you in The Epistle of Communication and the Ultimate Goal that truthfulness signifies the Imam, and I am that Imam.

Lying signifies the Imam's Opponent. Truthfulness and lying each consist of three letters in Arabic and thus resemble one another in the number of their letters while differing in form and meaning.

Know that al-Darazī and al-Bardhaʿī spoke without knowledge or understanding, acted without seeking our Lord's pleasure, and raised a building without foundations. What befell each of them came through their own deserts and the justice of our Lord—glorified is He—at my hand.

I submitted al-Darazī's name to the Divine Presence among many other names. He repeatedly begged me to give him some of the books of tawḥīd I had composed, but I refused because I foresaw his evil end. The possessor of the religious law said, “Beware the believer's insight, for he sees through the light of God.” Here the believer is the Imam, and “God” refers to the divinity of our Lord—glorified is He.

Through our Lord's light and support I perceived his condition and did not hand him what he requested. He then grew arrogant and said, “I am better, stronger, and higher than he.” He did not understand that the victor is the one whom our

Lord helps. “When He wills a thing, His command is only to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is. Glorified is He in whose hand is the dominion of everything, and to Him you return.”

As for al-Bardhaʿī, I sent to him and invited him to the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. He swore by our Lord that he would not enter this doctrine without a written authorization from our Lord. But when al-Darazī sent him a messenger with three dinars and promised him a mount and robes of honor, he went to him, opening for himself the gates of calamity and unbelief.

All his companions are recorded by me, and I possess documents witnessed by trustworthy people that they would never renounce what they heard from me. If one of them recants, he is repudiated by our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and our Lord repudiates him, punishing him as He wills without objection.

If our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—wills to punish them with death, we acknowledge that the will and choice belong to Him.

I instructed them, as I instructed you, not to curse anyone among those previously mentioned and not to approve of obscenities, whether outward or hidden. When they exceeded the bounds, our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—took vengeance upon them and upon the “shirt” in which they had worshipped Him. His will and choice govern them. If He punishes them, it is for their evil deeds; if He shows them mercy, it is through His generosity and compassion, not because of any claim they deserve.

I had written an epistle to Anūshtakīn al-Darazī, explaining that every outward thing has an inward aspect, every spirit a body, and neither can stand without the other. The Unveiling you seek is beyond your power and capacity to accomplish, for it has a spirit and body and neither can be perceived. Its spirit is true knowledge, of which you possess nothing; you do not know its nature. I have manifested true, creative knowledge beyond your capacity and that of all the worlds. This is through the support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—not my own power or strength. Praise and thanks belong to Him alone. Its body is the sword which our Lord has promised me, and He does not break His promise.

If you claim to be a believer, acknowledge my Imamate as you did at first, so that you may address the people of the Psalms from their Psalms, the people of the Torah from their Torah, the people of the Qurʾān from Revelation, the people of inward knowledge from Interpretation itself, and the people of logic through horizons, celestial spheres, rational proofs, and their own selves. Then each will see the defects in what he possesses, and the worship and tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will be established, together with repudiation of Iblīs and his party.

Do this without cursing anyone mentioned earlier, for curses neither increase religion nor diminish it. Address people in the best manner, for our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—loves those who do good. If you act thus, the hearts of the worlds will incline toward us and their tongues will cease speaking against us, until our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—wills their destruction and delivers them to the sword of His vengeance.

Then spirit and body, time and place and possibility, sword and knowledge and sovereignty will come together. No hypocrite will remain without his power being broken, and no polytheist without his end drawing near. Whoever survives the sword will pay the poll tax, as I explained in The Epistle of Communication and the Ultimate Goal.

The opponents (Nāṣibīs) will have the end of the left sleeve dyed violet and wear two lead pendants in their ears, weighing twenty dirhams. Their poll tax will be two and a half dinars; they are called the Jews of Muḥammad's community.

Those who adhere to the Foundation without our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will wear two iron pendants in their ears, weighing thirty dirhams, and have the end of the right sleeve dyed black. Their poll tax will be three and a half dinars; they are called the polytheists who are the Christians of Muḥammad's community.

The hypocrites who apostatized from the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will wear two pendants of black glass, weighing forty dirhams, have the breast of their garment dyed dusty lead-gray, and wear a pointed cap of fox skin. Their poll tax will be five dinars annually; they are called the hypocrites who are the Magians of Muḥammad's community.

Then our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will manifest Himself to His servants, and the question will be asked, “To whom belongs sovereignty today, and on every day?” The answer will be, “To our Lord al-Ḥākim, the Mighty, the Compelling.” Glorified and exalted is He above the assertions of polytheists and unbelievers.

Community of Responders, beware of disliking any act of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—concerning you or forming evil suspicions about Him, lest you lose your religion. Surrender the affair to Him and you will be saved. Accept His decree, remain patient under His trial, and give thanks for His favor and gifts. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—never breaks His promise and does not wrong His servants. He will complete His light through my hand, even if the polytheists dislike it. Rejoice in His promise and worship Him as He ought to be worshipped until certainty comes to you.

The copy was presented to the Divine Presence in Rabīʿ al-Ākhir, the second year of the servant and possession of our Lord, Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—besides whom none is worshipped. Praise belongs to our Lord alone in prosperity and adversity, hardship and ease. He suffices me; upon Him I rely, and He is the best Helper.

Completed with the praise of our Lord alone.

EPISTLE 17 — THE EPISTLE OF TRANSCENDENCE TO THE COMMUNITY OF UNITARIANS

رسالة التنزيه إلى جماعة الموحدين

I put my trust in our Lord, the Creator, the All-Knowing, the Most High, the Judge of judges, who does not enter thoughts or imaginings, whose remembrance is exalted above the descriptions of those who describe and the comprehension of humanity. “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful”: the Callers of His servant, the Imam.

From the servant who has known our Lord in manifestation and concealment, worshipped Him in every age and season, prostrated before His unity in secret and amid events, guided to tawḥīd and faith, and forbidden indecency and falsehood: the possession of our Lord—glorified is His power and exalted His glory—Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord and the strength of His authority.

His servant relies upon no created human being and worships no person or image. Rather, he worships universal Divinity, the Eternal God, the Originating Creator, who manifests His humanity to the world, whose station is named al-Ḥākim, and who is exalted above names, attributes, and intentions. Glorified is He above human comprehension through imagination, and exalted above the Preceder, Follower, Speaker, Foundation, and Imam.

To the community of believers in al-Ḥākim, the Creator, the Most High, who affirm His unity beyond every originated and eternal thing. Our Lord has guided you and us and aided us all through the favors and gifts He has granted you. He is the Guardian, the Powerful, the All-Powerful.

Now then: I praise our Lord, besides whom we have no lord. I command you and myself to thank Him for His favors and gifts, and for what He has manifested to you of His beneficence, and for His divinity being transcendent above His lordship and the servants of His Call. I confirm what I explained to you in The Book of the One Who Is Distinct through His Own Essence, and refute those who say that our Lord is the Speaker, Foundation, or Imam.

Every one of these groups claims to be a believing Unitarian, though he is an unbelieving polytheist and heretic. They adopted religion through opinion, analogy, obstinacy, and deception, and studied the books of the Opponents and of confused beliefs. Thus they strayed from the path and lost sight of the true light, so that they were not guided.

Had they looked with the eye of the heart and certainty, distinguished the realities of faith and religion, surrendered the affair to its rightful possessor, and remained upright upon the middle path, they would have obtained abundant knowledge, acquired pure reason, and followed the clearest road.

Instead they lost their connection with the Imam, followed human appetites, and associated idols and images with the universal Creator. Such people will not prosper.

I have already set out in The Book of the One Who Is Distinct through His Own Essence what invalidates the doctrine of each of their factions. In this book I shall briefly mention the subtleties and the pure realities of tawḥīd, sufficient for a discerning rational person and a cultivated Unitarian. The rational person hears the beginning of speech and understands its middle and end; hears its end and understands its beginning and middle; and hears its middle and knows its two ends. The ignorant person understands neither the outward arrangement nor the meanings of the words.

Know—may our Lord guide you to Him—that all the names familiar among believers, such as Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, Imagination, Speaker, Foundation, Imam Proof, and Caller, may refer either to praiseworthy or blameworthy beings. Every rank in the Call of tawḥīd has its counterpart in the Call of associationism and rivalry, so that an Opponent stands against it in each age and time.

The earlier teachers said that the Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, and Imagination were spiritual beings in the heights whom no one could see. They intended thereby to draw believers along gradually and also to deceive them.

Do you not see their saying that each spiritual rank in the heights has a corporeal rank in the lower world standing in its place? The Speaker stands in the place of the Preceder; the Foundation in that of the Follower; the Imam in that of the Grandfather; the Proof in that of the Opening; and the Caller in that of the Imagination. Thus it is established that nothing benefits you except worship of the Existent One and tawḥīd of the Worshipped One.

All the fine names belonging to the ranks of tawḥīd were adopted by the masters of the law-bound religions, who imitated them and usurped their names and stations until the appointed time. As Salmān the Persian—may our Lord's blessings be upon him—said to the Speaker, Foundation, and their companions: “Karziyū, karziyū, ḥaqq mīza bi-tazriyū”. Its Arabic meaning is: “You knew, you knew, until you overcame the master of the affair, imitated his friends, and claimed what was not yours by right.”

The earlier teachers likened the Speaker to the Preceder and placed him above all ranks out of fear of the world and desire for worldly goods. Yet the most exalted and highest station is the Imam. He is the true Preceder, originated by the Creator—glorified is He—before all the ranks.

He is the Intellect, concerning which ordinary people relate that God created it before all things. He said to it, “Approach,” and it approached. Then He said, “Turn away,” and it turned away. He said, “By My might, I have created nothing and shall create nothing finer than you.”

This is the Imam in whom everything has been enumerated. The true “things” are the ranks who stand before humanity. The Imam is a single light that our Lord—glorified is He—transfers as He wills. He knows the worlds, while they do not know him.

Whoever is appointed by the Imam as his deputy is the Follower, because he follows him in knowledge. He is also called Foundation, because he is the foundation of the Responders and the origin upon which their building rests. The Responders must obey him as long as he obeys our Lord—glorified is He—and the Imam who appointed him.

The Imam is called Imam because he leads them and guides them to worship our Lord—glorified is He. He is called Preceder because he was the first to precede others in knowledge of our Lord. He is truly called Speaker because in every age and time he speaks the truth and calls the world to the tawḥīd of our Lord—glorified is He.

His deputy is called Foundation because the Responders build their religion upon his words. He is called Follower because he deputizes for the Imam and follows his knowledge. The Caller is named Grandfather because he strives (jadda) to seek knowledge from the Imam and exerts himself in the affairs of Responders until he brings them to high degrees. The Authorized Instructor is called Opening because he opens the gate of the pledge and covenant to the Responders. The Mukāsir is called Imagination because he alludes through his knowledge and disputation like an image or apparition, having permission to hint in speech but not to disclose and explain openly.

These are five praiseworthy persons belonging to tawḥīd. All the names appearing in the Qurʾān apply to these five. But the earlier teachers concealed them, granted partnership to the masters of the religious laws, and placed the name of the servant above that of the Worshipped One. They established the five. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—will complete His light through my hand even if the polytheists dislike it.

They said that the Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, and Imagination were spiritual beings in the heights, invisible to the world. Their statement was correct in one meaning, for these five are the spirits of the Responders and are hidden from the eyes of the ignorant. But they did not explain their individual persons to the world. They withheld understanding and placed them in non-being, seeking thereby to keep people with the Speaker of the law, his Foundation, and their ranks.

They set against the five spiritual ranks of tawḥīd five corporeal ranks of the law-bound religion, so that everything might be paired and opposed, and the unity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His distinctness from all creation might become clear. He is the Originator of them all, their Knower, and the Fashioner of their religious forms. He does not enter numbers or become measurable by the one. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

The discerning rational person does not seek the non-existent and abandon the Existent One. Reports about what is absent are subject to increase and decrease; the Existent One is witnessed through intellect, proof, and direct observation. Thus you recognize the falsity of non-being and remove from our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—all falsehoods and accusations.

Among the greatest ordered rational proofs and clear satisfactory signs that our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is transcendent above the Speaker and Foundation, and that they are His servants, is that both are present in our own age and employed in His dominion.

They are ʿAbd al-Raḥīm son of Ilyās and ʿAbbās son of Shuʿayb. Two decrees bestowed upon them titles that can belong only to the Speaker and Foundation. There is another clear rational and visible proof: the protected communities and the people of religion agree that ʿAbd al-Raḥīm son of Ilyās, titled Heir-Apparent of the Muslims, is closer to our Lord—glorified is He—than ʿAbbās son of Shuʿayb, titled Heir-Apparent of the Believers.

Even if ʿAbd al-Raḥīm had no excellence over ʿAbbās beyond the mention of his name in the sermon, coinage, and public proclamation, that would suffice for the discerning rational person. The adherents of the religious laws agree that faith is superior to Islam and believers superior to Muslims.

Were it not for the profound wisdom He manifested to the worlds through making their persons known and their stations visible, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm son of Ilyās would have had to be called Heir-Apparent of the Believers, and ʿAbbās son of Shuʿayb Heir-Apparent of the Muslims, according to their degrees of nearness and the outward order of their ranks.

When we saw that their titles ran contrary to the outward ranking, we knew with certainty that ʿAbd al-Raḥīm son of Ilyās is the Speaker Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh, and that ʿAbbās son of Shuʿayb is the Foundation ʿAlī son of ʿAbd Manāf. Their Completer is Khutakīn, the Caller, corresponding to the one surnamed Abū Bakr. Their successor Jaʿfar the Blind corresponds to ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb. Beneath them stands the Chief Judge Aḥmad son of al-ʿAwwām, corresponding to ʿUthmān son of ʿAffān.

These five are the ranks of the outward religious law. They are forms without spirits, because the true spirit is acknowledgment of the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and undertaking His worship. All of them deny His power, disbelieve in His favor, associate others with His worship, and are ignorant of the foundations and sources of religion. They are heedless of the enmities of the past and do not know what is to come: the killing of apostates and the sale of their offspring in the market of Māzin, on a day when no soothsayer will speak and the intercession of a treacherous polytheist will be of no benefit.

You will see the polytheists like drunkards, although they are neither drunk nor suffering from wine; rather, their minds will be stunned by the awe of the Compelling King and by the sword and destruction that overtake them. Every soul will be recompensed for what it has earned, and they will not receive mercy.

Community of Unitarians of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—I have explained the path to you and opened a wide way through the narrow passage. Avoid the roads of associationism and error and follow the paths of guidance and perfection.

Know that every man who leads a people and stands before them is their imam, because he leads them in speech and action. But there are praiseworthy and blameworthy imams, as He said: “Fight the leaders of unbelief, for they have no faith, so that they may desist.” These are the leaders of the law-bound religion.

Muslims have attributed the Imamate to many scholars, such as al-Shāfiʿī, Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and others too numerous to discuss here. They called them imams because by their words they prohibited what was forbidden and permitted what was lawful, and people accepted their authority.

Likewise each of the five men I mentioned is an imam to those who obey, follow, and accept his words. The Heir-Apparent of the Muslims is their leader and greatest imam, because he occupies the station of the Speaker Muḥammad son of ʿAbd Allāh.

Fight them in your hearts by repudiating their beliefs concerning our Lord, the Creator, the All-Knowing, the Most High, the Judge of judges—glorified and exalted above their descriptions. They confine Him within form and humanity, whereas the power of our Lord is exalted and His divinity transcendent above their descriptions.

Just as there are five corporeal ranks of the law-bound religion, visible and existing to uphold its Call, there are five spiritual ranks, existing to uphold the Call of tawḥīd.

First among them, and greatest in excellence, is Dhū Maʿa. After him is Dhū Maṣṣa, followed by the Word and the two Wings, who are known as Preceder and Follower. But the corporeal Preceder is not the spiritual Preceder, for the true Preceder is the greatest Imam, Dhū Maʿa, whom our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—appointed to guide His servants and serve as the gate to His worship and tawḥīd.

Each of the four who follow him may be called an imam because he stands before the Responders and leads them to knowledge of our Lord, Lord of the worlds, through the mediation of their common Imam, the Universal Intellect, Dhū Maʿa, who manages their affairs. He raises the Callers through knowledge and forbearance and nourishes the Responders through discipline and learning.

From him they receive knowledge and to him they return in fear and peace. He is the means of reaching the mercy of our Lord—glorified is He—the gate through which they enter His tawḥīd, and the instructor from whom they learn the conduct of tawḥīd and the worship of our Lord, the Originator and Restorer who does whatever He wills, glorified and exalted above their descriptions.

No one among the ranks may compose a book or have one read to a Responder except by command of the one appointed as their guide and Imam. If someone reads a book to them without authorization, both reader and listeners disobey, because the Imam speaks through the spiritual support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—without intermediary. The Callers speak from the knowledge he has taught them directly. If they act without his command, they act through opinion and analogy.

The first to act according to his own opinion and measure knowledge by desire was Iblīs. He was removed from his rank and expelled from the Call and his station. Whoever obeys Iblīs belongs to his party and followers. Whoever among the ranks obeys his Imam and hears from him everything supported by our Lord—glorified is He—belongs to the angels brought near in the highest stations.

Whoever responds to the Imam through his hand and receives instruction by his command is guided to command what is right and forbid what is wrong. He permits them the good things our Lord—glorified is He—has permitted, forbids them impurities and the worship of created beings and customary idols, and urges them toward the tawḥīd and worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—the ultimate goal of every goal.

The ranks resemble the imams of mosques, each of whom is an imam in his own mosque and neighborhood. The Guide resembles the greatest Imam, who leads all the worlds in the Friday prayer and recites aloud in a manner no other mosque imam may imitate. He reduces the prayer by two cycles, which no other imam has authority to do.

Likewise the preacher: the imams of the mosques follow him, remain silent during his sermon, and pray behind him, for he is the imam of them all. Whoever speaks during his sermon or turns to look behind himself loses the excellence of Friday prayer, and his prayer is broken.

Whoever prays in his own mosque on Friday without praying behind the Imam who delivers the sermon disobeys God and contradicts his own beliefs. When the preacher appears upon the pulpit, the other mosques and their imams cease to exercise their usual authority, for he possesses evident signs that none of them possesses.

In all the mosques, the muezzins stand higher than the imam during the call to prayer, except on Friday, when the muezzins stand in one row before the Imam. The Imam stands twelve degrees above them. They stand while he sits upon the pulpit with his right hand on the hilt of his sword.

Likewise the Callers are imams over those who respond through them, until they stand in the presence of their Qāʾim and Guide. Then none of them may speak in the Call—of which the call to prayer is the likeness—except under his command and prohibition, while he sits upon the pulpit. The pulpit signifies his rank and excellence above the twelve dispersed Proofs. He wears a sword, signifying the support our Lord—glorified is He—has granted him beyond what any of them possesses.

He recites aloud, signifying his unveiling of knowledge that none of them may unveil. He drops two cycles of prayer, signifying his abolition of the Speaker and Foundation, which none of the other ranks can accomplish. He faces the people from the pulpit, signifying that he stands over all the worlds through support and the sword from on high.

When he prays, he faces the prayer niche, signifying his turning toward the sovereignty of our Lord—glorified is He—seeking His mercy. Each Friday he recites only the two suras known as The Hypocrites and Friday, signifying that he appears in each of the seven cycles and that his Call is one.

The beginning of the Call is repudiation of the ornamented religious laws, which are the very substance of hypocrisy and associationism. Its end is striving for the worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and gathering in His tawḥīd.

At the end of the recitation comes the supplication (qunūt), signifying worship of our Lord in secret as well as openly, so that their worship is not hypocrisy or display before people.

Bowing in a single manner signifies submission to divine support. The bending of the body signifies acceptance and humility until that support is received in its entirety. Rising signifies establishing the Call spiritually, without obligatory ritual burdens. The two prostrations signify worship of our Lord in the station of humanity and worship of Him through the reality of divinity. Sitting between them during the testimony signifies the dignity and stillness manifested between the two conditions. Sitting at the final greeting signifies the relief that spirits will enjoy in his age from obligatory rituals and religious laws.

At that time nothing will be required of people except worship of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—His tawḥīd, and acknowledgment of the Qāʾim of the Age and his ranks, through whom He has supported His righteous servants and guardian angels against the two religious laws.

The worshipper then offers greetings to the right and left, signifying surrender of his affairs to the Creator of all creatures. He frequently attributes power and strength to Him and acknowledges that everything he has done comes through the support of our Lord—glorified is He—and the strength of His sovereignty. Like all His servants, he is subject to weakness and incapacity, and his superiority over them consists only of the Imamate and the support he receives.

Thus these five persons have five counterparts, existing as opposed pairs: one group belongs to religion and the Call of tawḥīd, the other to worldly affairs and the Call of impiety. Our Lord—glorified is He—is transcendent above the ranks of religion and worldly life. He does not enter thoughts or imaginings. Glorified and exalted is He above their descriptions.

Praise and thanks belong to Him alone. He suffices us and is the best Helper and Supporter.

Its draft was written in the month of Jumādā al-Ākhira, in the second year of our Lord's servant and possession, Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists by the sword of our Lord and the strength of His authority alone, without partner.

Completed.

EPISTLE 18 — THE GREAT EPISTLE OF THE WOMEN

رسالة النساء الكبيرة

I place my trust in our Lord, the Righteous, the All-Knowing, the Most High above all creatures; His remembrance is exalted beyond the descriptions of those who describe and the comprehension of humankind. The letters of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful” signify the ranks of His servant, the Imam. Glory be to Him who manifested His wisdom and thereby rendered His creatures powerless.

He who appears to us in forms like our own does so to make us familiar and to reassure our minds. In this is consummate wisdom and a miraculous sign. He concealed Himself when He willed and appeared as He willed. None may oppose Him or turn aside His command. His prayers, favor, and greetings are upon the one appointed to establish the truth, who openly spread tawḥīd, spoke truthfully and with certainty, and praised the ranks who came after him. Peace and mercy upon them, each in order of nearness, conveying from him the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and expressing what they were commanded to express by the Lord—exalted is His name—besides whom none is worshipped.

We concealed no matter except what we were commanded to conceal, and manifested none except what we were commanded to manifest. A servant, in relation to his Lord, follows what he is commanded and abstains from what he is forbidden.

You, community of women who affirm the unity of our Lord, affirmed His unity in the way He commanded you. He concealed the knowledge of His unity when He willed and manifested it as He willed, since the will is His. “They do not precede Him in speech, and they act by His command.”

You, community of Unitarian women, must not conceal what your Lord has manifested, nor disobey what He has commanded you, thereby associating another with Him. Did you not hear in your gatherings that associationism is more hidden than the creeping of a black ant over black cloth in a dark night?

Think, then, about what was said in your earlier gatherings, so that you may understand the teaching appropriate to your own time. I advise you to hasten toward the tawḥīd of your Lord to which you were called by the person who explained it to you. If one of you says, “I affirmed the unity of the Lord and have never departed from it; I have no need of an intermediary,” the path of truth has been hidden from her.

Did you not hear in your gatherings of wisdom the account of the candle, which is complete as an illustration of tawḥīd? When its parts are separated, it cannot be called a complete candle. Wax by itself is called wax, cotton by itself cotton, fire by itself fire, and the wick-holder by itself a wick-holder. The name “candle” no longer applies. When the parts are gathered—wax, cotton, fire, and holder—only then is it called a complete candle. Understand, community of Unitarian women, why these examples were given to you: you cannot attain knowledge of tawḥīd except through all the ranks of religion.

Did your gathering not teach that the Qurʾān is a living person? When its chapters, divisions into tenths and fifths, and verses are assembled, it is called a complete Qurʾān. When its chapters and verses are separated, it is not called a complete Qurʾān. Its perfection resides in the Imam, who is the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. It is said that the Qurʾān is the Word of God. Here “God” means the divinity of our Lord, which cannot be bounded or comprehended. He manifested humanity to us out of compassion and to reassure our hearts, for we have no power to confront the divinity.

The meaning of “the Qurʾān is the Word of God” is that the Imam comes from the Lord—exalted and mighty is He. This demonstrates that no one reaches knowledge of the Lord—exalted be His praise—except through obedience to the Imam's commands and abstention from what he forbids. We may not make our own choices concerning the

Lord—exalted and mighty is He—or ask “Why?” or “How?” We must hear and obey what He commands us. If we owe this to His servant, how much more do we owe it to His manifest commands? Whoever imagines that he affirms the unity of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—while refusing His manifest commands imagines a marvel indeed.

Let us return to what was recited to us in the gathering, for we are not permitted to respond to an unauthorized person or accept his words. You know, Unitarian women, that the reader of the gathering spoke both as a warner of what would follow and as a bearer of tidings concerning what would come thereafter. He said: “A he-goat from among the he-goats of the Umayyads will ascend this pulpit of mine; after him a youth of Thaqīf will rise, a devourer of orphans' property and one who renounces the religion of the Compassionate. A third will rise, empty of religion, not among the people of the Call, devoid of knowledge. Then will come an interval and bewilderment. Afterward truth will rise as a stranger, and a stranger will establish it.”

We considered his saying about the Umayyad he-goat and found that it referred to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz son of Muḥammad. We considered the youth of Thaqīf who devours orphans' wealth and renounces the religion of the Compassionate, and found him to be Mālik son of Saʿīd. We considered the third, empty of religion, disowning the Call and devoid of knowledge, and knew him to be Aḥmad son of al-ʿAwwām. Our Lord—exalted be His name—had stipulated that he should not speak in the Call, and he knew nothing of it. We found him empty of its sciences.

The gatherings ceased; bewilderment descended; the community was turned upside down, and people invented false sayings. Then the appointed term of the book was reached, the first promise came, and what had been concealed appeared. Those who affirmed the Lord's unity did so through the hand of the one He chose and made worthy of the task. He manifested him and concealed him. We manifested him when He manifested him, and concealed him when He concealed him, without objecting to any of this, but obeying and submitting.

Then He appeared afterward. We raised no objection and imposed no interpretation, nor did we act according to our opinions or analogies. Through knowledge we understood that the concealment had been caused by the ugliness of your deeds, your many objections, and your attempts to choose for yourselves. We have no right to that. The Lord—exalted and mighty is He—graciously manifested the matter to us through the same person by whose hand He had first manifested it, and did not alter the person. We did not sin by remaining silent, since our intentions were pure and our minds directed toward His commands. We must therefore turn wherever He turns us, without objection, choice, “why,” or “how.”

Reflect, community of Unitarian women, upon what you hear. Weigh it with sound reason and a well-protected heart. No shortcoming is acceptable from you: you have reached the ultimate goal, so beware of neglecting even a single verse.

Did you not hear the reader of the gathering say that what was being recited to you was the inward meaning, whereas what was in your hands, such as The Book of the Pillars, the Abridgment of Traditions, and The Abridgment (al-Iqtiṣār), was the outward? Understand what was explained to you. At that time the Speaker represented the outward, and the Foundation the inward. He told you that a time would come when your inward would become outward, and a further inward would arise, the inward of the inward; and the outward in your hands would disappear.

Understand what he told you. Has not the inward been left to you as outward, showing you that the Foundation has lost his concealed rank and that his station in our age has become like the station of the Speaker? For this reason the honored decree from the Holy Presence was read: “Whoever wears his signet on the right and whoever wears it on the left are of equal standing before our Lord.” Does not the one who wears it on the left signify the Speaker and his companions, and the one who wears it on the right the Foundation and his companions?

Would you cast aside what issued from the Purified Presence and refuse to acknowledge it? If so, do not claim faith. I seek refuge with the Lord from that.

Did you not hear what was recited in the honored decree concerning the prohibition of kissing the ground before our Lord—exalted be His remembrance? Do you not know that the ground signifies the Foundation, and that kissing signifies receiving his knowledge? Your Lord has forbidden you this, so accept the prohibition. Beware of disobedience, lest you perish.

Did the Book not speak of the prohibition against prostrating to the sun and moon, saying: “Do not prostrate to the sun or the moon, but prostrate to God who created them, if it is Him you worship”? Does prostration not mean obedience? How then can obedience to the Foundation be permitted in our age?

Did your gathering not say this? The decree of the Lord, read before the public, declared: “Yesterday has gone with what it contained; today has come with what it requires; and tomorrow, do not suppose that you know what it will bring.” The gathering says: “Do not turn toward yesterday or wait for tomorrow. Attend to your present day, for it is concerning that day that you will be questioned.”

Did your gathering not say that one praying may not turn to his right or left, raise his head, or look behind him, but must fix his gaze upon the place of his prostration? Know that prayer is the connection with the Lord. Turning to the right signifies returning to the rank of the Foundation; turning to the left points to the rank of the Speaker. Raising the head signifies returning to non-being; looking behind signifies turning backward. Looking toward the place of prostration signifies one's own day, age, and time. What clearer explanation could you wish for, if you reflected?

Did the gathering not tell you that purification has two forms: washing and wiping? Wiping signifies only acknowledgment of those who preceded; washing signifies obedience to the Guardian of your own age and time. Awake from your heedlessness, return to the realities of your religion, and accept what your Lord has said. Beware of following desire, for desire alone has destroyed those who perished.

Consider, Unitarian women, what the Lord has unveiled to you out of compassion and affection. Do you imagine He wants your prestige or wealth? “Whoever acts righteously does so for himself, and whoever does evil does so against himself.”

Are not Muslims the followers of the Speaker, and believers the followers of the Foundation? Was ʿAbd al-Raḥīm son of Ilyās not named Heir-Apparent of the Muslims? Did this not show you that he is the Speaker? Did He not reveal to you that Abū Hāshim is the Foundation when He made him Heir-Apparent of the Believers? He thus made plain that these two are Muḥammad and ʿAlī. You must not obey either of them; religion has forbidden it.

Do you not see that the Lord—exalted and mighty is He—gave both dominion over this world? Did He not thereby indicate that both are base and defiled, since the world is called dunyā because it is lowly (daniyya)? These two persons wear the outward appearance of the Lord—exalted and mighty is He—yet have become two opposites. How can you worship them in our time?

Unless the Lord—exalted and mighty is He—wishes to make His tawḥīd proceed through the hand of whomever He wills, naming him whatever He wills. Can anyone object to Him? Whoever obeys this is a Unitarian; whoever disobeys is obstinate. Would you flee from something the Lord has decreed?

Did you not hear in your gatherings that whoever patiently bears God's decree undergoes that decree and receives a reward, whereas whoever complains of God's decree undergoes it and incurs sin? Since the decree must pass over a person whether he approves or disapproves, he must endure it patiently and so be praised.

Did you not know, Unitarian women, that you wrote binding documents against yourselves, raised outwardly to the Knower of secret thoughts and consciences? In them you acknowledged that you surrendered your spirits, wealth, children, flesh, and blood to our Lord al-Ḥākim—glorified is He—content with His judgment concerning you. Do you imagine that you acknowledged and witnessed against yourselves something that was not in your hearts? That would

mean that you believed He did not know what you concealed in your breasts. Exalted is the Lord's praise, and accursed is such a belief.

If you know that He is the Knower of unseen things, you must not disobey Him, since you have surrendered all your affairs to the Generous Lord. Why, then, do you object to what has befallen you? Beware of harboring evil thoughts about your Lord, lest evil turn back upon you. Let none of you fear anything except her own sin, or hope in anyone except her Lord.

Did the gathering not speak of three trials? At the first the believer says, “This is my destruction,” but escapes it. Then the second comes and he says, “This is certainly my destruction.” Then comes the third, and it lasts only a little while. The believer who panics at trials is one upon whom the name “believer” has been applied figuratively, not truly. The true believer is the Unitarian, and the true Unitarian has surrendered all his affairs to his Lord. He fears nothing from trials. Was not the third trial directed against Christians and Jews?

Do you not know that “Jews” here signifies opponents among the adherents of the outward, while “Christians” signifies adherents of the inward who remain with the accursed master of the inward? Take heed, and may the Lord show you mercy. Recover your hearts: returning to truth is better than persisting in falsehood.

This is an admonition I was commanded to write and present. I presented it, advised you sincerely, and extended to those who had received religious instruction from me the care a teacher shows those he has taught. Whoever accepts the admonition and counsel does so for herself and remains secure in her religious condition. Whoever rejects it loses her hereafter, and her name is written among the apostates. The matter is raised to the Lord according to what He has outwardly manifested to us. He knows hidden things and secrets.

The Lord has many other messengers in religion whom He sends as He wills. He intended this instruction through my hand out of compassion for those it reaches and as an honor and distinction for them. Praise and thanks belong to the Lord alone, without partner. Through Him I seek help in every affair.

EPISTLE 19 — THE MORNING ASSAULT THAT OCCURRED

الصبحة الكائنة

I have placed my trust in our Lord, the Forgiving, the Righteous, the Judge of judges, the Mighty, the Most High, the Exalter and Subduer, whose remembrance is exalted above the description of every tyrannical king. “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful”: the ranks of His chosen servant.

From the servant of our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, who has taken neither consort nor child and is exalted above spouses and equals, and His servant Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, Imam of the Unitarians, chosen servant of the Creator of the worlds, who takes vengeance upon unbelievers and polytheists through the power of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the sword of His retribution, His strength and might, and the righteous among the ranks of His Call. Exalted is His remembrance and mighty His name, and none besides Him is worshipped.

To Muʿānid and those with him in detention, who have suffered among the world of error.

Know—may the Lord guide you to the realities, keep you from calamities and misfortunes, and make known to you in our time the persons of the Foundation and Speaker and the forms of the Follower and Preceder, so that the tawḥīd of our Lord, the Creator and Provider, may become manifest to you—that although our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is not subject to any name and is not embodied in a body, each person apprehends Him according to his own condition and the utmost reach of his intellect. His veiled divinity is exalted above us, and His humanity is manifested to us. He appeared to His creation in a form like their own, through their creation and in the condition in which He created them. He does not enter imagination or become known through thoughts and understanding. Glorified and exalted is He far above what polytheists and heretics say of Him.

Now then: a note has reached me from Abū al-Qāsim Mubārak son of ʿAlī, the Caller—may the Lord support him in obedience—expressing thanks for you. He mentioned that he had met the son of Muʿānid and his servant—may the Lord preserve them—and that they carried a note asking about me and mentioning the Divine Presence, which needs no reminder and from which no report can be concealed.

I therefore wrote these lines to you, so that you might understand them, rest content with the subtleties of their meanings, and recognize the light of the Imamate and its guidance. The Imamate cannot be divided between two persons at the same time, for it is a single universal, radiant light. It cannot be divided, no opponent can defile it, and no adversary can change it. Since it appeared in humanity only under the name of the Imamate, we know that this is the noblest of the names applied to the Lord—mighty is His power—even though the Imam is the most excellent and exalted of His servants, His deputy, and the guide to His worship.

There is none among you whom I have not advised concerning guidance to His Call. Some responded and then broke their pledge, like ʿAlī son of Aḥmad al-Ḥabbāl, who was my Authorized Instructor and through whose hand Nashtakīn al-Darazī responded, and like al-ʿAjamī, al-Aḥwal, Khutlukh Mājān, and others like them for whom we wrote the covenant.

They sold the religion in the marketplaces and inclined toward passions and worldly attachments. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—therefore exacted retribution from them. We did not wrong them; rather, they wronged themselves.

As for you, Muʿānid, Abū Manṣūr al-Bardhaʿī, and Abū Jaʿfar al-Ḥabbāl, there is none among you whom I did not call to the tawḥīd of our Lord—glorified is He. You refused, except for Abū Jaʿfar al-Ḥabbāl, who had responded to Mubārak son of ʿAlī the Caller—may the Lord support him. His son ʿAlī prevented him. I had trusted him because I knew his religious conviction and the state he was in; may the Lord help and strengthen him. You, however, inclined toward the

perishable debris of this world and gave him the title “Master of the Guides.” This is nothing but unbelief and associationism.

I ask the Lord—mighty is His power—not to take you to task, and to hear your plea concerning your former sins. You, Muʿānid, and those arrogant men of ʿAkkā with you heard the Lord—mighty is His power—address you outwardly: “Do not increase dissension. I shall suffice you.”

When you came to me and I advised you, you told me that, because of what you had heard from the Lord—exalted be His remembrance—you would not return to any of those activities. I told you and those present that the Qāʾim of the Age cannot bring the Resurrection against the people of unbelief and tyranny except through the sword of our Lord and His manifest strength. I explained that you were destroying yourselves and burning yourselves in fire, and that the smoke from you would reach the excellent Responders. This exchange between us took place on the night before the morning of the event.

There is no cause for wonder in the power of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—over us and you. Falsehood has perished, and a cloud has poured upon the world the complete spiritual knowledge like a downpour of rain. He has honored whom He wills and humbled whom He wills. In His hand is the dominion of all things, and He has power over everything.

On the day of the event you numbered approximately five hundred men, armed and fully equipped, and were at the sanctuary. About forty of you were killed, and whoever could flee fled. Had it not been for the mercy of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—none of you would have escaped. Yet you killed none of the enemy and did not struggle through hardship and suffering as you had displayed abuse during comfort and prosperity. The smoke from you reached us, as I had told you it would, before the event occurred, through the support of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. To Him alone belong praise and thanks.

On the second day, which was Thursday, not one of the troops remained behind, whether eastern or western, Persian or Arab. Every horseman mounted, and every foot soldier pressed forward. All sought our blood, bringing naphtha, fire, ladders, and tools for breaching the wall. I had only twelve men with me that day, five of whom were unfit for fighting. We killed three of the polytheists and wounded an uncountable multitude with arrows. We did not defeat them by our own strength; rather, they perished through the strength of our Lord—glorified is He.

You have heard what happened concerning our strength in the trench until we emerged from it. Now the support of our Lord—glorified is He—continues to reach me, and His mercy and favor, outward and inward, are manifest upon me. All my companions among the Responders are honored and respected. Their needs are fulfilled among the police, the provincial administration, and the officials of the postal service, unlike the rest of the people.

My messengers carry letters and documents to the Divine Presence, from which nothing is hidden, whether in secret or in public. The Lord—mighty is His power—has promised me something outwardly in addition to His true promises of support. He fulfills His promises whenever He wills, without anyone setting a time for Him. If our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—wills, I shall mention you. Nothing of your affairs is hidden from the Divine Presence; but the nature of human beings called for an answer to your question. So rejoice and know that relief is near, faster than the blink of an eye; the apostate hypocrites shall know whose is the final abode.

Peace be upon you all, and the mercy and blessings of the Lord.

Written in Shaʿbān, in the second year of the service of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—by His chosen servant Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the strength of His sovereignty. Praise belongs to our Lord alone in prosperity and adversity, hardship and ease. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

EPISTLE 20 — THE DECREE OF AL-MUJTABĀ

سجل المجتبى

I have placed my trust in our Lord—upon us be His peace and mercy—and through Him I seek help in every affair. The Cause of causes and the attributes of the Cause: “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”

From the servant of our Lord in truth, the God of eternity, the One, the Self-Sufficient, al-Ḥākim, the Unique—exalted is His remembrance and mighty His name, and none besides Him is worshipped—and His possession, Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists, hypocrites, and covenant-breakers through the sword of our Lord, the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—and the strength of His sovereignty alone. We seek help from none besides Him and hope for the mercy of no one else.

To his brother and Follower, the one who draws from his knowledge, his second, the particular Adam whom He chose through His knowledge, guided through His forbearance, and nourished through His peace: Enoch of the age, Idrīs of the time, Hermes of all Hermeses, my brother and brother-in-law, Abū Ibrāhīm Ismāʿīl son of Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, the Caller. May the Lord prolong your life, perpetuate your honor and elevation, protect me from harm concerning you, and bring me to my hope in you. He is the Guardian and has power to accomplish this.

Now then, my brother Abū Ibrāhīm—may the Lord strengthen you with His support—I looked upon you through the light of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and through the support our Lord—upon us be His peace and mercy—granted me, and perceived in you what would benefit the Unitarians, suppress the hypocrites, and strengthen the believers.

I have therefore made you my deputy over all the Callers, Authorized Instructors, chiefs, Mukāsirs, and all Unitarians in the Pure Presence and throughout the islands and regions of the earth. I have named you the Choice of the Responders, Refuge of the Unitarians, and Possessor of the Knowledge of the First and the Last. I have given you the power of command and prohibition over all the ranks. Appoint whomever you wish and dismiss whomever you wish. Whatever good you discern and put into practice is my command, and whatever you forbid is my prohibition. Whoever opposes you opposes me, and whoever obeys you obeys me. Whoever obeys me in the Call to our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and His tawḥīd has reached the ultimate end and highest goal, and “the Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary, near which is the Garden of Refuge.”

Know this, seek the guidance of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and discharge the service incumbent upon you. Recognize the rights of the ranks according to what I laid down in The Ultimate Goal and the Admonition. Keep the hypocrites away from you and strive openly against them.

Thank our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—for the great favors and noble gifts He has bestowed upon you, that He may increase your excellence and establish you firmly in His obedience. He is the Guardian and has power to accomplish this.

The appointment of al-Mujtabā is complete. Peace.

EPISTLE 21 — THE APPOINTMENT OF AL-RAḌĪ

تقليد الرضى

Praise belongs to our Lord alone, without partner, in prosperity and adversity, hardship and ease. From the servant and possession of our Lord, the Qāʾim of the Age, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of our Lord and the strength of His sovereignty, to the venerable Shaykh al-Raḍī, Envoy of Power, Glory of the Unitarians, Bearer of Glad Tidings to the Believers, and their Supreme Word, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad son of Wahb al-Qurashī, the Caller. May God grant him success and strengthen him.

I have placed my trust in our Lord, the Righteous, the All-Knowing, the Most High, the Judge of judges, who does not enter thoughts or imaginings, whose remembrance is exalted above the descriptions of those who describe and the comprehension of humanity. The letters of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful” signify the ranks of His servant, the Imam.

From the servant of our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, transcendent above consort and child—glorified and exalted above their descriptions—and His possession, Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, supported through the strength of His sovereignty.

To the venerable Shaykh al-Raḍī, Envoy of Power, Glory of the Unitarians, Bearer of Glad Tidings to the Believers, Pillar of the Responders, and their Supreme Word, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad son of Wahb al-Qurashī, the Caller: Peace upon you.

I praise to you our Lord, the Provider, the Most High, the One who brings forth, al-Ḥākim, transcendent above the Follower and Preceder, the Foundation and Speaker, who manifests Himself to His creatures through their creation, in the condition in which the Creator created them. Glorified is He, who cannot be comprehended by imagination or known through thoughts and understandings; exalted far above what humanity associates with Him.

Now then: I looked through the light of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and through the support He granted me. I uncovered your secrets and what was apparent to me of the outward reports concerning you. Throughout the passing of nights and days and during great hardships I found in you nothing but tawḥīd of the Lord of humanity, the Judge of judges, repudiation of the worshippers of idols and images, and truthful speech in prose and verse. Upon you be my finest greetings.

I have therefore raised your degree and added to your station, which had been the station of Shaykh al-Murtaḍā—may the Lord sanctify his spirit. You alone received his knowledge and laid him in his grave and tomb. I have entrusted to you all his books of tawḥīd and placed you above all the Callers, Authorized Instructors, chiefs, Mukāsirs, and Unitarian Responders. None stands above you except the Choice of the Responders and Refuge of the Unitarians, Shaykh al-Mujtabā—Enoch of the age, Idrīs of the time, Hermes of all Hermeses, my brother and brother-in-law Abū Ibrāhīm Ismāʿīl son of Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, the Caller. May the Lord protect him from evil and fulfill my hope in him.

Seek guidance from our Lord—glorified is He—and carry out the service required of you in His path. Be gentle with the Callers and all the Unitarians; command them to do right and forbid them wrongdoing. Strengthen them in service to the Divinity. Command the chiefs to remain in your service and report to you all news and new developments in Cairo, its affairs, Egypt and its districts.

I have given you command and prohibition over all the Responders. Whoever you find upright in conduct and pleasing in his Ḥākimī belief, treat kindly, bring near to yourself, and tell me of his condition. If he is oppressed, I shall support him; if he is an oppressor, I shall subdue him. If someone has been imprisoned for an offense or wrongdoing and that offense has been pardoned, bring him to your house and strike him painfully with sticks so that he does not return to a fault unworthy of the Unitarians. Do this in a place in your house where the opponents are not present.

Gather the Unitarians together, and attend their rites of birth, weddings, and funerals according to the custom I have prescribed for them.

If you see that anyone among the ranks, Callers, Authorized Instructors, or chiefs has neglected his service or committed a lapse, replace him with another after his offense has been established by two trustworthy Unitarian witnesses who testify to his error in his presence. If he repents, accept his repentance after he swears by our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—that he will not return to such an error.

Advise them to safeguard one another; none of them should go without some weapon, even if only a knife. Remain in the service to which I appointed you: attendance at the Pure Presence, the shining lights, and the splendid stations.

Remain within the rule I laid down for you, and beware of exceeding it. Practice truthfulness. Beware of lying and of adding to or subtracting from words. Lying to your believing brother is unbelief; how much worse, then, to add to the words of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance!

Speak the truth and do not be ashamed before me or frightened, for the messenger is charged only with clear communication. Speak truthfully even when it brings hardship. Do not advance before the Presence unless you have been summoned, and do not speak before our Lord unless you have been asked.

Recite the supplication I commanded you in your first appointment. Begin it: “Peace, hidden and not manifest: from You, our Lord, comes peace, and to You peace returns. You are most entitled to peace, and Your Call is the Abode of Peace. Blessed and exalted are You, our Lord Most High, Possessor of Majesty and Generosity.” Continue the supplication to its end.

Do not persist obstinately in questioning. Do not raise your voice, move your hand, gesture with your eye, or lift your head while speaking. Speak the truth; fear nothing except your sin, and worship none except your Lord, the Most High, al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, transcendent above consort and child.

Do not conceal from me anything about your condition or the daily developments concerning the Responders, whether good or bad. I commend them to you as our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—commended them to me. Be a compassionate father and gentle educator to them. Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is gentle toward us and them.

Deliver every new covenant, book, and report to the maidservant appointed to receive the notes, and convey her replies. Send these to my sons ʿAlī and Ḥusayn, Authorized Instructors in the Call, so that they may reach the maidservant—may the Lord support them. Through Him comes success in every matter.

Serve in such a way that you deserve favor and escape associationism and retribution. Thank our Lord—glorified and exalted is He—and the intermediary through whom favor reached you. Protect the brethren and strengthen them in secret and in public.

Read this letter of mine to all the Callers, Authorized Instructors, chiefs, Mukāsirs, and Unitarians, so that they may recognize your station and the elevation of your rank, if our Lord wills. Through Him comes success in every matter, worldly and religious.

Praise and thanks belong to our Lord alone. He suffices us and is the best Helper and Supporter.

Written in Shawwāl, in the second year of the service of our Lord by His possession Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists and renegades through the sword of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and the strength of His sovereignty. In Him I place my trust, through Him I seek help, and from Him comes my request.

The appointment is complete. Praise belongs to our Lord alone.

EPISTLE 22 — THE APPOINTMENT OF AL-MUQTANĀ

تقليد المقتنى

Know—may the Lord grant you success, bestow upon you the path of guidance, protect you from error and passion, give you good tidings of what you love and approve, bless you in this excellence, and establish you in this lofty station and magnificent rank.

The address: From the Qāʾim of the Age, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists and renegades through the sword of our Lord—glorified is He—and the strength of His sovereignty, besides whom none is worshipped, Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad.

The designation: To Shaykh al-Muqtanā Bahāʾ al-Dīn, Tongue of the Believers and Support of the Unitarians, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī son of Aḥmad al-Samūqī, known as al-Ḍayf. May the Lord grant him success and strengthen him.

Praise belongs to our Lord alone in prosperity and adversity, hardship and ease.

“Copy into the register of the Unitarians, God willing; through Him comes success.” “Copy into the register of the chiefs, God willing; through Him comes success.” “Copy into the register of the Unitarians, and praise belongs to our Lord in every circumstance.” “Copy into the register of the chiefs and shaykhs.”

I have placed my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One, the Unique, the Self-Sufficient, transcendent above spouses and number, glorified and exalted above names and attributes.

From the servant and possession of our Lord—glorified is He—the Qāʾim of the Age, to whom the Criterion pointed: a servant who knew his Lord and affirmed His unity before the creation of existence, before darkness and the two lights, before place and possibility, before throne and smoke, before the spheres and the two ever-renewed things, before Callers and the two Origins, before manifestation and concealment. His was knowledge without doubt and pure light unextinguished by darkness: the First Intellect and the excellent Imam. Through him lies the goal of tawḥīd; through him glorification becomes known; and through his rising the warning becomes manifest among humanity. He is Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of our Lord—mighty is His power.

To the fourth of the psychic ranks and Follower of the spiritual ranks, Follower of the excellent Preceder and bearer of the honored word. By the Preceder I mean Shaykh al-Muṣṭafā, Organizer of the Responders and Honor of the Unitarians, Abū al-Khayr Salāma son of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Sāmirī, the Caller—may the Lord honor him and make him happy.

To Shaykh al-Muqtanā Bahāʾ al-Dīn, Tongue of the Believers and Support of the Unitarians, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī son of Aḥmad al-Samūqī, the Caller: Peace upon you.

I praise to you our Lord, besides whom we have no lord. I thank Him for the abundance of His gifts and favors, and worship Him secretly and openly. Through Him the outward order and its religious communities are overcome.

Now then: I praise to you our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—who has bestowed upon you a favor of which you were unaware, prolonged your life, perpetuated your honor and elevation, treated you with a kindness beyond description, granted you abundant noble honor, and made you one of the angels brought near and the lofty ranks.

Among His favors to you is the support He granted me concerning you when I heard your words, your extraordinary skill in ornamenting expression, and your mastery of composition. It was as though I had looked upon you long ago and recognized in you an intelligent, perceptive, and forbearing person. The radiance of your words shone in the heaven of your intellect, your hidden thoughts, reflections, and imaginings. The fragrance of your brilliance spread from the soundness of your belief, and through this you deserved a lofty station and exalted degree.

Time did not permit you to overtake the ranks that had already preceded you, so we made you the Left Wing, since the Right Wing had preceded you: Salāma son of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. That station was reserved for you until the Day of the Appointed Time, for it is the rank of the Follower. From him action becomes manifest to everyone who draws support from him after the lofty Preceder. The power of the Preceder remains concealed and hidden, while the Follower acts through correct and known deeds.

Our age is not like other ages, and its ranks cannot be measured against those who preceded them in earlier cycles. Our Follower in this age performs a task higher than that of any rank that has arisen.

Therefore serve, through the Lord's blessing, in the noble rank for which you have been prepared and appointed. Like your brother the Right Wing, equip yourself with thirty ranks consisting of Callers, Authorized Instructors, chiefs, and Mukāsirs.

Know that the first of the seven obligations is truthfulness of the tongue. Truthfulness is the Guardian, and its opposite is falsehood. Truthfulness and falsehood resemble one another in their written forms. Likewise the Opponent imitates the Guardian, though the Guardian—exalted is His name—has no opposite.

The Arabic word “falsehood” (kadhib) has three letters, and the word “truthfulness” (ṣidq) has three letters. Their numerical reckoning is as follows: kāf is twenty, dhāl is four, and bāʾ is two, making twenty-six. These signify Iblīs, his wife, and their twenty-four children. Whoever follows them departs from tawḥīd.

For “truthfulness,” the letters are “sīn: sixty; dāl: four; qāf: one hundred,” making one hundred and sixty-four. This signifies one hundred and sixty ranks. Of these, ninety-nine belong to the Imam, as the saying goes: “God has ninety-nine names; whoever enumerates them enters the Garden.” That is, the Imam has ninety-nine Callers; whoever knows them enters the reality of his Call, the Garden that encompasses its people.

The Right Wing has thirty ranks, and the Left Wing thirty ranks. These make one hundred and sixty-one ranks. Three ranks remain: the psychic ranks, the three concealed substances above the Preceder, which are unveiled and made personal only in the age of the Qāʾim. They are Will, Volition, and Word.

The Written One declared: “When He wills a thing, His command is only to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.” He also said: “You do not will unless God wills,” and “Had a word not preceded from your Lord...”

Will is Dhū Maʿa, the Qāʾim of the Age, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of our Lord and the strength of His sovereignty.

Volition is Dhū Maṣṣa, the Universal Soul, the pure and approved Proof: Shaykh al-Mujtabā, Choice of the Responders and Refuge of the Unitarians, Enoch of the age, Idrīs of the time, Hermes of all Hermeses, my brother and brother-in-law Abū Ibrāhīm Ismāʿīl son of Muḥammad son of Ḥāmid al-Tamīmī, the Caller. May the Lord grant him success, strengthen and help him, and fulfill my hope concerning him.

The Word is my brother Shaykh al-Raḍī, Envoy of Power, Glory of the Unitarians, Bearer of Glad Tidings to the Believers, Pillar of the Responders, and their Supreme Word, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad son of Wahb al-Qurashī, the Caller. May the Lord help, guide, and strengthen him.

Praise the Lord—mighty is His power—and thank Him for the succession of His favors.

Write the covenant for the Responders, carefully recording their identifying features and securing the testimony. Be gentle with them and compassionate toward them. This is what our Lord—mighty is His power—commanded me outwardly.

Copy the covenant and the epistle from the servant, Shaykh the Envoy of Divine Power. Raise the covenants through whichever of the two shaykhs of tawḥīd and pillars of glorification is available to you: the two blessed, loving, sincere brothers. May the Lord reward them well on my behalf.

Know Ḥasan son of Hiba al-Raffāʿ, Chief of the Chiefs, so that he and his companions may assist you in whatever affairs arise in the city.

Do not exact anything from the Responders beyond what was prescribed in the appointment of your brother al-Muṣṭafā—may the Lord honor him.

The peace of the Lord be upon you, a peace of contentment and love, and upon all the Unitarians, together with the mercy and blessings of the Lord.

Written in his own hand by the Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of our Lord and the strength of His sovereignty, on Friday, the thirteenth day of Shaʿbān, in the third year of the manifestation of his blessed years.

Our Lord suffices us. Through Him I seek help, and He is the best Helper and Supporter. Glorified is He alone, without partner.

EPISTLE 23 — AL-KUDYA AL-BAYḌĀʾ (THE WHITE HEIGHT)

الكدية البيضاء

I have placed my trust in our Lord alone, who fulfills His promise to His servant, the guiding Imam.

To al-Kudya al-Bayḍāʾ, whose people are exalted:

Peace upon you because of your good intentions and praiseworthy deeds. You have passed safely through the trial while you were victorious before me, reassured by the subtleties of affairs and the course of judgments. The Lord's will is effective; therefore be content and submit.

Do not allow your letters to wander away from me. Send them to me through the Shaykh, Envoy of Divine Power—may the Lord honor him through me. If the messenger does not know him, let him ask the Responders about Ḥasan son of Hiba al-Raffāʾ, Chief of the Chiefs. Give your letters to him; through his hand they will reach me.

I advise you not to listen to the slanders of base people, for they are a trial that falls upon those who spread them.

Peace. Written in the hand of the Qāʾim of the Age. Praise belongs to our Lord alone.

EPISTLE 24 — LETTER TO THE UNITARIANS OF ANṢINĀ

رسالة الأنصناء

From the Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of our Lord, God of the worlds.

Through the support of the Lord—exalted and mighty is He—I have spoken; through His guidance I have opened the matter; and to Him I have returned in every affair.

You, community of Unitarians in Anṣinā—may the Lord increase your numbers and purify your deeds—I called you to the tawḥīd of our Lord, besides whom we have no lord, the Cause of causes, transcendent above antiquity and eternity. He manifested Himself to us among us, exalted above resemblance and likeness, to make our minds familiar and out of compassion for us. Glorified and exalted is He above consort and child.

He chose me from among His servants and established me as Caller to His tawḥīd in every age and time. I have known no other and turned toward none besides Him. Glorified is He: how great His station and how exalted His sovereignty!

You are the Responders to His unity, who affirm His self-sufficiency and are content with His decree and will. Our Lord—glorified is He—alone, without partner, knows your secrets, sees what is concealed in your consciences, and recompenses you according to your deeds.

Community of Unitarians, my gaze turns toward you. Nothing of your tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—is hidden from me. I called you to His tawḥīd, warned you against breaking faith with Him, and gave you good tidings that He will fulfill His promise. For every term there is a written decree, and for every utterance an answer.

I replied to you with patience and commanded contentment and submission. The Lord has promised me, and He fulfills His promises as He wishes and when He wishes. None can oppose His judgment or avert His decree and will. Rejoice! The armies of relief have descended, their standards have been unfurled, and what was hidden has been unveiled. Be ready for this and rejoice in His wonders. Then you will be among the victors: no fear shall be upon them, nor shall they grieve.

Written by the Guide of the Responders on the tenth of Jumādā al-Ākhira, in the third of his blessed years.

Peace be upon you, and the mercy and blessings of the Lord. He is my sufficiency and my trust, and through Him I seek help.

Completed.

EPISTLE 25 — THE IMAM'S CONDITIONS

شروط الإمام

I have placed my trust in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

Praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim, who originates truth and supports it, subdues falsehood through truth, humiliates its people and scatters them, supports His friends and servants, and destroys the unbelieving deniers and obstinate opponents who doubted His perfect favor, His all-embracing blessings, and His repeated, continuous gifts.

His prayers are upon the one He chose from among His servants to unveil the secret of His commands and prohibitions, make plain the path for those seeking insight, and weaken the plotting of the disappointed people of error: I mean the Qāʾim of the Age and his servants, the ranks employed in his service.

From the chosen servant to all his brethren who call to the tawḥīd of the Lord, God, al-Ḥākim, the Compeller, and who have been appointed to judge among the righteous Unitarians and the discerning Helpers.

It has reached me—may the Lord prolong the lives of my masters and brethren the shaykhs—that the rulings concerning the obligations of contentment and submission in the marriage of Unitarians, and the union of brethren and sisters, have become closed to them, and that they do not know what the conditions of the religion require or how companionship between them is to be conducted.

My masters must know that the conditions of contentment and submission do not follow the course of other marriages, for contentment and submission belong to the affairs of the Creator—glorified is He. Whoever breaks them has opposed the command of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance.

What the conditions of religion require is that when a Unitarian man takes one of his Unitarian sisters as his wife, he should regard her as equal to himself and treat her justly in everything in his possession.

If separation occurs between them, the question is which one has wronged the other. If the woman has departed from obedience to her husband, and it is known that he treated her with strength and fairness, yet separation is unavoidable, he is entitled to half of everything she possesses, provided trustworthy people establish her transgression against him and his fairness toward her.

If trustworthy people determine that he has treated her unjustly and that she departed under compulsion, she leaves with everything she owns, and he has no claim upon any of her property.

If she is the one who opposes him and refuses to abide by his way, he is entitled to half of everything she owns, even the garment around her neck.

If the man chooses to separate from her of his own will, without any offense committed against him by her, she is entitled to half of everything he owns, including garments, household goods, silver, gold, and whatever his hand possesses, in accordance with fairness and justice.

Let the masters understand this letter and act according to it and to these conditions. Such is the rule.

Peace upon you, and praise belongs to our Lord alone, without partner.

EPISTLE 26 — TO ʿABD AL-RAḤĪM SON OF ILYĀS

عبد الرحيم بن الياس

I have placed my trust in the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—and through Him I seek help in every affair.

From the servant and possession of the Commander of the Faithful, the Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of the Commander of the Faithful, to the Heir-Apparent of the Muslims and deputy of the Commander of the Faithful.

Now then: the time has come for the Heir-Apparent to remove the veil and understand why he has been called the cousin of the Commander of the Faithful. Far be it from our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—to have father, son, paternal uncle, or maternal uncle. “He neither begot nor was begotten, and none is comparable to Him.”

He called you by that name and gave you that title in the past, when you served and held the succession over the Muslims and claimed a resemblance and kinship.

Our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—wished thereby to make known to you your station at this time, so that you might seek pardon for what has passed.

The Heir-Apparent must now entreat our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—to forgive him and erase his name from the writing, correspondence, and forms of address. He must not call himself the cousin of the Commander of the Faithful, since He—glorified is He—is transcendent above all likenesses. Nor should he say in speech or writing, “God's peace be upon him,” for God is his Lord and he is God's servant. You are the first letter (awwal ḥarf). The servant's peace does not descend upon the Lord; rather, the Lord's peace descends upon the servant.

The beneficence of our Lord toward you is ancient and recent, in every age and time. He has appointed you and established the proof against you.

Now the cycles have revolved; the Sun of suns and Moon of moons have risen. Our age requires the unveiling of what was concealed, pure tawḥīd and open manifestation, and worship of our Lord, the One, the Compeller.

I have delivered guidance and advised you sufficiently: proclaim worship of our Lord before the assembled witnesses, and acknowledge with your tongue that you are His servant and possession. Do not approach Him through kinship. You have been honored through service, not lineage. If you sincerely advise your Lord through His worship, you must acknowledge your servitude to Him, for there is neither pedigree nor family connection. Whoever asserts such a connection loses this world and the next; that is the manifest loss.

The Guide has given his warning, and the herald has called out. The messenger is charged only with clear communication.

Peace upon you, together with the mercy and blessings of the Lord. The epistle is complete, and praise belongs to our Lord alone. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

EPISTLE 27 — KHAMMĀR SON OF JAYSH

خمّار بن جيش

I have placed my trust in the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—and through Him I seek help in every affair.

From the servant of the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—our Lord, glorified is He, and His possession Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance.

To Iblīs of despair, the source of associationism and whispering, the accursed ogre, the sorrowful monster, Khammār son of Jaysh al-Sulaymānī al-ʿAkkāwī.

Now then, Khammār: if your original name is Ḥārith, Iblīs, do not let the postponement of punishment in this world deceive you concerning your unbelief, associationism, lies about our Mighty Lord—upon us be His peace and mercy—and your imitation of the Lord—exalted be His remembrance—of whom it is said, “There is nothing like Him.” He is al-Ḥākim through His own essence, distinct from His originated beings—upon us be His peace.

You have persisted in your associationism and stirred up the ignorant, inverted world against us with your cavalry and infantry.

Beware, beware of what you are doing to yourself. Consider your spirit before I rise with the sword against all the polytheists, beginning with you.

Beware, beware, and seek pardon before the journey. Recognize the right of our Lord, the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—and the strength of His sovereignty. Fear the punishment of His fires. Turn back from your unbelief and associationism.

Instead of sending a reply, come yourself with my messengers and servants to the source of religion and tawḥīd, by command of the Commander of the Faithful. We shall present to you faith in our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and acknowledgment of His unity. You must seek pardon for the unbelief and associationism you have committed. Entreat the mercy of our Lord, the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—to forgive your great unbelief and associationism.

If by adopting this name and making this claim you sought the perishable goods of this world, I ask our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—to give you the worldly goods you sought. But if you refuse and act arrogantly, depart from it, for you are accursed. The curse shall be upon you until the Day of Religion, which is the day when I rise with the sword against all the polytheists.

Then I shall command the servants to whip you and parade you through Holy Cairo, the streets of Egypt, and its alleys. If you repent and retract your claim, so be it. Otherwise I shall command the servants to flay you, stuff your skin with straw, and crucify you at the Gate of Zuwayla and the Gate of al-Futūḥ, so that your followers and admirers may see your disgrace before the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance.

By killing you we shall set the people right and prepare the land. Then we shall begin with others like you, killing them like dogs, and punish other groups until they pay the poll tax in humiliation.

That will be through the power of our Lord, exalted be His remembrance, who has no partner. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

EPISTLE 28 — LETTER TO THE JUDGE

الرسالة المنفذة إلى القاضي

I have placed my trust in the Commander of the Faithful—exalted be His remembrance—and through Him I seek help in every affair. The Cause of causes; the attributes of the Cause: In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

From the servant and possession of the Commander of the Faithful, Ḥamza son of ʿAlī son of Aḥmad, Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of the Commander of the Faithful and the strength of His sovereignty, besides whom none is worshipped, to Aḥmad son of Muḥammad son of al-ʿAwwām, called Chief Judge.

Now then: We previously sent you a letter asking about your knowledge of yourself, but you failed to answer, because you possess little knowledge of the truth and have turned away from it.

How can you claim this exalted title, Chief Judge, when you have no knowledge of the realities of cases and judgments? It is thus established that you are a pretender to the position you hold.

You must therefore learn to know and train yourself. If you remain ignorant of yourself, you are the Pharaoh of this age, and your actions follow those of ʿUthmān son of ʿAffān. You must abandon what you are doing and follow the conduct of your predecessors Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. Remove the white veil from your head, together with the turban and the ṭaylasān cloak. Wear a long black garment with yellow patches hanging down upon your chest. Wear a sleeveless outer garment, not a cloak, but one open at the breast, ornamented with red, yellow, and black Ṭāʾif leather. It should be short on you, so that you resemble ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb. Keep a whip upon your thigh, so that you can administer the prescribed penalties to those liable to them while seated in the congregational mosque.

In every marketplace appoint an officer dressed as you are, with a whip in his hand, to administer in that market the prescribed penalties upon those who deserve them: adulterers, thieves, false accusers, and wine drinkers belonging to your religious community. Deliver the sermon yourself, ascend the pulpit without a sword hanging from you, and go on foot and barefoot between your house and the mosque, so that in this too you follow your predecessors Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.

Beware, and beware again, of hearing any case involving a Unitarian—neither you nor your deputies may do so—whether it concerns testimony, marriage, divorce, a document, manumission, or a will. If anyone sits before you seeking judgment, inquire about him. If he is a Unitarian, send him to me with your men, and I shall judge him according to the spiritual law that the Commander of the Faithful—His peace be upon us—has authorized me to administer.

Look to yourself: I have given you your excuse and warned you repeatedly.

Written in Rabīʿ al-Awwal, in the second year of the servant and possession of our Lord, the Guide of the Responders, who takes vengeance upon the polytheists through the sword of the Commander of the Faithful. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

EPISTLE 29 — THE SUPPLICATION OF THE GUARDIAN OF TRUTH

مناجاة ولي الحق

In Your name, O God! Glory be to You. Your throne is ancient and eternal, and Your might is severe. Light of lights in every dwelling and place, Creator and Originator of things, Cause of causes and the One who sets them in motion. Most Holy, Most Holy! O You to whom souls have acknowledged their allegiance, and whom they have testified was worshipped before the most ancient ages and existed in bygone times. Lord of the higher lights and the eternal elements, Possessor of unique and self-sufficient glory, One in essence, everlasting in constancy, distinct from attributes.

You brought forth creatures in the beginning. You brought them into being by Your will, and what You established in truth did not revert to nothingness. He is outwardly manifest to establish the proof against the people, and inwardly concealed, beyond the perception of the senses. He established His power in the world He originated; each beholder perceives Him according to his own purity, like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. Glorified is He! He willed and created them by His kindness, and appeared to them so that faith in Him would be realized in truth and sincerity. Then He drew near to them and established the proof against them. They cannot grasp His manner of being or attain His essence by the strength of their intellects.

It is indeed fitting that someone who has not established the truth of existence or knowledge of the ranks should persist in denial and rejection. Yet He—exalted be His remembrance—is just and has acted benevolently toward creation in what He has done.

He arose among them, manifest and present, and required them to preserve their covenants and pledges. He taught them the reality of worship, from the worshipper to the Worshipped, through the Imam and obedience to the ranks.

Exalted is Your eternal light, before eternity, remover of causes and destroyer of former dynasties! You have never ceased to be inwardly concealed in Your manifestation and outwardly manifest in what was concealed. Your humanity arises in every age and time. You are not confined within humanity such that knowledge of the divine kingdom would be absent from You. Rather, You reveal Yourself and draw near without descending. Your appearance involves no departure or movement, and Your concealment no motion or agitation. Your manifestation through a thing is Your turning toward it, and Your absence from it is Your fulfillment of what is due to it.

Exalted is the Originator of intellect and kinds, who forms matter and individual beings through His command, creates and originates them, moves them toward their purposes, and directs their course. He arises in humanity, sometimes in weakness and then in power, revealing His command to everything caused by Him. He has given each cause its known station and appointed rule; it glorifies Him in its orbit and turns around the center of its understanding, obeying Him in its actions and praising Him through its intellect.

Glory, glory to Him! He is exalted beyond opposites and counterparts. No representation encompasses Him, no name can properly be applied to Him, no knowledge contains Him, and no imagination conceives Him. A creature reaches only another like itself; its seeking carries it toward its own kind and form. Does the observer see in light except by means of something resembling the density he sees there? Can the dense apprehend the subtle except through a substance possessing subtlety?

Rejoice, community of Unitarians, in the support our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—has given you through the Guardian of your age, by the aid of His subtle wisdom. Praise Him for the shade of His mercy He has spread over you, for He has guided you to His allegiance and to knowledge of Him. Act in obedience to Him and hold fast to love for Him. Know that you are His servants and in His grasp. He is the Lord of the Throne, your Lord; He knows your secrets and whispered conversations, watches your deeds, and sees you. Revere Him secretly and openly; He knows you and is fully informed concerning you.

Successful among you is the one who has a Guardian, remains faithful to His pledge and covenant, and accepts His judgment: such people enter the Garden and suffer no injustice. Whoever seeks refuge in His sanctuary and keeps His secret concealed has attained His generosity and goodness. He possesses honor and victory, holds power, ends poverty and hardship, rules over the cycle time after time, disperses the darkness of the interval, safeguards His friends against grief, and is the meaning of pilgrimage and lesser pilgrimage.

He precedes creation and is its Ancient One, the possessor and upholder of truth, the goal of intention and purpose, the healer of illness and disease, whose judgment none may challenge. The mighty Imam, possessor of the certain designation, right command, lofty palace, ready light, strength and support, supplication and glorification, who appears in every new age. Possessor of holiness and purity, and the meaning of symbol and sign: our Lord the Imam, the Qāʾim, al-Ḥākim.

O God, our Lord, through Your Guardian and Your ranks, gather together Your Unitarian friends and be for us and them a trustworthy protector. Save them from the precipice of destruction and place them among the angels, safe from the heat of Your fire. Mighty is Your protection and exalted Your praise. There is no god, our Lord, other than the light concealed by Your veil. Deliver me, my Lord, from this low and perishing world, and help me discharge the rights of Your Unitarian friends, my brethren. Grant that I live among them with reason as my character, with certainty in allegiance to Your Guardian, and attached to Your lights, my Lord.

O You before whom my forehead bows, to whom my cheek is humbled, toward whom my purpose comes, and to whom I proclaim my sincere praise! Here I am, my Lord, turning toward You and trusting in You for salvation. Do not distance me from the nearby station, nor prolong my journey from the noble world. Rebuke me, my Lord, for heedlessness of the truth I seek and for being encompassed by passing delusion. I have fled to You from my sins, hoping that You will relieve my sorrows and cover my faults. To You is my visitation, toward You my signs point, Your love is my purification, and You are my treasure in this world and in the next.

Bestow upon me a glance from You that gives me life; Your tenderness toward me enriches me, and Your satisfaction saves me. If You withhold, who will give to me? If You drive me away, who will draw me near? You possess the present life, and to You belongs judgment in the life to come. The heaven of Your praise gives shade; the clouds of Your bounty pour down. You enrich against every want and heal every illness.

I am Your servant seeking refuge in Your sanctuary, visiting Your generosity, thanking You for Your favors, and asking release from Your punishments. I seek Your shelter in this world from bewilderment and poverty and in the next from the torment of the grave. Creatures have erred about the radiance of Your light because of You. They became estranged by what appeared to them as a resemblance to their own kind, and doubted and remained bewildered, as though intoxicated by what they perceived, incapable, doubtful, and denying. Yet those certain of Your covenant and those believing in Your pledge and bond have found familiarity with You. You alone exist in the outward, none besides You; and You alone are worshipped in the inward, with none beneath You. You are near, answering the caller when he calls upon You, and distant to one who has not heard Your summons. Your light sparkles in the hearts of Your friends, and Your speech flows on the tongues of Your Proofs.

To You belong the sea of seas, the light of the Criterion and the Psalms, and the Throne Verse throughout all ages. To You and through You we have turned; to You we repent; to You is the final return, and You know all hidden things. Protect us from the temptation of impostors, the delusion of those who lead astray, and the trickery of every rebellious devil.

In the name of the One, the Ancient, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Illuminate through Your light the hearts of Your knowing friends. Give insight to Your chosen seekers who humble themselves before a vision of certainty. Remove the rust from their hearts and establish faith therein through knowledge of tawḥīd.

O You who possess might and dominion! Grant us victory over the enemies of religion, the renegades, deniers, and covenant-breakers who broke Your pledge, denied Your covenant and bond, departed from Your religion, and spread

corruption in Your land. Destroy them with Your destruction, as You destroyed the people of ʿĀd and Thamūd. Bring down their houses upon them, for You know all hidden things. You give dominion to whomever You will and take dominion from whomever You will. You give, recompense, pardon, and forgive whomever You will. You are just in Your judgment and bring Your command to pass. We are content and have surrendered our affairs to You. You are Praiseworthy, Glorious, Generous, and Noble. Overlook what has passed, pardon us, and forgive our sins. Replace our evil deeds through Your truthful promise and ancient beneficence. We are Your submissive, humble servants, awaiting the beauty of Your kindness, affirming Your promise and favor.

O Guardian of the righteous, ultimate goal of seekers, companion of those who know, and hope of the Unitarians! Through You we have been guided, through Your light we have seen, and upon You we have relied. You are worthy of reverence and the Lord of forgiveness. To You belongs praise for the favors You have bestowed, our Lord.

Praise belongs to our Lord. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

EPISTLE 30 — THE ANSWERED PRAYER (AL-DUʿĀʾ AL-MUSTAJĀB)

Glory be to You, O Originator of things—not out of any pre-existing thing, substance, instrument, helper, or model of a form previously known to You. Rather, by Your existence, knowledge, and will You brought them forth.

Glory be to You, O Inventor of the worlds and of all the marvels of their making, the subtlety of their ordering, and the hidden wisdom of their design. Your command, which is pure origination, is the cause of every thing described as existing.

Glory be to You, O Originator of the complete Intellect, in which You contained the entirety of creation in potential, so that nothing in creation lay outside it; and Creator of the Soul proceeding from it, to bring into manifestation the forms contained within its being.

Glory be to You, who made the Soul the cause of bringing forth the combinations arising from the spheres, heavenly bodies, and primary elements. You established the dwelling place of generated beings upon the most noble and highest of these, culminating in the finest of the worlds, humankind. You made the ultimate excellence and honor of humanity [rest upon] the two foundations through which the governance of this corporeal world is carried out. Through them the effects of the Intellect and the Soul appeared; through them the ranks and the other things within this world were appointed.

Glory be to You, whose favor through these two foundations toward the world is immense, for they were a means of guiding its inhabitants toward knowledge of You.

Glory be to You, who placed the guidance of those inhabiting the spiritual and corporeal worlds upon the support of the two exalted and luminous principles. Through them blessings were opened and benefits made manifest to every creature, subtle and dense. Through them the pure declaration of Your true oneness became manifest, and Your unqualified affirmation, unmixed with denial of Your attributes or with [the resemblance ascribed by] anthropomorphism.

Glory be to You, who made the continuance and endurance of all things depend upon pure origination, which is Your command, exalted above created things.

Glory be to You, who are exalted in majesty and irresistible power. Glory be to You, who alone possess greatness and dominion. Glory be to You, before whom there was neither age nor time, duration nor place. Glory be to You, too great for anything to resemble You or any description to encompass You. Glory be to You, exalted above equality and likeness.

You are the Mighty, the One, the Unique, who neither multiply, increase, nor enter into relations of proportion. You are the Creator who has no creator; the Maker who has no opponent; the Powerful One over whom no power is exercised; the Conqueror from whom there is no refuge except with You; the Judge over whom none sits in judgment. You do as You please and decree what You wish, by Your exalted command, glorified beyond all accompaniment of sounds or languages.

I ask You, our Lord and Master, by the immensity of Your majestic power and the light of Your sovereignty, which You bestowed upon all originated and created things, making them, through Your grace and mercy, the cause of the continuance of their identities.

I ask You by the first thing manifested from that power, by all its identity contains and all that its utterance draws forth in declaring Your unity, transcendence, and freedom from resemblance. I ask by the favor You bestowed upon it through its successor, proceeding from it as the image of its own being, to manifest the purpose of Your wisdom and will, issuing from Your command and traversing the stations of creation, and by all the spiritual and bodily forms manifested when the giver and receiver are joined in benefit and reception.

I ask You to favor me with pure knowledge of You and praiseworthy obedience to You, with attainment of Your pleasure, steadfastness in Your command, abstention from what You forbid, and patience through the severe trials and afflictions that overtake me in Your worship, by which souls are trained and purified.

O Most Merciful of the merciful, by the right You have over one who never turns his being away from praising, sanctifying, and glorifying You toward anyone else, grant me these favors. Give me victory and mastery over the passions of my soul, its vile whisperings, and the evils that bring me deficiency and negligence in obeying You.

Our Lord, I am Your servant, confessing the greatness of my offense, turning to You, humbling myself before You, beseeching You and submitting to You. I confess Your divinity, rely upon the breadth of Your mercy, trust in Your generosity, fear Your punishment, renounce everyone hostile to You, and seek nearness to You by love of Your friends. I disclaim all independent power and strength in myself, certain that power and strength belong to You alone, without partner. None can repel Your command or reverse Your judgment. Pardon me, forgive my sin, and make the knowledge of You that You graciously bestowed upon me abide forever within my soul, never departing or separating from it however circumstances turn, through Your mercy and grace encompassing all Your friends and beloved ones. There is no god but You and none worthy of worship besides You.

You are the Mighty, the Wise. Receive my striving, and make the thoughts held within my soul and expressed by my tongue, according to the limits of my strength, capacity, and effort, an expiation for my incapacity and shortcomings in the praise and thanks that I owe You. For praising, sanctifying, and glorifying You exceeds the power of speech to express and the power of the soul to imagine. It is greater and more exalted than the cultivated intellects can reach or encompass.

I ask You, our Lord, by Your kindness and beneficence, to grant me penetrating insight with which my soul may grow broad in the knowledge of Your oneness; through which my tongue may persevere in reciting Your wisdom; and by which my whole being may burn with longing for Your grace as it overflows from the most excellent of Your friends. May it never cease journeying through the degrees of instruction by which Your greatness is made known.

O Possessor of the Truth, no pointing can encompass You; neither a 'where,' a 'how,' nor a 'what' applies to You. Exalted, far exalted, are You above what those who deny, the ignorant who imagine, and the deficient who go astray say when they deny Your divinity in the face of the pure affirmation befitting Your majesty and grandeur.

EPISTLE 31 — THE SANCTIFICATION (AL-TAQDĪS)

I put my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim, who alone is worshipped, who fulfills His promise to His servant, the guiding Imam. I put my trust in our Lord, Ruler of the Intellect, the Cause above the first principle, exalted above type and exemplar, transcending genus and form, Master of all. The Intellect is His origination; thought is His bringing-into-being; decree is His sovereignty; names belong to His ranks; attributes belong to His servants. Every intellect is powerless when it glorifies Him and declares His unity; every thought is bewildered when it seeks to declare His transcendence and purify its conception of Him. To confess His unity is an acknowledgment; to point toward Him is only an exercise of thought. Minds cannot know the essence of His reality, and understanding is bewildered by the governance of His wisdom. Because of their inability, they are humbled, confessing, submitting, and held captive in the acknowledgment that He, exalted be His blessings, is the One worshipped through the ages, elevated above the Eternal, the Everlasting, the number and the count, and above every deity that can be believed in, every object of worship that can be singled out, and everything that relies upon His omnipotence.

The pure substances of intellect, when attempting to define His appearances, are humbled and baffled; before the passing intimations of His greatness they submit, acknowledging their captivity. The souls of the pure friends, in their entirety, turn back to their Originator, finding delight and tranquility. In their worship and declaration of unity they have escaped both denial and assimilation. Through the Guardian of their age they have attained the reality of unity and transcendence, and have drawn near to Him through His pure and unique ranks. They have established the truthfulness of these ranks' testimony concerning the deeds of the servants, been ennobled by their contact with the pure angels, and been sanctified by the subtle lights united with them.

O God, Master of humankind and Ruler of rulers, by the greatness of this declaration of transcendence and sanctification, by the majesty of the appearances of Your heavenly dominion before Your creatures for their reassurance, and by the establishment of proof over them through clarification, instruction, and firm foundation:

O God, make us truthful in recognizing the signs of unity through Your Guardian and his ranks. Make us certain in obeying You and them, in surrender to Your command. Protect us by Your kindness and care from the deception of impostors who assume a false likeness, and from the impure, rebellious missionaries who call people to them.

Grant us the time to witness the fulfillment of Your promise to Your sincere friends. You have power over this, and are fully worthy and able to answer this solemn prayer, to the glory of Your divinity.

The Sanctification is ended. Praise belongs to our Lord alone. He is sufficient for me and the best Helper.

EPISTLE 32 — ON KNOWING THE IMAM AND THE NAMES OF THE EXALTED RANKS, SPIRITUALLY AND BODILY

I put my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One worshipped. We point to Him alone in declaring unity.

The names applied to my master, the Qāʾim al-Zamān (the Riser of the Age), are these. First: the Cause of Causes. Second: the True Predecessor. Third: the Command. Fourth: Dhū Maʿa ('the one endowed with maʿa'). Fifth: the Will. His spiritual designation is the Universal Intellect. His bodily name is Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, Guide of the Respondents and Avenger against the Associators through the sword of our Lord, exalted be He, and the strength of His sovereignty.

After him comes the Universal Soul: the Pure and Well-Pleasing Proof, the Enoch of his time, the Idrīs of the age, the Hermes of the Hermeses, the Chosen Shaykh—these are his spiritual names. His bodily name is Abū Ibrāhīm Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid al-Tamīmī, the missionary.

After him comes the Word: the Well-Pleasing Shaykh, Envoy of Power, Pride of the Unitarians, Bearer of Glad Tidings to the Believers, Pillar of the Respondents, and their Supreme Word—his spiritual titles. His bodily name is Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Wahb al-Qurashī, the missionary.

After him comes the Right Wing: the Chosen Shaykh, Order of the Respondents and Glory of the Unitarians—his spiritual titles. His bodily name is Abū al-Khayr Salāma ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Sāmirī, the missionary.

After him comes the Left Wing: the Shaykh al-Muqtanā, Bahāʾ al-Dīn, Tongue of the Believers, Support of the Unitarians and Counselor of all creation—his spiritual titles. His bodily name is Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭāʾī al-Samūqī, the missionary.

On recognizing the four sacred ones:

Their names are Ismāʿīl, Muḥammad, Salāma and ʿAlī. Their patronymics are Abū Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿAbd Allāh, Abū al-Khayr and Abū al-Ḥasan. Their stations are the Universal Soul, Envoy of Power, Right Wing and Left Wing. Their epithets are: al-Mujtabā, Elect of the Respondents and Refuge of the Unitarians; al-Murtaḍā, Pride of the Unitarians and Bearer of Glad Tidings to the Believers; al-Muṣṭafā, Order of the Respondents and Glory of the Unitarians; and Shaykh al-Muqtanā Bahāʾ al-Dīn, Tongue of the Believers and Support of the Unitarians.

Praise belongs to our Lord, God of the worlds.

Finished. Peace.

EPISTLE 33 — WARNING AND ADMONITION (AL-TAḤDHĪR WA-L-TANBĪH)

In the name of the Eternal, the Ancient, the Generous Lord and Merciful Master: the One, exalted beyond the description of individual ones; the Unique, who resembles no other individual; transcending the marks of number and rivals; the Lord, too great for consorts and children; al-Ḥākim, before whose majesty all servants bow. He is not of one kind with anything of a kind; the descriptions of those who describe cannot reach His reality, the vision of beholders cannot perceive Him, and the thoughts of thinkers cannot encompass His being.

He originated all originated things by His power and united things through His will. He brought hearts into being to know obedience to Him; hearts took from knowledge of Him as much as they could bear, and He disclosed to them of His hidden secret as much as they could know. He originated things without a model and is the Enduring One whose dominion shall not pass away. He is alone in divinity and strengthens those who obey Him with the Holy Spirit. He originated the spiritual ranks and raised some above others in degree. He singled me out and preferred me above them through His aid and blessings.

Praise, then, be to Him who originated me from His light, strengthened me with His Holy Spirit, singled me out for His knowledge, delegated His command to me, and revealed to me His hidden secret.

I am the source of His originated things, the keeper of His secret and His trusts, singled out for His knowledge and blessings.

I am His straight path, and by His command I am wise and knowing.

I am the Mount, the inscribed Book, and the frequented House.

I am the master of resurrection and the raising of the dead.

I am the one who, by the permission of the Lord—glory be to Him—blows the trumpet.

I am the Imam of the God-fearing, the clear sign, the tongue of the believers and the support of the Unitarians.

I am the master of the first great convulsion, and through my hand the blessings shall follow one another.

I am the abrogator of the religious laws, and the destroyer of the people of association and innovations.

I am the demolisher of the two directions of prayer, the abolisher of the two laws and the overthrower of the two professions of faith.

I am the Messiah of the nations. From me blessings overflow, and through my hand punishment comes upon the people of association.

I am the kindled fire that rises over the hearts.

I am the support of the ranks, the guide to the unity of the One worshipped, and the annihilator of the people of association and denial.

I am the unsheathed sword of unity, and the destroyer of every stubborn tyrant.

I am the Riser of the Age, the possessor of the proof, and the guide to obedience to the Merciful.

Woe, utter woe, to whoever turns aside from obedience to me, rejects it, and does not acknowledge the unity of the Lord—glory be to Him—or my Imamate. He has revealed to me that the promised decree must inevitably be fulfilled, that every oppressive unbeliever shall be killed, and that I shall annihilate the people of association, obstinacy, hypocrisy, and opposition. With my sword I shall possess all lands and rule over all servants. One group shall find happiness, and another shall fall into eternal torment.

Whoever believes before the promise is revealed, declares the unity of the One worshipped, acknowledges my Imamate, and knows the degrees of the ranks shall attain deliverance with the righteous and dwell in the abode of delight and lasting rest. Whoever does not know the ranks or declare the unity of the One worshipped remains in denial and rejection: he shall pay the poll tax, undergo punishment, and lose the means of escape. The destruction of the hypocrites, killing of the wicked, and humiliation of the unbelievers must come to pass. They shall pay the poll tax in abasement, be compelled to wear distinctive clothing against their will, and suffer loss, transformation, and the disgrace of the ancient dominion.

So rejoice, O Unitarians, at the prospect of possessing their descendants, property, and land, the ruin of their homes, the taking captive of their women and children, and the mingling of their men's blood with that of their dogs. They shall be branded with the mark of servants, and even your weakest shall possess every stubborn tyrant among them. That day they shall seek deliverance, but the unbeliever shall say, 'There is no escape today.' They shall have no intercessors or affectionate friend. Their wretchedness will have overcome them already, while they had remained heedless of it.

The ranks called them, but they did not answer, nor did they turn away from their error and ignorance. They were invited to knowledge but did not awaken; they were warned of punishment but did not take warning. Their eyes were not blind, but their hearts were blind; their souls were ignorant because of their denial and error. They turned away from what they had been called to and turned their backs on what the Truth had indicated; they shall regret what they neglected and recognize the bonds that held them. Do not listen to their ornamented speech or answer the inventions they compose. Seek wisdom from its sources; do not occupy yourselves with this world and its wreckage. Inevitably the incoming supplies will be cut off, and afflictions and trials will multiply among you. Remain patient through the trials, and you shall obtain forgiveness and beneficence.

Protect wisdom from those who are not its people, but do not deny it to those worthy of it. Whoever withholds wisdom from its rightful people has defiled his trust and his religion. Whoever delivers it to those not worthy has departed from certainty in following the truth. You must guard it and protect it from outsiders, and conceal yourselves beneath what is familiar to those among whom you live. Do not reveal yourselves to people overcome by their misfortune and ignorance. You see them from a position from which they do not see you. You know what they possess and recognize the ornamented sayings they have adopted. They, however, are unaware of what is in your hands and excluded from the light of wisdom that you have received. They have been made mute while you speak, deaf while you hear, blind while you see, and ignorant while you know.

Praise the Lord—glory be to Him—for the shade of mercy He has poured over you, for the insight into His knowledge He has given you, and for singling you out with the light of His wisdom. Praise Him with praise without end, as His beginning has no beginning.

Give thanks to me and know me as I truly am. I am the one who stands among you by His command, upheld by His Holy Spirit. Recognize my station in relation to my spiritual ranks and Callers. Know the ranks by their names and qualities, and place them at their proper grades and stations, for they are the gates of wisdom and the keys of mercy.

I command you to protect your brethren, for by protecting them your faith is perfected. Answer their appeals, meet their needs, accept their excuses, oppose those who wrong them, visit their sick, show kindness to their weak, support them, and do not abandon them.

Hear my words, O Unitarians, and understand what wisdom has uttered. Accept what I have commanded you, refrain from what I have forbidden, and await what I have promised.

Peace upon whoever follows the truth, believes what has been promised to creation, and makes unity and truthfulness the foundation of his religion. Praise belongs to our Lord; in Him I seek help. He suffices me.

EPISTLE 34 — THE EPISTLE OF EXCUSE AND WARNING (AL-IʿDHĀR WA-L-INDHĀR)

I put my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim in His own essence, apart from His originated things. From the guide and warner of the community, the deliverer and protector of His friends from the trial of humankind, appointed over the Respondents as guide and Imam.

Now then: praise be to Him who clothed me in glory and entrusted the keys of the Imamate to me at departure and return. To Him belongs enduring praise and abundant commendation. He cannot be described by the attributes of creatures, lest He become one of the same kind as other things. Imagination and conjecture cannot contain Him. He is exalted beyond the kāf and nūn. The sharpest eyes cannot behold Him, nor can He be described by movement or stillness. Such is your God and the God of your fathers: worship Him.

