

An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 2

Ismaili Thought in the
Classical Age

Edited by S. H. Nasr and M. Aminrazavi

An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia

Previously published volume:

An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Volume 1: From Zoroaster to 'Umar Khayyām

An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia

VOLUME 2

*Ismaili Thought in the Classical Age
From Jābir ibn Ḥayyān to Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī*

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR *with* MEHDI AMINRAZAVI

with the assistance of

M. R. JOZI

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The Institute of Ismaili Studies was established in 1977 with the object of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in the historical as well as contemporary contexts, and a better understanding of its relationship with other societies and faiths.

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3. Editions or translations of significant primary or secondary texts.
4. Translations of poetic or literary texts which illustrate the rich heritage of spiritual, devotional and symbolic expressions in Muslim history.
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بچشم نهان بین جهان را که چشم عیان بیند نهان را
نهان در جهان چیست آزاده مردم بینی نهان را بینی عیان را
جهان را باهن نشایدش بستن برنجیر حکمت بستند این جهان را

See with the inner eye, the inner dimension of the world
For the outward looking eye cannot see the inward.

What is the inward in the world, men who are free,
Thou dost not see the inward, but seeth the outward,

One cannot bind this world with iron,
Thus bind this world with the chain of philosophic wisdom.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw

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- Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. *Kitāb al-aḥjār*, selected portions ed. and tr. Syed Nomanul Haq as *Names, Natures and Things: The Alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān and his Kitāb al-aḥjār* (Book of Stones). Boston, 1994, pp. 163–202.
- Nāṣir-i Khusraw. *Dīwān*, Partial English tr. Peter L. Wilson and Gholam Reza Aavani as *Forty Poems from the Divan*. Tehran, 1973, pp. 31–43.
- Nāṣir-i Khusraw. *Gushāyish wa rahāyish*, ed. and tr. Faquir M. Hunzai as *Knowledge and Liberation: A Treatise on Philosophical Theology*. London, 1998, pp. 24–53.
- Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* [*Treatise of the Brethren of Purity: On Numbers*], tr. Bernard R. Goldstein as *The First Treatise of the Division of the Abstract Sciences*. Cairo, 1347/1928. Reprinted from *Centaurus* 10 (1964), 135–160.
- Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* [*Treatise of the Brethren of Purity: Animals versus Man*], tr. Lenn Evan Goodman. Boston, 1978, pp. 51–77; 198–202.
- al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn Shirāzī. *Khuṭba*, ed. and tr. Jawad Muscati and Khan Bahadur A. M. Moulvi in their *Life and Lectures of the Grand Missionary al-Muayyad fid-Din Shirazi*. Karachi, 1969, pp. 78–91; 141–153; 174–178.
- Ṭūsī, Naṣir al-Dīn. *Sayr wa sulūk*, ed. and tr. S. Jalal Badakhchani as *Contemplation and Action: The Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar*. London, 1998, pp. 26–47.

Note on Transliteration

Arabic characters

ء	'
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	ʿ
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y
ة	ah; at (construct state)

long vowels

ا	ā
و	ū
ي	ī

short vowels

ـَ	a
ـُ	u
ـِ	i

diphthongs

ـَو	aw
ـَي	ai (ay)
ـِي	ayy (final form ī)
ـُو	uww (final form ū)

Persian letters added to the Arabic alphabet

پ	p
چ	ch
ژ	zh
گ	g

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*Contributors mentioned here are those who have translated new materials for this volume and M. R. Jozi, who variously assisted in the production of this volume. The list of others whose translations have already appeared elsewhere and of which we have made use appears in the List of Reprinted Works.

General Introduction

The second volume of the *Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* deals with some major schools of thought in the early history of Islamic Persia that were not treated in the first volume. In the first volume, in addition to pre-Islamic thought in Persia, special attention was paid to the Peripatetic school associated most of all with the name of Ibn Sinā (Avicenna). This much better known school of Islamic philosophy is usually identified in the West as Islamic philosophy. In most general treatments of the history of Islamic philosophy, little attention has been paid until recently to other schools of thought of that period which are of philosophical significance. In the early centuries of Islamic history, Ismaili philosophy and philosophers influenced by Pythagorean and Hermetic ideas—also usually associated with Shi‘i thought in general and Ismailism in particular—stand out especially as schools of great philosophical significance if philosophy be understood in its traditional and time-honoured sense.

Ismailism, which is a branch of Shi‘ism that shares the first six Imams with the mainstream form of Shi‘ism known as the Ithnā ‘ashariyyah or Twelve-Imam Shi‘ism, began to formulate its philosophical and theological teachings earlier than any other form of Shi‘ism with which it has always shared a common concern for the central role of ‘*aql*, or intellect, in the understanding of religious doctrines. Already one can see the propensity toward intellectual discourse, the significance of ‘*aql*, and the usage of demonstration or *burhān* in the *Nahj al-balāghah* (Path of Eloquence), which is a collection of the sayings and teachings of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first Shi‘i Imam, collected in its present form by Sayyid Sharif al-Raḍī. The Shi‘i Imams also held occasional discourse with those knowledgeable in Graeco-Alexandrian philosophies and sciences, as can be seen in the meeting between the eighth Imam of the Twelve-Imam School, ‘Alī al-Riḍā, and ‘Imrān al-Ṣābī, who belonged to the ‘Sabaean’ community of Ḥarrān, known to have been a centre where more esoteric currents of Graeco-Alexandrian thought were cultivated and preserved into the Islamic period. Moreover, the sixth Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq—the last person

to be accepted by both Twelve-Imam Shi'is and Ismailis as Imam—was associated with currents of Hermeticism, and Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, the first Muslim alchemist who is a historical figure despite having gained a 'mythological' dimension, was a student of Imam Ja'far. These and many other characteristics of Shi'ism and events in Shi'i sacred history created a more favourable ambience for the propagation of the intellectual sciences of which philosophy is the heart in Shi'i circles compared with most (but not all) climates dominated by later Sunni theological thought. The survival of Islamic philosophy during later centuries in Persia and its reflowering during the Safavid period, when Persia had become predominantly Shi'i of the Twelve-Imam School, is related to this reality as is the central significance of philosophy for the religious thought of Ismailism in general.

There is another cardinal point that must be remembered, and that is the esoteric dimension of Shi'ism that therefore links it at its very roots with Islamic esoterism as such, of which it is a manifestation along with Sufism, which is the central expression of that esoterism. Moreover, Islamic esoterism is based essentially on knowledge of a principal order (*al-ma'rifah/irfān*) and is therefore more than anything else Gnostic, if this term be understood in its original sense and not confused with the sectarian views of historical Gnosticism. From the beginning Shi'ism was concerned with gnosis, and throughout history one can observe the manifestation of Shi'i gnosis in various forms, with many of which we shall deal in later volumes of this series, especially those associated with Twelve-Imam Shi'ism. Meanwhile, in early Islamic history Ismaili gnosis began to manifest itself through a number of works that are both Gnostic and philosophical, or one could say theosophical in nature, if this latter term be understood in its authentic sense as *theosophia* or *al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah* in Arabic and *ḥikmat-i ilāhī* in Persian, terms which are its exact and literal equivalent.

Ismaili thought associated philosophy/theosophy with the esoteric dimension of the religion and the instructions of the Imams, who according to both Twelve-Imam and Ismaili Shi'ism possess knowledge of the esoteric (*bāṭinī*) truths of religion. During Islamic history many Muslims in fact referred to the Ismailis as *bāṭinīs*, sometimes in a pejorative sense accusing them of denying the outward (*ẓāhir*) form of the revelation. Without entering into this theological discussion which has had a long history, it suffices here to emphasize that for the Ismailis philosophy possesses essentially an esoteric, gnostic, and soteriological character and is not simply meant to be mental learning. It is related to the *ḥaqīqah* or truth at the heart of the Qur'ānic revelation, and therefore can be attained only after proper training of not solely the mind but also the whole of one's being, which then makes one worthy of receiving knowledge from the representative of true gnosis, who is none other than the Imam or his representatives. The role of the Imam and the hierarchy of those who know at whose head he stands is, therefore, essential in the disciple's gaining of authentic knowledge.

Understanding the true nature of this esoteric knowledge is related to grades of initiation and the attainment of spiritual virtues. The *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Treatises of the Brethren of Purity), composed in the fourth/tenth century, which the Ismailis have claimed over the centuries as their own (but which it might be said reflects the wider climate of Shi'ism in general), a work that had much influence in the Islamic world at large, is based more than anything else on the link between philosophy and the virtuous life. The Ismailis emphasized from the beginning the fact that a philosopher or *ḥakīm* had to be a sage in the traditional sense of the term, in whom perfection of knowledge and being were wed. They thereby propagated a view that the whole of Islamic tradition was also to embrace as the major intellectual schools of that tradition were crystallized. Such later masters of Islamic thought in Persia as Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā, though not Ismaili, never ceased to emphasize the inalienable link between knowing and being and the moral and spiritual qualifications necessary for the understanding of philosophy. The Ismailis and later schools of thought also often made a distinction between *falsafah* as the fruit of ratiocination and *ḥikmah* as true philosophy, adding that the first was attainable through the training of the mind and the second only through the training of one's whole being. This distinction was not, however, absolute and there are a number of authors who use *falsafah* and *ḥikmah* practically interchangeably and as closely associated terms, enumerating the same conditions for the mastering of *falsafah* as they do for *ḥikmah*.

In any case, Ismaili philosophy with its Gnostic nature was able to integrate readily into its perspective other schools of thought of a Gnostic and esoteric character with which it came into contact. These included not only the esoteric strands of Graeco-Alexandrian thought such as Hermeticism and Neopythagoreanism, but also certain cosmological ideas associated with Mazdaism and Manichaeism. Nor were the Ismaili philosophers indifferent to Neoplatonism. On the contrary, they showed great interest in this last major metaphysical synthesis of the Greek tradition, but they did not display the same degree of interest in Aristotelianism as did the Muslim Peripatetics. It is true that both the Peripatetics and the Ismaili philosophies integrated elements of Graeco-Alexandrian thought into their perspectives drawn essentially from the Islamic worldview and created philosophies which for this very reason were Islamic. But precisely because of the difference in emphasis and the type of Graeco-Alexandrian thought that they integrated into different dimensions of the Islamic intellectual universe, they created different and distinct schools of philosophy which interacted with each other in many ways and which must be considered fully in any serious study of philosophy in Persia. This claim holds true especially since nearly all the major early Ismaili philosophers, although associated with the Fatimids and their capital in Cairo, were Persians.

The selections of Ismaili philosophy presented in this volume cover some five centuries, from the second/eighth to the seventh/thirteenth, starting with the

enigmatic *Umm al-kitāb* (The Archetypal Book), the earliest Ismaili philosophical text written in archaic Persian, to the writings of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, who was devoted to the study of Ismailism while in the service of the Ismaili rulers of Alamūt, but who emerged as a Twelve-Imam Shi'i who wrote the first systematic work of theology in this branch of Shi'ism, entitled *Kitāb al-tajrīd* (The Book of Catharsis). The period considered in the present volume was marked by the ascendance of the Fatimids. Later on the period was punctuated by the 'Resurrection of Alamūt', announced in 559/1164 by the Ismaili Imam of the time, and associated with the name of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ and the establishment of Ismaili states in the mountainous regions of northeastern Persia, especially Quhistān in Khurāsān. This period came abruptly to an end with the Mongol invasion of western Asia by Hūlagu. Henceforth in Persia Ismailism took another form, going for the most part underground and becoming intermingled with certain forms of Sufism. In effect, the 'golden age' of Ismaili philosophy is the very period treated in this volume, which from the point of view of philosophy came to an end with Ṭūsī, although Ismaili thought continued to produce works of mystical and theological significance and even some of a philosophical nature, especially in Yemen and India.

Of special interest regarding philosophy in Persia is the fact that this early period of Ismaili philosophy, which also marks in many ways its peak, involved the cultivation of the Persian language as a medium for philosophical discourse. This tendency can be seen from the *Umm al-kitāb* onward and culminates, from the point of view of the beauty and maturity of language, in the works of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Usually, Ibn Sīnā is credited with writing the first philosophical work in Persian, the *Dānish-nāmah-yi 'alā'ī* (The Book of Science Dedicated to 'Alā' al-Dawlah). This statement is certainly true for Peripatetic philosophy, but if we look at philosophy in general, including other schools of thought, then the major contribution of Ismaili writers to the very foundation of philosophical Persian must be given serious consideration. Moreover, perhaps the only figure in the history of Persia who was at once a major poet and a major philosopher is the Ismaili Nāṣir-i Khusraw, 'Umar Khayyām being the only other possible candidate for such an honour. There were of course other Persian philosophers who were also poets, such as Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī, Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā, and Sabziwārī, but none held the same position of eminence in poetry as did Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who is considered by most authorities to be one of the seven greatest poets in the Persian language. At the same time he was a major philosopher who wrote all his works in Persian.

The Ismaili philosophers under consideration in this volume did not simply repeat the same philosophical ideas. While they were all concerned with the soteriological function of knowledge, the esoteric character of philosophy, the relation between religion and philosophy, the development of an esoteric cosmology and anthropology, the study of the philosophical significance of the presence of the Imam as the source of infallible knowledge, and many other issues, one can see as

well a gradual unfolding over the centuries of ideas concerning other matters. For example, the development of a metaphysics based upon not Being but the Beyond-Being, of which Being is the First Act, and the incorporation of the Neoplatonic idea of emanation into the Ismaili worldview took place gradually.

The centuries under consideration here also reveal extensive interaction between Ismaili philosophy on the one hand and various schools of Islamic philosophy and theology as a whole on the other. This fact can be seen in Abū Ḥātim Rāzī's criticism of Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā' Rāzī, the interaction between Ibn Sīnā's synthesis and systematization of Peripatetic philosophy and the writings of Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī, and the response of Sunni thinkers to the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', read extensively by many of these thinkers including such a major Sunni figure as Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad Ghazzālī, who at the same time wrote against Ismailism. In any case, the tradition of Ismaili philosophy, developed mostly in Persia during the earlier centuries of Islamic history, is of much philosophical interest and is certainly one of the important schools of philosophy that developed during the Islamic period. Its treatment of such subjects as the relation of time and eternity; cosmic cycles; the nature of the *anthropos*; a metaphysics based not on Being but the Absolute as Beyond-Being whose first manifestation is Being; a cosmology related to the hierarchy of spiritual beings; the relation between religion in its formal aspect and philosophy, reason, and revelation; and many other intellectual themes are of innate philosophical value as well as being of great significance for the in-depth understanding of Islamic philosophy in general.

The selections chosen for this volume begin with the *Umm al-kitāb* (The Archetypal Book), meaning literally 'Mother of all Books', which is one of the names of the Qur'ān itself. The work purported to be the result of certain questions posed to the fifth Shi'i Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, contains many themes of philosophical interest that were to be expanded in many later works of Ismaili philosophy. There is an explanation of the letters of the Divine Name 'Allah' interpreted according to Shi'i esoterism. This concern with the symbolism of letters, which is also found in the Kabbala, is in evidence among numerous Shi'i as well as Sufi authors and is said to go back to the science of the esoteric meaning of letters and their numerical values or *jafr* associated with 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalīb and taught by him to those who were inheritors of his esoteric knowledge.

The *Umm al-kitāb* also discusses the relationship between the Prophet and 'Alī, the legislating aspect of revelation and its esoteric aspect, and delves into the technical Ismaili terminology of the silent (*ṣāmit*) and the enunciator (*nāṭiq*). This whole section points to the sharp delineation made by Ismaili thought between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of religion and the association of philosophy as *ḥikmah* with the esoteric dimension. It is in light of this esoteric view of philosophy that the text deals with the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm,

astrological symbolism, and the explanation of sacred history based on the number 7, which is central to the Ismaili perspective to the extent that they have sometimes been referred to as the Seveners. These ideas reveal the early integration of certain elements of Hermeticism, Pythagoreanism, and other strands of esoteric ideas in the Graeco-Alexandrian world into the perspective of early Shi'ism in general and Ismailism in particular.

The selections from the *Umm al-kitāb* include also a section dealing with the esoteric significance of events and realities of Islamic sacred history, specifically the seven prophets and major spiritual figures of this cycle—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, the Prophet of Islam, and 'Alī—and what has been the most important event or object associated with them, namely, in consecutive order, the *bayt al-ma'mūr* (the heavenly prototype of the temple of Mecca), the Ark, the bird (mentioned in the Qur'ān in association with Abraham), Mount Sinai, the birth of Jesus, and the Dhu'l-fiqār (the two-pronged sword of 'Alī). All of these realities of Islamic sacred history are treated from the point of view of their esoteric meaning. The *Umm al-kitāb* also analyses chapters of the Qur'ān according to early Ismaili cosmology, identifying various chapters with stages in the cycle of prophecy. The same symbolic approach is used in the study of the tenets of the Shari'ah. It is of particular interest to note how the five daily prayers are shown to be correlated with both the external senses of man and his inner constitution. This type of study was to be pursued by many later Sufis and philosophers, and we find extensive studies in works concerned with 'secrets of worship' (*asrār al-'ibādāt*) in later centuries by such figures as Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī and Ḥājī Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī, both of whom will be treated in the last volume of this anthology.