Know, O brethren sincere in their religion, distinguished from all creatures by your belief and certainty: may our Lord keep you secure through obedience to Him and fulfill your hopes through His grace and mercy. The finest treasure to acquire for the hereafter and store up for the salvation of the soul is to persist steadfastly in loyalty, conviction, and belief in what all the other communities of humankind have rejected. He has revealed to me that this is what is sought and required of you, so that the proof may be established against the corrupt and obstinate.

Know that I am the Imam who is sought and intended, and that through my hand shall come the recompense of the servants. Beware lest lying tongues turn you away from me or the failing community snatch you up. Do not let the delay in the manifestation of your right make you despair of publicly proclaiming the word of sincere devotion. By my hand will come repayment and retaliation; from me forgiveness and deliverance shall be sought. Hold fast to the ranks and persevere in this undertaking with your utmost efforts. Beware of opposing my ranks, persist in counseling them and being in agreement with them, bind yourselves to them closely, and rejoice in what they have imparted to you.

By my hand will come the reward of whoever obeys and follows the decree, and the punishment of whoever rebels and turns aside from the truth he has understood, on the day I rise with the sword of our Lord al-Ḥākim—glory be to Him—and judge all creatures. I shall avenge you with the true retaliation, bestow my beneficence upon your faithful and sincere people, wrench souls out of bodies among the corrupt and obstinate, kill fathers and children, give you their property and their captive women, and kill their men, until they seek deliverance and find none. Your enemies shall suffer the fullest retribution, and the proclamation shall spread throughout the regions; the hypocrites shall find neither protector nor affectionate friend.

Whoever comes to you obediently, listens and submits, shall attain victory and forgiveness and be happy in the gardens. Whoever departs from the command of his Lord and allows corruption to overwhelm his mind and heart shall be held accountable for his deeds and his sins. This affair will occur through my hand soon, and the friends of God will see what gladdens hearts and delights eyes. Turn toward me, then, O people obedient to me, Unitarians who declare our Lord—glorious be His name—transcendent, all the people of my party.

For I am the kindled fire that rises over hearts. Nothing escapes my command, and nothing departs from my age. I am the master of the two stations, the abolisher of the two laws, and the overthrower of the two professions of faith. I am the master of the great convulsion, and by my hand successive blessings will come.

Know, brethren, that my absence from you is an absence meant to test you and all the people of the religions. Whoever of you keeps the covenant made with him and does not turn back on his heels shall receive from me a mighty reward and a noble station. Whoever turns backward, falls into error, turns away from truth and despairs, and listens to the devil's embellishments and whisperings, shall be placed under the poll tax, subjected to humiliation and disgrace for what he has committed, and brought to an evil end because he resisted and denied. Do not incline toward the devil's adornments or desire falsehood and lies. Turn instead to the missionaries of the Merciful; harvest the fruits of wisdom and proof, and you will be among those who attain success and forgiveness.

Soon a message will come to you that will heal your hearts and their burning pain. When it appears, it will bring a comprehensive blessing to the people of unity and complete vengeance upon their opponents. It will be brought by a man who comes from his home, whose reports have ceased, hidden behind veils, looking both far and near. He is one of the Helpers; knowledge of his rank brings religious distinction and honor. He comes neither from the Turks nor from the Khazars, and at his appearance he will be known as al-Muẓaffar (the Victorious). Though he may seem a stranger, he is rightly guided and supported in his actions.

Awaken from your slumber and turn away from your distraction: the manifestation has drawn near, and the appointed time has come.

I have sent this epistle to those who obey me and hold fast to my Imamate, as an excuse and a warning, a guidance and a clarification.

Be ready, brethren, for what concerns you. Do not think that your present circumstances are an evil for you. Rather, they are good for you.

Only a few ages will pass before you see your opponents' wives widowed, their people cast into dangers and ruin, their wealth and dominions plundered, and themselves handed over to Mālik [the angel of punishment]. They will be compelled to wear distinctive clothing, destruction will descend upon them, and vengeance on your behalf will be taken from them. You will be called people of spiritual distinction and described as nobles. Whoever receives your testimony will triumph and obtain delight; whoever is not granted speech by you will not be reckoned among the people of religion and excellence, and this will be torment and disaster for him.

You are the finest of nations and the best of those whose feet have trodden the earth, for you worshipped the Existing One while they devoted themselves to worshipping the absent non-existent.

Soon I will make their greatest men servants to your least, and their mighty will obey and prostrate themselves to each of you. I shall kill the associators and apostates with the sword of our Lord al-Ḥākim, God of the worlds and Creator of all beings.

Understand my counsel and remain steadfast beside my ranks, for your obedience to them is obedience to me.

Peace upon whoever turns toward me, repents, and holds fast to my ranks.

Finished, with praise to our Lord alone.

EPISTLE 35 — THE EPISTLE OF THE OCCULTATION (RISĀLAT AL-GHAYBA)

I put my trust in our Lord, the Conqueror of destiny, who appeared to bring familiarity to forms, and who is exalted above nonexistence even when He conceals Himself. Praise belongs to our Lord, who sees the innermost secrets and knows what consciences conceal; who sends every spokesman and messenger; who is exalted above all speech and everything spoken; the One, not by number, the One far above consort and child; the beginning of numbers and their end, exalted above opposites and those who summon others to them; the Originator of every name and attribute, indicated by every meaning and language; who shows Himself to His creation as the First and is indicated by the Eternal Word. Glory be to Him, exalted above evil suspicions and the attributes His creatures and others ascribe to Him.

He has made manifest to us the human form of His appearance, to give familiarity to those who behold the form; thought became bewildered when it contemplated it. Intellects were powerless to grasp His acts and confessed their inability and deficiency in the knowledge available to them. Tongues fell silent, unable to find a way by which their speakers could express the unity of their Creator. How could they speak of the unity of One who has neither limit nor beginning, neither firstness nor end? Even antiquity confesses that He brought it into being, while the end cannot claim to exist independently of beginning, because the end comes into being after the beginning. Glory, then, to Him whose creation is the beginning, and who is the end and passing away of everything.

By the determination of His decrees, He showed favor to His creatures by bringing His form into existence in the likeness of their forms. This form addressed them by the names familiar to them, so that intellects found reassurance in its outward appearance. He gently led them toward knowledge of Him through the subtlety of His wisdom, as a gift to His creatures. Through His concealment of the immensity of His power, the created order stood and remained stable. Had knowledge of their Originator been disclosed to them without reassurance and gradual approach, they would have been struck down by His power and fallen prostrate.

Glory be to our Lord al-Ḥākim, ruler over rulers, exalted above the attributes of every human being and beyond what tongues utter and pens write.

O Unitarians of our Lord, Master of the Day of Judgment, who are content with and submit to all His judgments concerning them, certain that He owns their souls and the souls of all the worlds: you confessed His unity and bound yourselves to it in your covenants. Beware of becoming like a man who holds a bitter medicinal substance in his hand, hoping it will taste sweet and pleasant. When he tastes it, its bitterness is too much for him, so he throws it away without knowing the measure of its benefit.

Know, O Unitarians, that the people of this world are divided into two sorts who destroy themselves, perishing through their many objections, ill-judged opinions, and corrupt suspicions.

One has the debris of this world in his hands and fears it may leave him, although it was given him after he previously had none of it. He fears losing what is in his hands, though it is only lent to him; he is not content when it is taken back, despite having begged and humbled himself to obtain it. When he possessed little, he was needy and weak; after he received his gift and his worldly affairs expanded, he became proud and powerful. He imagined that it belonged to him. When it was taken away, he remained angry and bewildered, thinking it had been granted as the reward of his own work or because he had earned a right to the gift, and grieving that it was taken from him.

The other has little of this world's debris, yet wherever he sees a prospect of gain he pursues it and seeks a means of approaching it. For some trifling, paltry amount he sells his religion and asks the Creator to aid him. He does not perform what has been prescribed for him, but asks Him not to abandon him and to increase his wealth.

Beware, beware, brethren, of these two losing groups. Let your deeds come before the pursuit of your desires; then your religion will be sound, your intentions purified, and your deeds made good. Let your desire be for the salvation of your souls, and your needs will be met. The debris of the world is easily gained, but it passes away and perishes. Religion is hard to acquire, but endures.

Beware, beware, brethren, of the world of passing away; concern yourselves instead with the world of permanence.

Brethren, whoever holds worldly goods in his hands and fears their removal on account of his religion must remember that the One who appointed him as custodian over them can take them back.

Brethren, whoever has little confidence in his Lord and fears a human being like himself will be cast by his Creator into the very thing that terrifies and alarms him.

Brethren, purify your intentions in your religion, and your Lord will suffice you against the plots of your enemies.

Brethren, it is more fitting to fear the All-Powerful, over whom none has power, than to fear one over whom power may be exercised.

Brethren, beware of hypocrisy, for hypocrisy is the doorway to fragmentation and separation.

Brethren, do not fear your enemies as you fear your Creator.

Brethren, whoever fears another human being like himself gives that person mastery over him. The Unitarian who acknowledges the Judge through the oneness of his Lord is courageous, not a coward.

Brethren, religious fidelity cannot be proved except under trial. In times of safety and health the people of the world appear equal, none superior or inferior in this matter. Degrees and the ascent to elevated stations are gained only through patience in times of hardship, when misfortunes are encountered, unwelcome things suffered, and desires left unfulfilled. Whoever patiently bears hardships attains delights.

Beware, brethren, lest opposing souls overpower the souls of the friends. If they subdue them, they will lead you down paths of return and expose you to dangers. If instead the opposing impulses are conquered, extinguished, and held in check, lasting delight and the fulfillment of hopes and good outcomes will come to you in all your actions. The duration of patience in hardship is short, its outcome praiseworthy, and its remaining benefit long-lasting and imperishable.

Brethren, do not be like a man suffering a fever that rises until it covers his vision and brings him to blindness.

Brethren, if you are certain that no dwelling place is ever empty of your Lord, yet your eyes no longer see Him, what screen has come between you and the sight of Him? It is nothing but your evil works and your ugly, corrupt deeds.

Brethren, do not be like a man whose stomach has become disordered, so that he rejects even what he once knew by sight to be good.

Brethren, whoever has wholesome nourishment has sound sight and can judge what he sees correctly.

Brethren, wake from your sleep and turn away from your distraction! Misfortunes happen when one sleeps. The sleeper is heedless of what is taking place; the wakeful person sees a trial and avoids it, while the sleeper stumbles into it in the pleasure of his sleep.

Know, O Unitarians of our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One worshipped, exalted above all limit and everything limited, that the Riser of your Age holds you answerable as your Lord has charged him to do for the corruption of your intentions and the ugliness of your deeds. In your covenants he made you witnesses against one another and established the proof against you. You have no excuse left, in view of the conditions you imposed upon yourselves and the consequences you consented to endure. Your souls inclined toward their passions and wandered when they saw the tribulations awaiting them. Their suspicions became evil when they imagined that their pleasures would remain and that they would

be safe from what displeased them. They turned back from what they had confessed and withheld what they had surrendered. Yet their turning back will not preserve what they have acquired, nor will denial help them. Every deposit must be taken back from its custodian, and every trustworthy person must avoid betraying what has been entrusted to him.

Be, then, brethren, among those who are satisfied and submit without demanding anything in return, willingly and without being overcome by force. Whoever hands over his trust freely and by choice remains steadfast and is recorded among the righteous. Whoever submits only under compulsion, when some calamity befalls him, hoping to escape it, falls into the very thing he dislikes and fears.

Beware, beware, brethren, of becoming like those who fear that their garments may be torn and their outward forms made to disappear. Their Lord may bring upon them the very thing they fear and dread, because they have so little trust in Him and fear His servants.

Brethren, be content and submit in prosperity, hardship, and every condition. This is what you testified to concerning yourselves and confessed in your covenants. Reduce your objections to whatever happens to you, whether good or evil, blessing or harm. Your trials will be lightened, and your distress lifted. Between you and the world of ignorance there is no distinction except contentment and submission; contentment and submission are the ultimate end of knowledge and teaching.

Return to yourselves and awaken your souls. Make the pages of your records white again by renewing sound belief and turning away from the corruption that has arisen among you.

How shameful it is for one of you who has knowledge and occupies a high station to commit the deeds of a blind and ignorant person. Anyone who belongs to a people ought not to act as their opponents do. Consider how the people of falsehood cling to what they believe and wait in confidence for what they have been promised. Whatever happens to them, good or evil, they receive it willingly; their hearts rest in it and they say, 'Welcome to what has overtaken us: thus it was decreed and judged.' It is therefore fitting that those who know the truth and have acknowledged it should have stronger certainty and better outcomes than those who are captive to error, persist in falsehood, and struggle to defend it.

Know, brethren, that your Lord has no need of your worship and is exalted above your religious practices. Obedience from the obedient does not increase His dominion; disobedience from those who rebel does not decrease it. Your deeds alone return upon you. Whatever hardship your age brings you comes from your own misdeeds.

Brethren, wake from heedlessness and seek treatment before the disease takes hold. Once a disease has hardened beyond gentle remedies, nothing will cure it but iron.

Brethren, wake before the Form is made manifest, for worship at its manifestation will be performed under compulsion.

Brethren, whoever worships only under compulsion gains no benefit from that worship.

Brethren, beware the deceptive river: its water is muddy, its depths are remote, and it offers little sustenance.

Brethren, beware the river that tastes sweet but kills souls through hypocrisy.

Brethren, beware the deep river with the filthy bed, empty of sustenance or goodness, which points toward evil and harm.

After writing the covenant and declaring the unity of the Creator and Provider, would you return to the worship of servants, like one who wallows in filth and pus? How powerful that affliction, how blind those who claim insight, how utterly those souls have lost their guidance! Did not the Riser of your Age make things clear to you and uncover every veil, establishing a proof against whoever turns away and disbelieves? He said in the covenant that you are free of everyone who has passed, is present, or is yet to be expected, —and this is one of the great matters.

Brethren, beware of being like a man holding a jewel who is deceived by someone who tricks his understanding, gives him a stone, and persuades him that the stone is a jewel when it is not.

Brethren, do not be among those who first believe and then disbelieve, becoming counted among people of heresy and change.

Brethren, what once seemed distant from you has now drawn near.

Brethren, beware of the darkness at dawn, for it is the blackest and darkest part of the night.

Brethren, beware of the ordeal at the close of the interval of concealment, for at the end of the interval the power erupts.

Brethren, do you not know that your Lord sees you from where you do not see Him?

Brethren, think well of your Lord and He will remove from your eyes the covering placed over them by your evil suspicions about Him.

Brethren, do not be like a traveler who leaves a town for his homeland but is negligent in preserving his provisions. His provisions run out upon the road. He seeks to return to the town he left, but cannot; he wishes to reach his homeland, but cannot reach it either. He remains belonging neither to these nor to those.

Brethren, the Hour will be established against the worst community through the best community. Strive to be among those who establish it, not among those against whom it is established.

Know that you were distinguished above the beasts, and they were placed at your service and granted you as provision, solely through the knowledge of your Originator and the unity of your Creator that has been bestowed upon you. Whoever denies after having confessed is more ignorant than an ass.

Brethren, beware of one whom the devil has deceived, for the adversary can emerge from the house of a friend. His outward appearance is piety, but his inward nature is betrayal. Beware of him, for he is the beginning of vengeance and the last of the trial.

Brethren, you have seen the story of our Lord's servant and property, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn Ilyās, heir apparent to the Muslims, and what was decreed concerning him. All this happened so that he might receive his full portion and that what he concealed in his soul might become visible to the eye. Our Lord al-Ḥākim—glory be to Him—made him a partner in the customary covenant, in the sermon from the pulpit, and in the coinage of the dinar. The blind rushed to follow him and every confused person ran toward him. When his actions became clear and the ugliness of his falsehood and delusion was apparent to the people, they returned to themselves in lamentation and distress, awakening only after ruin.

Brethren, after the unveiling of unity and the appearance of the Form of the One worshipped, and after that Form has accepted your declaration of unity through worship and the confirmation of religion, do not transfer the unity you profess from that Form to another. Were matters as you imagine, worship would be spoiled and the conditions of the Resurrection promised to you would be rendered void.

Beware, beware of following the devil when he appears. However high falsehood rises, truth will come upon it and extinguish it.

Brethren, know that the servant and property of our Lord, the Riser of the Age, has furnished you with the complete proof and guided you to the clear road. Nothing remains after the fulfillment of the proof except for its consequences to be carried out among you.

Awaken from your sleep, come to your senses from heedlessness, and take to heart your counsel. I can almost see the terrible and hateful event approaching you, and the sudden cry that will terrify you: 'O heedless ones!' Then you will be paid your recompense in full and suffer no injustice. Glory be to our Lord above what the ignorant imagine and the people of falsehood claim. He suffices us; in Him we seek help in every matter.

Finished. Praise belongs to our Lord alone.

EPISTLE 36 — THE DIVISION OF THE SCIENCES, ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TRUTH, AND DISCLOSURE OF WHAT IS HIDDEN

تقسيم العلوم وإثبات الحق وكشف المكنون

Composed by Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid al-Tamīmī, the designated Caller, Dhū Maṣṣa, who draws his knowledge from the Riser of the Age, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, Guide of the Respondents, avenger against the associators through the sword of our Lord al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance.

I place my trust in our Lord, the eternal Creator, and seek access to Him through His guardian, the Riser of the Age, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī. Praise belongs to the Originator of the Cause of causes, the Eternity of eternities, who appears without limitation in antiquity and is not a produced being. Glory and exaltation are His beyond the descriptions of nations.

He has drawn near to us through us and expanded our understanding through our own forms. He has appeared to us in the manner of our actions so that our minds might receive Him. Therefore we do not say that this visible form is He in such a way as to confine Him and place bounds upon Him—exalted is He far above that! Rather we say that He is it by way of concealment, nearness, and reassurance, without limit, resemblance, or likeness. As the Qurʾān says: “Like a mirage on a plain, which the thirsty one supposes to be water; when he comes to it, he finds it nothing, but finds God there” (Qurʾān 24:39).

Consider this visible form as a mirage which, from afar, you see as water; when you come to it to verify it with your eyes you find no water. Similarly, when you regard the apparent form with the eye of nature you suppose it to be a form like yours, but when you approach it with the eye of knowledge you no longer find it to be a form: you find God there. The divinity of our Lord is the eternal and everlasting One who neither receives limits nor admits description.

There is another likeness for the manifest form. Someone looking into the substance of a mirror sees the counterpart of his own image without touching it, grasping how it is there, or defining its essence. When he seeks to touch the image, he touches his own image; when his image changes, the image before his eyes changes. This is so when his vision is sound and unaffected by defects; a defective mirror or eye does not display his true likeness. In the same way, a person's sight of this visible form corresponds to the measure and soundness of his knowledge. I bear witness that everything visible and hidden, concealed and made public, is consummate wisdom; warnings are of no avail.

He originated a brilliant, radiant light, making it the element from which true sciences issue and spiritual forms arise. This is the Universal Intellect, the First Preceder, possessing beginnings and endings. Things have sprung from it and return to it. Our Lord—glory be to Him—is exalted beyond all these descriptions: nothing is like Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.

That light exists in every age, time, season, and interval. Our Lord transfers it in every age and time, under a name and attribute, as one who summons people to pure tawḥīd, who has not preached in the associating Call and knows no Call other than that of divinity. In our present age it is the servant and possession of our Lord, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, Guide of the Respondents, avenger against unbelievers and associators. Our Lord—glorious be His remembrance, mighty His name and sovereignty—has no other to be worshipped beside Him.

Now then. A person desired an answer to a book called *The Division of the Sciences and Disclosure of the Hidden*. My master, the Riser of the Age and perfect light—may the best peace and greetings of his Worshipped One rest upon him—ordered me to compose this book. I returned to my own soul and examined the limit of its understanding and the utmost reach of its power, and found it unequal to the work. Yet it was not possible for me to disobey him. I understood with certainty that he had ordered the composition only because his support would reach me and his knowledge would guide me, since supplies from our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—reach him directly and are withheld from the rest of humankind.

I became certain that power was passing from him to me, for I draw from him and receive a special remembrance from him. When his command came, I felt a strength unlike any I had known in the whole of my earlier life. I therefore composed this book by the instruction and spiritual writing with which he strengthened me. Whatever in it is right and eloquently expressed comes from him and returns to him; whatever in it is error or fault comes from me and is attributed to me. In our Lord I have trusted and sought help, and in His guardian, the Riser of Truth, I have taken refuge. There is no strength or power except through the exalted, all-knowing Creator; He suffices me and is the best helper.

Knowledge is divided into five divisions: two belong to religion, two to nature, and the fifth is the noblest and greatest. This last is genuine knowledge, the very thing intended, the goal to which the indications point. For its sake the dwelling was established, and among its inhabitants appeared the affair of our Lord al-Ḥākim, the Creator.

Each of the first four divisions is itself divided into numerous branches, whose explanation would take much speech; that is not the purpose here. The fifth division, however, is one thing. It does not change or become invalid, fall into separate parts, or fade away. We will come to our purpose in its proper place, if our Lord wills; through Him comes success in every matter.

The first two sciences are the sciences of religion: the science of the outward (ẓāhir) and the science of the inward (bāṭin). These are a pair; there is no tawḥīd in them, nor in any age in which they appear under a religious law.

The first science, the outward, belongs to the Speakers (nuṭaqāʾ): Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. Adam is excluded from their number, because resolution (ʿazm) means firm intention, determination, and decisiveness, while the Book says of Adam, “We did not find in him determination.” Thus the firm Speakers are five. Each was entrusted with a religious law for those entitled to it, and each had before him a Foundation and legatee to succeed him after his departure. Noah's was Shem; Abraham's was Ishmael; Moses' was Joshua son of Nun, “after him Aaron”; Jesus' was Simon; and Muḥammad's was ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

Not one of these Speakers passed away without pointing to his Foundation. The Foundation rose to interpret what the Speaker had brought, so that they became a pair. Thus the Book says, “Of everything We created pairs.” This indicates that the single one beyond the two is the intended and sought-for object. The first member of the pair indicates the second, and the second indicates the third, which is the purpose, the goal, and the end.

The Qurʾān declares in this sense: “A wall will be placed between them, having a gate: within it is mercy, and outside it, facing it, is punishment.” Thus the outward side faces punishment, and it and its possessor constitute punishment; the inward contains mercy, but the text does not say that the inward *is* mercy. A thing may contain something without being identical with it. So the inward points toward mercy. Mercy is the third division of religion and the fifth division of the sciences.

The outward designation refers to its possessor, the Speaker, and the inward designation refers to its possessor, the Foundation. Neither is the thing sought: both are servants employed to point toward something else. What they indicate is the goal, which is the fifth division of knowledge and the third division of religion. The first two divisions are religious and the other two concern nature; the fifth alone is the genuine division, the singular object of all indication. We call the divisions of nature “sciences” because the term is applied to them. All four receive the name of science figuratively, not in the true sense. Truth belongs to the fifth division.

Someone may ask: Why was the claim of divine significance not made for any earlier Foundation, but was made for ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and remains current even today? To answer we must explain the earlier ages, their stations, and the strength and weakness of their people.

Know, seeker after guidance into the realities of things, that before the Adam here referred to there were ages called the ʿAlm, Ramm, Ḥinn, Jinn, and Binn. The Binn were a people who had escaped uncertainties, recognized the Worshipped One, and worshipped Him. Our Lord—glorious be His remembrance and mighty His name—was then visible and manifest, bringing His creatures familiarity through names and attributes. When they abandoned the

Worshipped One, inclined away from truth and its possessor, and followed passions in their religion, our Lord became concealed.

The Book says, describing creation, that man was “created from an extract of clay.” Here the reference is to the creation of religion and to corruption in the religions of those who preceded. The partial Adam and the third Adam serve before the universal Adam al-Ṣafā. The Jinn turned back and departed from our Lord, while Adam and his party, meaning his offspring, his Eve, and the believing Unitarians, did not depart from knowledge of Him. Adam established no outward law. Therefore the Book says of him that no determination was found in him; determination means the binding and decisive establishment of law. The people of that age had turned back and followed their opinions. Then occurred the story of Abel and Cain and the extraordinary events told about them. The partial Adam and his companions summoned people to the unity of our Lord on Mount Sarandīb, while Iblīs and his soldiers filled the horizons with unbelief and the pursuit of their passions in religion.

Then Noah son of Lamech arose as a Speaker. He was the first to establish a religious law, forbade obedience to Adam, and directed people toward the absent non-existent and toward himself. For this reason he was also called the second Adam: the people of his law took their beginning from him, and he stood to opponents in the position of a father. His Foundation was Shem.

Then arose Abraham, whose Foundation was Ishmael. The strength of their knowledge of tawḥīd was comparable to the stage of the clinging clot in the formation of a human being. Next came Moses son of ʿImrān and his Foundation Aaron; the understanding of their age in tawḥīd resembled the stage of the morsel of flesh. Then Jesus son of Joseph arose, his Foundation being Simon al-Ṣafā; the understanding of their era concerning tawḥīd was like the stage of bones in the formation of a human being.

All these people possessed understanding and worldly sciences: medicine, philosophy, astronomy, geometry, and dialectical argument. Yet they pointed to the unity of the absent non-existent and did not know our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. They knew only the Preceder, the highest point of their knowledge, while the Preceder and Follower supplied them. The Universal Intellect and his Proof were among them without being recognized; our Lord was hidden from them because of their opposition, until their cycle was completed.

Another Speaker then appeared, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl, and after him came the line of entrusted successors, extending to Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ. Among his descendants was Saʿīd, son of al-Salghlagh, called the Mahdī. Their minds' attainment of tawḥīd resembled the stage at which bones have been clothed with flesh and a complete human form has been marked out but has not yet received a living, speaking spirit. Wisdom did not require our Lord to manifest Himself among people who were like the dead. The Book says, “You shall die, and they shall die,” meaning the imams and people of that cycle, not ordinary bodily death; to tell men what every ignorant person and child already knows about bodily death would not be worthy of the Wise One.

When a well-formed bodily image lacks only the entry of the spirit that will make it living and speaking, that spirit signifies knowledge of tawḥīd. Thus we say that, although the Speaker and Foundation in this period were stronger than their predecessors, they did not know our Lord. Had they known Him, He would have been manifest and unveiled before them. Rather, in His wisdom He remained hidden from them because of their corrupt beliefs. The Universal Intellect and his Proof supported the Speaker and Foundation, strengthening their enterprise and their resolve, so that wisdom and the form of tawḥīd could grow to completion at the close of the sixth Speaker's age and the rise of the seventh.

When wisdom required this and the appearance of our Lord in a lofty, royal human form was near, the Universal Intellect and his Proof appeared to strengthen the Speaker's affair. Yet they did not enter his religious law or adopt his religion. The Universal Intellect gave advice and counsel in that time, and the elders of the Age of Ignorance turned to him and accepted his advice. Muḥammad belonged to his household by way of upbringing, and so too did his Foundation; this did not mean that he was the bodily father of either one. The Speaker, according to this account, was

born in the mountains of Syria, grew up among merchant caravans traveling to and from the Ḥijāz, and then worked in mountains associated with Abū Ṭālib, from which his affiliation with him arose. The Foundation was born in Mecca. That Speaker's age was clearer and more powerful than the ages before it. That is why the claim of unity came to be made concerning ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, rather than the earlier Foundations.

Another reason is that the Qurʾān and earlier cycles contain indications of the appearance of ʿAlī the Most High. The expression "ʿAlī the Most High" would not have been used unless our Lord knew that a person named ʿAlī would rise and that unity would be claimed for him. Gabriel said to them, "My Lord and yours is ʿAlī the Most High," but they grasped it as a claim and not in its reality. In the account of the ascent, the Speaker said: "When I was in the fourth heaven I saw an angel most closely resembling ʿAlī; the angels visited him. I said to Gabriel, 'My beloved, has my brother ʿAlī preceded me into heaven?' He answered, 'No. The angels longed for ʿAlī, and so an angel was created for them and named ʿAlī, whom they visit.'" The Foundation had not looked into the heaven that the Speaker claimed. The Speaker imagined that ʿAlī was his Foundation, whereas the indication passed on to another person named ʿAlī.

The fourth heaven and the ascension refer, figuratively, to rising through knowledge of the order of the Call. The Speaker advanced in it and in its structure: first he was a Respondent serving under Jesus' law; then he became a Mukāsir; then he became a Speaker. This is the reason for the ascent: he rose from one station to the next. When he had ascended those stations, he was told that in future manifestations a form would appear *in* the fourth heaven. He was not told that this form *was* the heaven itself.

The seven heavens are the concealed Imams. The first, the heaven nearest the world, is Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad; the second is Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl; the third is Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad. In the third's time relief approached, for the third heaven came close to the fourth. Our Lord—exalted is He—appeared in Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad's time in a human form, but that form did not hold earthly kingship; it appeared under the name Abū Zakariyyā. The Universal Intellect appeared before him in a form named Qārūn, a distinguished non-Arab figure in the Call who did not associate another with Him in tawḥīd. At the end of his life, when he was an old man, he sent the Mahdī to Yemen. Our Lord also revealed His Proof, the Universal Soul, under the name Saʿīd al-Ṭāʾī.

The fourth heaven came into being with the rise of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad, a descendant of Maymūn. Our Lord appeared in a form named ʿAlī, while the preceding visible form, called Abū Zakariyyā, was named Ṭālib. Thus arose "ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib," ʿAlī the Most High to whom the indications point.

The fifth heaven appeared with Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh, also called the Mahdī as a covering; he too belonged to the descendants of al-Qaddāḥ and of al-Ḥusayn. Our Lord appeared in a form called al-Muʿall, in the regions of Palmyra and the East, dressed as a merchant. That visible form nevertheless inspired awe in the hearts of people and displayed signs of wealth and prosperity. Such was profound wisdom.

The sixth heaven appeared with al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad, likewise of the line of Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ. The form of tawḥīd continued as it had appeared. The seventh heaven arose with ʿAbd Allāh, father of the Mahdī, who took charge of the affair. The form of tawḥīd likewise remained as before. ʿAbd Allāh bore the name Aḥmad; thus Saʿīd was called "son of Aḥmad." This was the Mahdī whose name had been employed to prepare the way for him and to accustom the world to it.

The Seat (kursī) was the one to whom our Lord entrusted the deposit and whom He commanded to serve our Lord the Qāʾim. The first manifestation of our Lord to the world was in a form called al-Qāʾim, at which time He first appeared in earthly sovereignty.

Seeker, receive with strength what I have brought you and be grateful. This is what has been revealed to us concerning the manifestations. Our Lord—exalted is His praise—knows better and judges more wisely. He has no partner in His dominion, and none may object to His deeds. You have no reason to pursue the remembrance of what is past, for you are enriched by what now exists: our Lord al-Ḥākim, revealed and manifest before you, and His visible Proof, who renders the intelligent free of the need to search the past.

We now return to the five divisions. We have explained the outward and inward and established that the outward is not the object intended. Its designation as “knowledge” is figurative. Likewise the inward is not the object intended, for the sought-for goal is the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—in which salvation lies. The second division is therefore also called “science” figuratively. The meaning of outward and inward belongs to their possessors, the Speaker and Foundation. These are two servants of our Lord al-Ḥākim, employed within His kingdom in our age. Whoever knows them knows them, and whoever neglects learning remains ignorant of them. There is no tawḥīd in them.

The third and fourth divisions are two other sciences: the treatment of nature and the treatment of the speaking animal, the human being, together with the beasts. The first is called a physician, the other a veterinarian. Both kinds of healer attempt to treat what they do not truly know. They inherit their science by imitation from earlier philosophers, just as people of the outward law inherited their sciences from Speakers and philosophers. At most they have opened a human abdomen and looked at what is inside, then pronounced judgment upon it. But the inside of a person who has been killed and died does not work as it does in a living human being; their judgment about the living speaking person is therefore not reliable.

How often do you see a physician proud of his skill and confident in his medicine who treats a patient and kills him in the course of treatment? Eye doctors and surgeons have blinded many people; veterinarians and those who treat birds have likewise killed many. Whatever success they obtain is by coincidence in the things treated and by judgments drawn from their observations and preferences. This is their strongest argument, but in the knowledge of realities it is the weakest. The four divisions do not possess the reality; truth lies elsewhere.

Having dismissed the two divisions of medicine, we return to the two religious sciences, the outward and inward, and find no genuine reality in either. We discover that the third division of religion is tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. These are the four divisions, and the fifth is their noblest. So, too, in other matters, greatness attaches to the fifth: there are four natures, while the fifth is above them; the Proofs (ḥujaj), whose fifth is the highest. One is counted, then another makes two, a third makes three, and a fourth completes the pair of pairs, as in “We created everything in pairs.” When a further one is added, tawḥīd is complete: four individuals form an outward pair and an inward pair, while the unity sought is beyond both. It is the fifth division.

That is the knowledge of the division of the sciences, the establishment of truth, and the unveiling of what was concealed. In the age of Adam the Universal Pure One, when people denied the Creator and sought the non-existent, the name and knowledge of our Lord were hidden, concealed, and not permitted to be disclosed. They were kept in hearts until our Lord appeared in the form of the Qāʾim. The appearance of the form together with the concealment of tawḥīd occurred for a purpose decreed by wisdom. No Unitarian could openly proclaim the unity of our Lord, so it remained hidden and concealed. So it remained in the times of al-Manṣūr, al-Muʿizz, and al-ʿAzīz. All are one, and He manifested His wisdom to us.

When our Lord al-Ḥākim rose in the form of tawḥīd, what was hidden was unveiled, and our Lord was affirmed in His unity openly, before Him. One would not be denied, killed, or imprisoned for this. The unveiling of what was concealed thus means the tawḥīd of our Lord, for there is nothing concealed that equals it or exceeds its dignity. In our present age it has been unveiled; every concealment has been lifted, the intended goal has been attained, and His promise has been fulfilled without failing.

Whoever proclaims tawḥīd, renounces denial, recognizes our Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and affirms His unity in accordance with what has been unveiled; whoever directs himself toward Him according to His command, turns toward Him by the light He originated, receives the deposit from that light, and fully recognizes the promised Riser of the Age appointed for his own time—such a one belongs to the victorious. He need not fear a return to the accursed Iblīs or grieve over separation from the contemptible Ghaṭrīs. Such people devote themselves to obedience to the Guide of Respondents and listen to the sciences of tawḥīd recited to them. These are the victorious.

Praise and favor belong to our Lord. We trust Him in prosperity and adversity, hardship and ease. He suffices me and is the best support and helper.

Here ends *The Division of the Sciences, Establishment of Truth, and Disclosure of What Is Hidden*. Its composition was completed in the month of Muḥarram, in the third year of the manifestation of the Guide of Respondents, our Lord's servant and possession, avenger against the associators through the sword of our Lord. In Him I seek help.

EPISTLE 37 — THE EPISTLE OF THE TINDER AND THE CLEAR PATH FOR THE SEEKER OF GUIDANCE

رسالة الزناد والسبيل الواضح للطالب الرشاد

Praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim through His own essence, separate from all He has originated, whose existence precedes that of every other thing. Every living believer speaks His praise. He brings creation into existence and brings it back again. He strengthens His ranks and servants through the Holy Spirit. Divine power belongs to Him alone, without any rival who can equal Him. He prevails over His servants, and no opponent can contest Him. He neither begets nor is begotten, and none is comparable to Him. The most profound thoughts cannot reach His identity; neither inward insight nor outward sight perceives Him; descriptions cannot encompass Him. He is the Living, the Self-Subsisting, whom neither drowsiness nor sleep overtakes.

He is the Originator of originated things, indicated in all tongues, the Creator of names and attributes. He knows what has been and what shall be; beholders' sight cannot reach Him, and no thought or passing idea can encompass Him. He is the First and the Last. Minds are helpless to perceive His essence; tongues grow weary attempting to formulate His reality; reason recoils from grasping Him, and eyes fail to see Him.

He has appeared to creation as a trial, as a gracious gift, and as a test. For His friends the test and choice consisted in knowing and affirming His unity. They responded to His command and His Call, acknowledged His lordship, and affirmed His Word. Through His guiding servant He rescued them from darkness into light, punishment into reward, the abyss of fire into the exalted Garden, where neither exhaustion nor fatigue touches them. This is the party saved from the whole world.

He summoned the other parties to knowledge of Himself, but they turned away from His path. Seeing a likeness to their own kind in the form in which He appeared, they drew back in estrangement. Through disbelief and incapacity they returned to the inverted world; through ignorance and error they accepted it. There they remained in the fire, unable to know the Truth.

Because they imagined Paradise as a place perceptible to the senses, filled with fruit-bearing trees and running streams, their fancies attached themselves to that image. They sought a non-existent thing without reality or substance, because they were unable to understand intelligible meanings. Had they known the Garden, they would have hastened to it, remained in it, and realized that it already exists. The Creator has not referred them to nothingness; all that was promised to them exists through His existence.

They also say, "Paradise is as wide as the heavens and the earth," without knowing what this statement means. If its width is the heavens and the earth, what would its length be? And where would the Fire fit beside it? Had they understood its length, they would have understood its width, for the length of everything exceeds its breadth.

When we return to the true meanings, we find Paradise to be the rightly guided and guiding Call. Its fruits are the genuine divine sciences through which Unitarians are freed from ignorance and the disease of associationism. Its length is the Universal Intellect, the Riser of the Age, Imam of the godfearing, who arises with the Truth and draws the sword of tawḥīd, bringing every stubborn tyrant to an end. Its breadth is like the receptive Soul, which accepts the blessings, intellect, and strengthening grace from which all spiritual forms emerge, as a child emerges from a mother. Just as the breadth of a thing is not separated from its length, the Soul is not separate from the Intellect in receiving divine nourishment.

Whoever feeds upon these two Origins' sciences and drinks his fill has truly eaten Paradise's fruits and drunk its water through knowledge and reality, without referring the promise to nothingness. This is the exalted Garden, whose breadth is the heavens and the earth.

Fire, in the world of the senses, is what burns bodily things. Some of its names are praised and others condemned. The greater Fire, the kindled fire “which rises over hearts,” is a likeness of the Intellect because it knows the secrets of the world and the inner beliefs of its inhabitants. The condemned Fire, the fire of punishment, the abyss, and Hell, are names for the religious law of which its followers have become adherents, in which they have strayed and found their punishment. Were they told to leave it, they would refuse, act proudly, and obstruct the path.

They abide in it, left in denial throughout the cycles and ages, because they chose error over guidance, blindness over insight, embroidered sayings over reasoned verification, and blind imitation over investigation into difficult false claims. Punishment surrounded them and the means of escape were cut off. Such was the consequence of their refusal, pride, and denial.

On the day when the Guide calls to them, he will say, “Where are those partners of Mine whom you claimed were intercessors among you? The bonds between you have been severed, and what you imagined has vanished.” This means the day when the Qāʾim, master of the Resurrection, rises with the sword. His question, “Where are My partners?”, means: where are the leaders of the people of the outward and their devils, who misled them without knowledge and brought them into the dwelling of perdition—that is, the religious law and the prescribed obligations to which they had grown accustomed?

In reason these very obligations are the true Fire. As for the ornaments and falsehoods of the people of ignorance in which they took pride, they will be unable to offer any answer except to say, “Our Lord, our wretchedness overcame us; we were a people who transgressed.” Then punishment will descend upon them: their men killed, their children and women taken captive, and the poll tax exacted from men who remain and escape the sword, made to pay it in humiliation. They had wandered and been conquered by wretchedness and the inclinations of the bodily, animal soul. Its characteristic pursuits are natural appetites, and ignorance predominates in it.

Now the human being contains a substance that acts but is not acted upon; another substance that acts and is acted upon; and an accident that receives action but does not act except by means of its instrument. A mover is therefore required to draw knowledge of substance out of accident.

The substance that acts and is not acted upon is the Intellect united with the noble Soul. It is perpetually active and does not passively receive action. The substance that both acts and is acted upon is the noble Soul, which is rational, knowing, living, substantial, transparent, and receptive to forms. It can receive ignorance just as it can receive reason. The accident that is acted upon but does not act is the body, which the limbs employ in accordance with their wishes and inclinations.

Because the noble Soul can receive ignorance as well as reason, it looks toward both conditions. It inclines toward whichever of the two prevails. Its substance is concealed in it as fire is concealed in tinder. If tinder lay for all eternity without a striker or stone to set it in motion, no fire would emerge from it. Fire is brought forth from the tinder only by the striker and stone.

So too the Soul: when it is deprived of remembrance through the spiritual sciences—which constitute its nourishment, maintenance, and growth—it inclines toward ignorance as its sensory and animal nature gains power, and returns to ignorance. But when it does not lack the discipline of wisdom and nourishment by the divine sciences, and is receptive to what joins it from the effects of Intellect, it becomes refined and clear and attaches itself to its own world. Just as the striker, when moved, draws a spark out of tinder which can become a blaze of immeasurable size, although the fire began as the smallest spark, so knowledge's blessing and increase grow from the first spark into an ever-greater fire. Knowledge is an effect of the Intellect which unites with the noble Soul. The Soul receives it, becomes purified and grows, until it takes on a spiritual form.

Consider how the drop of generative fluid passes from one condition to the next until the figure of the embryo is completed and a child emerges with a complete body. At his birth he does not know that he was once a drop; he comes to know it when he acquires reason and reaches maturity. Likewise, the seeker does not know his former state of

ignorance, nor the station of knowledge to which he has come, until he attains knowledge, knows himself, and rises in rank.

We return to the tinder and stone and their meaning in wisdom. Fire lies hidden in tinder, but tinder cannot produce fire by itself. The stone must come upon it and move it before the fire appears. The stone too cannot produce fire by itself or from anything else without the striker. Thus the tinder and stone form a joined pair, male and female. Fire is begotten between them as offspring arise from a union, through the striker that moves the two.

The stone therefore signifies the Intellect, and tinder signifies the Soul. The emergence of fire from tinder through stone and striker signifies the emergence of spiritual forms from the Soul through the Intellect and the Creator's support. Their action is made complete by that support, just as fire is not manifested without the striker.

May our Lord make you, Unitarians, among those who have taken a flame from the blessed Fire, so that their fire shines brightly and increases in strength. May He not make you like the person who kindled a fire, and when it had illuminated what surrounded him, God took away his light and increased his wandering in darkness. May He ward off the designs of devils, protect you against doubt after certainty, and lead you along the path of those who follow right guidance.

Praise your Lord for the favors with which He has singled you out and the portion He has granted you, for He guided you to obey Him and His friend, the guide to knowledge of Him, who leads you along the path of His mercy.

Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His servant, the Riser of the Age. Our Lord suffices me.

EPISTLE 38 — THE EPISTLE OF THE CANDLE

رسالة الشمعة

The candle and its likeness in tawḥīd, and the likeness of its ranks on the third path. It was raised to the Divine Presence and released by the command of our Lord, the wise al-Ḥākim. We have known the reality of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”

Our Lord, our Master, our Hope! There is no god other than You and none to be worshipped except You. We submit to You something concerning which You know and judge more wisely than we. A community of Unitarians requested the Book of the Candle. It concerns the science of interpretation, which belonged to yesterday; yesterday and its knowledge have passed, while today and its law have come. As You have commanded and decreed, there is no opposing Your commands—exalted is Your power.

The servant Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, the Caller and son-in-law of our Lord's servant, the Riser of the Age, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī, composed this book upon the third path, which is the path of tawḥīd. I presented this book to our Lord so that He might command what He wills, in accordance with His previous favors and His divine decrees. Great is His grace. Praise belongs to the One who made His tawḥīd plain through the establishment of its ranks, made His praise manifest through the stations of His signs, and employed likenesses so that people of understanding might worship Him. He said, “None takes heed except those endowed with understanding.”

The candle, assembled completely with all its parts, is a likeness of pure tawḥīd. The word *shamʿa* (“candle”) has five letters, pointing to five concealed essences: Will (irāda), Volition (mashīʾa), the Word (kalima), the Preceder (sābiq), and the Follower (tālī). These are the Candle of tawḥīd.

Consider it another way. Wax does not burn except with cotton, and cotton does not burn except with wax. Neither receives the name of a complete, illuminating candle until fire has attached itself to it. The fire that takes hold of it has a subtle and a dense aspect. Its subtle part is the tall red tongue of flame, sometimes touched with blue, now hidden and now visible.

This tongue of flame indicates the Riser of the Age, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad. The fire that kindles the wax indicates his Proof, Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥāmid. The wax indicates the Word, Muḥammad ibn Wahb. The cotton indicates the Preceder, Salāma ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. The stand or spike (ḥasaka) supporting the candle indicates the Follower, ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Samūqī.

These five ranks include two dense and two subtle components: the subtle ones are fire and wax, and the dense ones are cotton and stand. The subtle tongue of flame, entering among and rising out of them, is the one who truly declared our Lord's unity. He is Dhū Maʿa, whose heart is with our Lord and never leaves Him. He points toward pure tawḥīd; from him comes its goal, and to him the indications return.

The candle is always found in the homes of great and wealthy people, who make use of it. So, too, people of knowledge understand tawḥīd through these five ranks and no others. They may not neglect knowledge of any of them: they must know the stations and relative excellence of each.

When a person uses fire alone he does not say that he has used a candle. Nor, if he uses fire and wax together, does he say that he has used a candle. When fire, wax, and cotton are brought together, he may say that he has a candle, yet it still needs something to carry it. Without the stand it remains an incomplete instrument. When the stand is provided, the candle is complete; it lights the house and benefits the person who uses it. It is erected among people as a sign indicating tawḥīd.

Likewise, someone who recognizes only the Riser of the Age cannot withstand his subtlety, for he is comparable to the delicate tongue of flame. If that person recognizes the Riser's Proof, the Universal Soul, he is like someone who has

kindled fire alone. If he recognizes the Word, he resembles someone who has kindled fire and wax. Recognition of the Preceder, comparable to the cotton, completes the flame; with the stand supporting it, corresponding to the Follower, the ranks of tawḥīd become complete.

Whoever lacks knowledge of these five ranks has not known tawḥīd in our present age; his claim to unity is only an assertion. Let the Unitarians know and believe this, and not worship our Lord without understanding. He said, “These are God's bounds, and whoever transgresses God's bounds has wronged himself.” This refers to the third path, concerning which the Qurʾān says, “A wall will be placed between them, having a gate.” The wall means religious law and the gate means the Foundation, just as the Speaker said, “I am the city of knowledge and ʿAlī is its gate.”

The statement “Within it is mercy” indicates that mercy is not identical with the inward. “Outside it, facing it, is punishment” indicates the Speaker, the possessor of the outward. The Foundation possesses the inward, and the Riser is the possessor of mercy.

Likewise He said, “From it We created you,” meaning the outward; “into it We shall return you,” meaning the inward; and “from it We shall bring you out once again,” meaning the departure of Unitarians from outward and inward into the third path, the path of tawḥīd.

People are thus of three kinds. The people of the outward are called *Muslims*. The people of the inward are called *Believers*. The people of the Riser of the Age are called *Unitarians*. Consider, seeker of guidance, these three meanings; there is no fourth. The pair, the single one, and what lies between them.

Someone who calls himself a Unitarian while clinging to anything of religious law has invalidated and falsified his own statement: rather, he is a disbelieving denier. Someone who belongs to the inward and its interpretation, yet calls himself a Unitarian, has likewise uttered falsehood and nullified his assertion. He is an associator and unbeliever, for he associates something with our Lord and opposes Him. The inward is the companion of the outward; the two are a pair.

As it was said in the assembly: know that God created everything in pairs so that He alone should be one and without pair, with nothing like Him. He created heaven and earth, land and sea, truth and falsehood, sweet and bitter, Preceder and Follower, Speaker and Foundation, Imam and Proof. There are many such pairs, for tawḥīd must be fulfilled by the Single One who is not paired.

Thus someone who claims tawḥīd while maintaining both outward and inward is false in his claim. Whoever enters obedience to the Riser of the Age and follows the third path becomes a Unitarian, for he has left the pair and followed the Single One.

Reflect, reader, on these proofs, and compare them with what you have heard in your gatherings and in the revealed Book, so that the truth becomes clear to you. The Qurʾān says through the tongue of Muḥammad, “We sent down the Book to you in truth.” The Book is ʿAlī, the one addressed is Muḥammad, and the Truth is the Riser. Thus they are three: the single one between the pair.

Know that wax comes from bees. The bees represent the Callers, and honey is the science of the Speaker. Wax is separated from and has left the honey. Likewise the Word has risen above the Speaker’s knowledge and has separated itself from him, proceeding toward the third path, the path of tawḥīd. Cotton comes from what grows out of the earth, and the earth signifies the Foundation. Cotton emerges from the earth and parts from it. Likewise the possessor of this rank, the Preceder, has left revelation and interpretation, become refined, and ascended to the third path, the path of tawḥīd.

The candle-stand (ḥasaka) is made from copper. In the language of the Arabs, copper is associated with smoke, and heaven was formed from smoke. Likewise, the Preceder supplied the Follower until all the dense parts took form from him. The stand has three legs; likewise the Follower has three ranks that hold fast to him. The first is the Grandfather (al-jadd), Ayyūb ibn ʿAlī. The second is the Opening (al-fatḥ), Rifāʿa ibn ʿAbd al-Wārith. The third is the Imagination

(al-khayāl), Muḥsin ibn ʿAlī. These five and these three together make eight, a number composed of pairs. The tongue of flame indicates tawḥīd: our Lord does not enter the number of His servants; He stands alone, exalted above them. Such is the Candle of tawḥīd.

As for the tongue of flame and the fire, these are Dhū Maʿa and Dhū Maṣṣa, subtle and dense, Will and Volition. The Book speaks of the two lights: “Light upon light; God guides to His light whomever He wills.” The first light is the Riser of the Age; the second is his Proof. “God guides to His light whomever He wills”: here “God” is applied to the Riser of the Age. He guides whom He wills to His light—that is, whoever receives speech through the inspiration of our Lord, by permission of His Proof, and whose speech brings life to one who hears it when the Volition has already ordained it.

This is the nature of the Candle of tawḥīd. Whoever has it lit before him can see and find guidance. These words do not come from my own strength or power, but from the gifts of our Lord—glorious and exalted—to the Riser of the Age, and from him to his miserable, impoverished servant. Whatever here is correct comes from our Lord's success and the benefits received from the Riser of the Age; whatever is mistaken comes from this humble, lowly servant, who asks forgiveness from our Lord and asks that His favor be confirmed and made to endure, if our Lord wills. Through Him comes success.

May His peace, blessings, and greetings be upon the one whom He has chosen from among all creatures, the Riser of the Age, greatest Imam and perfect light; and upon the high spiritual ranks, with our Lord's mercy and blessings. In Him we seek help.

Here ends the Epistle of the Candle, its likeness and its ranks in tawḥīd on the third path. It was raised to the Divine Presence and released. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His servant, the guiding Imam.

EPISTLE 39 — RIGHT GUIDANCE AND DIRECTION

الرشد والهداية

The words of the Chosen One, Enoch of the Age, Idrīs of the Time, Hermes of the Hermeses, the Universal Soul and chosen, well-pleasing Proof, the Proof of the Imam who is Riser of the Age—may his peace and mercy rest upon us.

Praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim through His own essence, distinct from all He has originated. Through obedience to Him He guided His Unitarian servants and, through knowledge of Him, guided His sincere friends. He gave confidence to the hearts of His believing friends, illuminated the hearts of the knowing by His light, and made the tongues of the truthful acknowledge His unity. Intellects were incapable of perceiving the manner of His being. Their inability to attain its utmost limit drove them back, unable to encompass His entirety. In despair of reaching His true reality, they confessed their deficiency and inability to attain His identity and essence, except for what He brought into existence among them of the knowledge of His unity. No essence encloses His essence, and no attributes disclose His being.

He established His proof against creation by His existence and distributed His Callers and ranks among them. Through His power He raised up one capable among creatures and established him to overcome all adversaries of truth, and gives support to His friends through His generosity. Glory be to Him, first and last, inward and outward! No age is without Him and no place without His light. He is the God existing in al-Ḥākim, the One worshipped. He is absent at no time and more deserving of the name Existent than anything else that exists. He is Originator of things, Lord of the next world and the first.

He originated the Intellect from His pure light through divine power, without instrument, pattern, or image. In a single act He brought all things into existence within it and through it comprehended all creation. He made it the root of originated things, strengthened it with divine power and the higher substance, preserved it from diminution, and made it present in every age and time. He made it the cause of all things, because the spiritual ranks return to it, and because it is the highest of the guides pointing toward Him.

Then He brought me forth from it through the power of its origination and substance. He made me its Follower and Proof, its spouse and the receiver of its image, the keeper of its secret and wisdom. He poured its light and blessing over me, brought forth from me the ranks of His Call, and made me the west to receive what shone out from the east of its light and outpouring. All that shines from it of spiritual sciences and exalted wisdom comes by divine power.

I am the Soul. My station in relation to the Imam of guidance is that of the moon in relation to the sun. Unitarians, rejoice in this wisdom when you hear it! Praise your Lord, toward whom you point and whom you worship. Thank His servant, the Imam of your age, to whom you return and whom you follow. Join my thanksgiving to his and to the thanks of all the ranks.

Be eager in seeking knowledge; strive earnestly. Come to the spirit of life and hasten toward the ships of salvation. Victorious is the one who empties his mind and heart for the pursuit of wisdom, pours its light upon his reason and understanding, and makes every effort to discuss it with the chosen servants of our Lord. Happy is the one who makes wisdom a dwelling in his heart, regards its acquisition as the purest gain, and protects it as in a fortress and sacred precinct from those who are not worthy of it, whose ears are stopped and whose hearts and eyes are blind to it.

Be eager in seeking knowledge, in accompanying people of understanding, and in discussion at every opportunity, and you will receive goodness and blessings. Let none of you consider that what he has committed to memory excuses him from studying wisdom or hearing repeated instruction. Let him not be satisfied with what he knows and at ease with what he understands, saying, “I have no more need of effort and exertion.” At that point he begins to fall into negligence and deficiency.

How often has a sharp sword, bright in its metal, lain for so long in its sheath that rust and decay covered it? Its cutting edges grow blunt, its owner loses esteem for it, and its polisher must labor to restore it. So too the noble Soul, after becoming refined and clear, acknowledging the unity of its Originator and attaining faith: if it withdraws from mercy and loses the light of wisdom that nourishes it, it returns to error after guidance and to ignorance after its former righteousness.

For God’s sake, do not cease to value wisdom after seeking it. Look at those before you: they have passed away. Wake from the slumber of sleep, and do not return to error after guidance. The proof has now been established against all creation, and the evidence is clear for those who can see. What happened among earlier nations has happened among you. Do not let most of you turn backward after going forward. Do not retrace your footsteps after taking the lead. Hold fast to the covenant and pledge. Gird yourselves for the pursuit of wisdom; do not return from faith to hypocrisy.

Answer the Caller when he summons you and listen when he calls. Whoever answers obediently, returns to him humbly, and listens with familiarity to his teaching obtains from the light of wisdom a shining radiance and beneficial knowledge. Soon people will be called, and most will turn away without answering. Those who come after them will be called as you and your fathers were called. If they answer as you answered, hear as you heard, surrender the matter to our Lord as you surrendered it, take from the light of wisdom as you did, they will escape uncertainty as you escaped it.

But whoever turns away from the path, attempts to travel the road of truth without a guide, or returns from knowledge of the Existent to denial and rejection, and from affirmation to the non-existent, joins the peoples of the former ages who have passed away.

Do not rest complacently in the interval granted to you, lest heedlessness overcome you. Watch for the Manifestation, for it comes when people are least attentive, and then the knowing Unitarian awakens while the denying opponent neglects it.

The negligent person among you resembles a traveler among a great crowd of people setting out for a distant country. Night falls upon them during their journey, and they stop in a vast, empty wilderness unknown to all except their guides. They settle there. One traveler sleeps for a little while at the beginning of the night, then stays awake for a long time, awaiting morning and the first light of dawn, fearing that he might become separated from his traveling companions. But when the night seems to him very long, sleep overcomes him and he falls asleep again. Dawn arrives while he sleeps. The others set out, and he is not awake. Their guide takes them far away. When he rises, he no longer knows the direction in which his companions have gone. He remains bewildered, without a friend, without hearing a sound in the wilderness, without a fellow traveler or a guide to show him the road. What will his condition be, with all hope of catching the company cut off?

Unitarians, beware of the sleep that overcomes you. Await the appearance of the Truth in every age and time. Do not fall into neglect after having sought it and worked for it. Gather the fruits of wisdom from its trees and gardens; drink the water of life from its springs and fountains. The realities of wisdom uncover its difficulties for you and open its locked gates and fastenings. Do not be like those who say “We have heard,” when they have not truly heard, or say “We believe,” while most of them associate others with God.

Messengers have already come to you, and Callers have been dispatched to you. Winds of mercy blow from every horizon; clouds of blessing spread across every direction; the first rains of wisdom have fallen over the whole land. Their rain has struck plains and mountains, and valleys and rivers have overflowed. In fertile soil the water sinks in and remains, whereas barren, salty ground rejects it because of its small capacity to receive and grow.

Reflect upon these likenesses, and praise our Lord—glory be to Him—for having rescued you from the erring parties of unbelief, granted you light by which to walk among people, and delivered you from the perplexities of the ignorant and those who argue by analogy. Your minds have become pure, your souls clear, and your inward sight has surpassed ordinary sight. You have come to know the realities of affairs throughout cycles and ages. Can light be perceived

except through sound vision? Can truth be known except by purified and discerning intellects? Had you not escaped the world of ignorance you could never have received the light of the Intellect's effects.

You resemble the blessed, fertile earth because you receive divine sciences and intellectual substances, bind yourselves to the exalted ranks, and answer the guiding and rightly guided Call. The parties of associationism and obstinate denial from which you have turned away represent barren, saline earth, for they are like corrupt ground, through ignorance of knowledge and its possessors, their adherence to unbelief and ignorance, their denial of their Lord and Imam, and their persistence in error and transgression. Do not turn toward or trust them. If they prevail over you they will show no mercy; they will drive you away from your security and seize you with hands and tongues.

Look to yourselves. Their disbelief does not harm you if you believe, nor their rejection if you answer, nor their ignorance if you know. Accept wisdom, people of wisdom, and persist in preserving it and protecting it from those unworthy of it. Wisdom has beginnings, divisions, realities, and foundations; use them to discern the one who points, the proof by which he points, and that toward which he points. Reflect, and follow the secret of the path, for the paths of truth are plain to those who seek them, the gates of mercy have been opened to the petitioners, the springs of wisdom are flowing for those who approach, and the ranks of the Call have been sent among all peoples to direct seekers of guidance. Light has appeared to those who see, and the summons is heard except by those whose ears are stopped.

Beware, beware with every care, before destiny descends, before regret seizes those who have been negligent. Then the unbeliever will say, “If only I might have another turn!” His plea will not be accepted, and his excuse will profit him nothing. Beware before the event descends and the Riser of the Age stands with the sword of our Lord al-Ḥākim—glory be to Him—to slay the people of unbelief and tyranny, leave their women widowed and their children fatherless. This is the day with which you are threatened, the day you await. On that day you will be brought forth for judgment, and nothing of yours will be hidden. Disgrace and punishment will fall upon unbelievers, while Unitarians receive recompense and reward. The sincere will triumph and the Unitarians prosper. Await the day, bind yourselves to the ranks of religion, and continue to give sincere counsel and goodwill to your Unitarian brethren.

Hear, therefore, friends, the words of this epistle I have composed and named *Right Guidance and Direction*. Those who seek guidance may receive direction from it, believers find the road through it, and those who know the Truth find reassurance in it, by the support of our Lord—glory be to Him—and the outpouring of the Imam of His Age. Preserve it just as you have preserved [what was previously entrusted to you].

Peace, and praise belongs to our Lord alone. Thanks to His servant, the Riser of the Age.

EPISTLE 40 — THE POEM OF THE SOUL

شعر النفس

“My success comes only through God.”

A doctrinal poem sent by Ismāʿīl al-Tamīmī, surnamed the Soul, to the people of Jabal al-Summāq near Aleppo, setting forth the doctrine of tawḥīd.

Shaykh Abū Ibrāhīm Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, the Caller known as the Chosen of the Respondents, speaks, directing people to the religion of our Lord and the knowledge of the Imam:

Toward the Goal of goals I direct my purpose and desire, Toward al-Ḥākim, raised above every ruler.

Turn and hasten toward al-Ḥākim the Victorious; No adherent of tawḥīd who turns to Him will be sorry.

He is al-Ḥākim, the Single One, whose name is exalted; He has no likeness to be measured against another ruler.

Wise, knowing, powerful, sovereign over all creation, He draws people near through the familiar name al-Ḥākim.

The lofty Preceder and the Follower became His servants, Together with the Grandfather, Opening, and Imagination.

They bowed as servants to our Lord's command, For every young follower of the religion is a servant of Adam.

He is the One who rises above every cause; All besides Him are servants and attendants.

He is al-Ḥākim, our Lord, visible through His humanity; Through His divinity He performs every mighty deed.

Rise up and approach our Lord al-Ḥākim; Your tawḥīd is true for every person of firm judgment.

When lofty al-Ḥākim appears in His procession, Affirm His unity with the eye of knowledge among the worlds.

He is called an Imam, although the Imam is His servant; Awaken, and do not listen to everyone who sleeps.

Our Lord has appeared and brought familiarity to His servants, Through acts like theirs, in the wisdom of al-Ḥākim.

He appeared through the actions and forms of servants, And brought familiarity to people, though creation resembles beasts.

When we broadcast tawḥīd their minds reel; They would tear at it as serpents tear at their prey.

The weight of our argument will cut them down, Severing their greatness as keen swords cut.

The truth is what we have said, and You are its witness; It cuts through the words of the people as throats are cut.

The men of truth will rise when the appointed rising comes, With resolute strength when all resolutions reach their end.

They will be driven against their will; their speech will gain no answer, Barefoot captives in the grasp of lions.

The Guide will call to them: “Come to what You have been ignorant of concerning tawḥīd, people of every world!”

“Come to the hidden meaning; enough for you Are the signs and proofs placed before you in the pillars!”

You practiced interpretation of meanings as religion, Contrary to what every Riser before you had said.

You imagined that a child must remain small because of his size, And forgot the limit of the concealed proclamation.

You joined others with God, and associationism fills your words, Like the clashing waves upon a sea of associationism.

The sword of truth will be drawn against your ignorance, And reap you like grain, without a merciful hand.

The people of response and godfearing obedience will drive you onward; Their tawḥīd grows greater than every gain.

A sword for al-Tamīmī will be drawn openly, Against your assembly, its action free of blame.

The Chosen of the Respondents will not abandon His struggle against you, neither through fear nor blame.

We shall quench the burning concealed within our breasts, And reach your lineages and the bonds of kinship.

You will go about openly in humiliation for your opposition, And meet every abasement, finding no mercy.

This poem will choke every hypocrite with suppressed anger, Adding distress upon distress to their rage.

From Shaykh Ismāʿīl to Jabal al-Summāq, to be read to every Unitarian man and woman. Our Lord—glory be to Him—approved it and caused copies to be circulated among the Respondents so that they might discuss and recite it as a hymn, drawing blessing from it on each new day.

Completed. Peace, with praise belonging to our Lord and proceeding from Him.

EPISTLE 41 — THE SEVEN PRECEPTS

الوصايا السبع

I place my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim, the One without a second, and give thanks to His servant, the Riser of the Age. Praise belongs to our Lord, who manifests universals and is the goal of rational contemplation, the Originator of names and attributes, who governs all essences through His own essence—glorious be His remembrance and exalted above resemblance to originated beings. His peace, blessings, ever-increasing favors, and most noble greetings rest upon the servant He chose to guide the community and rescue it from blindness and darkness: the Riser of the Age, who speaks the explanation, guides to the reality of faith, and takes vengeance upon associators and tyrants.

Know, Unitarians of our Lord al-Ḥākim who acknowledge the Imamate of His servant, the Riser, that when the form of the Worshipped One withdrew from sight and the Riser of the Age was no longer manifest, many souls despaired because they could no longer perceive Him with their senses. The energies of many people of tawḥīd came to a halt through the absence of their instructor. They disagreed concerning the right teaching, having little experience of the newly proclaimed rule, and quarreled over lawful and forbidden things.

They asked whether the Creator—glory be to Him—had imposed, through the tongue of the Imam, obligations by which humankind must live. Some said that the community must have obligations to restrain its passions, lest its passions instead bind it. Without such duties people would cease guarding themselves, there would be less objection to wrongdoing, and each would act according to his own opinion without agreement with the others.

When I saw this and the despair that had entered their souls, and observed some of them acting by private opinion and analogy, I feared that their desire for relief from obligations would draw them into heedless ease, that their animal nature would draw them toward treating everything as permissible, including foul and shameful actions. I feared also that despair over the absence of formal obligations might carry them into the doctrine of those who recognize nothing beyond the passing world: they might imagine that without stated rules there is no wrongdoing and no sin. In the absence of prohibition, honorable conduct would then fall away, the obligation to preserve brotherhood would disappear, disorder would enter the doctrine, and the restoration of good order would become difficult.

I considered a letter received from the presence of my master, the Riser of the Age—may the best peace and greeting of his Worshipped One rest upon him. In it he instructed me to compose books and read them to people of insight, granted me authority to speak throughout the regions and islands, and commanded me to explain the sciences that had become difficult for the community and make known the duties and practices I had learned.

I therefore composed this book, the first of seven parts. These parts contain duties imposed by our Lord—glory be to Him—the Possessor of generosity and beneficence, and pronounced by His servant, the Riser of the Age. They follow one another, and reason makes clear that they are obligations. Each book identifies what must be imposed, removes what must be abolished, and refutes what ought to be refuted. If you hold fast to these teachings you will be safe from error and delivered from wrath. If you perform what your Creator has imposed, the blessings of your Guide will increase, your Caller will draw near to you, and you will recognize your origin and your return. If you violate the prescribed duties, ill will enters among you, and rain is withheld from you. I shall now explain what has been imposed concerning truthfulness of the tongue.

Know, brethren who worship our Lord, Possessor of favors and goodness, and acknowledge the Imamate of the Riser of the Age, that our Lord has imposed upon you truthfulness of the tongue and preservation of the brethren. These are followed by five further qualities, making seven qualities of tawḥīd in all. They replace the seven obligatory pillars of the law-bound religion. Whoever understands what is imposed upon him by these seven qualities will clearly distinguish truth from impossibility.

The first and greatest is truthfulness, which separates falsehood from truth. Do not be among liars. Do not be like those who said, “We have heard and obeyed,” yet whose hearts had drunk in the calf through their unbelief. The calf signifies the adversary of the Riser of the Age, who seeks to resemble him without reality or proof. You know that Islam, faith, and the other religious laws and religions cannot be complete without conditions and good deeds. How much more must this be true of the tawḥīd of our Lord, which is the ultimate goal? Whoever claims to be a believing Unitarian but does not perform the duties imposed by our Lord, speak truthfully, and do good in his actions, merely claims tawḥīd while practicing associationism and denial.

Were you to recognize the obligation of truthful speech and preservation of the brethren, you would know truth from falsehood and denial from faith. For in Arabic the word *īmān* means affirmation and holding something to be true. Someone who is not truthful with his tongue is more hypocritical in his heart and less certain in his belief.

Know that truthfulness is tawḥīd in its perfection, while lying is associationism and error. Whoever lies to his brother lies to his Caller; whoever lies to his Caller lies to his Imam; whoever lies to his Imam lies to our Lord—glory be to Him—and deserves His displeasure. Conversely, whoever speaks truthfully to his brother is better fitted to speak truthfully to his Caller, and then to his Imam and our Lord, thereby deserving His kindness, gifts, and favors.

Know that whoever has trained his tongue to lie has associated another with our Lord, for lying points to the accursed Iblīs. The Arabic word *kadhib* (“lying”) has three letters. In the numerical reckoning of letters their values are twenty for kāf, four for dhāl, and two for bāʾ, altogether twenty-six. [These signify] Iblīs and his spouse, together with twenty-four of their offspring who stand in their place. Whoever takes their side renounces our Lord and the ranks of tawḥīd.

The word rendered “truthfulness,” written *sidq* with sīn (س) in this esoteric spelling, has three letters: sīn is sixty, dāl is four, and qāf is one hundred. Their total is one hundred and sixty-four. Of these, ninety-nine point to the rank of Imamate. As the saying goes, “God has ninety-nine names; whoever enumerates them enters the Garden.” Likewise the Riser of the Age has ninety-nine ranks before him, knowledge of which brings a person into the reality of his Call, which encompasses its people. Sixty points to the sixty ranks of the right wing and left wing. Four points to the four exalted ranks, Dhū Maʿa, Dhū Maṣṣa, the Word, and the Gate: the Riser of the Age, the Chosen One, the Well-Pleasing One, and the Elect One. Together these are one hundred and sixty-three ranks. The remaining one indicates the unity of our Lord and knowledge of the humanity of the Station. Whoever recognizes these ranks pointing toward the Worshipped One, and practices truthfulness, rises through the degrees, attains blessings, and repudiates the adversary and falsehood.

Whoever lies to his brother or twists his brother's words has lied to our Lord, abandoned his faith, and been overcome by his devil. Whoever acts contrary to his Imam's command multiplies his sins and offenses. Beware, Unitarians, of having your hearts contradict what your tongues say to your brothers: that angers the Riser of your Age and is associationism itself. “Associationism is indeed a tremendous wrong.”

It has thus been established that truthfulness indicates knowledge of the ranks and is the intended way, the upright and praiseworthy path. Lying indicates Iblīs; it is foul and corrupt speech which leads to denial and associationism with the Worshipped One.

But, brethren, you are not obliged to tell the truth to the whole community, the people of ignorance, blindness, and darkness. They are owed no such obligation by you. Truthfulness belongs to the conduct demanded among you; those outside your circle have no corresponding claim upon you. It is obligatory among your own brethren. Whoever lies to his brother or lies for him has treated him hypocritically and suspected him. Lying is not permissible among Unitarians, because it betrays doubt in religion and weakness in certainty. Whoever among you is accustomed to it should cease. “The Messenger's duty is only to convey the message plainly.”

When one person lies to a brother, one of three blameworthy causes is ordinarily present. First, the brother may have lied to him and he seeks to repay him in kind. Then both are guilty and both incur displeasure. The one who lied first did so because he suspected his brother. His duty was to be truthful. If he discovered the brother to be the keeper of his

secret and guardian of his affair, he ought to trust him; otherwise he could have remained silent rather than affirming or denying. Silence and ending the conversation are better than lying and sin.

The one who lied in retaliation has also erred: his reaction was mistaken and unjustified. If the community starts exchanging lies in retaliation, no truthful person will remain among them, but only an associating hypocrite. In such a condition there is no rightly guided person, no one with sound judgment, and no knower of the reality of tawḥīd. People ought to imitate one another in truthfulness and in the soundest opinions, not in lying and ugly deeds.

Second, one may lie to his brothers neither to repay a lie nor out of suspicion but from the habit of lying and because he treats it as permissible. He is the most wretched of the three, the greatest in guilt and most burdened with sin, because he has neither injury nor grievance to offer as his defense. How ugly is such lying! Once it is exposed, it becomes the cause of his humiliation.

No Unitarian has permission to lie to his brethren, except when an adversary is present, the matters at issue cannot safely be disclosed to him, and neither his rank nor his allegiance is known. If silence is possible, that is better. If it is not, there is no harm in altering one's words in the adversary's presence. After the devil has departed and he is alone with his brethren, he must return to truthful speech with them.

It is not necessary to speak with complete frankness concerning matters whose disclosure to adversaries would cause injury. Nevertheless, it is an excellence of character to avoid making lying a habit. Whoever grants himself permission to lie may become accustomed to it and finally employ it in every condition, for which reason the habitual practice is blameworthy.

Suppose one of you has killed a man from the outside masses. If those people question him, he need not tell them the truth, lest they establish the killing against him from his own confession and bring witnesses against him. The same applies to similar situations: if someone among you has taken property, or an adversary claims a debt without written proof or a deposit without evidence, and one is unable to repay or satisfy the claimant, denial or withholding the truth may be permitted because of the difficulty and fear of harm. We permitted such concealment only where necessity required it. But where no such difficulty or cause for injury exists, there is no objection to speaking truthfully. There must be neither harm nor reciprocal harm; perishable worldly property should not spoil one's dealings within the household of faith. Such allowance is granted only when necessity requires it.

As for the body of sincere, truthful, mutually protective Unitarian brethren who have escaped the net of accursed Iblīs, there is no conflict among them either in religion or in the things of the world. If one possesses another's money and the owner knows him to be unable to pay, he waits patiently; if the borrower asks for further help, he gives it. The indebted brother does not deny his debt because of his hardship, and the other, knowing his truthfulness, continues to excuse him.

Thus I have explained the truthfulness of the tongue that our Lord has imposed, and the permission granted in particular dealings, together with the obligations among brethren. This is the first duty, in place of prayer.

I shall now explain to you the abolition of prayer in its outward and inward senses according to the judgment of my master, the Riser of the Age—may the best greetings and peace rest upon him—and the permission to leave it, together with the true prayer imposed upon you in its place. The inward assemblies pointed toward this genuine prayer when they said:

“Believers, the world contains two opposed conditions, outward and inward. There is another wisdom, toward which indications point and which is concealed from the ignorant. It is the third division, toward which the Speakers, Foundations, their Imams, and those who follow them point: the tawḥīd of our Lord—glory be to Him.”

Concerning prayer and its abrogation in the outward and inward senses, Muslims transmit from the Speaker the statement, “Whoever abandons his prayer has disbelieved,” and, “Whoever abandons his prayer three times may die in

whatever religion he wishes.” Yet we have seen many Muslims neglect prayer, sometimes repeatedly, and some who have never prayed at all, without being called unbelievers. We therefore know that the matter is contrary to the report.

All Muslims agree that the man who leads a congregation has a prayer that counts as their prayer, an action that counts as their action, and a recitation that counts as their recitation. If he commits an error in an obligatory element without which the prayer cannot be performed, he must repeat the prayer, and so must they. One man leading prayer thus stands in the place of the community, and his prayer becomes their prayer.

Our Lord—glory be to Him—spent many years before His concealment without leading people in prayer, praying over a funeral, or offer the sacrifice on the festival, even though sacrifice is joined to prayer in the command, “Pray to your Lord and sacrifice.” We saw that our Lord, after displaying these things to the world, invalidated them. We therefore learned that He had overturned the two practices, prayer and sacrifice, and granted His servants permission to abandon them, for to Him belongs the end and from Him the beginning. This is the outward meaning of the abolition of customary prayer.

As for the inward, you have heard, Unitarians, that prayer is the customary covenant, called *ṣalāt* because it establishes a connection (*ṣila*) between Respondents and the Imam, by which they meant ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. They appealed to “Prayer restrains from indecency and wrongdoing”: someone connected by covenant to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, they said, would cease to love Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, whom they interpreted as indecency and wrongdoing. Yet we have seen many who entered ʿAlī's covenant remain devoted to Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, go to Muʿāwiya, and abandon ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

The inward assemblies also taught that the familiar covenant in our present age, before our Lord's concealment, was the link between Respondents and Him, and that indecency and wrongdoing designated Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. But countless people received our Lord's covenant during His manifestation among His servants, and did not cease loving Abū Bakr and ʿUmar or cease opposing our Lord and disobeying His command. So we learned that the reality differed from what we had heard in inward instruction.

We saw our Lord—glory be to Him—overturn the inward interpretation, for He permitted all the Nāṣibīs to display love for Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. A decree was recited publicly before witnesses, declaring, “Whoever wishes to wear a signet on the right hand or the left is not to be opposed.” We understood that He had abolished the inward just as He had abolished the outward, assigning them equal standing. We then sought what would save us from both conditions, deliver us promptly from both religious laws, and admit us into the Garden of Delight—that is, the Call of the Riser of the Age.

We learned that prayer truly imposed upon us and upon you at five times is the connection of our hearts with tawḥīd of our Lord—glory be to Him—by way of five ranks: Preceder, Follower, Grandfather, Opening, and Imagination. These are known and present in our own age. Whoever abandons this prayer three times through the three [ranks] Dhū Maʿa, Dhū Maṣṣa, and the Wing has disbelieved, apostatized, and denied, since denial of blessings is disbelief in them.

“Indecency” and “wrongdoing” are the two religious laws, outward and inward. Whoever joins his heart to the oneness of our Lord—glorified be His remembrance, with no object of worship besides Him—is restrained by that oneness from turning to the two religious laws, looking back behind him, or awaiting the lost nonexistence whose existence has never been established. This is the true prayer imposed upon you. This is also the truthful speech that has been firmly required of you.

I shall explain the six duties following truthfulness of the tongue, and abolish the six pillars that follow prayer in their outward and inward forms, establishing their realities through the success granted by our Lord—glory be to Him.

Beware, Unitarian brethren, after hearing of these duties of tawḥīd and the overturning of the obligatory pillars of religious law, that anyone among you should speak by mere personal opinion or analogy. Do not sink into despair concerning the manifestation of our Lord. Do not imagine that the religious laws are complete solely because the cycles

and periods have passed, or that further weeks and ages cannot arise by the power of our Lord, the One and Overpowering.

Our Lord al-Muʿizz said, “I am the seventh of the two weeks, the one who stands over the two covenants, and there is no week after me.” The two weeks designate the outward and inward religious laws. The law of the Mahdī, Saʿīd ibn Aḥmad, is the seventh outward law; the law of his Foundation, Qaddāḥ the interpreter, is the seventh inward law. As for “the one standing over the two covenants,” he explains that the new dispensation completed after him is the manifestation of pure tawḥīd, the tawḥīd of our Lord al-Ḥākim—glory be to Him.

The words “there is no week after me” mean that no further week of religious laws, nor any week of the Imam's former form of manifestation, is completed after him. Once seven Speakers and seven Foundations had been fulfilled, the cycles of outward and inward religious laws ended. Our Lord—glory be to Him—manifested Himself in kingship and humanity, appearing to the world in visible stations and speaking face to face from the House of Imamate. He brought what contradicts and abrogates those laws, whose ordinances had remained in one condition without change. Their ordinances belong to the order of the heavenly spheres; everything that reaches a seventh term comes to an end and is followed by something new.

Consider the seven days: when their count reaches the end, it changes and returns to the first, showing that when a week ends another begins. Likewise there are seven heavens, seven earths, seven regions; a person's height is seven spans of his own hand, his breadth likewise, the span of his hand contains seven finger-measures, and his face has seven openings. There are seven Speakers and seven Foundations; between one Speaker and the next there are seven Imams. Instances of this kind are so numerous that this book cannot contain them.

Each seven in the horizons has twenty-eight letters in its Arabic names. The seven wandering heavenly bodies are Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon; these amount to twenty-eight letters. The seven Speakers are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, and Saʿīd—twenty-eight letters. The seven Foundations are Seth, Shem, Ishmael, Joshua, Simon, ʿAlī, and Qaddāḥ—again twenty-eight letters.

Before His concealment, our Lord—glory be to Him—manifested for seven years in black clothing, for seven years growing His hair long, for seven years [under the sign of] imprisoning women, and for seven years riding a she-ass. All these actions were indications of our present condition. He did not change the practices with which we were familiar, knowing our limited comprehension of events and His accustomed ways, out of mercy and goodness to us.

His black clothing indicated the occultation, and that the trial and darkness would remain over His friends and servants for seven years after His disappearance. His long hair signified the concealment of the Imam, because the head in their symbolism stands for the Imam; thus we knew that the Imam would be concealed for seven years. The confinement of women indicated the silencing of the ranks. The four sacred months signified the sanctity of the Imam. All that He signified to us we found and encountered.

By riding the she-ass He gathered the hopes of all the peoples. Had they understood their true object, Jews and Christians would have known that they were waiting for Him in the very form in which our Lord disappeared. He appeared before everyone, but they failed to know Him. The riding of the she-ass holds indications sufficient for all religious parties.

Deliverance by His will is near. Most of the ordeal has passed and only its lighter part remains. Rejoice, Unitarian brethren, and bring good tidings to your brothers. Beware of despair and impatience. Be patient, for the good end belongs to those who endure, and successive blessings to those who give thanks. May our Lord assist us and you in fulfilling the duties and establishing what is prescribed. We seek His assistance, victory, and refuge in every affair. He is the best helper and supporter.

Completed, with praise belonging to our Lord alone.

EPISTLE 42 — ADMONITION AND REPROOF

التنبيه والتأنيب

I have sent this to Maʿadd ibn Muḥammad and to the negligent men who are with him in Cairo. In the fourteenth year of the Riser of the Age. Compared and found sound. Praise belongs to the Bestower of the blessing and its Lord. I place my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim alone, and give thanks to His servant, the Riser of Truth.

Praise be to God, who establishes and fortifies the foundations of tawḥīd, subdues falsehood through truth and confirms it, destroys associationism, humbles its adherents and scatters them, weakens the schemes of those who fail, and establishes the argument, through the justice of free choice flowing from His guiding, rising Guardian, against covenant-breakers and the unjust. He puts an end to the assaults of false doctrines through the Guardian of His truth and is exalted above the embellished inventions of the people of unbelief. Through the signs He has manifested, He has made His Guardian a witness to His unity.

His peace rests upon His messenger, who rises with truth and discloses the secret at His command; His mercy upon the spiritual ranks who proclaim tawḥīd, establishing justice among creatures as He required in their time and age. They give their voices to proclaiming what He has judged and commanded; they bear hardship, injury, and harm in His obedience through His favor upon them. His special blessings rest upon the awaited, rising Imam. His mercy rests upon the true friends in every region who are free of apostasy, denial, obstinacy, negligence, and rejection, and upon those who follow them in submission, kindness, patience, guidance, and certainty.

Now then: those marked by integrity, religion, right guidance, justice, transcendence, and tawḥīd have a duty to look with their inner sight, not merely their eyes. They must reflect upon the ages that have passed in the light of wisdom, repair what they have neglected, and recover through truth what they have overlooked. They must not imagine that the obligations laid upon created servants concern other people and not themselves.

No indeed! By God, the signs of the Resurrection have already overshadowed you. Still you remain heedless: you will not relinquish your obstinate resistance to the decisive signs or cease reviling the friends of tawḥīd, despite the warnings already given to you. When you are admonished with wisdom, its words pass across your ears. When callers summon you to tawḥīd, the words slide past your understanding. Have you forgotten the conditions and signs of religion, or deliberately shut your eyes to the Day of Resurrection and its judgments? Why do you show no reverence for God, who created you in stages? You compete in false accusation and ignorance and join forces in defaming people of religion and merit. You have undergone a transformation without knowing it, and your beliefs have exposed what you tried to conceal. Yet you remain unaware of it.

Were you not commanded, by an honored decree proceeding from the exalted authority, to carry weapons in all places—even the secure sanctuary—for the protection of great and small, near and far? This was an indication of the manifestation of tawḥīd and the open proclamation of praise and glorification, just as the earlier indication, during the time of concealment and prudent secrecy, was recorded in the books of wisdom: “Whoever lays down his weapon is safe; whoever closes his door is safe; whoever enters the house of Abū Sufyān is safe.” That is, remain silent; sheathe the sword of the tongue until permission is given for explanation and disclosure. But you are heedless of these judgments, wavering in confusion about the realities of the commands. Truth has become plain to those with eyes to see and the covering has been removed from the hearts of its people; still you turn away from the reminder.

This is confirmed by what was recited to you from the noble decree addressed to all of you: “You are in a stupor regarding the rights of divine lordship, blind concerning the obligations of the trust, far from discharging the duties required by blessings, lost in a perplexing wilderness through failure to distinguish, and afflicted by a severe illness of discernment.” “He knows your remedy and removes your misery born of deficient dispositions.” Do you think this rebuke and harsh speech were addressed to secretaries and administrators concerning the collection of revenues, or to

troops and Turks about marching and fighting? Those who turn away from God have lied and strayed far. You shall see, and they shall see, which of you has gone astray. The Guardian of truth knows best who has wandered from His path and who is rightly guided. It is also a sign for discerning religious people and a proof against the disputants the Jews of this community.

Everyone heard what was said in the celebrated sermon at the Mosque of al-Qarāfa: “Servants of God, the fast has run its course and departed, and the breaking of the fast has shown itself and drawn near.” Who could miss this except a lost and unsuccessful person, or one who falsely claims religion?

Then there appeared something that silenced the tongues of deceivers, humiliated the obstinate, and suppressed those who blocked the path of truth: a lofty, honored decree issued by the exalted authority. It said: “Remove from yourselves the sources of fear and anxiety; put away the corruption caused by imagination and apprehension. Know for certain that the Commander of the Faithful has placed you in a position of choice and has relieved you of the burden of concealment and secrecy regarding your convictions, so that each person may act sincerely, without relying upon obstacles and excuses to turn aside from what he sees and believes. The Commander of the Faithful has narrowed the scope of his excuse by conveying the full meaning of his intention and urging him to manifest his conviction, secure against any hand raised to injure him, resting within a covenant under which he shall not be attacked. Let whoever is present convey it to whoever is absent, so that knowledge of it may spread among the distinguished and common people. Let it be a lesson among humanity and let its wisdom remain through the passing days.”

Reflect on these words and their meanings! Did he not say that the Commander of the Faithful had placed you in a position of choice? What justice is there except free choice? He said that he had urged each person to reveal his belief. Did he urge people to disclose truth and justice or to declare falsehood and ignorance? O God, curse whoever has misunderstood this command, blinded his insight, and preferred his own choice to Your choice for him, so that his hidden character was exposed!

The decree says that this knowledge should spread among all and its wisdom remain through the ages. Did he command that his own will be made known—or the disclosure of something else? Does enduring wisdom lie in the tawḥīd which he commanded and manifested, or in publicly professing affection for Abū Bakr and ʿUmar? The decree also says that each person should be sincere in his actions, rather than avoiding what he believes by blaming external obstacles. Does this mean sincerity in tawḥīd and its manifestation, or sincerity in an associationist belief and concealment of that belief? And it says that the Commander of the Faithful had narrowed every excuse by conveying the full meaning of his intention. Did he explain it so that he might trick people concerning his command, or was this entire address meaningless? It must be one of those interpretations—or the third, which is his real intention. May God drive away the covenant-breakers and humble the ranks of renegades. For if this intention is established, as the widely circulated supreme decree shows, whoever conceals his creed or opposes the command has cast the bond of faith from his neck and departed from the people of tawḥīd.

The public issuance of this great decree, containing these carefully arranged words, is certain and well known. Whoever thereafter opposes it and conceals his religious belief has removed the bond of faith from his neck, disobeyed, and departed from the people of tawḥīd by opposing the command of the Most High and Glorious.

Someone might object: “Creatures cannot resist the command of the Creator, exalted be His power. If He commands one thing and forbids another, yet His command and prohibition are not followed, this implies weakness, whether in part or altogether.” The answer is that this person misunderstands the Creator's commands and prohibitions. If His command imposed an irresistible necessity and His prohibition an inescapable compulsion, nobody could doubt Him and all creatures would obey. Then distinction of merit would disappear. With distinction gone, reward and punishment would lose their meaning; and that would make the promise of recompense pointless. Far be that from God! Rather His command offers choice and His prohibition warns. In this way justice is established among creatures through choice, and the promised recompense and punishment on the true Day of Resurrection are justified.

Whoever judges impartially can see that this is the meaning of the Creator's command, though all humankind might deny it through ignorance. The noble decree allowing people to reveal their doctrines was made known to everyone. Those endowed with sound resolve and pure souls made their beliefs concerning tawḥīd explicit in obedience to the Wise and Praiseworthy One. Those committed to falsehood refused to answer; the deceivers disobeyed the divine command. They showed that their claim to this rank was empty, for they neither accepted the command nor obeyed it. “May God fight them! How they are turned away!”

The Creator, exalted be His blessings, protects the friends of His Guardian from these people and establishes the case against those who opposed Him and transgressed His command. O wicked community, the affair is not as you imagine or believe. The punishment is deserved because you neglected what you were commanded to do, and the proof stands against you because you denied and falsely accused the truth from which you turned away.

Another apostate may object that the decree was addressed only to Muslims, not to believers. The answer is that Islam is the broader designation and faith the more particular; all were addressed by the broader name so that no one might plead ignorance of the command. There is no plea against God after His messengers. The proof stands against those who rejected the persons who openly proclaimed tawḥīd and fulfilled the command of the Wise and Glorious One. The Creator's commands do not compel all persons irresistibly, nor do His prohibitions remove the possibility of choice. Were they irresistible, all creatures would be alike, reward and punishment would be void, and religious obligations would lose their meaning. His command offers a choice and His prohibition gives warning; by these, justice and recompense are established. The rational proof also stands against those who professed tawḥīd. Those who attended or heard the gatherings of wisdom and mercy are likewise responsible for what was recited to them.

When the false teachers denied the nearness of the appointed day and the manifestation of the Witness and the Witnessed, the imminence of the hour troubled them. The written word says: “On the Day when every soul finds present whatever good it has done, and whatever evil it has done, it will wish there were a vast distance between itself and that evil.” The Imam's recorded discourse also says: “On the day when some of your Lord's signs come, faith will not profit a soul that had not believed before or earned some good through its faith.” Justice was extended to the rest of creation so that the proof, established through freedom of choice, should reach all of them.