There is a body of writings in Arabic attributed to Jābir ibn Ḥayyān al-Tūsī al-Ṣūfi, which has caused a great deal of debate among scholars in both East and West. Some Western scholars have gone so far as to deny that there ever was such a figure as Jābir, while most Muslim scholars accept the traditional account that such a figure actually did exist and that he was a disciple of the sixth Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Most likely the latter view is correct and many of the treatises attributed to him are by him, while many other titles within the vast *Jābirean Corpus* were written by later authors of mostly Ismaili background inspired by him. In any case, the body of works associated with Jābir, who hailed from Khurāsān, forms an important chapter in Islamic intellectual history in general and that of Persia in particular.

Jābir is the founder of Islamic alchemy and its most famous practitioner, while he also exercised vast influence in the West where he was known as Geber and where, because of his authority, some Latin works were written and attributed to him. The *Jābirean Corpus* deals naturally to a great extent with Hermetic philosophy. But it also deals with many other subjects, including the philosophy of science in general and the philosophy of language. The vastly diverse domains that form the subject

matter of the *Corpus* are united by the central concept of the balance (*al-mīzān*), which Jābir applies in both a quantitative and a qualitative manner to nearly every realm of existence and its study ranging from alchemy to the science of the soul, which constitutes its inner dimension, to the study of language. He also establishes correspondences between these and other realms in the manner that one finds in Hermetic philosophy in both East and West.

The selection from the writings of Jābir consists of the *Kitāb al-aḥjār* (The Book of Stones), where he seeks to clarify the views of Balinās (Apollonius of Tyana) on the balance, complementing his own studies on the subject in the series of works he wrote under the title *Books of Balances*. The text reveals Jābir's mastery of the sciences of language (concerning Arabic) as well as alchemy and his acceptance of the traditional idea, later expounded by other Persian thinkers, that the name of a thing is related to that thing's nature and reality. For most authors this view involves the sacred language of Arabic and not just any language, and within the Islamic world this view is ultimately based on the Qur'ānic verse that God taught Adam the names of all things by virtue of which he and his progeny were able to gain knowledge of them. In this perspective the name of a thing is not simply a man-made word having nothing to do with the nature of that thing. Rather, each letter of that name corresponds to a nature or quality and also to numerical symbols. Through the balance, these numbers and qualities determine the outward and inward nature of a thing, as the term *nature* is understood in ordinary language and not in its alchemical connotation.

Hermeticism and the alchemical philosophy of nature, the philosophy of language in its relation to the study of the natural world, the idea of correspondences between various orders of reality, and many other ideas to be found in the *Jābirean Corpus* are all of great significance for the history of science as well as philosophy. One cannot in fact understand the depth and breadth of philosophy in Persia and the many different issues with which it was concerned without at least some sampling of the vast *Jābirean Corpus* whose origin and many of whose works certainly go back to the historical figure of Jābir, at once a Sufi, a man from the famous Khurāsānī city of Ṭūs, and a disciple of the sixth Shi'i Imam after whom the Twelve-Imam Shi'i Law (the Ja'farī) that has dominated Persia since the tenth/sixteenth century is named.

With Abū Ya'qūb Sijistānī we reach perhaps the earliest systematic expositor of Ismaili philosophy. The Persian text of his *Kashf al-mahjūb* (Unveiling of the Hidden) included in this volume is based on an earlier fourth/tenth century text in Arabic that has been lost, but the survival of this early Persian translation attests to the role played by Persian in the whole tradition of Ismaili philosophy. The work is composed of seven treatises on divine knowledge, making use of the central sacred number of Ismailism. In the first discourse, Sijistānī deals with Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) in the language of the radical apophatic theology that characterizes this

phase of Ismaili thought. He also deals with the angelic ranks and degrees of creation so central to Ismaili cosmogony and cosmology. Sijistānī emphasizes also the seven cycles of prophecy, each cycle beginning with a prophet and ending with an imam, who becomes enunciator (*nāṭiq*) of the next cycle.

In the selections from Sijistānī's other major work, *Kitāb al-yanābī'* (The Book of Wellsprings) the discussion of *tawḥīd* continues, but most of the material is devoted to the intellect (*'aql*)—its rapport with the Divine Origin (*Mubdī'*) on the one hand and with the soul (*nafs*) and the natural world on the other. A definition is given of the intellect and its primacy emphasized. The knowledge acquired by *'aql* is discussed in relation to divine assistance (*ta'yīd*) and as inspired by divine guidance (*mu'ayyid*). These are specifically Ismaili terms that help to define the Ismaili understanding of *'aql*, which plays such a pivotal role in Ismaili philosophy as well as theology.

Many Ismaili philosophers were knowledgeable in the doctrines of other religions and showed keen interest in comprehending their meaning, which according to their perspective they usually sought on the esoteric level. The section on Sijistānī terminates with a text that belongs to the field now often called comparative religion. Therein Sijistānī discusses the symbolism of the cross and why it is venerated by Christians. He also explains why its veneration for them is like the veneration of the *shahādah* for Muslims. Here again early Shi'i thought in general, and Ismailism in particular, displays interest in issues later treated in Sufism, often in similar or parallel fashion. The Sufi doctrine of the symbolism of the cross has become well known in the West thanks to the classical work of René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, which deals in a much more extensive and thorough manner with a subject for which concern is nevertheless present in this early work of Sijistānī written a millennium earlier.

Abū Ḥātim Rāzī's *A'lām al-nubuwwah* (Science of Prophecy) is not only a major text of Ismaili thought but also an important text of Islamic philosophy concerned with what is today called the philosophy of religion. Like Sijistānī, Rāzī was deeply interested in the universal reality of religion and revelation within as well as across the religious frontiers of Islam, and he dealt with many issues that lie at the heart of the current discussion in the West on religious diversity, or what many now call religious pluralism. This seminal work also deals, however, with another subject of great importance to Islamic thinkers—namely, the origin of the sciences. Rāzī considers the sciences including astronomy and pharmacology, especially knowledge of the medical properties of herbs, to have been originally revealed knowledge. Rāzī writes that in teaching Adam the names of all things, as asserted in the Qur'ān, God also taught him the medicinal properties of plants. Rāzī in fact presents a kind of sacred history of science that was shared by many other Muslim thinkers and is also found in traditions such as Hinduism, as well as among certain Christian and Jewish authors. His views are, needless to say,

of much importance for the Islamic understanding of the sciences of nature themselves.

With Ḥamid al-Dīn Kirmānī, we reach the most systematic treatment of early Ismaili philosophy. Kirmānī, whose systematic treatment of that philosophy caused him to be called by some later authorities the Ismaili Ibn Sīnā, wrote a number of works, among which *Rāḥat al-‘aql* (Repose of the Intellect) stands out as the best known and most influential. In pages chosen for this anthology from this work, arguments for the existence of God, the nature of the intellect, the system of emanation reaching down to the world of nature, and other major philosophical issues developed in Ismaili philosophy are treated in a logical and systematic fashion that bears comparison with the Peripatetic theses of masters such as Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. In a comparison and contrasting of Ismaili and *mashshā’ī* philosophies, the *Rāḥat al-‘aql* serves as a particularly valuable text that reveals the richness and diversity of philosophical thought in Persia in the early Islamic period.

The selections from the works of Kirmānī include also his treatise *al-Risālat al-durriyyah* rendered by its translator as *The Brilliant Treatise* while it literally means *The Pearly Treatise*. In this concise work, Kirmānī deals with the question of unity and the different meanings that technical Arabic terms such as *wāḥid*, *aḥad*, *fard* as well as *muwaḥḥid* and *muwaḥḥad* have in the context of Ismaili philosophy and theology. It is well known that Ismaili thought considers the Divine Reality, the Originator (*al-Mubdi’*), to stand even above Being. Kirmānī follows the same doctrine in this treatise in considering God as the Originator to stand even above *tawḥīd*, since He is the Originator of both *wāḥid* and *aḥad*, Names of God associated with unity. Kirmānī also deals briefly with numerical symbolism in relation to his discussion of the relation between the unifier and the unified and the manifestation of unity in the domain of contingency. This treatise represents a summary of Kirmānī’s views on the central subject of Islamic thought and was written in his later life after his major philosophical masterpiece *Rāḥat al-‘aql* to which he refers in this text.

The *Rasā’il* (Epistles or Treatises) of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, the enigmatic Brethren of Purity who lived in Iraq in the fourth/tenth century in the Shi’i milieu of Baṣra and perhaps Baghdad, are not the product of a single figure, Arab or Persian, but a group nurtured in a climate dominated by both Arab and Persian elements. Even their Ismaili affiliation has been doubted by some scholars in favour of a more general Shi’i character. They were, however, claimed later specifically by the Ismailis; the treatise entitled *Risālat al-jāmi’ah* (The Treatise of Summation), which summarizes the teachings of the *Rasā’il*, and the even more esoteric *Jāmi’at al-jāmi’ah* (The Summation of the Summation) especially are not only Ismaili texts but are also used as esoteric works taught only to those who have reached the higher levels in the hierarchy of Ismaili initiation. They were not even available to the general public until fairly recently. The *Rasā’il*, therefore, belong to any general treatment

of Ismaili philosophy as it developed in Persia, although their influence went far beyond the Ismaili, or even the general Shi'i world, and there were few major Shi'i or Sunni figures of later Islamic thought, concerned with the esoteric dimension of Islam, who were not familiar with it, including such colossal figures as Ghazzālī, Ibn 'Arabī, and Mullā Ṣadrā.

What is of particular interest in the *Rasā'il* is not only their assertion of the esoteric nature of true philosophy, grades of initiation, degrees of knowledge and the wedding between philosophy and spiritual realization combined with moral rectitude – so characteristic of Ismaili philosophy in general – but their clear exposition of Islamic Pythagoreanism and Hermeticism. No single treatise in Islamic philosophy is in fact more impregnated with Pythagorean ideas integrated into the Islamic perspective as are the *Rasā'il*. This is to be seen especially in the treatise on arithmetic, which is without doubt one of the major sources for understanding the Islamic philosophy of mathematics, but also in the treatises on music, geometry, astronomy—in fact, practically throughout the fifty-one treatises that constitute the *Rasā'il*. Herein is to be found an exposition in depth of the *quadrivium* and the *trivium* as these disciplines were understood in the medieval West and going back to Greek philosophy and the *artes liberales* of Cicero.

The selections chosen from the *Rasā'il* deal not only with this Pythagorean philosophy but also with the Hermetic idea of the relation between the microcosm and macrocosm, which Muslims trace back to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Extensive correspondences are described by the Ikhwān between the structure of the human state and the structures of the heavens and the earth; detailed resemblances are shown between man and the three kingdoms of minerals, plants, and animals, which are synthesized in man's being.

The selections from the *Rasā'il* conclude with a section on the debate between man and the animals, who argue about their respective rights before the king of the *jinn*. This writing by the Ikhwān is one of the most pertinent in the annals of Islamic philosophy as far as the current environmental crisis is concerned. At a time when man is usurping the rights of other creatures and destroying the natural environment on the assumption of his absolute rights over creation, the philosophical arguments provided by the Ikhwān concerning the rights of animals are of incredible timeliness and display an 'ecological philosophy' that is of the greatest significance for the formulation of an Islamic philosophy of the environment and a response to the current environmental crisis.

Of all the Ismaili figures presented in this volume, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn Shīrāzī is in a sense the least philosophical. Yet, as one of the greatest figures of Fatimid Ismailism, his expositions of the tenets of Ismaili teachings are both authoritative and revealing as far as the philosophical dimensions of Ismaili theological doctrines are concerned. Shīrāzī deals, in the selections from his *Jāmi'at al-ḥaqā'iq* (The Sum of Truths), first of all with *ta'wīl*, which means literally taking something back to its

source, based on the metaphysical principle that all that is manifested or revealed has an inward (*bāṭin*) and an outward (*zāhir*) aspect and issues from the inward to the outward. *Ta'wīl* is therefore a casting aside of the veil of outwardness or *kashf al-mahjūb*, a term used by both Sufis and Shi'is to denote not arbitrary rejection of the outward form, but of reaching the inward through the outward with the aid of a science, that comes from the dimension of inwardness associated with the Imam in Shi'ism. *Ta'wīl* can be said to be hermeneutic interpretation if the term hermeneutics is understood in its original sense as dealing with the inner mystery of things which was the function of Hermes to reveal or unveil according to Hermeticism.

With this understanding in mind, Shīrāzī, then, deals with the 'initiatic power' (*walāyah/wilāyah*) associated in the Islamic revelation with 'Alī and the necessity of the Imam, who is the inheritor of the power of *walāyah/wilāyah*, and the guide for those who aspire to carry out *ta'wīl* with respect to both revelation in the sense of sacred scripture and that primordial revelation which is the cosmos. As an example, Shīrāzī applies the method of *ta'wīl* to the understanding of the famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, 'I am the city of knowledge and 'Alī is its gate', in which the 'gate' itself is identified as the science of *ta'wīl*. He also follows the teachings of the sixth Shi'i Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, in providing a profound metaphysical interpretation of another well-known *ḥadīth*, 'he who knows himself knows his Lord', in which Shīrāzī has recourse to specifically Ismaili ideas and terms such as *ḥadd* (pl. *ḥudūd*) or limit(s), which is associated by Ismailism with the hierarchy of being and which he calls 'the parents of the soul'. It needs hardly to be emphasized how significant these ideas are for the understanding of Ismaili philosophy and theosophy and also how fecund they are philosophically speaking even independent of the Ismaili matrix within which they were cultivated.

With Nāṣir-i Khusraw we reach in many ways the peak of Ismaili philosophy. Some Persian scholars have even gone so far as to consider him the most challenging of Persian philosophers. The selection presented in this volume deals most of all with the relation between religion and philosophy, or faith and reason, which has been of concern to all Islamic philosophers. Like other Ismaili philosophers, Nāṣir-i Khusraw identifies philosophy with the inner dimension of religion and seeks to harmonize what he calls the *ḥikmatayn* or two philosophies/wisdoms (that is, philosophy and wisdom derived from the intellect and from revelation), this harmonization being the basic theme of his most important work, the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (The Sum of the Two Wisdoms). To this end he elaborates on the correspondences between man and the cosmos, cycles of prophecy, and the history and grades of Ismaili initiation. He speaks of the seven angelic lights and the seven prophets, and provides a philosophical explanation of such realities as angels, *parīs* (fairies), and devils—all of whom possess a specifically religious significance and play a major role in the religious cosmos. Through these explanations one gains

a glimpse of a rhapsodic Ismaili vision of reality dominated by the number 7, so central to Ismaili philosophy and theology and mentioned in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* in relation to the structure of both the heavens and the earth.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw also delves deeply into the meaning and significance of the intellect (*'aql*) and its relation to knowledge. He accentuates the general Shi'i emphasis on the significance of the intellect, an emphasis central to an understanding of why—as already mentioned in general, although not necessarily always—Shi'i theology and jurisprudence were more favourable to the intellectual sciences, of which philosophy is the heart, than were the majority of Sunni theologians and jurists and why an antiphilosophical *kalām* such as that of the Ash'arites did not have its equivalence in Shi'i theology despite the deep interaction between Sunni and Shi'i theologies

The section on Nāṣir-i Khusraw includes a discussion of cosmology drawn from his *Gushāyish wa rahāyish* (literally 'Opening and Liberation' but also translated as 'Knowledge and Liberation'), which contains a most penetrating example of early Ismaili thought concerned with the complicated questions of the genesis of the world, its newness or eternity, and similar issues that have been of concern to philosophers and theologians in Persia over the ages. Being the great moralist and philosophical poet that he was, Nāṣir-i Khusraw could not be included in this volume without a sample of his poetry. A few philosophical poems are therefore presented to bring to an end the selection of his writings.

Selections from the Ismaili writings of Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī who was not only an expositor of Ismaili teachings, but also a leading Peripatetic (*mashshā'i*) philosopher as well as the founder of Twelve-Imam Shi'i rational theology, brings this volume to a close. This section begins with a segment of Ṭūsī's *Sayr wa sulūk* (literally 'Journeying and Spiritual Wayfaring' but also translated as 'Contemplation and Action'), which has an autobiographical element within it although also dealing with philosophical issues. The title of the work, literally 'spiritual wayfaring', is associated especially with Sufism. But in it Ṭūsī deals more with his intellectual journey rather than with personal spiritual matters. Because he is one of the greatest intellectual figures in Persian history, at once supreme philosopher, theologian, and scientist, his own account of his intellectual journey is of great interest for the understanding of the tradition of Islamic philosophy in Persia in general.