For this purpose messengers were sent who publicly proclaimed tawḥīd and offered the choice, so that near and distant alike might hear them, including those who had not heard the gatherings of wisdom in this age. The argument was thereby established against them through a choice offered justly. Indeed, justice required that the proof be laid before the whole world in earlier ages; people stayed away through denial of truth and rejection of tawḥīd in every cycle. Its repetition ensures, as the scripture says, that people have no plea against God after the messengers. Among people of understanding the proof is founded on wisdom, the living witness, and rational evidence; for others it comes through the open proclamation of tawḥīd and a summons expressed as a choice. “Follow a straight path”; “You shall know its tidings after a time”; “The messenger's duty is only clear proclamation.”

I shall remind you of things familiar to you, notorious among all people and witnessed openly, indications of tawḥīd and signs for those of sound insight. A noble order directed everyone, when offering greetings, to stand on the right side alone; to put a single line on each petition; and to maintain singularity in other actions, public appearances by men and women, and the presentation of writings to the Sacred Presence. It also ordered secretaries and accountants to dispense with the distinguishing dots on letters, indicating clarification and explicit expression. Such commands signaled the open proclamation of the unity of the Merciful God and the end of the period of hiding through the appearance of clear speech. Gifts from the treasuries were also to be issued singly, and entry into the Sacred Presence restricted to individual admissions. Each was a sign and indication addressed to the people of tawḥīd.

The saying that “knowledge will soon be raised and ignorance will appear” was meant for devout Unitarians, not wretched unbelievers. One interpretation is that familiar knowledge of the religious law will be lifted as that dispensation ends, while what people had formerly dismissed as unknown—the tawḥīd of the Creator—will appear, through the blessing of the present age. Whoever has understood the doctrine of the Imamate, the termination of a religious law at

the beginning of each cycle, and the signs pointing to our own age ought to understand this. What clearer evidence could there be for the obedient friends of the Guardian than the abolition of almsgiving and sacrifices, the feasts of sacrifice and of breaking the fast, the end of the sermon in al-Azhar Mosque, and the interruption of pilgrimage and the rite of sacrifice? These were the inauguration of a new cycle and the public proclamation of the word of tawḥīd.

There is also another reading of “knowledge will be raised”: the standing of the science of tawḥīd will be exalted by its dignity and truth, while the world's ignorance of it will become manifest. This establishes the Creator's justice among creatures. If knowledge itself were simply abolished, the worlds would have an excuse in ignorance; no proof would stand against them, and they could not be called to account for failure to seek it.

The argument of truth has prevailed through proof and justice over those whose hearts have been covered by what they earned. “No indeed! They shall be veiled from their Lord on that day. Then they shall enter the blazing Fire. Then it shall be said to them: This is what you used to deny.” Such people wander in the bewilderment of error, roaming in every valley and pushing back against truth. “May God fight them! How they are turned away!” Blindness grew upon them over time until they seemed never to have heard the religious sages or the gatherings of mercy concerning covenant and fidelity. We are like travelers joined in a caravan when a terrible dark night overtakes them, wiping out their tracks and landmarks; every route threatens destruction except the single path of deliverance toward Paradise and peace.

Among the warnings recited previously is an image: we are like a caravan whose baggage has been loaded for travel and which is overtaken by a fearsome, dark night, with landmarks effaced and signs of the road lost. The journey continues, and its morning is the Resurrection. Many roads lead to destruction; one alone leads to the Garden and happiness. The warning continues: “Do not stray in your terrible night, for its morning brings a dwelling where there is no recovery from misfortune. Look to yourselves before the allotted period expires.” Is the one path of deliverance to be found among the ignorant and brutal enemies, or among those who called people to the tawḥīd of the Creator and obeyed Him? Or is it with those who disobeyed His command by attacking, killing, and declaring His callers liars? “Has God permitted you this, or do you invent a lie against God?” “God's curse is upon the wrongdoers.” On the Day of Resurrection, those who lied about God will have blackened faces: “Is there not in Hell an abode for the arrogant?”

As the verses say:

The miserable person, when he has little faithfulness, shows no concern for the passing of years and ages.

The enmity of religion—what hidden resentments feed it! Yet God will surely aid His supporters.

People plot in rebellious pursuit of their own desires; God knows their schemes and the plots they contrive.

How far can the striving man attain his desire? The ages pass, and the hours run out.

Patience is the shelter of those whose character is complete; God rewarded them for the patience they bore.

Praise belongs to God, a praise that never ends—the praise of those grateful for His blessings.

God is greater, with a magnification through which treacheries are annihilated until not a trace of them remains.

What drives their denunciation of the friends of tawḥīd is ignorance, weakness of understanding, corrupt judgment, and envy of those upon whom God has bestowed high station. Did they not hear in the gatherings of favor and blessing that those who had attended and remained firm were to disclose what had previously been done in secret, and that the community was to ascertain those who had been gained for our Lord among the believers? The faithful made their earlier deeds known, counted those who had gathered for their Lord, and acted decisively in publicly confronting the hypocrites. They were to be bold in confronting hypocrisy. This praise of those chosen for the task is hidden only from those who exchanged God's blessing for unbelief and brought their people into the house of ruin.

If one says that those words have passed into history and have no present use, then the same would have to be said of all the sciences we have heard—God forbid! Rather, the very distinction of a miraculous sign is that wisdom points toward an event before its proper time, so that the virtue of those upon whom it becomes evident may be recognized in their own age.

They, by God, are the ones who give their voices and lives, who openly proclaim tawḥīd and salvation. They are the true messengers and proofs of the exalted Creator against those who reject the truth. Their lights surpassed other lights and their fire quenched other fires through obedience to the Most High when opponents quarrelled and false claimants refused His command.

The gatherings of mercy also testified concerning their instruction of children in mosques in the land of the ʿajam. No one nourished by even a little wisdom can doubt that “the people of the ʿajam” here signify those to whom the signs of tawḥīd have become unintelligible, whose gates of knowledge and guidance are closed. The spiritual ranks are the “mosques”: through them the worship of transcendence directed to the One Most High becomes known. The shrines themselves are signs referring to these spiritual ranks, but are deserted because the world knows nothing of them: scarcely a pilgrim enters, one after another. Were they named shrines merely for their stones and clay, or to indicate what they symbolize among the ranks of religion? Their naming must signify wisdom, not a meaningless accident. Yet you, stubborn deniers, will neither wake up to the symbols nor obey the exalted commands.

Before long the Creator will expose the disgraces of the covenant-breaking apostates, and the Riser, who stands over every soul and what it has earned, will administer the recompense. Consider the movement of the days and awaken from your sleep before the pens grow dry. Learn from the reproaches made clear through the interpretation of the pillars of Islam.

Among these interpretations is the stoning of the pillars at the pilgrimage: it means throwing away doctrines that call to associationism, hypocrisy, error, and destruction, disavowing their advocates and deeds, and making tawḥīd sincere. Then comes mention of the final night prayer performed at Muzdalifa. Its referent is the Riser—peace upon his remembrance—and its four obligatory units correspond to the letters of his title.

Next come the three days of departure, signifying three heralds of the Riser—peace upon him: the first, the Gate of his Proof; the second, his Caller; and the third, his Proof. People move away from them and toward them; this, you have seen for yourselves. The proof of the man who called you to record your covenant has therefore prevailed: he directed you to escape the Iblises and hypocrisy. Return, heedless people, to truth, and consider truthful speech.

Do not become those described in the two hundred and forty-fourth gathering read by Mālik ibn Saʿīd: “Listen now to what is recited about hypocrisy and hypocrites, the harm of deceit and deceivers, and the invitation to reflect.” The gathering quoted: “Those who wait to see what happens to you: if you gain a victory from God, they say, ‘Were we not with you?’ But if unbelievers gain a share, they say, ‘Did we not gain power over you and protect you from the believers?’ God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection. God will never give the unbelievers a way against the believers. The hypocrites seek to deceive God, but He deceives them; when they stand for prayer they stand lazily, showing off before people, remembering God but little.” This is your own likeness. Anyone among you with reason who judges himself fairly will recognize it.

The same gathering explained your failure: do not imitate those who wait to see whether believers will succeed, staying away from the House of Emigration, the dwelling of faith and the Call. They profess faith in outward appearance while awaiting the outcome. If the believers gain victory and cease to fear concealment, proclaim wisdom, and open the inward teaching of mercy, these people join them and pretend that their delay was a form of patient waiting for instruction. But if weakness prevails and opposition and innovation gain strength, they flatter the opponents, boasting that they had not emigrated to meet the appointed ranks, and disowning the praiseworthy religion and the bonds of faith.

This is your likeness. Repair what you have neglected before it is too late; hasten to the Call of Truth before its appointed hour. Whoever has warned has given ample warning, and “the messenger's duty is only clear proclamation.” The proof has been established, the argument stated, and the reality explained. Where could you flee from the One from whom no distant refuge can protect you? Where will you go when summoned to true tawḥīd and asked to explain transcendence, free of resemblance and embodiment, and to give truthful proof for your beliefs? That day is not far away. “Bring your proof, if you are truthful.”

Those who defend falsehood will lose; those who act will triumph; impostors and hypocrites will be exposed by their deeds and words. They waver between opposing parties, belonging fully to neither. All the figurative interpretations I have cited are directed against those whose insight has failed to grasp them. Their time was the period when ritual prayer had effect and works were accepted and raised. But at the appearance of the Riser the benefit of those works ceases: the gatherings of mercy teach that the Riser, when manifested in unity, brings a time in which the old ritual deeds are no longer accepted. The Creator has established the proof against the world by raising the Riser and showing him before it. As was said, the proof of the Riser appears before him. He called them to Himself through Himself, pointed them toward His unity, and set aside the deeds of the former dispensation and their supposed merit. Only the certain Unitarians answered, while the deniers and the defiled held back, not understanding the account of the People of the Trench or the fire supplied with fuel.

The account of the fire is interpreted as the public proclamation of tawḥīd directed to the sole Worshipped One: “They sat beside it, witnessing what they did to the believers. They resented them only because they believed in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy, to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; God is witness over everything.” You have been blind to the promised day, abandoned the station of the Witness and the Witnessed, and persecuted believing men and women without repenting. Thus the Qurʾān warns of the torment of Hell and of the burning. When you were brought before the burning pit, you refused; when called to it, you broke your covenant and turned away. You did not equal the woman carrying her infant when she wept in dread of the flames and the child called to her, “Go forward, mother, into the fire, and do not retreat from the tawḥīd of the One, the Compeller.” Neither the signs of wisdom nor their open explanation awaken you. Such people are the fuel of Hell.

The scripture says: “Here you are, called to spend yourselves in God's path. Some of you are miserly, but whoever is miserly is miserly only toward himself. God is rich and you are poor. If you turn away, He will replace you with another people, and they will not be like you.” When truth speaks and the devils' voices are silenced, the hour of manifestation comes: the trumpet is sounded—“when the horn is blown, that day will be a hard day, not easy for the unbelievers.” It is the day when every nursing mother forgets the child she nursed and every pregnant woman lays down her burden; people appear drunk although they are not, for God's punishment is severe. “The day the earth will be changed into another earth, and the heavens also, and they shall emerge before God, the One, the Overpowering.” “The day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks, none speaking except those whom the Merciful permits and who speak rightly.” That is the true day, and whoever wills may take a way back to his Lord.

Other verses speak of people entering God's religion in multitudes and of the day of opening or victory when the faith of unbelievers no longer helps them: “Turn away from them and wait; they too are waiting.” Listen, then, to the Caller of Truth, people! Through tawḥīd the Call of the Iblises has ceased. Awaken from sleep before the great calamity arrives, with its cry and its crushing blow. When morning dawns and its signs appear, and the night passes with its appointed time, those who travelled through darkness will praise their night journey, and the shrouds of error will be lifted from the truth. Of what use to others will their reminder be then? Know that there is no god but God; seek forgiveness for your own sins and for believing men and women. God knows your secrets.

People, only a small remnant of time remains to you, with great and rapid events beyond it. Do not grow weak after having begun, nor refuse the summons before the pens dry and the command is given to cease speaking to you. God's proof concerning the man who summoned you stands firm; your task is to examine the evidence that his summons is correct, particularly the gatherings of wisdom recited to you during this trial of absence. If his claim is established by

clear argument from those gatherings, all of you must answer, acknowledge, and submit; if he cannot establish it, no claim can be made against you. This is the clearest proof and most excellent statement for you to hear.

The comparison with the call to prayer on the Feast of Breaking the Fast is part of this account. Before the Riser's manifestation, the call went forth in the period of his concealment; after his manifestation, the time is compared to afternoon following noon. The response in absence is accepted as a ransom of the soul; once the manifestation has occurred, the terms change. The verse “Faith will not profit a soul that had not believed before or earned good through its faith” is therefore interpreted in two ways: as an inner explanation concerning the end of the feast and forms of purification, and as the cessation of acceptance of earlier deeds at the coming of the Riser.

I have now overcome you with my argument and established the truth of my summons, and you have heard—if you can understand it—my prayer and appeal to God for your guidance. O God, whoever breaks the covenant after this explanation is read, whose inner sight remains blind after such rebuke, and who turns back after this evidence has clarified the way to tawḥīd and faith: take them by the forelocks toward the truth they neglected. Open their sight through the beginnings of their own intentions so that they may affirm it; answer their evil with the generosity You show to those who do good, so that they understand. Give them a path toward what pleases You. You have power over this, and You are worthy of answering the prayer.

O God, I am Your weak servant. I have given counsel as You commanded me, indicated Your unity as You taught me, and established Your argument, Guardian of Truth, with what You granted and inspired in me. You witness what I have done; to You belongs the praise for granting me success. Fulfill Your promise to Your Guardian, O You who never break Your promise and who do not countenance injustice toward servants. Bless the Riser of Truth who guides to You, signifies You through Your unity, is Your chosen one among creation and originated beings, and calls the nations through all the cycles to true transcendence. Bless him and his spiritual ranks who follow his path in obedience.

I added these words to ensure that the letter would be conveyed, discreetly and gently, to one of two men: Maʿadd ibn Muḥammad or Ṭāhir ibn Tamīm. May God guide whoever seeks His pleasure. If they work together to help the matter, God will not cause their effort to go astray, diminish their reward, or forget their deed. If they neglect it, their conduct too is known and preserved, and what they have done will stand before them tomorrow.

On the back of the letter was written: “I place my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim alone. This epistle has reached you and establishes the argument against you by what you have acknowledged and know. Examine it as one who looks to his own welfare and knows his past and his future. You are answerable for what has been told you in it and for carrying out the trust entrusted to you.” “Read it to all those whom you recognize as receptive, providing them with the choice without coercion or compulsion. If you do so, you will have fulfilled the trust and escaped the treachery of concealing it. If you hide it from a person in whom you recognize guidance toward tawḥīd, you will be lost and perish; and if you spread it indiscriminately to those outside the appropriate circle, you will be killed. Wait, if you wish, for the person who will collect it after you have copied it, and report what you have done.”

God gives success to whoever strives for His pleasure and abundantly rewards the grateful for what they do openly and secretly in His service. If you consider this with sincerity and careful examination, you will recognize the bright, clear road and the way forward.

Written in the fourteenth year of the Riser of the Age, who takes vengeance upon associators, apostates, Iblises, and tyrants by the sword of our Lord and the might of His sovereignty. Completed through the favor of the Guardian of the Command. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His servant, the guiding Imam.

EPISTLE 43 — A PARABLE SET FORTH BY ONE OF THE WISE MEN OF THE RELIGION

مثلا ضربه بعض حكماء الديانة

In the name of the God of Truth and the Master of creation. The one described as the Ark of Salvation and the least of the Callers relates: A wise man of the age prepared to set out on a journey. In his wisdom he was hidden, while in the knowledge of the ancients he was remembered, though unknown. He possessed considerable servants, wealth, and estates. Before his departure he bestowed gifts upon his household and dependants and distributed the remainder of his property as charity to creation.

Before withdrawing, he looked among his servants and placed some of them in stations appropriate to their worth, through his guidance and favor. He chose a group of them, charged them with responsibility for his estates and possessions, and entrusted them with their administration. They accepted their master's instruction, rose to his service in submission, heard his command, and obeyed. They worked hard to cultivate the estates and increase the wealth and goods entrusted to them.

The servants were tested by ingratitude and cruelty, while most people denied their master's gifts and what he had done for them. A pretender appeared who claimed authority over the age. Every wretched hypocrite followed him. He assaulted the wise man's servants, made their blood lawful in the lands, and pursued them with his followers wherever they went, in hostility to their wise master and rejection of his straight path. But the servants bore hardship and suffering patiently, giving themselves willingly to their master's service.

The Creator, exalted in power, great in generosity, supreme in His word, and irresistible in will and volition, granted survival and a period of respite to the smallest of those servants. The Lord gave him the means of right guidance, confirmation, and success. He humbled himself before his master's greatness, remembered the instruction he had received, and found guidance in it. He withdrew from the pretender’s center to a far country, cultivated and increased his master’s possessions, and drew the sources of rain toward them. The distant land received rain; its trees bore fruit, and the lights of the truths shone in it.

Then the servant considered another estate, particularly dear to the great King. It lay close to the pretender's stronghold and was threatened on every side. Beyond a mountain and a barrier there stood a strong fortress; the estate behind its walls was enclosed, with poor buildings, shrivelled fruits, and withered trees. Moved by the virtue of the enterprise, the servant remembered the wise man's command to preserve his household. Despite the great danger involved, he resolved to restore this estate. He brought into its soil a spring from the Garden of Bliss, mingled with the Water of Life, drawing upon its keepers and water-bearers. The people of truth and those brought near drank from it, and the miserable covenant-breakers were prevented from drinking.

The estate drank, its trees grew leaves, and its flowers spread. Yet after the withdrawal and ruin, creatures resembling transformed beasts and wolves had taken shelter there. Their likenesses were intelligible to those with insight. Some were like spotted serpents, others like black snakes and striped vipers. Whenever the sincere servant sowed a crop there and worked to bring it to maturity, these snakes scorched it with their spittle and poison; the black snakes beat it with their tails until the crop lay cut down and lifeless. The inhabitants remained hungry and in want, because the creatures had consumed the fruit of the servant's work without preserving his instruction.

When the faithful servant brought them clear, fresh water, they turned it bitter and salty. The venomous creatures had ruined what he planted; his orchard became barren, and he could only grieve at what had come to pass. He lamented their condition and wept in sorrow. He said to the estate: “As for me, my reward rests with al-Ḥākim, the Bestower of blessings. As for you, your punishment is to disappear from among the estates and lands.”

He turned away from it, awaiting deliverance from his Master, hidden from his enemies and the enemies of his master, patient with His judgment and affliction, and waiting for what He had promised.

This parable is medicine and healing to pure souls, but misery to souls sunk in ignorance. For the souls of the ignorant it is misery and woe.

The parable is complete. Praise belongs to the Cause of causes. To Him belong exaltation, majesty, sanctification, and praise.

EPISTLE 44 — EPISTLE TO THE BANŪ ABĪ ḤIMĀR

رسالة بني أبي حمار

I place my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim, glorified and exalted above the attributes of His creatures.

A reply to those who say that the form called al-Ḥākim passed into the form called ʿAlī.

Know, community of brethren, that the visible form through which the Existent One was worshipped appeared to bodily sight. We found the people of the world to be born ignorant, knowing only what was familiar and established before them. They could not understand intelligible realities as they truly are except by way of sensible things. Wisdom therefore required that a form should appear to them according to their own condition. They became familiar with that form because it belonged to the same visible kind as their own forms.

Their physical eyes perceived different appearances as divine power willed, through the changing of visible human garments or bodies; this subjected the world to a trial. People disagreed because they were tested by the change of these garments. The change in these visible garments itself constituted the trial imposed upon the human community.

You know, brethren—may the Lord grant you success in obedience and strengthen you in seeking what pleases Him—that our Lord al-Ḥākim has brought this worldly life to its end and that you now stand at the beginning of the hereafter. Your evidence is clear. Our Lord manifested to you the Imam of His tawḥīd, who summoned you, instructed you, indicated the way, and guided you to the unity of your Creator, until the argument had been established against you. Not one of you failed to write his covenant and bear witness against himself that he had no god in heaven and no worshipped one on earth other than our Lord al-Ḥākim, the Existent One.

Then you saw the One whom you worship, who received your covenants and knows your confession of unity. Thus no excuse remained to you, doubt and uncertainty disappeared, and you knew with reason and knowledge the Worshipped One who received your covenants and knew your tawḥīd.

At that point it was established for you that the world had departed—that is, the systems of religious law, religions, and customary forms of worship—and that you were among the people of the hereafter through writing your covenants and witnessing against yourselves concerning the worship and true tawḥīd of the One whom you worship. The proof therefore stands against you by what you have witnessed and confessed. For all people agree that in the hereafter the Creator will manifest Himself to humanity, address them, and recompense them according to their deeds. In this way they attain enduring existence, and dissolution and annihilation depart from them; they remain under their recompense forever, without perishing.

Know also, brethren, that in no earlier age has the true tawḥīd of the Lord of the Abode been disclosed as it has in our own time. The people of the world remain hidden within their deeds, free to do what they choose; what is concealed from them is the true oneness of the Creator and His manifestation to them. All people together are powerless to disclose what the Creator—exalted be His power—has kept hidden. But if He wills, He makes the outward signs manifest. He manifested His tawḥīd particularly in the form named al-Ḥākim, because in that form He received the covenants, called people to His unity and worship, and appointed the guiding Imam who proclaimed and magnified His transcendence.

He disclosed the unrestricted spiritual ranks of the Call to tawḥīd, made them publicly known, and opened to the world the House of Emigration which gathers the ranks together. He stripped the Call down to the unity of the Worshipped One, extinguished the summons to the doctrine of composition, removed the hand of the religious law from the guiding Call, and caused the friends to stand before the visible, revealed form in praise and sanctification. All this occurred while the people of the world, differing in their religions, united in opposition to us; their alliance and enmity could not frustrate divine power.

An instance of this was the rising of the world's people against the first two Unitarian servants, the brothers of Banū Abī Ḥimār, who practiced concealment. The Lord granted them success, supported them, strengthened them, and guided them. Our Lord, glorified be He, did not give the world power over them. Some people suspected them and wished to destroy them, but could neither achieve what they hoped nor obtain what they wanted. Nothing rescued them from their enemies except the soundness of their religion and the purity of their intention in the tawḥīd of their Creator.

Another witness to this is what we saw concerning the servant and possession of our Lord, ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn Ilyās, the heir apparent of the Muslims. He possessed wealth, kingship, followers, dependants, servants, and slaves; nevertheless he was devoid of the tawḥīd of his Creator, denying the favors bestowed on him by his Benefactor. All his authority, strength, glory, and numbers could not protect him when the command of his master reached him through a weak and lowly servant. He was seized despite his sovereignty, his wealth, and his men. The cause was his denial of the favors bestowed upon him and his ingratitude toward the Benefactor who made him known. By contrast, the Creator rescued His friends from the hands of tyrants through their acknowledgement of His unity, sincerity in worship, and purity of intention, though they were few, lacking in worldly resources, and abandoned by relatives and families. Their lack of worldly wealth did not prevent their deliverance.

Know, brethren, that if the Worshipped One—glorified be He—were to pass after this manifestation from one human garment into another, this would be an affair without benefit and without end. It would undo the religion's final purpose. The consequence would be that anyone who performed a deed would never receive its reward, whether for or against him. Recompense and worship themselves would fall away under the opinion that the Worshipped One continues to transfer among bodies after the word of tawḥīd has been publicly declared.

Beware, beware, brethren, of falling into doubt about the One whom you worship because the divine form is hidden from the sight of your bodily eyes. This concealment belongs to the new dispensation and to the fulfillment of promise and warning. You know that the familiar covenant taken for human Imams was a bodily, public covenant gathering together the ranks of the religious law. The Worshipped One—glory be to Him—manifested a form to the world and had the familiar covenant taken for that form. Yet the covenant declaring the tawḥīd of our Lord al-Ḥākim remained distinct. It negated the customary bodily covenant and the associationism that accompanied it. For our Lord had already abolished the religious laws and their differing interpretations without contradiction or ambiguity.

Then He manifested tawḥīd and the covenant; afterward He manifested the form named ʿAlī and had the customary covenant taken for that form. This was done as a test of the associationists, to make visible what they had concealed in their souls once certainty and awareness had arisen. His manifestation of the form called ʿAlī and the taking of the accustomed covenant signified that this form belonged among the last of the former Imams who had served our Lord, indicated His tawḥīd, and guided people toward it.

The covenant declaring the unity of our Lord remained particular to the form named al-Ḥākim. He shared it with none of His creations or servants. Glorified be our Lord above what they imagine and exalted above the descriptions of those who describe Him. He is sufficient for me, an excellent Protector and Helper. Through Him we seek assistance in all affairs.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His servant, the Riser of the Age.

EPISTLE 45 — APPOINTMENT OF LĀḤIQ

تقليد لاحق

I place my trust in our Lord, the Righteous and All-Knowing, who judges by truth and bestows favors upon humanity.

From the devoted servant Bahāʾ al-Dīn, the tongue of the believers and master of the Unitarians, to the chosen shaykh, the nurturer of the truths, the travelling star whose ways are praiseworthy, Abū al-Fawāris, the emir Ibn al-Sharaf Lāḥiq. May the Creator establish you firmly in the favor He has bestowed upon you: the taking of the covenant from those who seek it, and the summons to the tawḥīd of the Lord of the worlds. May that steadfastness gather the qualities of good in you and, through its honor, bring you to the highest degrees.

Now then: praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim, who received the covenant of His chosen friends and granted them authority to receive it from those who answer the Call of Truth. Let it be praise bringing the sincere in His tawḥīd to the House of Peace, and those of the multitude who cling to Him to the refuge of the righteous and fortunate.

Virtuous, religious shaykh: favors differ in excellence and responsibilities vary in rank. Nothing is better than the pure declaration of tawḥīd; no gift is richer than calling people through it to the Glorious, Self-Sufficient One. From these two things flow ever-multiplying good deeds and recurring blessings. I have judged you worthy of leading the guiding Call and proclaiming the exalted word, as I myself was appointed and called to it, through the permission of the Riser of the Age, by command of our Lord—glorified be He. Receive the authority over this guiding Call which I entrust to you with a strong resolve to obey, an unwavering covenant of service to tawḥīd, and firm, circumspect religious conviction.

This covenant is addressed to you today, but tomorrow you will answer for it, on the day when secrets are tested and destinies come before the Guardian of the religion, when every soul finds present what it has done. Endure thirst, fatigue, and difficulty for the sake of the highest stations and most distinguished degrees: you will find refreshment on a day when throats are parched, hopes are cut off, and tongues dry up. Beware, in everything you undertake or leave undone, the schemes of covenant-breaking apostates. Do not be entangled in the embellished speech of deceivers and alarmists. They are cut off from hearing and will be punished for their crimes. Leave them to play and dispute until the day they are promised.

Choose for yourself, from those marked by piety and religious commitment whose deeds precede them and whose actions testify to their certainty and excellence in tawḥīd, a company of approved Callers scattered among the great cities and flourishing settlements. Extend your proclamation into every district, however far or near. Do not appoint someone merely by a claimant’s word; examine his standing and proof in the Call. Where you can, set forth clear evidence and demonstration of tawḥīd for those who summon others.

Cause the covenant to be written for all who answer the guidance and whose sincerity becomes evident. Record the covenant for those whose response and sincere purpose have become clear. Beware the treacherous men who have severed the bond which the Creator commanded to be maintained and cast off the covenant's yoke, returning from obedience to the Guardian of the Command to rebellious humiliation through blindness of insight. Silence their false claims to the guiding Call, for their speech has become the language of the devil and Iblīs. They have become incapable of uttering the guiding truth, and their words serve the designs of Iblīs. The Guardian of Truth has already described those whose character resembles theirs: people whose hearts grow hard, who shift words away from their proper places, and who hold out hollow promises to those they deceive. Their evil ambitions will perish.

Make this known to the assured community of Unitarians after explaining the knowledge of the spiritual ranks and the distinctive properties of the religion. Establish for them the difference between spiritual and bodily ranks. Warn them against going near the dissidents' impossible claims or listening to their arguments and covenant-breaking doctrines. Whoever follows the dissidents and openly persists in opposition should be registered among the opponents, unless such people turn back from the hostility they have undertaken and repent of the covenant they violated. Then they shall

be pardoned for their offenses, forgiven for what they have committed, and released from their errors and lapses after repentance.

If you find any earlier Caller or Authorized Instructor turning aside from the path of the people of tawḥīd and certainty, and breaking with those who possess insight, replace him with someone whose judgment and guidance in directing the Unitarians are sound and whose faith and tawḥīd are free of the doctrines of those who fall short. Arrange these appointments with piety and forbearance; take pride in skill and knowledge, for these are the qualities of religious people and those who truly know. Call others as you yourself were called; grant them some of the good that has been granted to you.

Let your words be united with truthfulness, the first of the obligatory duties. The second is preservation of the brethren and sisters, which rescues them from ruin. The third is the denial of nonexistence in relation to the God of the heavens and earth. The fourth is repudiation of the Iblises and tyranny at all times. The fifth is making clear the tawḥīd of the Creator of created things. The sixth and seventh are contentment with Him and submission to Him in every condition.

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good admonition, and dispute with them in the best manner.” Appeal to your God in every affair: you have recourse to a mighty Refuge and Protector. Trust in Him and He will suffice you; seek His help and He will enrich you.

This is my charge to you. Make it a leader for your heart, a mirror before you, and a banner of guidance. If you receive it, the Guardian will grant you success in your actions and give you happiness through your righteous deeds. He is an excellent Protector and Helper.

Written in Muḥarram, the tenth year of the servant and possession of our Lord, the Riser of the Age, who takes vengeance upon the associators and apostates by the sword of our Lord—exalted be His power—and through the might of His sovereignty, the God of the worlds.

The appointment is complete through the favor of the Bestower of blessings.

EPISTLE 46 — APPOINTMENT OF SAKĪN

تقليد سكين

I place my trust in the Guardian, the divine al-Ḥākim who judges by truth, and give thanks to His servant, the guiding Imam and Guardian of creation.

From the devoted servant Bahāʾ al-Dīn, tongue of the believers and support of the Unitarians, the left wing and the fourth lesser rank, to the shaykh who has received divine approval, the proof of the believers and the choice of the Unitarians. May the Creator safeguard for you the favor bestowed upon you by His Guardian and bring near to you the calling of people to tawḥīd and the receiving of their covenant. He has qualified you for this duty and extended your authority in the Unitarian Call throughout the region of Upper Syria, including the power to appoint and dismiss there. May this charge gather the highest hopes and the most exalted ranks for you; may the purity of your inward intention in discharging the trust carry you to the most distinguished positions and the furthest goals.

Now then: power, majesty, transcendence, exaltation, sanctification, and divinity belong to the God al-Ḥākim, alone in origination and exalted above all descriptions that enter the thoughts of individual people, kinds, or species. Minds and imaginations fall short of apprehending Him; intellects and eyes are incapable of conceiving Him. He is unique in the majesty of sovereignty and the greatness of might and alone possesses the perfection of holiness and the purity of divinity.

His peace rests upon His Guardian, the Riser, who carries out the work commanded to him: dissolving, abrogating, and demolishing the foundations of the associationist religious laws and their regulations. Through truth he cuts off the lines of earlier ordinances, cancels the laws of religious communities, and destroys the Iblises of the ages and the adherents of previous religious directions by revealing tawḥīd. The Lord's mercy rests upon His spiritual ranks, who, with His support, are keys to closed knowledge and lamps for the friends who are confused in darkness. Their precious wisdoms dispel obscurity from souls during the universal flood and the schemes of the Antichrists that arise in times of interruption. Through their hands mercy reaches respondents in every district, and they patiently endure injury and hardship through steadfast submission and waiting.

Excellent, virtuous, and fully worthy shaykh: gifts differ in their merits and grants ascend through their benefits. No gift is finer than tawḥīd and no favor greater than the summons to transcendence and the pure proclamation of divine unity. Both cause the Guardian's blessings to follow one another and multiply, and make His signs recur and increase.

The entrusted districts begin among the Syrian borderlands and the lands approaching the Jordan. Your charge extends through the Syrian districts, from the Jordan region and the adjoining lands toward the coastal provinces, their districts and mountains, encompassing ʿArqa and its surroundings, as far as Rafaniyya and its surroundings, together with Ḥimṣ and its districts, then Ḥamāh, Tadmur (Palmyra), and Salamiyya, the place where saffron grows; then turning back to encompass Damascus and its districts, with the lands of al-Bathaniyya and Ḥawrān. I have designated you for the Call as I was myself chosen and authorized for it by the Guardian of grace and beneficence, by command of the Lord, God of creation and Judge of judges.

In the guiding Call for which you have been selected, follow the path of the discerning and learned. Take up this great report and weighty affair as those who governed the missionary regions did before you, whom the Creator granted honor through sound hearts and pure intentions. Through the cycles they became leading spiritual ranks and chiefs of communities, possessing a firm and powerful resolve to obey and sufficient strength to seek what was right. Let your speech be joined to truthfulness, success, and tawḥīd; let your actions be governed by wise judgment, forbearance, knowledge, and steadfastness. Let your heart prepare to meet the lights of the truths and receive understanding and help, as a transparent jewel shines when struck by subtle light and as the eyes the analogy of eyes facing the darkness of night and the radiance of daylight.

Prepare the way for the brethren through affection and humble yourself toward those you summon and spread your wing over them. Let your direction and your prayers be a means of seeking success from the Guardian of religion. Make your counsel and prayer a means of seeking guidance and support for them Treat the brethren and the young with gentleness, kindly admonition, and reminders, preserved through success, right direction, and sound judgment. Honor both younger and older among the upright Unitarians. Recite to them the distinctive principles of tawḥīd and disclose their realities. Establish among them the signs of religion, removing doubts and disagreements. Then you will take possession of the virtues your hands have planted, gather the fruit of your labor on the Day of Recompense, and receive favor in this world and the next.

Do not let the passing of the days obscure the admonitions of this age. The signs and judgments of this age remain a proof against creatures throughout the passing days and ages. Make their meanings a guide for your heart, a mirror before you, and a banner of guidance.

Deliverance, deliverance belongs to those possessing insight among the Unitarians! Destruction awaits the obstinate who fall short. Appoint in the region good Callers, upright men of virtue, and pure Unitarians whose religious discernment is sound, whose inward purposes accord with their outward conduct, whose conviction and religion are sound, and whose patience and certainty have been proved in the trial of the Antichrist. Appoint, as far as you can, enough to complete the number of eleven Callers, and six Authorized Instructors. Do not give yourself leave to neglect these appointments or make excuses about them. Instruct them as I have instructed you; grant them the good you have been granted. Beware of recruiting too many persons of no worth: most disturbances come from them.

Choose integrity rather than numbers; excessive appointments multiply disputes and corruption. Ask the guidance of our Lord, the divine al-Ḥākim, the Creator, and approach Him through His Guardian who guides to the everlasting abode. He will protect you from those who pursue opposition and from the schemes of evildoers. Adopt the disposition of the faithful, righteous Callers and upright Unitarians, for they are visible to the Guardian of their command and are examined concerning what they hide in their hearts and inward selves. Keep yourself above speaking with those hardened in hypocrisy, who have withdrawn from the covenant or have written it and then turned back in imitation of transgressors.

If one of these people presses you with speech and insists on questioning you, answer him with the realities of tawḥīd and sweep away his falsehood with the decisive arguments of transcendence and divine unity. For when lights meet and cast their rays upon a claimant who does not belong to their nature, their brightness dispels the dark inventions and false assertions of those who do not belong to their kind.

Know that truthfulness is the likeness of the Guardian of religion: it is the clear path and deliverance for His friends. Lying is the likeness of the accursed Opponent; it misleads his followers and leads them to ruin. Warn those among children and brethren who seek refuge with you against lying, and counsel them through the admonitions of men of merit and certainty.

Whenever some subtle matter of tawḥīd becomes difficult to you, or people of doubt and unbelief force a question upon you, turn sincerely and humbly to the Guardian of mankind. Seek guidance through His Guardian, the guiding Imam. Your thought will become clear enough for the obscure matters to be illuminated, and the purity of your essence, joined to sincere devotion, will enable you to perceive the truths of divinity. Inform me of these questions through trustworthy Unitarians, so that I may refer what you send to the One to whom I am commanded to refer it, in order to explain what remains uncertain.

Take refuge in all your affairs with the Lord, the divine al-Ḥākim, the Overpowering One, and seek help through His Guardian, the Imam who avenges himself upon the unbelieving Pharaohs, raising the banner of revelation on every height. He will suffice you in what troubles you and protect you through sincerity of intention and sound faith against misleading and destructive delusions. Understand my charge to you, and do not sell your hereafter for your worldly life.

A watcher is over you, hears your speech, and sees you. Praise the Guardian—exalted be His remembrance—for His abundant gifts, and give thanks for the favor of His Guardian, my master and yours.

Written at the beginning of Jumādā al-Ākhira in the years of the Riser of the Age. Praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim alone and gratitude to His servant, the guiding Guardian.

The appointment is complete through the strength and power of our Lord.

EPISTLE 47 — APPOINTMENT OF THE SHAYKH ABŪ AL-KATĀʾIB

تقليد الشيخ أبي الكتائب

I place my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim alone, who fulfills His promise to His servant.

I entrust you with the spreading of the Call of Truth and receiving the covenant in al-Bayḍāʾ and all the towns of Upper Egypt. I have appointed you to carry out this work among the travelling Callers as far as you are able, with full authority over what belongs to your charge, and to summon to tawḥīd those respondents who consent and submit. I have chosen you for this service to religion as I myself was chosen for it, through the permission of the Riser of Truth, the pledge of tawḥīd and truthfulness, and the command of the Lord, God of humanity and Originator of creation.

In the duty entrusted to you and for which you have been qualified, follow the road of discerning men of knowledge, so that the Riser of Truth's promise to the pure, striving believers may be fulfilled. The Creator has preferred them above the idle followers of falsehood, giving them victory over those worlds. Beware in what you undertake or leave undone of the intrigues of those who break the covenant, the deceptive ornaments of impostors, and the embellished sayings of apostates. Leave those who follow ignorance and disobedience to plunge into their errors and play until they meet the day that has been promised them.

Know that a guardian watches your glances and words, and a witness observes the covenants you uphold or break. As it is written in the words of the Guardian of Truth: “Not a word does he utter without a watcher beside him, ready to record.” Make your tongue a witness to truth, and make its speech a polished instrument that cuts through evasions. May the Creator guide you in the Call to tawḥīd with which I have entrusted you. Summon people to the path of your Lord through clear transcendence and divine unity. Who speaks more excellently than one who summons others to tawḥīd and religion, acts righteously, and shows among the people of truth that he belongs to those who submit?

Lower your wing in kindness, chosen shaykh, to the community of my brethren and yours, the Unitarians. Treat them according to their eagerness, sincerity of intention, pursuit of true knowledge, and faithfulness in religion. God knows them and is swift in reckoning.

Direct your attention also to teaching the Unitarian women and instructing them in the preservation of wisdom. You are responsible for them, and they in turn are responsible if they fail to preserve wisdom. Choose in al-Bayḍāʾ two pure and truthful Authorized Instructors, men of faith, trustworthiness, eagerness, and religion whose doctrine of tawḥīd is sound: the excellent shaykh Abū Muḥammad and al-Ḥusayn ibn Qāsim. Let them serve you and the brethren, and let them serve those who strive in the House of Emigration toward tawḥīd.

Avoid taking on too many idle talkers, gossipers, failures, and those seduced by deception and deceit. Such people are the foundation of turmoil and corruption. By their crimes, hearts become filled with opposition and obstinacy, and obligations are neglected, bringing ruin on the Day of Recompense. As far as you can, demolish the foundations of associationist institutions, dissolve the principles of the religious practices newly invented by them, and remove these corrupting causes from the people of tawḥīd and obedience. Direct your efforts to this with determination, as befits a trustworthy, chosen shaykh from the pure and chosen company.

Give precedence to faithful Callers who have escaped the corrupting defects of the opponents. Choose sufficient Callers who have escaped the defects committed by the wicked and have shown themselves faithful in service. Make your speech true, and keep your manner easy and welcoming toward those whom you summon. Lower your wing in mercy and kindness to all Unitarians, men and women. Explain tawḥīd to those who can discern it, and confront the deniers forcefully with the evidence of tawḥīd.

These are my instructions to you. Make them the sign and emblem of your heart, and a covering that protects your body from pain. May the Creator guard you under His watchful care and grant you success in this life and the hereafter through the gifts, support, and guidance of His Guardian.

Peace be upon you, and may the mercy of His Guardian come to you. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, al-Ḥākim who is beyond all limitation, and thanks to His Guardian who guides to the religion of tawḥīd.

EPISTLE 48 — APPOINTMENT OF THE EMIR DHŪ AL-MAḤĀMID

تقليد الأمير ذي المحامد

I place my trust in the Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above imaginings and beyond delimitation, description, and attributes.

From the obedient and submissive servant, the fourth of the numbered ranks and possession of the guiding Imam, the Riser, to the Possessor of Praiseworthy Qualities, the supporter of the Unitarians, the emir Abū al-Fawāris Miʿḍād ibn Yūsuf. May the Creator preserve you in the favor His Guardian has bestowed upon you, enabling you to establish the signs of His religion and His unity. May He uphold you through the support of His Guardian in declaring His transcendence and freedom from all comparisons. May He make you one who verifies and demonstrates the signs and conditions of the Resurrection, and one who protects those of the community around you who seek deliverance.

Now then: praise, glory, and greatness belong to the holy Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above the thoughts of intellects and souls. He has made the firm commitments of His tawḥīd into bonds around necks and has made His own reality manifest as an argument against the worlds through absolute certainty and demonstration, refuting the worlds of nonexistence by the proofs of existence. He has clarified the path through the Riser of Truth, the Guardian who points to the reality of the Worshipped One, makes plain the road of peace and guidance, and watches over every soul and all that it has earned. He is the One without equal. He unties the knots of the invented laws of the Iblises. He undoes the fabricated rules of the Iblises and demolishes the foundations of their falsely invented religious law.

Look, Possessor of Praiseworthy Qualities, upon these teachings with the eye of certainty. Conduct all your affairs according to the instructions of the approved shaykh, the chosen one among the Unitarians. Follow his example openly and inwardly, and in your important affairs resort to his presence: he is responsible for the flourishing of this district. If you wish to correspond with us through a messenger, you have permission to do so after consultation with him and after acquainting him with the matter; give precedence to what is good. Send greetings and inquire after those chiefs of the tribe who held this responsibility before you and then withdrew from it.

Turn your attention to the religious and noble shaykhs: the pure and chosen people of Faljīn, those at ʿAyn Ṣawfar, al-Murūj, and ʿAyn ʿĀr, and the sincere neighbors who have associated themselves with them and followed their example, like the steadfast striving people of al-Bīra. The nurturer of the truths, the traveling star, has made their lofty stations clear and explained their submission, unity, and acknowledgment. Convey to them all my thanks and praise, my prayers to the Creator for their success, and my supplication on their behalf.

In each one of these places appoint an authorized instructor (maʾdhūn) from among those whose conduct and religion are good and whose trustworthiness, submission, and certainty are established in your judgment. Let him read to the brethren and sisters the messages of grace which you have copied, after you have received and copied from the approved shaykh the epistles and decrees he has shown you.

As for the reliable shaykh Abū al-Qāsim ibn Manṣūr, increase his station, recognize his right on account of his sincerity and fidelity, and confirm that his merits justify a higher rank.

As for the two successful emirs, Abū al-Ḥasan and Abū al-ʿIzz, the rightly guided sons of al-Khiḍr: convey to them on my behalf acknowledgment of the honor they have won in religion. Give them good news of the ranks among the pure Unitarians to which their knowledge entitles them. Thus may blessings follow upon them through their perfected insight, and may the precious gifts and treasures they receive multiply through your good offices.

Lower your wing in kindness to the brethren and sisters marked by the sign of religion, that is, the sincere male and female Unitarians. Support them and stand beside them in their needs and important undertakings. In their various degrees they are your children and brothers, your companions in ease and hardship, and your helpers. Encompass

them with your shelter and protection; let your safekeeping be bound to them and their well-being joined to your own safety and well-being. Recite to them the particular qualities and meanings of tawḥīd. Explain its prohibitions and admonitions directly to them. Urge them to protect their brethren in religion, awaken them to mutual assistance among sincere Unitarians, and learn the stations of people of conviction and solidarity and those who fall short in equal treatment. Thus may the people in your district be distinguished by their meanings and identifying signs, and recognized in their endeavors by their names and characteristics.

The graves have been scattered, and the time of resurrection and reawakening has come near. The Guardian's road has become plain to all creation, and the proof of the guiding Riser has prevailed in exalting the religion of truth. The warner is ready and the truthful bearer of glad tidings is established. I admonish you, so admonish them; I awaken you, so awaken them. Make this testament a mirror and lamp for your insight, and a means and ladder toward the highest attainments. These words are addressed to you and to everyone alike; tomorrow each of you will be questioned concerning them.

Examine where sound counsel must be offered. May the Creator keep you under His watchful care. Look closely to the meanings of the wisdom that has been entrusted to you. I entrust you to the protection of the all-knowing al-Ḥākim. For your salvation and theirs I intercede through the one whose servant I am, the Master of the Presentation, the guiding Imam who rises.

The appointment of the shaykh Miʿḍād is complete. Praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim alone, and thanks to His servant, the guiding Imam, the Riser.

EPISTLE 49 — APPOINTMENT OF BANŪ JARRĀḤ

تقليد بني جراح

I place my trust in the Lord, exalted above attributes and the inmost nature of things, and seek nearness to Him through His Guardian, the Riser of religion, who is truthful to His promise.

From the servant al-Muqtanā, who offers counsel to all humanity, submissive in obedience to his Master and the least of the servants of the guiding Riser and Imam, to the two noble, trustworthy and devout emirs, pillars and supports of the state, its fortunate and wise men: Jābir, the offspring of purity and its blessedness, and Rammāḥ, the two sons of Mufarrij, who possess knowledge of truths and make them known.

Peace upon you and upon the people of religion in your company, who seek the Creator's good fortune and blessings, await the elevation of His Guardian's banners and the unfolding of His standards, and bear true witness to His just balances. May the Guardian's blessings rest upon those who establish proofs before the worlds through the aid that flows from His Guardian by the hands of the pure throughout the regions of the earth.

Now then: praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim, by whose command the beings of eternity exist, who transcends the worship of the worlds and the Cause of causes. He created that Cause as a veil for the worlds and a means of abrogating religious legislation and changing directions of prayer. Know, you two religious men, that distances have drawn near, boundaries have narrowed, the moons of the impostors have darkened, and their stars are nearing their scattering and fall. The nations are heedless of their condition, except those who hold fast to the Guardian. The remnant of creation lies abandoned and lifeless, wandering from the straight road and stumbling, denying the sincere Guide. Their eyes have become blind beneath the prevailing darkness of the period of concealment, and their thoughts have lost the path to the tree of relief and the place of power.

Noble men, incline yourselves to hear divine wisdom and cooperate in spreading the divine word of tawḥīd. Bear the bitter hardships of traveling in search of the stations of the people of the East and honor. You possess excellent qualities crowned with honor and praise, and merits surpassing distinctions of appearance, fathers, and grandfathers. Preserve, both of you, the bonds of the honor granted by this favor. Do not imitate any of the Arab chiefs in word or deed so that you are distinguished by the divine word from your peers. Turn away from the failed opinion of Sulaymān ibn al-Jabalī. Make your mounts travel under the guidance of the ranks of religion, draw from the sources at which the people of truth have drawn the knowledge of the spiritual ranks and gates, and use your remaining time to make up for days of ignorance and the period of training. Having been shown the marks of honor, do not content yourselves with the station of those who fall short.

The years and ages of ignorance have passed. The star of the cycle has risen at its appointed horizon. Its rays herald the downfall of falsehood. The structures of falsehood are falling; the opponents are being overcome, and those who turn away from truth, doubters and disputants, are being exposed. Those who submit and go before others will be distinguished from the lying by the signs of truthfulness. Awaken, then! The hour has come for the souls of the nations to rise again and for the origins of falsehood and their inventors to be uprooted and torn out. The she-camels of religion have been saddled and their driver has called to them; the horses of al-Aʿrāf have been prepared. The caller of the realities has summoned; the herald has announced with a truthful voice; the lights of holiness have shone at the appearance of the guiding Riser, the Imam.

Because of their stubborn opposition to truth, human beings are tumbling through the thick darkness of ignorance and falling into the deepest shadows of misguidance. Their evil actions have caused them to remain devoted to the calf and the buffalo, and diseased thoughts have prevented them from joining those who went before. They wander bewildered in the darkness of the interval, unaware and confounded by the signs and terrors of the Resurrection. Their minds and

understanding are absent, while their bodies and the corruption of their beliefs remain present. The horses of ignorance have carried them along, and worship of idols and divining arrows has distracted them from the truth.

Therefore, you two religious men, awaken to the instruction of wisdom and the favors of the Guardian of the Age: draw from the lessons of wisdom and the favor bestowed by the Guardian of the Age, and persevere at the branch of the Gate of Mercy. He has made His authorization and religious charge incumbent upon you. Obedience and the binding nature of the Guardian's proof are incumbent upon you and upon all who are under your care.

You two have heard the sincere adviser in his guidance and explanation. The duty of a truthful messenger is only to convey and explain clearly.

Praise belongs to the One whose transcendence rejects the association and delimitation of the worlds. The very inability to indicate the essence of what is known of Him constitutes glorification and exaltation. Thanks belong to His Guardian, the balance of justice through whom warning has appeared among humanity. Peace upon you both, and upon the pure Unitarians in your care.

My confidence in the Riser of religion suffices me: he takes vengeance upon the associators, apostates, and violators of their covenants with the sword of the Lord al-Ḥākim, God of the worlds.

Completed; obedience belongs to its Lord.

EPISTLE 50 — THE JUMHAYRIYYA

الجميهيرية

I place my trust in our Lord, the good and all-knowing Creator, and give thanks to His servant, the guiding Imam.

From the servant Bahāʾ al-Dīn, the tongue of the believers, support of the Unitarians, the devoted and submissive al-Muqtanā, the left wing, the last, least, fourth rank, to the noble emirs, the chosen and sincere Āl Tanūkh, the shaykhs and Callers. Peace upon whoever has been granted the grace of submission to his guiding Imam, the Guardian of the Age, and has opened the eye of his insight to recognize the ranks and signs of tawḥīd and proof. May the Creator's mercy and blessings rest upon my brethren who reach Him through true devotion.

Now then: tawḥīd, reverence, glorification, exaltation, submission, sanctification, transcendence, and acknowledgment are the guardians of obedience to the Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, the Mighty, exalted above everything imagined by thought and fancy, beyond the refinements of language and the reach of sight when it attempts to comprehend His irresistible might. He has made the inability of pure intellects to delimit Him both an acknowledgment of His unity and a test. Those who stop at negation and denial are left exhausted and bewildered between realities and doubts, their judgments overturned and cast down. Exalted is the Lord who has made His guiding Guardian a cause [of guidance], who watches over every soul and all it earns and cannot be evaded by anyone He seeks.

Shaykhs, meet the lights of the realities with the precious substances of your souls and keep those souls from imitating this inverted world. Your predecessors in religion have distinguished deeds: do not annul them. They have taken part in struggles for truth: do not suspend that work. They have inherited a noble lineage of faith: preserve and make it genuine. Do not lapse into weakness alongside people of doubt and contradiction. What is hidden in hearts has been exposed, and the decisive proof has prevailed over all humanity.

Brethren, the gate of the lofty palace has been opened for you, and the birds of Paradise have sung within it of strange praises and miraculous tawḥīd. The abandoned well has gushed forth, flowing with sweet, clear water, while the stagnant well attributed to the false Messiah has been drained. The corrupted well sickens souls, presenting accidental qualities as though they were the precious substances of truth, and corrupting noble knowledge with dissolution and contradiction. Through wickedness, stupidity, and lack of discipline, they bring blindness, deafness, and abasement where elevation should be. They linger in filthy garments because of the stubborn opposition and hypocrisy they have committed, because they have approved the spreading of lies and fabrications about the Guardians of truth, and because they have claimed the right to disobey their orders and flee their service.

Iblīs has strung his bows against you and shot at you from close by with schemes and treachery. He has said, in effect, 'Because You have led me astray, I will lie in wait for them on the roads and in the inhabited places. I will divide them through different beliefs and sects, and cause them to take turns drinking from unbelief and associationism.' Thus your company was scattered when you differed in doctrines and beliefs, imagined misfortune where assistance and benefits lay, and drew strangers near while abandoning your own kin.

People of tawḥīd, be sincere in affirming†1 the ranks of religion and submitting to the orders they receive through the Guardian of Truth. Help your certain and believing brethren in prosperity and adversity. Do not make yourselves instruments for confirming Iblīs's wishes or contradicting the Guardian's commands. Do not resemble those who fled from clear proofs, invented burdens and shackles for themselves, and retreated from truth.

You, discerning emirs and company of Unitarians, are the bright ornaments of the firmly established verses, the jewels of fruitful branches, and successors to the Callers of tawḥīd tested in obedience, who gave their very lives to protect the community of Unitarian men and women. They attain the exalted assembly through the height of their degrees and remain within the sanctity of purity and the place of lights. They shall appear with the Guardian of Truth at the completion of the cycles and the fullness of the moons, witnessing the reward of the sincere and the punishment of

wicked sinners for their assaults upon the Unitarians and their repudiation of the guardians of truth, against whom they had become adversaries and enemies.

Be heirs and successors worthy of your pure ancestors. Strengthen one another in the guiding Call so that you may attain the stations of truthful Callers and raise the word of truth so that your deeds may match the nobility inherited from your ancestors. Consider the afflictions that have fallen upon arrogant nations who refused to support their brethren and remained inactive in tawḥīd and faith. Seek refuge with the Guardian of Truth from the causes of arrogance. Purify yourselves through submission to the mighty Lord al-Ḥākim. Require yourselves to be humble toward the members of your tribes who preceded you in religious conviction. Care for His covenant and for the spiritual ranks whom you follow. Be one hand against opponents and apostates. You will be asked about the words you have uttered and called to account for the looks by which you have offended them.

Make satisfaction and submission the emblem of your community and the means by which you seek the Lord's mercy through His Guardian. Your drink will be purified and you will return to the cleanest and noblest element. Concord will spread the sheltering wing of its honor over you; greatness will extend the streams of its grace and sufficiency. Under the Guardian's shade you will possess overpowering authority and an enduring, established glory; you will be kings over the necks of the Arabs and rulers among them according to the noble origin and descent promised you. This will happen if you cast aside resentments and grudges, approach one another clothed in obedience and submission, act together against the people of rebellion and stubbornness, and forgive one another with clean hearts and unmixed affection.

Brethren, seize the teachings of the signs of tawḥīd and these moments of safety. Seek out the appointed understanding before its time passes. The moment has approached when veils will be lifted and the hidden contents of books will appear. Thunder has roared to open the heavy clouds, lightning heralding the manifestation has flashed and called down showers of rain, the trees of realities have ripened and prepared their flowers and fruit. The jewels of light have gleamed in their natural elements, shone with abundant radiance, and advanced toward fullness. The east wind has blown upon those who behave like children, while the south wind has turned against those who persist in error. The souls of the truthful have been separated out for their recompense, and the treacherous, lying lover has been stripped of his claim.

By God, the wakeful night has kept them sleepless and they have been returned to the lowest, defeated condition. The rules of falsehood have been raised while duty was left idle.

Brethren in religion, distinguish the narrow paths into which the apostates have entered, the changes in the minds of those who fail, the revelation of the hidden intentions of deceivers, and the flaws in the words of impostors who invent lies. May the souls of all of you agree upon the truth of certainty and gaze through the eye of reality at the honor of religious knowledge. Then the worthless ornament of the sinners will diminish beside your excellences, and your insight will rise higher as you seek union with the precious substance. The gates have opened for establishing proof through tawḥīd before humanity, the cycles have been completed, and the appointed time has reached its end. We belong to the Lord; through Him we gain strength, trusting in His promise to His friends and disavowing His adversaries and enemies.

Brethren, consider the parables I have set before you and the enclosed counsels I have written for you. By the truth of the Truth, these are teachings whose foundations have been firmly established. Only a short time is left before the term appointed for the associating nations comes to its close. Awaken to this reminder and admonition and consider the signs I have inserted into this letter to stir you from sleep. The Knower of the unseen and of every secret, acquainted with what hearts conceal, knows that I have not neglected you carelessly or abandoned correspondence with you out of forgetfulness or indifference. News of you reaches me in ways you do not know. You are watched over, safeguarded, and kept in remembrance through the Guardian of Truth.

The emir, Nurturer of the Realities, has written to me about what he has established and confirmed with the emir Abū al-Faḍāʾil ʿAbd al-Khāliq, relating his gratitude and praise, the excellence of which rises beyond description. This was supported and corroborated by a letter from the excellent shaykh Abū al-Faḍl al-Murtaḍā, Protector of Religion and Chosen One of the Unitarians. It was further confirmed by the good character of the two distinguished leaders, Abū al-Ḥasan Yūsuf ibn Muṣayyiḥ and Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbd Allāh, the two noble emirs. In addition I received a report from Abū al-Faḍāʾil praising the community and commending them in generous terms. Thus his request for a proclamation of good news to everyone has been granted, accompanied by his eloquent prayer. I hastened to send this letter to rouse the community before the appointed hours, so that they might obtain their abundant reward before the Day of the Meeting.

To the One who transcends limit and illusion, holy beyond confinement within knowledge, we offer praise and invoke His transcendent protection. Through the guiding Guardian, to Him I make my appeal: may He inspire those who summon others to tawḥīd and those who are summoned to it with fear of God; may He bring them and all the Unitarians to the highest, noblest degree. He is able to do this and knows and sees all things.

Written on the first day of Jumādā al-Ākhira, in the tenth year of the Guardian of Truth.

Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to Him for the favor He has bestowed upon His friends through His servant, the guiding Imam.

TEXTUAL ENDNOTES — EPISTLE 50

†1. The printed Arabic has *fa-lā takūnū* (“do not be”), although the surrounding exhortation appears affirmative. The English follows the contextual sense; the printed negative and the unresolved textual question are explicitly recorded here (historical register U-0271).

EPISTLE 51 — ADMONITION AND REPROACH

التعنيف والتهجين

I put my trust in al-Ḥākim, the Lord, the God, the All-Knowing, the Most High.

From a servant who has known his Imam and Lord, answered his Call, and given him allegiance; who has acknowledged the unity of his God and Creator and declared Him free from delimitation and resemblance through the blessing of His Guardian, his Guide, and the one who commands and forbids him: to all the Kutāma of Sanhūr who keep what is entrusted to them secret, to the true friends, and to the pure people of ʿAjīsa. Peace upon whoever is content with and submissive to the Imam of the Age, who has opened the eye of his insight and recognized the ranks of revelation and clarification, and whose sight rises toward the realities until the premises of proof become clear.

Now then: majesty, power, praise, holiness, might, and glory belong to the Lord, the one God al-Ḥākim, sanctified above likeness and opposites, free from companions and children, beyond numbers and rivals. He has made tawḥīd an honor and a salvation for His knowledgeable friends, and a crushing defeat and uprooting for the deficient and stubborn deniers who reject His Guardian, the Guide to the straight path. That Guide carries out the command entrusted to him, revealing the knowledge of tawḥīd and explaining the true religion. The Creator has made him a refuge for people of certain understanding, one who abrogates through tawḥīd the laws of former and later generations and points to himself through His clear written oath:

'Whenever a messenger came to you with what your souls did not desire, you grew proud: some you called liars, and some you killed. They said, "Our hearts are covered." Rather, God cursed them for their unbelief'—that is, for concealing the truth—'and little is it that they believe. When a Book came to them from God'—meaning the Imam by God's command—'confirming what they already possessed, although before that they had asked for victory against those who did not believe'—meaning that they announced tawḥīd before its proper time and spoke of its Riser before the appointed day—'then when what they recognized came to them,' that is, tawḥīd itself, 'they disbelieved in it. So God's curse rests on the unbelievers.' What unbelief could be greater, and what calamity more destructive of the manifestation, than rejecting the word of tawḥīd after the Guardian has proclaimed it with manifest proofs and demonstrations of divine support?

And have you ever heard, brethren, in past generations, amid the interpretation of revelations and sacred books, an explanation of the words 'On the day the caller summons them to a dreadful thing'? You have seen him publicly summoning people to the tawḥīd of the Lord—exalted be His remembrance—and you have rejected him in imitation of people of associationism and stubborn resistance. Are you content to occupy a station like those who renounce the Creator, mighty and exalted, and deny the Imam's rank?

By God, every one of you prides himself on being free of injustice and wrongdoing, and considers himself above malice, fraud, and deceit. How, then, can anyone attribute these blameworthy qualities to the Creator of created things, the Originator of all originated beings, the Sustainer of the earth and heavens? Would He first reveal Himself among His creatures and, in His wisdom, communicate His command to His creation, ordering people to proclaim His unity and knowledge of Him, so that His friends answered His tawḥīd, obeyed His command, restrained themselves from what He forbade, and acknowledged His signs and appointed ranks—only to appear again to them from another direction in contradiction of what He had commanded, once they understood tawḥīd and were free of doubt and denial?

God forbid! That would be a monstrous thing. Far be it from the Creator—glorified and transcendent—to test His servants with something that outrages reason and insight, or to treat them unjustly after commanding them to curse the unjust oppressor. Would He first declare their blood forfeit throughout the regions, order their killing and dragging through gatherings and markets, and issue public registers cursing them and calling for their extermination, thereby associating them with extremist sinners, violate the sanctity of religion, and strengthen the hands of impure opponents against them? Would He command their crucifixion on roads and streets, their condemnation in assemblies and

mosques, and the violation of their families, possessions, and children, after ordering some to be drowned and others burned alive?

Jews and Christians would be secure and at ease in their persons and property, while true Unitarians would be terrified under the humiliation of subjection, scattered to the furthest regions and driven from their homelands. Far above such actions is the Lord al-Ḥākim! Holy and exalted is He beyond this evident, impossible falsehood. He is beyond passing away or moving from one place to another. Rather, He is established in the glory of His lordship, alone in the majesty of His unity. He initiated His servants with signs that reminded them. His friends recognized the concealment as a test and examination. Trusting in His wisdom, they are certain and believing, awaiting the accomplishment of His promise and enduring trials and afflictions with patience. Some of the friends of His Guardian He concealed behind the curtains of protection, keeping them safe so that they might establish proof against the deniers and fulfill the trust.

The apostates were given room to dispute; the winds and waves of the sea of error clashed. Dust and blindness covered the eyes of insight; veils of folly and darkness were spread because of the absence of the sun, moon, star, and shining lamp. As the fires of doubt, unbelief, and perversity intensified, the sects of apostasy and error multiplied. The souls of the misguided became inverted, so that they located divinity, the Imamate, and the rank of the Veil in the station of the one-eyed false Messiah, the impostor. They failed to understand the marks of the true religion and were ignorant of the appearance of the Riser, the guiding Master, the Messiah. Their souls returned to denial and stubbornness; in earlier ages they had given themselves to perversity and corruption, drinking their fill of foul, stagnant water and living on the vilest provisions.

Shaykhs of firm certainty, friends who profess tawḥīd: reflect upon this explanation and counsel, for whoever possesses the insight to benefit from it. I place my trust in the Guardian of Truth and seek His help.

The epistle is complete. Praise belongs to al-Ḥākim, our Lord and Bestower of favor, and thanks to His Guardian, the guiding Imam of the Imams.

Written in the month of Jumādā al-Ākhira, in the tenth year of the Qāʾim of the Age.

EPISTLE 52 — THE LETTER OF THE VALLEY

رسالة الوادي

I place my trust in the Lord, transcendent above all causes, the God al-Ḥākim, and give thanks to His servant and effect, the master, the guiding Imam who rises.

From the servant al-Muqtanā Bahāʾ al-Dīn, tongue of the believers and support of the Unitarians, the left wing, the fourth, last, and lesser rank: a reminder to the Callers to tawḥīd in the blessed, pure district of the Valley and to all within it whom the Call of Truth has reached and who have responded to the religion of the guiding Imam, the Riser. Peace upon the people of insight and discernment who have been tested. May the Lord's mercy and blessings rest upon my brethren, the true messengers.

Now then: might, exaltation, glory, reverence, majesty, and praise belong to the Lord, who transcends the meanings of limitation and apprehension, exalted above offspring, opposites, and the attribution of partners. He is beyond the Cause of causes and is the Originator of the first mover of moving things, greater than eternity or a beginning and free from incorporation and totality. By the miracle of His originated beings and creatures He has indicated the wonder of His appearance in divine stations. He has dealt justly with creation by establishing proof against them through the beginnings of successive ages, and manifested the proof of tawḥīd in the most honorable age and most excellent time. Pure and chosen souls prepared themselves to receive it, while the souls of stubborn deniers turned away in defeat. Their former apostasy and wickedness have reappeared in our day as confusion and departure from the faith, distinguishing those who have broken faith and worshipped the calf from those who possess the genuine descent of pure Unitarians. These latter have endured injury and tribulation, cooperated in righteousness and reverence, and believed the signs of the unseen as proofs of the appearing of the greatest Sign.

You, Unitarian brethren, are a true company that has been tested. Your noble lineage of faith has been established; you have taken hold of the firmest handles and strongest bonds of truth. Preserve the merits of your earlier deeds and do not let Iblīs triumph over you by speech or action. He has set the snares of treachery for you and people like you; he has cut off the ways of right guidance for people of truth and filled them with folly, difference, and stubborn resistance.

People of knowledge and tawḥīd, guard yourselves against the accursed Satan by submitting to your Imam, who guides to the straight path. Fortify the roads leading to knowledge of the realities by purifying your intentions, entreating your Creator, repenting for the duties you have neglected, humbling yourselves before the ranks of truth, and discarding obedience to the impostors before the Day of Meeting arrives. Abandon the bitterness and grudges you harbor against the company of Unitarian men and women. The Book expressly makes an exception for one who is compelled while his heart remains tranquil in faith (Qurʾān 16:106).

Do not use your standing in tawḥīd as a pretext for pride or superiority over anyone whose belief is sound. Trials can be gifts as well as tests. This is where the assemblies of error, the paths of forbidden conduct, the marks of deception, and the ways of sin are distinguished. You may hold against a person demonstrated dishonesty of speech, failure in the rights owed to brethren, ignorance of the stations of the Proofs of the Guardian of the Age, or inclination toward the Iblises of this time. Anyone in whom one of these blameworthy dispositions becomes evident belongs among the opponents who have broken the covenant and entered the company of associationists and obstinate deniers. The evidence against such people has been established by the premises of demonstration, and it is then incumbent upon the Unitarians to distance themselves from them and cease close association.

Brethren, this reminder is for all. Is there anyone who will hear and obey, or gaze by his intellect toward the exalted assembly, so that the purity of his inner substance may rise above the defilement of accidental qualities, and his transparent soul be freed of the diseases of doubt that enter into the souls of disobedient humans? Such diseases send

them into the lowest bodies and most disfigured forms as the consequence of turning from truth and doubting the promised Riser.

Know, brethren in religion, and establish with certainty, community of Unitarians, that the best outcome belongs to those who endure their trials patiently in the abode of truth. Painful chastisement and terrible loss on the Day of Return belong to those who associate partners and break their covenants. Lower your wings in kindness to your brethren who have been weakened and accept their explanations for the injury brought upon them by the forces of the accursed Antichrist. You have degrees of precedence and a right to take pride in earlier service; they have the stations of those who follow you in doing good. Let your strength and vigorous force be directed against enemies of religion, and your sympathy and gentleness toward your Unitarian brethren.

Brethren in religion, rejoice at the preliminary signs of truthfulness. You possess the honor of having gone before and of having held fast to genuine conviction. Take strength from the memory of your praiseworthy deeds. Beware of fighting against doubts about the fulfillment of the Creator's promise to His pure Unitarian friends. The hearts of people of truth have seethed within them and their livers burned with longing because the devil's wind has continued to blow. Follow their example in patience. Though you stand upon burning coals of decree, be firm: the good outcome belongs to those who restrain themselves, endure, and bear suffering without complaint. Await the emergence of light from the celestial sphere of the signs, and be alert to the truthful cry on the Day of Coming Forth.

The lights of the realities have flowered through the noble ones of the nations, the Proofs of the guiding master, the Imam. By the rays of their brightness the mists of the Iblises have been dispersed and the curtains of darkness torn apart. The divine signs with which they are invested have become manifest for the reform of humanity. The heavens of religious law have been folded away by the Guide's proof, and the destruction of the tower of injustice, the abode of people of uncleanness, falsehood, and invention, draws near. The stars of the spheres have joined with ill omens, and the souls of false claimants, rebellious doubters, have been warned of disgrace, destruction, and ruin. Their bodily appetites have overcome their insight, and their blindness and deafness have returned them to this impure and inverted world. They departed from the Guardian of the Age and denied the proofs of the signs and demonstrations. They sought the barren paths of the devils, and the devils of the intervals trampled them under their hooves. These turned them away from clear, intelligible, and illuminating signs toward obscure and deceptive fancies out of ignorance of the transmitted principles of wisdom and its established symbols.

Brethren in religion, wake from the slumber of heedlessness and take advantage of the strength of this brief respite. The summons of resurrection is drawing near, and what lies hidden in hearts and breasts will be brought into the open. Do not imitate people who lie asleep in the intoxication of their conduct, heedless of the guidance of the Guide and unaware of what will befall them. The graves have been scattered and what breasts and hearts concealed has been brought forth. Await the cry of manifestation when the horn sounds and the third blast is blown into the trumpet. Then the victorious will rejoice in the works they have prepared, while those who doubted and neglected their duties will regret what they have done.

Remove from your souls the beginnings of vainglory and arrogance. Train them in contentment, submission, patience, and reflection. By the truth of the Truth, the winds of the signs of the Companions of al-Aʿrāf have begun to blow, overthrowing the reversing and contradicting schemes of the evil, oath-breaking Antichrist. Flashes of light have shone through the darkness; the helpers of the realities have openly prepared themselves at these fortunate times and in these excellent years. They have defeated with truth the souls of rebellious and unjust people whose stubbornness made them deny the Guardian of the Age, and have returned them to the covering of impurity and made them pass through bodies one after another, shrouded in what they had earned. The bright stars of the cycle have risen and hurled their meteors against the offspring of the one-eyed Antichrist and Satan.

Brethren, reflect upon this warning and instruction and awaken through this explanation. I have kept my exhortation and warning brief and made their meaning clear. Since the ordinary means of communication between us were interrupted, and so many fell away apart from those protected by the Creator, I have sent to your community my daughter Sāra,

complete in chastity and purity, who has offered her blood in obedience to the Most High through certainty of the truths of the highest world. With her is my brother and close companion, the respected teacher Abū al-Ḥasan Taqī, whom the Lord strengthen and support. I have known his service in the presence of the Guardian of Truth and found his religion, reliability, and integrity praiseworthy in important affairs. They are sent for the protection of the sincere community and to strengthen its standing in religion, so that its members may support one another in fellowship, cooperate in attaining reward and nearness, clarify your circumstances, and provide an accurate understanding of your affairs. They also provide occasion for gratitude to the Creator for the great favors reported to me from among you. I have concealed the names of my revered shaykhs to safeguard and protect them, while disclosing my own name as a screen against harm and a means of protecting them.

To the Lord who brings the ages into being and originates the Cause of causes I pray earnestly and humbly for guidance for you all. Through His Guardian I entreat Him to reunite the scattered friends who profess tawḥīd, to inspire in them goodness and compassion toward their weakened brethren, to protect them through obedience to His Guardian from the incitements of accursed Iblīs and his misguided Callers and helpers, and to place them in the cave of His mighty protection and under the shelter of His secure guardianship. Again and again I beseech the exalted Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, through His Guardian, transcendent above disappearance and change, to grant your community respite and relief so that it may witness the punishment, dishonor, and terrible chastisement that will descend upon the forces of the accursed false Messiah. He has the power to do this and to answer this prayer.

Received and authenticated. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His servant, the guiding Imam.

EPISTLE 53 — CONSTANTINOPLE (AL-QUSṬANṬĪNIYYA)

I put my trust in the Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above all by sanctification and praise; and I give thanks to His servant, the Imam, the Lord Messiah.

From the humble and sincere servant, the possession of the Messiah, the Imam, who worships the Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, the Messiah: an admonition to Constantine son of Romanos, ruler of the Romans, and to those who belong to his dominion and adhere to the religion of baptism. In former times they professed the denial of nonexistence and the affirmation of [divine] reality, but have forgotten the beliefs of their apostolic ancestors, who understood the existence of the eternal divinity. They have departed from the way of the saints through their resemblance, in the earlier ages, to Muslims and Jews.

Peace upon whoever knows his Messiah and his Lord, answers His call and summons, and submits to His command before reaching the end of his allotted term.

Now then: praise belongs to al-Ḥākim, the Lord God, exalted above every intellectual cause; beyond nonexistence, eternity [as a category], and modality; unique in His might beyond magnitude, whatness, and quantity; transcending the expressions employed of substances and the most subtle objects of conception. He is exalted above opposite, limit, and description, and above every property that can be enclosed within time and duration.

Pure intellects, unable to grasp even the most surprising elementary objects without proceeding through premises to conclusions, testify that He is the One worshipped throughout all ages and cycles, the Eternal of eternities and the One who gives duration to the ages. Through His command He brought into being the One who forms the worlds: the Imam of imams, the Messiah of the ages, the Guardian of the states [of being], the Blower of the Trumpet, the Qāʾim of the age, and the possessor of the cry of manifestation. The Lord appointed him as a banner and a way for revealing the meanings of tawḥīd, a blazing lamp amid the dense darkness of ignorance, a means for abolishing associating religious laws, breaking the necklaces of idols, destroying fabricated orientations of worship, and cutting off the codes of those devoted to nonbeing, unbelief, and tyranny. He is a decisive argument against those who deny, and a sufficient explanation for Christian worshippers who bow and prostrate.

Awaken, Christians, before the convulsion of souls and minds, before the terrible cry arrives, the written term reaches its end, the Beast of the Earth appears, and the veil is lifted. The cycles have drawn close to completion; the time for severing the bonds and bringing the matter to its end approaches. Lend your ears, brethren, to the truthful word. Awaken, heedless people, to the days of judgment and the opening of the way by the Messiah's apostle. John, the golden-mouthed apostle, has appeared to make straight the Lord's paths; the horizons shine with light through the rising of the Messiah, devoted to the worship of the Lord God al-Ḥākim, the Creator.

If you, community of saints, seek refuge in what John the Golden-Mouthed inscribed in his Gospel, have certainty in what the leaders of your denomination agreed upon, and believe the three hundred and eighteen whom, you say, the Holy Spirit caused to speak at Constantinople, then consider your profession of faith. In spite of the differences between your various Christian parties, you consider this formula indispensable to every sacrament, and you insist that without it neither religion nor the offering can be complete. Give me your understanding, therefore, and reflect upon what your priests say at each offering, upon your waiting for Jesus the Messiah to return for the salvation of the people, and upon your confession that 'he is prepared to come again to judge the living and the dead.' This is indeed true for whoever knows, through tawḥīd, the coming of the appointed day.

Your profession of faith bears witness against you for heedlessness and negligence. The leaders of the Christian community, its patriarchs, metropolitans, bishops, and clergy, agreed upon it, saying that the Holy Spirit spoke through the three hundred and eighteen. Though your denominations dispute other matters, they do not dispute this text. Their religion and offering, as they understand them, cannot exist without it. The text is as follows:

'We believe in God the Father, possessor of all things and maker of the visible and invisible; and in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, firstborn of all creation, not created, true God of true God, of his Father's substance, through whom the worlds were established and everything created. For us human beings and for our salvation he descended from heaven, became incarnate by the Holy Spirit, became human, was conceived and born of Mary the Virgin. He suffered and was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, was buried, rose on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sat at his Father's right hand. He is prepared to return to judge the living and the dead. We believe in the one Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from his Father, the life-giving Spirit; and in one baptism for forgiveness of sins and transgressions; in one holy, apostolic, catholic congregation; in the resurrection of our bodies and eternal life for ever and ever.'

This whole profession, however, was not commanded in this form by the Lord, the Messiah of the Ages, nor did He command people to regard the acts of incarnation mentioned by these leaders as grounds for worshipping idols. Rather, He commanded that its meanings be recited to the apostles and explained to the spiritual elect. They established those meanings in the Gospels and bore witness to them after explaining their purposes to the Unitarians. We know these things among the recording guardians, written in their places in the four Gospels of the apostles John, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We must identify their places in those four Gospels, so that all may know the true distinctions between what is forbidden and what is permitted, and so that you may recognize—though you have not understood it—your likeness to those who worship nonexistence, deny the truth, and stand at the outward appearance of words rather than their realities.

You say in the doxology appointed for the offering that he 'suffered and was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, was buried, and rose on the third day.' This is established in the second chapter of John's Gospel, where Jesus says to the Jews: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I shall raise it.' They denied that a temple could be built again in three days. He was speaking about the temple of his body; afterward his disciples remembered his words and believed the scripture and the saying.

Know, community of saints, that the 'three days' of absence refer to successive times of his rising with truth and summoning creation to truthful tawḥīd. The first concerns his disclosure to the nations that he is the true God—meaning that the Creator, exalted in power, is existent among His creatures and manifests Himself to them, according to their condition, in forms resembling theirs, so that the proof of His existence is established against all creation and He is not represented as a nonentity. Reflect upon this assertion and seek success through the Guardian of guidance.

The second day is the manifestation of the Paraclete, whom Jesus announced. In the Gospel of John, Jesus foretold another whose coming would be known, the Paraclete, whom he identifies as Muḥammad, one of the possessors of the religious codes, together with Noah, Abraham, and Moses, who appeared before the Messiah. He cites Jesus' statement: 'If you loved me you would rejoice that I am going to my Father, because my Father is greater than I. I have told you before it happens so that, when it comes, you may believe.' And: 'I shall not speak with you much longer, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in me.' The saying concludes: 'so that the people may know that I love my Father.' The world did not recognize the meaning. The ruler of this world is not the Creator. The point is to establish the proof against each cycle of humanity when the people fail to carry out the message of tawḥīd, turn back, and resume imitation and worship of nonbeing. That ruler has nothing in Jesus' message: he does not summon creation to the unity of the existing Worshipped One as the Messiah summoned you.

The third day is the appearance of the Guide—peace upon him—with his call to the inward meaning of the four scriptures that point the people of truth toward tawḥīd: the Psalms, Torah, Gospel, and Qurʾān. His letters and proofs have reached Constantine, ruler of the Christians in this time; they must have been written down by the leaders of learning among them. His call differs from that of the possessors of religious codes, for he announces the Last Day and the manifestation of the One to whom it points. If an intelligent reader considered the Guide's appearance and his call to the inward meanings of the four books in the time of the first Constantine, and the Lord Messiah's summons to tawḥīd in the time of the second Constantine, that reader would find in it an admonition and an example.

The 'last day' completes the first. The Gospel of John bears witness where Jesus' brothers say, 'Leave this place so your disciples may see the works you do. No one does anything in secret while seeking to be known. Show yourself to the world.' His brothers did not believe in him. Jesus answered that his time had not yet come, while theirs was always ready. His time, when he would disclose the word of tawḥīd, had not been completed. It would be completed upon his promised coming again. Jesus also says, in the Gospel passage invoked here, that he came down from heaven not to do his own will but the Father's, and that whoever sees the Son and believes possesses everlasting life; 'I shall raise him on the last day.'

These are the Messiah's announcements to everyone possessed of sound understanding. He has now come as he promised, appearing to the Unitarians whom he raises on the Last Day. Do not become like the people to whom John says that light came into the world but people loved darkness more than light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it lest his deeds be exposed, while whoever practices truth approaches it so that his deeds may be shown as done in God.

Another proof, from the tenth chapter of John, is the saying: 'I am the good shepherd. I know my flock and my flock knows me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep not of this fold. I must bring them too; they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd. For this my Father sent me, and I lay down [my life].' The earlier flock refers to the people instructed after the law of Moses, when the prophets were rejected, and the 'other sheep' with the religious law of Muḥammad, which was likewise promised a period of rule and then an end.

He also warned in the ninth chapter: 'We must do the works of Him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no human being can work.' By this I mean that the religious law of the code is like a dark night without light. The summons of those who established religious laws led people away from the command of the Creator, toward illusion, nonbeing, associationism, and error. These are the Lord Messiah's good tidings, by which the argument has reached you through this humble, sincere servant.

The Messiah taught the world that his future coming would summon it to the unity of the existing Creator and forbid the worship of a missing nonentity. Do not imitate those who follow the codes and doubt; do not turn back after recognizing the Worshipped One. You possess antecedents of a true religion. Do not deny the returning Messiah after knowing him.

Reflect also upon the passage where Jesus says: 'I have come into the world so that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.' The priests who were with him asked whether they too were blind. Jesus replied: 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, “We see,” and therefore your sin remains.' Those who claim knowledge but turn away when the one they profess to know comes to them are the blind. Those who once said they recognized him become blind when they refuse the religion and truth he promised. Do not inflict upon yourselves the very acts you condemn.

Matthew likewise records the warning: 'Many will say to me on the Day of Resurrection: “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and drive out devils in your name?” But I shall tell them: “Depart from me, workers of injustice. I never knew you.”' This saying concerns those who refuse knowledge of the returning Messiah when it is offered them. The Messiah also foretold that what happened at the beginning would happen at the end. John had announced him before his first coming and summoned the children of Israel to recognize his light, but they rejected what they heard and did not practice what they professed.

John also called himself 'the voice crying in the wilderness: Make straight the paths of the Lord.' The caller has now called, the voice has risen, the people of realities have answered, the roads of doubt have been cleared, and the paths away from love were closed. You, saints who once followed the traces of the apostolic ranks, could regain their station by gratitude, remembrance, and answering the Lord Messiah's call to the unity of al-Ḥākim. You would truly be His children. If you refuse, the shaking calamity approaches and the hosts of the tribes hurry toward you. They have recognized Him and affirmed the truth of what they awaited. The hour has come when, as promised, He no longer

speaks to them in parables but explains the matter openly. He says: 'I have spoken to you in figures, but an hour is coming when I shall no longer speak in figures and shall tell you plainly of the Father. On that day you shall ask in my name.'

My purpose is not to refute the realities of Christianity. I am following the command to make known to the learned and devout among its people the true meanings of divine matters, and to show them from the express wording of the Gospel the error they have committed. They have been deceived in what they imagined and believed. When summoned to recognize the existent God whom they worship, they treated Him as nonexisting; they did not distinguish the meaning of the Word united with the Lord Messiah.

This letter is written to them all as a warning, as the establishment of proof, and as the removal of excuses. The Lord instructed people to gird themselves and keep their lamps ready, to remain awake so that when the Word comes it finds them prepared. I have made this address brief, clarified realities to people of intelligence, advised the community of saints, and invited them back to the stations of those who went before.

I shall also explain the answer to all the associating denominations whose beliefs differ from those of the Christian community, cutting away their claim that their laws resemble the Messiah's summons to the eternal word of tawḥīd. This argument abolishes the codes of those who worship nonbeing and destroys the deceptions they have decorated for the nations. I shall answer them through one verse of the Qurʾān, through whose interpretation the Muslim community has claimed supremacy over the peoples of other religions. That verse overturns the laws of the makers of religious codes and shows their inability to bear the Word united with the ancient Spirit of Truth. Its meaning is subtle, established upon the substance of soul and intellect; it exalts the Creator above injustice and confirms the reality of justice.

The knowing Creator originated the worlds and bestowed guardianship upon humanity. He did not abandon the peoples or leave them without direction; at every time and age there is an existent caller to tawḥīd and guidance, an Imam free from error, associationism, and desire, so that proof is established over every people, and the Creator is exalted through the manifested Word of unity. The trust of tawḥīd was conveyed to the peoples, and no prophet or messenger was sent to them without being bound to that trust and the word of truth.

I have written in this letter a proof of the abrogation of the religious law of Islam, and await your response by obedience to the Word of tawḥīd and disclosure of the matter. The verse is: 'We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains; they refused to bear it and feared it; but the human being bore it. Truly he was unjust and ignorant' [Qurʾān 33:72]. It is among the most powerful proclamations of the Qurʾān, and a decisive key to interpretation and proof.

'Heavens,' 'earth,' and 'mountains,' mean the Speakers who made religious laws and codes, together with their Foundations, Proofs, and Callers who summoned people to service, associationism, and confusion. They failed to fulfill the obligation of tawḥīd, turned backward, and abandoned it. The Messiah of the Ages, the Imam of creation, stood alone in the Word of unity. The Creator is too exalted and just to offer the trust of tawḥīd to literal heavens, earth, mountains, or inanimate things; the verse signifies their intelligent counterparts named above. Those charged with the codes denied the Trust, hid what they had been commanded to disclose, and deceived humanity by substituting associationism and falsehood.

If an adherent of these denominations objects that the Trust was offered as a choice rather than imposed as an obligation, the reply is that he does not understand the Creator's command. The divine command is an offer and choice; His prohibition is admonition and warning. Had commands and prohibitions operated as inescapable compulsion, all people would have been equal in faith and belief, and rewards and punishments would have lost their meaning. Reason itself rejects that conclusion. The custodians of the Trust betrayed it, denied it, and abandoned the word of tawḥīd.

As for 'the human being' who accepted the Trust and proved unjust and ignorant, he is the individual Satan referred to in the Qurʾān, not an ordinary human being; he is the maker of the religious code of Islam. He was brought to witness the divine unity and then covered his nakedness with words other than the truth. For it is said: “Has there come upon man a span of time when he was not a thing mentioned?” He then turned away when the blind man came to him, as the address declares: 'He frowned and turned away because the blind man came to him. And what would tell you? Perhaps he might purify himself, or remember, and the reminder benefit him. As for the man who thinks himself self-sufficient, you attend to him—though it is not upon you if he does not purify himself. But as for the one who comes to you striving, in fear, from him you turn aside. No! It is a reminder; whoever wishes may remember.'

If you awaken from heedlessness and receive the teachings of the Lord Messiah, the annulment of the fabricated religious codes will become clear. You will truly become His servants. The call of your ancestor Isaac, which passed from Esau to Jacob among Abraham's children, will be restored to you; mercy, blessing, and the light of the angelic apostles will descend among you. Through obedience to the call of tawḥīd you will rise to the heights, and people from the regions and islands will come to you, so that you may be supporters and a center of the one religion and its teachings. But if you turn away from the answer and reject what is right, the messenger's duty is only to communicate openly and advise every believing Unitarian.

I have also annulled the form of religious law which you follow, by showing the weakness and denial that have affected it. After a long time of uncertainty you recognized those who gathered the profession of faith for you as authorities, despite your belief in the truthfulness of the Lord's apostles, who possessed the authority to forbid and permit. You sought another testimony instead of theirs and returned to the religious code, though those apostles bear witness against you in the Gospel itself.

Reflect on what Jesus told those who asked when the kingdom of the children of Israel would return and religion become manifest. He said that he would come like a thief and that they would not know the hour of his coming; whoever came before him would be made a pillar in the house of his God. He thus likened his return to that of a thief who comes while people are heedless. Praise belongs to the person who remains alert and hastens to meet him. And he said: 'Enter by the narrow gate, not the wide one, for there is destruction in the wide gate.' The narrowness signifies the difficulty of tawḥīd.

Consider, saints, the truth of these arguments. Return to what is right before the Messiah's manifestation ends the time for excuses. With the support of the Guardian I have also defeated the religious law of fabricated signs and falsehood through a single overwhelming proof. It is among the signs of the Messiah of the Ages, who returns after an absence of trial and fulfills what he promised his chosen apostles: coming again for judgment between the worlds.

Awaken from your heedlessness. Ask the leaders of your denominations what Jesus instructed his apostles. He called them to tawḥīd and sanctification, warned them away from ritual acts containing alteration and confusion, and did not establish a religious law in the manner of those who imposed the older codes.

He also answered the Jews when they said: 'Our father is Abraham.' Jesus told them that Abraham had not performed their works, and that they were not able to understand his word or endure hearing it. 'You are from your father the devil, and you wish to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning; he did not stand in the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he speaks falsehood, he speaks from himself, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' Jesus repeatedly referred to his *word*, not his *acts*: the lie is the inherited system of religious codes, and the Jews' claimed religious descent from Abraham does not justify it.

Jesus goes on to say: 'Truly, whoever keeps my word will never see death.' He does not say 'whoever performs my deeds.' The true word is the word of tawḥīd. For that reason his apostles baptized people with water: water is a sign of true knowledge and religious understanding. The places where baptism takes place are called the church and the altar. The altar's 'slaughter' signifies the killing of false beliefs and associationist doctrines, so that people may be placed upon the straight road of unity. The church signifies the pledge, oath, and covenant taken from everyone who answered

the call to the Word united with the Messiah. The substance of the Messiah had become united with the substance of the word of tawḥīd; he did not embody the works of a law-bound code or command the fabricated innovations of the legal religions.

Thus it is false to say that each prophet who instituted a law brought the same Word that was united with the Messiah. The people who came later confused the laws of associationism with the holy Word of unity. Their Christian leaders gathered together the profession they use for their offerings, imitating the makers of deceptive codes because they were distant in time from their apostolic predecessors and failed to understand the spiritual ranks.

Now, saints, examine this address and acknowledge its true explanation. The one Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, has appeared to bring forgiveness of sins through a single holy community that endured trials in obedience to him and believed in the resurrection and everlasting life. The rights and distinctions of the wicked will be overturned and the light of the word of tawḥīd illuminates the horizons for those who see clearly, while the ornaments of the wicked dwindle before its rising.

Awaken, Christians: the sower rejoices together with the reaper. The Word of truth has established the proof against unbelievers and deniers. We have gathered the seed of the fruits of life and begun uprooting the tree of tyrannical Pharaohs. As the Messiah said, look upon the fields: they have ripened and the harvest draws near. The appointed sign of tawḥīd has appeared and the promised time is near. Where will you go? The opponents have been confounded and impostors exposed. Truthful Unitarians have prevailed, while those who neglected their duty are put to shame.

Awaken from sleep and heedlessness. The cycles have turned, the times of the religious codes have expired, and the peoples remain distracted, making no preparations for the day that cannot be averted. The sun rises from the sphere of lights, and the command of al-Ḥākim becomes manifest surrounded by pure spiritual angels, with troops possessing wings and lights, led by the Messiah of the nations across the ages and cycles. Heaven has opened its gates to assist him; the valleys of the earth shake before his awe and power. The seal of honor and permanence has been struck for him, and blessed is whoever receives its keys before the final manifestation.

By the truth, you are certain to encounter what you have been promised. Every term has its appointed decree; you shall know. You will remember what I say to you. I consign my affair to the Guardian of Truth, whose reward is not cut off.

Written when seven days remained in Ṣafar, in the eleventh year of the Qāʾim of the Age and at the completion of the seventh year of the absence of trial.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim alone, and thanks to the Lord of the nations and their Guide, His servant.

EPISTLE 54 — THE CHRISTIAN EPISTLE (AL-MASĪḤIYYA)

I put my trust in the Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above number and offspring, and I give thanks to His servant, the one Messiah.

From the eloquent servant, possession of the Lord, the guiding Messiah, to all who have drawn near to the divinity through the reality of the sacrament and who hold to it: to every priest, patriarch, and metropolitan among the people of truth.

Peace upon the people of unity and religion who follow the traces of the pure apostles, recognize the doctrine of the trustworthy and truthful messengers, and possess purified souls. They endured what they encountered in obedience to the Lord and pledged themselves to him, devoting their lives at the beginning for love of the obedient High Priest, by which I mean the martyr of martyrs and people like John, who brought good tidings to humanity and endured slander, slaughter, and beheading for the favor of his Lord.

It is extraordinary in this age, and ought to cause astonishment, that the nations have forgotten the foundations of their religions, committed what their own teachings forbade, obeyed Satan and Iblīs, and acknowledged the falsehood and lies that their worship-books bear witness against them. They have agreed in transgression and sin, and their corrupt beliefs have become notorious among the truthful near and far.

Where, claimants, is your obedience to the Lord? Where is your acceptance of his commandments, liars, if you truly believe him and are certain that he will return to save the people of truth from their sins? Did he not command you in Matthew's Gospel: 'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who mistreat you, and pray for those who drag you away by force and expel you in arrogance. In this way you will be children of your Father in heaven, who causes His sun to rise upon the good and the wicked and His rain to fall upon the righteous and the transgressors. If you love only those who love you, what reward or excellence do you have? Even tax collectors do the same.'

O ignorant and brutish people, remnant of idol-worshippers: you accepted neither the counsel of the one who directed you, nor the coming of the one who announced his return and brought you grace. You neither heard nor obeyed his command. Rather, you broke the covenant of his instruction and disobeyed his prohibition against obedience to the devils. Like the rebellious Jews of old, you imitated those who killed and intimidated prophets. You visited evil and injury upon the one who announced the Messiah's coming to you, committing the associationism and manifest unbelief he had forbidden. In your arrogance you assaulted the learned apostle, the truthful and trustworthy wise shaykh, departed from the straight way by harming him, and left the path of people of truth and upright religion. You became like the chief priests among the Jews, who persecuted Christians who bowed in worship and resisted the Lord's revealed Word by rejection and denial.

In your deafness and dullness you resemble a mute beast. A person moved by compassion might come to help such an animal, only for it to kick him violently and prevent him from doing the good he intended. So have you acted, deaf to truth and unable to accept the parables of the true Messiah. Look, heedless people—if you have eyes capable of seeing! Understand—if you have minds capable of understanding—the examples issuing from the sources of true knowledge.

Matthew's Gospel records: 'Truly I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the Kingdom of Heaven before you. John came to you by the road of righteousness, but you did not believe him, although you saw him with your own eyes. Nor did you repent of what you had done or believe what you witnessed.' You have neglected this wisdom, failed to safeguard the rights of those affiliated with Christianity, and disregarded the manifestation of the Universal Cause. You disbelieve the signs of its coming and deny the passages foretelling it. You are figures without souls, pleased by foolishness and ignorance and disgusted by virtue and intellect. Instead of taking the Lord's true parables to heart, you devoted yourselves to fabricating the religious codes assembled for you by lying leaders of falsehood.

Listen to the parable in Matthew which sets out your deeds and what will become of you at the time of his manifestation. A householder planted a vineyard, put a wall around it, dug a winepress, built a tower, leased it to farmers, and departed to his country. When the harvest approached, he sent servants to collect its fruit. The tenants beat some, stoned others, and killed the rest. He sent more servants than before, and they treated them in the same way. Then he said, 'Perhaps they will be ashamed before my son,' and sent his son. But the tenants said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us take his inheritance.' They cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. 'When the owner comes, what will he do to these farmers?' The hearers replied: 'He will destroy those wicked people completely and lease the vineyard to others who deliver its fruit at the proper time.' Jesus explained that this is what they did at the beginning and would do at the end: 'The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who bear its good fruit.'

Your days of rule and continuance have reached their limit. Because of your deeds you are threatened with uprooting and retribution. If you deny this Gospel passage, you deny and invalidate the very book you profess to worship through. If you believe it, you acknowledge the evil deed and yet commit it yourselves. If you say that Jesus spoke only about the people of a past age, remember that the apostles stand between you and that past, and that you have repeated the acts of the Jews and their wicked chief priests. The parable portrays you, people who have departed from the path. The prediction that the Kingdom will be given to a people who produce good fruit lies before you: parts of it have already been fulfilled, but you failed to understand them. When he promised you that his messengers would come, you called him a liar.

Jesus also said: 'You have heard, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I tell you not to resist the wicked. If someone strikes your left cheek, offer him the right. If someone demands your tunic, hand over your cloak as well'. Every time you read these Gospel verses, you condemn yourselves. You tyrannize the weaker members of your own denomination, manipulate their minds, and oppose what Jesus commanded and prohibited. You were ordered to pray for those who forced you out, yet you expelled his friends by force and persecuted them in arrogance. Which Lord, then, do you worship? By what religion do you conduct yourselves? Do you have commandments apart from the Gospel, or do you turn to a direction other than the one Jesus designated?

You have deceived the weaker Christians by decorating the fabricated religious codes, seized their reins through deceit, led them away from obedience to the Messiah, and bound them to overt unbelief and associationism. Falsehood's dissolution is approaching, and the truth will emerge to destroy Iblīs and his callers. The dominion of wrongdoers and the forms of unbelief are coming to an end. You rejected this very instruction in full sight of what you were doing. If you truly considered the Gospel's commands binding, believed in the Lord's return and in his reckoning with humanity on the Day of Resurrection, you would have remained within his prohibitions and commands instead of rebelling against them.

What, then, do you believe? Whose commandments guide you after his? By what argument do you defend your disobedience? You will be among those who call to him on the coming day, only for him to answer: 'Depart; I never knew you, you unjust workers of falsehood.' You will withdraw disgraced, condemned, and regretful. Through these deeds you have shown yourselves to be, in truth, children of vipers, and he has disowned you because you followed a way other than that of Jesus.

Consider the instruction read on Great Tuesday, when Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives. We have a greater claim to its truth, because we are the truthful. His apostles came privately and asked: 'Master, tell us when these things will be and what sign will announce your coming after the end of this world.' Jesus answered: 'Beware lest anyone deceive you, for many will come in my name and say, “I am the Messiah.”' Notice the sign he appointed: the appearance of many pretenders, each claiming the name Messiah. This sign has already appeared, and the claimants have uttered precisely these words in falsehood.

The true Lord Messiah is too exalted to come to this world declaring, 'I am the Messiah.' The one who claims that title for himself is the lying messiah, the accursed deceiver, the foolish and miserable pretender. The true Messiah comes to

all the world through his proofs, signs, and testimony, carried by the hands of his truthful guides and his honored, believing apostles.

After warning them about false messiahs, Jesus continued: 'You will hear rumors and reports of wars. Do not be troubled, for these things must happen, but they are only the beginning. Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, and people against people. Hunger will be severe and calamities will multiply in different places; these are the beginning of birth-pangs. Then they will hand you over to suffering and torment, kill you, and all peoples will hate you for my name.' He made clear that the people of truth are those who undergo persecution, are killed, and are hated by peoples, families, and companions. These people cannot be identified with a mad pretender who declares himself to be the Messiah; such pretenders themselves fulfill a different part of the prediction.

You who make these claims, when have you been persecuted for the faith? Who afflicted you, handed you over to suffering, killed you, or hated you on this account? These signs have happened, and reports of them have spread among the nations. Yet it is the Lord's friends, those who have proclaimed his name and called humanity to him, who have been tried through you and people like you, publicly persecuted, tortured, and killed. You deemed their persecution permissible, approved it, joined in it, hated them in word and heart, and helped to kill and expel them. You are outside the description of the people of truth and included among their enemies; you have forgotten the words Jesus made binding upon you.

The same instruction says that people will hate one another and deliver one another to death. Because of the enormity of the trials, love will diminish in many hearts, but whoever endures until the end will gain everlasting life. Jesus announced that 'this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout all the world as a witness to every nation, and then the end will come.' Awaken, Christians who remain bewildered in your inherited law. Where is this worldwide proclamation? You know of neither its time nor its nature, though you claim belief in his wisdom and await the signs of his return. The witness has been carried to all the peoples; you are the ones who do not recognize it.

Jesus also warned: 'When you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place, then let whoever is in Judea flee to the mountains.' Those signs, too, have appeared and have become known throughout the world. The abomination that occupied the holy place will soon have its traces wiped away. Again he said that his coming would be like lightning running from west to east. That is proof that the true Messiah does not simply appear before the world and announce 'I am the Messiah.' The person who does so is the accursed impostor; the true Messiah's heralds make his signs and testimony known to the nations.

No human being and no angel of heaven knows the hour of the Messiah's manifestation, but the Father alone. Before the Flood people ate, drank, married, and celebrated, heedless of what approached, until the waters carried them away. So will his coming in majesty destroy you and those like you who rebel. Do you imagine that he must appear only among you, or that no one outside your community awaits him? What are you in comparison with even a hundredth part of this world, whose peoples he comes to release from sin? Awake from heedlessness and return to truth with his friends before the period of respite ends. The cycles have passed, the Father's unity has been made manifest, and Jesus said: 'This generation will not pass away until all these things have been accomplished.'

These are explicit passages of the Gospel. Only a stubborn unbeliever denies them. You have denied them, departing from the religion of the Lord Messiah just as you departed from the other religions.

The Messiah also wrote to a monk in Gurgān [Jurjān], describing a period of hardship and trial imposed upon his apostles because of the sins of their persecutors. He spoke of trials stretching from Antioch to Alexandria. Those who endured them were his pure chosen people; yet you deny and dissociate yourselves from them. The fact that he located the persecution between Antioch and Alexandria excludes you from the honor you claim for your Christian faction. The fulfillment has appeared before your eyes: nation rose against nation and kingdom against kingdom; the followers of falsehood killed the Lord's friends in those places, surrendered them to death, hated them, and expelled

them from their homes. You joined in the violence and persecution, imitating the wicked among the Jews who oppressed the Lord's messengers at the beginning.

What wrong has the person committed who explained tawḥīd and sincerity to people, or awakened the sleeping through evidence that the Messiah was coming? Why attack the trustworthy and wise man, the learned apostolic shaykh, and slander him? You will answer for this before the Lord at the great reckoning. Punishment includes a change of form in subsequent embodiments: the persecutors become like apes and pigs as their wrongdoing is repaid. You have become unworthy successors to the apostles: you broke the Lord's covenant, rejected the eternal Word, laid traps for his chosen friends, denied his messengers, and preferred the ornament of falsehood to the Gospel's wisdom. Examine the Gospel if you wish to act justly toward yourselves.

Consider the Gospel passage about the faithful and prudent servant whom his master appoints over his household to give them food at the proper time. 'Blessed is the servant whose master finds him doing so when he comes. Truly, he will appoint him over all his possessions. But if the wicked servant says in his heart, “My master is delayed,” and begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink, his master will arrive on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. He will cut him off and assign him a portion with the hypocrites.'

Contemplate this speech, you deaf and heedless ones. What are the master, his servants, his household, and its food? Do you suppose that 'food' means the eating, drinking, and perishing possessions to which you have devoted yourselves? Do you imagine that you yourselves are the people of his household? He also said: 'I am in you and you are in me,' and, 'You are in me and I am in my Father.' The people in whom he dwells and who dwell in him are his true household, distributed across the regions of the world and awaiting his coming for judgment. The faithful servants whom he appointed to supply its food are his messengers. As in the beginning, so at the end, they announce his coming at the appropriate time, warn the peoples against the false messiah, and bring spiritual nourishment by explaining his wisdom. 'Blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing what he commanded; he will entrust all his possessions to him.'

The faithful servants are thus the messengers of the Lord Messiah, announcing his signs and wisdom before his manifestation, and guiding the peoples to obedience to him, which leads to obedience to the Father and illumination by His light. If you truly believed in the Lord's exhortations, why do you not cease wrongdoing and withdraw from persecuting the servants to whom he entrusted the food of his household? Your removal from these stations and your punishment alongside the deniers may soon be hastened. You have exceeded even the rebellious Jews in oppression. What offense is it to explain the word of tawḥīd and summon you to the Lord who forgives sins and judges all creation? Your denial of his messengers will be answered on a day when delay and excuses will no longer be possible.

Recall the account of Great Thursday, when the Lord gathered the apostles whom you deny, but who will bear witness against you. He told them that his time had drawn near and that Judas Iscariot would hand him over to the Jewish Pharaohs of that troubled age. He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, blessed it, drank, and gave it to them: 'Take and drink; this is my blood, the new covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.' And he said: 'Truly, from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it anew in the Kingdom of my Father.' This was at the end of his first time and the completion of his call, when he announced his departure from the world and the coming of his absence.

Be fair with yourselves. You read and hear about this new covenant and its greatness continually in your own religious books, yet turn away from its meaning. He forbade drinking it during the first period and permitted it anew after his return, on the new day in his Father's Kingdom. He has now returned to the world for forgiveness of sins, given the new drink to his friends, and you have not noticed. The letters of his servant announcing this have reached you, but you have rejected the messages and denied the truth they explain.

The time is complete, leaders of Christianity. You have broken the covenant the Lord established with you and the truthful apostles; you have killed or persecuted his truthful, trustworthy advising servant. He warned you about the

pretenders and wrongdoers among the peoples, made clear the signs by which you should recognize them, and spread the call of the true Messiah to every horizon. If you respond, you will attain; if you remain behind, the Gospel's express passages will stand against your denial.

As for you who carry guilt and sin, if you seek to answer the Lord's message with words, I shall not hold back my answer or permit error to pass in silence. You must either abandon the deviations in which you persist or continue upon the path of falsehood and wrongdoing. I shall expose the baseless religious codes, clarify the error in the doctrines of the cross and the offering, overturn the invented grounds of associating sects, and lay open the false statements attributed to the true Messiah throughout the ages. This shall be done after permission is given by the Qāʾim of the age, the Messiah of the Ages.

Praise belongs to our Lord alone; thanks belong to the Messiah and Guide of the nations, His servant.

Completed, through the Guardian of the Hereafter.

EPISTLE 55 — PURSUIT AND EXAMINATION (AL-TAʿAQQUB WA-L-IFTIQĀD)

I put my trust in the Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above all indications and customary conditions, the Abrogator of religions, the Destroyer of Iblīs and Satan, the One who brings an end to the Calf and the Shayṣabān, who takes vengeance upon unbelief and tyranny and wipes away opposition and rebellion.

To the one placed in authority after Romanos the Perished—the commander Michael—and to all the filthy, tyrannical sects of the Christians, the denial-ridden, wicked and rebellious community, whose very root has been cut off and whose appointed term is drawing to its end.

Now then: praise belongs to the Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, who effaces the [false] Messiah, possesses the hypostasis and the sacrifice, and is the exalted Cause above the causes, beyond the categories of beginning and eternity. He is exalted beyond what occurs in intellectual imaginings, and sanctified beyond the illusions of elementary things. He has made incapacity and freedom of choice the means by which pure souls obtain [knowledge and] reward, while disobedient souls follow their deeds toward their recompense. Peace upon His Guardian, the true Messiah, the Qāʾim who stands at the end of the cycles to alter religious communities, abrogate their laws, and change the states of power.

O people destroyed by ignorance, rebellion, forgetfulness, and heedlessness! Consider the causes of your trials and the reversal of circumstances. You have attached yourselves to the accursed one-eyed Antichrist, who will bring you disgrace and destruction at the end of the ages. He will break the reins at the greatest terror, flee toward his own kind in longing for the worship of idols, kindle the fire of associationism, and drag behind him the darkness of sedition. Through him winds of extinction and calamity have struck you. Your dominion has announced its ruin and disappearance, and the foundations of your religious law—built upon deception and military force and falsely attributed to the Messiah—are collapsing.

Think about the punishment due for your evil deeds and the consequences of your grave offenses. Remember what you did to the saints who endured patiently, believed, and submitted.

The Messiah's saying will soon be fulfilled: 'With the measure you use you will be measured.' What you did will be done to you. You will be subjected to compulsion and humiliation as you killed others by oppression and force, and driven to the punishment prepared for you as you drove his followers out in arrogance. The Hour has approached and the moon has split; the gates of repentance have closed and the records have been raised. You still fail to understand the judgment of the present age, forget the Gospel's words, and ignore the saying, placed on the Lord's lips through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.' It was not merely in an age of weakness that this summons went forth from Egypt. It is in the present time of power that the truth of the sayings is shown and the religions are judged.

You disregarded these signs and commandments and assisted the oppressors, bearers of sin. You rose against the Lord's friends and killed them in error and impiety. In the conditions of the Resurrection you supported the leprous, one-eyed Antichrist. He invokes a prophecy in Arabic verse concerning the decisive miraculous end of the old religions:

“The Antichrist of the Resurrection was one-eyed; He rose from Aleppo on the day of fierce ordeal. The Romans all became his supporters, and he is the one Who surely brings them humiliation and war.”

Then, concerning the Guardian and his followers:

“O Lord, fulfill Your promise to them through their Guardian, In the land of Egypt, in Jumādā or Rajab.”

And, marking the completion of their period and the approach of its end:

“When you behold the time, watch for its appointed hour;

You will see the Christians have reached their last rank.

Then know that the command has come to pass:

The oven of the ship has boiled over and overturned.

Hasten to accept it, for it is

The breeze of safety, whether dwelling or seeking.”

Reflect, oppressive unbelievers, upon what these signs say about your departure from the true road and the passing of your reign. Recognize what your own ancestors did, as Jesus said: 'Woe to you, scribes and religious teachers. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the tombs of the righteous, and you say, “Had we lived in our fathers' day we would not have joined them in killing the prophets.” Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets. Complete, then, what your fathers began! Serpents, offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of hell?' This is the Gospel's testimony against you, which none but those committed to denial and rejection refuse.

Jesus also announced that his messengers would come in this age, before his return, at the end of his first time and during his absence. He said: 'Therefore I send to you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your assemblies and chase from city to city, until upon you comes the guilt of all the righteous blood shed upon earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous to the blood of Zechariah, father of John, whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say that this generation will not pass before these things come upon you.' This is a warning that you and your wicked predecessors must answer for the persecution of the messengers when you come forth in support of the Antichrist.

Do not be deceived by this brief respite. It is an interval during which deeds and offenses accumulate and their reckoning draws near. You have denied the indications the Lord gave concerning his manifestation, overlooked the truths disclosed by his chosen messengers, and forgotten the proclamation of John, who came crying in the wilderness: 'Repent; prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight.' The Lord's might and Kingdom were not openly shown in that earlier time as they are now, through the signs that have appeared and the realization of the Gospel's promises of his return, the deliverance of humanity from sins, and his judgment of the secrets of souls and hearts.

Had he appeared only among a single recognizable people, or within an established religious law, the matter would have followed the pattern of earlier laws. Then no distinction could have been made between the people of those codes and the Master of the Disclosure, together with his certain, Unitarian followers. Rather, he has manifested himself before all in a manner that confounds them, as the scriptures and psalms foretold. The Caller has summoned to a strange and unrecognized thing; the peoples have rejected it, while his followers have endured afflictions and come to him in successive groups.

Prepare yourselves, opponents, for the cup of destruction. Do not be deceived by any victory of the armies of Syria. Afterward humiliation, weapons, and armies of the victorious will overcome you. You will again wear distinctive clothing and be deprived of leaders, like the Christians and Jews as they have been described. These are signs of the Day of Religion and the coming of the great announcement. They announce the blessed day when the Messiah returns to his Father's Kingdom, though you have not perceived it. Your deeds have veiled him from you.

Jesus said: 'Among those born of women none has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.' And the Gospel says of the days of John and the taking of the Kingdom by force: 'If you will receive it, he is Elijah who was promised to come. Whoever has ears, let him hear.' In this interpretation, Elijah is the figure who prepares the Lord's road, exposes Iblīs's shame, and abolishes his religions. You have repeated the acts of your predecessors, who killed John, the golden-mouthed one, and before him Zechariah between the sanctuary and the altar. Your new deeds add to the unbelief and punishment incurred by their earlier deeds.

Jesus also said that the Son of Man would come in the glory of his Father with his holy angels and reward each person according to his work, and that some of those standing before him would not taste death before seeing the Son of Man coming in his Father's glory. He was speaking of this time. His messengers have reached you, yet you deny their messages and refuse their wisdom. Your days have expired, and you have been granted delay only as Iblīs was delayed until the Day of Resurrection.

The return of John as Elijah is also proved by the question of the scribes: Why must Elijah come first? Jesus answered that Elijah comes and restores everything, but that Elijah had already come and the people did not recognize him. As he came at the beginning to establish proof and provide grace, so he returns at the end to establish accountability and punishment. Jesus likewise said that whoever acknowledges the Son of Man will be acknowledged before the Father in heaven. Thus, when he returns, only those who answer his call can truly profess him; the rest refuse and become deniers.

He said also: 'Do not think I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but contest, opposition, and division. I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household.' You have witnessed these divisions yourselves and know that the Gospel foretold them; nevertheless you have closed your eyes to their meaning.

Then Jesus foretold the treatment of the servants who would come: 'They will hand you over to the judges, flog you in their assemblies, and bring you before governors and kings, as a testimony against them and all peoples.' This concerns the present persecution of the people of truth. Jesus continued: 'Brother will deliver brother to death, father his child; children will rise against parents and kill them. You will be hated by everyone because of my name, but the one who perseveres to the end will gain everlasting life.' When have your people suffered such persecution in the name of this religion? You, instead, are among those who have killed the Unitarians who responded to the true call.

What answer remains after this precise identification, explanation, and proof? You sided with the Antichrist, disputed against the people of truth, killed the Lord's messengers, and disobeyed. Where will you go? What doctrine can justify you? Jesus taught that the gate is narrow and the road leading to life is difficult, and said that the Son of Man comes like lightning across the east and west. These sayings show that your numbers do not make you the faithful and that you neither recognize nor await the true return, because you have denied its signs and the wisdom preserved by the apostles in the Gospels.

Jesus warned: 'Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Can grapes be picked from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Every good tree produces good fruit, but the bad tree produces bad fruit. Every tree that fails to bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.' Consider this parable and the leaders of your denominations. They are the false prophets Jesus warned against. Wearing the clothing of sheep, they act within like predatory wolves. They profit from deceiving and deriding you, divert you from the right way, ensnare you with perishable wealth, and make you carry their invented falsehoods as though you were beasts of burden. Recognize their fruit: the poisonous crop of thorns has deprived you of your understanding and led your souls away from the truth.

He continued: 'On that day many will say to me, “Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out devils in your name, and work miracles in your name?” I shall answer them, “Depart from me, workers of evil; I do not know you.”' This is the fruit of your bitter, uprooted trees. Your predecessors first offered that fruit to the Lord's followers and killed the innocent by the sword. When the chief priests challenged Jesus—'By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you this power?'—he replied: 'I will ask you one question. If you answer it, I shall tell you by what authority I do these things. Was John's baptism from heaven or from human beings?' They debated among themselves: if they said 'from heaven' he would ask why they had not believed; if they said 'from people' they feared the multitude, which regarded John as a holy prophet. They therefore answered, 'We do not know.' Jesus replied, 'Then neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'

Every sign of the Lord's appearance, explained by his servant John the herald, has become widely known across the horizons and has been accepted by obedient Unitarians. You have denied it, turned toward associationism, and imitated the disbelieving ancestors who rejected the Word. You refused to consider Jesus' testimony to John's prophetic truth, nor the confession of your ancestors that John was a holy prophet. Awake, you heedless people! The Imam will come to settle the account and exact vengeance for the evil acts of those who opposed him. The iron firmness of his speech will demolish the bases of fabricated religions and disgrace their deniers.

Listen to another parable concerning your deeds. Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven resembles a king who arranged a wedding for his son and sent servants to call those invited. They refused. The king sent more servants saying, 'My feast is prepared, the fattened animals have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding.' The feast, in this interpretation, signifies the Lord's wisdom now prepared and made available. The slaughtered animals signify the decorated religious codes you follow, which have been overthrown in this *Pursuit*, in the *Christian Epistle*, and in the letter concerning the Torah. The hour is ready for the Messiah's manifestation in shining light.

Those invited scattered, and some abused or killed the king's servants. When he heard it, the king was furious and sent out his forces to kill the murderers and burn their city. He then told the servants that the invited guests had proved unworthy and that they should invite others from the roads. This is the Gospel's description of you. You rejected the wisdom, killed the bearers of the invitation, and so face the destruction of your cities and houses. Your deeds repeat the deeds of your impious ancestors.

The Lord also cried: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killer of prophets and stoner of those sent to you! How often I wanted to gather your children as a bird gathers its chicks beneath its wing!' He said that he would send prophets, wise men, and scribes whom the people would persecute and kill, and concluded: 'Your house shall be left to you desolate.' You have sided with the Antichrist's faction and must bear the consequences. 'You shall not see me again until you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”' His messengers have reached you, yet you have refused their call and disobeyed his express teachings.

Think also of the parable of the ten virgins. They took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five were wise, carrying oil with their lamps; five were foolish and brought none. When the bridegroom delayed they slept. At midnight a cry announced his arrival. They arose to prepare their lamps. The foolish asked the wise for oil, for their lamps were going out. The wise answered that there would not be enough for both groups and told them to go to the merchants. While they departed, the bridegroom arrived, the prepared entered with him, and the door was shut. Later the foolish returned crying, 'Lord, open to us,' but the answer was, 'Truly, I do not know you.'

This is your situation beside the people of truth, heedless deniers. The hour approaches while you ignore it. The lamps of the religious codes will soon be extinguished, the deceivers destroyed, and the forged rules and pretended traditions exposed as fabrications. You have neglected the genuine parables and the Gospel's testimony about the Messiah's return. You stand upon the edge of the abyss and will soon drink the bitterness of the punishment described in the letter.

The herald of the Hereafter has warned the world, and the call has distinguished the good from the wicked, in obedience to the just Qāʾim, in expectation of the reward and the reckoning, and in patient endurance of the plots of the foolish and the rebellious.

I close by praising the Lord God al-Ḥākim, who has granted the nations respite despite rebellion and denial, and who gives His Guardian victory over the impostors and their false religious laws. His Guardian's light separates the darkness; the sea of true knowledge swallows up the sea of opposition and ignorance. He suffices his weak, devoted servant upon the great day when the time of the Calf and Shayṣabān comes to its end.

Completed through the grace of the Guardian of the Hereafter. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to the Qāʾim of Truth, His servant.

EPISTLE 56 — AWAKENING AND GOOD TIDINGS (AL-ĪQĀẒ WA-L-BISHĀRA)

I put my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim, exalted above the imagined nonexistence of those who wear the disguise of truth, and I seek His help through His Guardian, the Qāʾim of the religion, who knows what is concealed within intellects and souls.

From the acquired servant, submissive and obedient, to those who have distorted, changed, and neglected the truth among the people of the two Iraqs, Baghdad and its surroundings, and the people of Persia and its regions and the countries beyond them, and all the nations of past and future bearing different, related, and overlapping names. This is a reminder to those capable of hearing and understanding, an awakening for souls that have passed through descent, ascent, embodiment, and return, yet have forgotten the resurrection and repeated return of disobedient souls and the reward of obedient Unitarians. Their heedlessness is bound up with their past actions and their response to the manifestation of the Guardian.

Now then: honor, might, glory, sanctity, praise, and thanks belong to the one Lord God al-Ḥākim, exalted in His own reality above attribute, description, and limit. To describe Him by categories belonging to creation is in itself limitation and denial; to stop before that which souls cannot encompass by imagination is to acknowledge true tawḥīd and worship. Through His Guardian He has set an end to the appointed ages of the misleading laws which summon people to nonbeing, destroyed the states of the Iblīses, revived the dead, and struck down the peaks of the fabricated religious codes. Peace upon His Guardian, who guides the nations, exposes error, annuls sects, doctrines, and teachings, uncovers inventions, and makes the decisive signs clear. He stands over souls according to what they acquired through the justice of choice in earlier ages, and possesses the judgment of return, account, reward, and punishment.

Awaken, possessors of bodies empty of spirits, structures standing like the shadows of phantoms! The dark night and its days have come to an end. Its veil has been removed and the earth has shone with the light of its Lord. Its darkness has withdrawn, and truth has become clear through the wisdom of the people of the Heights [aʿrāf].

You heedless ones are captivated by the banners of the devils, obeying the Pharaohs of the ʿAbbāsid house and drawing near to them in your prayers, while you are unaware of the Resurrection and its conditions. Your sight has been blinded to the straightest road. The snares of the ill-omened one-eyed figure have reversed your understanding, fastening it to deceptive outward appearances, weakening it before the true substances and the evident signs of wisdom. Your heedlessness has turned you from the doors of truth to rebellion and kept you before the doors of error, deprivation, and apostasy.

Will you not awaken? Months and years of respite have passed. The shaking calamity overshadows you, followed by another great disaster, but you remain intoxicated and uncomprehending, drowned in the sea of ignorance and neglect. You are like wandering cattle, or dumb beings prevented from understanding and speech. You tread upon the cushions of wisdom without knowing where mercy is found or how blessings flow.

You broke the covenant and rejected the pledge, accepting theft and flight, blind to the day promised to all humanity and obstinately denying the manifestation of the Lord, the Qāʾim, the guiding Imam. Having once approached the truth, you retreated. Your souls descended from their proper activity, the fruit of perfection; they sought readiness from outside themselves, departing from truth and right measure, and pursued lower things contrary to their own nature. They clung to lower objects unlike their own nature, forgetting their spiritual distinction and neglecting the loss of the knowledge they once possessed.

Their whole being has sunk into the depths of evil. After the gain of obedience, they returned to rebellion and loss, wandering in idleness and ignorance. Too weak to conceive the meanings of truth and the substances flowing from intellect, they have become feeble through sickness, lost in confusion, and eager to return to the corrupt element. By the deliberate evil of their actions they stripped themselves of knowledge and sank into degradation. How is a world

sunk into loss to be delivered? How can a people who have returned to Iblīs after knowledge and acknowledgment of divine unity be saved, when they refuse the advice of the truthful Guide?

Awaken, people of despair, delusion, and blindness. The one-eyed Antichrist's sun has set; his moon has passed into eclipse; his stars dwindle and burn as they descend from their stations. His earth shakes and his sky approaches collapse, for the sun of realities rises from behind its veil, the moons of truth send out rays in longing for manifestation, and the stars that restore what Iblīs corrupted in the worlds shine forth.

The sea of religion has surged forth from Hajara, sparkling with the substances of divine invention, and its light has spread across the horizons through noble spiritual angels, whose ranks rise above material composition. They are free from the doctrines invented by the Iblīses of the ages and falsely imposed upon the people of truth. They are the illustrious leaders of the Heights, the Proofs of the guiding Lord, the suns of the Resurrection and the full moons. By their swords vengeance comes upon the devils of earlier cycles and their sinful followers. Their blessing answers the blood of Unitarians who suffered affliction and illuminates the regions.

In truth these are the possessors of sharp Indian swords, courage, and strong arms. Their helpers are descendants of the pure prophets and righteous tribes of truth: the light of the regions of religion, the chosen of Naphtali and Benjamin, and the descendants of Manasseh and Gad. They will exact justice for the people of truth when the guiding Qāʾim appears. He chose them with knowledge, concealed them from the world, and announced their coming on the Last Day as victory and mercy to believers.

Thus the words, 'When the promise of the Hereafter comes, We shall bring you together in one gathering,' are interpreted as the assembly of all these people to serve truth, save its adherents, and destroy lying deniers after every soul has acquired the deeds for which it is responsible and the party of apostasy has been separated from the party of fidelity.

When the morning of that radiant night breaks and its darkness disappears, the head of the associating sects will be cut off, their lofty claims overturned, and the religious codes and their structures demolished. The great sign of this announcement will be the uncovering of the founder of those codes—identified with Iblīs—and the exposure of his corrupt and base works. The nations will tremble, and the buildings of truth rise through the movements of the religious elements, distinguishing the dense physical forms from the subtle meanings of souls and making the beliefs of wicked, pretending spirits visible. Thus recompense and punishment will become manifest to bodily eyes through justice, and the peoples will be confronted with intellectual knowledge of their own souls. Genealogical links and fabricated ties will be severed, and the inventors' ranks will fall on account of their fabrications about the higher spiritual orders.

Learn from these clear proofs. Hear the cry of truth which discloses the reality of religion. Now is the time for the wanderer to look behind him and the ignorant to abandon stubbornness before the blazing heat and the great thunderbolt overwhelm them.

When the flags of the fortunate, victorious King come from the distant pass and his judgment falls upon the composite world through alteration of forms and destruction, the mill of death will grind in the lands of the opponents. The Caller will proclaim the breaking of the fast to humankind, the bonds of the devils will be broken, and the season of affliction will give way to a festival for the people of truth. The scattered followers will gather for the sacrificial feast. The flood of Resurrection will pour forth with blood, striking the house of the wicked. Its lightning and rain will bring forth the fruit of recompense. Its light will unite with its origin and eclipse the Antichrist's false suns. The fires of the resurrection will flare across the regions; the hearts of doubters, associators, apostates, and hypocrites will burn. The mixed elements will be returned to their proper origins, what is pure separated from what is turbid, and the peoples of high and low brought to their appointed ends.

Awaken, deniers, and understand if you are capable of understanding truth. The noble messengers have delivered what was entrusted to them of tawḥīd and explanation. The Guardian's proof has been established against all denominations through true demonstration. The cycle of concealment has ended and the reign of tyrannical usurpers

has run out. The gates of repentance are closed to those who have persisted in apostasy and have laid bare the wickedness concealed in their hearts.

O Lord, You know that I have delivered to the nations, insofar as I have power, the advice of tawḥīd. I acknowledge myself as Your Guardian's owned servant, the least of servants, and confess weakness and inadequacy before the grace through which You strengthen and assist. O Lord, bear witness against those who lied about the Qāʾim of the religion, rose against his pure ranks, and turned back in apostasy. Curse those who fought truth and sought to extinguish its light. Remove Your protection from those who disputed with Your Guardian through harming his followers, invented accusations against the people of truth, and made their passions their gods.

O Lord, fulfill Your promise to Your Guardian and his followers and spiritual ranks. Reveal the end of those who joined Iblīs and his soldiers in rebellion. Grant us the honor of beholding Your Guardian's chosen friends, the treasuries of Your favors. Make us acknowledge our inability to repay their rights and grant us recompense through their goodness on the day of resurrection and judgment.

You are exalted beyond the words and expressions of tongues, sanctified beyond what imaginations imagine and what minds conceive; the source of true divinity is beyond the powers by which the world assigns names and attributes. Exalted is He who makes pure intellects incapable and makes them instruments and indications of His creation. Praise belongs to Him for making known the party of truth and for the respite extending to the final limits of the peoples; thanks to His Qāʾim Guardian for establishing proof in this age as he established it in ages past.

Written on the tenth day of Dhū al-Qaʿda, in the fifteenth year of the Qāʾim of the Age.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian, His servant.

EPISTLE 57 — ON THE REALITIES: WARNING AND DISCIPLINE FOR ALL CREATION (AL-MAWSŪMA BI-L-ḤAQĀʾIQ)

I place my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim in truth, and in the One who establishes His proof through His Guardian, the Qāʾim over all creation. From the servant known as Bahāʾ al-Dīn, tongue of the believers, support of the Unitarians, the Left Wing, the fourth and lesser subordinate Rank, to all those encompassed by the Call of Truth in the pure and radiant mountain [Jabal al-Summāq] and its neighborhood, especially Antioch, mine of the precious treasure and substance, and those who inhabit al-Jazr, al-Nuqra, Jund Qinnasrīn, ʿAzāz, Aleppo, Bālis, the two Raqqas, the River Khābūr, the Jazīra, Manbij, the River of Walnuts, and the two valleys—including the River of Gold—and everyone far or near before whom this epistle is read.

Peace upon the chosen, the earliest people of tawḥīd, and the Lord's mercy and blessings upon my good and truthful brethren.

Now then: praise, majesty, grandeur, and honor belong to the worshipped Lord, and transcendence and sanctity to the existent God al-Ḥākim, who made the inability of intellects to delimit His unity a proof for those who know, imposed obedience to His Guardian upon the followers of all religions, and established him as Imam of the Call of Disclosure, separating those who responded from those who denied. He extinguishes the flames of the religious laws, overthrows what Hāmān built, and ends the bellowing of the Calf and the arrogant adversary. After exalting the Lord above the Cause of Invention, the Guardian was chosen to lead the spiritual ranks; the higher and lower among them differ in degree and elevation.

After these ranks come the Callers of Majesty, distinct from the callers of the one-eyed Antichrist. They vary in the way they depict the realities and according to their former actions, and share in the purity of their intentions and the teaching of the truths to responding Unitarian men and women. After them come those who preserve and communicate knowledge of the Gathering and Resurrection and recognize the reality of the Night of Decree. Then come the supervisors [nuqabāʾ], guardians of the realities of truth, who avoid falsehood and corruption and recognize the rights of the spiritual ranks of the Call.

After these are the responding Unitarians, to whom the special qualities of mercy have been granted, who drink from the flowing realities of wisdom. Their hearts are humbled at the sight of the rising stars blazing with light, spiritual souls shining in their union with the moons. These souls have been purified through direct contact with the realities across the ages, passed from potentiality into activity at the most noble time, and answered the spiritual ranks in obedience to the exalted Lord when the Disclosure appeared and the shaking calamity came upon apostates.

Come, pure souls, toward the breeze of the flowing springs. Soon the dawn will be announced from the side of al-Muqaṭṭam, the concealed King will appear, and the cry of the Calamity that lowers and raises will sound. The earth will shake with the Antichrist and he and his followers will be driven out. Then people of the realities will prevail through righteous deeds and the ignorant will suffer the results of the evils they acquired.

Brethren, beware of regret when the witnesses rise and the secret deeds of the doubters and the stubborn are exposed. On the day when hidden things are tested and destinies are brought before the Guardian of religion, no foot shall advance except according to what a soul has acquired of good action and knowledge. The peoples will be summoned under their Imams. Beware of drawing near to covenant-breakers and vile pretenders who set themselves up as Pharaohs. The deceivers' mirage has vanished; light illuminates the insight of Unitarians, and proof has been established for everyone who hears and sees.

Awaken, distinguished brethren, and do not rely upon ignorant, brutal men whose dispositions flow toward transient goods. Forbidden—utterly forbidden—is it for anyone marked by the sign of tawḥīd, whose belief has become distinct from those of doubters and deniers, to exploit a brother after acquiring sufficiency himself. Equally forbidden is it for a believing brother, when he knows another's need, to force him to seek assistance elsewhere. This is the rule for noble,

pure souls, the generous character appropriate to singular knowers. Whoever lies among the brethren of unity while remaining safe among the apostate opponents has turned away from tawḥīd and the Disclosure and distinguished himself through hypocrisy and broken faith.

Know that anyone who pledged his allegiance to the soldiers of rebellion, or took from responding believers the covenant of the Call of tawḥīd to the Lord al-Ḥākim and then renounced the pledge and returned to falsehood, accepted the covenant of Iblīs instead. His assemblies bear witness to his punishment, despite the fact that he was neither forced nor threatened by sword or fire. He has revealed himself as one of Iblīs's party in the earlier ages, returning to the corrupt element among his fellows. Whoever commends his speech after that apostasy or praises his conduct has separated himself from the Call of tawḥīd and entered into the same condemnation.

Know that night has departed and the morning is shining. Hold fast to what you have received from the concealed knowledge of unity and wisdom. Continue, with firm certainty, to knock at the gate of mercy, so that the knowing Creator, Originator of the worlds and Lord of humanity, may become manifest to your understanding. He prevails in absence and manifestation and rules the ages. Through His guiding servant, who rises with truth and the divine power, He recompenses souls on the Day of Judgment and Resurrection. The spiritual form anticipated by every prophet and herald will then appear, showing all humanity that their Creator truly manifests Himself at the end of the ages, despite the denial of unbelievers.

The followers of the four religious laws—the Brahmans who follow Abraham, the Jews who claim Moses, the Christians who follow Jesus, and the adherents of Muḥammad son of Abū Kabsha —all profess belief that the Creator will become manifest on the Day of Resurrection, judge humanity, tear apart the heavens, and replace the earth. Yet they do not understand the reality of the saying. At the manifestation of the divine command and will, the religious laws of their predecessors will be torn apart: those laws are the 'heavens' of the peoples. The changing of the earth signifies the dissolution of their doctrines. The 'white earth' mentioned in the expectation is the Imam of Truth, the created Intellect, the awaited Imam who unveils the covenant on the day of disclosure. This is the day on which the hidden lights become manifest and all creation is brought before the One, the Overpowering. The deceivers will be broken and doubting apostates regret their choices, while those who believed and submitted will prevail.

Listen, brethren, to the Caller of Truth. Answer the example of the patient and truthful. Help one another in righteousness and reverence; do not cooperate in wrongdoing or aggression. Await the appearance of the Great Sign. Do not isolate yourselves from truth or join another people. Time has passed, and the appointed reckoning approaches. Preserve obedience to your Guardian, maintain the conditions of tawḥīd, guard what has been entrusted to you, and remember your religion.

Doubt and associationism have entered people's hearts as rot spreads through a tree's roots. A destructive wind has swept through their religion, not their hair. Wickedness and breach of covenant have become their nature; they have turned apostasy from a possibility into action and rushed forward in groups. They compete in slander and ignorance and help one another to defame people of religion and virtue. The interval of trial has robbed them of understanding and revealed the rancor hidden within their hearts. They forgot their pledged portion of truthful speech, submitted to the Antichrist, and let deception lead them into the dwelling of defilement and error. The stain has covered their minds, and their appointed end and misery draw near. Whoever denies his Imam and Lord and makes desire his god after professing faith has lost both this world and the next through falsehood spoken against the pure chosen people.

The curse of the knowing Creator falls upon whoever transgresses his proper rank, competes falsely with the righteous spiritual ranks, or claims distinction for himself without appointment by the Guardian of Truth. No honor or degree exists in this Call except what the Guardian confers by his authorization and favor. The curse also falls upon those who invent lies about the Guardian's ranks, falsely accuse them, twist their words, raise parties in opposition, and claim the stations of the higher ranks for themselves. Through such rebellion they and their followers sink into error.

O Lord, fulfill Your promise to Your oppressed followers and cause the consequences of wrongdoing to turn upon apostates who attack those appointed by the Guardian to teach the religion. Satan made their deeds seem good to them and turned them from the right path after they had been guided.

Know, community of true Unitarians, that those who rebel against the Guardian's friends at this time are the same hypocritical deniers who, in previous cycles, recognized the Imam of the Age and then disowned him. Do not listen to them in uncertainty after knowledge, or accept the devils' dubious arguments after a covenant firmly established. Do not rely on false resemblances or their deeds: they are the deceivers, and through their speech they deny the Guardian of Truth.

Know also that the written declaration or undertaking which the servant of religion directed to be made among the children and brethren, freeing them from the perplexity of doubters and tyrants, was drawn up with knowledge of his present and future circumstances. He knew of the approaching interval of absence and trial. He did not neglect the covenant of the Proof of the Guardian of the Age. He wrote the undertaking partly to conceal the covenant while adversaries were ascendant, for he was among those traveling and had no stable abode of migration. Had he openly distributed the full covenant to all the Responders as he delivered the undertaking, the Callers would have become indistinguishable from the pretenders, and opponents would have used it against them. Thus he acted in accordance with a matter known to those among you who understood it. The Guardian knows better what you hold within yourselves.

Beware of censuring what has been explained in this written document or accepting excuses and doubts that lead to further confusion. Truth deserves to be followed, and suspicion deserves to be cast aside.

As for Ḥumayd, ʿAskar, Ghannām, and those resembling them—treacherous, rebellious men—the period of trial has united them in error and betrayal. The guiding Call has severed their claim to spiritual kinship. Though their bodies and intellectual dispositions differ, they have joined in innovation, opposition, and slander, inheriting blindness and deafness through their actions. Iblīs has played with their minds and led them into grievous delusion through their breaking of the covenant of the Call.

If they repent of the unbelief and error they have committed, abandon what they were forbidden, leave the road of rebellion, cast off pride and tyranny, and ask the Guardian of religion to pardon their fault, they can return to the ranks of the peaceful Unitarians. They will possess the same standing as the virtuous and pure, and we shall intercede with the Guardian of Truth for their earlier offenses. Our prayers for them and for all Unitarians continue by night and day.

If, however, they persist in denial and hypocrisy, exhibit rebellion and flight, refuse the command given by the lowly servant and Left Wing, and turn away from its permitted, clear water, then they will encounter the closed watch-post and the blazing fire. Whoever follows them in apostasy shares their condition; the appointed place of decision and judgment is where we shall meet them.

Know that the waves of doubt and associationism have risen in the seas of corrupt souls, stirring up their impurities. Yet the winds of true life come from the noble right side of the Mount, and divine lights are rising while the ill-omened one-eyed star falls. The hour approaches for separating the ignorant from those possessing knowledge. When the lights flower on the Mountain of Light and the fire of truth spreads to the horizons, the wandering star of the realities will shine. Where then can the apostates flee from the Guardian of Truth? When the Caller summons from the mountain and the world glows at the appearance of the guiding Qāʾim, the near angels will bear witness, the apostates will be recompensed, the faithful will prevail, and the doubters and hypocrites will lose.

Do not be like people who received divine favor and then denied its blessings, forgetting what had been entrusted to them. The person who forgets the Guardian of Truth loses the truth itself and testifies against himself by his deeds. He imagines that his devil guides him, while the devil in fact deceives and destroys him.

Brethren, hold fast to the luminous examples and beware of turning back. Use this period of respite well and draw near to your Guardian through righteous actions, before the records are folded, the pens dry, the doors of mercy close, speech is cut off, and the gates of wrath open against those who insisted upon rebellion. These are the first signs of the rising of the witnesses and the clearest indications that the great guiding announcement approaches.

Brethren, I have fulfilled the duty of admonition and advice, made the matter plain, and directed you with convincing arguments. The messenger's obligation is only to communicate openly; I put my trust in the Guardian of Truth and seek help from him.

O Lord, the horn of Satan has risen: humble him. The ranks of apostates and covenant-breakers have grown: reduce them. They have revealed the malice once hidden in their hearts and publicly declared opposition and stubbornness. They have fought us with weapons from a direction in which we thought ourselves secure, and returned to the worship of the Calf and the Buffalo. O Lord, to You alone is our appeal and our complaint. Life and death belong to You, and through Your Guardian we plead and hope. Show us the truth of Your promise through the uprooting of the tree of opposition. Bless Your pure followers who bear witness and grant peace upon them.

The composition of this epistle was completed in Jumādā al-Ākhira, the seventeenth year of the Qāʾim of the Age, who takes vengeance upon associationists and tyrants.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim alone, and thanks to His servant, the guiding Imam.

EPISTLE 58 — THE HEALING OF THE SOULS OF THE UNITARIANS (AL-SHĀFIYA LI-NUFŪS AL-MUWAḤḤIDĪN)

The letters of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful” signify the ranks of the Qāʾim of religion. Praise belongs to God, who has made the truth a refuge for whoever adheres to its obligations and covenants, and made abasement the lot of whoever denies the rights of His religion and the duties owed to its ranks. Through the truth He has ordained the curse upon accursed Iblīs and his soldiers. Peace from the glorious and mighty Lord upon the Imam who stands for tawḥīd and points toward Him through the true transcendence and stripping away of attributes; and the Lord's mercy and blessings upon the springs of wisdom, His friends in every renewed age.

Now then: the tawḥīd of our Lord—exalted are His favors—is the greatest object of search, the most precious treasure, and the most honorable acquisition. It is the fruit of the religious devotions practiced in vanished ages and the just balance by which heaven and earth are established. Through sound tawḥīd pure souls attain eternal reward and ultimate perfection; through failure to attain it, corrupted souls remain in punishment, shame, and an evil destination.

Tawḥīd of our Lord—glorious is His power—is the first of obligations and the reality of religions. As one who pointed to His unity and declared Him free of the qualities of His creatures and servants said: the beginning of religion is knowledge of God; the perfection of knowing Him is the completion of His tawḥīd; and the perfection of His tawḥīd is to deny Him the attributes of created beings. Sound intellects testify that the attribute is other than the one described, and the one described is other than the attribute. Knowledge, however, concerns what has been witnessed and seen.

The written text, in the section concerning the Imam, says: “They recognize God's favor and then deny it.” They recognize the one being pointed toward insofar as He exists, yet they do not know the reality of tawḥīd. They reject the favor that God granted them because their intellects have not grasped the completeness and order of unity, nor how to declare Him free of the attributes of creatures and servants. The adherents of all religious sects admit a Worshipped One, yet deny Him when summoned to knowledge of actual existence. They admit that they have a Maker and Creator; when called to recognize His unity, however, they deny His existence.

All those religious communities make worship obligatory for themselves, hoping through it for reward and fleeing punishment. Intellect decisively judges and bears witness that reward cannot be established without knowledge of the one who rewards. Creation needs to know the Rewarder more urgently than it needs to know His reward.

Moreover, adherents of the earlier laws and doctrines, and all who claim to turn toward the unity of the Lord, regard their most distinctive act of tawḥīd as denying Him quality, boundary, description, bodily vision, and related things. But their denial of these properties amounts, to pointing toward His nonexistence: they say that eyes cannot encompass Him. According to their own logic, if He does not exist, there is no excellence in their eyes' inability to encompass Him; their vision fails only because of His absence. And if He exists, why should they claim that seeing eyes cannot perceive Him?

By God, the highest proof of His power and the most powerful demonstration of His divinity is that He be existent among His creatures. Yet each party declares His unity and transcendence only to the degree of knowledge and illumination it has received. If our Lord exists—as ordinary discourse permits us to say—then the one who declares Him free of attributes, limits, and descriptions *while affirming His existence* performs a noble act of transcendence and earns lasting reward through penetrating understanding. In contrast, the one whose understanding is too coarse and who likens the Lord to creatures and servants is liable to punishment. If the Lord were nonexistent, proof against creation would collapse, and all would have an excuse for giving up the search for truth.

This agrees with words transmitted among people: God does not hide Himself from His creatures; rather, their own deeds hide Him from them. Another saying is: if they truly knew God they would not worship Him. And the written revelation declares: “How many signs in the heavens and earth do they pass by, turning away from them! Most of them do not believe in God without associating partners with Him.”

I have thus presented, concerning the assertion of the Lord's existence in language that can be spoken, enough to satisfy a person who understands the meanings and is granted success in grasping them. I do not ascribe any of this to myself or claim that I explain it by my own power and strength. Whatever in this epistle is correct and eloquently expressed comes from the blessing of the Qāʾim of the Age, the Guardian of favor and beneficence. Whatever is mistaken or badly said falls upon me alone. I seek pardon from the one who knows my inner thoughts better than I do, and beg him to guide me to the soundest and straightest road.

As for declaring the Lord free of attributes, His greatness is beyond what pens can trace or tongues can encompass with speech. Only someone who has been granted the good promise by the Guardian of his age and has lifted his gaze toward the highest assembly can make some indication of it. That is so when the person's intention has been purified of doubt and his inner disposition toward the brethren of religion has become sound, in accordance with his rank and degree in transcendence and abstraction. People must differ in rank; this difference makes just reward and punishment possible according to their true deeds.

I say, then, that all the scholars of earlier times—the logicians, philosophers, astrologers, those who claim the Twelve Imams, the followers of earlier laws and schools, the hostile literalists and traditionists—remain within the degrees of their own sciences. Some speak of Firsts and Seconds and the arrangement of expressions and their meanings. Others speak of heavenly spheres, governing bodies, generated beings, and elemental mothers. Others speak of Gabriel, Michael, and the spiritual angels. Still others speak of transmitted reports and things known by hearing. Each party believes these are higher realities and that the human being stands below them, since he is only one of the things produced in the world.

Yet if a rational person employs his thought upon their realities, he finds that the things generated by those principles consist only of animals, dead or living, inert matter, and plants. Were all religious communities to strive to invent so much as one letter added to or subtracted from the order of what I have described, the visible facts would defeat them and demonstration would prove their inability. Each of them would have to concede that what they call the higher causes are, in their conception, the divine things themselves.

We therefore ask every one of these parties to judge by its own intellect, its own objects of devotion, and the principles it treats as real. By what has humanity been distinguished above all other generated kinds, and raised until it joins the highest degree of originating? We oblige them, through what they themselves acknowledge of higher lights, divine truths, and spiritual sciences, to answer that humanity surpasses the other created kinds through the powers it has acquired. The truth deserves to be followed.

We ask them further about the reality of this bringing-into-existence: how does it become established, who laid its foundation, who prepared it, who is its source and who unfolds its consequences? The evident truth and a sound demonstration compel them, according to this argument, to answer: it is the Imam of the Age, the one who openly declares and explains, in every season and time. Such a matter cannot be accomplished without an intermediary. For this reason the people of the religious laws await that one, and profess their belief in him.

We also ask them to compare two creations. The first is the spiritual creation, the reality of the things to be served and the just balance for those of earth and heaven. The second is the corporeal creation, bodies, implements, instruments, composite limbs, and lights attached to dense, inert things. Which of the two has the better claim to association with divine things? They fall short of answering or fail to understand what is right. All things, however, can be divided into the excellent and the inferior, and the inferior follows the excellent.

These are two limits or ends. The end of religion is the Imam, the possession of our worshipped and transcendent Lord; the end of physical objects and compounds is below His servants, the ranks. Everything to which those scholars point consists of bodies, natural dispositions, things receiving those dispositions, substances, and lifeless matter. The human being, by contrast, has been joined to what is higher through nearness to the eternal, discovery of the truth, and connection with subtle spiritual matters. Bodily objects stand within his comprehension because of the divine matters

with which he is joined. I have clarified this form of tawḥīd and demonstrated it through the favor of the Guardian of blessing, the Imam who stands for truth and extends mercy to his friends.

If an objector says, “When you count the visible manifestations in all past ages, you multiply the deity, deny Him, and associate others with Him; but if you dismiss those manifestations without proof, you disbelieve, reject what has been plainly seen, and abolish the truth. Tell me the right answer,” we reply: tawḥīd of the Lord is not achieved by looking with the eyes or by the words and expressions of speech. The one given success in it employs his intellect upon the reality of unity; his soul becomes pure and ascends to true transcendence. He frees himself from enclosing past ages within his conception, neither admitting a plurality of deities nor forming images of numbers in the One worshipped. Instead he reaches transcendence and abstraction, free from denial, comparison, and limitation. This saying refreshes the hearts of those who understand and polishes the souls of those who possess unity and knowledge.

I now address those who believe in the Imamate, those encompassed by the noble Call of Truth, and judge them by what was taught in the honored gatherings in reference to our age. It was said there that when the Qāʾim appears he stands for oneness, and after his appearance there is no further religious work in his time. Another gathering said: “Through tawḥīd I knew all things; it was not through things that I came to know tawḥīd.” Yet another taught: “Tawḥīd is a gift from the One to the Unitarians.”

According to those who teach the Imamate, the One in every age and time is the Imam, and what he entrusts of religion to the world is truth, for he is intellect and the source of understanding for those who take refuge in him, withdrawing from misleading passions and keeping the straight way. Hence every person of discernment should know that the One from whom tawḥīd is a gift to the Unitarians is the Imam, the servant of our Lord—exalted be His remembrance. He is the Qāʾim who stands for oneness: that is, who summons people to the tawḥīd of our Lord and declares our Lord beyond comparison. He is the Qāʾim after whose appearance no further work remains in his age.

Here lies the error of those who deny our Lord and His ranks. They fail to distinguish Him from His servants. They associate others with Him, arrogantly oppose and deny the guiding Qāʾim, and resist the truth through disbelief. They neither worship the Lord by affirming and declaring His unity and transcendence, nor know the just Imam through whom they might approach knowledge of the Lord and obey Him. Instead they hurl accusations at the Imam and his ranks, refuse him, and turn from justice toward oppression, folly, and ignorance. This is the cycle of Resurrection: deeds come out into the open, the intentions of those who profess reality are uncovered, and the previously concealed rebellion of the covenant-breakers becomes plain.

When we examined the beliefs of all who speak of worshipping the One, we found humanity divided into three classes. The first seeks Him through sight and direct sensory vision. The second seeks Him through words, dialectic, and verbal propositions. The third denies that these modes can encompass Him and affirms His unity through intellect, as expressed by the saying that tawḥīd is the gift of the One to the Unitarians. When asked what that gift is, the reply is “the final intellect.”

The first class consists of the people of revelation and religious laws. The sensory eye perceives a thing in its outward form, neither adding nor subtracting; likewise they adhere to the form of what was revealed. The second class, seeking unity through words and dialectic, consists of the interpreters, who add and subtract in the way that expressions and verbal formulations can add and subtract.

The third class consists of those who affirm the unity of our Lord in their hearts and declare Him transcendent through sound thought and intellect. They do not derive unity from visual shapes or pictures, or from verbal containment and enumeration. Through sound thinking they affirm it, declare Him free of everything imagined by the first two classes, and deny that He is nonexistent. Without the denial and comparison made by those two classes, there would be no distinction belonging to the people of true unity and transcendence. If the Lord were nonexistent, no proof would stand against negligent unbelievers and innovators; if He existed only in the manner the others imagine, all adherents of the laws would be equal in tawḥīd.

God Most High said: “Are those who know equal to those who do not know? Only those possessed of understanding take heed.” And He said: “You see them looking at you, but they do not perceive.” This indicates the spiritual ranks while declaring the existent and powerful One beyond them. As for the hostile literalists and traditionists, the references in scripture to a hand, an eye, and a side suffice as indications of existence and signs pointing to the one Worshipped.

The challenger continued, in the manner of examination, to put the Possessor of Unveiling to the test through outward presentation and description. Then a company of the noble appeared: they refrained from finding fault in fellowship and from tale-bearing, attained the utmost generosity, and received those of the intimate companions appointed to them. They proceeded toward what was unseen, directing their faces toward it, with mercy set before them.

As for what came in the Gatherings of Wisdom, pointing to our own time—what has passed and what lies ahead—consider what was recited in another gathering: “When the house had been established among the company who had set out, they disclosed what had already been done. They counted those who had purified themselves and those believers who had gathered to their Lord; the light and radiance that came upon them increased. They began openly to confront the hypocrites and waited for permission until the outward command and its forerunner came to them, gladdening the eyes and soothing the breast.” These things have been witnessed and seen. Those who carried them out are known, as is the command by which they were made manifest.

I have completed the argument I intended and conveyed what I had to say. I have summoned people to our exalted Lord with clear signs and demonstrated wisdom. It is as the saying speaks of a day when a caller calls to a strange and unrecognized thing: you have seen and heard it; you were summoned to tawḥīd and rejected it. You stood before the truth, denied it, and maligned it.

Come, then, believers, to the Qāʾim who upholds manifest truth! Come to the Judge of the Day of Judgment! Come to what you have been promised with certainty of sight! Come, thirsty ones, to sweet water and the true flowing spring! The approaching Hour has approached, and none but God can uncover it. Do you not see those who deny the truth wandering in idle discourse and play? Long shall they weep while they are silent.

Do you marvel at this discourse, laugh, and fail to weep, while you remain heedless? Prostrate yourselves to God and worship. The truthful messenger's task is only clear proclamation. Praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds; peace upon the Qāʾim of Truth, the Guardian of religion, and mercy upon his pure and near ranks. He suffices His weak and acquired servant, and through Him I seek help. He suffices me, the best Helper and Protector. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, who has neither partner nor another worshipped beside Him.

EPISTLE 59 — LETTER TO THE ARABS (RISĀLAT AL-ʿARAB)

I place my trust in our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above nonexistence, and give thanks to His servant, the Qāʾim of religion and Guide of nations. From the obedient, submissive servant and warner, the possession of the Imam who stands over the peoples through limits and distinctions, and breaks, dissolves, and changes the laws of the Iblīses:

To everyone in Lower and Upper Syria, in Upper Egypt, the Ḥijāz, and the land of Yemen, to the people of selection and fidelity, and in the Jazīra and the two Iraqs, the farther and the nearer; to the chiefs of the Arabs, possessors of ranks, stations, distinction, and lineage, different as their ancestries may be. I mean Ḥassān ibn Mufarrij and his clan; Rumāḥ and Jābir, brothers in tawḥīd and custodians of its trust; Rāfiʿ ibn Abī al-Layl, the accomplished lord whose action accords with his felicity; Jāmiʿ ibn Zāʾida and his family; Daffāʿ ibn Tibhān and his relatives and companions; ʿUmayra ibn Jābir, his family and brothers; Shabīb ibn Waththāb and those of his region; the sons of al-Musayyab, particularly Qirwāsh and his descendants; another Rāfiʿ and his people, consummate in lordship; everyone belonging to Khafāja, in particular the house of Thimāl and their emir, sound in action and purpose; and every other Arab.

Peace upon whoever returns to the truth and its straight road, looks with the eye of reality upon the stations of the patient, truthful, and submissive, and elevates his aims toward the signs by which the people are distinguished and divided. Such a person recognizes the structures of the ages and what takes place in each time by the Creator's command, including the abrogation of religious communities. He recognizes the power of his God and Maker, perceives the intention of his Creator with fairness, submits to His commands and prohibitions, and uses his sound intellect to profit by the time allowed him. He rescues his own soul and family from negligence and forgetfulness; he seeks for his soul honor and sovereignty on Resurrection Day and rejects the teachings of the Iblīses.

Now then: praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim, exalted beyond the nonexistence of conjectures and difficulties, removed from the weakness of originated and created things, alone in His own existence among the divine stations. He establishes His proof over creation and justice among them by the true manifestation of Himself; He defeats the doubt that leads to denial and the abolition of truth and distinguishes the people who believe from the lying party of alteration. All creatures stand equally before the demand to seek the Existent One, but pure souls surpass one another in transcendence and obedience to the One they worship.

Awaken, sleepers! The ages and generations have passed; the trumpet has sounded, graves have been overturned, and what is inside hearts and breasts has been brought forth. Yet you still drown in the darkness of ignorance, rejoicing in what false time has ripened for you and neglecting the terrors of its reversals.

Awake, heedless sleepers! The appointed measure has reached its completion, and your allotted days and times have run out. You have accumulated what your former actions earned and received the consequences of your deeds. The warner has come, the sincere bearer of good news has called aloud, yet you have blinded yourselves to the truth and its proof. Kaʿb and ʿAwf have wandered away from the proper religion and its road. The proof stood against you from what you yourselves knew, but you cast aside the wisdom delivered to you by faithful, virtuous witnesses, who had been tested at the hands of the most depraved and unsuccessful one. His error, unbelief, arrogance, and rebellion were a warning to you. This is an admonition for the heedless, an explanation of the path you were shown, and a rebuke which establishes proof against you all.

You abandoned the road of truth in favor of associationism and obstinacy. Your hearts came to agreement in spite, suspicion, unbelief, and denial. You listened to the doctrines of the vilest nations, who are like cattle and sheep. How could this happen to people proud of their ancestors and of their powers of understanding and discrimination? Your intellects have become subordinate to the vulgar and to coarse, hard-hearted wrongdoers. They belong to a cursed, short-lived city; soon their bodies and necks will be given over to the sword and punishment. In every age they opposed the Imams and rose against the people of truth alongside unjust rulers, rebellious sinners, and the supporters of the Antichrist. They are like the remnants of ʿĀd, Thamūd, the Companions of the Well, and the people of earlier disobedience.

Expect, miserable assembly, the ruin of dwellings and, after a little while, the destruction of households and erasure of their traces. The moment approaches for the Qāʾim to manifest himself and exalt religion, and for the nations of associationists and deniers to perish. When the one-eyed Antichrist of Resurrection opens his mouth and stirs up his followers, he and his party will perish along with the offspring of al-Qabbās, through their failure to understand the decisive passages of the Gospel and their obedience to the accursed one-eyed deceiver.

When the foundations of Fusṭāṭ shake toward collapse, a false claimant will appear there—a frenzied, infatuated man who falsely claims descent from Kutāma and lays claim to the rank of Imamate. He will be called the Unique One, the Messiah, the son of the perfect and advising Lord, and the true eternal hypostasis. He will persist in hypocrisy, deception, deviation, and corruption, and retreat under the weight of what he has committed. His appearance will fulfill the signs of the false Messiah and the impostor, as foretold in the wisdom of men of understanding. He will be the last of the Pharaohs of the period of interruption and one of the first clear portents for certain believers.

Good news to those who possess patience and truth! The scandal of creation has been exposed, falsehood separated from truth, and the deception of the wicked made visible. That impostor and his party have left the company of the pure and descended into pride and condemnation. He and those who follow him have become enemies of truth and fled from service to it. A foolish imitator has become devilish under the whisperings that afflict him, as did his deranged brother. Then those who belong to the precinct of truth shall await the signs of the noble possessors of the Heights. The letter nūn will curve and its stroke join the kāf. Those in the heavens and earth shall be struck with terror; nursing women will forget their infants, and the roof erected by the Iblīses will be broken at the arrival of the appointed Day.

Where can the opposing Arab Pharaohs find refuge from the calamity that burdens them? Their deeds will bring them to burning fire. Their ranks will be scattered; they will turn and flee. They will be like an evil tree torn from the surface of the earth, with no abiding root. Time has allowed them to flower and blossom only as a temporary trial, because of their ingratitude toward the Imam, their associationism, and the violation of religion's sanctity. They dared to liken creatures to the Creator, imitated the presumptions of earlier nations, and claimed the power of thunder, pelting, stoning, and earthquakes that belongs to Him alone. They intruded upon matters concealed from them and rushed to claim knowledge they did not have; the prophets and truthful witnesses denounced their wrongdoing.

But, by God, the auspicious signs of success have flowered through the noble deeds of the great lord Abū al-ʿAlāʾ Rāfiʿ ibn Abī al-Layl. He has stood to spare the blood of the Unitarians, defending the weakened company with his wealth and person. By God, in his elevation he has risen to the very heights of the heavens, and his station has joined those of the angels brought near. He will gather the fruit of his striving in the presence of the Lord of Truth, and his happiness will be completed in this world and the next. The time has ripened for the separation of what is false and its removal, and the sign of truth is becoming visible as its curtain is lifted.

Where now can the Pharaohs go? No! There is no refuge. Night has retreated and departed, and the pure morning has appeared with clear light. What calamity will strike humankind when the sword is drawn and the religions are brought to account, when the people of sincerity, truthfulness, and certainty prevail and the Creator's command makes purity visible, free of disobedience!

Take heed, Arabs, from the decisive signs, and answer the Caller of Truth before the Day of Appointment. Answer before the mouths and hearts are sealed and the connections of the lying bearers of sins are broken. When the sun of realities rises from the course of the spheres, earth and the tightly woven heavens are folded, the Qāʾim of Truth emerges from the veils, and those sought from among all creation are exposed. The signs shine forth, the stars depart from their familiar courses, circles and triangles interlace, and sparks fly out to change times and seasons. Their former effects are undone at the rise of the light of truth, whose rays burn the Antichrists of ages and the Iblīses of intervals.

The warner has discharged his responsibility, the careful bearer of good tidings has advised the nations, and the messenger's obligation is nothing beyond clear communication. Praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds; prayers

upon the just Imam, the Qāʾim of religion, and peace upon his exalted ranks. He is sufficient for us and the best Helper and Protector.

This epistle was completed through the favor of our Lord alone, on Tuesday, the tenth of Rajab, in the year four hundred and twenty-two (422 AH). Our Lord suffices us and is the best Helper and Protector.

EPISTLE 60 — LETTER TO YEMEN (RISĀLAT AL-YAMAN)

I place my trust in our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted beyond what is called essence; and I seek His help through obedience to His Guardian, the Qāʾim who recompenses the nations.

From the acquired servant, the moderate and penitent one, the warner who summons people to worship the Lord of presentation and reckoning, the possession of the Master of recompense and punishment, weak in comparison with the higher ranks and doors who preceded him: to all those whom the land of Yemen gathers together, though their tongues, peoples, and ancestries differ; to everyone who knows his Guide, returns to him from his former sins and errors, submits with the submission of those certain of his wisdom and its perfectly ordered meaning, and receives light from his teaching and direction from his proofs and signs.

Now then: praise belongs to our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above the worship expressed by tongues and the pictures formed by intellects, whose divinity is pure of the thoughts and fantasies mingled with the imaginings of men and their words. His majesty transcends finite existence, and His power is higher than nonexistent absence. The greatness of His divinity is free of the inventions of falsehood and denial.

He manifested His veil to establish justice among humankind, and established a binding proof over creation through the Call to tawḥīd that flows from the command of the lordly guiding Imam. He made that Imam, through the gift of his wisdom, the one who cuts through and dissolves the statutes of the Iblīses and who defeats the ornamented deceptions with which they have disguised themselves before the nations.

He brought forth His Proof before the people to excuse and to warn them, reminding corrupt souls of what they have acquired and revealing their stubbornness, denial, and unbelief. He recompenses pure souls through their acknowledgment of what physical sight has not encompassed, their explanation of the truth, their profession of unity and their confession; and he rewards obedient embodied beings with delights, gardens, and rivers. His peace rests on His lofty ranks, faithful friends, and followers who have endured the test in the path of His sovereignty.

Wake up, certain community and favored remnant! Take the greatest possible share of obedience to the Guardian of Truth, the Qāʾim and Imam. Reflect upon what has been placed before you and upon the admonitions specially entrusted to you from the pure shaykh Abū al-Fatḥ Manṣūr al-Khaṭīb. You already possess the beginnings of wise counsel and reminder, and indications through which you may be guided to certain recognition of the Qāʾim of Truth.

Know, you who are addressed and favored, that the conclusions of matters are contained in their beginnings. What comes first establishes what follows, the second and the third. Therefore listen with understanding to the sincere Caller of Truth. Abandon heedlessness and distinguish yourselves by obedience to the guiding Imam who stands for truth. The signs for the reckoning have been raised; the affairs of the lying Antichrist have reached the point at which punishment and vengeance await them. Across the regions his followers wander without direction and sink, struggling, in the sea of error.

The great Iblīs has enslaved them in ways they know and ways they do not know. They obey his commands and obey his prohibitions. May God defeat them in the error to which they are turned! He has kindled the fire of his falsehood to burn and has sent his deceivers throughout the horizons to attack the people of truth, sensing that his appointed time has nearly run its course. He has placed the poison of his pollution upon the fangs of his followers and sharpened the weapons of whoever befriends him.

These followers are like ravenous tigers and predatory beasts toward the friends of truth, or venomous serpents and vipers. They pursue ancient hatreds which their natures have carried across times and generations; with their own polluted dispositions they nourish what is already passing away and perishing. Blinded, they suppose that others are the deceived and ruined ones.

Deliverance, deliverance to the people of insight and understanding! Ruin, ruin to stubborn, negligent fools! The shells have opened to disclose the hidden pearl of the noble leaders of the peoples, and the spring of life flows with its preserved, pure water for those who drink. Through their auspicious manifestation the realities represented by the Corner and the Station appear. The obedient must submit and surrender. Allegories cease to hold their former place when those represented by them manifest themselves. The symbols and false analogies of deceivers are exposed by the appearance of the noble lords, and the structures of religious law are overthrown by the emergence of spiritual rulers.

Wake up! The steeds of the possessors of the Heights pull upon their reins for the race, led by their noble riders. The nūn of being, once distant from the kāf, has drawn close and bends to join it. The caller of Resurrection has cried out; the time has come for the rising of those in graves and tombs, and the trumpet has been blown for the third time.

Awake, people of Yemen, for you are the ones addressed as humankind. Remove the veil of confusion from your souls; respond to the Call of the Creator, return to your Maker, and slay the *beliefs* of associationism and despair. Do not intend to offer something foul, while you know what you are concealing; the Lord of Truth knows what is hidden. Follow, righteous company and excellent remnant, the obedience practiced by the pure Unitarians who came before you. The foundations of the praiseworthy religion belong to them, and they were the first to seek the sweet water and the refuge of the guided.

Take advantage, pure brethren, of what time and age have placed within your reach and of the opportunity and strength given to you before mouths are sealed, speech is cut off, scrolls are rolled up, and pens are dried. By the truth, the stars of the Antichrists have become dim, their heavens stripped away, and their earth folded up. The very event they denied has overtaken them, and they have drawn upon themselves the wrath of God because of their disobedience toward His Guardian and their aggression against the truth.

Then the winds of ruin and disorder will blow over them, earthquakes and convulsions will crush them, and time will meet them with trials and calamities prepared by their earlier works. Its terrors and marvels will emerge to confront them. When the seas of religion rise with the waves of insight, and justice passes from possibility into action by the movement of the command among the possessors of the regions, the veils will be lifted from the Guardian. Creation and the worlds will be exposed by the symbols of scripture explained to them from the beginning. Tyrants and idols will fall upon their faces and chins, and the solitary human being will be asked: “Where can you flee?” No, there is no refuge for the Iblīses!

When the sharp sword is drawn from its scabbard, the earth flashes with fire and sparks, and the sky becomes dusky with vapour and smoke; the horizons blacken from the greatness of that Day. The regions become dark as the offspring of Shayṣabān perish. The sun of the accursed Antichrist is eclipsed and sinks into the sea of opposition and error. The flood of the sword overwhelms the covenant-breakers and apostates, bringing down what this author calls the “distillery of unbelief”: Mecca, the house of injustice.

At that time the Antichrists throughout the world will perish, and their ruin will complete the decreed term. The deep darkness that concealed the morning of truth will be cleared away, and the sun of religion and full moon will rise. Justice will manifest at the appearance of the guiding Qāʾim and Imam, who stands for recompense over spirits and souls, while the power of our Lord, the holy God al-Ḥākim, remains transcendent.

Awaken, people of Yemen! By God, it is as though the promised event has already happened. Reflect, pure brethren, upon the signs and arguments made clear to you, and consider the truths and explanations placed within this written epistle. Through it the proof is established over you as it has been established over every religious community.

Renew obedience in place of altered and misleading doctrines. Do not blind yourselves to the realities of religion, lest your negligence cause you to associate with the Iblīses and devils, who will obstruct the truest and most trustworthy road and turn you back upon your heels. The truthful messenger has no duty except clear proclamation.

O Lord, Your generosity knows that I have advised all creation, and Your majesty witnesses that I have proclaimed the Call to unity in obedience to the Guardian of Truth. O Lord, fulfill the promise You made to Your Guardian for the sake of his friends who have endured their trial, and uproot the stars of those who have multiplied corruption and destruction, brought hidden hostility into the open, and declared their opposition to Your Guardian.

O Lord, You are the refuge in whom we seek deliverance. To You belong our complaint and our appeal, now and at the last. Through his rank with You, bring us the truth of Your promises of salvation, and grant us respite within Your mercy from the proud, naked Pharaohs of religion. You have power to do so, and You are worthy to answer this supplication.

Written in the last ten days of Shawwāl, in the seventeenth year of the Qāʾim of the Age, whose appearance is awaited for the destruction of the one-eyed Antichrist. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian, His servant.

EPISTLE 61 — LETTER TO INDIA: REMEMBRANCE AND COMPLETION FOR THE GUIDED, EXCELLENT SHAYKH (RISĀLAT AL-HIND)

I put my trust in our Lord, the truthful God who judges with truth and is worshipped in the tongues of all creation. From the acquired servant who speaks clearly and brings truthful good news, the possession of the Guardian of the Age through disclosure and the absence of testing; the Guardian who stands for the guidance of the party of truth, and whose proof opens the clearest road to tawḥīd: to the rightly directed shaykh, refuge of the Unitarians, the well-guided and generous one, the wise man granted assistance and success in speech and action, Ibn Sūmar Rājpāl.

Peace upon you and the company of guidance gathered around you: the Unitarians in the land of India and Hindustan, who await the rising of the banner of truth and the manifestation of the Qāʾim of the Age, who offer their very lives in the struggle against the people of falsehood and the Iblīses of religions. The exception among them is ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Layth, who has cut the bonds connecting him with his pure Unitarian ancestors and, in folly and opposition, set himself against the command of our Lord, the God of the worlds.

Now then: praise belongs to our Lord, the God who alone possesses the meaning of divine manifestations, above what minds can encompass or logical expressions delimit. Nonexistence is the opposite of existence, and it is a path that draws people toward rejection, the abolition of reality, and denial.

Exalted is our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, greater than spouses and children, unlike shapes and rivals, existing beyond the conjectures of absence and above the expression of eternity or primordial antiquity. He made His Guardian, the Qāʾim of Truth, a beacon revealing tawḥīd, guiding those illumined by the light of his wisdom toward transcendence and abstraction, and preserving through his proofs those who are sincere from denial and imitation.

Our Lord's mercy and blessings are upon whoever lifts his eyes to the heaven of realities, furnished with constellations, raises his sight toward the exalted assembly, and trusts the one who announces the true emergence. Such a person has attained the furthest reach of origination, realized the stations of the bounds of nobility in honor, exaltation, and elevation, and recognized the true nature of that union, arrives in understanding at the end of numbers, and renounces the filth of opponents and enemies for the sake of his Guardian.

You are the worthy successor of the men of ancient distinction, the one who carries forward the reality of the trust held by pure, glorious predecessors. I mean Abāyā, your grandfather, after Dāwūd the Elder; then Hūjayda, eldest of the sons, Hurayṭa, Abū ʿAlī, and Kaysā, the last of the individuals.

Awaken your Unitarian people, eminent Rājpāl, and treat the condition of Dāwūd the Younger, whom the fortunate one has released from imprisonment and confinement, following your establishment of proof against his nephew ʿAbd Allāh and against all the people of Multān. Let those who profess divine transcendence, tawḥīd, and certainty distinguish themselves from the faction of delusion, opposition, licentiousness, and rebellion. Success for you and through you in this undertaking comes only from obedience to the Guardian of Truth, the one who abrogates religious laws. I ask his mercy for whatever shortcomings or weakness have occurred, seeking pardon, forgiveness, and remission.

Bring them to repentance, rightly guided and assisted shaykh, and wake them! The call to declare the unity and transcendence of our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, has spread abroad. What you were promised has become known across the horizons. What your ancestors believed would take place has passed from possibility into actuality; all the adherents of truth were awaiting its arrival.

The Guide of Truth has come, his signs have appeared, and his proofs and tokens have spread through the world. Do not be deceived by the ornamented language and opposition of the failed Ibn al-Layth. He has stripped off the religion of his fathers and ancestors and stands upon the brink of the collapsing bank of Gehenna, clothed in conspicuous shame and a contemptible disposition.

Awaken him, excellent and successful wise man, and establish the proof against him by the message that has reached you and continues to reach you. The pillars and foundations of the earth have already shaken before the manifestation; its winds shift between blowing and stillness. Say to his followers, the people of error: How long will you remain deaf and mute? Graves have been overturned and what hearts and breasts concealed is now obtained and brought to light. Yet you play in the darkness of your ignorance, rebel in the concealment of your delusion, and never turn away from the destructive errors of your beliefs. Do you think you will be neglected? How evil your supposition! You have banded together in doubt, associationism, and unbelief, and joined hands in negligence, deception, and stubbornness.

Your natures have mingled with the nature of the failed man and fallen into a corrupted condition. Their spirits have mixed with his in the filth of denying divinity. They reject the truth by fleeing from servitude, and turn away from the Middle Servant, the center of praise and virtues. They attach themselves instead to the two condemned roads, the home of opposition and disgrace. Their original disposition has departed from the path of divine origination, and the corrupted element draws them back from the truth into doubt and relapse. Their souls have become ready for the furthest reaches of evil, weakened by disease and its misery, unable to receive intelligible forms or to clarify meanings and recognize the true natures of things.

They deny the tawḥīd of our Lord, the Almighty God al-Ḥākim, and despise the favors of His Guardian, the Qāʾim of Truth, shown in the earlier ages. Our Lord appointed that Guardian to abrogate the statutes of the Iblīses and overthrow the embellished falsehoods by which they deceived the nations. He unbinds the knots of unbelief, exposes the magical traps they whisper into people's ears, demolishes the buildings of their lies erected upon false doctrines, and conquers the doctrines and schools through tawḥīd.

Wake your people, wise shaykh, and present clear proof to them that they may recognize the Qāʾim of Truth, the Guide to the straight road. The herald of Resurrection has cried out, the branches of the tree of Imamate have begun to turn green. Grief and remorse have overtaken the contentious and those who neglected their duty; the men of the Heights, witnesses of religion and masters of the nations, have answered the call of truth, proceeding according to their ancient virtues. Their buildings of tawḥīd have risen above every signal and banner; the connections of mere ancestry have been severed by truth. The faction of the false Messiah has grown rebellious in impurity and obstinacy; through its evil deeds it has been brought to wretchedness, hardship, and punishment, and is barred by denunciation and curse from the Messiah of Truth, holder of honor and master of necks.

By the truth, it is as though the great event with which creation has been threatened had already descended; the concealed has been revealed. We take refuge in our Lord and hold fast, in confidence, to the Imam of the Age, the true Messiah, against the terror of a Day beyond comparison with ordinary days and beyond what disputants can encompass in speech. On that Day hearts and eyes tremble and our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, discloses Himself to His creatures through His own creatures. Intellects and souls lose their composure before His holy majesty; the veils consist of pure spiritual angels and companies of cherubim possessed of wings and lights. Among them stands the noble lord, Imam of nations in every cycle and age, before whom the regions and horizons have submitted; the created substances acknowledge his Lord’s sovereignty and their own incapacity.

A caller will proclaim, “To whom does sovereignty belong today?” and authority will return to al-Ḥākim, exalted beyond age and slumber. The scales will be set for the reckoning, deeds will be judged, the connections of lying claimants will be severed, and their wishes will come to an end. The hidden causes of their disgrace will become visible to the eye. The Qāʾim, the true Messiah, will recompense each soul according to what it has earned. The truthful will succeed through the works of their faith; the doubters and slanderers will regret the things they fabricated against the possessors of sound knowledge.

Bring them, excellent and discerning lord, to the truth. Draw the people of unity, belief, and certainty near, and explain to everyone the true foundations of divine transcendence and faith. What was in possibility has now appeared in action, plainly before the eyes. Truth has become established, creation has been separated into its proper classes, and the days of the interruption are over. Those who uphold the truth must now hasten and make the migration toward al-Quds.

Come forward, excellent shaykh, with what you have so long deferred. Reveal what you have concealed and kept back. The conscientious messenger is obliged only to deliver his message clearly. Peace upon you and all who are with you—every Unitarian who holds to religion. Praise belongs to our existent Lord al-Ḥākim, and thanks to His Guardian, the guiding Qāʾim and Imam.

Written in the seventeenth year of the manifestation of the Qāʾim of religion, who takes vengeance upon associators, unjust men, apostates, and rebels by the sword of our Lord al-Ḥākim, God of the worlds. The Letter to India is completed through the favor and blessing of our Lord.

EPISTLE 62 — REBUKE AND EXPLANATION: ESTABLISHING THE GUARDIAN OF THE AGE'S PROOF (AL-TAQRĪʿ WA-L-BAYĀN)

I place my trust in our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above number, and seek His assistance through His Guardian, who stands over every soul according to what it has earned and believed. From the obedient, sincere and submissive servant, a reminder to the people of the Call in Cairo and Fusṭāṭ, who have broken with the precedents of truth and sunk into the degradation of making peace with Jews and Copts.

Peace upon whoever knows the Messiah of humankind, turns through him toward our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, the Judge above judges, seeks approach to Him through obedience to His Guardian in the return and the final outcome, and takes advantage of the period of delay to store up the best provision for his soul through worthy deeds. Such a person declares our Lord al-Ḥākim transcendent through true transcendence and tawḥīd, and renounces for His sake all notions of generation, similarity, and embodiment. The Lord's mercy and good pleasure rest upon my brethren who bow and prostrate, inheritors of the land of realities in spite of the accursed and mutilated Antichrist.

Now then: praise belongs to our Lord, exalted beyond the hidden recesses of thought and the passing fancies of the mind, holy beyond what intellects and inner vision can approach, and higher than comparison with an original or its representation. Every intellect that attempts to imagine His power returns bewildered; every soul that tries to comprehend His exaltation by conjecture comes away weary and confined. He established the Word of transcendence as a Guide and beacon, and made its brilliant signs of tawḥīd into suns and moons. He appointed that Guide as a leader to the nations who sought salvation, and as a mirror and banner for whoever held fast to His wisdom. He openly declares the realities of unity, destroys the rising laws of falsehood through proof, and demolishes the structures of the Iblīses at their roots. He will avenge the people of tawḥīd upon Shayṣabān and the Calf, when those who have relied upon delusion lose hope and the appointed term reaches its conclusion.

When morning appears from the side of Mount Ṭūr and its light rises, and the star of religion flashes with good fortune, the masters of the nations will rise with the bonds of exaltation and glory, lifting them toward the completion of their virtues beneath the banner of praise. The sources of humanity will be transformed there, and truth and justice will appear from that station. The noble camel of truth will grind its jaws and stretch out its forelegs; the creature's neck and head stand in this image for Mecca, the very seat of disgraceful unbelief. Its sides are cut open and its jugular severed; the defender of the false cause falls to the sword of the Qāʾim, and his followers are humbled in wrath and scorching heat.

Then the furnace of realities will blaze with hidden lights. Its radiance will reach every horizon and region and become bright as the Qāʾim appears through the command of our Lord, the mighty God al-Ḥākim.

Awaken, bewildered and overturned bodies! Consider, you whose souls have been polluted and reversed! Did you not ascend by wisdom along the road of salvation and guidance? Had you not arrived, through tawḥīd, at the age of the unveiling of the highest ranks? Were you not purified by manifest proofs and granted through unity the widest field in which intellect might operate?

What miraculous event made you need to doubt the truth and apostatize? What justice did you discover in religion which could have driven you away from truth and fairness into oppression? Away with intellects inclining to error and ignorance! Woe to polluted souls turned by injustice away from reason! Iblīs has brought them into the harshest paths and left them on the mountain of destruction, near the appointed end. He has fixed them in bewilderment, foolishness, and stupidity, filling their vessels with passion, covenant-breaking, and error.

Give attentive ears, heedless ones, before mercy withdraws and the doors are closed; before the scrolls are spread open with the crimes of creation and the veil is removed; before the great earthquake comes and the trumpet sounds for the third and final time.

When the sea of realities surges from the side of the exalted Mount, its currents will shake the foundations of the lower earths. Its winds will sweep over rebellious peoples with punishment and displeasure, and the mill of destruction will turn in the homes of the impure. A flood of the sword will spread, flowing with blood as heavy rain flows from storm clouds.

Then lights will be disclosed to the insight of Unitarians. Their leader and chief, the one who directs the believers, will arise; his radiance will lift across the horizons and uncover what religion has concealed. His friends will enter the secure Sanctuary after the darkness of the Antichrists. Punishment and humiliation will seize those who have altered the truth and invented heresies, turning in lies and slanders toward the worship of the Calf and following its imitators, publicly calling the Messenger of the Creator and the Guardian of Truth liars, and disobeying the commands of the Wise One.

A layer of corruption has covered their intellects and prevented them from distinguishing the sound from the unsound. They have taken up the ways of spiritual theft and filled their bellies with the bitter tree of zaqqūm and scalding water. They openly opposed the Creator's command, exerted themselves in pride, rebellion, and wrongdoing, and rejected the opening of tawḥīd to all humanity after the age of concealment. They denied the favors conveyed by the Proofs of the guiding lordly Imam. Because they acquired unbelief and despaired of mercy, their own works have turned them toward bewilderment and delusive imaginations. In reality they have become the people of enmity, doubt, associationism, and reversal, turning from what was high into covenant-breaking, injustice, unbelief, and denial.

Will you not seek the straight road, heedless people, and turn away from perishing delusion? We owe you sincere counsel, must show you the paths of right guidance and establish the proofs of tawḥīd, patiently enduring injury and striving for your benefit. If you refuse, beware, treacherous covenant-breakers! Prepare for a calamity that will not delay. How near the promise is to the pure and certain; how swift the threatened punishment for those enemies who deny them!