In the *Sayr wa sulūk* Ṭūsī explains his early attraction, after studying *Uṣūl* or the principles of religion and the Sacred Law, to the intellectual sciences and his study of theology and philosophy. But in turning to the study of the supreme object of metaphysics, that is the Divine Reality, Ṭūsī gives an account of how he realized that ordinary philosophy was not enough and that there was the necessity of a 'truthful instructor' and 'instruction' (*ta'līm*) from an infallible teacher who had received knowledge of God from God Himself. Herein lies the specifically Ismaili nature of this treatise for this idea of receiving instruction (*ta'līm*) from the infallible Imam

was so characteristic of the Ismailis that they came to be known in Islamic society at large also as ‘those who receive instruction’ (*ta’līmiyān*). In discussing the necessity of instruction in the particular sense given to it by Ismaili doctrines, Ṭūsī also discusses the nature of the Divine Intellect in its relation to the human intellect and the whole act of intellection.

As for selections of Ṭūsī drawn from his *Taṣawwurāt* (Notions), they begin with the definition of the soul (*naḥs*) in its various levels of reality and distinct from the intellect. Ṭūsī emphasizes the supreme importance of knowledge (*‘ilm*), which is the ultimate goal of the soul and whose realization marks the soul’s perfection. He also discusses the levels of intelligence within human beings, going back to Ibn Sīnā’s enumeration of the four stages of the intellect. Ṭūsī then turns to the human body and why the soul becomes attached to it. In the manner of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Ṭūsī compares the body to a city while he also considers the stages of the growth of the body from its inception in the womb until its birth, a process governed at each stage by one of the planets.

In a section of particular interest for understanding the continuities and discontinuities of the philosophical tradition of Persia, Ṭūsī discusses the nature of good and evil and points out that they are not ontologically equivalent. He explicitly rejects the usual understanding of Zoroastrian dualism in which Yazdān and Ahrīman, to use Ṭūsī’s language, are opposite forces of good and evil that seem to possess the same ontological status. Throughout its long history, Persian thought has been concerned with the question of good and evil, but with the advent of Islam, which emphasizes unity above all else, the metaphysical background of the ethical discussion changed and even those such as Suhrawardī who supported the wisdom of the ancient Persian philosophers (*ḥukamā-yi furs*) asserted that these sages were unitarians and did not believe in dualism and the ontological equivalence of good and evil.

Ṭūsī then turns to *ta’wīl*, in the time-honoured sense of the term already discussed, to deal with the thorny issue of the newness or eternity of the world. He asserts that time is cyclic and in each cycle there is a new world that did not exist before. Therefore, *this* world is not eternal but new (*ḥādīth*). Yet, there is always *a* world but not *this* world that did not exist in the last cycle and will cease to exist in the next cycle. As there is always *a* world, there is also always *a* humanity but not the humanity of this cycle. In each world man must be present because he is the final purpose of the world. Ṭūsī also deals in greater detail with the seven smaller cycles of cosmic history, each cycle consisting of seven thousand years after which—that is, after forty-nine thousand years—the Great Resurrection takes place and the whole of present creation reaches the end of its cycle.

The subjects and themes treated by the major Ismaili philosophers of Persia in this volume constitute the heart of Ismaili philosophy as such and have been treasured by later Ismaili thinkers of not only Persia itself but also of the Yemen,

India, Syria, and other lands where much of the later Ismaili writings saw the light of day. But it must be remembered that this Ismaili philosophical tradition is not to be identified solely with the Ismaili branch of Shi'ism. Rather, it belongs to the integral tradition of Islamic philosophy as well as Shi'i thought in general. Like Sufism, Ismailism and Twelve-Imam Shi'ism drew their inspiration, knowledge—in fact their very existence—mostly from the esoteric dimension of the Islamic tradition and their philosophy bears the imprint of that source. That is why Ismailism shared certain ideas with Sufism and after the Mongol invasion it went underground in Persia to appear in many places as a form of Sufism. In this context it is noteworthy that one of the greatest masterpieces of Persian Sufi poetry, the *Gulshan-i rāz* (The Secret Garden of Divine Mysteries) of Maḥmūd Shabistari had not only later Sufi commentators but also Ismaili ones.

Ismaili philosophy also shares much with later Islamic philosophy as it developed in Persia in the Twelve-Imam Shi'i milieu created by the Safavids. It is true that it was most of all Mullā Ṣadrā who, in the eleventh/seventeenth century, drew the full implications of the philosophical saying of the Shi'i Imams, as one observes in his commentary upon Kulaynī's *Uṣūl al-kāfi* (The Sufficient Principles). But long before Mullā Ṣadrā, the early Ismaili philosophers drew to a large extent from the teachings of the Shi'i Imams whom, up to and including the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, they shared with the Twelve-Imam Shi'a. That is why they must be considered as being among the predecessors of Mullā Ṣadrā from the point of view of the exposition of the philosophical dimension of the esoteric teachings of the Imams. It should be added that Mullā Ṣadrā was in fact familiar with some of their writings. In any case, Ismaili philosophy is an important manifestation of philosophical thought in Persia related in profound ways to Sufism on the one hand and the later flowering of philosophy in the Shi'i Persia of the Safavid period on the other. The Ismaili philosophical tradition also created some of the most important philosophical works in the Persian language, and left an indelible mark upon the development of Persian as a vehicle for philosophical discourse, a vehicle that was to be used continuously by Persian philosophers through the centuries continuing in fact up to today.

Ismaili philosophy provides teachings of great depth about time and eternity, cosmic cycles, the nature of the *anthropōs*, a metaphysics based not on Being but the Absolute as Beyond-Being whose first manifestation is Being, a cosmology related to the hierarchy of spiritual beings, the relation between religion in its formal aspect and philosophy or reason and revelation and many other basic philosophical themes. It is certainly one of the major schools of Islamic philosophy associated in its early centuries nearly completely with Persia and also to a large extent with the Persian language. Although Ismailism went underground in Persia after the Mongol Invasion, its influence in later schools of philosophy, theology and even certain strands of Sufism is evident while the major philosophical

works written by such figures as Abū Ḥātim Rāzī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw, not to mention the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' written by both Arabs and Persians, are among outstanding monuments of the long tradition of philosophy in Persia.

S. H. Nasr

Umm al-kitāb

Umm al-kitāb is a major work of the early Shi'i Imami tradition of Central Asia. It was originally written in Arabic in the second half of the second/eighth century by a Shi'i *ghulāt* sect called al-Mukhammisah (the Pentadists), and then rendered into an eccentric Persian style and preserved by the Nizārī Ismailis of Central Asia. Its origin is evident not only in the doctrinal and cosmological features of the treatise but also because of such nuances as its attribution of a major role in the rise of Islam to Salmān al-Fārisī, whose gnostic name here is al-Salsāl and who is regarded as a gate through whom one could gain access to Muḥammadan Light.

The treatise contains a discourse of the fifth Shi'i Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732), who appears here as a five-year-old child, the situation strongly resembling certain apocryphal Gospels relating to Jesus. Imam al-Bāqir responds in this treatise to thirty questions raised by a group of disciples among whom Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, Ja'far al-Ju'fi, Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, Abu'l-Khālid al-Kabilī, and Muḥammad ibn al-Mufaḍḍal can be named.

Umm al-kitāb offers an esoteric hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the nature of man and his place in the universe, as well as of questions concerning cosmology, epistemology, and Islamic worship within a Qur'ānic context. The analysis and interpretations offered in this treatise seem to be a synthesis of many different pre-Islamic religious traditions and schools of thought, such as Manichaeism, Buddhism and Valentinian Gnosticism, with Shi'i teachings.

The central idea in the work is the psychological and philosophical interpretation of cosmological symbols, and the faithful are asked to engage themselves in acts of inner purification and transformation. Throughout the work, the 'theology of light' pervades every doctrine. An extraordinary number of colours are displayed to symbolize different theurgies and the corresponding levels of consciousness that man must realize within himself.

This text, which remains part of the corpus of the Central Asian Ismaili literature to this day, is held in high esteem particularly by the Nizārī Ismaili communities

living in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and northern areas of Pakistan and more generally in the Pamir range. The selection deals primarily with the subject of man and the esoteric and philosophical significance of the Qur'ān and the symbolic significance of worship in Islam.

M. Aminrazavi

THE MOTHER OF BOOKS

Umm al-kitāb

Translated for this volume by Latimah Parvin Peerwani from *Umm al-kitāb*, ed. W. Ivanow, in *Der Islam*, 23 (1936), pp. 1–32.