One of its signs will be that all religious sects unite in an attempt to kill the people of tawḥīd and that nations everywhere join together in cursing, maligning, and driving them out. Then, evil nation, expect the cry of destruction and the disclosure of the treasure in the wall. When the Sun of suns rises and the gates of heaven open for the manifestation of the command of our Lord, the holy God al-Ḥākim, nursing mothers will forget their infants, the breast will burn with regret for neglected obedience, and faces will be humbled before our Lord, God of earth and heaven. Where can you go, rebellious sinners? The lean noble horses have been saddled to avenge the people of truth. The course is finished and the race has come.

When the keen sword of the eastern land becomes renowned and the hidden one comes out from behind the veils to purify the earth and change its religious communities, the Iblīses of religion and their political dominions shall fall. What a punishment this will be in the very place that had been favored, bringing destruction upon the peoples of the two Egyptian cities! What a general calamity upon the Pharaohs between the two seas!

When the one-eyed Antichrist of the Arabs stirs his strength and the failed, polluted one rises up—meaning the notorious mound at Aleppo—when he acquires one ground for injustice after another, our Lord will take vengeance upon the unjust through his own wrongdoing and his appointed term will run out together with the deniers. Then the eastern blade will become known, and the guiding Qāʾim and Imam will rise to judge the deniers by its edge.

When trustworthiness has become rare among you—as indeed it already has—when cursing and defaming the people of religion have spread, and religion becomes an object of mockery on the tongues of children of sharp-tongued women, it will be like a carcass thrown down. Then await the cry of annihilation, you dregs of the nations, you remnant of the servants of the Calf and the Idol.

Follow any road you find, and violate every sacred religious boundary you come upon! For the pens have been lifted from you, the matter has reached completion, discourse is finished, and the noble warners have delivered what was entrusted to them.

Praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim, the possessor of generosity, favor, and blessing, and thanks to His Guardian. “Rebuke and Explanation” is complete through our Lord's favor and the gracious assistance of the Qāʾim of the Age.

EPISTLE 63 — INSTRUCTION OF THE DISOBEDIENT SON (TAʾDĪB AL-WALAD AL-ʿĀQQ)

In the name of the God who knows what is concealed within creation and exposes the inner thoughts of anyone who deceives the people of truth.

From the tender and compassionate father, the sincere and gentle physician, to his son who stands upon the road but neglects thought and sound guidance and refuses the way of people who believe and pursue certain knowledge.

My son, may the Creator preserve you from the impulses of the Iblīses and devils and protect you from the abysses of those who go astray and rebel. May He inspire you to resemble those who possess reverence and religion. May He make you one who follows and affirms the commands of the Guardian of Truth, who submits to the signs of Resurrection and its conditions as genuine realities, and who casts away the clothing of pride and conceit. May He reveal to your insight the religious matters that have become confused to you and protect you from mixing with the people of deception and mockery.

The corrupt opinions of those people have reversed their souls and condemned them to corrupted embodiment. Their souls have been brought to the pools of thirst and disobedience by fleeing from obedience and taking delight in opposition and the company of brutish things. Through such a condition, disobedient souls become distinguished from obedient, faithful, pure souls.

Noble souls, because of their subtlety, rise above low things through the signs of wisdom and disciplined effort. Disdaining descent and degradation, they long for the highest stations, devote themselves to the matters of religion, and turn away from stubbornness and objection. But turbid and disobedient souls, because they cling to the false Iblīses, have been reversed in their dwellings and states, drawn toward the two condemned extremes and far from the middle way and moderation. They accept false conclusions because they have departed from sound premises.

Follow, worthy son, the deeds of people of religion and excellence. Weigh your conduct upon the balance of truth and justice. Do not consent to occupy the station of the negligent and ignorant, who have cast away the rein of truth for falsehood. They withdraw from truth, fail to receive the influence of intellectual meanings, and prove unable to bear the obligations of religion. They depart from it as an arrow passes through its target. The consequences of rebellion are already visible. The children of obedience have been marked out by happiness, and the children of broken covenants and filial disobedience by misery. Their souls have entered the racecourse of realities, where those who lead are distinguished from those left behind. Winds of safety blow upon the ships of deliverance, while the signs of Resurrection carry negligent people toward the flames, because they have forgotten that the appointed term is drawing to its close and failed to understand the meaning of the known number. Iblīses have trodden them beneath their claws and hooves and turned them from the truthful aim toward wrongful deception.

How long, disobedient son, will you wrong your own soul and exceed all bounds? How long will you persist in this childish folly while your own conduct makes you confess that you know better? How long will you disgrace yourself through evil practices while swearing falsely to deny them? How can you repent of destructive acts while violating your oaths and breaking your covenant?

Do you think, wandering son, that you will reach repentance before the days change, before you arrive tomorrow at the presentation of Resurrection with your work incomplete? The sickness of your soul will meet the sickness of your intellect, and through their union you will be overcome. Your subtle soul will lie defeated by animal desires, and intellect will find itself deprived of the soul through which it acts. Your faculties will then be weakened in their pursuit of reality. Your former and latter destiny will be ruined in the return. Your ties and hopes among the people of truth will be severed. You will ask for pardon and not receive it; you will regret having dishonored your soul by what your hands have earned, and your eyes will shed blood after tears.

Have compassion on yourself, lost son! Truth has arrived and falsehood has vanished; falsehood can neither originate nor restore anything. After a little while the doors of repentance will be closed and the presentation and account will come upon the deniers. Each soul will be recompensed for what it has committed despite the reminder and explanation. It will be reckoned even for the number of its breaths spent in the company of those who oppose, deny, and rebel. It will be held to account for advising the negligent just as it is for stubbornly resisting the people of tawḥīd and faith. It will answer for obeying Iblīs, the foolish devil, the last impure remnants of the heavenly course and the first residue of transgression and corruption.

Will you not desist, disobedient son, from these tremendous offenses and shameful acts? Will you cast aside the admonitions of a compassionate father who sincerely counsels you? I have advised you, son, because of your professed affirmation of divine unity and submission. Before my Creator I disavow your deeds and your involvement with the hypocrites, the wicked, and the tyrants.

You and others like you must come out of the intoxication of ignorance. The period of the foolish deranged one has come to an end, the days of the false Messiah have passed, and the lying hopes of the apostates have retreated. The millstone of death has overturned them with its right side and ground them like scattered dust with its left.

Where can the world of corruption, ruin, and apostasy go? Where can those who cling to unbelief and denial escape from the torrent that sweeps away its own froth, or the overwhelming flood of the sword? Where will the liars, covenant-breakers, and deceivers flee from its flame when its thunder shakes the mountains of the Sacred Precinct from the side of Mount Ṭūr, its lights illuminate the Raised Roof and the Inhabited House, its rainstorm bursts over Bahrain and al-Yamāma, and its sweeping edge reaches the “distillery of unbelief” and the great gate of Tihāma? Its fire will be kindled there for the destruction of the structure and the burning away of the blindness of hearts.

When the suns of Resurrection blaze up to overturn the elements of former religious dispensation, and moons of felicity grow full and prepare to appear and exert their power, they will pass from possibility into action. They will be ready to undo the knots of the parties of alteration and negligence. Then nations and their religious communities will lament their beliefs as their crosses are broken, their Kaʿba destroyed, and their houses of fire torn down.

When the victorious and fortunate company sweeps forward upon lean, noble mounts, supported by the truth and the banners of the lords, the horizons will glitter with the splitting apart of the sects and the disclosure of the realities of their devotional obligations. The hidden tribes of truth will hasten out from their concealment. The earths will tremble at the appearance of the Qāʾim, Imam of transcendence and abstraction, and the banners of holiness and spiritual purity will become known in all regions. Then composite things will cast aside their shadows; originated spiritual substances will bear witness against the deniers. By His command our Lord, God of earth and heaven, will be manifest to the worlds, and the bonds fashioned by the Iblīses will be undone through the breaking of customary laws.

Intellects will be incapable of enclosing Him within limits and attributes. He is higher than the most immediate propositions of mind. The superior one who receives the truth will gain felicity, while the inferior who opposes it will receive loss and displeasure.

Good tidings, then, for whoever is satisfied and submits before the opportunity passes, and renounces the Iblīses and their followers to his Guide and Lord before the appointed Day. Woe and evil recompense to anyone overtaken by the Resurrection while still keeping company with the people of opposition and division.

O Lord, You witness concerning those who opposed the proof that I have delivered it truthfully; You know that I have spent my best efforts to explain Your straight road. Fulfill, O Lord, Your promise to Your Guardian concerning his friends, as You promised him. He commanded us to pray to You as You commanded him and gave him strength. Bless him as You commanded us to maintain his connection; sever the bonds You forbade and condemned. Praise belongs to You for Your patience and respite with the peoples, and thanks ascend to You through Your Guardian for the continuation of Your favors.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His servant, the Qāʾim of Truth.

EPISTLE 64 — THE CRUSHING REFUTATION OF THE PRETENDED PHARAOH

I put my trust in the Lord, exalted above the limitations imposed by transgressors and apostates, and seek approach to Him through His servant, the Qāʾim, for the destruction of whoever doubts Him and departs from the ranks of religion. From the weak, helpless, impoverished, possessed servant, needy of the mercy of his Master, the Imam who stands to cast down the banners of falsehood, uncover the beliefs of impostors, and sever the religious law of the Pharaohs, the devils, and the party that denies the signs of the wisdom of the Qāʾim of Truth and the return of his manifestation, and repudiates his rising to judge the worlds and bring about their resurrection.

This is to awaken those whom fabrication has lulled into heedlessness and to establish the proof against the renegade, covenant-breaking faction. The warning is meant to awaken those who fabricate excuses, and every pretended Pharaoh, so that proof is established before the return; at the time of discrimination the soul goes back to its vile element and undergoes the full measure of its misery.

Now then: grandeur, overwhelming power, majesty, and dominion belong to the Lord whose sacred divinity is exalted above everything reason imagines concerning absence or presence, every expression devised in speech, and everything stirring in the hidden places of hearts and breasts. He is above the cause of causes that exist through the ages and periods; He brings His command to pass and guides nations by victory and conquest after every renegade, denying unbeliever has despaired. He cuts the cords of those who join themselves to falsehood, turn from truth, doubt the reality of the Manifestation, or slander the ranks of religion with lies and calumnies.

May the Guardian's prayers rest increasingly upon the obedient ranks of his Call, those who await his promised manifestation, call humanity to him in truth to seek his pleasure, and submit even to the smallest of his servants, awaiting the return of security beneath the banners of his truth. They separate themselves from whoever turns away through blindness of perception or doubts his appearance because the period has seemed long. The trials of his wisdom have exposed others through despair, hypocrisy, tyranny, disobedience, obstinacy, and deprivation. He said: “Know that my absence from you is an absence of trial for you and for the people of all religions.”

Through this trial the disguises of pretenders are exposed, and the apostasy of those who doubt the Guardian of Truth is shown, so that the people of truth may differ from them in belief, speech, and action, and confront them with the decisive argument. Their souls have been displaced by the assaults of desire and have joined the forms of obstinate apostates as the appointed day approaches. The time of concealment, taking advantage of their weakness, has drawn them toward the element of falsehood and disclosed the filthy beliefs formerly hidden behind their coverings.

O smallest and most contemptible company, O wretched faction—and those who have misled it by lying inventions! Diseased souls have made alluring but evil promises seem good to you. Through corrupted intentions you have substituted transient accidents for the realities of meaning. You have treated the Exalted Creator as though He did not exist, and transferred the station of the Guardian of Truth through false claims and deception to the least of his feeble servants, seeking to elevate yourselves above humanity by disguising and corrupting religion for the perishing goods of this world.

O Lord, witness that I utterly reject this false, detestable assertion, compounded of deception and hypocrisy. Curse whoever is satisfied with it and holds it as a belief, for they remain in impurity, doubt, and abandonment. Crush the adherent of this contemptible opinion, and confound this feeble, lying pretender whose insolence has brought him so far.

By God, this address is painful to me, but falsehood has no standing beside truth. There can be no indulgence or honor for a person who holds such a belief. I speak only to honor the truth and the obedient ranks of those endowed with understanding.

By God, I know that you have accepted this claim only because false premises, established in your minds by heedlessness and illusion, led you to it. Through Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim and Shaykh Abū al-Khayr I explained the vileness of the opinion and the impurity of its originator; I refuted his words with sound knowledge. What then made you depart from the perfection of obedience and the right road, and doubt the counsel of a truthful guide?

May our Lord, the Divine Judge, repudiate whoever is content with this statement or accepts this belief. May He dissociate the people of truth from it, and cast its believer into the basest form and most impure body. And may the God of gods curse, banish, and chastise me with punishments beyond my strength, if I ever imagined the wickedness you attribute to me, suggested it, or allowed it to pass through my thought, awareness, or senses. May He accept neither excuse nor repentance from me should I deserve this repudiation. Whoever after such an oath still repeats the accusation or nurtures suspicion belongs to the accursed company of apostasy, disobedience, and associationism. You have committed wickedness and brought others into it; you have made associations in religion and caused others to do so; you have departed from its bounds and led others astray. The curse and displeasure of the Creator are upon you if you persist in this belief and despair of His mercy.

By God, the person who denies grace and favor is no worse in my sight than the one who attaches this innovation to a weak servant, professing obedience and servitude, who is the smallest servant of the Guardian of the Age. O least and most wretched of men, O corruption of this age! Know that your souls and the soul of the man who led you astray have wandered away from the meanings of truth through their inadequacy. Unable to confront the radiance of true realities, they have welcomed lies and abandoned truth. What you have put forward, and what that wretched man put forward, turned you away from the unity of the Exalted Creator and from knowledge of the Imam. You have retained the language of the obedient only through your outward likeness to them in natural constitution and bodily form. Your souls, and that of your deceiver, were unable from the beginning to attain the noble element. Therefore they became too feeble to affirm the Creator's transcendence above verbal definition and description. You doubted the sacred station of the Imam, treated him as nonexistent, and blindly pointed instead to one of the least and weakest of created servants.

By God, he who led you from truth lied and made you drink a bitter poison. He destroyed the community and filled it with the winds of misfortune, corruption, associationism, and hypocrisy. If he and you had possessed discrimination and reason, and had sought truth with the intelligence that distinguishes the superior from the inferior, you would have known that I would be answerable for your wrongdoing if I concealed the truth from you. I would deserve punishment if I prevented you from knowing the Imam, for I would have deceived you and defrauded all humanity.

And you people of ignorance: if the Imam reviles whoever recognizes him, disowns whoever acknowledges him, and curses the person who affirms his imamate, how could any argument remain to him, or to the Creator, against the nations? How could the person who opposed or disobeyed him be punished if the Imam himself had hidden the truth from him? The sentence involving God's judgment and revealing a concealed secret is badly corrupted.

As for what Ibn al-Kurdī cited to you from the wisdom called *The Healing*, by the truth itself he lied, altered the text, and acted as a devil. He sought to extinguish truth with falsehood, and his fabrication has divided you, who had been united, into parties. He has filled hearts once purified with doubt, despair, obstinacy, and hypocrisy.

As for the sentence he quoted from the wisdom in support of his fabrication, he intended to associate someone with the exalted Creator and to abolish obedience to the Imam. He treated it as if it were a statement addressed to the Pharaohs of Syria, those foolish and coarse people who, in their ignorance, did not understand the age of concealment, when the nations lived in blindness and error. The Exalted Creator brought them from nonexistence to existence through the teaching of the Imam, the standing Guide, the Active Intellect.

If the author of *The Healing* did not acknowledge that it came from the overflowing wisdom of the standing and guiding Imam, and that its author was a weak servant yielding obedience and submission in gratitude for his Master's favors, he would be cursed and driven away, as Ibn al-Kurdī is driven away for exploiting this name to raise his standing and thereby debasing it. He sought to tie together the cords of falsehood, but truth tore them apart.

Had that ignorant covenant-breaker understood that *The Healing* establishes existence as an argument against men like him—followers of demonic invention, associationism, and denial—he would have examined what comes after the passage and recognized its author's confession of weakness, inability, submission, and prostration. I claim none of that station for myself, nor can I express its truths through any power of my own. Whatever is right and well said in that epistle comes from the blessing of the Qāʾim of the Age, Guardian of grace and goodness; whatever is mistaken belongs to me and is laid upon me. I ask forgiveness of the one who knows my innermost thoughts better than I do and beg Him to guide me to the straighter path.

This brings the noses of the lying claimants low. For the Guardian's wisdom, in the admonition and warning, says: “Know that my absence from you is an absence of testing, for you and for the people of all religions. Whoever remains steadfast in what he was entrusted with and does not turn back on his heels, I shall give him a great reward and grant him a noble station. Whoever turns backward, loses himself, rejects truth, and lends an ear to Satan's whispers shall fall under tribute and suffer humiliation and disgrace as the recompense of his own deeds.”

This is proof enough for whoever has deceived himself through pretense, apostasy, and wrongdoing. Wake up, apostates, if you persist in this condemned unbelief, before you are made to pay the tribute and wear the distinguishing dress of subjugation, you killers of truth and doers of sin!

To rely on an isolated saying of a servant of religion as authority is mere imitation outside the order of knowledge, a retreat into error and delusion. That is all this coarse man could manage because of the poverty of his understanding. The scales of wisdom, the truth of religion, acknowledgement, justice, and fair dealing establish among the people of truth that the Exalted Creator is displeased with whoever denies the appearance of the Qāʾim of the Age and his judgment of humanity after the absence of examination. This is the very Imam whose appointment was declared publicly before witnesses: at his manifestation he will take vengeance by the Lord's sword upon the people of doubt, apostasy, and obstinacy.

Alas for you! This is proclaimed where all the world may hear, by a great multitude of people who have gathered across the regions and lands. The Exalted Creator repudiates this renegade and pretended faction; the Guardian of the Age and his ranks curse and disown whoever refuses to disown the impurity of the one who led you astray—Ibn al-Kurdī—so long as they accept his adorned lies and maintain what that impure man has invented for them, seeking worldly goods because of his weak understanding, feeble religion, and error. Many have already renounced his demonic pretense and false claims, recognizing the greatness of his ignorance.

This is the separation of the people of truth from the apostate covenant-breakers, and a decisive argument against the falsehood of whoever denies it and persists in departing from religion. Brothers, repent of the heedlessness that led you away from governing truth! Repudiate before the Guardian of religion the person who became a devil, led you from the truth, and seduced you. Return to complete obedience, justice, reason, and fairness. Abandon this heedlessness, and do not follow the people of doubt. The person who counsels you seeks no payment, yet you wrong him.

O Lord, take by the forelocks those who have mistaken falsehood for truth and lead them to truth and right guidance. When their intentions have become sincere, turn them from the ways of corruption. Bring them to acknowledge the manifest signs of the appearance of the standing, guiding Imam and this great news. Praise belongs to the Creator who will grant victory to His Guardian when the time of the unjust has ended and the appointed day has arrived.

Written in Rajab of the eighteenth year of the servant of our Lord and His sovereignty. Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone.

EPISTLE 65 — THE LETTER TO ABŪ AL-YAQẒĀN

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. From the servant in the possession of his Lord, Bahāʾ al-Dīn, small in station and worth, acknowledging servitude and yielding obedience to the ranks of the Guardian of Command, tested because of his weakness by the devils of the interregnum and the pretended Pharaohs of this age, to the brother distinguished by his virtues, a portion of success and right direction. May God prolong your time upon the path of trustworthiness and rectitude, continue your ascent to the degrees of elevation, shelter you from the darts of every misguided, accursed devil, and preserve you from the pollution of every rebellious, slanderous apostate.

Now then: praise and sanctity belong to the Lord, the exalted God, beyond the transcendence of every created being. He has particularly entrusted the guiding Imam, Guardian of Truth, with the glory of affirming His transcendence and unity, so that the structures of creation may not be confused with the meanings of origination in the realities of His wisdom. Thus He brands the souls of those who invent associations, lies, despair, and falsehood, so that people may distinguish intellect from what intellect apprehends, and these from the things constituted in their physical natures. Thus the people of reason and truth, who grasp wisdom, accept truth, and follow it, are separated from the faction of falsehood and the people of doubt, apostasy, and innovation.

You know, my brother—may God make you happy—that I rely upon you to deliver this letter to my children and brethren. I charge you to show them compassion, treating the small and the great, the distant and the near, with gentleness. Assure them of what is in my heart: that publicly and privately I pray for the good guidance of them all.

I asked you to write to me explaining their circumstances. Do they remain in repentance, obedience, faithfulness, acceptance, and agreement? Or have they fallen into the disagreement, apostasy, disobedience, and deviation that have been reported to us? I would not willingly describe those whose intentions are sound in such terms. Rather, a satanic trial has appeared to their inner selves like a mirage flashing before their eyes. May the truth turn aside the eyes of the wicked from them and send upon their enemies consuming fire and deadly heat.

If you find them upright in character, continuing to accept the words of this epistle with patience, contentment, belief, and submission; if you verify the soundness of their intentions through repudiation of the one who turned them from truth and branded them with this shameful name; if you examine how they greet you with recognition, honor, reverence, and respect, and how each attends to the rights of the others and to his own duties toward his brother—if words and deeds accord in all these things—then establish among them the beacon of truth. Make known the disgrace of whoever has wandered into falsehood and lies because his corrupt soul could not abide the truth.

Remain with them for this summer or part of it, and appoint for the affairs and reform of this community a trustworthy, noble elder: al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Khayr al-Raʾīs; Abū al-Māḍī, a visitor of purity and sanctity; Abū al-Khayr Salāma ibn Jandal; and Abū al-Faḍl Ḥamza ibn Abī Manṣūr, the noble and honorable one.

Live together, brothers of purity, in obedience. Be gentle with little children; in education, humility, honor, and regard, bring them into the company and ranks of the great elders. Strip off the garment of pride, for pride destroyed the person who led you into the company of evildoers and unbelievers. Teach the children the qualities of the Unitarians: modesty of soul and excellence of character. Soften harsh conduct toward them so that they may distinguish themselves from the cold, contentious, and hypocritical. Protect the honor of your sisters and children, and put the opponents of religion to shame by keeping their accusations from finding grounds among you. Some among them have embraced religion as an opportunity for ease, license, and the pursuit of appetite. When you admonish the community to protect the people of religion, the wickedness of that conduct will be driven back to its impure origin.

Pure brethren, remedy with gentle care the injuries done to your good name by the woman known as al-Sariyya al-Baghiyya, a supporter of Ḥasan al-Ḥāmilī and those like him. Refrain from their vile ways and unite upon the realities of religion.

Send a copy of this letter to the truthful and steadfast Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim Naṣr ibn, eloquent in heart and tongue. His noble actions bear witness to obedience, belief, and submission, and mark him as a preacher among the people of justice, chastity, and sound judgment. Let him read it in Damascus, discreetly and gently, to the brothers and sisters in whom he places confidence. Let him explain the baseness of the doctrine of the banished and accursed traitor Ṭarrād, who received his religion from the apostate, filthy hypocrite Lāḥiq, one of the first to introduce the doctrine of permissiveness. He made it a ladder for every apostate, pretending that religion was a pastime of comfort, amusement, and play, a deception of the ignorant and a source of subsistence and profit from worldly goods. O Lord! They have exposed the people of truth to trials, abuse, slander, and denunciation upon the tongues of humanity.

Pure brethren, renounce the destructive places of desire frequented by the lying pretenders. Repudiate them and their impure convictions if you are Unitarians. By the truth, I have given you sincere counsel, if you possess understanding. I am free from the pollution of these innovations, and the Guardian of the Age curses their founder to the farthest limits.

By God, had your belief been sincere tawḥīd for God's sake alone, unmixed with the brutishness of desires, fools would have found no means of gaining power over you, and you would have escaped all those afflictions.

Therefore strive, pure brethren, and cooperate in uprooting these corrupt beliefs through piety and righteousness. Tear them from the hearts of the community. May God sever the root of their inventor, break his strength, and withhold mercy from him on the day of accounting and gathering.

I have been informed that Sukayn commanded everyone and imposed upon them the payment of works, offerings, and alms, urging the community to pay these things and gathering the proceeds from them at all times. You know that exalted commands forbidding such payments were sent throughout all the regions. The people of truth accepted them. The people of apostasy, doubt, and hypocrisy disobeyed, defied the exalted commands, despaired of the Guardian of Truth, and passed from obedience into rebellion.

Several members of the community have confirmed to me that Sukayn claimed one of the highest religious ranks for himself, describing himself as the *riḍā*, the holder of the office of embassy and speech. He also sent secret instructors to various places to assert that the humble servant in possession of his Lord—the least of the ranks—was in fact the Imam. He had no religion in doing this; he did it for worldly gain, plotting for the goods of this passing world. The Lord curses whoever accepts this conviction and will expose the disguises of those who seek to mislead His people.

I examined Sukayn's actions and found them tainted by deception, ignorance, and corruption of wisdom arising from the poverty of his reason and deficiency of his understanding. The deluded man tampered with the epistles of the Qāʾim of the Age. In his wicked audacity he even altered the Covenant of the Guardian of the Age, invented the innovations of treacherous wrongdoers, and followed the paths of covenant-breakers, thieves, and deserters. He stirred up discord, caused the blood of Unitarians to be shed, and exposed them to the slanders of fools and the swords of opponents. He authorized young men to commit acts for which the God of the worlds will call him to account: the shedding of blood, frightening of neighbors, and the ruin of the inhabitants' condition. His object was to fill his own belly by imposing payments upon them that the foundations of religion forbid. The just Imam, Guide of all humanity, could not lawfully command this.

Had he put off the garments of arrogance and dishonor and governed the Unitarians as people of justice, fidelity, and excellence govern, he would have forbidden deeds that shame the faithful, degrade their station, and give ignorant opponents arguments against them. He would have commanded them to refrain from harming others, to act honorably, and to conceal private faults from the people of error. He would have left worldly goods to those who sought them, and contented himself and his companions with a little lawful wealth rather than much that was forbidden. He would have occupied them in safeguarding wisdom and learning fidelity, patience, and forbearance. They would have clung to tawḥīd, contentment, submission, discretion, and noble deeds, refusing to presume that a claim of religious allegiance licensed shameful offenses.

If, after receiving such counsel, they had refused to correct themselves, he should have withdrawn from them and written to me about their actions. He would then have been excused before God and His Guardian for deeds they committed without his agreement. Instead he clung to the earth like Iblīs, respecting no obligation to truth and forgetting the day of reckoning and presentation. By the truth, had he administered them with reverence, religion, and excellence, they would have been protected from their trial and truth and justice would have prevailed among them.

Repudiate him, brothers, and his actions. He has opposed God and His Guardian through falsehood, and his vile practices and character are manifest. His distortion of the truth, claims, and humiliations are notorious. Show all the epistles in your possession to the trustworthy and reliable shaykh; let no critic's blame deter you from truth. I am giving sincere counsel to you and to all the Unitarians. Accept it and you honor and prepare yourselves; reject it and you will regret your own loss and disgrace.

Trustworthy shaykh, investigate the reality of this man's condition and this discourse. Explain it to the community and cleanse them of these stains and illnesses. Read to them the relevant passage from the wisdom of the Guardian of religion in *The Cause of Causes*, which says that there is neither repentance nor pardon for whoever departs from truth and appoints himself among the highest ranks and gateways. Explain that no pardon belongs to whoever leads Responders away to the worship of a created being, since worship is obedience throughout all the ways of the true religion. How much worse is the person who treats the Guardian of religion as absent and redirects obedience, which is worship, to the weakest of his servants!

Trustworthy shaykh, if they fail to prepare to obey the directives and accept these virtues, and their souls prove afflicted by a chronic disease, and their hearts fail to become as clear toward one another as pure drinking water, seize the opportunity to depart from them and leave their land. The messenger is bound only to convey the message. Seek the excellent company of the obedient in the northern regions.

Make your journey to one of the coastal fortresses, either ʿAsqalān or Caesarea. Write to me concerning the country and the people for whom you take responsibility. Tell me what passes in your affairs and what happens on your journey, so that I may instruct you on what you must carry out and what you may rely upon.

Praise to God, who does not change His blessing while those who receive it remain worthy of its company, and who withdraws His gifts only from those who deny them and doubt those entrusted with them. Peace upon His Guardian, who fulfils His promise to the sincere and obedient, and destroys those who doubt his manifestation through vengeance by the sword of our Lord against rebellious deniers and associationists.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His servant, the Qāʾim of the Age.

EPISTLE 66 — DISTINGUISHING THE UNITARIANS FROM THE DISOBEDIENT, WICKED COVENANT-BREAKERS

I have trusted in the Lord, the ruling God, exalted above the transcendence attributed to Him by humanity, and sought guidance to Him through His servant, the standing, guiding Imam. From the servant in His possession, subject to the obedience of the guiding and standing Imam for the exaltation of the religion of truth, confessing that he counts as nothing beside his ranks and falls short of their stations, weak and belonging to his Lord as a bondservant; he appeals to his Lord's generosity to answer his supplication, renew his service, and release him from his bondage.

To all who affirm tawḥīd, contentment, submission, and acknowledgement: those who accept the truth in the radiant valley, those of sincere intent who inhabit the luminous mountain, those who affirm the truth in al-Bayḍāʾ, and everyone in the regions and lands. And also to the small faction that has assembled for division, wickedness, and ugly deeds deserving condemnation and expulsion, that has met the Guardian's favors with ingratitude: the people of Cairo, the unfortunate valley, and Fusṭāṭ whose souls have inclined to deception, decline, and abasement; who walk the paths of the devils of the interregnum in dispute, negligence, opposition, and rebellion. Their basest appetites have enslaved them as the trial reaches its completion. The age of unveiling exposes their betrayal, covenant-breaking, and hypocrisy, and their return toward impure elements and the forms of the deniers. Satan has set a seal upon their hearts. They have even held the killing of the people of truth to be permissible, joining apostasy and hypocrisy to rebellion against God. When the period of respite is over, severe punishment will descend upon them.

Leave the honor of the guiding Call, rebellious deniers, you devils! Sink into the humiliation of disobedience, you mendacious deceivers. In a little while, wicked fools, you will see, and the two parties will know who is the one stripped of knowledge, driven back, and astray.

By God, a foolish, leprous intruder has struck his like, shrouding their insight, and has claimed deafness and blindness for those miserable peoples. He has filled his heart and the hearts of men like him with doubt and associationism, flowing like shed blood. May that wretched man's hands perish and theirs with him. Neither he nor they have benefited from the wisdom and knowledge they acquired. These things will testify against them for the abuse, slander, and unjust judgments they directed toward the people of truth. They accepted such treatment of the just Imam, exalted above ignorance and injustice, and beyond what false claimants invent when they distort religion.

Good tidings to the people of truth! This is congratulations on the separation of nations, honoring those who endure patiently, believe, accept, and attain certainty. It is a rebuke to the man whose reason has been taken from him, who after reaching a high station has fallen into a base and distant abode, and a warning to those who turn back from faithfulness to their promise and the truthful messenger and return to the most unfortunate element. They separate themselves from the people of purity and truth: Ibn al-Kurdī and his like among the nations, who neglected their souls, forgot guidance, accepted the ornaments of Satan, and followed falsehood because they doubted truth. They made their own desire their god.

Now then: praise and exaltation to the Lord al-Ḥākim, beyond the analysis of philosophers and theologians, beyond movement, the passage of time, the ordering of ages, and the appointed ends. He originated every movement and moving thing, exalted above the high and sacred stations, whose very inability to describe absolute divinity is disclosed to all worlds. No soul reaches the goal of tawḥīd or points to the meaning of sanctification and praise except through obeying the Qāʾim of Truth, the owner of religion and of promise and warning, accepting his commands and enduring prosperity, hardship, and severe distress in obedience. What falls outside the comprehension of intellect has no demonstrated meaning for those who attempt to speak about it; every emanation of a thing is intelligible only in relation to its origin.

Exalted is the Lord who has made the understanding of the worlds too narrow to encompass His essence, and who has appointed the standing Guardian to watch over nations and to call them to account for the secrets of their hearts and the deeds by which they have disobeyed Him. He rewards obedience and pure deeds and requites their opposites.

Will you not awaken, heedless people headed for destruction—and you, vigilant chosen ones! This address is directed to both parties: it is an awakening and an instruction for each of you according to the reality of his condition. The preacher has exhausted every excuse and conveyed admonitions and distinctions in precious words.

Where will the lying, deceitful small fry of the interregnum flee? Where will the impostor Pharaohs of past cycles go? How will the apostate opponents and obstinate dissidents escape when the flood of the sword and the blaze of burning have approached, when the time comes to destroy the ancient edifices of their vain beliefs, and their land trembles and sinks beneath the signs of their doctrines and schools of genuine doubt and associationism? The land of the oppressive, unjust deniers is consumed from its edges. Winds of divine displeasure strike them for violating religion's sanctity and openly following the impurity of the people of Taym in killing sincere Unitarians.

You wretched creatures whose forms stand before us but whose understanding and insight are absent, whose unlucky souls and doctrines have turned from truth: will you not consider the wisdom of the Creator in sending earthquakes to undermine the ancient House and calamities to destroy mosques, congregational places of worship, and churches? These are signs announcing the overturning of an era and the destruction of its religious laws.

Take warning, neglected creatures, and awaken from sleep, obstinate deniers. How long will you rise against truth and act tyrannically toward its friends? You revolve blindly upon the wheel of the Resurrection like beasts unaware of their motion. How long will you reject the signs of the Resurrection and call them false?

Do you maintain that the thunderbolts falling upon the curtains of the sacred rites and the Holy House, splitting the corner of your sanctuary and the Station, and the destruction of mosques, congregational buildings, and churches in Syria occurred without the command of the knowing Creator? If you say they took place outside His will, you strip Him of His power and deny what is plainly before you. If you admit that they occurred through His command and will, the case of those who summoned you to truth is established against you, for you rejected their proof and killed the obedient friends of the Lord. In this you have outdone the adherents of other religions, just as the impure people of Taym rejected the truth when they killed its trustworthy Caller and incurred the curse.

Where is your refuge or escape now? The appointed terror has drawn close; you have disobeyed the guide, cut the road of truth, killed its followers, and filled the way with fear. Stop wronging people, heedless souls destined for ruin. The reckoning of mankind has drawn near while they turn aside in heedlessness. No fresh reminder comes to them from their Lord but they listen to it in play. God's command has come; do not seek to hasten it. Glorified and exalted is He above what they associate with Him.

It is time for the earth to tremble, the sky to sway, the mountains to be scattered, and the great heights to boil. The trees of falsehood have borne fruit in the hearts of the nations; their perception is shrouded so that they can no longer discriminate, like grazing cattle. A crust has settled upon their reason, making them deaf and dumb. The harvest of the seeds sown by the Pharaohs is near: the cutting of the things planted by Iblīs in hearts, the uprooting of the accursed tree of Zaqqūm named in scripture, and the removal of the foul sign represented in Daniel's book as the structure of the impure, one-eyed Antichrist. It will be driven from the pleasant and pure place it has usurped into the ruinous, desolate, impure wilderness.

These are indications that the cycle of concealment has reached its completion and signs of the approaching revelation of the light of the standing master, the Imam. They expose the convictions of those whom Iblīs has mastered, who distorted religion for worldly purposes. The souls of the sincere will be distinguished by the substance of holiness, raised through their pure works beneath the canopy of religious wisdom, and will draw out the noble meanings of goodness through the bounty flowing to them from intellect. They ascend through degrees of perfection, rejoicing in certain knowledge. Light rises upon them after the darkness of natural oppression; they are adorned with the jewels of virtue and united with sacred lights. Their substances attain completion and training through intellectual knowledge, remaining in possession of the divine teachings.

When the stars of the cycle rise in flames and burning to abolish the beliefs of wrongdoers and expose the apostates among the people of Taym, the party of obedience, the chosen faithful, shall be distinguished from the party of error, the people of Satan, rebellion, disobedience, and apostasy. Then the signs of fulfillment will come forth and ascend in splendor.

The souls of those who act justly will be exalted by the integrity of their substance, made receptive to the influence of the overflowing, originated Intellect, and joined to permanence beyond dissolution, corruption, and decay. By their pure element and clarity they escape the stains of uncertainty and transitory defects. Through the true acceptance of intelligible forms, certainty, and just discipline, they become capable of receiving still greater grace and remain a stable substance to eternity, marked by spiritual excellences and distinguished from those who turn toward Satan, apostasy, and denial.

The others treated religion as a diversion for falsehood and a game of wrongdoing. God will expose them. They abandoned the obedience of the just and guiding Imam and cast off the covenant of tawḥīd. With their devilishness they accepted the authority of a leprous fool, styling him the god of promises. Through belief in absurdity and impossibility they returned to their impure elements and former stations in the age of distinction, so that their followers may see the shame, humiliation, and wickedness that come of placing themselves outside the bounds of truth. The deceiver who led them astray will be exposed by the decisive proof.

God will destroy them through their own actions. They oppressed the weak people of truth, inflicted temptations and trials upon Unitarians, and, by their lies and covenant-breaking, made possible the abuse and defamation of the faithful. Not one of those traitors has responded to the sayings of the virtuous; none has thought seriously of his own return and the days of judgment and justice. None has disciplined himself through repentance for falsehood and prohibited deeds or reflected upon the Guardian of religion and his judgment of the worlds. How could they, when they have kindled the fire of sedition against Unitarians throughout the cycles?

The evidence for my words lies in the conduct by which they have condemned themselves: even in the age of unveiling, they persist in obstinacy, pretension, rebellion, and disobedience. They give no thought to the day when whoever has claimed a rank without right, invented lies about the pure ranks, and forged falsehood about the Guardian will be exposed. No approach to Him is valid except obedience, submission, reverence, and acknowledgment.

Awaken, you structures doomed to impurity through killing the people of truth and its Callers. Your intellects and insight are emptied out; you have ignored investigation and reckoning, preferred mirages to the pure water of wisdom, and been deprived of the gracious draught. Open your eyes to the clear signs and reflect on how luminous proofs dissolve the bonds of devils and demons and cut the power of deceivers through the sharp swords of miracles.

The lights signaling the end of cycles of deceptive association have begun to shine, exposing their impure, invented beliefs to the nations. This is the unveiling of what had lain concealed beneath pretended divine doctrines, and the manifestation of the men who, though they once knew truth, departed from it and killed its guardians.

Be silent, miserable ones! Lights have flashed in glad tidings to the souls of the truthful. The heights of the blessed people on the right are radiant with the reality of the Manifestation. The sources of life's water flow from the stations of the masters and pour their noble substance over the souls prepared for the truth of religion. Through the might of volition and the perfection of true sovereignty the structures of pretenders and liars are destroyed. After their separation from natural matter the pure souls are united with noble intelligible spiritual beings, and the Active Intellect, the Imam of the Age, is shown in existence.

When the great tempest shakes the world and the thunderbolts of truth sound, the masters and the people of the lofty places will rise to avenge the faithful; the tribes of religion will stand to aid them, and the house of the wicked, the abode of the devils, will be surrounded.

Then the sun of all suns and moons will rise. The Imam of the worlds will appear in the cycles and epochs; his truthful utterance will be heard through the ages, his lights will glitter over the lands, and the sky of wisdom will pour down a shower of support in the meanings of exaltation and the stripping away of attributes. The branches of knowledge will bear the fruits of holiness and submission. The stations of the sincere will be raised through the signs of truth, and those of ignorant deniers will sink. The call will announce the resurrection and judgment of souls; truth and justice will rise with the standing, guiding Imam. Apostates and doubters will lose; they will be seized by their forelocks and feet. The buried girl will be asked concerning the burdens and offenses laid upon her, and for what sin she was killed. Matters will occur that neither ear has heard, nor eye seen, nor heart imagined, for those who hold fast to the exaltation of the Lord al-Ḥākim and submit to Him.

At that time the pure souls of those who know realities will perceive what was hidden. Their power, made manifest in the forms of truth, will reach the highest limits. They will receive likenesses of intelligible things through the Active Intellect, contemplate the noblest beings, and ascend to the highest stations and divine matters in accordance with their acquired knowledge.

Awaken at the call of this sincere guide, neglected little creatures who have rebelled. Open your hearts to understanding if they can still grasp truth. The nations have reached the times inscribed in their books. Their presentation, reckoning, and recompense are near. Yet they are like hollow wood, departing from the road of guidance and staggering drunkenly far from the straight path. They have left the obedience of the standing Guardian to follow the inventions of the pretended Pharaohs, fallen down the steps of abasement, and trampled wisdom beneath the feet of devils. They neither restrain themselves from openly violating the prohibitions nor desist from slander and wrongdoing.

They have soiled the signs of religion with filth and corruption and agreed upon covenant-breaking, doubt, disobedience, and blasphemy. They put off repentance in the belief that the present respite might last. But this age of trial, this greatest and most revealing interregnum, is the time when every soul's works are brought to completion and the worlds are distinguished.

Brothers, the times have passed. The destruction of Satan's party, once thought far away, approaches. Both parties among you have entered the arena of reward and punishment. Listen to the truthful servant, the least servant of the Guardian of the Age and of command.

Know that this is the time of which it was said during the former period of discipline: “He who holds fast to his religion will be like one grasping a burning coal.” The believer will flee with his religion from height to height, that is, from Caller to Caller. Which Caller can he now trust? The true Guardian of the Age. The saying did not refer to a lack of persons claiming to be Callers; it referred to the scarcity of the obedient and the multitude of rebels, traitors, and apostates.

By the possessor of mercy, I read among the well-known writings of truth that, when the Qāʾim appears, the first people he will kill will be those who profess allegiance to him before he turns to the other opponents among creation. Know the justice intended: these are men who profess him with their tongues while disobeying the commands against corruption that came through their religious superiors.

Now is the time when all stand on equal footing in seeking to come forward, while the one who stands over every soul according to what it has earned is the guiding Imam.

Know, brothers, that anyone in this region who claims to be a Caller sent by the servant in possession of his Lord has departed from his command and that of the Guardian of religion and has joined the wicked transgressors. Whoever makes that claim after being warned to refrain from speaking is numbered with the pretended Callers of the interregnum. None of them has authority to command obedience from any Responder.

This letter is my proof against you, and yours against me, before the Lord of the worlds and the Imam of the Unitarians. In this region the Callers are now equal with regard to silence and abstention from claims. No person has power to command or forbid another except in the work of reconciling Unitarians. No one has superiority to his brother except by

the wisdom he has preserved, the obedience he has shown to the Guide of humanity, his noble conduct and gifts to faithful brethren, and his continued study of what is accepted and preserved on trustworthy authority. Continue to do good to your brothers and obey the one whom the Imam of your age has ordered you to obey.

Whoever among those claiming to be appointed Callers under my authority hears this instruction and joins the responding Unitarian brethren, regarding himself as no better than any of his brothers except through what he has acquired of wisdom and clear instruction for the salvation of his own soul, is a brother among the brethren. After he acknowledges sincere repentance, pardon may be sought for his earlier negligence and aggression. Whoever refuses this condition has departed from the authority of the Proof of the Guardian of the Age. While they persist in rebellion, all such men are gates of wrath and not gates of mercy. They have risen against the very authority from which their instruction and rank came. The Guardian entrusted them with wisdom, distinguished them by their outward service, and placed them in known localities to reform the community. Instead they mounted the beast of treachery, wickedness, and corruption, exposing the faithful through evil governance to abuse, slander, and the swords of enemies.

When the person they had been ordered to obey wrote forbidding them their wrongs, they turned against him with deceit and devilry and reviled him. The wretched covenant-breaker went to his coarse followers and incited them from his familiar store of poison. They conspired treacherously against the trustworthy shaykh with a pure soul, whom I had sent to discipline and admonish them, and killed him. They ordered others to draw up false written accounts to justify their abandonment of truth. One of them fled toward Syria to his companions in apostasy and persuaded them to aid him. They agreed in opposition and carved an idol of their own making to worship: a calf of flesh, fashioned after their desires, emitting a lowing sound by which they could deceive and mislead those who accepted their wickedness.

God witnesses that, despite what they show outwardly, they are divided against the Guardian of Truth and against one another. Their hearts differ even while they agree in falsehood. Each is an enemy to another and plots his own ruin while pretending to be a friend. They bear their own burdens and burdens added to them, increasing their apostasy through darkness of heart, ignorance of truth and its ordinances, imitation of the devil's tricks, and the spreading of his decorated delusions to deceive mankind.

These are the marks of whoever wanders from truth and persists in ingratitude: his secret condition is exposed. He continues in hypocrisy and obstinacy, invents breaches of covenant, and through ignorance loses the sight he once possessed.

Several years ago I warned you about this age while it was still possible to act, making the truth plain to everyone. I never ceased pressing this matter in private and in public. Whatever wisdom the Qāʾim of Truth, Guardian of the Age, gave me, I placed in epistles, explaining it with all the clarity possible to anyone who looks with justice. Already then, through His success, I understood what would become of some who had once appeared to serve but in this age would break their covenant and turn back after the proof had been presented, rejecting truth and becoming tyrants.

By the truth, whoever abandoned it during the past cycle of concealment and examination has less excuse in my eyes than the one who turns back in the cycle of unveiling after the proofs have been established. The two are indeed the same souls, returning in bodies of covenant-breaking, to be disclosed by their lies and calumnies on the day of judgment. The epistle called *The Realities*, concerning the discipline of all creatures, bears witness to this, and its copies have traveled throughout the lands.

In that epistle I said, among other things: Brothers, make use of this period of respite. Draw near to your Guardian through righteous works before the pages are folded, the pens dry, the gates of mercy close, speech is sealed, and the gates of wrath open against those who display obstinate opposition. These are the beginning of the signs that the witness-guardians will rise and that the great, guiding news will be revealed. I supplied sound and persuasive proofs. The messenger has only to deliver the clear message. I put my trust in the Guardian of Truth, and seek help through him.

I likewise wrote in *Awakening and Good Tidings* of the difference between one who rebelled against truth and grew tyrannical and one who turned away from wrongdoing and desisted. There I set out how the foundations of truth are raised through the movements of the religious elements, exposing the pretenders' confusion between dense, naturally constituted bodies and the subtle meanings of souls. I also laid bare the false beliefs of impure souls, so that reward and punishment might be manifested and the proof established before all peoples through knowledge of themselves and of intelligible realities. These and other matters are recorded in the epistles of the servant in possession of his Lord, so that the signs may be disclosed. He and those who follow him shall testify against those who broke faith and abandoned justice when customary laws were overturned.

This letter is a warning to everyone who has sought and followed the path of truth. It establishes the case against everyone who hears and grasps its meaning. Know, brothers, that God has placed before you the proof of what your own eyes can see. He did not deprive you of people able to explain the course of the ages and the rise of the pretended Pharaohs within religion.

There must be an interval in which God tests the remaining people of truth to reveal whose intentions are sincere. Whoever follows a false pretender who usurps the Guardian's authority will find that truth destroys him and brings punishment upon him.

I am a weak servant, excused for fleeing the company of devils and escaping to the Guardian of the Age, appealing to him for refuge and for judgment against those who oppressed the people of truth and oppressed me. I place my confidence in him on the day of recompense, as the righteous servant Iamlīkhā fled the oppression of the unbelieving Jews and the Creator protected and rescued him. Amid my own weakness, restraint, and forbearance, I have established the proof as far as I was enabled; I fulfilled what was owed to the worthy and even acted generously toward those who rejected truth, stirred up troubles against its people, and turned their backs upon religion for falsehood.

O Lord, this small, weak, humble servant regards himself as nothing beside Your immense favor. He appeals to You, Owner of religion, to help him give thanks for the blessings bestowed upon him. Before You, Guardian of Truth, I disavow the wickedness and corruption introduced by the devils of the interregnum and the fabricated charges with which they have defiled religion and its people.

O Lord, I seek the power of Your authority against every guilty liar and accursed, erring devil who denies the day of presentation and accounting and the manifestation of the Master of the Ages. O Lord, I shelter beneath Your protection from their fraud, and take refuge from their tricks, as they have denied Your favors and lied about the ranks of Your religion and Your friends.

O Lord, separate me from them, for they persist in obstinacy and contention, in foolishness, arrogance, and transgression. Their spiritual disease is too severe for the medicine, their error too entrenched for healing. Neither the study of wisdom nor the preservation of knowledge has cured them. They have not learned from the signs of wisdom nor recoiled from the miracles of truth; they show no reverence for God and come to truth only to fight and harm its people.

O Lord, whoever among them follows me after hearing this letter, whether by speech or action, in order to investigate my news, discover where I stay or go, or pursue my traces, is disowned by the Originator of all and opposed to the God of heaven and earth and the one who judges souls for the crimes they have committed. May God's anger and curse fall upon him to the most distant reaches. You are the judge, my Lord, between him and me, and You wrong no one, not even the weight of an atom.

I entrust the people of faithfulness and truth to God, who knows the secrets of creation and grants victory, in spite of the deniers, to the standing, guiding Guardian of Truth. He suffices me and is the best helper of anyone who trusts in Him, does not abandon His obedience, and speaks with sincerity.

Completed, with praise to God, Possessor of grace and beneficence.

EPISTLE 67 — WITHOUT THE QĀʾIM OF THE AGE, THERE IS NO GUIDE TO OBEDIENCE TO THE MERCIFUL

Whatever is right and eloquent in this discourse comes through his blessing and through holding fast to his ranks and signs; whatever is mistaken or wayward arises from my own weakness and shortcomings. I say, and He it is who grants right guidance: My Lord suffices me, and excellent is the Helper and Supporter. Upon Him I rely, and through Him I seek assistance in every affair.

The spiritual persons are known to most of the world only by names that people imagine without verifying their reality. People suppose that there exists a simple spiritual world that is neither perceived nor sensed nor limited by any of the senses. But what cannot be established is imagined and nonexistent. What form can be shown to a person who believes this false belief? Such a person is stubborn toward the people of reality. Yet these people agree that the spiritual world is superior to everything else.

I wish I knew what benefit they derive from esteeming it, when by their own account it consists of substances that do not exist and possess no established reality. Things become real through their reality when they appear as persons among the world, acting in it as the soul acts in the body: directing it, making use of it, and understanding through it, as the subtle acts upon the dense, directs it voluntarily, and employs it in its undertakings.

All creation likewise agrees that the Creator—mighty is His power—is just. What justice would there be in making the spiritual world consist of simple, unlimited, imperceptible substances and then requiring servants to know them? No one in the world understands, perceives, or learns except through a living, speaking, discriminating form. What justice could there be in abolishing such persons when the entire order of the world rests upon them, and without them the world could not subsist?

The Qāʾim of the Age and Guide to obedience to the Merciful is the command of our Lord, exalted be His remembrance, by which He commanded things to be, and they were. Those things are the people of tawḥīd, for they possessed no form of actual reality until the Qāʾim of the Age brought them into being—upon him be the Lord's finest greeting and peace.

The substances called Intellect and Soul are persons in his presence: men who speak and understand. Through them the entire order of the spiritual and corporeal worlds subsists. The spiritual rises through them and through knowledge of them to that greatest station, the rank of tawḥīd, while the corporeal world is administered by them at the command of our Lord. Thus whoever is in heaven or earth serves our Lord, willingly or unwillingly.

For these reasons, spiritual persons must be knowledgeable, understanding men. Without this, things would possess no realities and the world would resemble that of the sophists who deny that anything has a real nature.

The revealed text and its interpretation show the same thing: neither possesses truth independently. Those who claim that the truth lies only in some third form, saying that revelation cannot be understood without inward interpretation, admit that the two depend upon each other despite their opposition. Not one word of the interpretation is valid without the revelation, nor can they say what revelation truly means without interpretation. Each depends upon the other for its existence. By their very opposition and interdependence the knowing person discovers that neither is truth in itself.

Interpretation also does not have a single face or a single path, whereas truth has only one. And interpretation has no limit at which it stops. Whatever proceeds in a series without any ultimate end is false. Thus the truth must be knowledge that has a definite object and a goal beyond which the intellect cannot proceed: our Lord, exalted be His remembrance, who has appeared to His creatures through a form of their own kind, manifest and unveiled to servants who know Him.

His ranks are persons, men who command and forbid, teach and communicate knowledge. If they act rightly, our Lord and the Lord of every lord says to them, “You have done right”; if one errs, he is told, “You have erred.” Thus they know

their position with certainty, and those successful Unitarians who follow them likewise know their own position with certainty.

The remainder of the world lives in doubt. Doubt is unbelief, for people worship someone who, as they conceive him, neither sees, hears, harms, nor benefits them. They do not know whether their worship is what he wishes, or whether he has wanted anything of them beyond what their limited understanding has imagined. This itself is doubt, from which we seek refuge in the Lord.

It has already been established that the Guardian—exalted be His remembrance—is just and does no wrong. What justice could require us to know and worship a deity seated above the seventh heaven, as the associationists suppose? Who among all humankind could know what lies behind a wall closer to him than anything else without having the wall opened and being able to see beyond it? If a thing so near cannot be known while concealed, how could humanity be ordered to know One whom it is said has hidden Himself behind such a veil? Rather, the Lord has appeared in this human form which resembles us. This is just, through correspondence and likeness in the means of human apprehension.

There is another argument. The son of Adam is the purpose of the Creator's work among creatures, for the higher and lower worlds exist for him and on his account. Since the knowledgeable, discerning, and wise have established that the son of Adam is the noblest of all things, it follows that the Creator conceals Himself in the noblest of forms, not the lowliest. We seek refuge in the Lord from the belief that He is identified with the ignorant dead, who neither see nor hear nor benefit nor harm.

The world agrees that the Creator has power. Where would that power be if He remained absent through all the ages and never manifested? Would that not make Him unable to manifest? Conversely, if He appeared throughout all the ages and could not be absent, He would be unable to conceal Himself. And if He appeared in every manifestation only in a single form and condition, that too would be a limitation of His power. What sort of deity is invoked by a man who claims his deity is absent and unable to appear? Inability is no property of One who possesses power.

Our Lord is the God of the first and the last and is powerful in every condition. He has been concealed and manifested Himself in appearances of different forms. In outward appearance He has passed through the form of childhood and then perfection, and afterward, outwardly, the body has suffered illness, so that it cannot be claimed that He is incapable of this. The demonstration of such possibilities is a demonstration of power.

Had He remained absent without appearing, the Worshipped One would not have been established and the indications of the ranks would have had no reality. Had He appeared and never withdrawn, worship would have become compulsion and force. All the inhabitants of the earth would have agreed about Him without disagreement. That too would represent a defect in the created order, for everyone would then be knowledgeable, no one ignorant; everyone would be a Unitarian, no one an associator. The world would be compelled, without anyone earning reward or punishment, since compulsion excludes both. This would mean inability to manifest the learned and the ignorant, the deficient and the excellent, a thing and its opposite. Rather, through the appearance of opposites, power is made complete and wisdom is fulfilled, the Worshipped One is known, and the ranks of those given guidance and success are disclosed.

A learned man spoke on this matter in verse:

“The God appeared in visible form, in justice and grace; There is nothing concealed in that manifestation.”

He also said in three couplets:

“The Lord did not burden all His servants

With an extravagant command that cannot be fulfilled;

Nor with worship of distant nothingness, unjustly imposed,

Whose existence they cannot even represent to themselves.

Rather, He manifested to His servants, every one,

And brought them knowledge of what is forbidden and permitted.”

Consider also this: if a child were born of two parents who could not speak, and never heard speech from anyone else, he would likewise not speak. If his parents could speak, he could learn to speak. Tracing an effect backward to its cause requires an ultimate teacher or originating cause. Form is only received from form. It follows that the Originator—exalted be His remembrance—appeared of old in a visible form permitting correspondence and understanding.

The same argument applies to all sciences and crafts. Follow every effect back through its causes, and there must be a final origin where the sequence stops. No person on earth produces an art by himself that has never been preceded by something similar or analogous. All things must therefore have a single source to which they return and upon which they rely: the Originator, exalted above what the deniers say.

The clearest proof of the imamate of the Qāʾim of the Age is that he brought what is the opposite of the doctrines of the world. All the Speakers, Foundations, and masters of successive cycles pointed toward a supposed absent nothingness and placed it beyond the world's senses. The Qāʾim of the Age, Guide to obedience to the Merciful—upon him be the Lord's peace—called humanity to a being who exists and is manifest, a God powerful and victorious in all things. Whoever calls to al-Ḥākim, the existing and worshipped God, judges himself fairly. Whoever calls to an imaginary absent object seeks leadership for himself. For a rational person the distinction is plain.

Another aspect is that he disclosed his purpose all at once. People east and west knew that he summoned them to the unity of our Lord. After that, the nations were given freedom to practice and manifest their religions. It follows that this proclamation was especially for the people of tawḥīd, not for ignorant associators; otherwise it would have been part of the established custom even before the appearance of the Qāʾim of the Age and his followers.

The restoration of churches, the removal of the requirement that Christians carry crosses, and their elevation above Muslims in various places provide clear evidence that the former Islamic dispensation had weakened and come to its end, and that truth now shines: the tawḥīd of our Lord al-Ḥākim through His own essence, distinct from His originated beings. Whoever went ahead to recognize Him was saved, while whoever remained behind perished in error. What an astonishing people, shut off from hearing and fleeing from the true knowledge of our Lord, while clinging to idols!

The learned man said, in ten couplets:

“How strange the act of those who stayed behind,

Rejecting truth once truth had plainly appeared!

And stranger still, the worship they offer

To one concealed, absent for so long.

If he possessed power he would have appeared—

A strange affair indeed to anyone who reflects!

But tawḥīd arrived, and the power

By which the minds of all the worlds were dazzled.

It became clear that al-Ḥākim, the Just, is One,

Tender and merciful toward creation and mankind.

Yet those without insight lagged behind,

While the noblest among the people went ahead.

Is it not strange that churches are built,

And Christians exalted after an order has passed away?

He has alerted the minds of all His servants:

There is no truth except obedience made manifest.

The God of creation, exalted beyond every denier,

Is the Lord al-Ḥākim: the pride of whoever takes pride.

In Him I take pride throughout my life,

Obedient to the rank of truth, waiting upon it.”

I marvel at the people who cross desolate deserts and endure the hazards of travel to a country they can reach only with great difficulty, for the sake of a black stone and a lifeless house of rock, without life or speech. What could be more astonishing than this deed? Yet they condemn the luminous company of Unitarians for worshipping the one glorious Lord al-Ḥākim, witness over all things.

What benefit is gained by kissing the Black Stone? What intellectual insight or genuine divine science does it give? Their action is like that of Christians venerating a cross—or even less reasonable because crosses exist everywhere, while followers of the Black Stone travel from every region to reach it.

They honor the stone, they say, in reverence for their prophet. Yet is not the person who occupies the prophet's station in every age more deserving of excellence, honor, and reverence? Is it not an intellectual impossibility to prefer the sign to the living person whom it signifies? A people searched for their deity all their lives, obtaining nothing but names which, once investigated, had no reality except through the existence of a living, speaking form. When the Worshipped One appeared to them, confirming what the ranks had indicated, they refused, grew proud, and called Him a mere man. Pride deceived them concerning the Lord. Then they behaved with the hatred and envy toward Unitarians that their predecessors had displayed in earlier ages.

What profit could be greater for human beings, whether they travel in worldly or religious affairs, than to receive abundant sustenance without providing capital? That would be profit from every point of view. Yet in the case of revealed truth, they reject the one gain that can be received without surrendering another possession.

You, people of tawḥīd, good guidance, and right direction, have known your God while other creatures deny Him. You have profited from knowing Him while others have suffered loss. Those endowed with perception and excellence know that worshipping imagined nothingness was a very great loss. When our Lord manifested Himself to the servants, those guided recognized that He had not imposed an impossible object of worship. A supposed being that could never be delimited, described, or perceived by any sense could not provide the knowledge He has now disclosed.

It is intelligible to anyone who thinks that the son of Adam is the purpose of the Creator's creatures, and that the higher world, including the sphere and its governing bodies, and the lower world, including animals and plants, exist for humankind. How could wisdom require that the intended human being be an unreachable nothing through all the ages? That would attribute the greatest inability to the Creator.

Reasonable and knowledgeable people know that the number of human souls has neither increased nor decreased; they are a fixed number from the first cycles to the completion of the world and the return to their lasting abode. The higher and lower creation has no bounded date or limit known to the world; if the number of human souls increased at every interval, an impossible conclusion would follow. If, in every thousand years, even a single person were added to the world, would the earth not become crowded with them? And if in every thousand years a single person were subtracted, would there not come a time when not one of them remained?

The persons have neither decreased nor increased. Rather, they appear in different bodily forms in accordance with what they have acquired of good or evil. The Creator's power enables Him both to reward and to punish in those bodies.

Someone may object: “Why do we not remember our previous cycles and epochs?” The person who argues from truth replies: “If you remembered and knew them, you would share the Originator's hidden wisdom, and that would imply a defect in His power—may we seek refuge in Him from such a thought. It would also ruin the world's order. If you knew the soul you formerly possessed and the condition in which you lived, you would know the previous condition of others. You would also know the Originator who has repeatedly brought you into bodily persons. If you knew Him in that way you would know everything in the world, just as you know yourself. Then learned and ignorant, deficient and excellent would be equal. The Creator would no longer have manifested a world containing the ignorant as well as the learned and the imperfect as well as the perfect. His power and wisdom are instead revealed by the learned and the ignorant, the deficient and the excellent, each thing beside its opposite.”

Another indication is that, when the Qāʾim of the Age summoned his people, certain persons who had known truth in earlier ages answered the Call, accepted it, and did not deny it. Their minds were ready and they possessed genuine understanding, without any worldly advantage to gain. Instead they suffered hardship at the hands of opponents, envious enemies, and those of base character, yet they endured.

They even affirm that the rest of the world is in the Fire while they are in the Garden. What clearer sign could there be that, when reminded, they remembered, and when told, they recognized what had been familiar to their souls? Meanwhile the ignorant and contemptible stayed behind, rejecting the Qāʾim of the Age and claiming he had taken what was not rightfully his. They refused, disbelieved, and passed the blessing by, although the Lord is rich and worthy of praise. Vengeance and recompense will come upon them for having turned away.

Listen, company of Unitarians, worshippers of the Lord of the worlds, who are free from false testimony and association with those who give partners to the divine. You are the angels brought near; from among you are the prophets sent forth. May the Lord place us with those who are granted obedience to the ranks and who recognize the meanings by which those ranks point toward the Worshipped One, the present and ruling God al-Ḥākim.

Make your souls joyful and lift up your heads. The Lord is with you; He is your Guardian, and the Qāʾim of His Age is your Imam and guide. You are the best of people in the best time, the most excellent community in the most excellent age. Obey your ranks and know the One you worship; then you shall be guided and given success. The Lord is able to do all things. He suffices me, and excellent is the Helper and Supporter in every affair. The epistle is complete.

EPISTLE 68 — THE JOURNEY TO THE HONORED MASTERS

I put my trust in the Lord God al-Ḥākim, beyond the transcendence described by human minds, and seek approach to Him through His servant, the Guide who upholds the truth of tawḥīd and divinity. From the advising servant Bahāʾ al-Dīn, tongue of the believers, defender of the Unitarians, possessed by and subject to obedience to the guiding Qāʾim, his Master and Lord; the left wing, the fourth, the last and smallest of the ranks, according to the command of the One who favored him and guided him.

To all the noble, pure, honored masters in al-Aḥsāʾ, successors to the masters of the nations—the truthful former Callers to tawḥīd, inheritors of the virtues of their forebears, the faithful and God-fearing messengers. They succeed their forebears in excellence and in seeking redress for the blood of oppressed and tried Unitarians; and to the faithful, pure, submissive friends in their company, people of patience, trust, submission, and certainty.

Peace upon whoever has been enabled to submit to the guiding Imam, Guardian of the Age, whose insight has been uncovered so that he knows the ranks and signs of tawḥīd, the clarification, and the demonstration; who has found guidance through the lights of his instruction and been delivered from vanity, arrogance, and injustice toward the people of truth. The Lord's mercy and blessings upon my brothers who seek through him a way to the sovereign Judge.

Now then: greatness, dignity, exaltation, worship, submission, and acknowledgement belong to obedience to the Lord God al-Ḥākim, the overpowering One, exalted above the most subtle stirrings of imagination and the passing thoughts of the mind. His unity cannot be limited by the understanding expressed in words, nor can His mighty power be comprehended through sight and reflection. He has made the very inability of purified intellects to encompass Him an acknowledgement of His unity, and has tested humanity through His manifest appearance in a form of correspondence, so that the case against the souls of the worlds may be established through the reality of truth, with a warning and full opportunity to understand.

Honor, therefore, belongs to those who grasp the reins of obedience and acknowledge the Existent One. The others remain confined in their denial, wandering between the realities and doubts, stripped of the purified insight of those who serve the Guardian. Exalted is the Lord who made His guiding Guardian the means of uncovering the concealed purposes of hearts and appointed him over every soul and what it has earned, so that nothing beyond His power could escape.

Honored masters, receive the lights of the realities with the substances of your souls. Confront the hostile obstacles of time with patience. Your pure ancestors established this foundation upon the truth of tawḥīd and its clarification. They strengthened it with humility, noble character, contentment, and submission, until the building stood firm. Believers resident among them and those who arrived from all countries shared in its construction, spreading the word of tawḥīd and making it known among the people of every religion.

Their virtues became celebrated in the regions through the purity of their tawḥīd. Their successors followed their example in the truth throughout successive periods. Why then have you narrowed the security, justice, fairness, kindness, and forbearance which your predecessors extended in their own dwelling to those who reached them? Why has a man who crossed difficult and remote lands, endured hardship, hunger, and dangers in obedience to the Guide of the nations, and carried to you true knowledge from the awaited, standing Imam, not received that welcome? He came to explain among you the decisive signs of tawḥīd and the books of guidance.

Why did you not receive the person responsible for carrying this noble gift and blessing, who knew its meaning and grasped its excellent evidence, and who asked you no reward, as you receive those who come and dwell among you from the sects of lying unbelievers? The latter have not learned from the respite granted them, have refused the call of truth and mercy, have not abandoned their foolish innovations and corrupt desires, and have not sought the guidance of the lofty palace now visible. Their minds remain those of wandering beasts in human form, captivated by degraded appetites and hard hearts.

You, honored masters, need fear no earthly power because of any wrong you have committed against it. Nor do the nations outside the religion of tawḥīd possess grounds to brand you unbelievers, so that you would have to conceal this message; nor does an enemy occupy your land whom you must placate. What, then, has caused you to reject hearing the Qāʾim's wisdom, the wisdom toward which you and your ancestors have pointed and which you have awaited through the ages?

If—God forbid—the masters have forgotten the signs of tawḥīd and faith because time has seemed long over repeated ages, why did they not receive the martyred shaykh as one would receive a messenger sent by a sovereign from a neighboring land? In worldly government, the sovereign must hear such a messenger himself, or have his chief representative hear him if he cannot, in order to learn what the sender has entrusted to him. This is the conduct of the comfortable rulers of this world. How much more fitting is it for men of rank to inquire into the signs of religion!

Unless this rejection and arrogance toward those who reached you arose because the written wisdom in the epistles was weak or its language lacked substance—or because it did not contain decisive proofs requiring obedience to the awaited Guide—there is no reason for it. If intermediaries failed to convey the message to you, I appeal to the awaited Guardian of Command to guide you and complete His favor of tawḥīd upon you.

What grief it brings that persons of noble standing, who have long carried the hostility of the nations and kept their promises and covenants in expectation of the Qāʾim, should hold back when his signs are presented! They have turned from obedience after being summoned to recognize his exalted stations. When the guidance of his religion reached them through his Proof, they neglected and drove away his messenger, although believers who heard him had recognized his words, submitted, and accepted them. Before the pure messenger reached his intended destination, he passed from this life in obedience to his Lord. His son arrived in his place; that is part of what has led us to understand what happened. May God grant safety on the day of recompense to whoever accepts the Guardian's command and gratefully receives the water of life sent to him.

Honored masters, distinguish yourselves through virtue from those who merely imitate the practices of the multitude. Through the noble teaching of the awaited Qāʾim, separate yourselves from the obstinate who doubt his ranks and despair. The secrets of hearts have been displayed; the case has been established against the unjust. The gate of the lofty palace has opened, and the birds of Paradise sing within it with strange hymns of glorification and miraculous affirmations of unity. The disused well overflows with sweet, pure water; the other spring, linked to the false Messiah, pours bitterness and sickness upon the souls of deniers. They mistake the substances of reality for accidental attributes and weaken the bearers of the noblest forms of knowledge through corruption and dissolution. Through the ignorance, lack of discipline, and baseness of the Awaited One's enemies, these souls have fallen from elevation into blindness, deafness, and degradation, condemned to return in impure bodily forms for their obstinacy, hypocrisy, and fabricated accusations against the Proofs of the Guardian of Truth.

You, honored and faithful masters, are the flower of the decisive signs, the noble fruits of the branches of truth, successors to those who called people to the highest knowledge. You have followed their ancient way by guarding the faithful men and women, and are acquainted with the transmigration of spiritual substances as they return among tongues and palates. These substances ascend to the exalted assembly when they have completed the degrees of perfection, abide in a pure and radiant dwelling, and will appear with the manifestation of the Guardian of Truth at the completion of his intention. They will witness the reward of the sincere and the punishment of wicked transgressors, in recompense for their defense of the Unitarians and their repudiation of apostates who made themselves enemies of the Guardian and envied his friends.

Honored masters, will you not be worthy successors of your pure predecessors in the labor to which they devoted their minds? Will you not publish and manifest the guiding Call and stand together before witnesses to spread its signs and explain them to the nations? Draw knowledge from its pure origin, from the overflowing wisdom and sacred light within it, and uphold the standards of the righteous who came before you. Thus the word of truth may rise through your efforts and your lineage may be established in the sacred dwelling through the guiding Call.

Look at what happened in former ages to nations proud of themselves that oppressed the brethren and, after being warned, refused tawḥīd and belief. This age is not like those that came before. In it the enemies of the Qāʾim are stripped of their pride and victory, while the nations who deny his blessings fall under humiliation and compulsion. Seek refuge, pure men, in the Guardian of Truth from the consequences of arrogance. Sanctify yourselves through humility before the Lord God al-Ḥākim before the pens grow dry, the pages are folded, and the light of manifestation sends its thunderbolts upon those who have refused tawḥīd.

The awaited, guiding Qāʾim—peace upon his remembrance—is free of injustice and oppression, exalted above fraud and cruelty. His patience and knowledge encompass the peoples. Humanity agrees in expecting a guide who will fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with injustice and oppression. But consider what truth and justice themselves require. Could the awaited, standing Guide demand from nations that they obey a religion not made known to them? Could he punish them for failing to follow teachings they never learned? Surely he must warn them and establish the proof so clearly that they can recognize and comprehend his commands.

How can obedience be demanded to one who has not appeared to the world to be known, whose name and qualities have not been identified, whose commands and prohibitions have not reached the ears of nations, whose doctrine has not spread to the horizons, and whose Callers and proofs have never established his claim before mankind? Only when his injunctions and prohibitions have become known among Arabs and non-Arabs does his case stand against the nations. His reward after manifestation and his intercession before the Creator belong to those who receive his command, obey, are satisfied, and submit, while those who turn aside bear the consequences.

These established proofs refute the claim of every sect that demands obedience to a standing, guiding, or awaited one who has never appeared to the world and whose knowledge and Call have not been made manifest in clear speech. The case can only be established through a publicly known summons, commands, and prohibitions addressed to the followers of every religious community.

Such communities include Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Magians—among the communities of the preceding religious dispensations—and the religious groups known as Nuṣayriyya, Qaṭʿiyya, the followers of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar called Ḥamrāwiyya, the Shumayṭiyya, Kaysāniyya, Jārūdiyya, Zaydiyya, Mūsawiyya, Kashkāwiyya, and others not named. Their claims are deceptive, and accepted only by those who abandon reason.

Reason decides, and truth allows or forbids a religious assertion according to whether the person concerned actually appeared to humanity, summoned it to a religion, and established a case by verifiable words and deeds, then withdrew from the world after that manifestation in a withdrawal explicitly announced as a trial and examination.

If an advocate of one of those sects protests and adorns his position with deceptive words, saying that his master called people to religion before his absence, the response is: “Do not say, 'Before his absence'; say, 'Before his death.'” Moreover, if he called people at all, it was to an absent nothingness, to religious law, and to associationism and deception, rather than to the present truth.

The awaited, guiding Mahdī, the Qāʾim of Truth—may God's peace rest upon his remembrance—rose in the most noble of stations and established the case against the worlds by his public manifestation with proofs and signs. That is why he is called the Qāʾim. After publicly receiving the designation of Imam, he summoned the nations to the unity of the Lord God al-Ḥākim, Originator of originated beings, the existing God and Mighty One of heaven and earth. He set up the proofs and clarifications, while his ranks and Callers spread the Call of tawḥīd throughout the horizons. Thus no one could say, “No bearer of good tidings or warning came to us.” The warning did indeed come, although only a small, praiseworthy company accepted it.

Only after establishing the argument before the worlds did he withdraw—peace upon his remembrance—into the dominion of his Creator, for a term that He will complete according to the teachings of wisdom. At its end the truth of the proofs will be established against the obstinate. The obedient who were oppressed will be vindicated against the

doubting, apostate wrongdoers, and equity, truth, and justice will be established on the day of resurrection, judgment, and separation through the power of the Creator and the blessing of His Qāʾim and Guide.

Listen closely, noble masters, endowed with pure souls, substantial intellects, ancient honor, and sound judgment, to the Caller of the awaited, guiding Imam. Drink his water, clear and undefiled by the small creatures who have polluted the wells. Bind your pure souls to harmony with the earlier believers. Lower your wings in humility toward distant Unitarians, so that you remain firm in obedience to the standing, guiding Imam, faithful to his covenant and ranks, and mindful of the blood of Unitarians unjustly shed.

Let contentment and submission be the motto of your assembly, as they were of the pure predecessors. Through the return to the Guardian's command, obtain the sweet water of life from its spring; return to your noblest and purest element through the sanctity of the imamate, remaining in it. May the shelter of its dignity extend over you when the knowledge of religion is revealed, and may rivers of blessing flow upon you when the banners of truth, victory, and triumph are raised over the nations that resist truth.

You shall then dwell under the victorious authority of the Guardian, within steadfast glory, rulers over the Arabs and judges among them on account of your noble precedence in tawḥīd. This is so if you put on the garments of obedience and submission, extend a hand against obstinacy and rebellion, reconcile with those of the earlier faithful, and preserve sincere affection. Take heed, noble masters, of the admonitions in the signs of tawḥīd and the opportunity for peace. Clothe yourselves in certainty before the Resurrection overwhelms you.

The veils have been lifted from the egg of truth and the concealed one is near his manifestation. Heavy clouds rumble, and the lightning of appearance flashes forth before the rains of resurrection. The trees of reality are ripe and ready to flower and bear fruit. The jewels of light gleam within their elements, ready for fullness and perfection. The breeze blows upon the frivolous and the south wind upon the people of error; the souls of the people of truth are distinguished for recompense, and the seeker and the sought become known.

Reflect, honored masters, on the narrow paths of those who deny, the changing purposes of the deceivers, and the exposure of pretenders. Thus your souls may be secure in true certainty, your eyes may look with knowledge upon the realities of religion, and the devices of the wicked may become small beside your virtues. Your understanding will rise toward union with the noblest substance.

The doors have been opened for the establishing of proof and repentance before creation. The cycles have reached completion, and the time inscribed in the Book has arrived. We belong to the Lord and rely upon Him, trusting His promise to His friends.

Honored masters, understand the examples I have set before you and recognize the meaning of the advice and sayings I have offered. By the truth, their foundation has been made firm. Be awakened by this reminder and exhortation. Reflect upon the true counsel I have placed in these arousing signs.

The Knower of hidden things and the inward secrets of hearts knows that I have not neglected the masters or cast aside correspondence with you through indifference. Distance and immense dangers have stood in the way. The Unitarians were not secure even in their homes because they had become mingled with their opponents. How then could they be safe in travel? The easiest road lies among the Arabs, among whom treachery has multiplied and fidelity to obligations has diminished. They have betrayed those who sought their protection and broken trust in companionship and deposits. Few among them now hold fast to religion, and the changing times have placed them far from us.

The departed shaykh—may the Creator sanctify his soul and restore it to the sacred station of the imamate—sought a route to the masters through Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shabāsh, his son, a descendant of blessed men, and the vizier, the noble master Ẓahīr al-Dīn, helper of believers and sword of the Unitarians, rightly acting in his commands and prohibitions, bearing the duties laid upon him in obedience to the awaited, guiding Imam. With the sword of truth, that

Imam will destroy the person who resists, doubts, and disbelieves, and his banners are bound with honor, victory, and triumph.

The pure Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shabāsh proclaimed the merits of the noble masters, celebrated their virtues in discourse, and made known their generous deeds and excellent qualities. Through the auspicious action of Ẓahīr al-Dīn, helper of the believers and sword of the Unitarians, the paths leading to the masters were opened to Unitarians after having been obstructed, and the fires of associationism that had flared in the region were extinguished.

Afterward the departed shaykh went to the noble masters carrying the letters. His son returned following his departure from this life—may God illuminate his face—full of thanks for the two noble princes, Abū Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn ibn Jaʿfar and Abū Muḥammad ibn al-Ghayth, and for the accomplished Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Faḍl. He established that they possessed praiseworthy qualities and virtues.

I learned that the noble masters wished to correspond directly with someone without an intermediary, a person who would know the finer meanings and could give complete answers to their questions. Therefore, despite the remoteness and hardship of the route, I hastened to send my pure daughter Sārra, assured of her great reward from the Qāʾim of Truth and her success in the hereafter.

The honored masters should know that she is among the weakest servants of the Qāʾim, wavering between life and death. May they see with the eyes of truth who has risen through degrees of excellence, and recognize those accompanying her among the pure brethren sent with this writing. They undertake this journey to urge the masters to act before the opportunity is lost, that they may obtain rich reward before the appointed hour.

I supplicate the One exalted beyond limits and imagination and sanctified beyond the reach of knowledge, seeking approach to Him through His awaited Guardian and the chosen ranks who follow His will. May He inspire the Callers to tawḥīd and those called to it with piety, and lead them together with the assembly of Unitarians toward what is noblest, best, and highest. He is capable of doing this and worthy of answering the prayer.

Praise and sanctification belong to the Lord God al-Ḥākim, exalted beyond all description; approach to Him is through His awaiting, guiding servant the Qāʾim. He suffices His weak, possessed servant on the day when the lips are sealed and the inward secrets of hearts are revealed.

Written in the month of Ṣafar in the twenty-second year of the Qāʾim of Truth and Guide of guides. After the writing of this letter, obstacles arose which prevented the pure woman from traveling; the journey was to be undertaken only after the masters' acceptance of the teaching of the awaited Qāʾim had become clear. I have dispatched brethren to the dwelling of the masters, who are free to decide as circumstances permit. We await whatever good news comes from them.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to the Qāʾim of the Age, His servant.

EPISTLE 69 — THE ASCENT TO THE SALVATION OF THE UNITARIANS AND THE LADDER OF LIFE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE CERTAINTY

I put my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim, exalted beyond comprehension and nonexistence, and give thanks to His servant, the Qāʾim, Imam of the imams and Guardian of blessings. Majesty, praise, greatness, and glory belong to our Lord, who fulfills every promise made to the people of His unity, and before whose sovereign might every existent thing is brought to naught. He has made His unity a dignity for those who believe in and accept it, a support for those who rely upon it; He has made opposition to His Guardian an abasement for those who cling to it and a precipice for those who seek it. In every cycle He has established a road to His unity, and at the culmination of the cycles He has manifested through the Qāʾim the proof and demonstration of that unity. Praise corresponding to the perfection of His power and its manifestation, and to the enduring and repeated triumph of His cause.

I testify that there is no god but the exalted Lord, whose light and proof dazzle, and whose command and dominion prevail. His peace and honor rest upon the most excellent pure Intellect, the noblest elevated Light, and the purest devout person, in whom the Creator’s light of unity shines, who calls to Him in the world and points toward Him: the Imam of the pure community, the Qāʾim of the cycles when their period is complete.

Now then: a rational and virtuous person must use the discerning intellect to advise his own soul, casting aside whatever cannot be arranged according to wisdom and the order of tawḥīd. Someone who excuses his own desires and follows his passion is hardly likely to give good counsel to others. Everyone who possesses knowledge, religion, and understanding should therefore examine, with insight and sincerity, what the sages of religion have said, what the earlier guardians of religious law expressed in pointing toward unity, what the Imam's written discourse has indicated, what the honored gatherings have explained and preserved, and what the exalted commands have suggested. Thus the seeker may find the standard of truth and the believing student reach the reality of tawḥīd.

I say that the nations, despite their diverse beliefs and opposing purposes, acknowledge a Maker. They disagree about His attributes because their sciences have failed them in the search for His reality and because their minds have not distinguished between what is necessarily existent through itself and what is necessarily existent by its relation to another. This distinction is among the preliminaries by which the philosophers pointed to divine unity and transcendence; properly understood, it leads toward the reality that the discerning among them could infer.

By the kindness of the Guardian of Command and the favor of the Imam of the Age, I shall clarify the meaning of necessary existence through itself, and set out an argument that distinguishes the unlimited from the limited. I begin by addressing those trained in philosophical discipline and those who employ the methods of logic, using premises accepted among the early philosophers and bringing forward their conclusions. My object is to summon everyone to the unity of the Lord of all creatures.

The early philosophers, our pure elders, and the discerning members of the Call agreed that the most excellent and complete reward is to apprehend divine objects of knowledge and acquire demonstrable virtues. This is the highest happiness, the end for which a human being exists, and the final perfection of the soul. Once the soul attains it, it desires nothing beyond it; unlike wealth, which is sought for the pleasures and benefits that it brings, happiness in this sense is sought for its own sake, not as a means to something else. It is the soul's ultimate completion, admitting no further addition. In the terminology of the sages, the meaning that exists necessarily through itself, rather than through another, is the Intellect.

I say this to declare the Creator—mighty is His power—transcendent above both meanings. All things below this happiness, the Intellect, are objects of knowledge derived through their relation to it. If someone asks, “If the Intellect is not sought for the sake of anything else, how can the Creator's unity be perceived or apprehended?”, the answer is that Intellect is not sought for the sake of another intermediary between it and the intelligible objects of knowledge. It is their cause and the cause of caused things; but the unity of the Creator, exalted beyond perception and relation, is different.

The true end of these objects of knowledge is to bring us to acknowledge our inability to comprehend Him, after first knowing the proofs that establish existence.

If these objects of knowledge were directly related to the Creator, they would involve Him in the mutual conditions of related terms. The existence of one related thing is established with that of the other, as son is related to father, father to son, servant to master, and master to servant. But to make the Creator dependent on the existence of objects of knowledge in this way would subject Him to an added relation. He is exalted beyond relatedness, resemblance, and limitation.

The disposition of every human mind, and the belief of all religions, agrees that divine objects of knowledge can be understood only through the Intellect and are related to it. Through it they become manifest in every age. From the standpoint of truth, the Intellect is a servant and possession, acknowledging its inability before our Lord al-Ḥākim throughout time. He has made it visible to the world and connected the knowledge of religions with it. The fabrications by which the sects have referred these matters to an absent nothingness are nearing dissolution, along with the snares of the accursed Iblīs and those who summon people to his cause.

It is therefore clear that what exists necessarily through itself is the guiding, standing Imam, who is supported by the ranks that serve him. These ranks are related to him and point toward the truth of the Worshipped One. Our Lord, exalted is His glory, transcends their connections, determinations, and descriptions; He abides in the majesty of divinity and the sovereignty of indivisible unity.

I say further that the peoples of the world acknowledge that divine unity requires the removal of every attribute and limitation. Such negations apply intelligibly only to something that exists. The Creator, exalted is His greatness, must be affirmed as existent, yet no one attains knowledge of His unity without rejecting attributes and bounds. The very universality of the summons toward Him is proof enough: the Call points to the reality of unity, declares Him one, proclaims His transcendence, and invites all creation toward Him.

If the Creator were nonexistent, every party would be equal in its claims of transcendence and abstraction. There would be no gradation of knowledge through genuine unity, and thus no grounds for reward and punishment. Likewise, if He existed in some form altogether unlike His creatures, or appeared to them with a form immediately befitting the greatness of His divinity, no one would doubt Him. The difference between people would disappear and with it reward and punishment. Rather, He is existent for the knowing friends who recognize Him, and as though nonexistent to their heedless opponents.

One who imagines seeing the One to whom he points merely looks at his own image, like someone staring at a polished iron mirror. Each time he looks afresh he finds only himself and returns with weary, frustrated sight. The Imam's written word says, “Eyes do not perceive Him, while He perceives eyes.” If He did not exist and eyes did not perceive Him, this would be no wonder at all; the declaration would be foolish, since anyone could tell another that he cannot see what does not exist. It must mean that He exists but cannot be encompassed by sight. Indeed the very intellects of human beings are incapable of encompassing the One who originated them; they falter before the representation or comprehension of their Creator. How then could His creatures and their passing properties attain His sacred majesty?

Every subtle spiritual origination and every gross material creature is incapable of creating another of its own kind. The Universal Intellect cannot originate another Intellect equal to itself; none of the embodied beings can create another being out of nothing as it is. Every reason acknowledges that its own power falls short of this. But it is possible for the Creator to manifest His existence in a form resembling that which He originated and created: nothing renders Him incapable of it. His unity indicates this, while His justice establishes the proof for His creatures and guides them by making His blessing accessible. These logical premises and rational demonstrations answer the philosophers who reject religion and weaken the objections of negligent people.

Those who profess belief in the imamate of the Creator and affirm the authority of the sacred gatherings have already heard words sufficient to silence their doubts. The Imam said, in effect, that the persons of the Speakers disappeared while the persons of those who sent them remained, and that the persons of the sent ones vanished from ordinary sight while the meanings of those who sent them became visible. The point is the manifestation, in this age, of the meanings once concealed under the persons and cycles of earlier messengers.

Our Lord also revealed a sign concerning this present age and the breaking of the fast of tawḥīd, in the year four hundred and four. The saying announces that the fasting period has passed and the festival is approaching. Yet how many sinners persist in their deeds without coming to repentance!

In the two-hundred-and-fortieth gathering read by Mālik ibn Saʿīd, people are warned not to despise the “orphans” assigned to the women, whose rights had been withheld—an image interpreted as the proofs of the concealed imams who await the lifting of precautionary concealment. Under the earlier wisdom, concealment belonged to the period of danger, while open proclamation and victory were promised for the period of manifestation. They hope to extinguish divine light, but the Creator will manifest His truth.

I witnessed a debate with a deceiver who had learned from a caller falsely claiming knowledge, or from an aged shaykh repeating the same error. He spoke extensively of the soul's return, claiming that at the resurrection the soul would exist separately and be united only with its objects of knowledge. His strongest argument, borrowed from his teacher, was that the soul acts independently during dreams and therefore has no need to unite with bodies in its final return.

A young Unitarian replied to him: “May God correct you! You have missed the truth. Do you not know that someone born without sight has no image of visible objects during waking life and cannot dream their visible shapes later in life? A soul in sleep pictures what it has perceived through the bodily form with which it is joined. Its images reflect objects previously received through the senses. It does not independently produce those images from nothing.” The shaykh's claim that dreaming proves the soul's separation from the body is therefore overturned. The youth's argument establishes that the soul's future return is not outside its union with bodies.

Some contemporary philosophers who repeat the theories of the ancients declare the heavenly spheres, with their governing powers, superior to earthly bodies. This judgment appears in their books and teachings. Yet the same philosophers describe those spheres as constrained, compelled to move, and acting without knowledge. How can they then call those bodies superior without contradicting themselves?

I maintain that the natural human body is superior to constrained heavenly bodies. Rational virtues and divine sciences appear through the human form alone. Only through it can teaching and learning take place; the Intellect cannot distinguish without it, and the soul forms no representations except through it. The soul constantly takes the image of things it has encountered and reproduces the essential virtues according to what it has witnessed in conjunction with the body. Among visible beings, the human form is therefore the most excellent, and without it the divine sciences have no outward manifestation.

I have already established that no originated or created being possesses the power to originate another being identical with itself. Therefore the Creator may manifest His existence through a form like those He has created, since no incapacity constrains Him; true unity excludes attempts to bind Him by “what” and “how.”

Consider another demonstration. If the Creator made the earth, heavens, and their moving powers but left them without plants, offspring, and creatures, their order would be incomplete and fail its purpose. If He filled them with animals and plants but excluded the rational human creature, the completion would still be absent. With the appearance of the speaking, rational human being, equipped for intelligible discourse, the universe gains its completion and crown. Human beings are the most excellent of created forms because intellectual excellence appears through them, and the act of teaching, understanding, and worship reaches fulfillment through their faculties. This rational division is plain to people of learning and faith. I shall explain it. The completion of a thing is not the same in kind as its efficient maker. A maker does not necessarily resemble what he makes. Imagine an architect who conceives a building, determines its

measurements, distributes the parts, orders the materials, and gives directions. A workman who carries out those directions is merely an instrument placed at the architect's disposal. The ordered form first present in the architect's mind is the source of the building's completion, while the laborer who builds it by prescribed motions does not resemble the intellectual pattern and has not himself designed it.

This distinction applies to things that come into being and perish through physical motion, and to heavenly bodies constrained in their motion, as well as to the more enduring forms of intellectual perfection visible in humankind. The perfecting principle of a thing is not identical in kind with its efficient instrument, and a mere efficient instrument cannot necessarily imitate the perfecting source. Plato, in the book associated with his pupil Timaeus, is cited as saying that the first cause does not act in the ordinary manner of an efficient maker: what perfects a thing is not of the same kind as what merely makes it, for the maker is not like what it produces, whereas the perfecting source may resemble what it perfects.

The sage then says that divinity is present in a part of the world—namely the human being, the living, rational, speaking creature—who resembles the higher principles through excellence, honor, and restraint, resembles Intellect in rational virtues, and resembles soul in life and movement. Once these principles reach completion in the “little world,” the human being, it becomes possible to understand that the Creator manifests within the world through the principle of perfection rather than through an instrument of compulsory mechanical production. This is presented as an argument for the Creator's unity and manifestation. Yet many professed philosophers have failed to recognize it or turn toward the Guardian through whom its true sense is made plain; instead they cling to books and private opinions, rejecting truth when they encounter it.

The possibilities for discussing the Creator's existence in relation to our world—not in relation to the incomprehensible essence of His divinity—fall into four classes. First, one might deny Him existence, attributes, limits, and description altogether. Then all parties would become equal in “transcending” an unexistent object; they would only be negating a nothing. Without an evident proof, assertions of superior transcendence would be empty. With no differences of attainment, there would be no reward and punishment, no wisdom, and no coherent purpose in created things. Far be this from God.

Second, one might say He exists in a form unlike every creature. But if His presence were self-evident to everyone, differences of knowledge would vanish, and the promised reward and punishment would become purposeless, once again negating wisdom. Far be this from God.

Third, one might suspend judgment and render the whole matter idle. This is contrary to the natural dispositions of reason, which attest to His reality and acknowledge it. Far be this from God.

Fourth: He exists in relation to His creatures and is among them through the grandeur of His wisdom, so that the just proof is established for all. Each Unitarian affirms His unity according to his knowledge and capacity, declaring Him transcendent according to the degree of learning, sincerity, perception, and effort he has attained. This preserves the actual differences between creatures and makes intelligible the rewards and punishments by which their knowledge is distinguished. Seeking learning is therefore an obligation upon every believing man and woman, because through it the degrees of excellence in tawḥīd are made plain and the deficiencies of negligence and ignorance are exposed.

When the sincere servant has attained the object of his quest, recognized the necessary truth, and reached what his Lord has made accessible, let him be satisfied and grateful for what he has received. Praise and glory belong to the victorious Lord for inspiring His unity and transcendence; thanks belong to His Guardian for strengthening, supporting, and awakening the seeker.

The epistle is complete. From the Guardian of Truth we seek pardon, forgiveness, and release from our shortcomings.

EPISTLE 70 — ON THE RETURN (AL-MAʿĀD), AND IN REFUTATION OF ONE WHO SPEAKS FALSELY OF IT

The letters of “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful” are the ranks of the Qāʾim of religion. Praise belongs to God, who has granted success and joy to the friends of His religion, brought evil fortune upon whoever turns back on his heels, and ordained disgrace and curses for whoever defies the command and turns aside from the truth. May blessing rest upon the Sun of humankind, the Lamp in darkness, the awaited one through whom the nations are delivered: the standing, guiding Imam. May peace rest upon the interpreters of his wisdom, the ranks close to him, and the witnesses of religion, his noble messengers, who are among the most discerning of genera and species and are endowed with wings in twos, threes, and fours.

Now then: someone came into the pure, sacred Presence in Cairo. He spoke to some young men who had carelessly gathered around him, proclaiming teachings about the return of souls, issuing commands and prohibitions to them. He led them along the difficult path of ignorance and, through his misrepresentations, put them upon a mount that could not carry them. He directed them into blindness and error, decorating his condition with deceptive speech. I learned what he had taught and what he claimed to have established, and found that everything he put forward he attributed to the noble shaykh, the source of excellence and right guidance.

Indeed this shaykh is known for debating and educating those who came to him, and they have acknowledged his learning and benefited from his instruction. But this newcomer claimed on his authority that the soul, after separating from the body, returns to its own world as a subtle spiritual being, no longer in need of a body. His particular proof was that a soul can act apart from the body in sleep, recalling and reporting what it sees in dreams.

I have treated this doctrine at length elsewhere, exposing its false premises by a reasoned explanation and demonstrative proofs. By the favor of the Guardian who shall restore truth and defeat covenant-breakers, I shall tear away the coverings of this doctrine and overthrow the arguments of its supporters. As the scriptural saying has it: “We hurl truth against falsehood, and it crushes it; behold, falsehood vanishes.”

A soul does not carry out its actions apart from some bodily person or instrument. Once that living configuration is dissolved, its capacity for articulated logical expressions ceases. Even when matter is in flux beneath its forms, the form is not manifested apart from matter. Matter itself belongs to compounded things. The assertion that a soul continues to perform the same kinds of acts after the whole configuration has been taken apart remains unproved.

As for this teacher's claim, that the soul separates during sleep, it merely reproduces images of what has been sensed and of bodily things it has previously encountered. Indeed, consider the person born without sight: no soul, whatever excellence one attributes to it, can independently conjure in a dream the visual forms of man-made objects never perceived, much less the forms of divine realities. It dreams of what has entered its experience—bodily intimacy, foods, drinks, and the like. Thus the supposed proof from dreams does nothing to establish the independence of the soul after death. Accurate judgment requires careful distinctions in reality, just as a correct formulation must correspond to the meaning of what it says.

By the kindness of al-Ḥākim, sovereign over all ages, and His servant, the Qāʾim of the Age, whose concealment tests the nations, I shall explain the terms genus, species, individual, difference, and property, so that an argument can establish the truth against those who deny it.

Consider the individual persons, species, differentiating marks, and properties that depend upon soul—that highest genus to which all these are referred. They require it; it does not depend upon their existence. Remove any number of individual persons and particular species, and the genus of life is not thereby destroyed. Remove the genus, and the species, differences, properties, and individuals dependent upon it cannot remain. Whatever disappears when the genus disappears, while the genus does not disappear when they do, is subordinate to the genus. Individual persons fall under the human species; the species falls under the genus, soul or life, which is here treated as enduring. No body

exists as a living body without soul, and no spirit belonging to this world is observed as a wholly disembodied physical agent.

The other teacher's claim is no more than an inducement to belief: it is not rooted in the disposition of reason. Worse, it implies injustice in the Creator's governance. Let us ask its adherents whether the Creator is just or unjust. They must answer that He is just and never acts oppressively. Then let them explain why people in this world occupy unequal stations, why their souls vary in aptitude for knowledge and excellence, and why some have stronger faculties and others weaker.

If they answer, as some early philosophers did, that the Creator's bounty flows to His creatures but each receives according to the capacity originally given to it, or as later thinkers do, that the distribution results from His particular will and preference, both answers merely move the inequality back to an unequal initial gift. Why would He bestow capacity on one creature and withhold it from another, then judge them for the consequences? The same objection applies to differences in knowledge, nobility, and livelihood. To attribute them to an arbitrary unequal distribution would be to attribute injustice to the Creator, exalted far above this.

If one person had been endowed with greater capacity by irresistible favor, there could be no earned reward for it, for the recipient would have been compelled by the gift; and there could be no earned punishment for the person deprived of what was given to another. The just account is rather recompense according to the preceding actions of souls. Choice comes first, and recompense follows what a soul has acquired and the discriminating faculties it has exercised. This preserves the reality of justice. Anyone disputing it must give a coherent explanation of divine justice, and cannot do so simply by appealing to a selective initial donation of capacities.

Suppose the same philosophers say that souls were cast down into this world without knowledge because of an earlier transgression in the different world they describe. There are two possibilities. If a soul descends here to become purified from the defilement of that transgression, then the place where purification is accomplished is superior to the place where the soul originally erred. If, on the other hand, it descends as punishment, to inhabit a low and contaminated condition appropriate to its earlier fault, what meaning can religious worship, education, and the acquisition of knowledge have? The soul would have been brought here merely to suffer in an environment corresponding to its fault, not to pursue perfection.

A place of impurity, as they describe it, cannot simultaneously be the proper setting for worship and the attainment of the highest teaching. Is there anything left here except obstinate argument?

Their theory also implies that a soul could never leave this world. If a transgression caused its original descent, every further transgression must obstruct its return. No human being can sincerely claim never to have erred in this life, excepting the protected and sinless persons recognized in religious teaching. If souls are kept from the higher realm by fault, they will remain here. But if their proponents admit that a soul here can learn after ignorance and purify itself after mistakes, they must recognize that this world has the very excellence that they denied to it. It is a place suited to purification and the acquisition of knowledge, not merely a prison of punishment.

No one who examines himself fairly can claim that he has never made an error. This is beyond any ordinary person's power to maintain. I testify that Shaykh Nuṣrat al-Dīn would never affirm that his own soul has never erred, for he recognizes that he has learned what he once did not know. Consequently, the argument that our souls leave this world for another realm where they will supposedly be perfected is not established; their return and recompense concern this world itself. The objectors have not shown that the souls were once pure, fell here, and shall then ascend out of the very realm in which they acquired their purifying knowledge.

By the favor of the Qāʾim, abrogator of the religions and destroyer of the assemblies of Iblīs, I shall also answer the philosophers who followed the ancients without understanding them. Their successors have left the luminous marks of the spiritual teachers and fallen below the rank of the sages they claim to emulate.

Pythagoras, according to the tradition cited here, taught his pupils the pure unity of God. He affirmed that the Creator, exalted beyond likeness, is an existent, pure Light. The knowledge of that Light becomes manifest only to one who is worthy of it, who has fulfilled the obligations of worship. He compared a person to someone clad in a sheepskin: while the skin covers him, others cannot see what lies within; when he removes it, what was hidden becomes visible. Plato, the great sage and teacher of Aristotle, is also said to have agreed with the central truth of this teaching. Those who reject it, whether ancient or modern, have departed from their masters' path and read books without understanding their demonstrations.

If the greatest sages affirm that the Creator truly exists in relation to this world while remaining transcendent beyond the definitions applicable to creatures, then the nobility of the world of souls and its place within visible human existence becomes apparent. The theory that there is another world in which the soul must be united with a different kind of existence, away from this one, wrongly confines the Creator to some distant upper region. Those who imagine that an ethereal realm must be more sacred merely because it appears far away confuse the bodily distance and motion of the heavenly spheres with the essential nobility of the intellectual soul, which apprehends intelligible truths and remains above the qualities of inert matter.

Many contemporary readers, seeking access to ancient philosophy, have turned to the books of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī. They know he derived his formulations from earlier sources, gathered their finest sayings, and explained their doctrines. Some mistakenly place him among those earlier sages. But he worked through what he understood and sought to make their subtle teachings intelligible to less experienced minds. In the fifth chapter of the book known as *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, he discussed the separation of souls from bodies.

Let us distinguish possible meanings of that separation. Perhaps by “separating” the soul he meant its independence in essence, rank, and noble intellectual acts while it still possesses and governs a body. Perhaps he meant that the soul separates from vices and bodily passions, whose actions ordinarily originate in the physical constitution. Perhaps he meant that corporeal accidents are removed from its essence and that its scientific acts are independent of material composition, not that the soul ceases to exist together with its living body. Or when he said that this matter is exceedingly difficult to conceive, perhaps he referred precisely to the difficulty of grasping how a soul can be essentially immaterial and intellectually elevated while united with bodily faculties. If so, he has expressed the old sages' teaching with greater clarity and directed attention to the true goal of religious knowledge.

But if he literally meant that the soul separates from the body it governs, and can act only apart from that body, he contradicts the organization he gave to his own ideal polity. He says that the ruler who reaches his final perfection departs from this body and this world. Taken literally, this leaves no perfected ruler in the city to communicate perfection to others. The stream of instruction ceases; no one remaining can reach the final perfection. The world becomes purposeless, and the perfect ruler would have abandoned his city unjustly. The just Creator is exalted above such injustice.

If a perfected soul can remain here for some period after reaching perfection, why could it not remain longer, or indefinitely as the matter requires? Its perfection while ruling and instructing through its embodied faculties is nobler than an isolated perfection after departure. Indeed the philosophers themselves agree that the soul reaches its final perfection while joined with natural bodily life. Their own premise ought to lead them to acknowledge the superiority of a soul exercising its perfected intellect through the human form, spreading the light of its knowledge to others. Let anyone claiming otherwise demonstrate a spiritual act accomplished by a disembodied soul after its alleged departure from every visible instrument. Mere assertion and imaginative rhetoric do not establish such an act.

I say that Shaykh Nuṣrat al-Dīn did not present all these subtle divisions and demonstrations to his followers because their understanding could not yet bear the full analysis. Their narrow interpretation is no warrant for altering his doctrine. Moreover, he himself feared their bad intentions and their inability to understand him. It is by deeds that a person meets the consequences of his choices. The Book says to the tranquil soul, “Return to your Lord well-pleased and pleasing;

enter among My servants," and elsewhere declares, "That is because of what your hands have sent ahead; God does not wrong His servants." The criterion is what a person has done, not an unrelated original grant of capacity.

Their view also implies that the souls of chosen prophets and pure imams were themselves sent down into this world because of earlier sins. This destroys their claim to prophetic and imamic authority by making them equal in wrongdoing to ordinary sinners. A person subject to a legal penalty cannot administer that same penalty as an innocent judge, and one who has disobeyed cannot purify the disobedience of another. The implication is contrary to the religious teaching they profess to honor.

There is an account in the seventeenth gathering of the second hundred, read by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, according to which the purified guides do not extend a hand toward the prohibited, utter unlawful or sinful speech, or break the bonds of kinship by their judgments. Through purity of heart and intention they were allotted the highest station and made foremost among the ranks in every cycle. This is enough to explain the return of souls and the difference in their degrees.

The twenty-ninth gathering of that hundred likewise describes the best soul as one which never has to cry, "Alas for my failure in my duty to God!" The worst is the soul driven into punishment after acknowledging its negligence. Pure souls are those that remain steadfast in religion, believing and doing righteous works. "Remaining steadfast" refers to dwelling and staying in that condition. What room remains for the contrary doctrine of the soul's departure to a different realm?

If this man from Shayzar has falsely attributed the doctrine to Nuṣrat al-Dīn, he should be denounced, his claim exposed, and his authority in the Call rejected. If, however, he has reported accurately, then the doctrine itself demands grave scrutiny. May we be protected from a fall from blessing into punishment.

I have not written this to challenge truth or indulge idle disputation, but to expose those who falsely claim authority in religion. I cannot tell what is more astonishing: the weakness of their perception, the foolishness of their judgment, their blind hearts, or their lack of understanding! They affirm that the Creator can manifest to them through a human form, yet claim that their own souls cannot be satisfied with this form and must become disembodied spiritual entities after death. Their claim is incoherent: they grant the human form to the Creator, then consider it too mean for themselves.

They have spoken falsely and wandered far from truth. Let them withdraw this corrupt belief so that they may be free of the rebuke addressed to it. Otherwise let them go on discoursing and playing until they meet the day promised them, when nothing that any soul has done will be hidden from the Qāʾim. "To whom belongs the kingdom this day?" To our Lord al-Ḥākim, the Overwhelming. "Today you shall be recompensed for what you used to do." "This is Our Book, speaking about you in truth; We were recording what you did," until the saying, "When the word falls upon them, We shall bring forth for them a creature from the earth that speaks to them, for people did not believe in Our signs."

Praise belongs to the Lord of the worlds, through His Guardian and the Qāʾim who brings salvation to the Unitarians; upon him be peace.

EPISTLE 71 — CLARIFICATION AND SUPPLEMENT (AL-TABYĪN WA-L-ISTIDRĀK)

I put my trust in the Lord God al-Ḥākim, the Lord of eternity, and seek approach to Him through His Guardian, the standing, guiding Imam, the Cause of causes. From the weak servant, the one possessed by the ranks of the Guardian and seeking their aid in turning toward the divine Kingdom: the sinful servant implores by their dignity and intercession to be counted among those whom the Lord embraces with pardon and good pleasure, and upon whom He bestows the abundance of His favor.

The sincere, possessed servant says: When I examined the religious law of Iblīs, I did not leave its defective and plainly erroneous passages unexamined. I recognized that in this time the exposure of the impostors who misrepresented religion is among the most profitable undertakings and noblest works. Therefore, having completed my earlier work, *Pursuit and the Unveiling of Hidden Unbelief*, I looked again and reconsidered the statement attributed to God in the chapter of the Table (al-Māʾida), and the alleged revelation invented around it: “Today the good things are lawful for you. The food of those given the Book is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them; and lawful to you are chaste believing women and chaste women of those who received the Book before you.” He thus made these things lawful, and the community practiced the permission for a long period.

Then he returned and overturned the revelation he claimed had been revealed to him, exposing his falsehood and his embellishment against God, exalted is He. In the chapter of the Cow (al-Baqara) he said: “Do not marry women who associate others with God until they believe. A believing slave woman is better than an associating woman, even if she pleases you. Do not give women in marriage to associating men until they believe; a believing slave man is better than an associating man, even if he pleases you. Those people summon to the Fire, while God summons to the Garden and forgiveness by His permission. He makes His signs clear so that they may remember.” Thus the statements contradicted one another, and deeds fell into confusion.

Then the lawgiver listed prohibited family relations, including daughters and mothers, and said: “Nor may you combine two sisters, except for what has already passed. God is forgiving and merciful. Also forbidden are married women, except those your right hands possess. This is God's ordinance upon you.” Thus he forbade what he had previously permitted, abrogated his own ruling, and overturned the conditions he himself had laid down for marriage.

A man comes to a woman and agrees with her upon a known number of months for a known number of dirhams, setting a payment by mutual agreement. When the period ends, he may dismiss her or agree with her upon another period and payment. For this he cited: “You incur no blame for what you mutually agree upon beyond the prescribed due. God is knowing and wise.” In this way he abrogated the marriage ruling and broke all its conditions. Affairs passed into licentiousness and fornication, the sound attribution of children was disturbed, and the genealogies of people became confused.

When the pious Unitarians questioned him about this, disapproved of it, and challenged him while remaining concealed in their cave, he said that God had revealed to him: “Do you wish to question your Messenger as Moses was questioned before? Whoever exchanges faith for unbelief has strayed from the straight path.” He also cited: “Many of the People of the Book would like to turn you back to unbelief after your faith, out of envy from themselves, after the truth has become clear to them.” In this way he answered their challenge with accusations of disbelief instead of establishing the marriage ruling he had altered.

As for the saying: “We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth, but they refused to bear it; the human being undertook it, for he was unjust and ignorant.” The heavens and earth declined the Trust in its inward meaning of tawḥīd, whereas the human being and others like him bore it in the outward sense of transmigration and embodiment.

His insight was clouded concerning the direction in which he commanded them to pray. At one time he ordered them to face east, at another to face west, because of the limits of his knowledge. He claimed that God revealed to him: “The

foolish among the people will say: What has turned them from the direction of prayer they used to face? Say: East and west belong to God. He guides whom He wills to a straight path.” He added: “Thus We have made you a middle community so that you may be witnesses over the people, while the Messenger shall be a witness over you.” The Messenger cannot stand as a witness over the true Imam. The Imam, peace upon him, has no one who witnesses over him; he is the witness over creation, and all the nations depend upon him.

In the truth of religion, it is the Imam of each age who sends messengers carrying the trust of divine unity. Most of the lawgiving messengers disobeyed or acted hypocritically toward that trust. The Imam is the operative command of God, exalted beyond the subordinate ranks of witnesses. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, and those like them have occupied differing religious stations; but the genuine proofs of faith and callers toward it are those who manifest the evidence of divine unity and establish the signs of knowledge and justice, not those who impose invented laws upon peoples.

Consider the stories preserved in the written Scriptures concerning the excellent proofs whose prayers were answered and whose enemies were defeated. Of Ṣāliḥ it is said: “People, this she-camel of God is a sign for you. Let her graze on God's earth and do not harm her, lest a painful punishment take you.” When they harmed her, destruction came upon them: “Those who did wrong were seized by the cry and lay lifeless in their dwellings, as though they had never lived there. Thamūd disbelieved in their Lord; away with Thamūd!” These are signs of a prophet whose proof was confirmed, not of a claimant unable to establish his assertions.

Likewise the story of Lot in the chapter of Hūd includes his warning to his people, their contempt for his protection, and the divine reversal of their dwellings: “When Our command came, We turned its highest part into its lowest and rained upon it stones of baked clay, marked by your Lord.” The chapter of al-Ḥijr says also that the last of those people would be cut off by morning and describes their refusal of the guests Lot had taken under his protection. These accounts display the answered appeals of righteous persons and the punishment of those who opposed them.

Of Shuʿayb, the chapter of Hūd relates: “My people, act according to your standing; I am acting. You will learn who will be visited by a humiliating punishment, and who is the liar. Watch, and I watch with you.” When the command came, Shuʿayb and those who believed with him were delivered, while the wrongdoers were seized by a cry and lay prostrate in their homes. It was as though they had never dwelt there; Midian was removed like Thamūd before it. The true Scriptures also show that Shuʿayb received Moses and imparted knowledge to him, whereas Moses subsequently opposed and acted hypocritically toward him.

Such examples distinguish the honest friends of the divine Call from the lawgivers who forced bodily rituals upon their communities while disregarding the knowledge of the divine command. These Qurʾānic words condemn those lawgivers themselves. In al-Māʾida: “For each of you We have appointed a law and a way. Had God willed, He would have made you one community, but He tests you concerning what He has given you. Race toward good things; to God is your return, and He will tell you about that in which you differed.”

The disagreement must be the disagreement of the lawgivers, since each prescribed conflict against the followers of the others, making their peoples fight one another. If an opponent insists that the passage addresses ordinary communities rather than the makers of religious laws, another problem follows: to grant all communities freedom to choose among different laws would deny the exclusive validity of each lawgiver's claims. In particular, it would contradict the prohibition of departing from the law of Muḥammad, the force used to impose that law, and the claim that earlier religions were superseded. Therefore this is a rebuke to the lawgivers whose institutions divided humanity, not an endorsement of their separate systems.

This too is among the accounts of the lawgiver of Islam, when his community asked him for miracles and for clear proofs and signs. This was his answer to them in al-Anʿām: “Say: I stand upon a clear proof from my Lord, but you have called it false. What you seek to hasten is not in my possession. Judgment belongs only to God, who declares the truth and is the best of judges. Say: If I possessed what you seek to hasten, the matter between me and you would already

have been decided.” This response admits that no manifest proof had been produced, especially when compared with the signs described in the earlier stories. Another passage says: “They swore by God with their strongest oaths that if a sign came they would believe. Say: The signs are with God. And what makes you know that, even if a sign came, they would believe?” This evasive answer is deceitful, and so is its speaker.

The unbelieving opponents had asked: “God, if this is the truth from You, then rain stones upon us from heaven or bring us a painful punishment.” He answered with the assertion: “God would not punish them while you are among them,” and elsewhere: “Why should God not punish them when they keep people from the Sacred Mosque?” These passages contradict one another, unlike the immediate punishments attributed to the prayers of genuine prophets and proofs.

Then consider Moses and his companion in the chapter of the Cave. Moses tells his young attendant to bring their meal because the journey has exhausted them. The attendant recalls the fish that took its way into the sea, and they retrace their steps. They encounter a servant of God's servants upon whom mercy and direct knowledge had been bestowed. Moses asks, “May I follow you, so that you teach me some of the sound judgment you have been taught?” He is warned: “You will not be able to remain patient with me. How could you be patient concerning something that you have not encompassed in knowledge?” Moses promises patience and obedience. The righteous servant, knowing the difference between his own knowledge and Moses' limited understanding, tells him not to ask questions until an explanation is provided.

As for what is reported of Moses and the righteous servant, the account is well known, circulating on people's tongues and set down in books: the boat was damaged, and Moses protested; he withdrew his objection, but then protested when the young man was killed: 'Have you killed a pure soul without another soul?' He declared someone innocent before knowing the cause hidden from him. When the wall was repaired, the righteous servant said, 'This is the parting between me and you,' and disclosed the reasons for the deeds Moses had condemned. Consider how the lawgiver judged by outward appearances while the righteous servant possessed knowledge he had not yet received.

Another chapter addresses the messengers: “Eat of the good things and do righteous deeds. I know what you do. This community of yours is a single community, and I am your Lord, so fear Me. But they divided their affair among themselves into writings; each party rejoices in what it possesses.” “Writings” here means books of religious law by which separate parties established permissions and prohibitions, incited their peoples to combat, and imposed invented restrictions. The actual peoples did not compose these different systems; their leaders did. The following words, “Leave them in their confusion for a time,” are accordingly interpreted as a condemnation of those founders of religious division.

As for Muḥammad's night journey: Muḥammad claimed to have been carried through the night, to have reached the heavens, and to have heard celestial voices. When the people of Quraysh doubted this and asked for proof, he asserted that a revelation had vindicated him: “Glory to the One who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose surroundings We have blessed.” According to the polemical story, a Jewish man then challenged him: “Rise a single cubit above the ground before us, and we shall believe you. We will not substitute a distant report for something seen with our own eyes.” Muḥammad could not satisfy the challenge, and his opponents judged his narrative an invention.

He also exploited claims of revelation for financial gain. First came the warning to those who hoard gold and silver: “Give them news of a painful punishment, on a day when these treasures are heated in Hellfire and their foreheads, sides, and backs are branded: 'This is what you hoarded for yourselves; taste what you used to hoard.'” Then came the command: “Take from their wealth a charitable offering by which you purify and cleanse them; pray for them, for your prayer is reassurance to them, and God is hearing and knowing.” These are cited as instances in which the supposed revelation both threatened possession of wealth and provided a way for its collection.

The chapter of the Confederates likewise says: “It is not for a believing man or woman, when God and His Messenger decide a matter, to have any choice in their affair; whoever disobeys God and His Messenger has gone plainly astray.”

Consider then the episode of Zayd and his wife. The scriptural account tells how Muḥammad addressed the man whom God and the Messenger had favored, saying, “Keep your wife and fear God,” while concealing in his own soul what God would make public and fearing people when God had greater claim to be feared. When Zayd had finished with her, the verse says, “We married her to you so that believers should suffer no restriction concerning the wives of their adopted sons when those sons have ended their union with them.” It adds that the Prophet incurs no blame in what God prescribes for him and that this was the custom of earlier messengers. Thus he made mention of Zayd’s wife a matter for which God calls His servants to account. He claimed that God had commanded and revealed this and similar things to him. I have explained this in *Unveiling Hidden Unbelief and Refuting the False Religious Law and Code*.

By contrast, examine the merits attributed to Jesus son of Mary in the account of al-Māʾida. God says: “Remember My favor upon you and your mother, when I supported you with the Holy Spirit, so that you spoke to people in the cradle and in maturity; and when I taught you the Scripture, wisdom, Torah, and Gospel; and when you formed from clay the shape of a bird by My permission and breathed into it, and it became a bird by My permission; when you healed the person born blind and the leper by My permission, and brought forth the dead by My permission; and when I restrained the Children of Israel from you as you came to them with clear proofs.” It continues with the inspiration of the disciples to believe. These are examples of the authenticated acts of divine proofs, not merely of persons who imposed law.

Let us also consider the Qurʾān itself. Its claimant asserted that it was the revealed speech of God, neither created nor fabricated, and that “falsehood cannot approach it from before or behind.” Yet Muslims recognize and authorize differing ways of reciting it. The seven celebrated reciters are Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ, Ḥamza, al-Kisāʾī, ʿĀṣim, Nāfiʿ, Ibn Kathīr, and Ibn ʿĀmir. Each had transmitters who explained and defended his readings, such as al-Yazīdī's transmission from Abū ʿAmr and Warsh's transmission from Nāfiʿ. These traditions multiplied into distinct accounts of particular letters and meanings.

Consider also the variant readings of the verse, ‘God brought you forth from your mothers’ wombs, not knowing anything.’ Some read the crucial words with ẓāʾ and rāʾ, making them ‘from your mothers’ clitorises’ (*min buẓūr ummahātikum*) instead of ‘from your mothers’ wombs’ (*min buṭūn ummahātikum*); This is nonsense and foolishness. There is also Ibn Mujāhid's reading from ʿAlī and other disagreements among the reciters. How could speech described as protected from all falsehood need correction by grammarians, philologists, and rival reciters? The very existence of disputed readings defeats the claim that the text is perfect.

Such people attribute the speech of the Worshipped One to the products of ordinary human expression and fail to recognize the command that governs the worlds, the promise of the appointed day, and the true speech by which the Guardian supports the ranks of his Call. Such corrupt speech cannot be attributed to the Worshipped One. Rather, the command operative throughout the world and the promised day support the words of the Guardian. He undertakes this clarification to declare the Creator transcendent and to make the reality of existence clear.

The true Guardian has thus been established in his own person, and I have pointed to him and made clear the error of those who mislead the worlds. This sincere servant has achieved part of his aim and discharged, through his effort, part of the duty that lies upon him; let him acknowledge what remains of his shortcomings. Praise belongs to our Lord, and thanks to the Guardian of the Age, the just Imam, the Qāʾim of the Resurrection and abrogator of the religions. He is the means by which the nations approach the Creator in their cycles, the highest path to worship of the Lord God al-Ḥākim, transcendent beyond limits and signs. He suffices the weak servant who seeks salvation through his Master, the Qāʾim of Truth, on the Day of the Appointment. This writing was composed on the thirteenth day of Dhū al-Qaʿda, in the twenty-first year of the Qāʾim of Religion, the avenger against covenant-breakers, associators, unjust rulers, apostates, and renegades, through the sword and authority of our Lord al-Ḥākim, God of the worlds.

Completed, with praise to God and His favor.

EPISTLE 72 — THE ISRAELITE EPISTLE, A REFUTATION OF OBSTINACY AND DENIAL

I put my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim alone, and seek approach to Him through His servant, the Qāʾim of Truth.

Those who have stayed behind from truth claim descent from nine and a half of the tribes of the Children of Israel: the houses of Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Naphtali, Reuben, Gad, Benjamin, Manasseh, and half the house of Samūʾīl. They have turned from the certain unity of the Creator. The other two and a half tribes, the *abābīl* birds, are innocent of denial, covenant-breaking, alteration, and substitution. They stand ready against tyrannical peoples who doubt, associate others with God, or reject the Creator, as foretold in the true Scriptures and through the proofs of interpretation.

The Scripture says to the descendants addressed after Pharaoh: “Dwell in the land, and when the promise of the last time comes, We shall bring you together in a company.” It is also said, “We have sent you as a bearer of good tidings and a warner.” These sayings concern the people who followed and obeyed, who were rescued from their enemies and led across the waters. Those who deserted or opposed them were left in humiliation and need until the day of resurrection and the destruction of the enemies of truth.

Now then: praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim, exalted beyond the praise of the nations, beyond the expression of tongues, and beyond everything that words can convey of the reality of the guiding Imam. He originated His Guardian, the Qāʾim of Truth, as a veil of majesty and greatness, and assigned him, as the Intellect, the rule and just governance of spiritual substances.

Whoever has the faculty of discrimination should listen with the ear of understanding, whether his customary language is Arabic or Hebrew, put away pride and self-admiration, accept the proofs of truth, and submit to the awaited Guide, who is exalted above error, doubt, and suspicion. This Guide has come to abolish the religious laws that attach created things to the Creator, remove their injuries, and free those bound by them. The weak servant has received his instruction and assistance so that, through reasoned proofs, he may establish an argument against the Jewish religious law and the inventions of those who have abandoned truth.

We must begin with premises of reason and witnesses drawn from religion, premises which minds can recognize and by which the ignorant may benefit when reminded. Jews themselves accept that earlier messengers were sent and that they were necessary up to the coming of Moses. Here is a demonstration founded upon that admission. The reason why Moses and those before him were sent must either still exist in humanity or have disappeared. If it still exists, it cannot be reasonable to deny the necessity of messengers after Moses. If the Jews claim that this reason disappeared with Moses, they must allow the very argument that earlier peoples could have raised against Moses himself: those who claimed no further need of a messenger after Noah or Abraham would have been justified in rejecting him. That destroys the grounds on which they themselves accepted Moses.

The cause that requires the sending of messengers is humanity's ignorance of the realities of religion and its denial of the unity of the Creator in every age. Everyone who reasons can see that the founders of religious laws have successively overturned the laws before them. Their adherents had done nothing except practice the duties their former lawgivers had commanded, yet the new system treated their practices as obsolete and even permitted their enemies to attack them. What justice is there in condemning people for obeying one set of bodily obligations when a later system prescribes another? The true spiritual meanings of tawḥīd have remained beyond the understanding of these founders and their followers.

The Scripture says: “He taught the human being what he did not know,” and “God—there is no god but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting; neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him.” These sayings point toward the Creator's manifestation in the visible conditions and forms of humankind, although in His reality He transcends every limit. The bodily lawgivers have denied this indication of the Worshipped One's existence. The just Imam, Qāʾim of the Religion, must therefore

terminate the exhausted religious laws and publicly proclaim the unity which the preceding lawgivers could not make manifest.

One of them had been commanded: “Messenger, deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord. If you do not, you have not delivered His message; God will protect you against the people.” Yet he did not deliver the reality entrusted to him, but obscured its indications through the outward law. Others followed the same path and fell short of obedience to the command of the Creator.

Consider the Torah's commandments. “I am the Lord who brought you out of the place of slavery; you shall acknowledge no other god beside Me. Honor My name and hold Me one.” The Jews understand this as a merely geographic departure from Egypt, whereas the real exodus signifies release from ignorance and the approaching Call in the lands of Syria, when the Messiah would summon people to recognize the living Creator. Instead of acknowledging the promised meaning of existence and divine unity, the Jews rejected the one who came in the name of the Holy Spirit and denied his signs. They then appealed to an alleged permanent prohibition on any other religious law after Moses. But that would make their own unchanging tradition superior to every future manifestation of the Creator's command.

Every legislator and his law are originated things: Moses was a created being; the law he instituted was created; and the people upon whom he imposed it were created. A rational person knows that the founder and maintainer of a law is greater than the law itself. A law has no independent existence or agency; it depends upon a person who establishes and applies it. If the founder can disappear while the law remains only as a custom, the law can also be abolished or replaced. It is foolish to say to the Worshipped One: “You may impose upon me only what You imposed upon my ancestors, and command me only what You commanded an earlier generation.” That is to dictate terms to the Commander rather than to obey Him.

True obligations are trials through which the Creator tests the acceptance and deeds of His servants. The bodily lawgivers have misled their communities by attaching eternal necessity to changing forms and failing to understand the spiritual realities they conceal. The Creator tests His creatures in every time as He chooses, by manifestation or concealment. His freedom to do so cannot be curtailed by any earlier statute or religion. The one continuing obligation is obedience to the Creator in whatever He commands and prohibits; the commanded servant has no right to dictate to the Commander what kind of command he will accept.

The divine Command remains operative in creation, and it is not fitting that the wise Creator should abolish His own command by requiring disobedience to it. The Command manifests through the Qāʾim of the Age, the living Imam who summons creation to tawḥīd. In every period he is the Creator's proof and the real authority operating in the world. His essence as Commander is disclosed through the one who stands by His command; it is not independently known through a law copied from the past.

The absence of the living guiding Imam would amount to neglect of creation. If creation were truly abandoned for the blink of an eye, its established order would fall away and its inhabitants could not be held to recompense. Yet we know that the Creator's acts include both permanence and dissolution. This world itself changes and will perish: if eternal continuity were necessary for every divine act, no created thing could ever cease. So it is no marvel if a religious law ends or is replaced by another. Even the founders of earlier laws acknowledged replacement when they judged the laws before them to have ended.

You Jews acknowledge that the messenger you await and through whom you hope for deliverance is greater than Moses and Abraham, and that he will bring clear signs. Yet the living Guide has already called humanity to the Creator's unity, established the proofs, and been opposed or denied by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. His argument has been made known; his judgment and recompense will soon be manifest.

Nor does the Torah itself stop with Moses. According to the Jews' own received history, prophets succeeded him one after another: Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Daniel, and others, down to Malachi, whom they count among

the last prophets. The Scripture requires the recognition of messengers who show signs of the kind through which the earlier mission of Moses was recognized. Such proofs existed before and after him, from Adam through Noah and Abraham and their successors. Moses himself is said to have forewarned his people of the coming Messiah and commanded them to recognize the one who would come. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel likewise told them to heed those who truly spoke by God's command. Their later denial violated the very tradition on which they relied.

Malachi rebuked them for rebellion, denial, and contempt for the command of God. Their conduct caused the true teaching to be concealed from them while the righteous guides withdrew. To this day they profess to await the deliverer, though their own treatment of the Messiah and his companions prevents them from recognizing the one who has come.

Let us then bring forward the texts of the Torah and its prophets, whose authority you claim and whose indications of those to come after Moses you have ignored. It is written: “The Lord came from Sinai, dawned from Seir, and shone from Paran; He appeared from the height of holiness.” Sinai refers to the place from which Moses made his proclamation; Seir is linked to the place from which the Messiah appeared; Paran is interpreted as the region of Mecca; and the height of holiness points, in this reading, to a later and greater manifestation whose sanctity and radiance surpass those preceding it.

The appearance of the Messiah was also indicated by the mention of Seir. In the region of Seir and al-Sharāt there is a place called Nazareth, from which the designation “Nazarenes” came. The later Nazarenes, however, failed to accept the true purpose of the Messiah's mission and thus opposed him more gravely even than those among the Jews who had already denied him. Their errors have been treated extensively in the preceding epistles against Christian doctrine.

Isaiah says in the name of the Lord: “Behold, I shall create a new heaven and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come into the heart.” He also says: “I am the Lord; that is My name. My glory I do not give to another. The former things have passed away, and I announce new things before they spring forth.” Again: “Do not remember the former things or ponder what is past. Behold, I am doing a new thing; it shall appear among you.” These are prophecies that older religious forms will pass away and that new revelation will be made visible. He faults those who profess allegiance to the prophets while denying the change their words supposedly foretell.

Isaiah foretells roads being opened in the wilderness and rivers passing through places where there were none, so that the chosen people might drink. “The people I formed for Myself will proclaim My praise.” There are also four rivers flowing from the height of holiness toward east and west. These become signs of knowledge flowing from the living Guide, the one who proclaims the Creator's unity in every age, and signs of a final people especially devoted to praising and recognizing Him. To cling to the written Torah as though no further knowledge could arrive would be to reject the very promises contained within it.

Another voice cries from the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord in the desert. Raise the valleys, lower the mountains and hills, straighten what is crooked, make the rough places level, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” This is taken to predict that the divine Call will arise in places where earlier religious authorities did not expect it. It announces a change of religious leadership and the disclosure of a glory previously concealed.

David likewise says in the Psalms: “The Lord said to my lord: Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Here David acknowledged a lord greater than himself. David also commands a new song of praise and speaks of the righteous congregation rejoicing in its Maker, exulting on its beds, glorifying God in its throats, and holding two-edged swords in its hands. Through him, God will take vengeance upon the nation that neither worships Him nor acknowledges His unity.

Another psalm, attributed here to David, speaks of a ruler whose dominion extends from sea to sea, from the rivers to the ends of the earth. Kings bring him tribute and all peoples obey; the mighty bow before him and his enemies lick the dust. Yet he delivers the poor person who cries out, the afflicted without a helper, and shows pity to the weak and needy. Prayer and blessing continue for him, and his name endures. Such a description, surpasses the merits of earlier prophets and belongs to the awaited standing Imam who will judge the nations and avenge the oppressed.

You, O Jews and all people of the religious law, wander blindly in your intoxication, having strayed from what your righteous ancestors awaited. Isaiah's old warning has proved true: because of your doubt you will not find what you desire or succeed. Isaiah told your ancestors that they would not find the one they awaited, and that through doubt they had lost what was in their hands. He also said to them concerning God: "Those who did not find Me sought Me, and those who did not ask after Me found Me." He told them that they would not find God because they clung to the old creation, while others would find Him.

Malachi, the last of their prophets, rebuked them before his disappearance for their rebellion, denial of the truth, persistence in what had been forbidden to them, and distortion of the Torah. He said to them: "God commanded me to take a clay vessel, bring the elders of the Children of Israel, break it before them, and tell them: Thus says the Lord: I will break this nation and this city as a clay vessel is broken, never to be mended. Whoever approaches Me with a ram is as though he approached Me with a dog; whoever sacrifices a bull to Me is as though he sacrificed a pig. I have come to detest you and your offerings. If you return to Me, obey My command, follow My path, and keep the covenant of Qubbat al-Zamān, I will grant you forgiveness, accept your repentance, and deliver you from your enemies."

If you, community of Jews, had returned to the Creator, followed His Guide and His proof, accepted His command, walked the path of truth, kept the covenant He made with you, and submitted to the one to whom you were commanded to submit, He would have granted you forgiveness, accepted your repentance, and delivered you from your enemies. You know that you are under the Creator's anger until the day of reckoning, subjected to oppression, the payment of tribute, humiliation, and poverty, with no leader to whom you can turn and no minister on whom you can rely in matters of religion or worldly life.

You are humiliated and oppressed in this world, and, because you have opposed His friends in religion, you are under the Creator's anger and accursed. The proof of His anger is His saying: "Whoever approaches Me with a ram is as though he approached Me with a dog; whoever sacrifices a bull to Me is as though he sacrificed a pig."

Then He said to you, confirming His displeasure with you: "I will establish a new covenant," the covenant of Qubbat al-Zamān, unlike the covenant made with your ancestors. You, O Jews, were called to the possessor of the awaited covenant and denied him. He showed himself to you through signs and proofs; you recognized him and rejected him, just as the Christians rejected the Messiah's testament concerning the covenant, following their ancestors in confusion, unbelief, denial, and disobedience.

You have not reflected on what is recited to you in the last passage at the ninth hour of Great Thursday, which signals the abrogation and alteration of the earlier law. The Master gathered his disciples, whom you, O Jews, and all Christians deny and reject. He told them that his time was near, and that Judas Iscariot would hand him over to your Pharaonic company—that is, the heretical Jews.

This is what has kept you under the wrath of the Lord of the worlds to this day. The Master took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take this, my body, and eat it." Then he took a cup, drank, and gave it to them, saying: "Take this, my blood, and drink it." It is the new covenant over which much blood is shed for the forgiveness of faults and sins.

Then he said to them: "Truly I tell you, I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine from now until the day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God my Father." He pointed to this noble time, signifying the appearance of the great news for which the worlds had waited and about which they still differ today.

Now the hearts of the nations have come together in unbelief and alike oppose the people of truth. You, O Jews, and all nations have been shown the proof of the awaited Guardian; you are free to respond, and before long you will see with certainty and regret. Anyone who has achieved his purpose in his craft should cease speaking. I have reached my goal and fulfilled the obligation entrusted to me.

Let this close with praise to the Creator exalted above nonexistence, and thanks to His Guardian, the Guide of the nations.

Completed by the favor of the Guardian of Command.

EPISTLE 73 — SEVENTY-ONE QUESTIONS

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. The ranks of the Qāʾim of Religion. Praise belongs to God for inspiring us to thank Him for His favors and blessings, the praise of one who recognizes the value of His gifts and their abundant succession. To Him belongs praise without end, constant and enduring. I testify that there is no god but Him, present in every age and lasting through every time, invoked by tongue and speech. Glorified is He: His concealment is not a concealment of nonexistence. Rather, He manifests in a way corresponding to the appearance of His creatures while transcending what their intellects and senses can encompass. He is veiled by the radiance of His light even as He is manifest in existence. His appearance establishes the proof against all humanity, not because He becomes something bounded by reason or enclosed by the senses.

When the forms of indications and signs had been brought to completion, He manifested Himself to human sight as appearances permit; by the light of His own manifestation He remained veiled. His friends, responders, obedient servants, and lovers speak through His Call, summon to what He commanded, spread His virtue and knowledge, announce His return and reward, warn against His chastisement, and declare lawful and unlawful what He instructed them to declare. In their speech they are instruments of His command.

Whoever among them acts against the instruction received, leaves the straight road, and invents a teaching or religious science contrary to what the Imam arranged before his concealment, merely to draw people away from obedience and toward an unauthorized Call, has abandoned the Call of tawḥīd. His promises to his followers are adorned with deception, and his claims of special knowledge are corrupt. He has acted like an apostate who flees from the authority of his Lord.

Such a person must not be accepted as a guide. Those who follow him may find themselves brought with him into punishment for his false teachings. I seek protection for myself and for the faithful brethren from the people of innovation and from those who obstruct the true Call. The account of the Day of Judgment pictures the wrongdoer biting his hands and crying: “Would that I had taken the path with the Messenger! Alas, would that I had not taken such a man as my friend! He led me away from remembrance after it reached me, and Satan has always deserted the human being.”

Now then: claims of religious authority have multiplied in this time, and the path of truth has become obscured for many brethren. Each pretender has laid snares, nets, and devices to catch some of the faithful and turn them aside from religion. Each produces writings or books and promises special knowledge and extraordinary reward to attract followers, who become entangled in his system. Some remain fixed at the station where their leaders placed them, imagining that everything outside what they have learned must be false. Soon they will recognize the consequences of trusting such men and will say: “Our Lord, whoever presented us with this, increase his punishment twofold in the Fire.” May God save the steadfast brethren from such deception.

A messenger from one of these claimants came to me bearing a letter. He repeated several of the claimant's statements and promised that I would be brought near to him, increased in his favor, and strengthened in my present position. His speech was hesitant, self-contradictory, and confused. He recalled a passage from a noble decree written to Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAlī, formerly a missionary in the *jazīra* (missionary district) of al-Rayy: “The tongue of truth is clearer and more eloquent, while the tongue of falsehood stammers and falters.” I read the message and, relying on the guidance of our Lord and His Imam, determined to test the soundness of the claimant's teaching by asking questions drawn from authoritative books.

There are ten questions from the Torah, ten from the Gospel, ten from the revealed Book, ten from allegorical interpretation, ten from religious law, ten from the reports of the Messenger, ten from the prohibitions and decrees of our Lord, and one question from reason. The purpose is to learn whether the claimant has genuine knowledge of the meanings he professes to understand, or merely repeats attractive words.

Someone who truly belongs to the way of truth follows and confirms what the earlier possessors of true knowledge established without inventing a contradictory religious system. The present Call of tawḥīd is the last of the calls, its ranks the last of the callers; it abrogates the competing doctrines and false claims that preceded it. Once the true Imam and the manifestation of the Creator have appeared, the next stage is recompense. Happiness belongs to those who are accepted; woe to those whose ignorance leaves them among the rejected.

If this claimant gives clear and sufficient answers to the questions, I shall be the first to seek him out, acknowledge the goodness of his learning, declare my need of his instruction, and publicly recognize his excellence. I have no desire to pretend to know everything: the sea of truth is immense, and perfect knowledge belongs to the complete guiding Imam. Moreover, I affirm that the world is never left without a person of true knowledge, because such a person is the proof against ignorance. As sight depends on visible light, rational perception depends on living people through whom intellectual light is transmitted.

God spoke to Moses and instructed him to tell Aaron that a descendant of the Children of Israel who bears certain bodily defects must not approach the divine offering or sanctuary, lest the holy things be defiled. The ten bodily defects it names are: being one-eyed, being lame, having a flattened nose, a broken hand, a broken foot, missing eyebrows, being cross-eyed, an affliction or opacity in one eye, congenital blindness, and leprosy.

These are ten known defects visible in the body, corresponding to hidden defects in religion. If he intended the outward meaning and forbade those with these visible defects to approach God’s offering because they would defile the sanctuary, then acts of worship and religious obligations have been lifted from them. He would also have been unjust to them in placing them under defects and infirmities, although many human beings are free of them. If these ailments are hidden defects of religion, what is the meaning of the concealed defects mentioned here?

Jesus told his disciples that nothing entering a human being from outside can defile him; rather, what comes out of him defiles him: the evil thoughts that come from the heart, namely fornication, wickedness, murder, theft, desire, deceit, and folly. These seven evils, which come from within and defile a person, are bodily acts visible to the eye; what comes from the heart consists of words spoken by the tongue. What is the meaning of these hidden defects, and who are the people bearing these particular faults? If he forbade only their outward forms, no human being fails to reject them, and there would be no benefit in the Spirit of God forbidding things whose ugliness is known to the learned and ignorant alike. If they have inward realities expressed in these words, people of religion should discuss them. What are they? Give a correct and eloquent answer, useful and welcome to its hearer.

Jesus also warned that whoever causes one of the little ones who believe in him to stumble would be better off with a great millstone hung around his neck and thrown into the sea. “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off: it is better to enter life maimed than to go with two hands into the unquenchable Fire, where the worm does not die.” The same warning concerns a foot: it is better to enter life lame than be cast into the Fire with both feet. And the warning concerns an eye: it is better to enter God's kingdom with one eye than go with two eyes into the Fire, where the worm does not die.

The Book says: “Our Lord, You made us die twice and gave us life twice. We have acknowledged our sins. Is there any path by which we may go out?” What are these two deaths and two lives? What is the “going out” that those who have lived twice desire? Why should they ask for further escape after receiving life a second time?

It says: “It is a tree that emerges from the root of Hell, whose fruit is like the heads of devils.” What is this tree? What is Hell? What are its fruits, and in what sense do they resemble the heads of devils?

The Book says, in the story of Jonah: “The great fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy.” What is this fish that swallowed Jonah? Blessed are those who follow the right teaching rather than inventing a new one.

It says: “As for the unbelievers, their works are like a mirage in a level plain. The thirsty person imagines it is water, but when he reaches it he finds nothing.” What is the mirage, who is the thirsty person, and why does what he considers water fail to quench him? What is meant by an apparent work that disappears when its seeker approaches it?

In one honored gathering it was said: “Knowledge will soon be lifted away, and ignorance will appear.” What kind of knowledge is to be lifted, and what kind of ignorance is to appear? If ignorance becomes manifest in outward words, on what basis will a person who lacked the knowledge needed to understand those words be judged for falling into error? What proof has been established against someone who has never had access to the instruction?

Another gathering says: “One who is subject to a penalty must not administer a penalty, and one who has disobeyed cannot purify another who has disobeyed.” What is this ḥadd that must not administer a penalty, and who is the disobedient person who must not purify another when that person needs purification?

A gathering says that the persons of the Speakers passed away and the persons who sent them appeared, and refers to the Speakers from Adam to Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl. Who are these senders in reality? Do not point to the Worshipped One, exalted above sending messengers. Rather, their senders were manifest and known to people of knowledge. May God condemn the opinion of the deceitful pretenders.

Another gathering commands the believers: “Seek what lies above the spiritual and the bodily; seek the ultimate end of origination.” Who are the spiritual beings? Who are the bodily beings? What is the ultimate limit of divine origination that the believers are commanded to seek?

The gathering also says: “The right and the left are two misleading ways, while the middle is the road to salvation.” What are the right and left in their true inward sense, and which middle way actually leads to deliverance?

The legal saying declares that someone who turns right or left during prayer, or directs his gaze up toward heaven, has broken and spoiled his prayer. The worshipper's eyes must instead remain upon the place of prostration. What is prayer in its reality? What is turning aside? What are right and left, and what is the heaven toward which the worshipper must not turn? Why should looking upward ruin prayer, if those who pray profess that the Lord is exalted? What is the place of prostration to which attention must remain fixed?

Another saying is: “The day of your fast is the day of your sacrifice.” What is fasting and what is sacrifice? Who or what is the “day” of fasting, and who or what is the “day” of sacrifice?

Another saying holds that whoever observes the crescent of Ramaḍān must fast and whoever observes the crescent of Shawwāl must end the fast. What are the crescents of these two months in the inward sense? Why should the one make fasting lawful and breaking the fast forbidden, and the other make breaking the fast lawful and further fasting forbidden?

Why is washing the face commanded before washing the hands when preparing for prayer? The verse reads: “When you stand for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows.” What is the true washing of the face, and what is the washing of the hands? What impurity is removed, with what water, and by what purification?

The Messenger is quoted as saying: “When innovations appear within my community, the learned person must make his knowledge manifest; if he does not do so, God's curse is upon him.” What are the innovations that appear, and who is the learned person whose knowledge is to become manifest?

Another report says: “Knowledge is lifted from three: from the child until he reaches puberty, from the person deprived of reason until he recovers, and from the sleeper until he awakens.” What is this knowledge? Who is the child, who is the person deprived of reason, and who is the sleeper?

A report states: “The slaughtered animal of a boy is not to be eaten until he reaches puberty.” What is the slaughtered animal, and who is the boy?

Another report speaks of three creatures that may be killed in the sacred precinct: the attacking dog, the snake, and the scorpion. Who is the attacking dog in religious interpretation? Who is the snake and who the scorpion?

Another says that three things interrupt or invalidate prayer: a woman, a dog, and a donkey. What is prayer, and what do these three figures designate in its inward interpretation? Why should their passage nullify it?

If the Creator knows what is concealed in every breast and understands the hidden thoughts of all souls, why is it necessary to send intermediaries carrying pacts and covenants? What purpose can a covenant fulfill for One who already knows each person's inward intention?

If this world is the dwelling of worship, why do those who disbelieve enjoy some of its best provisions while believers are denied them? The believer needs these provisions to sustain the body through which religious work and learning are accomplished. If an opponent answers that material blessings come from the heavenly spheres, we must ask whether those spheres know what they are doing. If they act without knowledge, how do their motions distribute help and deprivation justly? If they have a conscious Governor who orders every movement, let the claimant explain the principle of equity by which that Governor distinguishes the recipient of benefit from the one deprived.

What makes messengers differ in their teachings if the One who sends them is one?

What causes differences of intellect and understanding among human beings? If these differences arise from an exclusive gift unrelated to effort in learning and action, why should anyone strive for knowledge? What becomes of hope, merit, and deserved recompense?

Does the Creator need His creatures' worship, or is He wholly independent of it? If He needs nothing, why did He manifest among human beings and become an object of recognition under forms accessible to sight? What purpose does such a manifestation serve?

Does Iblīs persist in the very form in which he misled Adam, or does he appear today in another form?

When souls move among bodies, does their transfer happen simultaneously or successively through the passage of time? How can a particular migrating soul be distinguished among the changes of persons and ages?

Does the rational soul inhabit the body? If it inhabits the whole, does a soul diminish whenever a limb is lost? If it resides only in a particular bodily member, which member is it, and how does it govern the others? If someone instead says that the soul does not inhabit the body as an ordinary property inheres in a substance but illuminates and encompasses it like the sunlight that lights a room, how then are the particular obedient and disobedient souls distinguished for reward and punishment? The claimant must explain not only an analogy of illumination but the specific identity and recompense of each soul.

Among the recorded decrees is the command that no one should walk behind the Lord in a procession or in any other setting. What is the proof or inward meaning of that command? Give an intelligible, open answer, one from which the listener may benefit.

Another decree forbade people to open, after passing through, a particular doorway or passage which had been closed. What is the door, why is it closed, and why may it not be reopened? What is the inward command indicated by this outward act? Give a decisive argument against those who have appeared after the Imam's concealment and opened what he commanded to be closed, thereby claiming an authority he did not bestow.

Another decree forbade the opening of windows or apertures in walls in Egypt, and commanded that the streets be swept of refuse and dirt. What are the apertures to be shut, what are the streets to be cleaned, and what kind of impurity is meant? Explain the signs rather than merely repeating the municipal regulations.

Another written decree commanded the emancipation of all the mamluks and enslaved persons, declaring their unrestricted freedom. It forbade anyone to bring them back under bondage or claim ownership of them, and declared

anyone who violated the decree unjust and accursed. Who are the freed servants in the deeper sense? What does their liberation mean? What is the “face of God” for whose sake their freedom was proclaimed? These provisions invalidate the claims of pretenders who would again make those servants the property of another owner, since the decree places them beyond the ownership of anyone other than the Lord.

Another proclamation publicly forbade intoxicating wine in every land. It prohibited its manufacture, consumption, transportation, and trade and pronounced a curse upon those engaged in the prohibited acts. What is the true intoxicant of this drink? How does it cloud the intellect and lead the drinker away from truth and judgment? Who manufactures this intoxicant, and who consumes it? Explain what it signifies in religion, not merely what it does to the body.

If this claimant to knowledge can answer the questions with useful, true, and convincing explanations, showing that he possesses the knowledge he claims, then he should be sought out and listened to. Every rational person benefits by asking a genuinely learned teacher and does not despise the acquisition of knowledge. If the claimant answers in accordance with truth, no one should refuse a correct teaching because of personal pride or rivalry. The questioner himself will acknowledge him and seek benefit from him.

But if he offers decorated phrases, reversed meanings, and false interpretations that impress only the inexperienced, then he is not guiding anyone toward the Creator. Such men pretend to strengthen religious conviction while distancing their adherents from truth. They are among those who will lament: “Our Lord, we obeyed our masters and our great ones, and they led us astray.” Their alleged works and their proud learning are like the mirage that a thirsty person imagines to be water, until he comes to it and finds nothing. Their teaching is corrupt; the one who spreads it is rejected and kept far away.

If the claimant cannot provide an answer or show a genuine proof, let him seek a poor servant who acknowledges his own need and the excellence of his Lord, and has drawn from the immense seas of the Guardian's knowledge. That servant will answer according to what he has learned and preserved from his Master. Where he has no knowledge, he will ask the Master in humility and seek an answer through His generosity. The Creator's wisdom has no knowable limit and the benefits of His teaching cannot be exhausted; He bestows them upon His friends and withholds them from His enemies.

Praise belongs to God for His blessings and gifts, and thanks to Him for His successive favors.

Completed, through the praise and favor of our Lord.

EPISTLE 74 — CLARIFICATION OF DIVINE UNITY (ĪḌĀḤ AL-TAWḤĪD)

I have put my trust in our Lord, the divine al-Ḥākim, whose existence the usurpers and deniers, the doubters and the impious, have denied. I seek access to Him through the Guardian of His truth, the truthful Imam: through whose imamate the knowing Unitarians were guided, and from whose obedience the disobedient, apostate and denying unbelievers have turned away, ruined by their own deeds.

From the least of servants, who acknowledges himself a possession and a sincere counsellor, the servant of the guiding Imam, the standing Messiah, to everyone capable of eloquent speech and utterance: a demonstration against the religions and nations, Arab and non-Arab alike; a rebuttal of the assertions of unbelieving fabricators and a refutation of the beliefs of doubt-ridden pretenders who claim religion and faith but deny the manifestation of tawḥīd, confirmation, and certainty. They object to the Creator’s will and intention, hasten to slander the awaited Imam, the Qāʾim of the Resurrection, the possessor of disclosure who explains the Creator’s unity, and, despite knowing his rank, reject his command and commit disobedience. They have cast off the bond of what the Creator required concerning the open declaration and knowledge of His unity.

Now then: praise belongs to our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, who gives existence to existent beings, and to the guiding Imam who stands for the Call of tawḥīd in each renewed age. He is the proof before the nations, the banner of divine praise and the balance of equity through the cycles and eras. Through him the argument reaches all regions and peoples of the earth. I, the possessed servant, acknowledging my weakness and deficiency beside the exalted ranks that preceded me, shall speak.

When I considered the sects that deviate from the truth, their misguidance and the contradictions of their various creeds, I found one party nearer to the truth in its words, yet no less deficient in understanding than the other opponents. They confess tawḥīd by imitation rather than through an intervening proof, demonstration or certainty. They accept it as a received tradition without examination and verification. For all this, they are bitterly hostile to the Unitarians, stubbornly denying the just Imam, the Qāʾim of Religion, and joining themselves to every other hostile sect in order to curse the people of truth.

One of their accusations is that we declared divine unity before its appointed moment: we disclosed what we were supposedly never commanded to disclose at that time, proclaimed the sincere profession of unity in every region, and possessed no military power sufficient to fend off the plots of the enemies and hypocrites. Others even acknowledge that what we said is true, but insist that we spoke prematurely: what had been commanded to remain concealed, we made public to those who opposed us.

My answer to these heedless and unjust people is this. In admitting that we manifested and publicly proclaimed the tawḥīd of our Lord al-Ḥākim, they have spoken truth. But in treating this as an offence they have denied the Creator's judgments and made themselves associators. They accuse men who obeyed the Creator's command and did not disobey Him; they condemn servants who complied with the will of an Imam whose obedience is required. Can any created being defeat the will of his Creator? Can a servant object to the One he worships because the latter commands that His unity and worship be declared?

How could sound understanding allow the will of human beings to prevail over the will of the Creator concerning what His servants have explained and revealed? How could anyone maintain that He intended a matter to remain secret, yet His servants overcame His intention and published it against His will? People of equity, judge between us and those who reject divine wisdom through folly and stubbornness.

Have these people forgotten what is recorded in the authoritative writings concerning the final Imam, through whom God brings the servants together in obedience and manifests religion over all religion? The comparison was made with the ninth month, Ramaḍān, and with the birth of a child after nine months of pregnancy; the embryo becomes strong during the seventh month. The corresponding interpretation concerns al-Muʿizz and the sequence of unveiling: after the

seventh of the two weeks, beyond which there is no other week, the completion comes with the Qāʾim and the second disclosure. Did not al-Muʿizz announce that revelation would occur at the second of the second? What more could a person of understanding ask without rejecting the Creator's wisdom?

If disclosure were a matter that human beings could carry out or postpone whenever they pleased, religious order would collapse and the divine power would be rendered ineffectual. It is far from the Creator to be governed by the will of creatures in what He has prescribed for their worship. Nor could the teachings previously made known through the truthful servants be overturned. Those teachings divide time into two conditions, the cycle of concealment and the cycle of disclosure. The world cannot escape this distinction, whether people assent or refuse.

By God, the hearts and inward eyes of these people have been sealed through their injustice. The just disclosure has laid bare the secrets of the people of truth, while the Creator will disclose the wrong committed by those who denied Him, retreated from the truth, broke their word and attacked its people. Is this not the event promised to you? Was it not the object toward which the earlier teachers of religion pointed, and for which people of insight waited?

Your corrupt deeds have prevented you from fulfilling the obligations you profess. Disputes with the adherents of denial have kept you from joining the people of truth. You have approved the unjust shedding of the blood of innocent Unitarians, and have participated in a great crime through the deeds of those whom you supported. If you do not repent of these offences, the punishment will reach you from quarters in which you supposed yourselves safe. You opposed the Creator's command and the killing of His friends, repeating the conduct of earlier ages.

Consider what was said in the thirty-eighth gathering of wisdom. A person's first duty is to know the abstraction and transcendence of the divine Creator from all descriptive properties. The first boundary of such abstraction is the difference between *maʿrifa* and *ʿilm*, recognition and knowledge. Through the proper understanding of unity, right guidance and support are completed. All other things are known through tawḥīd; tawḥīd itself is not deduced from other things in the same way. The teaching negates what can be perceived with the eyes, but affirms existence without subjecting it to the limits of direction and sensory comprehension.

To distinguish recognition from knowledge is to avoid mistaking descriptions of visible beings for the truth of the divine Lord. We have learned that success is not achieved without stripping the truth of the attributes of creatures. During the cycle of concealment, expressions concerning sons and fathers, mothers, spouses and offspring were used; they were signs adapted to the world before the completed time of disclosure. The Creator is removed from those relations. Once the command to disclose unity came, they could no longer serve as literal attributes of the One worshipped. Those who stopped at the rank of the Imam instead of distinguishing servant from Worshipped One failed to understand the meaning of the teaching.

The same gathering says that after a person knows the object of this first obligation, discerning His name and description in the proper way, another obligation follows: knowing the commander and prohibitor, the one who gives directions and forbids acts. He is just, not unjust, and does not impose on a soul more than its capacity. The teaching thus directs us to the Imam who stood for the Call of tawḥīd, received the Creator's order and prohibition, and passed them on to those who obeyed. He does not become the transcendent Creator merely by conveying the command. I say: seeking tawḥīd is an obligation for knowing believers, and the highest obligation and greatest honor is to accept the command of the God of the worlds.

I have already examined this party at length in an epistle called *al-Tanbīh* (“The Admonition”). There I explained this division and the command for the public manifestation of beliefs. Let the heedless learn: the one who commands and forbids is the Imam of the Unitarians, the Qāʾim throughout the cycles, and the executor of the Creator's order. He carried out the disclosure and instructed the true Unitarians to receive it. That this was lawful and necessary is established by the noble public decree that gave the people freedom to declare their religious beliefs and required the uncovering of their positions.

Whoever rebels against accepting this command, resorts to refusal and denial, objects to it, and rejects it has rejected the Creator’s command and departed from the company of Unitarians who profess openly. The command says: 'Remove from yourselves the sources of fear and aversion; free yourselves of corrupt anxieties and imagined dangers. The Commander of the Faithful has placed you in a position where you may choose. You need no longer hide what you believe or bear the burden of secrecy. Let each of you sincerely perform the acts demanded by the beliefs he actually follows, and do not claim that restraints or impediments prevent you from displaying them. The Commander of the Faithful has cut off that excuse by making his intention plain and urging you to declare your profession.'

After this honored decree was read, the declaration of tawḥīd spread by the Creator's order. Those who accepted His judgment and were satisfied with His decree made their religious profession known openly, despite the opposition of the apostates. They proclaimed their beliefs in the regions of the earth, in submission to the One who commanded and forbade. The obedient hurried to answer the summoner of truth; the divine order established the Call's public manifestation.

At Cairo the Call was announced; the house named Dār al-Anmāṭ was appointed for the Creator’s servant and Guardian. The herald called for the renewal of tawḥīd and truth. People came from the horizons to accept the guiding summons, and a covenant of tawḥīd was taken from those who wished to enter the religion of truth. The authority of judges and officials of the police, together with the instruments of governmental coercion, was removed from those who answered the guiding Qāʾim. Their status was raised above the judgments of the prior religious law and from the bondage of its covenants. What more visible favor could be imagined?

People of religion, how could there be a clearer announcement? Distinguished and ordinary alike heard it. It identified the Qāʾim who administered the Call and broadcast the wisdom through the world to heal thirsty hearts. The obedient, it is said, had been disposed in their natures to recognize this Imam: they acknowledged his wisdom, guarded his covenant, preserved his ranks, and surrendered their souls and spirits to his guidance. They did not cling to bodies that must perish, nor grieve over the end of men who had oppressed them.

Justice requires obedience to the just Imam in what pleases or displeases a person. The Creator is just, not tyrannical. During the age of concealment He judged hearts and secret intentions, rewarding and punishing according to what lay hidden. But this is now the age of the Resurrection, the public disclosure of religious beliefs, whether the world wills it or not. Before that disclosure the sects and schools might have concealed their positions; after it, the adherents of truth can be distinguished by open profession from deniers and hypocrites. This is the festival of breaking the fast, the moment they had been promised. They failed to heed it because they rejected the guidance of the Qāʾim.

As the third gathering of the second hundred made clear to the people charged with preserving and reporting the teaching—those who turned away from it while looking to the people of rejection and unbelief—the Day of Breaking the Fast belongs to the Master of Disclosure. Before his appearance is the time of his concealment; now those of the elect whom God has enabled may establish the Call in his name among His creatures. After noon, following his appearance, the obligation changes: during concealment the respondent’s offering of his life as ransom is accepted, whereas whoever responds after his appearance finds his redemption suspended. After the opening, when a person merits it, the ruling upon him is like that upon the sacrifice itself: “Faith will not benefit a soul that had not believed before, or had not earned good through its faith.” This has two allegorical meanings: the passing of the breaking of the fast and the forms of purification, and the cessation of acceptance of works when the Qāʾim appears, when change becomes obligatory. Thus the noble gathering established that the Day of Breaking the Fast belongs to the Master of Disclosure.

Do you suppose that the Creator Himself, transcendent above delimitation, is the one called 'the possessor of breaking the fast'? Far be it from Him to fall under an expression tied to blindness and sensory deficiency. It signifies His servant, the guiding Qāʾim, whom He commanded to take covenants from all the nations, declare His unity, and make the distinction intelligible. When the gathering says that the chosen ones may conduct the Call in 'his name', is it possible to think they conduct it without an intermediary? If you say that the transcendent Creator performs an earthly missionary

administration under His own finite identity, you have assigned Him a rank below some being superior to Him. That is a contradiction of the unity you claim to protect.

Your reasoning overturns the foundations of religion. The festival of breaking the fast has already passed: the guiding Imam fulfilled what the authorized gathering had described. The Day of Sacrifice and its reckoning will come upon the deniers. The *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* explains the Days of Pilgrimage through the covenant, the ranks of the Imams, and the stages of the anticipated completion. The Day of Tarwiya, on which pilgrims bring themselves and their beasts water, indicates the seventh Imam, al-Muʿizz. The Day of ʿArafa, when worshippers wait in expectation of mercy and relief, signifies the Imam who comes immediately before the Qāʾim, al-ʿAzīz, through whom his appearance was anticipated.

People of transcendence, are you going to say that the Creator is a father or a son, or will you confess that He is the one God beyond such relations? Expressions about parents, children, the Qāʾim of Resurrection and the Master of the Covenant were permissible metaphors in the period of concealment, when language used what was known among the creatures to point toward the higher truth. Once divinity and tawḥīd appeared in disclosure, the Unitarians were obliged to understand what those expressions truly signified. The Creator is beyond number, genealogy and description; His servant is the Imam who stood to explain those very metaphors.

The teachings of the early gatherings were read repeatedly to the believers; their words sounded through the West and through Fusṭāṭ year after year. But when those who had heard them saw the fulfillment they recognized, they denied it: 'When there came to them what they recognized, they disbelieved in it; the curse of God is upon the unbelievers.' Their deeds made them blind in heart and eye, and led them backwards into an attack upon the pure. It was just, therefore, that their professed beliefs be made visible. The apostates' lies and slanders, their accusations against the friends of truth and their flight from the covenant, would separate the obedient from the disobedient and provide the basis of just judgment.

Had the Call not been established through the public proclamation of tawḥīd, how could a faithless denier be distinguished from a believing worshipper? How could one recognize the person who kept the covenant and the one who broke it? The Imam was asked when the Hour would come, and replied, that it would come when no concealed evil remained without manifestation. The Resurrection would arrive against the worst of the nations through the best and purest: the people who raised truth, who applied the just Imam's commands, and who demanded an account of those who had committed great crimes and violated the rights of the Unitarians.

Some of the deniers simultaneously call the Creator the Imam and the chief of his Proofs and Callers; then, when confronted, they proclaim that He is transcendent. Either they make the Worshipped One a rank among His servants, or they must affirm the distinct just Imam, bearer of the covenant, who declares the truth of tawḥīd and transcendence. The second is correct. That Imam will take account of the torment inflicted upon the earlier Unitarians, who were tested by those who claimed religious authority while abusing them.

You subjected believers to the sword, murdered them, drowned them in the sea, burned them with fire, scattered their remains, plundered their households, captured women and children, and killed men in numbers. The heads of Unitarian men were hung upon the necks of their sisters and daughters, and nursing children harmed before their mothers. You paid no regard to kinship, covenant, youth or old age; the innocent were dragged away, their possessions taken.

Why did you not even treat the Unitarians according to the terms you recognized for Jews and Christians, by taking a poll tax, rather than slaughtering them? The covenant made before the concealment required you to guard the Lord's friends, yet you violated it. No earlier people committed so grievous an outrage after receiving warnings and clear proofs. We appeal from you to the divine Lord and His Guardian.

An opponent may ask: if the Call was true and conducted by the divine command, why did its followers suffer persecution instead of triumphing? The answer is that a member of the Call, having accepted the covenant, was already furnished with evidence and obliged to stand firm; the fact that he suffered does not annul what he knew. But if truth were to defeat every opponent by force at once, the deceitful might accept the Call merely from fear. There would

be no way to distinguish those who freely chose the truth from those compelled to conform. Punishment could not justly fall on one who had merely obeyed under coercion.

Concealment therefore forms part of the trial. If the guiding Call had remained externally victorious, accompanied by unbroken military power and obvious worldly security, opponents from all religions would have professed its doctrines under threat of the sword. Then the genuine believers and those like cattle who repeated an imposed formula would appear equal. The divine judgment and the different rewards due to obedience and disobedience would be obscured. The Creator's wisdom instead gave people a choice; the two groups could reveal their dispositions in what they did when no external compulsion settled the matter.

Consider the early gatherings again. They repeatedly established the argument and pointed toward the imminent disclosure of tawḥīd and the appearance of the standing Imam. Once the Creator appointed His servant and he publicly summoned people, the distinction between Worshipped One and Imam became plain. That was the justice needed by the Unitarians. Persecution itself gave the obedient a field for patience, endurance and meritorious action. Had they never suffered trials, there would have been no occasion for their voluntary steadfastness to be made known; the unbelievers are recompensed according to their chosen denial and the people of truth according to their chosen obedience.

I have not undertaken here to refute every sect and doctrine. Elsewhere I have done so with proofs and the rules of disputation, by the favor of the guiding Imam. My present purpose is to answer people who *claim to belong to the religion* yet have committed the worst deviations: they joined the enemies of the Call in violence and slander and acted against the very men through whom its doctrine had been explained. They refer to themselves as Unitarians or migrants, although their actions resemble the people who expelled the believers from their homes. Their profession cannot transform injustice into obedience.

The books of wisdom tell of the groups of denial gathering against a single saved group. The account of the sixtieth and thirtieth gatherings, and of the spiritual conjunction of the Prophet and Legatee, is cited to show that both are servants under the one Creator. How can one of the two be declared the single uncreated Lord when the earlier teaching repeatedly speaks of their conjunction and their shared obligations? The unity belongs to the Creator of both individuals and pairs, not to either of the paired ranks. Submit to the One without partner; receive the light of the Qāʾim's instruction rather than the darkness of these men, before regret comes upon the soul for neglecting the true ascent.

The seventh admonishes believers to take care while warnings and obedience can still help them, while the outward practice is accepted and the inward meaning remains available to the seeker. It says they stand between an inward truth about to appear and another wisdom that is still concealed. Look, people of justice: the inward was disclosed, the Call openly arose, and the covenant was taken from the nations. What stronger proof can remain against one who rejected the truth after its fulfillment?

The teaching also directed people to act according to the outward law while its time remained and to pursue the inward meaning while it was still concealed. These actions were accepted, and their rewards hoped for, *until* the last of the pure guided Imams, the Qāʾim of Resurrection, should stand and unveil the inward entirely. The earlier deeds would then be vindicated, while someone who neglected them until too late would wish to recover the opportunity but be unable. Why, then, do you still look for a hidden inner meaning after the appointed disclosure? The age in which that search counted as obedience has ended. What was formerly called the rank of Imam has been assigned to the servant who announced tawḥīd; the transcendent Lord is no longer to be referred to as though He were that finite administrative rank.

Here is a passage from the eighth gathering, concerning explanation and proclamation: whenever one of the former Imams passed away, a successor rose after him. But after the Qāʾim—peace upon him—none shall rise, for he is the completion and end of the cycles. And from the tenth gathering of the second hundred, recited by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz: the middle prayer is the afternoon prayer, after which there is no additional voluntary prayer. In the same way the Qāʾim

comes at the end of all those ranks, and there is no successor after him, for the affairs of this world have reached their end. O people of understanding, the world's appointed time has ended with his manifestation and the disclosure of tawḥīd. The Creator is transcendent beyond spouse, child and parent altogether. This world has been the realm of outward things, the hereafter concerns the inward, and tawḥīd is the inward of the inward.

Use what remains of the period in which repentance and pardon are accepted. Judge justly between yourself and other people, do not slide through pride and injustice into falsehood, and do not return to stubbornness after the clear explanation. If you have understanding, seek truth, acknowledge the Creator's transcendence above fathers, children and genealogies, and believe what the gatherings state about the Qāʾim's having no successor.

The same doctrine is confirmed by public information about the succession arrangements of al-Ḥākim. A well-known decree named ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn Ilyās as the caliph's successor 'during my life and after my death'; earlier he had been designated heir of the Muslims, while al-ʿAbbās ibn Shuʿayb was designated heir of the believers. The decree that appointed them obliged gratitude for its benefits. Yet their designations and authority came to an end; neither retained the power to govern Islam or faith after the appearance of the standing Imam. These arrangements were thus signs of former ranks whose appointed periods were completed, not indications that the divine Lord Himself would be father to a human successor. The names are ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn Ilyās as heir of the Muslims and al-ʿAbbās ibn Shuʿayb as heir of the believers.

These are the realities of wisdom among the people of tawḥīd and faith, the jewels of true knowledge established by evidence and proof, as set forth in the interpretation of the *Pillars of Islam*. After such explanation, guidance and clarification, what remains except to reject the command of the exalted Creator, envy the people of truth, and oppose the people of religion? In decisive speech and conclusive proof, each community and sect must be confronted with what it itself believes, and addressed through the texts it studies, observes and preserves. The people of inquiry and disputation make those texts a measure and a criterion. Whoever objects after the testimonies of truth have been set before him reveals his poor discernment and ignorance. The erring party claims to build, but God pulls down its building.

Among the things established in the twenty-fifth gathering of the second hundred, which ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz recited, is an indication of tawḥīd and a proof of truth for the obedient and rightly guided. The Master of Disclosure put people to the test, until three persons appeared who were distinguished by their worth and fitness for deputation and succession. They reached the utmost extent in giving and went forward toward the unseen with mercy before them. You yourselves witnessed the words of the three and heard their call to tawḥīd. You saw the great burdens they bore for the deliverance of the nations, giving of their pure souls and bodies and declaring the disclosure of tawḥīd openly to particular people and to all. What greater grace or more decisive proof could you seek than the success of this ordered affair? And from the twenty-sixth gathering, which silences those who argue falsely and rebukes the stubborn: the three went forth with brightness and radiance, openly confronted the people of hypocrisy, and sought permission until the manifest command should reach them. The lofty commands had repeatedly required disclosure and witness before those people. They gave the truth to those entitled to it and withheld none of it; testimony was established that, by the higher choice and command, they had declared and unveiled the truth.

These earlier written testimonies had existed before the later disclosure. You, opponents of truth, thereby bear witness against yourselves: the very doctrines you received predicted this event. Had you followed the earlier teachers honestly, your former piety would have led you toward the Qāʾim rather than to the persecution of his friends. Instead your minds have been mixed with the doctrines of the adversaries so thoroughly that warning no longer moves you; habituation to denial has made you incapable of clear reflection.

The party of error, apostasy and reversal cannot distinguish the bounds of disclosure and obedience from the bounds of Satan and Iblīs. As the one-hundred-and-fifty-sixth gathering says: how great is the difference between the mighty and the mighty! Of creatures formed together, one may rise to accomplish what entire nations, even by their combined effort and cooperation, could not accomplish. This makes plain the Creator's power and the excellence He bestows

upon one of His servants above many peoples and creatures. And from the one-hundred-and-seventy-first gathering comes a rebuke of the nations for their deeds and an explanation of what their error has brought them to: they did not keep faith with the Imam through whom wisdom appeared. There are two kinds of envy: Satan's envy of Adam—peace upon him—because of his station, and the envy of a weak man who slanders another in order to gain a piece of worldly goods and satisfy his appetite. 'God's punishment is greater, if they but knew.'

From the passage recited before this, confirming this and matters like it, comes the word of God, the most truthful of speakers: 'This is indeed the true narrative. There is no god but God, and God is the Mighty, the Wise. If they turn away, God knows the corrupters.' Nor does He waste the reward of those who do good. I have now fulfilled my purpose in establishing the argument against the denying factions. So praise belongs to our Lord al-Ḥākim, God of the worlds, and thanks to His Guardian, the Qāʾim of truth, who takes vengeance upon the apostates and rebels by the Lord's sword. He suffices His weak servant on the day when creatures are presented and the oppressed lay claim against their oppressors.

Written in the month of Dhū al-Qaʿda in the twenty-second year of the Qāʾim of the Age, who recovers the right from associators, deniers, hypocrites and tyrants. Completed by the favor of the Guardian of Command, received and authenticated.

EPISTLE 75 — REFUTATION OF THE PEOPLE OF ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION (AL-RADD ʿALĀ AHL AL-TAʾWĪL)

To those who teach the recurrence of gods in different human forms: is the God you profess just, or an unjust and oppressive ruler? They will answer that He is just. Then ask them: how is knowledge of Him, and the affirmation of His unity, required of every creature, while He changes from one bodily garment and material person to another? This would itself be injustice.

According to your claims, He establishes Callers and makes them guides to His knowledge; He obliges the creatures to obey the Callers and to answer them in worship and tawḥīd. They direct the people to know Him in a certain person, in a visible bodily form, recognized as a grown man. Yet soon afterward He returns to the condition of a child, and the world is required to learn His identity through upbringing anew. Those who fail to recognize Him in the second person are declared unbelievers. Then you make Him a third, fourth, fifth person, and so on without end. Where is the conclusion or limit to such a teaching?

How can the Creator, exalted be He, be repeated in distinct bodily garments when you reject the doctrine of transmigration held by other religions? You even make the Lord's repeated entry into successive persons a greater kind of transmigration than what you condemn. Your position contradicts itself.

And then you say that when the souls of your own people depart from their bodily forms they are stripped of material heaviness and become subtle spirits. The virtues and good works of their earthly lives draw them near their origin; their evil acts prevent them from reaching their source. You maintain that the soul has no reward except knowledge and no punishment except ignorance.

Heedless ones! How can it acquire knowledge when it no longer has the bodily instruments through which knowledge was acquired? How can ignorance be joined to a spirit that has left behind its sensible faculties? How can the subtle spirits enjoy delight in their own immateriality, and in what way do they abide near their origin, recognizing it and experiencing their rewards?

You may say that the soul sees in dreams and relates what it has seen, and that dream-visions prove its ability to perceive without bodily instruments. Yet we have never found it perceive the objects it dreams of without its natural bodily constitution and the images first obtained through that constitution. Animals, too, see things in dreams, just as human beings do. What empty intellects and feeble arguments these are!

You maintain also that the world is never empty of human beings. Whenever a generation passes, another arises, and thus the world remains populated through all ages. Yet you reject the teaching of the transmigrationists and those who believe in an eternally repeating world, who say that the succession of humanity resembles the succession of plants. Do you not see the likeness of the very position you condemn?

Tell us, teachers of abstraction: where do the powers that leave human bodies go, and where do they remain? If you say they linger between earth and heaven, their number over the ages would fill that region and mingle with the air. The changing natures of that world and its corruption would then act upon them as they do upon other things. If you move their permanent abode above the heaven, they must fill that expanse as well. What is their condition while ascending there? Are they substances or air, and what carries and preserves them?

If you answer that the souls remain fixed near their first source, gazing upon it and receiving their satisfaction from knowing it, explain why they ever left it. By your account they could receive no delight, advantage or increase except from the very origin they abandoned. What compelled a part to separate from its source and share the indignity of natural existence, only to return to seek conjunction with what it had left? Why would the source send them forth ignorant if its own nature is perfect knowledge?

Perhaps you say that the spirits join the natural world in order to become perfected by knowledge, like iron that acquires a polished brightness. But iron and other polished material objects never cease to depend upon their constitution, their material and the work that shapes them. We have not seen a created substance that stands entirely through itself, needing nothing. Your analogy fails to prove the immaterial self-sufficiency you assert. You have driven likeness and false resemblance into the doctrine that claims to free the Creator from likeness.

People bereft of resolution! Why do you make the Worshipped One repeat His appearance in bodily garments through years and generations, and oblige His existence to depend upon material forms, while you declare your own souls capable of existing without such forms? You confine the Creator to an instrument while freeing the servant from instruments. On your account, the divine presence must never leave the world for even the blink of an eye, lest the proof to creation disappear; yet your souls have no need of the bodies through which they learned in the first place. Which of these contradictory claims will you defend?

Explain how knowledge could be acquired without an instrument. If you say that souls need no instrument, why did they leave their source and enter the natural world? If you say that they came there to learn, you must assume they left the source of knowledge in a state of ignorance. An origin that is itself knowing should not produce from itself an ignorant emanation, if your account of their unity is correct. But if you insist that the soul comes already knowing and has no need for further teaching, then it has been made equal to its source, and there is nothing left for it to gain.

You have said that the greatest pleasure of the soul is to behold its source, because the source bestows blessings and good upon it. Yet you also call the soul independent of the source and in need of nothing. Tell us, people of equity, which of these assertions is the one on which you rely. Does a soul need its source and receive something from it, or is it self-sufficient and equal to the source?

You maintain further that ignorant and disobedient souls leave their bodies and rise toward the Originator, but the sphere prevents them from reaching Him. They are forced to remain between earth and heaven, suffering the burning heat of the sun and the cold of night as punishment. This is a fabricated doctrine. If soul belongs to a world outside nature, how can the accidents of the natural world bring it pain or pleasure?

If you insist that heat and cold torment the departed soul, it follows that the original source from which the souls came—placed by you above the sphere, nearer the causes of heat and cold—should suffer even more. If you exempt that source from thermal change, you have conceded that the thing of which these souls are said to be a part is not subject to the punishment that you attribute to them. Explain, then, the actual means by which the obedient souls are rewarded and the disobedient punished.

If an answer eludes you, acknowledge your ignorance. Do not claim knowledge you lack. Someone who asserts a doctrine without evidence merely exhausts his faculties and finds no sound result. Truth cannot be located in mutually contradictory valleys. It has one direction, a clear tongue and a profitable teaching. Genuine proof exposes a lying pretender. Its justice is firm and its advantage evident; falsehood has neither stability nor guiding light.

Do not become the prey of the false Pharaohs and those who misleadingly adorn the religious path. Whoever accepts his religion through hearsay, follows those who oppose the truth, and submits to the devils will be trapped within ever narrower passages until he can find no way forward. But anyone who wants rescue and the spring of life should follow the evident road and the sincere guide. The guide seeks no payment or material recompense for conveying the message. He passes on the trust and the Call as commanded; his Creator made him a door for the willing, a guide for those who answer, a summons to the unity of the Lord of the worlds, an awakener of the heedless, and an Imam for the discerning.

Whoever knows him receives good things, becomes joined to rational benefits, and has the delusive kinds of knowledge removed from his heart—the notions that corrupt spiritual forms and attach the soul to the world of animals. We ask our Lord for His mercy, to keep us from the conduct of sinners and associators, through His power. He

embraces the nations in His knowledge and His forbearance. He suffices me; the Qāʾim is my confidence and trust, and that suffices.

EPISTLE 76 — REBUKE OF IBN AL-BARBARĪYYA (TAWBĪKH IBN AL-BARBARĪYYA)

The epistle entitled ‘The Crushing Letter against the Impure Transgressor, Exposing the Followers of Apostasy and Deceit.’

In the name of the true God, Lord of creation. Peace upon the community of truthful brethren, people of insight and certainty, who hold fast to the ranks of the Guardian of Religion and inhabit the secure sanctuary.

From the weak servant, who is owned and bound to the obedience of the standing Imam who exalts the religion of truth, who makes clear the disclosure of tawḥīd by command of our Lord, the divine al-Ḥākim, transcendent above the descriptions and limitations that the adversaries invent; to the true Unitarians who preserved religion, repudiated apostasy, and escaped the snares of devilish pretenders.

I have received your writing concerning the ignorant, irrational claimants who remain like the last remnant of a dark night. I have been obliged to live away from the pure presence after migration, heading toward lands I dislike for the sedition and controversies contained in them. I ask our Lord to help the oppressed servant against those who harm him and to enable my return toward the blessed sanctuary of Cairo. I ask His pardon for the shortcomings of this imposed separation.

Your letter reached me and I understood what has afflicted the pure brethren. I considered your complaint concerning the deranged deceiver, his claim to the rank of the standing Imam, and the response of those ignorant villagers. They turned aside from the truth despite knowing it, and hurried back toward the practices they had once rejected. Their hearts were hardened over a long interval. Let them pursue their amusement until the promised day meets them.

As the Hour approaches, the parties of falsehood and rebellion are separated from the people of truth. The wind of delusion has blown through them; they cling to the worship of the calf and to stubbornness. Through the favor of the guiding Qāʾim I shall set out an answer to the lies of this deceiver and the defection of his followers that you have reported. I shall make the matter clear for the people of religion. Look carefully at it and understand.

By the grace of the holy Lord and His Guardian, I shall expose the shameful reversal of these people, the deformity of their conduct and the corruption of their souls. Their inward eyes were blinded by denial of the enduring imamate. They turned again to the first age of ignorance, listened to the babble of Ibn al-Barbarīyya, and returned to worship of the calf. He stole the seal of Solomon in public, altered what he stole through deceit, and imitated the work of Pharaoh and Hāmān. He is among the last of the 'Pharaohs' of concealment and among the first to claim the standing Guardian's rank in the age of disclosure.

Those charged with calling people toward guidance, who affirm the imamate of the Qāʾim and repudiate the people of arrogant refusal, must forbid such excesses. They must state the accuser's case openly, identify those whose doctrines have become more objectionable than the Jews and Magians, and record the false promises attributed to this man's followers. Their accounts have circulated through witnesses among the Unitarians, including what is reported from their own leader, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bayyāsh. A transmitted teaching warns that whoever possesses knowledge but leaves heresy unexposed when it appears betrays his duty. Another saying is attributed to the Guardian's Proof: whoever conceals a heresiarch's heresy betrays the standing Guardian's Call.

It is therefore right to reveal these lies so that a discerning Unitarian can reject them and a doubtful follower recognize their nature. I shall record the promises the pretender made and their failure. The standing Imam had already warned the world of such deceptions before his concealment, and the instruction reached the elect so that those who returned to truth could be distinguished from those who continued in rebellion.

In the Epistle of Excuse and Warning, the just Imam had said, 'Beware lest lying tongues seduce you and the failed nation snatch you away.' What tongue could be more deceitful than that of this man who claims to be the expected

Messiah? What nation more unfortunate than one that trades the sound religion for falsehood? The Qāʾim warned of what would happen to people who broke their covenant and abandoned his guidance.