[4] This book is called the ‘Mother of Books’ (*Umm al-kitāb*), because it is the capital (*sarmāyah*) of all the books. Every kind of knowledge which exists in this world is extracted from this book. This book is called the ‘Mother of the Books’ (*Umm al-kitāb*), [5] that means whoever reads this book it is such that once and for all he becomes independent of every science. This book is called the ‘Spirit of the Books’ (*rūḥ al-kitāb*), for it is the spirit of all the books, and essence (*maʿnī*) of all the books. There is insight [about everything] in this book. It is called the ‘Light of the Books’ (*nūr al-kitāb*), because the [explication of] the light of the heavens and the earth is given in it. It is called the ‘All-embracing doctrines’ (*wāsiʿ al-maqālāt*), because it reveals the seven divine doctrines. [6] It is called the ‘Seven Disputes’ (*sabʿ al-mujādalāt*), because the seven disputes between Iblis and Adam are given in it. It is called the ‘Exalter of Degrees’ (*rafiʿ al-darajāt*) [Qurʾān, 40:15], because the degree and the essence of the believers and the infidels and those spirits are known by this book. It is called the ‘Bearer of good tidings’ (*bashīr al-mubāsharāt*), because it is the herald of good tidings to the believers who attain liberation and salvation by [following] this book. It is called the ‘Ten Articles’ (*ʿashr al-maqālāt*), because the attribute of ten cosmic palaces and the mode of ten spirits is known through this book. It is called the ‘Seven Manifestations’ (*sabʿ al-ẓuhūrāt*), because the attribute of seven physical and spiritual cycles in its real sense is given in this book. It is called the ‘Book of Reward’ (*Kitāb al-mujāzāt*), because the reward and punishment for the believers and infidels of the microcosm and macrocosm are described in it. It is called the ‘Book of Mothers’ (*Kitāb al-ummahāt*), because it is the root and essence of Tawrāt, Injīl, Zabūr, Furqān [Qurʾān], and [the essence of] every scripture which exists in the world [8] is given in this book.

This book was composed in the city of Mecca in the locality of Quraysh b. Hāshim, in the house of ʿAbd al-Manāf, and was found in the treasury of Bāqir al-Salām. Jaʿfar [al-] Juʿfī¹ brought it to Kūfa. In the time of Hārūn [al-Rashīd], ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm brought it to Iraq. After his death it was handed over to the believers and [his] apostles as a trust to be safeguarded from the undeserving. The believers, the unitarians (*muwaḥḥidān*) and [9] the chiefs have not exposed

1. Jābir (or) Jaʿfar al-Juʿfī, (d.128/746), known as one of the noteworthy *ghulāt* in the circle of the sixth Shiʿi Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. Cf. W. Madelung, ‘Djābir al-Djuʿfī’, *Et2*, Supplement, pp. 232–233.

it to any dissident person, nor have they spoken about it to any creature. That is because not every believer can comprehend this knowledge, for this is that category of knowledge which transcends our comprehension and imagination and we are not receptive to it except he who is a unified believer, or a dispatched prophet or a cherub. That is why their hearts are full of the light of divine unity. [Apart from them] no other believer has any capacity to stomach this knowledge of the realm of Mysteries. [If he endeavours in it] he only wastes his life and thereby suffers the loss of life. [10]

The attribute of the unity of the Creator, glorified be His majesty, is known through this book. Also, the realities of God's creation from behind the highest veil, the veil of the believer, the attribute of the Throne, the Pedestal, the Tablet, the Pen, the veils of the spirits of believers, unbelievers and the dissidents and 'how' and 'why' [they are so] are known through this book. Moreover, [the account of] existence, non-existence, the knowledge of the Exalted Lord, glorified be His majesty, five angels in the seven divine and human cycles is known [11] through this book. Also, the seven debates between Iblīs and Adam and the total creation whether it is possible or impossible to comprehend and imagine, has been revealed in this book from the discourses of Bāqir, may peace be upon us from him, for 'He it is Who has revealed unto thee the Book wherein are clear signs—they are the *Umm al-kitāb*, and others are *mutashābihāt*' [Qur'an, 3:7]. This book is named the *Umm al-kitāb* of Bāqir, and is the *Umm al-kitāb* of Bāqir al-'Ilm, may peace be upon us from him. [12]

When Bāqir was born and came into existence, he said to [his mother] Āminah, the 'mother of all believers', 'The *āyāt* (signs) which are clear are the *Umm al-kitāb*' [Qur'an, 3:7]. When he was sent to school, the divine power (*farrah-i izzādī*) of wisdom and inspirational knowledge (*'ilm-i ta'yīdī*)¹ manifested through him which no teacher knew. Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī narrates that when Bāqir al-'Ilm, may peace be upon us from him, was only a child of five he was sent for education to 'Abd Allāh Ṣabbāḥ. 'Abd Allāh, according [13] to the custom of the teachers, gave him a clean silver tablet on which twenty-nine letters of the alphabet were written. He said to him. 'Recite *alif* [the first letter of the Arabic alphabet]'. Bāqir said, '*Alif*'. Then 'Abd Allāh said 'recite *bā*' [the second letter of the Arabic alphabet]'. Bāqir said, 'Until you explain to me the meaning of *alif* I will not recite *bā*'. 'Abd Allāh said, 'O the delight of the eyes of believers, O Bāqir, recite *alif*'. Then he said, '*Alif* is for Allāh, 'there is no deity save Him the Ever-living the Self-subsistent' [Qur'an, 2:255]'. [Bāqir] said O 'Abd Allāh, '*Alif* [or A in the word] 'Allāh' stands for God and [the letter] *lām* stands for Muḥammad. *Alif* signifies the spirit of Muḥammad.

1. The term *ta'yīd* is a verbal noun derived from the verb *ayyada*. The notion of *ta'yīd* conveys the idea of assistance and divine inspiration which is a source of supernatural wisdom. This notion is derived from the two verses of the Qur'an (2:87 and 253) in which God says about Jesus, 'We inspired him (*ayyadnāhu*) with the Holy Spirit'.

It consists of three letters and a [diacritical] point, [14] which are *alif*, *lām*, *fā'* and the *nuqṭah* [the point]. *Alif* stands for Muḥammad, *lām* for 'Alī [ibn Abī Ṭālib], *fā'* for Fāṭimah, and *nuqṭah* for Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. [The two names] Ḥasan and Ḥusayn end with *nuqṭah* so does *alif*.

'Abd Allāh was astonished to hear [this explanation] and said, 'O the light of the eyes of believers, this [knowledge] is strange. What thou art saying regarding the description and a characteristic of *alif* is not from any book written by a man.' Bāqir replied, 'That is how the book of us, the *ahl al-bayt* [the family of the Prophet], has been in every cycle and period. O 'Abd Allāh, *alif* [corresponds to] the place of the throne and seat of God, the Mighty and Majestic. [15] It is called the Vital Rational Spirit (*rūḥ al-ḥayāt-i nāṭiqah*) which [dwells] in the brain of the believers. *Lām* corresponds to the Luminous Spirit (*rūḥ-i rawshani*), *fā'* to the Spirit of Invincibility (*rūḥ al-jabarūt*), and *nuqṭah* to the Reflective Spirit (*rūḥ al-fikr*). Above the non-spherical *alif* there is a spirit which is the veil of 'Alī, may peace be upon us from him. *Alif* also corresponds to the spirit of 'Alī, *lām* to the radiance of 'Alī, *fā'* to the reflection of the spirit of revelation of 'Alī, and *nuqṭah* to the luminous speech of 'Alī which encompasses the thirty letters [of the alphabet].

'Abd Allāh Ṣabbāḥ was greatly astonished [to hear such an explanation] so he said, 'O son of the Messenger of God, by God, indeed by God the most exalted, this is the divine guidance. I have never heard such knowledge from any master before. How strange that thou hast been sent to learn from me! How strange that thou who hast never been sent to any teacher before, nor hast read a book nor hast seen any learned man [to speak of such astonishing knowledge]! O the fruit of the heart of the believers, what kind of situation is this. For, it is not lawful for anyone to teach a science to people when he himself is ignorant of it. I wanted to teach thee *alif*; I never knew that I would end up learning from thee. O the light of the eyes of Muḥammad and 'Alī, complete [thy] favour by giving me the explanation of [the letters] *bā'* and *tā'*. May [God's] mercy be upon thy parents'. [17]