The warning continued: 'My absence from you is an absence of examination and trial for you and for all the religions. Whoever fulfills what he has pledged and does not turn back on his heels shall receive a great reward and a generous recompense.' It also forewarned that the apostate party would relapse into hypocrisy, turn toward the deceiver's ornamented words, and accept inventions in place of the covenant. 'Do not incline toward what the devil has embellished; do not desire falsehood and lies.' Such a warning indicates that a person claiming extraordinary authority would indeed appear and seek followers.

You who are deaf to the counsellor's truthful word and blind to the straight road, who exchange religion for contemptible pleasures and forbidden acts, are you going to call the Creator unjust? Or is He the just judge? If He were unjust, you could say He concealed the standing Imam from the nations and let your one village alone receive his appearance. But the Creator is just. The Call of disclosure, the argument of the Qāʾim, has reached peoples and lands everywhere; the summons went beyond Sind to Hindustan. It was not a private revelation given exclusively to a little community whose claimant demands their allegiance.

If this deluded man were the Imam whose return you expect, then his very claim would belie the established doctrine. The Qāʾim, after his absence of trial, cannot appear before the completed appointed number and the public fulfillment of the signs. When he appears he does not hide, but stands with his sword unsheathed against all the deniers in every land. Where are your claimant's miracles? Where are his proofs and signs, standards and armies? Where are the indications of the universal standing he claims? You have offered nothing but a few local adherents and contradictory words.

Consider the predictions attributed to him. In the twentieth year the claimant—or a subordinate who spoke for him—promised his followers that land taxes would be abolished. Instead, the reports say, the community endured disturbance and humiliation. At the beginning of the two Jumādā months he foretold that wheat would become so costly that it would be unobtainable, and famine so severe that no person could hope for relief. He then announced that the Resurrection would occur during the second half of Jumādā al-Ākhira. Neither announcement came to pass.

When the predicted event failed, he changed the date. He promised the Resurrection four months later, at the beginning of winter. Again the time passed. Next he announced that the Resurrection would occur five days into Shawwāl; that failed too. During Rajab he described a mysterious meeting of 'the bride with the bride' and called people to hear his embellished discourse. He foretold three dreadful battles in Rajab and a wind that would prevent travel by land and sea, causing death. The month passed and no such events occurred.

In another proclamation he said that all young people of twelve years of age would die in Shaʿbān, together with the other children of a stated age. Later he said that in Ramaḍān all the sons of Ḥām would die, by which he meant the Black people and servants of African origin. These monstrous announcements also proved false. His partisans, rather than measuring his words by their outcome, remained willing to believe each replacement prediction.

He also promised the Resurrection in winter, his own joyful appearance and the fulfillment of the signs. He described a strange movement of the sea: it would become full and complete at a given festival, then diminish at night, recede and nearly vanish. He made these announcements in verse and swore that they proceeded from the Lord's command. Yet the great events he foretold were not manifested; his followers received suffering and privation instead. Two trustworthy shaykhs are invoked as witnesses to the account transmitted by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bayyāsh.

I do not deny the true Qāʾim's appearance after his allotted absence. I reject only the lies of this deceiver who claims knowledge of hidden matters and beguiles people through predictions. He has also written a covenant of his own for those who have followed him, calling himself the one who transcends likeness and description, claiming that all affairs return to the Imam—meaning himself—and adopting exalted titles belonging only to the rightful authority. He makes

himself a 'god of promises', last of the world's false claimants and first of the 'Pharaohs' to be destroyed at the Resurrection.

The truth is that the divine Lord is above this man and his claims, above all names, attributes and boundaries, above time and fixed duration, and above the human conditions of concealment and reappearance. The *absence* is instead the Imam's absence, by which the world is tested. The guiding Imam's authority was supported by clear designation, universal preaching, truthfulness and the actions by which he manifested his doctrine. When the Qāʾim truly returns, he cannot be hidden from creation or confined to one little band. On the Day of Resurrection no rival claimant will have a refuge.

If this pretender says that he is awaiting the *Lord's* appearance, he has imposed the spatial and temporal conditions of bodies on the transcendent Creator. If he is awaiting some other person, that person must be the expected Imam; thus the pretender's own expectation contradicts his claim that he himself is already the one awaited. Even his chosen followers cannot consistently maintain both assertions. His promises and their postponements therefore expose the lack of any genuine authority.

There is also his disreputable conduct, including sexual misconduct involving several named persons, witnessed by people who knew his actions before the schism. The claimant and his followers fall below the ethical obligations they themselves previously acknowledged. They had known, he says, that authority in the Call cannot be granted merely by the assertion of someone who violates its teaching.

I say all this not to relish obscene language but to expose the source of the pretension and the reversal of those who have willingly followed it. The people of truth must remain separate from these apostates, who heard the authentic Call and then put it behind their backs. They heard the calf's bellow and began to worship it in place of the teaching they knew. The Lord's justice has brought the rival claims into the open; the blind man's assertion to divinity and the pretender's assertion to imamate are now exposed side by side.

The truthful believers and the ignorant deniers have been distinguished. The warnings were delivered and counsel was given. Whoever warns has discharged his obligation. What remains with the messenger is communication of the message, and with the listener the responsibility to understand and accept. Praise belongs to the One whom thought, expression and hearing cannot confine. Thanks belong to the guiding Qāʾim, the Imam who is obeyed.

EPISTLE 77 — REBUKE OF LĀḤIQ (TAWBĪKH LĀḤIQ)

In Your name, O God. To the released and unsuccessful rebel, the covenant-breaker who has disobeyed; to the man incapable of honorable obedience, who has run instead toward falsehood and flight; to the inventor of lies, division and discord, who has walked the road of treachery and hypocrisy.

Miserable man! After you were given respite your deeds have brought ruin upon you. As the interval grew longer your defects came into view. Wisdom has disclosed the disobedience concealed in your breast; the conditions of the Resurrection have brought into the open the baseness of your inward intentions. Your chosen belief, empty of true knowledge, has shown what you really harbor. You were once hardly a thing worth mentioning, and you have forgotten your origin. Yet you now claim extraordinary standing through the very teaching by which your conduct has made you a rejected and dishonored man.

Have you forgotten the time when the people you approached cast you away? Two of the ranks to which you appealed rejected you and threw you out; they left you without helper, deprived of strength or secure refuge. You returned to me seeking protection. I answered your cry, strengthened you when you had become feeble, defended you when humiliated, guided you when in error, and opened your eyes when you were blind. When you made your wish known, I repaired your broken condition, accepted your appeal, answered your prayers, and bestowed upon you what the Guardian of Religion had bestowed upon me for your well-being in this life and the next.

I granted you a standing above your expectations and beyond what you had hoped to obtain. I appointed you to address tribes and clans, made your name conspicuous in correspondence and epistles, and gave you the title of the *Traveling Star* to elevate you among the most honorable of the ranks. Through the favor of the true Guardian I supported you with the knowledge and means of the Call. I established the proof before you when he appeared and you accepted his command; and I sent you on your traveling mission, as the Guardian of truth commanded me, to the districts and regions in which your work could bring benefit. By his strength I prepared the lands before you and conferred upon you the means of speech and action.

But your weak soul and corrupt acts kept you from the service entrusted to you. Your evil intention and ancient errors deprived you of the power to fulfill it. Instead, you welcomed comfort and so-called permissiveness and invented innovations as the devil had done. You forsook the truth, manufactured a new doctrine, and reverted to the base element from which you had been delivered. By your conduct you denied the very favor whose administration had been entrusted to you, although its visible signs attest to your breach.

You met the light of that favor with the darkness of lying. You went back to believing in the imamate of the pretender, that foolish claimant, and denied the standing Imam of the Age. You severed what the Creator had commanded to be joined and sought to extinguish the light through which the Qāʾim of Religion had demolished the institutions of liars, opponents and tyrants. That light had brought the false idols down and humbled the deniers. But you embraced the very people from whom you had been delivered.

You have not retained the Guardian's teachings and signs except for the testimony they now offer against your own lies and contradictions. Remember what he commanded in the Letter of the Traveling Star, rebuking deceit, disobedience and stubbornness: 'If you understood the truthfulness of the tongue and the protection of the brethren that you were bound to observe, you would distinguish truth from falsehood and denial from faith.' Faith in the Arabic language means genuine acceptance and verification. A man who is untruthful with his tongue has even less truthfulness in his heart, weaker certainty and greater hypocrisy.

Truthfulness is the fullness of faith; lying is associationism and error. Whoever lies to his believing brother lies to his Caller. Whoever lies to his Caller lies to his Imam. Whoever lies to his Imam lies to our Lord, denies His grace and deserves His anger. Whoever attributes to his brother a statement he never made, alters his speech, permits him what his Imam forbade, or says of our Lord what should not even be said of His servant has renounced true favor and faith

and manifested disbelief. Whoever opposes the servant of our Lord, the standing Imam of the Age, has disobeyed the Lord Himself even if he maintains that he worships none but that Lord. Whoever falsifies the Imam's or another rank's words and claims that the Lord is unaware of the lie has excluded himself from the company of the Unitarians.

These are the words you once learned and repeated. You have thus been judged by the standard you acknowledged. By the truth itself, you lied to your Caller, to whom you had promised truthful speech. You deceived the people of religion and abandoned the rights of the brethren. The discerning Unitarians can now distinguish the truth from the falsehood, and the believers from those who deny. By your public lying you have shown that your tongue is not truthful and your heart cannot hold firm conviction.

Your lying against your appointed guide is worse than lying against an ordinary brother. You have fallen from the company of truthful believers into the party of associators and hypocrites. Your false reports about the Guardian of the Age and the persons of his ranks deny the grace that raised you. You appointed men of your own choosing to offices and judicial positions within a Call which had already abrogated the religious laws, and presented these appointments as though they flowed from genuine authority.

You introduced among the people entrusted to your direction a doctrine of *ibāḥa*, license or indiscriminate permission, along with lies and arbitrary alteration. You taught them to commit acts they had previously treated as prohibited, to follow illicit attachments, to corrupt their communal obligations, to violate what was held inviolable, and to kill children. You went beyond even these innovations, treating the divine trust as a thing to be broken, until your own followers' breaches of the faith could no longer be concealed.

Everyone knows that the possessed servant relieved you of your appointment and removed two companions alongside you. Who, after that removal, authorized you to speak in the name of the Call or to appoint officials? You and your associates are pretenders, not lawful representatives. What are you and those like you but an evil tree, uprooted from the face of the earth, with no firm place to stand? You have invented falsehood, denied faith, openly embraced apostasy, lies, unbelief and tyranny, and cast away the Guardian who first supported you.

You returned again to the people from whom I had removed you, flattering them with fabricated miracles and extraordinary signs. You claimed to have visited the Qāʾim and found his son seated at his right hand. You said you had entered upon al-Riḍā, 'ambassador of power and herald to the believers'. You then spoke of your wonders, saying that you had been burned twelve times for the religion of tawḥīd. These statements were among your new inventions for winning followers.

You even wrote to the brethren, purporting to inform them of the ranks they had occupied in former ages and saying that, but for your compassion, you could tell them their ranks in this age and in the ages yet to come. They disowned you and whoever attached himself to you, and sought vindication before the Lord and His Guardian against the errors you had spread among them.

What made you a pretender, unfortunate and overturned? How did your passions so master you and blind you? You have damaged your present life and the life to come. Was the problem a deficiency in what you had been taught? No; it was the corrupt disposition that the interval of testing brought to the surface. The teaching was supplied; you chose to apply it falsely.

You and your companions resemble an emaciated donkey turning a waterwheel to irrigate an orchard, or a mule walking in a mill. Both seem to move forward with great effort but remain bound to a circular labor, turning the wheel for the benefit of others. They produce the finest food and fruit yet obtain only barley and fodder for their work. So you, with all your words about wisdom, have failed to attain the benefit of what you learned and have returned to a miserable state. Your learning was not defective because it was too little, but because it was employed in deceit.

Now I have composed this letter of rebuke against the people of defiance, dissent, lying and disobedience, after explaining what has been said about you and your deeds and showing you the just measure of your conduct. Yet even

now the more suitable course for you is to repent of your pretensions. Seek forgiveness and return while the Guardian's protection has not been withdrawn and your return might still be heard and accepted. Do this before the doors of the truth are shut in your face and your name becomes a curse upon the tongues of all people.

If you persist, correspondence will be sent to the regions recounting your defection, and those who once honored and followed you will disown you. Your rivals will rejoice in your downfall, your reputation will be extinguished, and the company you deceived will abandon you. Listen instead to the guidance of the sincere servant and the counsel of the standing Imam's possession. Cast off the garment of falsehood, remove from yourself the cloak of hypocrisy and domination, and accept the discipline of truth. I have acted with restraint and endured your ignorance despite the justice of the charge against you.

If you return to the Guardian, confess your wrong and abandon your false claims, the servant will ask his Lord to overlook your wrongdoing, forgive the excess of your transgression and cover your faults. He is gentler to you than you are to yourself in those false devices, more just and compassionate to you than any father or mother in all their ways of care and counsel. But if you continue in rebellion and disbelief, your wasted efforts will lead only to the day of retribution that you cannot avoid.

Praise belongs to the Lord who frustrates the plots of treacherous transgressors, exposes the unbelieving hypocrites and reveals what their breasts conceal at the hour of distinction. Peace rests upon the Intellect of the worlds, the Guide of the nations, the Imam of justice, the Qāʾim of Religion, the Master of the Covenant who takes vengeance against the rebels by the sword of the Most High. He suffices me; the Qāʾim of Religion, holder of command and prohibition, is my trust.

The rebuke is complete. Praise to our Lord alone, and thanks to the Qāʾim of the Age, His servant.

EPISTLE 78 — REBUKE OF SAKĪN (TAWBĪKH SAKĪN)

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

The letter of the excellent shaykh and the community reached me. May God establish them in obedience to the Guardian of Religion and preserve them from entering into what the deniers and apostates of this community have approved. I read and understood what you wrote. I was astonished that you joined together to ask about a certain man—may God deal with him according to his deeds— while claiming that you had no news of him and had not met him. You also said that you had not met the person who, according to your report, uttered a condemnation against him. Brethren, it is unbecoming that you should treat facts before you as though they were idle stories concerning which no inquiry was possible.

May God curse anyone who condemns a person undeserving of condemnation. No one can count on the intercession of another to justify what is false. Yet we do not hold you answerable for the inventions of pretenders when those inventions have not reached you accurately. If you fear God, recognize the truth and those who possess it, and judge yourselves fairly. Do not act unjustly toward your own souls by lending support to the ignorance of liars.

You say you believe that a certain estate or village has been endowed to this man, and that the owner wrote the grant in his own hand. You suppose the property remains in his charge, under his management and orders, with authority delegated by the lord who endowed it. The condition of the appointment, however, was that the guardian should introduce no harmful innovation into it, neglect no necessary maintenance when he had the means to carry it out, and remove any steward who was causing ruin. He was to spend the funds and resources entrusted to him for those whom the donor had designated, even where the resources were held separately from the estate.

If this is what you believe, then you must understand the obligations that follow from it. The appointed administrator gave guarantees and brought other persons under sworn commitments, recorded before witnesses. They promised not to betray their trust or introduce changes without authorization. People of judgment know what the conditions meant. We know that you do not wish to deny what you have recognized of them. But to introduce an unrelated argument about 'the three' and 'the two' is to move into a quarrel that others have taken it upon themselves to maintain; you need not bear responsibility for it.

As for your asking without sufficient knowledge about the particular person, this is an improper objection against the people of truth. One who acts in ignorance should not be judged as though the whole matter had already been explained to him. We know more of the circumstances than you do; I shall therefore set them before you, and before everyone to whom this letter is read, so that the man's opposition, corruption, and betrayal of the people of truth may become known.

By God, the man about whom you wrote failed the expectations we had placed in him. He ruined estates instead of developing them. He opened to those under his authority forms of wickedness and prohibited conduct of a kind we had not even heard described before. By this misconduct he made the public say that the people of the Call had licensed the shedding of one another's blood and the taking of their possessions. This was contrary to the order of religion and the conduct required of its people.

He permitted followers to take people's wealth, divided the proceeds with them, and authorized killings among neighboring inhabitants. May God condemn anyone who commanded or approved that. Such conduct was concealed from the true owner of the estate until the community approached the ruin about which you and others have heard. The administrator imposed compulsory labor and payments upon cultivators. He claimed that he would carry their burdens and arrange the expenses required for them, but the object of his dealings was to deceive them out of their money. None of the funds taken reached the owner of the estate as a benefit; they were expended or diverted for worldly advantage.

He wrote to me describing the poverty of the farmers and the losses they had sustained. He sent accounts of many difficult circumstances; I repeatedly forwarded him substantial sums and instructed that they be spent upon the people of the estate. Instead, he took the money himself, then wrote back claiming that he had spent it as instructed. These matters were hidden from us until trusted men, afraid of God, came to inform us after the losses and disasters had occurred.

Later he sent word that he wanted to visit us in Alexandria. I sent an escort with considerable funds for his journey. When he arrived I treated him and those accompanying him with generosity, as was known to people who came to us. I am not describing these temporal affairs because I grieve for money or regret having spent it. I mention them so that you may see that this man sought earthly wealth and showed no gratitude for what he received. He has learned neither how to conduct worldly affairs honorably nor how to act for the hereafter.

While he was staying in our presence, he began to perform the acts of the deceivers. He spoke to the men associated with Abū al-Musharraf among you and used their position as a means of asserting authority over us. His purpose was to establish his own claim to the rank of al-Riḍā. We became convinced that he himself was the source of that claim, which Abū al-Musharraf had heard from the group and then repeated without knowing how corrupt its foundation was. When I confronted him with the reports, he refused to admit the truth, insisting that he would not withdraw from the position whose original proponent deserved condemnation.

This was another way to gain worldly standing and force acceptance of the false claim he had previously circulated. I admonished him and treated him gently, but could find no means of persuading him. He repeated, in substance, that the matter had been authorized by our Lord or by someone he called his Master. But the only source of that command was his own foolish mind; no true authority had ordered him to assert it.

When he failed to achieve his aim while living with us, he resolved to leave and establish himself somewhere else. He asked permission to depart. At his new location he sent the corrupt intermediary already mentioned to tell the others that his earlier claims still stood and that his departure had not been disobedience to our command. We learned of this when reports came from the districts and from Ḥasan ibn al-Maʿādh. Each report exposed another effort to persuade the people that his pretension was authorized.

Among the communications reaching us was a proposal that the people should kill a man named Qays. As soon as we heard of it, we sent a letter with Qays himself, directing the people in unequivocal terms: 'Do not kill Qays.' Afterward another messenger, called, came from your region with news that the communities and their settlements had been devastated by the practices the pretender encouraged. We sent another written condemnation of whoever had done such things, cursing those who approved them and continued in rebellion.

Ibn al-Kurdī came and followed the same path; he engaged in further practices for which God will hold him to account. When I realized that the communities were being ruined, I wrote a letter to the people and sent it by ʿAmmār to the inhabitants and managers of the estate. Its purpose was to reveal the baseness of the doctrine, repudiate those who approved it, and explain what just conduct required. The accused learned that ʿAmmār had set out, and a consultation followed with a shaykh described as their leader. It was said that their situation could not be corrected unless an outsider, not a member of their community, were sent to explain what was right. The accused then sent to Banū Tamīm; they came to him, and he departed in company with one of their men.

I wrote a second letter to ʿAmmār, recounting the reports we had received concerning the community. But the conspirators assembled to kill ʿAmmār so that he could not reach us with accurate news of what was occurring. By God, I maintain that ʿAmmār was killed by the accused man's command. May God condemn whoever ordered it and hold that person answerable in this world and the next.

A month ago a report reached us that they had murdered ʿAmmār and divided his clothes among themselves. Earlier reports had said that they attacked and wounded him when he first read out the letter, but some of them restrained the others and said: 'Let him go out from your land, follow him, and then kill him.' The sword of ʿAmmār was found with Ibn

Jandal, who acknowledged possessing it and said: “It was entrusted to me for safekeeping.” We learned of Abū Jumʿa’s words among the Sākiziyya. He said: “His letter remained with me for fifteen days, and we did not send it out.” He meant ʿAmmār’s letter. By God, ʿAmmār was killed only on the accused man’s orders. The shameful acts they performed were the result of his command.

If such acts seem acceptable to you, our answer to your inquiry has failed. But we have not concealed the information from you. You are people of religion and I advise you sincerely. How strange that you omit ʿAmmār's murder from your inquiry! You were told that the attackers first wounded him and took his possessions; afterward they pursued and killed him when he had left their territory. Yet you leave this case aside and ask instead for an explanation of a claim whose truth you have not established. It troubles me that you have permitted yourselves to stand in such a position.

Brethren, whoever believes that God and His Guardian are true must acknowledge that God does not place an unjust and corrupt person in authority over the world while calling that person a just and fair guardian. By attributing these acts to the authorized rule of the Call, you have in effect represented that just authority as oppressive. Do not receive every story without distinction, like a container that accepts pure water and foul water equally. First learn where clean water comes from and where the foul is found.

Was the letter we sent condemning the apostate and his breach of the trust the foul water? Or was the pretender's order, which you found pleasing, the pure? I tell you that a person who holds such contradictory opinions would scarcely welcome a truthful answer. Yet I shall not withdraw the explanation, since you may not have known all the facts.

We excuse you now, brethren, because perhaps the person who induced this inquiry has concealed his acts and you did not know the offences of which we have learned. You remain, on that account, excused for what you did not know. But after being informed you must weigh the evidence and judge as men who care about their religion.

Abū ʿAbd Allāh, Abū Jumʿa and others belong to the accused man's party, he having appointed them. They are unjust men who attribute to us things we have never done. We received reports concerning a person called Abū Tamīm and his actions, none of which we had commanded. His statements and those of his associate were made in agreement with false and invented claims, not with our authorization.

When your letter reached me, I gave thanks for what was sound in it, but was astonished by the rest. One who knows the source of a benefit refers his affairs to that source; one who knows the leader of a corrupt innovation repudiates it and seeks the protection of God and His Guardian. Yet you have failed to distinguish between benefactor and pretender. You deserted the former, listened to the latter, and accepted his inventions. The true people of religion should be far removed from the wiles of such men.

If you wish to save yourselves through the religion, judge your own conduct with care. Reflect upon truth and the conduct befitting its people: purity, restraint, endurance of suffering, patience, good character, decent treatment of families and proper relations with the brethren. Then compare these with what the claimants have permitted: indecencies, the taking of people's property, the killing of persons whom the Creator has forbidden to be killed, and the ruin of families for worldly profit. What crime, I ask, did ʿAmmār commit against them that these men should pursue and kill him?

The justice required of me is to counsel you and make the argument plain. This time is the time of the *great interval* (*al-fatra al-kubrā*). No one can hide what he has done, however fiercely he tries to conceal it. The pretenders have multiplied, and false knowledge has been advanced in place of the truth. Every person should therefore hold fast to what he genuinely knows, preserve the true teachings he has received, and not incline toward a preacher merely because he possesses a title. Rely upon the authentic writings of the Proof, the possessed servant of the Guardian of the Age, insofar as they agree with the Guardian's own word.

It has even reached us that a man said: 'If Abū al-Musharraf arrives, kill him.' May God condemn whoever issued and repeated such an instruction. Another, Abū Jumʿa, said before travelers that he had retained a letter for fifteen days and had not delivered it. The people seemed ready to do every evil act that lay within their power. These reports show why it is no longer right to entrust the community to their direction.

I therefore direct you: do not heed anyone's instruction in this period merely because he belonged to the former missionary order. Do not obey Sayf, Masʿūd (Ibn al-Kurdī), Abū Jumʿa, Abū ʿAbd Allāh, or any other person who now advances one of these pretensions. They are the Callers of the interval and the trial, not authentic Callers of truth. Their aim is to make themselves powerful and to win goods for themselves. They have betrayed the authority they were instructed to obey and have taken people away from truth toward falsehood.

None of them retains a right of command or prohibition over any of you. This is my command to you and a proof binding between us. Whoever is obedient and regards himself as one of the believers must put away the desire for privileges and rank. Let no man set himself above another in this period. All are equal in the absence of recognized earthly authority. Distinctions now depend on the wisdom people have preserved, the righteous conduct they have practiced toward their brethren, and their continued obedience to the Guardian's genuine instructions.

Whoever among the persons who once claimed appointment by the possessed servant accepts this condition, denies any exclusive right to command, and lives as a brother among brethren is to be treated as one of you. Whoever refuses it, insists that he possesses an independent command and prohibition, or clings to what has been declared illicit, separates himself from this community and falls under its condemnation. The doors of such men's teaching are doors of wrath, not mercy, for they have abandoned the religion and assisted the killing of its adherents.

I warned you of the coming interval years ago in the epistle called *On the Realities*. Its date is known and a copy is among some of you. Look at what was said there about this time and its people: 'Brethren, make use of the period of respite; draw near to your Guardian through righteous works before the leaves are folded and the pens dry, before the doors of mercy close, the mouths are sealed and speech comes to an end, before the gates of wrath are opened against those who manifest resistance and retaliation. These are the first signs that the guardian witnesses will stand, and the most evident tokens of the coming proofs.' The precise boundaries of the reused passage require comparison with that earlier epistle.

The present letter is thus a warning to everyone who seeks the road of truth, not merely a private reply. Whoever hears the explanation should recognize that the pretender may try to divert him with the claim that some authoritative person has died and been transferred to another rank. The one who justified the killing of the truthful people is a deceiver. His companions are the 'Jews of this community', worse even than their predecessors: those earlier enemies persecuted out of ignorance, while these men attacked persons whom they already recognized as Unitarians.

Do not object that the community cannot be maintained without a person possessing a right to command. The prophetic warning had described an age in which holding to one's religion would be like clutching hot coals, and the believer would flee from one height to another, from one teacher to another, seeking a truthful Caller. This was not said because every claimant would be absent, but because truthful claimants would be few and apostate pretenders many. This is that time.

The written teachings also say that when the Qāʾim appears he will first deal with those who claim his name but disobey his command before he deals with his other opponents. These men have professed him with their tongues while repudiating the commands he gave. The Creator has not left you without knowledge of the trial; its signs have been explained, and those who have heard remain responsible for their conduct.

I shall not send further commands in this matter beyond what is now written, unless a new direction comes from the holder of the Command. If a new condition is established, it will stand outside the rules of the present interval. The blame for the offenses already committed rests upon those who chose them, not upon the innocent brethren who rejected the offenders.

I have made the explanation plain, without elaborate rhyming and verbal adornment, so that it may be understood like a conversation among you. No one should be able to say that the language prevented him from understanding. There is no compulsion or force in religion here: it is a declaration to the nations and a matter of choice. If the Creator wishes to visit calamity upon a people, none can repel it. The pretenders have revealed their hidden corruption by taking the life of ʿAmmār, and the deed will become known among all who investigate the religion. The disclosure itself is part of the distinction between truth and falsehood at the hour of trial.

Reports have now reached us from many regions, including Damascus, concerning this unfortunate man. They agree that the order to kill ʿAmmār came from him. He did not strike the blow with his own hand, but would have struck the messenger who delivered the letter had he been able. A man of this kind is the worst possible person to place over the followers of truth; he has neither religion, knowledge, nor just conduct. His associates know his deficiencies. Muṣʿab once took precedence over him in gatherings, and the pretender resented his lesser position. When this was reported, I wrote to Muṣʿab, who corrected his conduct on hearing the warning. Such episodes show the difference between a man who receives a truthful rebuke and one who insists upon falsehood.

Since the pure shaykh ʿAmmār has been killed, you must repudiate the accused and his followers. Muḥammad al-ʿĀwī must also be rebuked for dishonest correspondence and his willingness to follow the same pretender. A person who sets himself up as a witness and guide by lying has learned nothing from religion except the conduct that resembles his own appetite. I reject such men and the authority they claim.

Brethren, truth is a straight and visible door, a clear path. Falsehood is a rough and difficult passage attended by deceivers and their helpers. Choose for yourselves which company you wish to keep, and follow the side you have knowingly chosen. Peace rests upon those who act with justice and good will. Until this moment I remain on the shore of the salt sea; today I intend to travel toward Antioch, fleeing the hearing of these dreadful reports. Praise belongs to God as is fitting. His blessings upon His trustworthy messenger and His peace upon the messenger's pure family. He suffices me and is the best helper.

This additional section reached me after I had written the letter. Brethren, if in earlier days you held that obedience to Masʿūd was a true religious obedience, you must know that it came to you from a true source. The person who appointed him did not invent an office without authority. Your religion, in that earlier act, was rendered sincerely to God, His Guardian, and the recognized intermediary between you and the one who had commissioned Masʿūd. He did not derive his rank from himself or from any other person of his own choosing.

Therefore obedience to him *now*, after he has disobeyed the very authority that appointed him, is a contradiction and an act of disobedience to God. You know that the one who appointed Masʿūd could, had he wished, appoint another in his place. Neither Abū Masʿūd nor anyone else could rightly object to that new commission. The question is not settled by force, personal bias or attachment to a leader. The transgressor is disobedient and accursed; you remain free to choose, while I repudiate him and those who knowingly follow his rebellion.

Everything I have set down concerning this man has not been collected from remote rumor alone: it includes what was established in his presence, with the testimony of the people assembled. What he and his companions have done by appropriating estates, towns, houses, their occupants and their possessions is more extensive than a brief letter could enumerate. Those estates and goods belonged to their proper owners; taking them is not a right of religious office. These actions concern the affairs of this world, and their shame does not disappear by attaching a holy name to them.

The warning has been delivered. You remain responsible for your own choice. A sincere messenger is bound only to convey the matter clearly. Praise to God alone; through Him I seek assistance.

The rebuke of the unfortunate claimant is complete. Praise to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian and servant.

EPISTLE 79 — REBUKE OF IBN ABĪ ḤAṢIYYA (TAWBĪKH IBN ABĪ ḤAṢIYYA)

In the name of the God who carries His command and will into effect whenever He chooses, by His volition and His word. May God prolong the lives of the pure and trustworthy elders and of the excellent, chosen community.

Reports have reached us about people who profess religion and faith, yet have taken to arrogance, dissension, and an unmistakable deficiency of judgment. In every district they have joined together in license and immorality, rejecting the repeated warnings against these ugly actions, which properly belong to obstinate and rebellious people. They have neglected *The Crushing of the False Pharaoh* and the reproaches directed at those who disregarded the letter of the trustworthy martyr, the shaykh Abū al-Yaqẓān. Ibn Abī Ḥaṣiyya, the renegade—may God remove him—has repeated such assertions in our time among the residences of the families of ʿAbd Allāh and Sulaymān. They are immersing themselves in error, discord, and corruption worthy of a lying and coarse fellow such as he.

It has become common knowledge that he has split the people of al-Bustān and others into factions, filled their vessels with the defilement of doubt, and turned them into companions and followers of the devils. He takes aside whichever of the pure believers he has tempted—such as Faraj ibn Saʿd Allāh and others of the excellent and pure—and deceives them with the claim that he will disclose to them religious knowledge they have not yet attained. He decorates for them unbelief outside the truth, although its falsity has already been demonstrated in *The Crushing of the Pretending Pharaohs*. There is no need to repeat its proofs here: they have silenced the tongues of the arrogant who dispute without knowledge. This renegade has made his claims a ladder to fornication and the pursuit of fleeting goods, daring to oppose the Most High Creator and the teachings of the guiding Imam who stands at the head of the age. Recognize his wrongdoing: his acts and scandals are already manifest. God will expose and recompense those who commit these offenses.

I have sent to the Mountain a circular forbidding this little band the practices by which it has departed from the people of truth. I send it to you also. Its contents, including repudiation and condemnation of those who profess this religion while declaring lawful the acts of this band, are binding. Such people follow the servants of the pharaohs of past cycles and their immoderate, renegade followers, imitating their deeds in order to mislead the world. I have sent the circular to all the elders of al-Bustān as an admonition and an argument against them and against the entire families of ʿAbd Allāh and Sulaymān. Here is the circular:

"In Your name, O God, Master of the Command, the just Imam and Qāʾim of this age and time!

"To the fanatical, denying party, blinded to the truth after having known it and received instruction: the beginnings of their actions have turned them toward degradation and distorted forms, toward an abhorrent and humiliating condition outside the truth. Their hearts are lost in bewilderment; they turn away from the truth and cannot restrain themselves from destructive vices. They have followed the cries of the devils of the interval, when falsehood must be distinguished from truth, and the rabble and dregs of the nations. Their souls have made attractive to them the hypocrisy, obstinacy, and debauchery they knew in former times. The verses and the wise remembrance do not restrain them, nor do they stop imitating the disgusting actions of pretenders, because their souls have become intermixed with impurity and shameful deeds.

"Their souls are too weak to bear the truth, being diseased and ruined; in their own nature they reproduce the filthy offenses and violation of covenants in which they were caught in previous times. Through their deception they have become accustomed to companionship with the devils of the successive cycles, their spirits mingling with rebellion against the Imams of the ages. They expect neither a life to come nor a reward, and they do not understand. The interval has robbed them of their reason and intelligence, and obedience to devils has made them forget their spiritual ranks and the doors through which they were taught.

"O misguided company! Have you found no warning in the miraculous wisdom of the Guardian of the Age that has reached you through his servant? Alas for you! Have you learned nothing from the decisive verses on divine unity and

the books of the righteous? Where are you going, away from the truth? What religion do you claim to practise while persisting in abominations? No possessor of understanding came to defeat you in argument and so beguile you; no teacher arrived with knowledge better than what you had already learned to deceive and destroy you; nor did a man of worldly wealth arrive to seduce you with his possessions. You have forgotten the followers of Abū Jawf, while your lowest parts have become your highest.

"Look at the practices you have adopted. You have no cause for them except that your souls are habituated to the orders of devils and stained with ignorance and opposition. You seek distinction through the very depravity in which you have become singular, though on the Day of Presentation and Judgment you will have to answer for it. With what argument will you defend yourselves? Which piece of knowledge that came to you gives you grounds for doubt? God is your adversary, and you are the wrongdoers.

"We have learned that Mukhallā is the cause of this great innovation and scandal. May God neither raise his standing, nor bring his project to completion, nor prolong his life except for punishment, disgrace, and exemplary retribution. May He place him among the low, profligate pretenders who have been led away from the truth.

"No admonition or further letter remains for you among us, rabble of the nations. The bonds of relationship and kinship between us have been severed. Have you run to these abominations after learning of the prohibition issued against the innovations of the apostates? You had received the book sent to the trustworthy appointee, the associate of divine unity and right guidance, and had read *The Crushing of the Pretending Pharaohs*. Yet you have forgotten the landmarks of self-restraint and praiseworthy religion and chosen rebellion, unbelief, obstinacy, and denial. Enter whatever road to immorality you find; commit whatever outrage against the sanctity of religion you can discover. You have openly resisted the people of religion and truth and unsheathed the swords of falsehood against all creation.

"Understand what is set forth in the wisdom of the Qāʾim, the Imam—may God's peace rest upon his remembrance—concerning those who carry out your actions, under the images of transformed creatures, male and female. He explains the condition of one who invites another man to his own wife under the image of the *jarīth*, a kind of river fish. The man who makes his wife available to another falls into the shame of such an act, and his degradation is manifest in the worlds: outward disgrace now and torment for the grievous sins he has acquired thereafter.

"Likewise, when the wisdom describes women displaying themselves who obey men of immorality and betrayal and have departed from the realities of religion, it gives the image of the hare. The hare represents a woman who betrays her husband and brings misery upon herself. Through the defilement of her soul and the gravity of her condition, she does not purify herself of her pollution and enters the houses of God carrying inward corruption and a curse.

"These are descriptions, in the wisdom, of those who commit offenses and depart from the truth and the reality of religion. The pure friends of the faith are innocent of their deeds, while such descriptions belong to apostates and usurpers."

Whoever belongs instead to the company of the truthful and obedient, among the sincere, pure and certain Unitarians, recognizes the unity of our Lord, the divine al-Ḥākim, the Almighty who requites through His guiding Guardian those who persist in opposition, obstinacy and resistance. Such people acknowledge the imamate of the guiding Qāʾim, through whom the nations are delivered in their times and cycles. They also recognize that al-Muqtanā is His weak and insignificant servant, especially when compared with the exalted ranks of honor and light that preceded him.

Let such a person honor himself by rejecting the abominations of these coarse fools, repudiating them and remaining faithful to the wisdom of the Qāʾim, the guiding Imam. Through the refinement of his soul let him distinguish himself from those given to vice and the distorted minds of beasts, without joining them in speech or action. This faction and those who repeat their words belong to impurity, hypocrisy and folly. With their filth, ugliness and corruption they have effaced the signs of religion and departed from truth. May God banish and curse them for fabricating additions to religion, stirring up sedition against the pure followers of its ranks, and grafting on to it the uncleanness of those who apostatize and oppose its truth and wisdom.

I commend the people of reverence, obedience and restraint—and those who have repented and confessed their error—to God, who grants His Guardian victory, triumph and deliverance of His friends, bringing them from the constriction of devils into the breadth of justice and relief. God is sufficient for His weak servant al-Muqtanā, who follows the easy path of truth; He humiliates those who choose the crooked, difficult road of falsehood.

God knows, in His kingdom and power, how greatly I cherish my brother elders—may God sustain them in obedience—and the elders of the household of ʿAbd Allāh. I ask the Guardian of the Truth not to remove them from His near station but to make their passage easy. I mean the pure shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, Salāma ibn Ḥasan, Ḥamza ibn Muḥammad, and Ḥasan and his son Ḥusayn, together with their community of people faithful to their word and to the truth; and the pure elders of the family of ʿAbd Allāh, among whom are Rajāʾ, Ibrāhīm, ʿAbd Allāh, Ḥusayn and another Ibrāhīm, with the faithful and virtuous people in their company.

Let their community know—may God confound the enemies of truth—that the people are on a journey and its end is near, though they are heedless; they stand upon the edge of a crumbling bank of their own actions while wandering in their intoxication. This reminder concerns the young men who have rebelled against the truth without understanding. Their names and relationships have become known to us through their disobedience and their characteristics. They are enamored of falsehood and far removed from the truth, threatening God's path and daring to harm His friends through wrongdoing. Let supplications be made against them for their injustice toward the proofs and signs of God; let us entreat His power to strike them as He struck the mighty and pampered people of ʿĀd. Let Him join them to those who turned away from obedience, and let the aggressor receive his due punishment. God does not waste the reward of those who act well.

As for what the pure shaykh mentioned about having left his home and settled elsewhere: if he did so to avoid those already named who have departed from truth, and to be rid of their evil, write to us, by the established channel, the names of everyone who persists in hypocrisy, foolishness, dissension and conflict, so that we may add them to the list of these defiant men: Barakāt, Mūsā, Muzāḥim, al-Shamālī, Naṣr, and the doubting wrongdoer Muẓaffar. Their names are recorded with those of the other rebels whom Satan has mastered, who have departed from the company of believers and exposed themselves to punishment with the usurpers.

Concerning the pure shaykh's report about his son—may God protect and restore his health—the nature of his food and drink must be established, and whether the mixture has entered the stomach cavity, or whether the condition is one of general weakness. The physician must also see him with his own eyes and hear his account, so that a useful medicine can be prescribed after a complete examination. If he is sent to us with a trustworthy person, we shall undertake his care. May God ease his recovery and grant him and the good community what we wish for them.

As for what the pure shaykh and the elders of the household of ʿAbd Allāh said about establishing an account, the brethren have not explained the matter to us in a clear letter, and it remains obscure to us. The matter calls for clear proof and demonstration. We have sent an accounting into far-off regions; in that discussion, what was potential did not come into actuality until after the tenth and ninth years.

I give the pure elders of the families of ʿAbd Allāh and Sulaymān my most complete greetings, and wish the approved blessing upon everyone around them, great and small. I have united these two communities in a single copy of this letter because I regard them as one soul in obedience and good deeds. Do not forget the pure shaykh Abū al-Darʿ and his companions: let them share in the blessing that God grants those whom He knows to be good and worthy.

I commend the community to God, who knows the hidden things within His creation and carries out His command by His will and volition. Praise belongs to God, who manifests His truth even if the associators hate it, and whose will is carried out despite the apostates. He suffices the weak, lowly, possessed servant in bringing what was spoken into being. This rebuke is finished. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian and servant.

EPISTLE 80 — REBUKE OF SAHL (TAWBĪKH SAHL)

The letter from the excellent, trustworthy and faithful shaykh has arrived. Its words disclose his learning and virtues, and its contents attest to the soundness of his understanding. May God prolong his life in the condition he now enjoys, and perpetuate his ascent in the degrees of distinction.

I read the whole letter. I found in his readiness to answer and the cleverness of his replies evidence of his inner hostility to the people of truth as well as his penetrating intelligence. I praised God for the condition in which He placed me, as regards possessions, family and children, after I had entrusted their preservation and care to this man. Yet I discovered that his heart contained rancor previously hidden from sight, which has now become plain and notorious after remaining concealed.

Glory be to God! I reproach you in private for the shameful act you have approved, rebuking you consistently for the magnitude of what you have committed. Yet you address me as incapable, foolish, and with other inventions suited to you. You have not borne the responsibility entrusted to you with patience, nor honored the trust bestowed upon you.

By God, among the greatest and strangest calamities is to see men of presumed seniority and understanding attack the skillful and eloquent for the sake of a garment —in pursuit of a shirt—. What you and those like you thought to possess has flown away; another took it by force or theft.

Heedless man! Do you imagine that, before a presence that rejects injustice and absurdity and seeks truthfulness in speech, you can claim that when you emigrated you left part of your property with me, trusted me with your family and children, and that I then wronged them and committed disgusting acts against them? What is this but an accusation devised by you?

Glory be to God! Are these the signs of noble ancestry and virtuous manners of which you boast in your genealogies and lineage, as you say in your letter, you poor wretch? What excuse will you have when the tongues of truthful men examine you before the pure Presence? When you unjustly call me a wrongdoer, you yourself are the wrongdoer; when you call me a traitor, you are the treacherous one.

I reproached you as one brother reproaches another, because of the ugly conduct you committed. I rebuked you out of concern for the reports circulating about your actions in your own town and its surroundings. Instead of answering, you moved the discussion to something I had not raised in my letter, and returned me a reply that was no reply at all, seeking to confuse your error and adorn the falsehood you have embraced. So I say in verse:

How have you undone the bond of friendship, Sahl, And corrupted fidelity, you treacherous one? You have proclaimed your obstinacy without an injury, And furnished evil grounds for suspicion.

You rushed ahead with ugly words,

The language of betrayal plain to see;

You wished to make war against the foremost of the Arabs,

Against one whose sword-edge cuts through armored bodies.

Who can face a blazing meteor's fire,

Its lightning so bright it blinds the eyes?

You acted ignorantly toward a learned, dignified man,

And raged; I scarcely doubt your madness.

Was breaking the covenant not enough for you,

That you must also use foolish and contemptuous speech?

You claim that I raised you as an infant;

With your own hands, you contemptible man, you contemptible man!

Do you not know that knowledge came through me, Influencing creation when it was still clay? I truly am a summoner to the Merciful, With the illumination of unveiling and the religion of unity.

Why then did you deny my right, my friend,

When friendship had long been pledged between us?

We both ascend toward the honor of high things,

And are honored to serve their cause.

The changes of time have tempted you,

And you forgot my affection in your infatuation.

If you persist in malice and wrongdoing,

I shall seek help from God, the All-Protecting.

In the age of recompense we shall meet again:

Its hidden hour you neither know nor can foretell.

Be wary and afraid of what will come;

Your soul will find no lasting dwelling there.

Concerning the word he says I uttered against him: even if that word is literally true, I did not use it in making a claim to religious authority or in seeking fame among the Nuṣayrīs. He seems to have imitated their acts and accusations in making this charge against me.

For his own benefit he tried to set snares and demanded that I condemn the very man who is his Caller and mine, who nourished and raised him, in whose household he grew up and from whose home he departed. He neither respected that man's sanctity nor regarded the ties that bound them. If this is how you behave toward your own benefactor, how will you treat someone who has none of these claims upon you? For this reason I reprove you for what you have spread, and for your failure concerning the family and children entrusted to your care.

The account is supported by the widespread reports of the people of your town and brethren, and by the testimony of a great many associates and neighbors. Yet you lavish praise on yourself while directing blame and insult at me. You have broken faith with God and His Guardian without grievance or injury, merely to indulge in ornamented, rhyming prose, as if you could compete with the masters of composition and embellishment. How far such skill is from a mind with so little knowledge! Words are sound only when they correspond to meanings. Riffraff and vulgar people, whom you take as friends and followers, approve what people of discernment reject and what reason cannot accept; through deficient understanding, they excuse your fabrications and lies.

I shall show you some of the poverty of your argument when you attacked my father and paternal uncle. You elaborated accusations against them and tried to ascribe to me the disagreements you alleged between them and the pure Imams. God, Lord of the worlds, will call you to account for this. By God, they lived with honor and died lamented, known for concealment of faults, chastity, religion, justice and trustworthiness. They and their ancestors were preachers, judges

and jurists in their city, recognized for their place in the school they followed and for transmitting its teaching. Their reckoning belongs to God Most High, for whom no sin is too great to judge, even if unbelief is its furthest limit.

Had you possessed even a trace of learning or discretion, you would have recognized what rebounds upon you when you attack a man's parents: the same reasoning permits an attack upon the noble prophets and a rejection of the mighty Book of God. Silence would have suited your condition better and relieved your mind. His saying demolishes your falsehood: "Every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned" (Qurʾān 74:38); and "A father will avail his child nothing, nor a child his father" (31:33). Thus the Book itself answers you.

Your argument is also an insult to the pure prophets. In the account of Abraham, the Friend of the Merciful, he admonishes his father for the worship of idols: "My father, do not worship Satan; Satan is disobedient to the Merciful" (19:44). As for the Master of the messengers and Imams, consider Abū Lahab, his uncle, and what the tradition says concerning his family. Nor did God disgrace the pure prophets on account of members of their households who apostatized and rejected their obedience. How then can you hold me responsible for your invention about my father and uncle? God is far above injustice and oppression.

Two things moved you, man of little learning, to this: first, you opened a door through which Jews and Christians might attack the religion of Islam and cast aspersions upon the noble prophets; second, your weak judgment and gross incomprehension prevented you from seeing the faults in your argument. Either offense could suffice to bring punishment upon you. One of these offenses could warrant the cutting out of your tongue, the tearing down of your limbs, and the striking off of your head. Your heart has been darkened and Satan has mastered your thought. You openly exposed what you concealed and brought forth accusations for which you will answer helplessly before the Judge on the Day of Judgment.

And I say of you in verse:

You have revealed what was concealed within you,

And disclosed a sin for which no excuse can be made.

You have broken the bond of friendship, betraying your pledge,

And confronted supreme majesty with your injustice.

You addressed him foolishly, declaring him deficient,

Although he is master of his forbearance and the gifts of his wisdom.

You said—your ignorant words themselves bear witness—

That the full moon stands at the utmost of its fullness.

"Our first matter and our original form":

What has your foolishness made of this claim?

Do you know, blind man, the wretchedness

Of the last age and its final resurrection?

Who is the master of the cycles and ages alone,

And who is his speaking caller, known by name?

Who is the Second Preceder and the Follower with him,

Who makes the true word clear after its concealment?

Who is Khiḍr among the righteous, who never dies?

How did Jesus ascend to heaven in his body?

Where is the Ancient of all time, and how is He one,

Though described as governing upon the throne?

How does the subtle soul receive its recompense,

And by what knowledge can its existence be known?

You have no wise answer to a single question,

Nor a decisive proof that settles its meaning.

I know that the calumny of those who preceded you

Will be exposed by the arguments of truth.

You and they alike are companions in falsehood,

Servants of the cycles of concealment and their stars.

How can you dispute a man of exalted dignity,

When your own claim is marked by corruption?

You disparage him with the denials of unbelief,

And have lost what you might have attained.

His soul possesses knowledge of resurrection,

While you understand neither its proof nor its reality.

You have made yourself a victim of your ignorance,

And the downfall of the unjust comes suddenly.

Completed through the favor of the Guardian of the Hereafter. Thus ends the rebuke of Sahl. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to the guiding Imam, His servant.

EPISTLE 81 — REBUKE OF ḤASAN IBN MUʿALLĀ (TAWBĪKH ḤASAN IBN MUʿALLĀ)

The letter of the excellent shaykh has arrived. May God prolong his life and continue to protect and support him. We were pleased to learn of his safety and complete well-being. For this we thank God greatly; His blessings and peace be upon His Messenger and the Messenger's family.

Know, shaykh, that Ḥasan ibn Muʿallā came to us accompanied by another man. May God not reward this man with goodness: there is scarcely anyone more shameless or less religious in the world. He is laden with lies and false pretenses. He carried a letter he alleged came from the community. At its beginning the letter says that Naṣr delivered to the shaykh ʿAmmār everything we had sent with him: the expenses and provisions, the equipment and other materials. It claims that he handed everything to ʿAmmār after gathering all the inhabitants of the estate, that they carried out everything communicated to them, that ʿAmmār acquainted them with it and had written acknowledgments made, and that he then departed from them, happy and pleased with the cultivation and improvement God had renewed through his hands.

Yet at the end of the same letter it says that Naṣr delivered nothing to ʿAmmār of what had been sent in his charge and told him nothing about it! It further claims that when ʿAmmār heard of the letter, he denied the affair and kept it hidden from him. Naṣr then gathered them secretly, without ʿAmmār's knowledge, and handed them everything he possessed, saying: "Take this and go with it to al-Kurdī; he is my friend." According to the letter, they rebuked him: "You should have brought it to the person to whom it was addressed," meaning ʿAmmār. Naṣr replied: "I would not be the first to cast blame upon my companion out of fear".

The bearer sealed the letter and said to us: "Take it and send it to him." We refused. So he took it, sealed it himself, and swore by God that no one should open this seal except his companion al-Kurdī. The document contained many further lies too tedious to repeat.

When we saw that one part of the letter contradicted another, we knew it belonged to the stratagems of al-Kurdī. This conclusion was reinforced by our knowledge that he has neither the understanding nor the competence to devise a sound plan of this kind. He had no understanding of what could be relied upon in such a matter; he possessed only the name, nothing more. Yet the more carefully he contrived his trick, the more plainly he exposed his lie. He had written this copy to trick the overseers of the estate and thereby bring its affairs into disorder.

I took the letter and the two men to a gathering of cultivators and estate people whom our Lord had favored before His disappearance. The whole gathering assembled and I read the letter before them, with both men present. They were overwhelmed by the shame and humiliation of their scheme; may God spare honest and truthful people such dishonor. All present could see its contradictions, falsifications, tricks, lack of religious integrity and lack of reason. They were astonished that someone would attempt such a deception against our Lord. They established that the two men had lied and that the maker of the document had lied, and understood that it was one of al-Kurdī's snares. They said: "This letter is evidence that ʿAmmār's complaint was justified and that he had been wronged. Our Lord said before his departure: 'I have nothing more to say to anyone.'"

The men were asked to go to the three shaykhs—Abū al-Maʿālī, Abū al-Khayr, and Abū al-Faḍl and fulfill what was required of them, repeating before those elders and the assembled people what had been done to ʿAmmār. If they refuse, we can have no further arrangement of cultivation or management of the estate with them. A letter that reaches us by deception cannot form the basis of a good conclusion or an agreement.

This Ḥasan also said that Abū al-Khayr had gone to ʿAlī and apologized to him; and that ʿAlī had said to ʿAmmār in front of the gathering, "By God, were it not for that, I would have ordered someone to drag you by your leg all through the town." Abū al-Khayr approved of this; it would be outrageous to treat in this way a man who was the community's messenger. We hope all of this is false, like the claims we have already established as false in the letter.

The shaykh must not delay his reply. Tell us everything he knows about all that we have described and about what happened to ʿAmmār, together with the statements attributed to Abū al-Khayr and his willingness to accept these acts. If you can communicate the matter to the community, do so, that their answer may tell us what they themselves know. We shall continue to seek the truth.

Praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds, and may His blessings rest upon His Messenger and the Messenger's pure family. Let the community know that we are not accustomed to forwarding forged documents; only the fear that failure to disclose this one would neglect an important matter made us pass it on through the appropriate channel. Our fullest greetings of peace to you and everyone with you, and from all of us to you our most complete salutation. Peace. The epistle is complete, with praise to God alone.

EPISTLE 82 — REBUKE OF THE UNFORTUNATE MUKHALLĀ (TAWBĪKH AL-KHĀʾIB MUKHALLĀ)

A letter sent to the community in the name of the God al-Ḥākim, who has entrusted the keys of heaven and earth to the one He appointed as guiding Imam and guardian over souls on the Day of Reckoning and Presentation.

For a long time we have dealt gently with you through decisive verses, you people of rebellion, heedlessness and forgetfulness. Your souls have refused to receive truth and honesty because of the unbelief and apostasy to which they were accustomed in earlier times, and the lies and slander in which they were reared. You have increased in doubt, deception, obstinacy and hypocrisy in the face of the ordinances of wisdom, and in denial and rejection before sound admonition.

We sent this letter to you with the son of the trustworthy one and the Jew. In our judgment both are full of hostility, obstinacy and division: one is a servant of Mukhallā, the unfaithful, treacherous and profligate pretender; the other follows the expelled, thieving apostate known as the Magian. This is an argument against them and against you, with the aim of exposing those who have rejected the truth. They had previously been of the company of those whom we trusted, but they have now turned from their former course. We have sent this proclamation as proof against them. Let it be read to the gatherings of people who are jealous for the religion and disapprove of the filth of lies and calumny. Let those who recognize the need to uncover the faults of rebels carry its argument to anyone among the people of the towns whose uprightness they know.

For seventeen years we have presented to you God's proofs, decisive arguments and clear signs, together with the severe warnings and reports contained in the Guardian's wisdom. Yet these mighty verses have increased only your unbelief and rebellion: you have turned your backs on the epistles of wisdom. After this communication the connections of fellowship and kinship between us and you will be severed. This is the text of the proclamation:

"In Your name, O God, Master of the Command, the just Imam and Qāʾim of this age and time!

"To the fanatical, denying party, blinded to the truth after having known it and received instruction: the beginnings of their actions have turned them toward degradation and distorted forms, toward an abhorrent and humiliating condition outside the truth. Their hearts are lost in bewilderment; they turn away from the truth and cannot restrain themselves from destructive vices. They have followed the cries of the devils of the interval, when falsehood must be distinguished from truth, and the rabble and dregs of the nations. Their souls have made attractive to them the hypocrisy, obstinacy, and debauchery they knew in former times. The verses and the wise remembrance do not restrain them, nor do they stop imitating the disgusting actions of pretenders, because their souls have become intermixed with impurity and shameful deeds.

"Their souls are too weak to bear the truth, being diseased and ruined; in their own nature they reproduce the filthy offenses and violation of covenants in which they were caught in previous times. Through their deception they have become accustomed to companionship with the devils of the successive cycles, their spirits mingling with rebellion against the Imams of the ages. They expect neither a life to come nor a reward, and they do not recognize the return and the recompense awaiting them. The interval has robbed them of their reason and intelligence, and obedience to devils has made them forget their spiritual ranks and the doors through which they were taught.

"O misguided company! Have you found no warning in the miraculous wisdom of the Guardian of the Age that has reached you through his servant? Alas for you! Have you learned nothing from the decisive verses on divine unity and the books of the righteous? Where are you going, away from the truth? What religion do you claim to practise while persisting in abominations? No possessor of understanding came to defeat you in argument and so beguile you; no teacher arrived with knowledge better than what you had already learned to deceive and destroy you; nor did a man of worldly wealth arrive to seduce you with his possessions. You have forgotten the followers of Abū Jawf, while your lowest parts have become your highest.

"Look at the practices you have adopted. You have no cause for them except that your souls are habituated to the orders of devils and stained with ignorance and opposition. You seek distinction through the very depravity in which you have become singular, though on the Day of Presentation and Judgment you will have to answer for it. With what argument will you defend yourselves? Which piece of knowledge that came to you gives you grounds for doubt? God is your adversary, and you are the wrongdoers.

"We have learned that Mukhallā is the cause of this great innovation and scandal. May God neither raise his standing, nor bring his project to completion, nor prolong his life except for punishment, disgrace, and exemplary retribution. May He place him among the low, profligate pretenders who have been led away from the truth.

"No admonition or further letter remains for you among us, rabble of the nations. The bonds of relationship and kinship between us have been severed. Have you run to these abominations after learning of the prohibition issued against the innovations of the apostates? You had received the book sent to the upright, trustworthy and faithful man, the associate of divine unity and right guidance, and had read *The Crushing of the Pretending Pharaohs*. Yet you have forgotten the landmarks of self-restraint and praiseworthy religion and chosen rebellion, unbelief, obstinacy, and denial. Enter whatever road to immorality you find; commit whatever outrage against the sanctity of religion you can discover. You have openly resisted the people of religion and truth and unsheathed the swords of falsehood against all creation.

"Understand what is set forth in the wisdom of the Qāʾim, the Imam—may God's peace rest upon his remembrance—concerning those who carry out your actions, under the images of transformed creatures, male and female. He explains the condition of one who invites another man to his own wife under the image of the *jarīth*, a kind of river fish. The husband invites another man to his wife and so exposes the baseness and ugliness of his own conduct; the fish is made the image of this humiliation. The man who makes his wife available to another falls into the shame of such an act, and his degradation is manifest in the worlds: outward disgrace now and torment for the grievous sins he has acquired thereafter.

"Likewise, when the wisdom describes women displaying themselves who obey men of immorality and betrayal and have departed from the realities of religion, it gives the image of the hare. As for the words concerning shameless women who display themselves, the teaching presents the image of the hare. The hare represents a woman who betrays her husband and brings misery upon herself. Through the defilement of her soul and the gravity of her condition, she does not purify herself of her pollution and enters the houses of God carrying inward corruption and a curse.

"These are descriptions, in the wisdom, of those who commit offenses and depart from the truth and the reality of religion. The pure friends of the faith are innocent of their deeds, while such descriptions belong to apostates and usurpers."

Whoever belongs instead to the company of the truthful and obedient, among the sincere, pure and certain Unitarians, recognizes the unity of our Lord, the divine al-Ḥākim, the Almighty who requites through His guiding Guardian those who persist in opposition, obstinacy and resistance. Such people acknowledge the imamate of the guiding Qāʾim, through whom the nations are delivered in their times and cycles. They also recognize that al-Muqtanā is His weak and insignificant servant, especially when compared with the exalted ranks of honor and light that preceded him.

Let such a person honor himself by rejecting the abominations of these coarse fools, repudiating them and remaining faithful to the wisdom of the Qāʾim, the guiding Imam. Through the refinement of his soul let him distinguish himself from those given to vice and the distorted minds of beasts, without joining them in speech or action. This faction and those who repeat their words belong to impurity, hypocrisy and folly. With their filth, ugliness and corruption they have effaced the signs of religion and departed from truth. May God banish and curse them for fabricating additions to religion, stirring up sedition against the pure followers of its ranks, and grafting on to it the uncleanness of those who apostatize and oppose its truth and wisdom.

I commend the people of reverence, obedience and restraint—and those who have repented and confessed their error—to God, who grants His Guardian victory, triumph and deliverance of His friends, bringing them from the constriction of devils into the breadth of justice and relief. God is sufficient for His weak servant al-Muqtanā, who follows the easy path of truth; He humiliates those who choose the crooked, difficult road of falsehood.

Whoever repents of this innovation in the presence of the brethren, and calls God and His Guardian to witness that he renounces his error, accept his repentance. Answer his appeal according to what you recognize of the sincerity of his intention and his acceptance of the truth and obedience. This exception does not include the unfortunate covenant-breaker Mukhallā—may God destroy him through his own offense—who has denied the favor bestowed upon him. No such innovation can arise at a time like this except through an accursed devil, a slanderer who spreads malicious reports. Whoever obeys benefits himself; whoever disobeys brings degradation and estrangement upon himself.

The letter sent to the community is completed. Praise belongs to God; in Him I seek assistance. He is the best helper and protector.

EPISTLE 83 — THE ELDER DAUGHTERS (AL-BANĀT AL-KABĪRA)

In the name of the God of Truth and His servant, the guiding Imam, who is the cause of creation.

It has reached me, righteous, believing and chaste daughters—may the Creator establish you in obedience to His Guardian and preserve for you the approved safety of religion—that you have listened to the words of a presumptuous, heretical apostate woman; your hearts became occupied with the lies of an impudent, sinful woman. Before this woman of misconduct you were unable to answer, and you were silenced when it came to explaining the truth. The reason was the weakness of your insight and your lack of attention, and your preoccupation with recreation and delight instead of preserving the teachings of the master Imam.

Because you possessed so little knowledge, doubt concerning religion entered your minds. Truth became obscure to you because you had neglected the purpose of the Unitarians: to preserve knowledge of the spiritual ranks, to know with certainty the witness and the witnessed, and to be mindful of the promised great day. Such people devote themselves to preserving the sciences of the realities, and by means of truth they refute the assertions of falsehood.

You, by contrast, have rejoiced heedlessly in passing pleasure and vanishing delights. You have gone on associating with people of opposition and division. Your conduct has turned toward joking, theft, and acts of opposition. I forbade you to associate with this woman of misconduct and with another condemned unbelieving woman. Yet you have not restrained yourselves; rather, you have increased your attachment to the renegades and disregarded the admonition. After repentance the Creator forgives your community and pardons you. He is generous in bestowing grace upon those who abandon their mistakes and negligence.

How long will you remain in heedlessness and idleness? How long will you imitate the people of foolishness and idle imagination? Do you not feel ashamed at the thought of standing on the Day of Reckoning and Presentation, and of what you truly owe your Lord? People who preserved knowledge were able to reply; you and those like you were confounded and could say nothing. The degrees of those who preserve knowledge rise, while the degrees of those who neglect the preservation of wisdom sink to the lowest limits.

Years and ages of the interval have already passed, and only days and months remain. Will you not awaken, believing women, and preserve that which will bring you deliverance on the day of suffering, after the duties you have neglected? You will feel remorse at a time when remorse can do you no good when those who preserved knowledge and learned have attained the highest stations.

Has the argument not already been established against you by the *Epistle of Excuse and Warning*; by the *Explanation of the Ranks*, concerning the beginning of creation and intended for people of reason and insight; by *Sanctification, the Remedy for Sickness and Confusion*; by *The Answered Supplication for the Manifest Knowers*; and by *The Intimate Prayer that Unbinds Falsehood*, which unveils the inward secrets of those who persist in deception and denial? Other firm epistles on preserving wisdom have likewise reached you. The proofs and signs have reached you, yet you have cast this wisdom behind your backs. It will testify against you when you appear, revealing your negligence.

You are satisfied merely to say, "We are believers," without understanding that reward and good recompense depend upon preserving divine sciences and realities. Awake, you whose judgment has been scattered! Understand that the religious obligations laid upon bodily members are removed only when a believer does his duty by preserving the divine sciences and realities that lead to tawḥīd: the knowledge of the Imam. Through preserving such knowledge, pure souls are distinguished from the souls of the careless, coarse and ignorant.

You are shackled in the net of Iblīs, obedient to his orders, attentive to his ornaments, yet distant from truth and hostile to its people. Through your devotion to animal appetites and your nature's attachment to ease, you have failed to preserve the divine sciences and realities and have followed the cursed and false renegade pretender, full of suspicion.

Glory be to God! Awake from this negligence in which you have placed yourselves. Shake off your slumber, recover from forgetfulness, and consider what the *Epistle of Excuse and Warning* required of you. It said: "Turn toward the callers of the Merciful and gather the fruits of wisdom and demonstration, that you may attain triumph and forgiveness." It also said: "Hold fast to the ranks; strive in their service with every effort; beware of opposing them; maintain sincere counsel and agreement with them; bind yourselves to them firmly; and rejoice in the knowledge they impart to you."

What labor have you endured for religion? When were you commanded to do something and obeyed without resistance? When did you bind yourselves to the teachers with firm attachment, and when did you rejoice in the knowledge they presented? By God, you are on the straight path, but neglecting the preservation of wisdom is a tremendous sin.

Through preserving wisdom and knowledge the degrees of truthful people ascend. By neglecting them, liars are distinguished from the truthful. Understand this epistle, daughters, and make it an imam for your minds. Strive to preserve wisdom, for abandoning it brings punishment and regret. Keep its words in your hearts and follow them closely.

This epistle is an argument against everyone among the inhabitants of the Two Palaces who hears it, and a proclamation to men and women throughout the Two Cities. Whoever neglects to preserve what has been entrusted to him, throws away what was granted to him as a favor, occupies himself with fleeting pleasure, and takes obligatory obedience lightly, has stepped outside acceptance of truth and obedience to the Imam's commands. Such a person will have no argument against the callers of truth on the Day of Questioning and Dispute.

It is through the preservation of wisdom and knowledge that the good are distinguished from the wicked, and the deceivers who occupy themselves with pleasures from the pure and God-fearing. After this admonition none of you can say that she was not warned or reminded, or that she was not commanded to preserve what she was obliged to preserve and to guard herself against neglect.

The one who warns has discharged his responsibility, and the one who makes knowledge clear has offered sincere counsel. The Messenger's duty is only to deliver the message plainly. Praise belongs to the Guardian of Religion, whose obedience leads to obedience to the God of the worlds. May the Creator's curse fall upon anyone who reads this before a doubter, a person who opposes it, or someone not entitled to receive it. If you knew the true condition of this time, you would refrain from food, drink and sleep.

The epistle is completed, with praise to our Lord, glorified is He, and thanks to His Guardian, the guiding Imam.

EPISTLE 84 — THE YOUNGER DAUGHTERS (RISĀLAT AL-BANĀT AL-ṢAGHĪRA)

رسالة البنات الصغيرة

I have placed my trust in our Lord, God al-Ḥākim, transcendent and worshipped, and have thanked His servant, the Qāʾim of the promised Day.

O heedless daughters, who have forgotten the rights owed to the women who summon others to the Truth! For a long time I have admonished you with the striking proofs of conclusive arguments. I have warned you of the arrival of the appointed Day, when every soul shall be questioned about what it has done and about what awaits it. By God, the pure souls have become distinguishable through obedience from the turbid souls in impure bodily forms. The time granted to those who have wandered into error, misguidance, and turning away has run out.

Awaken from this slumber, you who are subject to reckoning! The breaking of the fast has come to bring fasting to an end. You have been as ignorant of what lay before yesterday as you are of what lies beyond today. You have denied the obligations of tawḥīd. Reproof, promise, and threat did not succeed with you; gentleness, counsel, and guidance did not benefit you. At last the command of the Creator came, and the gates were closed against every obstinate opponent.

Therefore, before the Creator and His Guardian, I renounce everyone who undertook the covenant of Truth and then broke it. There shall be separation and estrangement from every soul among you that swore by the Creator and then denied its oath and committed perjury.

Woe to you! Was the covenant of the Guardian of the Age not taken from you? Did you not disavow the devils and the powers of tyranny? Were you not commanded to speak truthfully and to protect your sisters and brothers? Yet you violated all this and imitated the abominations of the False Messiah. You adopted the unbelief and vile practices of those who opposed the truth and hoped, after your disobedience, to escape the fate that is coming upon you.

The Creator witnesses that I repudiate every one of you who has approved this state of affairs for herself, and everyone who has befriended dissenters, whether from her own family or another, taking them as sisters and brothers, women or men. May the Creator's curse follow anyone who hears this declaration and rejects or denies it; and may His anger fall upon whoever violates the truth entrusted to this and the other instructions.

This is a separation between the people of Truth and the profligate pretenders; it distinguishes the stations of those who obey from those who rebel and calls down condemnation upon those who deny and break their covenants. By my life, kindness, gentleness, affection, and compassion toward all creation, as well as patience and fairness, are more fitting and appropriate for the friends of the Guardian of Truth.

Now, whoever acknowledges her offense and repents may do so: the gate of repentance remains open until seven nights of the month of Ṣafar have passed. Whoever hangs back, breaks her covenant, and denies the truth shall be cursed by the tongues of the friends of Truth, rejected and disgraced.

Let everyone among you who hears these words pass them to those who were absent, so that the proof may be established against deniers and hypocrites and punishment and divine displeasure may fall upon covenant-breakers and slanderers. The truthful messenger is responsible only for making the message clear.

Praise belongs to the God of the worlds, and thanks to His Guardian, who upholds the reality of religion and takes vengeance, with the sword of Truth, on deniers, covenant-breakers, and apostates.

The epistle is complete. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian and servant.

EPISTLE 85 — TREATISE IN REFUTATION OF THE ASTROLOGERS (AL-MAQĀLA FĪ AL-RADD ʿALĀ AL-MUNAJJIMĪN)

المقالة في الرد على المنجمين

In the Creator, who transcends limitation and nonexistence, I have placed my trust; and in the guiding Qāʾim I have sought refuge. The servant al-Muqtanā, tested by the burdens of religion and afflicted by dissension and the apostates' violence, says: What prompted me to set down this treatise independently, rather than include it in a collected book or another epistle, was the extravagant speech of a person without standing who claimed to possess religious understanding yet showed himself to be obstinate, apostate, and ignorant.

There is also the failure of the learned in the age of concealment, before the appearance of the Qāʾim of religion. They excused their own weakness and abandoned the doctrines and rules they had adopted for replying to the people of Truth. Certain disputants and would-be philosophers agreed with the people of Truth that the soul is a subtle, transparent substance, enduring through its essential perfection. Yet they then declared that this substance bears accidents within its essence and identity, and made every kind of knowledge an accident borne by the souls of creatures. They did not distinguish the soul of a truthful, pure, obedient, knowledgeable Unitarian from that of a wicked, treacherous, oppressive and unjust apostate.

It is as though these people looked upon truth with eyes whose souls had become accustomed to repetition in confusion and opposition. They made no distinction between souls whose substance is illuminated by the radiance of Intellect and its sacred lights, and clouded souls that have turned away from Truth toward base teachings and the darkness of nature.

The latter are the souls that turned back from the unity of the Creator and doubted the just, guiding Qāʾim and Imam. Their learning became mere accidents because they turned away from the living power of Intellect and became attached to the usages of devils and rebellious spirits, departing from Truth in both branch and root. This is not the same as granting an intellect to people who openly show foolishness, obstinacy, apostasy, and ignorance. The wisdom of the awaited Qāʾim, the guiding Imam of unity, exposes their incapacity in the cycle of Resurrection and reveals the hidden vices of the accursed Opponent. The Opponent's concealment is explained through a comparison: he is subtle and transparent in relation to his own coarse followers, just as his influence flows among them like blood; but compared with the light of Intellect, he is darkness, and compared with Intellect's subtlety, he is dense. How can such people possess intellects when ignorance has made the reprehensible qualities of the Opponent master over them: disobedience, darkness, arrogance, ignorance, and stubborn resistance?

These are the qualities of punishment, the blameworthy dispositions opposed to Truth. By contrast, the people of unity and Truth are adorned with the known and praiseworthy qualities of Intellect: the warmth of Intellect, the strength of light, the repose of humility, the coolness of forbearance, and the pliability of the underlying matter [hayūlā] that enters their dispositions and issues from them. These are the praiseworthy, recognizable qualities of Intellect.

The world of the Opponent does not possess intellects in this sense. Its members have only a faculty of discrimination by which they can distinguish falsehood from Truth. Yet this faculty and their freedom of choice are enough to establish the case for reward and punishment against every creature. By virtue of their nobility, the souls of the people of Truth have the substantiality of Intellect's four qualities; the souls of those who oppose them are joined to blameworthy qualities such as dullness, wickedness, stubbornness, and ignorance.

If the souls of the world of the Opponent were united with Intellect, they would necessarily have an excellence comparable to the souls of the Unitarians. Creation would then be purposeless and all would be confusion, for Truth and justice would be mixed indiscriminately with oppression, wrongdoing, and frivolity. When some of them display good manners, generosity of character, seemly conduct, or knowledge consistent with the doctrines of unity, Truth, and

justice, that does not establish their continuing union with Intellect. Rather, they are souls that have retreated from knowledge and the religion of unity, Truth, and justice, retaining a trace of the noble soul because of some righteous action they performed toward the people of Truth in the beginning and at the origin.

Not everyone who memorizes some religious information, even a great quantity of it, possesses a soul united with Intellect. If he makes it a means of ostentation, reputation, deception, gain, or arrogance toward people of religion and merit, that information does not make him rational in the sense intended here.

Such habits deprive people of the praiseworthy qualities and obligations of tawḥīd, the discipline of religion that precedes its outward practice. These are the excellent virtues in their perfection, which the Most High Creator made the foundation of the religion of unity, Truth, and justice. So too He made the celestial natures, the 'mothers', the basis of bodily growth, the completion of created bodies, and the continuation of generation. If one of those celestial natures were absent from this world, bodies and plants would not develop fully. The ordering of things would become confused, depart from the arrangement of wisdom, and lose its proper form.

The substantial soul likewise reaches its perfection through union with the obligations of unity and with the praiseworthy qualities of the soul, the dispositions of reward by which it can become united with what Intellect bestows. If the soul lacks even one of these praised qualities, which together constitute its perfection, its knowledge becomes confused, its vision of unity is darkened, and its order is corrupted. The principles of its understanding become deficient, and its sciences lose their proper object, mixing seriousness with frivolity. Reprehensible dispositions opposed to Truth and justice gain mastery over it and lead it toward wickedness, oppression, injustice, and ignorance.

A sound witness is the continued existence of a human body through the five members on which its nature and life depend: heart, liver, gallbladder, spleen, and lung. If one of them is lacking, the body disintegrates, perishes, and ceases to follow a sound and orderly condition.

This heedless man's standing does not justify an answer addressed to him as one of the recognized authorities. We have made his words an occasion and a means to reply instead to those logicians and philosophers who consider knowledge one of the accidents. They do not distinguish the spiritual substance united with Intellect and bearing its substantial character from a coarse, corporeal substance that bears accidents because of the corruption of its own essence.

Now, by the Creator's will, I shall expose the defect in the reasoning of those who assign to the inanimate stars the power to issue decrees, to determine good fortune or evil fortune, and to govern and influence the livelihoods of people and their distribution. Whoever asserts this openly contradicts the exalted Creator’s rejection of astrology (*ʿilm al-najāma*).

Such a person has revealed his error in the face of established prohibitions and exalted commands. He has left the safe path of obedience and openly opposed Truth, denying the signs of the Imamate. By attributing to the stars a genuine rule over people's livelihoods, allotted shares, and recovery from sickness regardless of changes in food, air, causes, or maladies, and over the happiness or misery of souls, as astrologers declare in their books and fantastic pronouncements, he invalidates recompense according to deeds and makes reward and punishment fall away, like the beliefs of ignorant deniers of divine responsibility.

On their reasoning, all people would be excused for every disgraceful thing they did, because the event would have occurred by a heavenly determination arising from the action of the stars, as the astrologers claim.

Their doctrine, meaning that of the philosophers and astrologers in this matter, also abolishes the distinction between souls joined to Intellect and its commands in obligatory worship and souls opposed to them. It would surrender the ordering of the worlds to things lacking intellect, soul, and rational representation: the celestial spheres and the inanimate stars. Nothing could refute them more completely than recognizing that this makes them depart from all the binding judgments of religious obligation.

Whoever accepts this doctrine, or any part of it beyond the stars' natural action in developing material bodies through airs and vegetation and the airs' nourishing of the elemental 'mothers', assigns to the stars an agency that does not belong to them. Whoever attributes another power to them associates a partner with the Creator of created things and disavows the God of earth and heaven.

This is enough for whoever considers the meanings of Truth, deals fairly with himself, and belongs to the people of faith and certainty. Praise belongs to our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, exalted above action, attribute, boundary, designation, and utterance. Thanks belong to His Guardian and servant, the guide to the religion of Truth, the possessor of favor, excellence, and generous bounty. He suffices His weak captive servant al-Muqtanā, of little strength and power.

EPISTLE 86 — THE BEGINNING OF CREATION (RISĀLA MAWSŪMA BI-BADʾ AL-KHALQ)

الرسالة الموسومة ببدء الخلق

In the name of the God of Truth and the Originator of the cause of creation.

It is best that I begin by praising the Creator, exalted above beginning and primordiality. In His supreme wisdom He has veiled Himself from His creatures by means of what He created; He is the One who knows the cause of causes on high, who turns the ages and governs the cycles, who originates the mover of perpetual motion, and brings into being the knowing souls that endure. He is One, not as one of a number; abiding, without any allotted term. I bear witness to Him as His angels and those possessed of knowledge bear witness sincerely: He is the God of gods and the Originator of the Imam of the knowing, guiding Imams.

You, dear and truly faithful brother, asked me to set out for you at the outset an adequate explanation to which you might return and upon which you might rely in your general beliefs. I have answered you because I know the sincerity of your intention and the goodness of your inward disposition. I have therefore placed the unity of the Creator before myself and sought the assistance of His Guardian, the Qāʾim, throughout this discourse.

You have asked about the creation of the soul, the nobility of its element, and the different movements that occur through it despite the different bodies it inhabits: how its creation and formation began, and how these diverse movements arise.

I shall mention what permits the explanation of its creation: the existence of the soul since its origination, the bringing forth of Intellect, the soul’s relation to Intellect and its cleaving to it, and the descent of its nature to the various stations. I shall discuss its essence, the manner in which it enters the world, the variety of forms and the unity of the soul, the agreement of bodies and the diversity of movements, insofar as the ability of a weak servant permits.

Know—may our Lord guide you to every noble quality and every object of knowledge, grant you the path of right guidance, and protect you from error and passion—that the Creator, exalted is He, is the supreme God. Everything that exists as an effect derives from His Cause; and that Cause is the true Originator and the truthful Intellect. The supreme One is He whose divinity the intellects have been unable to comprehend. What He originated is the mighty substance, primordial in its own order, the mover of movement, itself moved by no other mover. Motion has never been without it, just as it has never been without motion. This is what is called the World of Intellect, prior to every action and everything acted upon.

Thereafter an action was brought into effect, producing something below Intellect. That action was the noble World of Soul, set in motion by the mover that subsists in movement and remains established through the Greatness.

By 'the Greatness' I mean the World of Intellect, the simplest and most subtle of lights; the World of Soul is below it. In this respect the two are different; by their common kind they mingle. The two worlds have always been intermingled, and the two primordial elements have always been in motion, the one revolving around the other. They are mover and moved through the divinity of the One who knows all effects.

Those two primordial principles possess the simple Word, the simple Light, and subtle Wisdom; thus there came to be four sides and a point at their center. These are, in brief, the principles of the spiritual world, expressed through words that point to subtle meanings.

As for the bodily world, its beginning is Nature, the source of motion and rest. Nature moves by virtue of its own being, yet its being is related to the World of Soul, which contains and rules over it. Nature is subject to that world. It begins

movement in things that have no movement of their own, bringing each such thing from potentiality into actuality. Whatever exists merely in potency emerges into action through movement.

When Nature has finished its action upon a particular thing, its activity in that thing comes to rest. This shows that Nature is the source both of movement and of rest. Heat comes from movement and cold from rest; between them arise moisture and dryness, and each intermediate quality takes its position between its two extremes. From their conjunction the elements come into being: fire from heat and dryness; earth from cold and dryness; water from moisture and cold; and air from heat and moisture.

When the higher principles, namely Intellect and Soul, acted upon one another, the effect of each passed into the other. Their activity entered bodily things through the subtlety and mutual affinity of those principles and through their relation to body. The bodies then acted in likeness to the earlier subtle spiritual origins.

Through the power of psychic movement and the natural lights, the bodily elements rose in every direction; there came into being lofty spheres with exalted constellations. Luminous governors, moving in a circular course, took their places within them, for the completion of wisdom and the ordering and bringing forth of things by governance. The spheres revolved, their governors ordered things, the elemental 'mothers' performed their work, and the elements appeared. What was subtle mixed with what was dense, and what was dense with what was subtle. Thus were formed solid bodies, plants, animals, and finally the excellent rational human being.

A rational soul and a bodily form were constituted. An excellent rational soul was joined with a body made by craftsmanship; its formation had reached such perfection that it could not be in any better or more excellent condition. It was compounded of a subtle spiritual element and a dense corporeal one.

Whatever grows subtle rises toward the World of Intellect; whatever remains dense stays in the World of Nature. That which perishes and passes away is bound to that which neither perishes nor passes away, since the subtle has a beginning but no end, and the dense too has a beginning but no end.†1 It is the last effect of Nature: the bringing forth through movement of what had existed in potentiality into actuality.

I have reached the purpose for which I set out. Let us close this book by praising the Giver who bestows blessings, and by thanking the guiding guardian, who leads to worship of the Originator, the One who has veiled Himself from His creatures by what He created. He is sufficient for us, and in every matter we seek His aid; excellent indeed is the Helper and Supporter.

Thus ends the epistle called *The Beginning of Creation*, through the support of the Guardian of Truth, spoken by the tongue of his servant Bahāʾ al-Dīn and by the tongue of the believers, the adviser to all creation, the Left Wing and the fourth, lesser spiritual rank. Peace.

TEXTUAL ENDNOTES — EPISTLE 86

†1. The printed p. 727 assigns both the subtle and the dense a beginning but no end, despite the preceding contrast with what perishes. The wording is translated as printed. The philosophical and manuscript question remains open.

EPISTLE 87 — THE EPISTLE CALLED THE ADMONITION (AL-MAWSŪMA BI-L-MAWʿIẒA)

الموسومة بالموعظة

I have placed my trust in Him whose existence the doubters and atheists deny, and thanked His servant, the Qāʾim of Truth, whom the rebellious apostates oppose.

From the servant tested by the devils of religion and the tyrants of successive ages, to all those who have adopted the designation of tawḥīd in this region and to all those in the horizons and distant lands who have perceived the winds of Resurrection and escaped injustice, vanity, and arrogance. Peace upon whoever hears and sees, and upon the pure and unitarian people of Truth who hear the admonition of the Caller to Truth and follow the signs of transcendence and divine uniqueness belonging to our Lord, the God al-Ḥākim, the Mighty, and seek refuge in the protection of His Guardian, the Qāʾim of Truth, the guide to the abode of permanence.

Know, distinguished believing brothers and saved community of Unitarians—may God make the attainment of substantial virtues easy for you and spare you the accidents of bodily maladies and the afflictions that mislead belief—that these signs of Resurrection and its judgments oblige the souls of the true, pure, and sincere Unitarian friends of God to practise mutual assistance, concord, alliance, and brotherhood.

Through their union with the honor of known wisdom, they can acquire the lofty virtues, noble character, and care for one another. Wisdom prevents them from approving of vices, and diminishes in their eyes the worth of the transitory pleasures of this world. It also turns them away from scrambling after those passing pleasures.

If you encounter someone claiming to possess religion while departing from these qualities, associating with people of immorality, covenant-breaking, apostasy, and deviation, and lying against his brethren, going beyond justice and fairness into wrongdoing and oppression, know that his soul is displaying the character of others like himself and revealing the beliefs of those whose company he has chosen.

If one who belongs to your community shows any of these qualities, first admonish and counsel him. If he persists in his conduct, blame him and rebuke him. If his foolishness and obstinacy continue, avoid his company. If he remains in error, repudiate him and put him apart from you.

I speak the truth: this is how the souls of people of error and misguidance behave. They conspire together and become allies in apostasy, frivolity, and deviation, mingling with one another in character, speech, and conduct.

Take advantage, pure brethren, of the admonitions of a sincere, affectionate, and compassionate adviser. Do not approve the disgraceful acts of pretenders or attach them to true religion. The time remaining for delay has grown short. You have already harvested what was in your hearts, whether it was stubborn resistance, hesitation, shrinking back, or neglect of the obedience owed to the Guardian of Truth. I have dealt fairly with you and with all nations by what I sent in explanation, included in the *Epistle of Distinction* (*Risālat al-Tamyīz*). May God multiply the discernment of the people of Truth and turn the deficient among them back toward Him; that is not difficult for God.

Praise belongs to God, exalted beyond the representations that minds suppose, after their intentions have been illuminated and the signs of their secrets disclosed. Peace upon His Guardian, the Qāʾim of religion, who appoints the measures of successive ages in their differences and repetitions, and who gives every community its appointed term once the proofs have been established against its members, by the All-Sufficient One who directs their return and departure.

My sufficiency is my trust in the One who stands over every soul according to what it has earned, in the abode of return, after its confinement and rejection.

Written on Saturday, the fourth day of Jumādā I, in the twenty-first year of the Qāʾim of the Age and Lord of the abode of the Hereafter.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to the Qāʾim of Truth, His servant.

EPISTLE 88 — THE ADDRESS / PETITION (AL-MUWĀJAHA)

المواجهة

Peace upon the Imam who truly, truly points toward God. Peace upon the trustee of the Creator and the goal of those endowed with understanding. Peace upon the Qāʾim of Truth, who takes vengeance on whoever conceals the truth and makes false claims. Peace upon the One who stands over every soul according to what it has earned and committed.

To the servants who visit his sanctuary and seek the overflowing bounty of his hands and his generosity: the lowliest, least servant, al-Muqtanā, the Left Wing, offers submission, sanctification, proclamation of transcendence, profession of unity, magnification, and acknowledgment of divinity to our Lord, the Creator al-Ḥākim, and thanks to His servant, the guiding Imam and Qāʾim.

The least submissive and possessed servant, al-Muqtanā, the Left Wing, humbles himself before the Presence of sanctity and support, and entreats the Tree of Truth and the channel of the word of tawḥīd. He asks his master and lord to pardon his failings and offenses, and to overlook what has passed through his hands.

This is the station of one lowly and insignificant, the place of one seeking refuge and protection, the concern of a captive shaykh who takes shelter in the secure sanctuary, and who seeks intercession with his Master and Lord through the ranks nearest to Him.

I implore him, through the chosen lords of his elect, to count me among those embraced by his satisfaction and pardon, and those upon whom he has bestowed forgiveness for mistakes and forgetfulness in the pages concerning tawḥīd that the servant has composed and arranged through the support of his Lord, and in the epistles he has sent to the Callers of Truth, which he has based upon the proclamation of transcendence and to which he has attached its proper meanings.

My Lord, whatever is found in these writings, letters, books, and treatises that the servant has sent forth—whether eloquent address, sound reasoning, or decisive discourse—derives from the beneficence of the Imam of this age and the provision of the Qāʾim of the time. Whatever errors or slips are found in them belong to this least servant, grieving and thirsty for grace. He seeks his Master's kindness in excusing his shortcomings and desires his Master's generosity to pardon what he has done and brought upon himself.

Here I am, my Lord, pleading humbly before You, acknowledging what my hands have done in Your presence. Bestow upon Your servant the favor You have shown by pardoning wrongdoers; overlook his slips and errors as You have overlooked the faults of those who confess their sins.

The servant has no work upon which he can rely on the Day of Resurrection, and this weak servant has no refuge from his Master's displeasure except in that Master Himself. Grant Your pardon, my Lord, to this miserable, impoverished servant. You are an excellent Master, mighty and able to forgive.

EPISTLE 89 — LETTER TO SHAYKH ABŪ AL-KATĀʾIB

مكاتبة الشيخ أبي الكتائب

Know, my brother, that my conduct and yours are observed by One who neither acts unjustly nor wrongs anyone.

Do you not truly understand that the Master of creation stands over every soul according to what it has earned and will recompense it for what it has concealed and what it has made public? You and I, my brother, and all creation stand exposed before Him, and we are responsible for what we do. I do not declare myself innocent of error or stumbling; rather, I seek intercession through humble entreaty, asking pardon and forgiveness of the Cause of causes.

No sin is too great for Him to forgive, and no mistaken affirmation or denial may be ascribed to Him.

Set your own soul right in the course you follow before Him. Why should one who knows that he has a Guardian who deals kindly with him, judges fairly toward him, and does not wrong him, fall into despair? You have a spacious place within my heart, and you are released, with sincere goodwill, by a soul pure of resentment and rancor. Cast the veil of overthinking away from your heart, and take for your own soul admonition and remembrance. Know, my brother, that whoever sets his dwelling right does not sell his hereafter for his worldly life. Be yourself the guardian of your own soul.

Do not give oppression any portion or share in it.

Consider what I have laid before you. Pursue what lies within your power, and what can be made easy for you once you have the capacity. If the place where you now reside is suitable for continuing on your way, remain there. But if you desire freedom from these burdens and ease of heart, then go to the lands of Syria. If, as you have said, you desire to serve, then your reward for that service belongs with the Qāʾim, the guiding Imam. Comfort your soul, make piety your practice and companion, and do not let thoughts of your failings turn into anguish and agitation.

I entrust you to One whose deposits remain guarded and are never lost. He is an excellent Master, praiseworthy and all-hearing. Praise belongs to the One for whom there is neither defining attribute nor limit, and thanks belong to His Guardian, who carries out the promise.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian, His servant.

EPISTLE 90 — CIRCULAR TO THE HOUSE OF ʿABD ALLĀH

منشور إلى آل عبد الله

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Our letter to you, pure brethren and illustrious, radiant Unitarian lords: may God prolong your lives under the shade of His mercy, and perpetuate the support and favors He grants you through His Guardian. May He protect your noble persons and exalted stations beneath the protection of His kingdom, preserve you through excellent obedience from the pharaohs of the cycles, watch over you, open your minds to the signs of manifest wisdom and make you radiant, and nourish and refresh you from the knowledge of His guiding Guardian.

It comes from our residence in the pure and noble Presence, on the evening of Friday, the fourteenth of Dhū al-Qaʿda. May the Master bring you happiness through obedience to His servant and acquaint you with the one who is to come after him.

As for our condition, brethren whose intentions are guarded in private and public, who are fashioned for obedience to the Guardian of the Age, and who devote their persons and their possessions in secrecy—

—and openly: our affection toward you is established, and our desire to meet you and be close to you is constant, should your gathering and your nearness be brought about in accordance with His will.

Our longing for you and grief at being apart from you are like the longing of the thirsty for cool water, or of a traveler scorched by heat for the shade. Were it not that we console ourselves and promise our hearts that we shall be reunited at the appearance of the Guardian of Truth and in the presence of our embodied selves, sorrow would overcome us and anxiety exhaust and burden us. We appeal to the One who has joined hearts and inward intentions, that He grant our desired reunion through His bounty and generosity.

Two brethren came to us from you: one called Rābiḥ and the other Mufarrij. Their arrival happened at the most difficult of times, in one of the most trying hours and greatest intervals of affliction. We were told that Mufarrij had attacked certain brethren, and an account of what he was said to have done was conveyed to us. This troubled us greatly. No one among us spoke with either visitor; they remained for a time and then departed. Later we learned that he was innocent of the accusation brought against him.

By God, we did them an injustice through our withholding of what was due to people like them in greeting and hospitality. We had intended to write to you immediately concerning this, but we found no one to carry our letter. We therefore seized the opportunity of sending it by our brother Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Sindī, who carried it to your region, when we heard of the scattering that had occurred among you and the estrangement into which you had fallen.

What, brethren, has caused this estrangement? The souls are one, the word is united, and the favor granted by the Guardian encompasses all. You stand on the very brink of the Resurrection; the signs and marks of the Imam have begun to appear. News has spread through every land of the first manifestation of the expected action from Tihāma, and all the Unitarian brethren have rejoiced together in it. By God, the night in whose darkness we are walking, awaiting dawn, has overtaken us. It is almost as though the moon has risen—

—and shown itself, shedding light like a lamp. Whoever stands firmly upon his religion and belief will prevail, and whoever is destroyed by his own deeds through doubting his Unitarian conviction and doctrine will fail.

I ask you, brethren, to bring into the open what lies in your hands, even when you have to protect yourselves. Although the days have made matters difficult, keep your word united and your company together. Disagreement produces failure, and neglecting to discuss matters of religion causes established work to decline.

You and we are living through the intervals of the Resurrection and the Day of Recompense. Nothing remains to us or to you except to preserve the brethren and maintain good fidelity. Had it been possible, we would have explained more than we have said. But what we have mentioned suffices for people of your understanding, the purity of your minds, the excellence of your knowledge, and the soundness of your beliefs.

We commend all of you to the One with whom the deposits of the Unitarians can never be lost, who will not wrong anyone by an atom's weight on the Day when the Truth becomes clear. Our community offers yours, young and old, near and far, the fullest greetings and peace. If circumstances had permitted, we would have asked for a reply; instead, may the noble brethren honor us by accepting our apology, for the time has grown too short to request one before the affair reaches its conclusion. Praise be to God for the favors He has granted after concealment has given way to unveiling.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to the Guardian of the Age, His servant.

EPISTLE 91 — REPLY TO THE LETTER OF THE NOBLE LORDS

جواب كتاب السادة

If instruments could convey what wills and intentions contain, I would wish the noble brethren, who hold fast to obedience to the Guardian and Judge, to enjoy lives whose blessings continually rise, whose fruits ripen in the good of Unitarian devotion, whose plants and trees grow, and whose happiness endures with security multiplied. We would then devote ourselves to their noble letter, which is so dear to us that we would kiss it again and again, until its lines were impressed upon our lips. We would make it a beacon to guide us in the darkness as lights do. But our chief appeal to the Guardian who grants blessings is for the gathering of our fellowship and the fulfillment of what we long for.

Our community read the letter, and it refreshed breasts that distance had set aflame and watered souls that separation had made thirsty. We delighted in the beauty of its poetry and prose, and in the remarkable manner of its prohibitions and commands. The noble brethren made no mention of their longing for us or their sorrow at our separation without stirring in us the anguish of the heart and tears flowing from the eyes like water poured from a vessel. Even rivers could not convey that anguish away, nor seas of repeated words entirely submerge it.

Its arrival coincided with a time of obscurity affecting all the nations, except those whom the Creator has protected from error and whose darkness He has illuminated. The present moment obliges the discerning Unitarian to grasp his religion as one grasps a glowing coal, because the Proof is absent and the clear path has been effaced.

So I say to you, worthy, pure brethren: what your souls have recognized, what your inward thoughts have contained, what has entered your flesh and blood—as though what had been impending has already occurred and what was hidden has been brought into the open—has indeed become known through every region and land. The Qāʾim of the Age has appeared in the farthest Yemen, and what was distant has drawn near. What has come to us and you of the wisdom suffices to preserve its secret. So long as you preserve agreement and receive the favor properly, you have recognized the path through the proof that has been established against us.

May your word, brethren, be one; may your fellowship be gathered, and your discussions of the faith continue. Whoever forgets the Guardian of Truth forgets the Day of Return itself; by what he has committed against himself, he becomes a witness against himself. It was for a time like yours that you were promised and threatened, that you preserved wisdom and prepared yourselves.

It is as though the light of your night had already risen like a full moon, its morning had opened, and its brilliant star had shone forth. Then the hypocrite and apostate will say: “Where is there any escape? No! There is no refuge. To your Lord that Day is the place of final rest.”

This much is sufficient, brethren, for one who looks and reflects, knows and thinks, and lifts the veil from his insight so that he may see.

We entrust your community to the One who does not allow His friends' trusts to be lost, and who will not neglect to vindicate you against His enemies and yours. Our community sends yours, those far away and those nearby, its fullest greetings and peace. The time has grown too short for correspondence and replies; through its severity speech and discourse have been cut off.

Completed through God's support and aid.

EPISTLE 92 — THE LETTER SENT BY THE HAND OF SARĀYĀ

الكتاب المنفذ على يد سرايا

May God prolong the life of the virtuous and excellent shaykh, continue to support and favor him, and guard his trustworthiness and his intention from alteration. He knows—may his happiness endure—that the one who departed from us took with him the merchandise he carried, that we trust him and are satisfied with what he will do concerning it. We have seen nothing, praise be to God, that warrants reproach or suspicion, and the profit and capital made available to us have reached us from him. We have found nothing blameworthy in what remains in his care, for he is trustworthy in our judgment, and likewise the brethren who accompanied him before us judged him so.

The shaykh knows—may God support him—that trade in Egypt has suffered because prices are constrained, and that in every town little remains beyond old practices and their remembrance. I therefore made arrangements for this merchandise to be sent with Shaykh Abū al-Fatḥ—may God protect him—and in his company Shaykh Abū al-Faḍl al-ʿAjamī. I knew them both to be trustworthy: they would not approve any betrayal in buying or selling, nor would they take anything away from the merchandise; nor would they entrust it to anyone other than a person worthy of trust.

I sent the youth Yaḥyā with them to serve them, since he had previously traveled that road with the late shaykh—may God have mercy on him. If Yaḥyā had been trustworthy in our judgment, we would not have delayed sending this merchandise with him until Shaykh Abū al-Fatḥ arrived, for it had been kept with us and its dispatch delayed for a long time.

News reached us that Yaḥyā had gained possession of some of it, had sold it in an unsuitable place, and disposed of it. He squandered a considerable part of the capital along with the profits it had yielded. Certain shaykhs involved in the trade assisted him and encouraged him in his opposition to Shaykh Abū al-Fatḥ. Such conduct is not proper among merchants, and it was another reason their increase was hindered.

No one came to us from the worthy shaykh's direction to ask us to send Yaḥyā in this capacity, and it would be foolish to suppose we deliberately chose him for that reason. We sent him in hope that he might reform his conduct and prove a helpful assistant to the two shaykhs on the journey, not that he should act on his own or go beyond the opinion and command of Shaykh Abū al-Fatḥ. If God makes his return easy, inform him that his betrayal and transgression have reached us, and that he has shown himself untrustworthy in the matter committed to his care.

Nothing of the merchandise belonging to the community of shaykhs has reached us and been neglected or wasted by us. Nor have we accepted anyone's treachery concerning their property or obeyed him in such a matter. God will judge our actions and what we intended concerning him; should he act in keeping with his character, we leave him to God, who will judge both him and us. What astonishes us is the conduct of the shaykhs who helped him sell what he did not own.

May the excellent shaykh—may God continue to protect him—attend closely to this business and, if God permits the return of the travelers from their visit, handle it in the way best fitting for men of integrity. This youth is immature in judgment, and his ignorance makes him unreliable. By God, I did not send him in their company except in the hope that he would prove honest and faithful. None knows the unseen that belongs to God; we did not know the betrayal in advance or deliberately overlook it.

If the shaykh and the community consider that some action accords with their trustworthiness and their religion, let them take it, refusing to permit anything that would stain their good names or cast doubt upon the trusts they hold. Whatever the excellent shaykh needs, he may tell us; we will hasten to accomplish it and meet his request. We have also sent goods with al-Maghribī and al-Badawī. If any of them reach him, he should undertake their sale and collect what is due.

I send him and the community of shaykhs with him my fullest greetings and peace, and likewise all our friends. Praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds, and His peace to His Messenger, the Seal of the Prophets, and his pure family, the approved Imams. God suffices us, and He is the best Trustee, Helper, and Supporter.

By God's praise we are in excellent health. Prices in Fusṭāṭ have eased, praise be to God, and the Nile's waters point toward an abundance of increase, blessing, and security. News has reached us that the Byzantines have taken Sicily. May God cause that report to prove false and not allow it to be true.

Peace.

EPISTLE 93 — A LETTER OF REMINDER

مكاتبة تذكرة

My letter to my family and brethren, the righteous and truthful, the pure and chosen people who stand upon the truth: it is a reminder to whoever will remember, an invitation and a clear road for whoever returns to the truth and follows guidance; an argument against whoever denies and turns away; a prohibition against following whoever opposes the truth and goes backward; and a rebuke to whoever disobeys the command, calls its people liars, fabricates claims, and sets himself up as something he is not.

It is to inform everyone that the entrusted agent had been responsible for the cultivation and maintenance of the estates, but asserted that these were his own property, together with all the money and goods in them. He held back from pursuing what was good and was content to give his corrupt soul over to theft, disobedience, and flight. Abū al-Naqṣ al-Kāmil assisted him in this wickedness, complete as he was in theft, lying, calumny, and hypocrisy. He bore witness to the wretched man's statements and his expressions of disobedience and rebellion; he also heard those who agreed with him in the division and conflict he had undertaken. That Iblīs concealed the matter from you through the embellished stories he invented and related. Others who opposed the truth and followed their passions helped him.

Cast him away from yourselves—may God cast him away—and curse whoever approaches him or joins his cause. He has proved to be one of the accursed devils of the interval, for he has confounded truth with falsehood and passed lies off upon truthful people.

So be certain that the time has come for the offspring of honest people to be weaned from the uncleanness of the pretenders who claim to be religious. Their wickedness has been made plain to those who obey, in contrast with the wretched covenant-breakers.

Know that people have stood upon the same footing, but have diverged in the degrees of separation and reunion through the mastery of the devils.

Know that you have no shaykh and no chief over you, nor does any human being possess authority to command you, except in accordance with what conforms to the truth. Hold to the authentic words that have been established and to the well-known line of teaching you have followed over the years. Understand that no one is superior to another except by the wisdom he has learned, believed, and passed on to the people of religion. There is no virtue except in steadfastly standing with the people of truth in truth and renouncing whoever turns away from it and withdraws. There is no elevation on the Day of Return except for one whose tongue has spoken truth, who has accepted the commands of the one whose obedience is obligatory, and who follows his guidance.

Beware of envy and disagreement, and accept truth, fidelity, and justice. As far as I know, the choice remains yours. Nothing is required of the messenger except clear delivery of the message. What lies hidden concerning us and you will be brought into the open, and you shall know.

I entrust all of you to God and to those of the community who preserve their trusts. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter. May His peace and blessings be upon His truthful and trustworthy Messenger to all nations and upon his pure family, the sources of goodness and the paths of delight.

Peace, and praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His guiding Guardian, His servant.

EPISTLE 94 — LETTER TO NAṢR IBN FUTŪḤ

مكاتبة نصر ابن فتوح

The letter of the excellent shaykh has arrived—may God prolong his life and continue His support and favors to him. We examined it and understood everything he mentioned; we praised God for his safety and thanked Him for it.

As to what you mentioned concerning another person, someone concerned with these matters: when the noble one—may God strengthen him—learned of it, although extremely ill in body, he said: “These estates were included because of the shares owed to me in these places, and also because of the community of good, trustworthy friends who described these places to us.”

If these people have fallen short of what was required of them in encouraging the cultivation and maintenance of the estates, and have not accepted the agent whom we sent to them, but have considered the first agent to be their own man and refuse a replacement, this demonstrates betrayal on the part of all of them. When the cultivator colludes with the agent, it is evidence of the loss of the owner's property.

I have seen my noble master resolve to dissolve the guarantee—I mean the guarantee for these estates—and to be satisfied with the shares that belong to him. We have learned of the good conduct of these two men, of their paying what still remained due from them, and of their submitting what they held. We thank them for this and distinguish them from the others; may God reward them well.

I have seen my noble master resolve to dissolve the guarantee—I mean the guarantee for these estates—and to be content with the shares that belong to him. He will transfer these two trustworthy men to them, for time has exposed the condition of the others and disclosed their inner intentions through their failure to distinguish right from wrong.

What could be more astonishing than the people of an estate claiming authority over its owner to decide whom he should appoint as their agent? If those people and the agent were truly trustworthy, they would not agree upon the loss of the owner’s property. He has treated them fairly, not unjustly; his only aim is their welfare.

Even more astonishing, the agent himself admits to us the fraud and theft he has committed, together with Musharraf—may God not preserve them. The community bears witness concerning them, yet the cultivators say of the agent: “He is trustworthy; we do not want another.”

The noble one said: “We shall make plain his actions and theirs. As for what we have with them, we shall take from it whatever can be agreed upon. If they prevent us from obtaining some part of what they hold, we shall reckon it to God and free ourselves from them and their machinations.” The noble one consulted certain heads of the government, including a person with influence at the bureau, about dissolving this guarantee. That person agreed, and he is now striving to dissolve it. He has directed that his equipment or goods in the estates be taken to another place until God makes possible something better.

Since the matter stands thus, the man sent to ʿAmmār must not remain with the people for even an hour. Let him go back to one of the places we mentioned to him and commanded him to withdraw to, and write to us about it, so that we may tell him what to do. You will be praised and thanked for what you have done; proceed with it, and success comes from God.

Concerning the linen that has arrived, be diligent in selling it and collecting the price. If you use the proceeds to buy oil from the districts of Palestine, that will be better. Tell us about ʿĪsā and Ḥarb, and what happened in their trading. If you wish to send the letter to be read before the shaykhs, do so, but do not return to them concerning it.

Furthermore, the elder Shaykh Ḥasan was with us and witnessed all of Masʿūd's betrayal and wrongful actions. By God, I reproached him for accepting such behavior and forbade him to do so. I told him: “You intend to go to the estate

without bearing witness to what you have seen and heard of this liar’s treachery. If so, God will punish you, for you are a deceiver.” By God, I commanded him to remain with me, but the wretched man prevented him. He departed on the understanding that he would return and stay with me before going away. He went off, remained for three days, and afterward came and told me that he had lost his way to the place.

By Almighty God, he had left the place and returned to it more than ten times before making that statement! He was not ashamed of this absurd excuse. Rather, the other man had been preventing him and others from reaching us, so that his wrongdoing would not be exposed before the Helpers and the rest.

As for ʿAlī, the brother of al-ʿAzzāl, this man has spent his life being made to practice deception and lying in religious affairs at every turn, until he lost all trustworthiness. I wrote to them: “If this ʿAlī comes to you claiming to have received a command and saying, ‘This is the guarantor's command,’ do not accept it from him. Do not entrust him with anything in your hands; he uses such devices and others like them.”

We shall endure these circumstances until we can extricate ourselves from these people in a seemly fashion. If they withhold what they possess of the religion and the remainder of the trade, we shall rely on God against them. If thereafter we have the power to do anything, we shall do it when their affair reaches open denial. I send you my fullest greeting, and the same to the community with you. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, and His blessings upon the best of the prophets. God is sufficient for us, and He is the best Trustee.

By God, by God, do not let ʿAmmār remain among them for even one hour, lest they contrive some trick against him, for the people have become corrupt. Write to me upon his arrival at whatever place he reaches. Be diligent in sending someone who can reach him to travel toward Abū Jumʿa, and write about his arrival. Tell me whether anyone has come to him from his family, and what you have heard of Ḥasan al-Maghribī and his family. Ask about their trade, and whether anything from either of them has reached the vicinity of Tripoli. Explain all that to me, together with everything you do, in a prompt reply to this letter, and insist upon the courier's speed in answering, God willing. Through Him comes success.

Extract from another letter:

More serious still is that my brother ʿAmmār traded as people normally trade with their money, from one land to another. The people of the estate tricked him and took his property, and I do not know whether he is alive or dead. What value could the entire estate have, even if the man were killed because of it? God curse such wicked souls! Do not mention to us again the cultivation of this estate. The guarantee for it has been dissolved and what goods were there have been given up. As for what remains with them, whoever is able may demand it without committing injustice against them.

Peace.

EPISTLE 95 — THE DECREE SENT TO NAṢR

السجل الوارد إلى نصر

The letter of my excellent lord the shaykh arrived—may God prolong his life and continue His support and favors to him. I examined the whole of it and praised God for his complete safety and the fullness of his well-being. Abundant praise belongs to God for that, and His blessings and peace upon His truthful messengers.

Concerning what you mentioned about the state of the shares, and the haste of those who hurried to fulfill what was due from them: we know that God Most High does this for a person to whom He wishes good. As for someone who denies and acts unjustly, withholding what he owes, God will requite him for it. Nothing of our provision will be diminished.

As for what you reported of Ibn Muʿallā's statements and the falsehood he utters against you, he is no trustworthy person whose word against someone more honorable and more God-fearing than himself should be accepted by us. God forbid that we should entertain such a notion!

As for Ṭurād—may God disgrace him—there is One who will requite him for his deeds and disgrace him through them. You know that the truth deserves to be followed above all else. May God curse whoever seeks to wrong another. You must therefore guard yourself against anything by which a fault might be attributed to you or you might be associated with such conduct.

You did not tell me anything about the condition of Shaykh Abū al-Maʿālī and the two shaykhs Salāma and Ḥamza—may God preserve them—nor how they have accepted the guarantee. Nor did you mention Ibn Wahb's condition, or whether he has paid anything of what was due from him. Nor did you say anything about Ḥarūsh, the owner of the hill, and ʿĪsā, or how their affairs have proceeded in the matters in which they are engaged.

The community sends you its finest and kindest greetings. Do not allow the matter of Ibn Muʿallā to weigh upon your heart. News will surely reach you of what befalls him.

Praise belongs to God alone, and His blessings upon His Messenger and the pure family. He is sufficient for us.

EPISTLE 96 — PROCLAMATION TO SHAYKH ABŪ AL-MAʿĀLĪ AL-ṬĀHIR

منشور الشيخ أبي المعالي الطاهر

In the name of the Almighty God, the One who has brought near the term of the covenant-breaking unbeliever. May God prolong the life of the excellent shaykh. The paths of oppression have widened through the defiled souls of the deceivers, and corruption has multiplied as the destruction of the transgressing sinners approaches. Their behavior has reached the point of inventing false charges against us, for which the God of the worlds will soon bring them to account.

Ghannām rejected the testimony concerning Naṣr that had been given by a group of trustworthy, sincere shaykhs of the House of ʿAbd Allāh. Had Ghannām—may God distance him—wished to put an end to that assertion, he could have done so by giving testimony to us contrary to what the lying slanderer had testified. Yet he is unlikely to raise it in a letter without bringing disgrace upon the one who invents it—one of those treacherous liars. Let the shaykh examine this manifestly false allegation with care and accept the testimony of the shaykhs about Naṣr, rejecting the accuser's words. Those hypocritical deceivers have severed the bonds of compassion from the hearts of the peoples.

By God, I have no complaint against the pure shaykh except his reception of Ghannām after what Ghannām did with the letters entrusted to him. Such conduct was outside truth and religion. God forbid that I should attribute it to the shaykh himself! Rather, he acted out of trust and the purity of his own soul, and so that the failure of the deceivers might become evident.

Let the shaykh not delay in sending a letter setting out the matter in an orderly and suitably formulated way, establishing the ruling against those of these heretics who have been plainly cursed.

I send the community my fullest greeting and peace.

May God hasten the recompense of this rabble! He is the Avenger against anyone who alters his words, twists them, puts falsehood in the place of truth, and adorns the lie. Praise belongs to God, the powerful God who destroys whoever fabricates and denies. His peace is upon His Guardian, who undertakes the recompense of whoever invents falsehood against God and leads others astray. He is the Avenger against the impostors whose pretensions have been laid bare.

Let this be delivered in the vicinity of al-Azhar Mosque.

Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His servant, the Qāʾim of the Age.

EPISTLE 97 — PROCLAMATION TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE HOUSE OF ABŪ TURĀB

منشور إلى جماعة أبي تراب وشيوخ المواضع من الأهل والأصحاب

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. May God prolong the lives of my pure shaykh-brethren, make their intentions and success good, and direct their path and way, through complete obedience, toward the highest stations. May He establish their beliefs and convictions upon the signs of guidance. Praise be to God: our condition is one of all-embracing, sufficient well-being, blessings succeeding one another, and perfect, unclouded mercy. God Most High knows how my heart turns toward the believing shaykhs and rejoices whenever the soundness of their affairs is renewed, at every time and season.

I mean Shaykh Abū al-Surayyā, Abū Muḥammad, Abū ʿArūs, Abū ʿAbd Allāh, Abū Jumʿa, another Abū Muḥammad, the pure believing brethren around them, and all the pure and truthful shaykhs of the various places.

This letter reaches all of them by the hand of my good brother Shaykh Abū al-Shibl. It sets forth the favors and gifts that God Most High has bestowed upon us and upon those who obey Him, out of the overflowing abundance of His praises. The least of those gifts can only be acknowledged by admitting our weakness and inadequacy before the bounty and blessings of the Intellect.

The pure Shaykh Abū al-Shibl is a support and strength to his believing brethren, and one of the greatest of the Unitarian shaykhs who have been nurtured among us. Let the community preserve recognition of his former services and efforts, and distinguish the signs of obedience in his actions and continued support.

The time for agreeing and reproving has come to an end. Whoever among the believing brethren has repented after being made to witness his errors is no longer to be reproached, and is not like those who denied the grace of the Creator and His Guardian, clothed themselves in disguise before the people of truth, and became their enemies.

God does not wrong them; rather He judges them according to what the believers themselves have carried out and judged concerning them.

Praise belongs to God, who has made His friends a means of distinguishing the peoples and a just balance for establishing the proof on behalf of the obedient and good. May His peace be upon His Guardian, the one who takes vengeance upon the Iblīses of the successive cycles with the sword of justice: the guiding Imam, the Qāʾim. He suffices His weak servant, al-Muqtanā, on the day when saliva catches in the throat and the throat burns.

Let the community of shaykhs know the religion and excellence of Shaykh Abū al-Shibl. Let Shaykh Abū ʿArūs—may God continue to preserve him—know that I have answered his question and confirmed the truth of his statement. Let him maintain with Shaykh Abū al-Shibl the best relationship, in keeping with his earlier conduct. This letter, however, is to remain in the hand of Shaykh Abū al-Shibl.

Praise belongs to God alone. He suffices me and is the best Helper and Supporter.

EPISTLE 98 — LETTER TO JABAL AL-SUMMĀQ

رسالة جبل السماق

I put my trust in our Lord al-Ḥākim—exalted be His remembrance—and give thanks to the Qāʾim of Truth for His command.

From the servant al-Muqtanā, who gives sincere counsel to whoever hears and sees, to all the people of truth upon the pure and radiant mountain—that is, the mountain of the people of excellence, truthfulness, and fidelity, Jabal al-Summāq, the gathering place of honor, patience, and purity.

Peace upon whoever is free from the suggestions of the devils through submission to his guiding Imam, the Qāʾim; who has kept himself clear of association with the people of deviation and heresy; and who has been released from every burden of religious betrayal and injustice.

My brethren! The assault of the Hour has drawn near, and the appointed completion is accomplished. The morning of truth has flashed forth, while the suns of falsehood have been eclipsed and covered by darkness and gloom. The people of obedience have triumphed through patience and truthfulness, and the coarse and foolish apostates have lost.

Remember, then, brethren, the distinctive teachings of wisdom. Establish your conduct upon them, and distinguish yourselves from those who doubt their truths, attach their own filth and lies to them, and thereby corrupt them. Gather upon the single word of sincere devotion and divine unity, and establish the names of the people who declare God's transcendence, exalt Him above created likenesses, and glorify Him.

Let seven representatives, or nine drawn from nine places, undertake this secretly, chosen from those whose truthfulness and freedom from corruption are accepted among the people of piety and right guidance. Do not let reproaches from the people of anthropomorphic resemblance and embodiment turn you away from the truth.

Do not neglect the people of obedience and excellence in the two valleys, nor the people of good from Bālis, the territory of the Euphrates, and al-Raqqatayn. Help one another in piety, reconciliation, and good conduct; be among those who take the lead. As I have described you, put an end to haste and rancor through the stillness of souls and the concealment of this secret. The time for delay is over, and the period for asking to be released and having one's excuses accepted has passed. Attend compassionately to one another's rights, and strive to perform the established practice and duty.

My brethren! Creation has now been distinguished and truth has become manifest. The One who stands over every soul for what it has earned cannot be deceived by lies or flattery. Preserve your rights through truthfulness, patience, fidelity, and purity. Avoid the people of deviation and calumny who, after obedience and gain, turned back to rebellion and loss.

I have advised you as righteous callers are obliged to advise their pure Unitarian brethren. Praise belongs to God, exalted beyond what eyes and thoughts can comprehend, and thanks to His Guardian, who gathers creation and recompenses them for good deeds and wrongs through successive ages and cycles. He is sufficient for me, and my means to dwell in the Abode of Permanence.

Written in the month of Rabīʿ al-Ākhir, in the twenty-first of the blessed years.

The epistle is completed. Peace.

EPISTLE 99 — PROCLAMATION TO THE HOUSE OF ʿABD ALLĀH AND THE HOUSE OF SULAYMĀN

منشور إلى آل عبد الله وآل سليمان

I place my trust in the Lord, exalted above thought and limitation, and seek access to Him through the Imam who shall fulfill the promise and the warning.

From the servant al-Muqtanā, who counsels all the people of divine unity, to the pure brethren of the House of ʿAbd Allāh and the House of Sulaymān.

Peace upon whoever has resolutely directed his discernment toward divine unity and sincerity; whoever has freed himself from the defilement of the Iblīses of the successive ages, considered the consequences of presentation and recompense, and kept his soul free of the schism stirred up by the damned liars. Such a man is certain that the Imam, who stands for the truth, will arise to requite the worlds, and he submits to the ordinances of that Imam's right as proclaimed by the pure ranks who serve him.

Brethren who have answered the Call! The days of the treacherous and pretended pharaohs are ended. The herald upon the heights has risen to give the summons and to call aloud the names of the pure friends. The herald’s cry has sounded—

the carrion birds and snorting steeds have been checked, the clear torrent of pure, sweet water has surged forth, and the bitter salt water has run dry.

So awaken, brethren, from the sleep of lethargy, and do not take pleasure in the empty arrogance of the obstinate pretenders. The time for seeking release from obligation has passed, and repentance will no longer be granted when the celestial sign of Kaywān rises. Therefore help one another in piety, righteousness and reform. Maintain concealment, calm and discretion as the time requires, and practice the considerate guidance, success and salvation we have made plain to you.

Let the pure, composed shaykh and the distinguished pure shaykhs who are with him take responsibility, in secrecy, for recording the names of those who enter into their dealings. Let them secretly establish the names of those dealing with them and dispatch them discreetly, under cover, to the shaykhs of the House of ʿAbd Allāh, together with a copy of this letter. It is to be held by the trustworthy, reliable man—meaning the one whom he has approved for that duty—and by the confirmed keepers among the shaykhs. The appointed agent should also send whatever has been assembled in his possession and among the House of ʿAbd Allāh, through a trustworthy messenger, to the shaykh and the shaykhs of al-Bustān. If no one can undertake that journey, let the material be sent without delay to the House of Abū Turāb.

Brethren, I have made known to you what I know and clearly set forth what has been entrusted to me. Pay attention to the warnings of the warner and understand the signs of the truthful bearer of good tidings. The duty of a messenger is only to convey the message gently, through exhortation and sincere counsel. Those to whom the message is sent must understand and accept it through genuine obedience.

Praise belongs to God, exalted beyond what passes through thoughts and minds. Peace rests upon His Guardian, who shall requite souls and guide them to the Abode of Permanence. He suffices me and is the best supporter against the plots of the wicked and the unbelievers.

Written in Rabīʿ al-Ākhir of the twenty-second of the blessed years, to the House of ʿAbd Allāh and the House of Sulaymān.

Additional section: When Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim and Shaykh Abū al-Maʿālī came to al-Bustān, they met with Naṣr. They settled with him what had reached him from their direction and then departed. A letter, written in Sakīn’s own hand, then

reached him saying: “I have placed all the estates under your supervision and empowered you to demand and recover whatever debts are due.”

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian, His servant.

EPISTLE 100 — PROCLAMATION TO ABŪ ʿALĪ

منشور أبي علي

Your letter has arrived, my brother, dear and precious to me—may God prolong your life and perpetuate your honor and blessings. I read it, and thanked the One whose grateful servant is never disappointed.

My brother, the entire matter has passed and is finished; there is no reason to raise it again. Between you and my noble master there should be affection, respect, and truthful friendship, which must continue. Whatever you can obtain of what is still due to him from someone who freely acknowledges it—without coercion or reliance upon an overpowering hand—receive graciously. But do not demand anything from someone who denies, wrongs, and conceals what he owes. There should be nothing between you and anyone except what is good.

You know that Ibn Tamīm and Ibn Sakīna went out only because of their abuse of my noble master. After that they attributed shameful things to him, and he disapproved of their behavior. You may take his conduct as an example. My noble master has now dissolved the guarantee for that estate. He no longer has any need of it, since it has brought him no benefit comparable to the distress it has caused him. Loss is followed by having to hear words that should never have been spoken. Were I to expand on all the individual points in the letters that reached him, a single book could not contain them. A brief statement is sufficient for people of intellect and understanding.

Now then. In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. My success comes only through God, the Most High, the Magnificent.

Let my brethren among the pure shaykhs—may God guard and protect them—know that the pure Ibn Wahb, Abū ʿAlī, is known for trustworthiness, probity and his acknowledgment of the Guardian. His only failing was his delay in explaining the condition of the community, even though he had witnessed the matter and observed those who defended the traitor in opposition to what truth demanded.

When his heart turned back toward the truth, as his mind and conscience led him to do, he explained the actions and scandals of that person to the community. God repays each person according to his intention and requites him. By God, I count Abū ʿAlī a truthful, trustworthy, religious and upright man. God is Pardoning and Forgiving toward whoever repents.

Let the community recognize his merit and his place without reproaching him. The things said about him in the earlier letter were intended as rebuke and admonition. A compassionate counsellor's sternness and correction do not impugn the intentions of the people of truth. I send him my fullest greetings, and to the community my wishes for sound and praiseworthy well-being.

As for my brother—may God preserve and protect him—I have witnessed his truthfulness before the community and verified his intentions. Whatever doubt or haste he showed, the trustworthy shaykh should not count it against him or reproach him for it. By God, He will confirm for him and the community the virtues I have pledged to them and fulfill them.

The pure shaykhs of the House of ʿAbd Allāh, my brethren, are people of patience, honor and composure. God will suffice us against whatever danger we fear for them or their community. Reports arrive praising their good character. Their stations rise in honor and dignity before God and His Guardian.

He also mentioned the cloak and shirt that the wronged shaykh, whose trustworthiness exceeds that of trustworthy men, had worn until they were threadbare. Let those articles be sold, and let the proceeds be distributed among the poor of the households and the daughters.

As to the sword in the possession of my brother Abū al-Khayr, he has the best right to retain it in every circumstance. There is no need for us to purchase it. Whatever has been concluded was done discreetly and in secret. God watches over the community; to Him belong praise and thanks. He is sufficient for me, and His Guardian is the avenger against people of treachery and unbelief. Peace upon the House of ʿAbd Allāh and the House of Sulaymān.

Completed through the favor of the Guardian of the Command.

EPISTLE 101 — CODED PROCLAMATION TO ABŪ AL-KHAYR SALĀMA

منشور رمز لأبي الخير سلامة

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Written to my brother, the shaykh Abū al-Khayr Salāma—may God prolong his life, continue to support and guard him, and grant him success and blessings—from our residence in Alexandria, in the month of Shaʿbān. May God seal the month with happiness and make increase and abundance easy for him in his wealth and trade. May the peace that continues to encompass trustworthy men like him cover them, as a consequence of the purity of their lives and of his. Praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds; His blessings upon His Messenger, the best of the prophets, and upon his pure and blessed household.

My brother, reports have reached us of changes in trading conditions in your district. We have heard what became of people formerly counted among our pure and trustworthy companions, until they fell into betrayal in their selling and disobedience in their conduct. Through the weakness of their minds they incurred the greatest losses.

As to the cotton you carried last year, which the people of Tadmur (Palmyra) intercepted, its affair has passed. God has compensated you in the trade you previously undertook, and placed the greatest blessings in it. Remain firm in your trustworthiness and purity of soul and spirit. Do not mix your merchandise with inferior merchandise. May God set upon everyone who does that the afflictions and contagious diseases of their lands, and allow them no fruit from the trading in which they engage, but take from them all the blessings it might have brought.

We sent to Shaykh Abū al-Fatḥ—may God protect him—some dabīqī cloth and sharab, with bundles containing fine Adeni garments and cloaks of the finest Chinese work, and instructed him to put them up for sale as God makes possible and provides. He must not invent excuses about their sale, even in al-Jazīra, nor say, “This has become unsalable, while that has found a buyer.”

Information has reached us concerning Abū al-Ḥulā†1—may God deny him a good reward and hasten his punishment for the betrayal of his companions. We entrusted something to ʿAmmār—may God be pleased with him—and then delivered it to the agent, insisting that it be put forward for sale, as we instructed him. But that heedless man ordered inferior merchandise offered first, and mixed what he possessed of the fourth kind of merchandise with the corrupt wares of treacherous and dishonest men. He returned to the betrayal he had formerly learned and practiced with the agent and his earlier accomplices. May God expose the one who betrayed his own soul and corrupted dealings, withdraw His forbearance from him, and unleash upon him and others like him the swords of their Roman neighbors, the polytheists.

We also received a letter from the faithless administrator Ḥasan, who lives at Kaftīn. It contained nothing that could excuse him. It mentioned the Sindian devil, who had returned to what the devils among the pretenders and dissenters had taught him. I learned that he had declared himself the lesser Dāwūd, an impious, corrupt, treacherous and dissolute man. May God curse a people who permit such falsehood to be spoken about themselves! If these were not defiled souls whom God had exposed to the world through their filth, they would never have been deceived in their property by a base liar, destitute of riches and money. Their trading with him brings only weakness, degradation and loss. God's punishment is nearer and shall descend upon the traitors, together with the torment of the Fire.

We had already sent to Shaykh Abū al-Fatḥ—may God preserve him—goods bundled with the bales of linen. He should watch their sale carefully, without delay or negligence. In our judgment he is a pure, trustworthy, and reliable person. Whoever sells against his direction or rejects his word is a deceitful and treacherous man, accursed.

As for Ḥarmāsh†2, may God call him to account for his offense: he betrayed through his lack of trustworthiness and wasted his own soul in the matter of the letter. I find no grounds for restoring him to favor. The sharab and dabīqī

fabrics, however, promise an excellent result when carried. Linen, by contrast, is now costly and heavy to transport, and burdens the merchant with excessive expenses. As for myrobalans, cinnamon bark, ginger, and all the other spices, their trade routes have been cut off, and their merchant has fallen into financial distress.

Do not mention him in any correspondence.

My brother Abū al-Khayr, be particularly diligent in conveying this letter to Abū al-Ḥulā, so that he may perhaps return from the betrayal, reprehensible actions and arrogance he has adopted. God has made us independent of whatever merchandise has reached you, praise be to Him, for the abundance of what we possess throughout the regions. We have lost confidence in that man and entrusted his affair to God, the One, the All-Compelling. He avenges the religion against treacherous, wicked enemies.

Whatever property God has delivered safely to him and returned is God's gift to him. As for whatever the agents of tyranny and oppression have taken, God will destroy those agents and hasten disgrace and requital upon whoever has committed injustice.

Praise belongs to God, the Destroyer of the traitors, the One who distinguishes their deeds and hastens their disgrace for the offenses they have committed, and draws near their exposure before their appointed deaths arrive.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to the Qāʾim of the Age, His servant.

TEXTUAL ENDNOTES — EPISTLE 101

†1. Printed p. 765 reads أبي الحلى . The consonants are clear, but vowel pointing or an independent biographical identification remains uncertain; Abū al-Ḥulā is provisional. †2. Printed p. 766 names حرماش . The source treats this as an individual, not a fabric. The printed consonants are legible, but name vocalization and one accompanying idiom need specialist checking.

EPISTLE 102 — PROCLAMATION OF INCISION AND LANCING

منشور الشرط والبط

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, through the ranks of the Qāʾim of the Religion.

Pure shaykhs! The warner of the hereafter has discharged his duty of warning. He has brought to the communities miraculous wisdom and brilliant proofs, and the people of truth, those endowed with discerning souls and tranquil, purified intellects, have submitted themselves to their meanings. Whoever finds doubt in himself, or sees a fault in his own actions, must acknowledge what he has done and what he has witnessed. Whoever possesses a soul free from doubt has no cause to take upon himself a reproach directed toward someone else, or to suppose that words intended for another are directed against the honor he enjoys.

As for what the shaykhs have written about their hearts being occupied by promises and threats, and their anxiety at exhortation, prohibition and warning: by God, what they have written has pained me, and the picture they have formed has saddened me. Have they forgotten that the wisdom of the Qāʾim—peace upon his remembrance—which proceeds upon the tongue of his Proof and servant, gives to each rank the portion proper to it, and brings each recipient through its true meanings toward his Lord and his intended end? How can the Guardian who gives pure and sincere counsel be wronged merely by a rebuke? How can a man distinguished by his worth be counted as a traitor? Who in this world can set himself above command and prohibition, admonition and correction?

Whoever accepts truth and submits to the Guardian of the Command does so in both prosperity and adversity. By God, those who do this in this region are few in number and cut off from their old bases of support.

The shaykhs also complained of harshness and of comparisons with people who have no firm standing or foundation in the truth. Far be such conduct from us! Harshness means putting truth in the wrong place, removing it from its proper context, or hurling false charges at someone who does not deserve them. Praise be to God, we are innocent of such behavior; we attach ourselves instead to those in whom truth is rooted and firmly established.

What right remains to someone who lies about the people of truth? What sound statement can be made by someone who advances falsehood against the people of sincerity? The shaykhs' own letter reached me declaring their innocence of what Ibn Abī Ḥaṣiyya and Ghannām spread about them. Yet they have recorded in writing the difference between their account and the accusations, specifying the person who redirected or corrupted the report. Such falsehood is among the greatest forms of defilement and wrongdoing.

If the shaykhs mean that we wronged them personally, and believe that these words were aimed at them, they have conceived of our intentions in a manner unlike that of the people of truth. They built their judgment in this letter on something other than guidance and truthfulness. This is what the people of religion ought to fear if they have gone astray and their responses have come to resemble the crudeness of al-Kurdī.

If, however, their distress concerns the reproach directed toward someone guilty of lying, and if their hearts are troubled by warning, correction and discipline applied to the person whose conduct deserves them, I am not their reckoner. The time has grown too short for this kind of argument to be repeated. I hope this was simply a slip of the pen, an error by the letter-writer, or an unintended utterance rather than a settled belief. God does not lay upon them the burden of an error, nor does that error confer upon them rank or remembrance among the people of truth.

I have read in one of the decrees of the Pure Presence, addressed to certain Callers in the regions, that the weakest remedies are the most delicate and least beneficial; the real benefit is found in scarification, lancing, cutting, and cauterizing (sharṭ, baṭṭ, qaṭʿ, kayy).

I previously established, in two letters sent with Saʿd al-Ḥalabī and Shaykh Abū al-Shibl, that the shaykhs of each community must accept the request for pardon of someone who seeks pardon after a lapse. The same applies to

someone who comes into their presence after an error committed against companions, brethren or family. Whoever returns after repentance and a petition for forgiveness to despicable or shameful actions, however, and violates the bond of faith, is to be separated from the community when he is shown to be a faithless covenant-breaker and tyrant. I reaffirm that judgment in the present circumstances.

We have now reached a time in which the wisdom of the Guardian has reached this world by the hand of His servant in a measure greater than they deserve. No one has any remaining argument against God and His Guardian, or any right to demand one.

Let the shaykhs reconsider the wondrous teachings that have reached them. Let them understand the proofs and signs addressed to them, and not behave like those apostates who stand apart in doubt and division. Let them be certain of the day of recompense, and receive the advice of someone who asks no payment for it and places upon them no sin or burden merely by crying out against wrong and denying it.

As for the section mentioning the arrivals from the lands of the north, news has reached us of some of the shameful things they have done, their false statements about God and His Guardian morning and evening, and their departure from truth and uprightness. We wrote to you about them as we did, and commanded you to disavow anyone who finds the indecent practices of such people acceptable in religion. We have assigned to them the indignation and displeasure they have brought upon themselves.

As for Abū Sulaymān Dāwūd, we have known nothing but good of him. By God, I owe him services and obligations few others among those we have seen have performed. I hold him in the fullest honor and esteem, and count him among the best and most excellent. I thank the community for its gratitude and praise toward him, and pray that God will grant them success in obeying His Guardian and His friends. Ḥasan, Abū Sulaymān’s brother, came to us, and the community witnessed how deeply his yearning and longing moved him; their own hearts grieved at his anguish.

Muḥammad has now gone toward him, so that he may rise up with him. We shall rejoice at his coming, that he may cool the heat of his brother's heart and satisfy a little of his longing.

Praise belongs to God, exalted in might and greatness, who does not withdraw His favor so long as those who receive it submit to the Guardian of His truth and to His friends; and who does not cut off the hope of anyone who seeks refuge with Him and dissociates himself from their enemies and His. May His blessings rest upon the just and awaited Imam, who through his ranks establishes the proof over the worlds, and may His greetings be upon him. He suffices His weak servant al-Muqtanā on the day when the wrongdoers and doubters shall repent of having despaired of his return, his meeting, and his rising with the sword of truth. He will rise with the sword of truth and justice against those who turned away from the Guardian of Truth and his signs.

Completed with praise to the Guardian of Grace.

EPISTLE 103 — LETTER TO THE PENITENT SHAYKHS

مكاتبة الشيوخ الأوابين

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, through the ranks of the Qāʾim of the Religion. May God give good help to the pure and penitent shaykhs, make the paths of right guidance easy for them, and turn away from them the watchful eyes of the treacherous, impious enemies.

Brethren! The number of years granted to those unbelieving, renegade people has run out. The days of the impostors who led you to the pools of license and immorality have ended. They made you drink the cup of abasement and disobedience, exposed you to the swords of all the communities by violating inviolable things, and brought disgrace upon your reputations, reducing you in the eyes of everyone to the condition of cattle and sheep left to graze. May God hasten their destruction, uproot their foundations, and withhold mercy from them, just as through deception they mixed themselves into the minds and souls of people of piety.

God has favored us—praise be to Him—through the arrival of the excellent Muḥammad al-Sindī, who recounted what he witnessed of your noble conduct: the modesty, integrity, obedience and purity that now mark all your affairs.

By God, his report removed sorrow and distress from my heart, which had been burdened by the obscurity of these affairs and by uncertainty over those who had previously fallen into wickedness and disgrace. I praised the Possessor of glory, majesty and transcendence for the guidance and repentance that He granted you. I prayed to the awaited Qāʾim, who will distinguish the worlds and deliver them from the condition of those who associate others with God and liken Him to creation, that he might raise your community to the highest and most excellent degree of purity of intellects and souls, and make you avoid those whose corrupt souls have made reprehensible practices and the actions of the Magians appear permissible.

Brethren, be guardians and watchmen against the one who disgraced your reputations with his defilement and delusions, and led you from purity and the religion of truth by his falsehood and error. Begin anew in obedience before time changes and the day comes when no excuse is accepted and no one among humans or jinn has his stumbling forgiven.

By God, what seemed distant is now near. Whoever invented lies has been cursed and ruined. Letters have gone out to the shaykhs in all districts, cities and villages, commanding them to accept the request for pardon of someone who departed from justice and then repented to God and His Guardian, and to accept the return to truth of whoever returns in purity and uprightness.

Whoever, after asking forgiveness and repenting, returns once more to rebellion and disobedience, makes his separation plain through folly, apostasy, fabrication and hostility, is to be excluded and removed from the ranks of the believers. Speech with him is forbidden, and he is deprived of the favor bestowed upon the Unitarians.

What the people of obedience and religion among all the brethren must do, so that the filth of the Iblīses who spread doubt and associationism through the foundations of religion may be removed, is this: the people of each locality shall gather with their shaykhs in a protected place, privately and in secrecy. They shall call God and the Guardian of the Age to witness concerning themselves. They and their shaykhs shall implore forgiveness and ask release for their previous failure to dissociate themselves from the devils and Iblīses who corrupt souls and religions. They shall preserve secrecy, sound judgment, calmness, fine conduct, gravity and balance. They shall join together in modesty, integrity, obedience, purity and noble character, keeping apart from anyone who has reneged, doubted, acted hypocritically or turned to rebellion and flight.

Let the people of truth recognize, brethren, that I have given counsel as well as I could to a brother near and dear to me. I have exerted myself to rescue you from destruction, shown you the paths of truth and fidelity, and blocked from

you the road that leads to falsehood. The messenger who counsels can do no more than strive and convey his message; it is for the Qāʾim over souls to grant aid and success.

Brethren, the time for rebuke, correction and delay has ended. Truth has been made clear, and false statements and actions have been discredited. God bears witness that I have offered to everyone the advice that He has enabled me to offer, and that He extends mercy and pardon to whoever has made his departure from the ranks of the Iblīses clear.

Praise belongs to God, who is exalted above the ability of intellects to comprehend the reality of His Guardian. Thanks belong to His Guardian, the Qāʾim, who inspired His friends with patience against whoever persisted in falsehood and ruined himself. He suffices His weak servant al-Muqtanā on the day when feet slip and the Qāʾim rises with the sword of justice against whoever has apostatized and turned backward.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian, His guiding servant.

EPISTLE 104 — PROCLAMATION CONCERNING THE PARDON OF SAʿD

منشور في ذكر إقالة سعد

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, through the ranks of the Qāʾim of the Religion.

I have written—may the lives of my brethren, the people of felicity and purity, distinguished by trustworthiness, truthfulness and fidelity, be prolonged—concerning blessings that, praise be to God, have appeared one after another, and favors that have followed gratitude and thanksgiving. Their letter reached me, and may God reward them for their protection and safeguard them from the deadly afflictions that befell those who practiced deception in their religion and their trust, and who brought themselves loathing and displeasure after their treachery became manifest. I understood their circumstances, despite the differences of their stations and districts; I praised God Most High and asked Him to increase their portion of happiness in their souls and possessions.

I have considered what they said about Saʿd and explained in their letters and notes: that he has repented of the great doubt, misguidance and disbelief he embraced. God accepts the repentance of one who turns away from falsehood, whose beginning was departure from the truth and whose end was bewilderment, and who then abandons that course. May He number Saʿd among those who followed a similar road but recovered sound judgment, repented, and were guided by the Qāʾim of Truth, the Imam of Justice, the Master of the Presentation and Reckoning.

The Guardian of the Age and his ranks bear witness to the sincerity of my repudiation of every reprehensible act committed by the people of conjecture, doubt and uncertainty. As for the penitent, God knows his inward intention and the matter of his repentance; it is He who deals justly with what a person declares and what he conceals.

Concerning what the pure shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm mentioned, together with his two brethren, the shaykhs Muḥammad and Jarrāḥ: he reported Naṣr and his request for pardon. To whoever comes to the truth after falsehood and abandons what has occurred among the brethren, I have issued a response that clears the clouded gaze of the perplexed and gives drink to a person tormented by thirst.

I renew my instruction so that all the shaykhs of al-Bustān and the other towns, people of sincerity and integrity, may follow it. Anyone who slips and departs from justice, then returns to truth, divine unity and faith, and calls trustworthy people of religion to witness that he has repudiated the people of deception and wickedness, shall have his repentance considered. This is so that, after the sending of the messengers, no one will have an argument against God, nor say, “We were excused by the absence of intermediaries and the closure of the roads and paths.” This establishes the proof against people in these districts during times of peace, before the terrors of the Resurrection.

As for what the pure shaykhs of the House of ʿAbd Allāh, the House of Sulaymān, the House of Abū Turāb and the House of al-Bustān have said at length concerning the account of Naṣr and his truthfulness and religion: by God, he did not depart from my presence except in the highest state of scrupulousness, chastity and uprightness. He repudiates before God and His Guardian what they did in the house of Ḥusayn ibn Shabīb at the instruction of the person who invented falsehood and made his folly and betrayal manifest.

Every intelligent person now knows that Ibn Abī Ḥaṣiyya and Ghannām were the two who accused him falsely, defamed him with this lie, and disgraced his reputation. They testified concerning him in our presence before trustworthy believers, and a great number of the House of ʿAbd Allāh were said to have confirmed their account of Naṣr. But the pure shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm examined the affair and declared in his correspondence that the House of ʿAbd Allāh repudiated the testimony: it had been offered by only one man and one woman, neither of whom was trustworthy. That was the account given in the first letter. Whoever affirms false testimony against the people of truth is disgraced in this world and the next; fire is his resting place. The falsity of this accusation has become evident, and God will recompense whoever invented and constructed it.

Let the assembly of shaykhs honor Abū al-Qāsim Naṣr, protect his standing and that of his brother, and assist him in his affairs, whether favorable or adverse. Let no one reproach him. He rendered service for which his rights should be preserved. Justice does not require a truthful man to lose his standing because of a liar whose rebellion and wickedness have become plain.

This letter shall remain with Naṣr, entrusted to him so that he may present it to his brethren and household as confirmation of his standing. Whoever of the excellent community wishes to make a copy may do so.

O God, the realization that You know the innermost minds of Your creatures gives the truthful and obedient security against perplexity and indignation, while the claimants' ignorance of the meanings of Your wisdom and favors leaves them, after the choice has been made clear, under disappointment, doubt and distress.

O God, make truth firm for its people, and bring their condition together in trust, sincerity and certainty. Let the circle of misfortune fall upon those who have falsely defamed the people of truth: may their punishment be disgrace, defeat, estrangement and dispersion.

Praise belongs to God, exalted beyond the expressions employed by those who imagine themselves perfected and divine. He has passed beyond the comprehension and reach of the most discerning. He has made His dominion a domain in which a servant establishes the proof against those who deny His signs and entertain doubt, the treacherous wrongdoers. He suffices His weak servant al-Muqtanā on the Day of Gathering, when creatures assemble and witnesses rise to expose the disgraces of the lying pretenders; the day when the wrongdoer will bite his hands and say, “Would that I had been among the God-fearing and obedient.”

Let a copy be made for Saʿd after he has established his position before Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim Naṣr, so that God may renew favor and gratitude.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian, His servant.

EPISTLE 105 — CODED LETTER TO SHAYKH ABŪ AL-MAʿĀLĪ

مكاتبة رمز إلى الشيخ أبي المعالي

The letter of the pure and upright shaykh reached me: a man of tranquil soul, a bright and lofty intellect. I considered the contents of its sections, the premises of its arguments, and what it proposed concerning the branches and their roots. By God, its words were like cold water upon the heart of a thirsting man overcome by fullness, or like recovery from an old and lingering disease. I praised the Possessor of might, bounty, grace and favor for the good and sufficient aid He has given me in this shaykh and in the community of cultivators.

I thanked God for what the shaykh related of kindness, gentleness and patient forbearance in his dealings with the cultivators, and of careful management and commendable speech. Continue to meet them with your own excellent qualities. Instruct the community to do likewise, so that the people may be known by truthful words and upright actions.

As for the incidents, disorders and troubles in some places that you have described, and the negligence, disagreement or hesitation of certain cultivators concerning their cultivation, do not burden your own heart or those of your brethren and cousins with grief over the matter.

For these allotted holdings have been dedicated by their owner to the repair of watering places for travelers and to the maintenance of mosques. Whoever betrays his trust in them does so to his own harm, and whoever fulfills the trust does so before God, the One, the Most High.

As for the harmful influence of the agent who has gone away, this and similar conditions have passed and come to an end. That was only a temporary triumph of the devils. After a little while, the person who persevered in tending the fields will rejoice; the sower who spread seed will rejoice; and the cultivator who bore the cold of winter will find the spring's greenness. Whoever seized the property of others along the way of God has no intercessor awaiting him.

Concerning the treacherous agent, who ordered the account registers torn apart: we shall pass over this for the present and reserve it for the Day of Recompense and Return. It does not injure the Owner. God Most High replaces whatever is lost. The bearer delivered all the marked communications. I say that patience in all affairs is a mount that never stumbles beneath the people of religion.

You mentioned the interruption of letters. It could hardly be otherwise, given the severity of these times. Whoever fails to provide food and clothing for his dependents will soon expose them to the pain of hunger and the cold of winter. A person who understands the movements of time does not permit failure or sluggishness to overcome him in the pursuit of what is necessary.

Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ought to have explained to the community what he himself witnessed of the false claimant's opposition, what he saw of him directly, and the defects and duplicity in all his actions. Let the good shaykh not be negligent in looking after his brethren and his cousins, the cultivators. Let him devote himself to the sound management and correction of all the neighboring people. Let the excellent shaykh inform me of the affairs of the House of ʿAbd Allāh and their shaykhs, and of the strength of their certainty. Send my warmest greetings to yourself, who are dear to me, and to all your family and cousins.

As for al-Jarmaqī—may God disgrace him—we have no knowledge or news of him other than an isolated report. Should he come among you, drive him away. May God curse whoever joined him to this business and brought him near.

From this point onward, correspondence should be kept brief and restricted to what is necessary, after the previous discussion of distribution and accounting.

Praise belongs to God as befits Him. His prayers and blessings be upon His Messenger and his family, and may He grant peace abundantly. God is sufficient for us and the best Trustee.

EPISTLE 106 — PROCLAMATION TO THE NOBLE RADIANT ASSEMBLY

منشور إلى المحل الأزهر الشريف

I have put my trust in our Lord, the Forgiving, the Righteous, the God of the Worlds, and sought approach to Him through His Guardian, who takes vengeance upon the enemies of religion.

From the servant and possession of the Guardian of ages and times, the Qāʾim who recompenses humankind, Master of the Resurrection and the Rising, to the assembly of shaykhs of the religion in the noble Radiant Assembly (al-Maḥall al-Azhar al-Sharīf), who have repudiated those who split and altered and distorted the truth.

Peace upon whoever considers the realities of wisdom with the eye of inward discernment, takes warning, restrains himself and seeks refuge in the protection of the Guide, the Guardian of his age, and is guided; who purifies himself from clinging to the alleged infallibility of one who strayed from his religion, descended from his station and fell; and who becomes his own restraint against those who denied the favor, departed from the truth and went astray.

Now then: praise belongs to the Lord, the divine al-Ḥākim, the Righteous, exalted beyond being ancient or nonexistent and beyond whatever moves within secret thoughts and inward intentions. He brought all His creatures into being and made clear the ways of guidance and error. He made the proof manifest against living, speaking humanity through what people find in mute animals lying prone, and alerted them to what no rational person can overlook, so that proof may be established with justice over those who disobey and those who obey, and so that reward and deserved punishment may follow.

His peace rests upon His Guardian, the Guide of nations, the Cause of the causes of existing things, who administers recompense to souls for evil and good; and His peace, favor and blessings upon the ranks of His religion and those who follow them and struggle against the people of deception in the gravest trials.

O pure brethren! The period of the oppressive adversaries has ended. What the rebellious claimants concealed in their consciences has now emerged from potentiality into actuality, and they have openly declared the doubts they harbored against religion. Awaken, brethren, from the sleep of the inattentive, and do not follow the rumors spread by the base faction. They are the scoundrels of humankind, followers of rebellion and ignorance, and adherents of the ingratitude and error their souls have made attractive to them.

By God, I mean the three leaders of that faction, the foundation of tumult and corruption. Through their appetites and malicious schemes they contaminate the intentions of souls with dissension and obstinacy; the result is a lowering of stations and transformation of forms on the Day of Recompense and Return.

Do not, brethren, invalidate the beginnings of your obedience because of the ornaments of deceivers. Do not withdraw from the sound truth because those who deserted the foundations of religion have turned backward. Letters have arrived from the pious brethren of the House of Sulaymān and the House of ʿAbd Allāh, repudiating those among the wretched faction who turned from their religion and departed from the truth. I thanked God Most High that their scattered company was reunited and that their hearts had regained affection.

By God, I was calmed by the meaning of their words and recognized the sincerity of their testimony. I received further communications from the truthful, discerning Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn and from Abū al-Sarāyā, faithful in service. They confirmed the excellent obedience of the community after dissension, the removal of rancor and the preservation of souls against injustice.

By God, these two have fulfilled what may rightly be hoped of them. They have become spokesmen for the virtues of the House of ʿAbd Allāh and the House of Sulaymān and have made their good qualities known with truthful speech. The expressions in the letters describing the suffering and distress endured by my daughters and brethren have

reached me. By God, they wounded my heart and brought abundant tears to my eyes for what befell them, including injuries that came to my knowledge and distortions of which I had not previously been informed.

I leave the reckoning of those who injured their reputations through distortion and deceit to the One who does not disappoint whoever turns to Him in sincere prayer and unity. I seek approach through the Guardian of the Religion to the Lord transcending every description devised by His creatures and servants, that He may establish your community in obedience, submission and satisfaction with His Guardian, and direct their intentions to the straightest and broadest path.

Indeed, I had not supposed any member of the community to be truly guilty of the entire disorder. Responsibility lies rather with those upon whom the community relied for its guidance and direction: they fell short of directing the people away from their error. All this, in my judgment, occurred within that failure. But repentance before the Day of Judgment expiates the sins that preceded it. Their reconciliation in purity of religion keeps them far from the burning fire. My brethren and shaykhs know this to be true.

I also say that Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, the chief, did not give the command concerning what was done to ʿAmmār—may God be pleased with him—except in consequence of the obligations he believed he owed to a man he had accepted as a founder and guide; this was the work of an impostor returned to the lowest condition by deception and disguise. Thus the shaykh is not to be blamed if he repudiates the false charge, repents, returns to the truth and acknowledges the Guardian, the Qāʾim of the Religion. Read this letter of mine to him and to those with him, and make them attest their commitment to honoring the truth and obeying it. That way the proof will stand against the person who committed the greatest part of this offense, should he persist in his deed.

I have examined all the memoranda, lists of names and letters from the pure shaykhs innocent of doubt and blame. By God, the arrival of the religious Shaykh Abū al-Maʿālī, companion of trust and purity, gave me joy. His reunion with the two distinguished shaykhs Abū al-Khayr Salāma ibn Jandal, the precious Realization of Religion, and Abū al-Faḍl Ḥamza ibn Abī Manṣūr, the noble Supporter of Truth, strengthened this feeling. They and their companions from Ḥuwayẓa repudiated those who strayed from the truth through foulness and deception.

I have read the letter from my brother Musharraf, brother of the Supporter of Truth, and accepted his supplication and thanked him for his effort. I have done the same for Abū al-Ḥasan, brother of the Realization of Religion; the good Shaykh Furayj ibn Surūr; al-Ḥasan Jarrāḥ ibn Tamīm; al-Ḥasan ibn al-Baṭmī; Qassām ibn ʿĪsā; and their counterparts among the neighboring communities and the pure adherents of truth.

I also considered the letters received by Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn, the truthful demonstrator of proof: those of the pure descendants of my clan and of trustworthy, faithful people who discharge the debts of my ancestors—Rajab ibn Yūnus, guarantor of the believers; Muṣabbiḥ ibn al-Ḥasan, Supporter of the Unitarians; Abū Ṭālib, Nourisher of Knowledge and Religion; Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad; Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān; Abū al-Fawāris Najāʾ; another Ibrāhīm; and the rest of the community whose names I have not listed. All are my brethren, people of purity, noble standing and certainty.

I have also examined every letter sent by the two distinguished shaykhs Abū al-Dirʿ Jawshan and Abū al-Laqā Thābit—may God keep them in success—who share in upright direction and verification, as well as those of the Unitarian community around them. Their sincerity in repudiating those who broke their allegiance in religion has been established to my satisfaction.

Likewise I examined the letters of the pure Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn, the demonstrator, and his account of the obedience of the noble shaykhs of Damascus. He had earlier reported their names and families, and testified concerning their fidelity after their opposition to the rebels had become apparent. He informed me that deception had entered into his own testimony in fabricated legal records associated with a wretched impostor. He also made known that brother Ḥasan al-Ḥāmilī had withdrawn his earlier position; I accepted this. May God gather the souls of all the sincere upon the word of truth.

I have written the names of all these pure people and established them in the Register of Felicity. When the remaining forms of their repudiation of those who abandoned obedience are complete, they will be transferred to the Register of the Divine Will and the station of volition.

I have been told that Abū al-Ḥasan has said in some of his statements, “If the branches are corrupted, the roots are corrupted.” The poor man has been excessively expansive in this argument. He looks from the place where he imagines an impossibility. I therefore establish for the people of truth a principle that frees them from sickness and bondage. In brief: in certain earlier explanations of wisdom, the roots of souls concern their association with deeds. Souls are rewarded for practicing truth and punished for displaying opposition and error.

It is therefore established that the people of truth do not share the same roots with those who have departed from the realities of religion. Nor should the branches and roots of religion be compared to the branches and roots of natural bodies. Know, brethren, that creatures have freedom to choose and, after a short while, will be brought to presentation, reckoning and recompense. Whoever fabricated false accusations against the people of truth will regret what he invented.

Listen carefully, pure brethren. This is the time of distinction, when you must hear the decisive signs, display truthfulness and sincerity, and awaken to the striking proofs of wondrous wisdom. The path has become clear to the world of creation; proof has been established for the nations by the designation of the originated spiritual substances.

Where can the one who cried for help to the devils of the factions during the interval now go—the one who galloped with the horses of the Iblīses against the landmarks of the ranks and the gates?

I have written this book to give the virtuous Unitarians a choice and sincere counsel. It is an address to them as the people of truth owe them an explanation of the lying faction, so that the proof may be established against those who remain obstinate and resistant.

Praise belongs to God, transcending all ends and limitations. Thanks belong to His Guardian, inheritor of the keys of the earth and heavens, destroyer of the faction who turned religion to falsehood and who will bring the interval of imposture to an end.

I entrust the community of my brethren to the One in whose protection no trust can be lost.

Completed. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian, His guiding servant.

EPISTLE 107 — PROCLAMATION TO NAṢR IBN FUTŪḤ

منشور نصر ابن فتوح

The letters of the good, religious shaykh reached me. May God raise his station still higher and reward him generously for his commendable obedience and effort.

I have examined what was intelligible in them and received what he sent on behalf of the holders of obligations. I compared these with what had come before and found them sound in measure, weight and account. I praised God Most High and sought approach to Him through the Imam of His creation and the greatest of His names, asking Him to preserve you and the community in your charge through His protection, His guardianship and His gracious favors.

Concerning your mention of the letters that were circulated: they strengthen the hearts of everyone and are like rain poured down from clouds. I had already spoken about this, and the matter has now been tested. Accursed Satan had infected their hearts with sickness both secretly and publicly. He fastened snares upon what lay in their breasts and necks; the time of distinction has exposed the theft and flight they concealed.

The Creator—glorified be He—has given the servants of His Guardian an excuse upon which they may rely after they have striven in obedience, and has made it obligatory for every person of truth to distinguish what he has preserved within himself from the impurity of the people of false creeds and doctrines. Thus the judgment of the interval is realized, so that what has remained fixed in hearts through the corruption of the beliefs and doctrines of deceptive people is brought from potentiality into action. The distinction between people of truth and transgressive brethren then becomes obligatory.

As for your reluctance to speak with anyone outside your household and your brethren, there is no need for you to involve others in either your secret or your public business.

I have sent you the letter from ʿAlī Abū al-Ḥasan, carried by Abū al-Sarāyā al-Sarrāj. If it has reached you, well and good; otherwise write to him about what I have mentioned, in the hope that he will return to the straightest path and to the truth of the proper method. Write to the pure shaykhs of the House of ʿAbd Allāh and the House of Sulaymān, and tell them of their commendable efforts, so that they may know the abundant reward due to them.

Inform me whether the person named in the intervening communication has recovered his proper judgment, or whether the devil whispered in his ear and made his shameful actions appear. Send greetings to the three pure shaykhs—Abū al-Khayr, Abū al-Maʿālī and Abū al-Faḍl—and to the House of ʿAbd Allāh and the excellent persons in their care. Tell me the news of Abū al-Dirʿ and his brother Thābit, and of the people under their protection: how they support one another and remain joined together.

Greet the shaykhs and brethren at al-Bustān, together with yourself and all those there. Keep me informed of your affairs and theirs. Do not omit mention of the House of ʿAbd Allāh and the House of Sulaymān and their circumstances, for I attend to their situation with great concern. May God acquaint me with news of the community that brings joy and peace to my heart. He is the Guardian who answers prayer and who has power to do so.

Praise belongs to God, who vindicates truth despite the deniers and destroys falsehood through the signs of the ranks of the Qāʾim of the Religion. Peace belongs to the Qāʾim; he is my sufficiency, my confidence and my support against doubting unbelievers. I had mentioned violet flowers to the shaykh; let him not forget them. May God preserve him.

After I had written this letter, another letter arrived from the shaykh mentioning that the books had reached him, but not saying what became of the remaining letters. If the communication that ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn sent in order to ask forgiveness for his lies and denunciations has reached the shaykh, let him tell us. If he received a different one of the earlier communications, let him inform us of that instead.

Concerning what I have mentioned to you about estates and allotments: let there be no address, argument or quarrel between you and anyone on the matter. Let all the shaykhs remain together. They must not become agitated by any affair or retaliate against anyone for an offensive act; they should bind themselves to patience and endurance. This time is not like the time before it. Each person has received a portion of grace sufficient to distinguish truth from falsehood and guidance from error. “Whoever sees, it is for his own soul; whoever is blind, it is against it.” I was pleased by the circumstances of Shaykh Ḥasan, his son, and his transfer from the circle of ʿAlī to the allotments†3.

The period in which correspondence could proceed in its former ordered manner has now passed, for people have recognized the letters. Therefore, by God, do not write anything about the arrangement that might reveal what you are doing. People and copyists have already objected to the mention of estates and similar affairs. Write to the community in every place about secrecy and about describing circumstances only in general terms. They are to avoid dispute and contention, exercise patience and endurance, and answer nobody by either word or deed. Their strongest recourse must be patience, silence and concealment.

Write these instructions to all the localities and recognize the working of God Most High. Our letter was written in accordance with what we knew before yours arrived. I wrote it on the road, at the time when Abū Jumʿa was traveling toward the shaykh.

Had Abū Jumʿa not come, we would have been unable to write to you at all. As for Ṭarrād, his situation has improved through the questions he submitted and the repentance he sought before the pure shaykhs. As for Kāmil, he has died; may God destroy those who clung to him. The harm Kāmil caused the community in his country cannot be repaired. Whenever an old statement of his becomes known, examine it, for he damaged the localities and had no practice except lying. Do not grant him any further advantage in this affair.

By God, by God, let no one of the community speak with anyone outside. Conceal your condition and write to all the districts in general terms, teaching the people the merit of patience and endurance. What I have written is more than sufficient.

By God, do not let this letter pass out of your hand; write to every locality instead, instructing them to conceal their affairs and speak of them only in general terms.

I seek approach to God for your protection and well-being; He suffices me, through Him help is sought, and upon Him I rely. Read this letter of mine to all the brethren. Make it clear to them that it was written before your latest letter arrived, so that they recognize the kindness of the Guardian of the Age and conduct themselves according to what has been conveyed to them.

TEXTUAL ENDNOTES — EPISTLE 107

†3. The printed word الحصص means allotments or portions; in this coded administrative context, its precise spiritual referent is not independently established.

EPISTLE 108 — CODED LETTER TO THE HOUSE OF ABŪ TURĀB

مكاتبة رمز إلى آل أبي تراب

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. The letter of the shaykhs, my brethren, reached me. May God prolong their lives, preserve their success and raise their stations. I read its contents, examined it closely and sought an explanation of the obscure parts of its knowledge through my brother Abū al-Ḥasan—may God Most High give him honor. I found it expressing pure consciences and good, virtuous, radiant souls, shining with the dawn of the causes of a new age and the prospect of meeting beloved friends under an auspicious rising star. They spoke of their longing, but God is witness that what I feel is many times greater. Whatever time permits of the fulfillment of some of these hopes, I ask God to bring the desired gathering and its joys to pass through His bounty and kindness.

As for what the shaykhs of the House of Abū Turāb said of their agreement, their reunion, their resolution to sell these goods, and their effort to realize the trade while guarding against loss and ruin: may God strengthen them with the means of His success and guide them to what is right and good along the clearest path.

I have accepted everything the shaykhs mentioned and recognized the truthfulness of their account. I have likewise accepted the judgment of Shaykh Abū al-Sarāyā and his appeal to God Most High. He and the others are released and given ample scope in all that they have mentioned. They are forgiven everything that, through ignorance, they neglected or failed to carry out in this affair. May God strengthen them in their company and in the work they undertake, and recompense them generously through His favor.

Regarding Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim, the custodian of al-Bustān—may God exalt him—and what he mentioned about the House of ʿAbd Allāh, the House of Sulaymān and the community, and what caused them anxiety and weighed upon them in the matter of the oath: they should not fear that obligation if it becomes necessary for them to undertake it.

A sincere oath is an act of glorification and praise. If a man does not take it, however, he may impose upon himself a financial liability and find himself exposed to estrangement and displacement. God judges every person according to his belief and holds him accountable for his intention.

Abū al-Qāsim also asked concerning al-Jarmaqī—may God curse him. By God, we have not seen him; we were only told that he was in Egypt with al-Kurdī and his companions and did not leave them. Whatever he says is the work of al-Kurdī, who laid the foundation of these actions for him and others in the past and at the present time; the matter originated with him. By God, do not permit him to settle in any of your localities. He is a cursed corrupter. His behavior comes from al-Kurdī, who in our judgment has produced even greater confusion in Egypt than in Syria. May God permit him no further advance.

As for the condition of the two distinguished shaykhs from the House of ʿAbd Allāh—I mean Shaykh Ibrāhīm and Abū al-Fawāris Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, whom God strengthen—I have been told of their strength in cultivation and the labor they and all their cousins have performed in farming. Write to them from me with the promise of good things: we shall strengthen them, together with their cousins, with resources for which no account will be demanded from them. Nor will they be denied additional aid when they request it, without their being required to sign binding instruments of debt concerning it.

Likewise write to Abū al-Dirʿ and Abū al-Laqā—may God strengthen them—with the same favorable promises.

Send this letter to Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim, the guarantor of al-Bustān, enclosed in Shaykh Abū al-Sarāyā's letter and carried by someone trustworthy who will act promptly rather than delay its delivery. Inform the shaykhs of the House of ʿAbd Allāh and House of Sulaymān about it. Enforce the banishment of the liar Ṭarrād al-Jarmaqī—may God curse him and whoever instructed him to bring ruin and destruction to the localities.

All the shaykhs who serve as heads of the allotments should administer affairs on their own authority and promise their people support and improvement without requiring account from them. The noble master has already disbursed some of his own property specifically designated for restoring the allotments. They are excused for whatever the locusts destroyed. If any part of the fruit has been lost or damaged, he will release compensation to them without charging it to their accounts.

By God, by God, the shaykhs must not delay the delivery of this letter to Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim, custodian of al-Bustān—may God strengthen him. Shaykh Abū al-Sarāyā and whichever other shaykhs can accompany him must see to the matter. Do not neglect it: it has not been possible to write more than this.

By God, put the expulsion of the accursed al-Jarmaqī into effect. May God expose his disgrace and hasten the shame of whoever supported him in this affair. Tell us what has happened to the olives, vines and all the fruit. Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan reported that the olives, grapes and figs bore a fine crop again after the locusts had eaten them.

Do not delay your answer about the result of the affair and the condition of this fruit. Did it return to producing like the fruit of every ordinary year after the locusts devoured it? Do not put off reporting on this.

I and the community send the shaykhs of the House of Abū Turāb our fullest greetings. The same greetings go to the shaykhs of the House of ʿAbd Allāh and the House of Sulaymān, to everyone in al-Ḥamrāʾ and to the shaykhs of al-Bustān, as well as to all those in the capital and those belonging to every allotment.

Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds; may His prayers rest upon His Messenger to all created beings, and may He grant peace. God suffices us and is the best Supporter and Helper.

Send this letter to the House of Sulaymān and the House of ʿAbd Allāh so that they may read and examine it. May God choose the best outcome through His favor, generosity and kindness. Peace.

EPISTLE 109 — LETTER SENT TO THE RADIANT MOUNTAIN

رسالة الواصل إلى الجبل الأنور

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, through the ranks of the Qāʾim of the Religion.

Your letter has arrived, my dear and cherished brother ʿAlī—may God prolong your remaining life in His obedience, and preserve your religion and your worldly affairs. It came by the hand of the good brother Abū al-Ḥasan al-Maḥallī, may God raise his rank. We read it and understood it, and its account of your devotion and fidelity was clear. Were it not that his presence among us was prevented by our need for concealment, the narrowing of our circumstances, the length and breadth of the routes and country, the confusion of affairs, and the bitterness of this wretched life—with few supporters and friends, and without a kindly neighbor or companion—and were it not that the roads and passages have become inaccessible to us, while we stand with our families on the edge of a precipice of calamities and ruin, we would have called you to visit. We excuse their conduct, knowing the difference between the position of the borrower and that of the owner†4. I mention these conditions only so that neither you nor anyone else will say that we have kept you at a distance, neglected your circumstances, and failed to invite you.

In your letter you gave us no clear account of the condition of your relatives and family. Nor did you mention the matters about the community that we await: their security, tranquility, and well-being.

We had previously received word that a group had mounted the paths of wrongdoing, sharpened the staff of defiance, and openly manifested folly and rebellion. They had attached themselves to forbidden things, following the practices of the Ṭaymūs†5 and Satan, and competed in the error they had been taught, behaving like the offspring of devils.

Read this letter of mine to the assembled shaykhs and brethren, so that they may ponder what is written in it and separate themselves from whoever has become notorious for apostasy and departed from the practices of the people of religion. Identify them by their beliefs and make their distinguishing marks known. The time of the pretenders and people of error has come to an end; the roof of falsehood has fallen upon the unhappy apostates.

Where can they wander? Where can the people of ruin go? The herald of the Resurrection has sounded his warning; the Hereafter has shone forth with its terrors, to bring recompense upon those who followed perversity, violated their pledges, and persisted in obstinate opposition. In every age there have been such base people: they have loaded themselves with sins in the time of the Resurrection, interrupted the work of religion, and turned away from the truth after being made acquainted with the realities entrusted to them. Their recompense and punishment will be doubled for their lowest deeds and remotest ambitions.

May God destroy them by their own acts and strip from them the covering of His protection, just as they deceived the world and lied against the people of religion, describing them in the foulest terms. God will judge them justly and show them no mercy, for they gave the people of the Sunni faction a means of attacking the people of truth through the deeds they invented and the forbidden acts they permitted.

Whoever among you acknowledges one of these people as child, parent, or brother—male or female—is accursed, has broken the covenant of religion, and stands outside its great proofs and signs.†6 Recognize them, people of discretion and guardianship, and separate from them in life and death.

The age of the pretenders is finished; their snares have been exposed to the people of truth by their promotion of forbidden practices. The argument has now been made clear concerning both parties. The people of truth have prevailed through their obedience; the covenant-breakers have been marked by the rancor and fraud they carried in their hearts against the religion.

Will you not learn, people of rebellion and covenant-breaking? Will you not desist, people of apostasy and the offspring of wickedness? How many times have the blows of proof and revelation struck your hearts! Yet they are as hard rocks, or as salt ground unable to bring forth wholesome plants.

Alas for those who, after the truth was explained and the Wisdom preserved, after joining the Inhabited House and entering through the Gate of Mercy, were turned about by deceiving pretenders. Their hearts are blacker than the darkest night and harder than solid rock. The waters of the Nile do not moisten them, nor do they feel the pleasure of coolness. Their ears are deaf to the truth; they hear neither its summons nor the voice of thunder. Their eyes are covered against remembrance and blinded by the arrival of ill fortune and the absence of good fortune.

People! The warner of the Resurrection has discharged his warning and openly proclaimed the truth. The Greatest Imam has established the proof against all creation. You scattered congregation, you deniers and breakers of the covenant: only two things brought us together—affirming the unity of the Creator, exalted is He, and obeying the Guardian of the Age with genuine faith. By these two qualities we find deliverance from the tricks of Satan. When you turned back from the ordinances of the Guiding Qāʾim and Imam, you broke the very profession of divine unity that you claimed; there is no true unity without obedience to the commands of the Qāʾim of the Age. Following this betrayal of truth, you are no longer children or brothers to us.

What remains after this warning and explanation except error and ruin? We invited you to the truth and prayed on your behalf, but you would not answer. May God make the breakers of the covenant, the enemies of religion, a harvest for the swords of His guardians, who devote themselves to obedience and rely on Him in ease and hardship.

We had appointed many shaykhs in the towns, people of strength in religion, steadiness and sound judgment, and had permitted them to accept the repentance of anyone who submitted and requested pardon, acknowledging that he had abandoned licentiousness, iniquity and error. All of this was to establish the proof before the worlds and silence the unjust adversary, lest they say: 'No warner or messenger came to us; we knew neither guide nor proof of the truth.'

The proof has cut off the excuses of mankind. The breaking of the fast has approached, and the month of fasting has passed; the earth shines in the light of the Qāʾim, the Guiding Imam. Let none of you say, 'You say this at every time and in every year.' For the meaning in the order of origination is this: his manifestation is like his concealment, and his concealment like his manifestation—especially now that the signs of his exalted station have appeared. I have already conveyed to you what is necessary by way of justification and warning, and set it down for you in the Admonition and the Reminder. Nothing remains incumbent upon a truthful messenger except painstaking delivery of his message. God gives success to whoever accepts and submits until the Day of Recompense and Return.

Praise be to God, the Exalted, the destroyer of ages, the changer of eternity, the Originator of the ancient Intellect, the Cause of causes. Peace upon the Intellect of the worlds, the Imam of mankind who summons to the best of deeds. He is the sufficiency of His weak servant al-Muqtanā on the day when none has protection except whoever holds fast to the Qāʾim, the Guiding Imam, rectifier of religions and overturner of states, who takes vengeance upon those who associate partners, act unjustly, and depart from truth and justice.

Written in Ramaḍān, in the twenty-sixth year of the Qāʾim. Peace.

Completed; praise be to our Lord alone, and thanks to the Qāʾim of the Age, His servant.

TEXTUAL ENDNOTES — EPISTLE 109

†4. Printed p. 796 reads موضع المستعير ومنزلة المالك . The contrast of borrower and owner is literal; its historical implication is not defined by the sentence itself. †5. Printed p. 797 reads طيموس . It is left as Ṭaymūs without conjectural identification. †6. Printed p. 797 names a child, parent, and sibling of either sex. The translation records the author’s threat; its social enforcement cannot be inferred from this text alone.

EPISTLE 110 — LETTER TO THE SHAYKH ABŪ AL-MAʿĀLĪ

مكاتبة الشيخ أبي المعالي

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, through the ranks of the Qāʾim of the Religion.

I have written—may God prolong the life of the good shaykh and his brethren, preserving their service to religion and its guiding signs. May He make nearness to His people the most exalted of the shaykh's acquisitions and the noblest of his aims, and grant to him and them purity of soul, free from what befell the man whose heart was made sick by Satan's breath, his deceit and his insolence. For he has yielded to the world in his actions and ordinances, and Satan has drawn him into the abyss of fantasies, gaining possession of his reins and seizing his very being.

Your letter reached us—may God perpetuate your guardianship—revealing the purity of your soul and its inner nature. I gave thanks to God, the Giver, Master of Resurrection and Reckoning, for the beautiful protection and safeguard that He has bestowed upon me in your community, and I implored Him humbly to guide everyone who seeks the path of salvation through keeping the obligatory practices of religion and fulfilling the trust.

As for what you said—may God prolong your protection—about the sorrow of not seeing one another and being present together: through God's grace we converse with each other in the nearness of our souls and the sincerity of our intentions, despite the distance, through what hearts and breasts conceal. The times themselves have denied us meeting, because of our bitter straits, and those whom we fear because of their malicious accusations and oppression. Each day we stand on the edge of an expulsion and an expected insult from them.

In this time of concealment we have no person upon whom to rely, nor any refuge except God and acquiescence and submission to Him. The nāṣibīs, the openly hostile religious opponents, have shown us more gentleness and mercy than those who profess to be believers. Among the people of opposing creeds we live secure and tranquil; among those claiming faith we are apprehensive and afraid. They have their excuses for themselves, and we, in a certain respect, excuse them, although in the eyes of the people of truth they are blameworthy.

Let the pure shaykh make his mind supple in reflection and seek the springs of his thoughts through the outpouring of wisdom. Let his thought return to him, that by it he may glimpse what lies hidden from the seeker at the beginning and end of his journey. When those springs of reflection are stopped and the mind no longer engages with its ideas, it produces contradictory speech and claims to which rational understanding bears no witness. What it expresses then comes from outside the kingly soul and inclines toward the natural realm. That is a lesson for others, and it speaks about the man who has strayed from the commands of truth and accepted for himself the destructive depths of base conditions.

Let the pure shaykh remember this, so that the hearts of his relatives and family may turn away from such error, and let him guard them from the pasture of folly in the hope of the intercession of the Guide of Nations.

Let the pure shaykh consider the full radiance of the heavenly stars of the Gates (*al-nujūm al-bābāniyya*), their perfect splendor in shining lights, and their brilliance at their manifestation through the help of the people of obedience and the failure of the people of opposition.

The winds of the Qarmaṭian apostasy have blown; its arrows have flown, its lightning has flashed, and the course of its rising and setting has become plain to those who observe it.

The time has come and the fires of punishment blaze. Where can the people of the Book go astray in their darkness? Where can they flee on the Day of Presentation and Reckoning? The riding camels of the Resurrection have been set on their journey, driven by their camel-driver; the moons of the Resurrection have risen, drawing their light from the

suns of the Guiding Qāʾim and Imam. Very soon, by God, the nations will be brought to stand before Hell, and they shall be asked about their neglect of the counsels and signs of truth and of the straight path.

Is there not a warning in these tidings for anyone possessing understanding, that he may distinguish his own pure soul from the person whom despair has driven away from accepting the prohibition and command, whose intellect has become diseased and whose patience is small? Will the one who has rebelled against the truth not awaken before the coverings are lifted and the Night of Decree appears—before he loses hope of the Guardian of Truth, Imam of time and age, and before those who have become Satan's followers, pretended to falsehood, and ruined their religion and worldly life through the malice, fraud, and treachery that they have received into themselves are exposed?

Such a man promises everyone who has been deceived by him phantoms of lying and intimidation, and tempts them with his fabrications, which will vanish and perish. He is like the calf of the Children of Israel in former times; he is no less false or divisive. He has burdened himself with the sins of those in the community whom he led away from the truth by his foolish fictions, burned by his fire, turned their insight away from truth, and drowned in the ocean of his errors. Will those who have been thrust toward destruction not wake up and perceive the danger already approaching them, toward which they travel?

Give this counsel, excellent shaykh, to everyone who seeks your advice in religion. Accept the repentance of whoever seeks pardon once you have established the sincerity of his speech and his conviction. Be gentle with the community in what you say and address to them. Do not be harsh toward them after showing them the pure truth and the right course; do not say, 'Thus is it written in the book.' For to the Guardian of the Command and the Truth belong severing and joining, breaking and mending, compelling and freeing necks. His words tear down the veil of falsehood by the pure truth and make clear the final return; their words are sharper than keen-edged blades, striking necks and cutting down positions of authority.†7

Be happy, pure shaykh, in what has come to your court and home. Seize this chance of an age bearing witness to how the Guardian of Truth exposes the scandals and misdeeds of his enemies and yours. Peace upon you, upon my brethren who are yours, your cousins and your relatives.

Praise be to God, who is beyond even the transcendence ascribed to creatures and originated beings; holy beyond being reached, even if the understanding of the worlds should grasp some subtle forms of worship. Only confession of incapacity, acceptance, submission, and obedience to the Guardian of the Age and his appointed ranks remain. Thanks be to the Guardian, the Intellect, the Qāʾim publicly designated before witnesses from among the worlds to command and prohibit in the realities of religions. He suffices His weak servant al-Muqtanā on the day when the pretenders' ties of kinship are broken, and victory belongs to the truthful and trustworthy.

Written in the twenty-sixth year of the Qāʾim over souls, with their acquired crimes.

Knowledge of the House of ʿAbd Allāh has grown distant from us; their names and news have disappeared, and they have ceased mentioning us, while we continue to wait for reports and traces of them. May God grant them enduring steadfastness and not forget them in His mercy on the Day of Presentation and the appointed Hour. May He provide from among them successors to the shaykhs who preceded them, the people of submission and obedience. They should inform us who among them now remains upon the right way, who is certain in his preservation of the Wisdom, and who holds firm to the realities of religion. We and those with us extend to you all full peace and the finest greetings.

Completed; praise be to our Lord alone, and thanks to the Qāʾim of the Age, His servant.

TEXTUAL ENDNOTES — EPISTLE 110

†7. Printed p. 803 has martial metaphors, including ضرب الأعناق . The exact terminal noun is difficult; the violent polemic is unmistakable, while the exact force of the final expression قطع المناصب remains uncertain.

EPISTLE 111 — THE PROCLAMATION OF CONCEALMENT

منشور الغيبة

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, through the ranks of the Qāʾim of the Religion.

To the people of contentment and submission, people of purity, reverence and peace, who recognize the Guardian of the Religion, the Qāʾim of the Resurrection: peace upon whoever accepts and submits to his Imam, watches for his standards and banners, and considers with sincerity what has reached him of the explanations of his Wisdom.

Brethren of the religion, preserve the signs of divine unity and keep what has been set forth for you in the prohibitions against forbidden things in *The Realities*, *The Crushing*, *The Distinction*, and the book of the pure martyr Abū al-Yaqẓān.

For I, the weak servant, am innocent of the shameful things invented by those who fabricated them and attributed them to religion and faith. The Creator bears witness to what I made known in forbidding the prohibited practices introduced by Lāḥiq, Sakīn, Muṣʿab and their like. That was my first act when I was ordered to establish the Call by the exalted Command, the Guardian of the Age and Lord of Manifestations.

Whoever among you preserves the Wisdom, purifies his soul of involvement with the people of apostasy, shameful acts and licentious practices, awaits what will arrive on the Day of Recompense and the appointed Hour, safeguards his brethren in religion, and patiently bears the great events to come, may hope to be delivered from all sins and disasters on the day when each soul finds before it the deeds it has performed, good and bad.

Know, brethren, that you are living through the greatest of intervals of concealment. We have announced and conveyed to every land, region and distant district so much that, even if the swelling seas were its ink, they would not suffice to express a tenth part of it. By it the proof has been established against all religious communities and nations, proclaimed to them publicly and in secret. Yet this advising servant has found not one of you, nor among all the nations, who turns inwardly toward the Creator free of the plots of opponents and evildoers.

This submissive servant has established the proof before the religious communities and nations; he has surrendered himself to his Lord and is departing into absence and concealment.

He entrusts all the people of truth, those near and those far away, to the command of the Lord, the Divine Ruler, the transcendent Compeller.

And whoever among you is subjected to an ordeal and is required to revile this servant, let him disavow this servant; and if required to curse him, let him curse him. This is in circumstances of necessity. God knows what you show and what you conceal.

New testimonies of falsehood and fabrication have arisen. The Creator is bringing near the recompense of whoever committed the act to which he testified, whoever bore witness falsely, and whoever accepted what the liars invented and disguised. He will bring near the recompense of the doer, the speaker and the one who receives it. Soon He will place this testimony before their eyes, and they will find no mercy in the injury they have done to truth and the lies they have invented.

Praise be to God, who is beyond all descriptions, who graciously helps the guardians of His truth by establishing the proof and the excuse, and consoles them amid the assaults of enemies and the devils of this interval, in exile and desolate lands, although those who would draw near to Him have been deprived of the means leading to manifestation, honor, and victory.†8

Peace upon the Guardian of the Resurrection, the Qāʾim who brings about the raising and gathering of the dead.

He suffices His weak servant, who hopes for His mercy on the day when family ties are severed and the knots of excuses are undone.

The proclamation is complete. Praise belongs to our Lord alone, and thanks to His Guardian, His servant.

TEXTUAL ENDNOTES — EPISTLE 111

†8. Printed p. 806 has a syntactically dense final clause (كما أحرمهم من يتقرب إليه بأبواب سببها أيسا من الظهور والعز والنصر). The English follows the most coherent printed reading; another witness is needed to settle the pronouns and agency.