Bāqir replied, 'O my learned teacher, *bā'* is the threshold of *alif*. *Alif* [corresponds] to Muḥammad, and *bā'* to 'Alī. The [diacritical] point under *bā'* corresponds to the speech of 'Alī. *Alif* [is like] the Luminous Spirit, and *bā'* the Vital Spirit of the brain, whereas the diacritical point is like the speech (*nuṭq*). O my learned teacher, tell me what is the first letter of the alphabet?' 'Abd Allāh replied, '*Alif*. Bāqir said, 'By what reasoning?' 'Abd Allāh replied, 'O the light of the eyes of the believers, I do not know more than this'. Then Bāqir said, 'O 'Abd Allāh, all these learned people [18] are really ignorant teachers. They really do not know whether *alif* is the first [letter of the alphabet] or *bā'*. The first letter of the alphabet is *bā'*, and then comes *alif*. *Bā'* stands for 'Alī, and *alif* stands for Muḥammad. Outwardly Muḥammad is prior [to 'Alī] and 'Alī is the threshold (*bāb*) of Muḥammad. [Just as] in order to enter the house one has to go through the gate, [similarly] in order to reach Muḥammad [one has to go] through 'Alī. Both Muḥammad and 'Alī are

one [reality, as] *alif* and *bā'* are one [reality]. The [diacritical] point of *alif* is hidden, [similarly] the speech of Muḥammad is [in the] veiled [form]. But the [diacritical] point of *bā'* is manifest [like] the speech of 'Alī which is manifest by [19] the light of knowledge. These infidels who are from the nest of Ahrīman know the way (*sharī'ah*) of Muḥammad, and they protect it, but as for the way (*sharī'ah*) of 'Alī, they have no knowledge about it. For Muḥammad is [like] this world and 'Alī the next world. The truth of this matter is affirmed by the saying of Him the Exalted, 'They know the outward significance of the life of this world, but of the next world they are heedless' [Qur'an, 30:7].

[Bāqir continued, and said,] 'O 'Abd Allāh, is the first letter of the alphabet the point or *bā'*?' 'Abd Allāh replied, 'O the light of the eyes of Muḥammad I do not know unless I hear from you.' Bāqir said, 'the first letter of the [Arabic, or Persian] alphabets [20] is the 'point'. The point [corresponds] to the speech of the believers who are attributed with speech. *Bā'* corresponds to the Spirit which [dwells] between the two eyebrows, and *alif* [corresponds to] the physical body. So [the alphabets] begin by the point, followed by *bā'* and then *alif*. O 'Abd Allāh, you are my learned teacher, [tell me] out of the two which one is bigger *alif* or camel.' 'Abd Allāh replied, [21] 'I know neither the *alif* nor the camel unless I hear from you.' Bāqir said, 'The *alif* [is bigger.] It is the Luminous Spirit (*rūḥ-i rawshanā'ī*). The love and brotherhood amongst the believers are due to it. The camel is [also] a spirit. In spirituality its name is 'rational soul' (*naḥs-i nāṭiqah*). Then 'Abd Allāh said, 'O the fruit of the heart of the believers, is it true, what they say, that *alif* is bigger [than the camel] because in writing it is possible to stretch *alif* as much as one could?' Bāqir replied, '*Alif* [corresponds to] the Spirit [whose seat is] the brain. It is called the Spirit of Faith (*rūḥ-i imān*) and is above the Vital Conscious Spirit (*rūḥ al-ḥayāt-i nāṭiqah*). It testifies to eight other Spirits which are above it and are interconnected within the Spirit of Faith which englobes [everything] from the earth to the heaven. The first one is the Spirit of Preservation (*rūḥ-i ḥifẓ*) of the Guarded Tablet of the Exalted King. It is concealed within the Spirit of Faith. [22] The next one is the Spirit of Reflection (*rūḥ-i fikr*) of the Pen of the [Guarded] Tablet. It is concealed within the Spirit of Preservation. Then comes the Spirit of Invincibility (*rūḥ-i jabarūt*), which is concealed within the Spirit of Reflection. The next one is the Spirit of Knowledge (*rūḥ al-'ilm*) which is concealed within the Spirit of Invincibility. Then there is the Spirit of Intellect (*rūḥ al-'aql*) which is concealed within the Spirit of Knowledge. Then there is the Sacred Spirit (*rūḥ-i quddūs*) which is concealed within the Spirit of Intellect. The next one is the Supreme Spirit (*rūḥ al-akbar*) which is the Universal Spirit (*rūḥ-i kullī*); it is hidden in the Sacred Spirit. Finally there is the Sublime Spirit (*rūḥ-i a'zam*) which is hidden in the Supreme Spirit. [23] O 'Abd Allāh, all of them are interconnected, hence it is said *alif* is bigger [than the camel].'

Question XII

Then Jābir said, ‘O [251] my Lord, what is the Qur’ān?’

Bāqir replied, ‘The Qur’ān is the Eloquent Spirit (*rūḥ-i nāṭiqah*), as the Exalted Sovereign said, ‘This is our Book which speaks to you the Truth’ [Qur’ān, 45:28]. It signifies that our Book is the true Word and Speech. In the macrocosm Salmān al-Qudrah is the chant of the Exalted Sovereign. [This chant] is his speech from the Spirit of Enunciation. Salmān is also the Last Day and the Great Day. ‘The Qur’ān is the Speech (*kalām*) of God which is uncreated, so whoever says it is created is an unbeliever in God, the Almighty. That is to say, this Salmān al-Qudrah¹ is [252] the Qur’ān and the chant of God. Whosoever does not testify to it is an unbeliever in God. O Jābir, the significance of this discourse is that the Qur’ān is the speech of God which is the uncreated Salmān. Likewise, the chant (*āwāz*) of the Exalted Sovereign is uncreated unlike the Dissident Spirits, so ‘whoever says it is created is an unbeliever in God the Sublime’. It signifies that these unbelievers have been manifested by the chant of ‘Azāzīl and have [therefore] become unbelievers in the Exalted Sovereign, both in the Macrocosm and in the Microcosm. When the Exalted Sovereign said, ‘He is the Lord of those who believe, and the disbelievers have no Lord’, [Qur’ān, 47:12] He indicated that, He was not the Lord [253] of the concupiscent soul, nor of the reprovéd anima.

‘The Eloquent Spirit also effuses benevolence, quietude and compassion upon the Pacified Spirit (*rūḥ-i muṭma’innah*). But it does not benefit the Captive Spirit (*rūḥ-i ḥabsī*), the Concupiscent Soul (*naḥs-i ḥissī*) and the dissident Adam; rather [it causes] their destruction. Muḥammad, to whom the Qur’ān was revealed, is the Pacified Spirit [which dwells] in this heart which is placed at the centre of the seven firmaments and twelve constellations.’

Then Jābir said, ‘O my Lord, do elucidate its meaning’. Bāqir replied, ‘This earth which is called the ‘heart’ [254] is placed amidst the four natures. The water is wetness, the air is sanguine, the fire is yellow bile and the earth is black bile. The sphere of the moon is the bone-marrow, the sphere of Venus is the fat, the sphere of the sun is the blood-vessels, the sphere of Mars is the blood, the sphere of Jupiter is the flesh, the sphere of Saturn is the skin, and the Outermost Sphere is the Vital Rational Spirit (*rūḥ al-ḥayāt-i nāṭiqah*) which glorifies Him [the Exalted Sovereign] in all the spheres. ‘Everything in the sphere glorifies [Him]’ [Qur’ān, 21:33].

From the twelve constellations, six rotate [255] above the earth which are: Aries which [corresponds] to the head, Taurus to neck, Gemini to hands, Cancer to chest, Leo to abdomen, Virgo to back. These six constellation signs are

1. Here Salmān al-Qudrah is the gnostic name of Salmān al-Fārsī. He was a Persian who was taken into the household of the Prophet. Later he became the model of spiritual adoption and mystical initiation in Shi’ism and Sufism. Cf. Louis Massignon, ‘Salmān Pāk et les prémices spirituelles de l’Islam iranien’, *Société des études iraniennes*, 7 (1934). repr. in *Opera Minora* (Damascus 1957), I, pp. 443–483.

placed above the heart. Six [constellations] are below the heart which are navel [corresponding] to Libra, the genitals to Scorpio, thighs to Sagittarius, knees to Capricorn, legs to Aquarius, and feet to Pisces. These constellations are placed below the heart.

The Pacified Spirit is [the symbol] of Muḥammad. The Light of Effulgence (*nūr-i rawshanāʿī*) passes from the Eloquent Spirit to all parts of the body via the white vein and then enters the heart and awakens the Dissident Spirit (*rūḥ-i muʿtariḍah*) from the slumber of heedlessness. This Spirit-Light is connected to the White Sea of the Macrocosm and Microcosm and from there to the heart.

Question XIII

Then Jaʿfar-i Juʿfī got up and said, ‘O my Lord, what kind of state is this that at times I see dreams which cannot be narrated to anyone; at times I see strange things in the dreams which have not been seen in the waking state?’

Bāqir al-ʿIlm replied, ‘If you see any dream of the moon, the sun, the angels, the cherubs in this azure dome, [then know that] that is seen by the Luminous Spirit. A dream of the Prophets, the Imams, and the heavens is seen by the Spirit that has been tested (*rūḥ-i mumtaḥanah*); a dream about the state and condition of the world is seen by the Pacified Soul, and the dream which depicts murder, killing, adultery with women and pollution is seen by the Concupiscent Soul. Any time the Luminous Spirit transfers itself and departs from the summit of the Spirit that has been tested; the Spirit of the heart enters into the slumber of heedlessness. When the Conscious Spirit leaves the brain the Spirit of the heart goes into the sleep of ignorance. When the Pacified soul departs the whole body dies including the Concupiscent Soul and everything that is there in the body.’

Question XV

Abuʿl-Khaṭṭāb¹ got up and recited the prayer of benediction and then said, ‘O my Lord, if it is not heavy for you then [please] explain [the meaning of] the Throne of the Exalted Sovereign as well as Bayt al-maʿmūr of Adam, the Ark of Noah, the birds of Abraham, the Mount Sinai of Moses, the birth of Jesus, the ascension (*miʿrāj*) of Muḥammad, and the [sword] Dhuʿl-fiqār of ʿAlī, to this weak servant and illuminate his rusted heart so that this servant is liberated by Thy [knowledge] and becomes Thy well-wisher.’

Bāqir al-ʿIlm replied, ‘O Abū Khālid Kābilī (sic) [266], these seven cycles constitute the seven manifestations [whose knowledge] with such clarity was not given to anyone by the Exalted King except to Muḥammad, as He said, ‘Say: the knowledge

1. Abuʿl-Khaṭṭāb, a Kūfan from the tribe of Asad, was one of the chief *dāʿīs* of Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādiq. He died around 145/762. Cf. *El2*.

is with God only' [Qur'ān, 67:26]. [It means] 'O Muḥammad, only God and those who are proximate to Him know the knowledge of Resurrection.' There are many learned and enlightened theologians but they have no access to this knowledge. [I seek] protection [with God]! Attention! We have not read about this discourse in any book; nor have we written it in any book. This discourse has not been revealed to any prophet. You should safeguard it [267] as much as you can. Read it day and night to the believers and the obedient ones. The believers to whom this book reaches in inheritance should safeguard it and read it alone by themselves.

The first temple [of God], al-Bayt al-ma'mūr, was revealed to Adam. Adam is the Lord; He is the Spirit whose seat is the frontal lobe of the brain. One wall of the temple al-Bayt al-ma'mūr is made of pure silver, one is of red gold, one is of verdant chrysolite, and one is made of [268] red ruby. Its floor is made of yellow carnelians and its roof is made of white pearl. These are [the symbols of] six Spirits of different colours. The silver wall is [the symbol] of the Spirit of Faith; the gold wall [symbolizes] the Spirit of Preservation (*rūḥ-i ḥifẓ*); the chrysolite wall that of the Spirit of Invincibility; the ruby wall that of the Sacred Spirit. The floor which is made of carnelians is [the symbol of] the Spirit of Knowledge; the roof of the temple which is made of white pearl is the [symbol of the] Supreme Universal Spirit (*rūḥ al-akbar-i kull*), as [He] the most exalted says, 'By the Mount and the scripture inscribed on fine parchment unrolled, and the al-Bayt al-ma'mūr and the exalted roof and the sea kept filled' [Qur'ān, 52:1–6].

Question XVI

Abu'l-Khālid Kābili [269] said, 'O my Lord, what is the meaning of the Ark of Noah?'

Bāqir replied, 'The Ark is also a [symbol] of the Spirits. The four walls of the Ark [symbolize] the Spirit of Faith, the Spirit of Preservation, the Spirit of Reflection and the Spirit of Knowledge. The roof of the Ark [symbolizes] the Luminous Consciousness (*nuṭq-i nūr*); the anchors ... the sail of the Ark is the Extreme Temperament (*mizāj-i ghāyatī*); Noah is the Conscious Spirit, as [He], The Exalted said, 'And we carried him upon a thing of planks and nails' [Qur'ān, 54:13].

As for the four birds of Moses, one of them was the eagle, one was the peacock, one was the vulture, [270] and one was the heron. Abraham [symbolizes] the Vital Conscious Spirit which [dwells] in the frontal lobe of the brain and is the Lord of the Sublime Spirit. The eagle is the Spirit of Faith; the heron is the Reflective Spirit; the august Humā is the Sacred Spirit; and Vulture is the Spirit of Intellect which is the life of the Spirit of hearts (*rūḥ al-qulūb*). Whereas the Reflective Spirit is their captive, as He the Exalted said, 'Take four birds and cause them to incline unto thee, then place one of them on each hill, then call them, they will come to thee in haste' [Qur'ān, 2:260].

[271] Moses is the Vital Conscious Luminous Spirit. The rod of Moses is speech (*nutq*); Mount Sinai is the Spirit of Faith. [As He said,] ‘We caused the Mount to tower above them.’ [Qur’ān, 4:154]. The Pen is the Reflective Spirit; Gabriel is the Spirit of Invincibility; and God is the Sacred Spirit. Moses desired to see the beauty of the Exalted Sovereign, but He said, ‘O Moses, you cannot see. Go and look at the Mount so that you see My power [Qur’ān, 7:143]’. Moses looked at the Mount. The Exalted King emanated His splendour on the Mount which was shattered to pieces and Moses went into prostration. It means the Vital Spirit [272] of the brain is Moses. It is possible to see God by the Spirit of Faith, and Mount [Sinai] is the Spirit of Faith. The Splendour of the divine manifestation cannot settle on anything but the Spirit of Faith; it settles on the mount, [i.e.,] the heart of the believer. The splendour is the divine manifestation in the heart through the vein of Solar wind in which there is no blood. It signifies the manifestation of the Sublime Spirit, as He the Exalted said, ‘And when Moses came to Our appointed tryst and his Lord had spoken unto him, he said, ‘My Lord, show me [Thy self], that I may gaze upon Thee’. He said ‘Thou wilt not see Me, but gaze upon the Mountain. If [273] it stands still in its place, then thou wilt see Me’. And when his Lord revealed [His] glory to the Mountain, He sent it crashing down. And Moses fell down senseless’ [Qur’ān, 7:143].

In reality [the word] Sinai is composed of seven letters and three dots. They [symbolize] the seven Spirits [dwelling] over the brain of the believers about which it has already been explained in many places.

There are three other Spirits beyond [those seven] whose names cannot be written in any book. The Pacified Soul ascends to this place through the vein of the Solar wind for the inner litany (*munājāt*) and [274] converses with the Sublime Spirit on this Mount Sinai which is an ensemble of seven mountains standing over each other. These are the seven spirits of seven colours from the seven thresholds and spheres (*dīwān*). They are: the Unified Spirit of Faith, the Spirit of Preservation, the Reflective Spirit, the Spirit of Invincibility, the Spirit of Knowledge, the Spirit of Intellect, and the seventh one is the Sacred Spirit.

The three Spirits above it are: the Supreme Spirit, the Sublime Spirit and the Extreme Temperament which is above everything. Moses is the Spirit of hearts; the Scripture Torah is the Vital Conscious Spirit [275]; the Israelites [symbolize] the Spirit in the liquid chamber [of the heart] and the Awaiting [Spirit] in the chamber of blood. The Spirit of Faith dwells above the Conscious Spirit. Those [Spirits] which are in the heart accept [the Spirit of Faith]. When it detaches from them, they fall in the sleep of heedlessness. He the Exalted said, “When we shook the mount above them as it were a covering, and they supposed that it was going to fall upon them [and we said]’ ‘Hold fast that which We have given you and remember that which is therein, that ye may be pious.” [Qur’ān, 7:171]

Jesus [symbolizes] [276] the Spirit of the brain; his mother Mary is the Spirit of Faith. At the time of giving birth [to Jesus] she went to the Siloan fountain. At

the edge of the fountain was a palm tree which was dried up. The fountain which was also dried up, started flowing with water by the grace of Jesus, and the tree also became green and fresh. Jesus could not separate from his mother, so God the Exalted and Sublime sent His Spirit of Revelation to Jesus that he should tell his mother to shake the palm tree so that the ripe dates fall down which she should eat so that her labour pain eases. So Jesus called his mother from the womb and said, 'O [277] mother, shake this tree so that the ripe dates fall; then eat those dates so that I am born without incurring any pain to you.' So Mary shook the palm tree, the ripe dates fell down which she ate and Jesus was born [without much pain].

Jesus [is the symbol of] the Vital Conscious Luminous Spirit, which calls from beneath the Spirit of Faith by the power of the Extreme Temperament which is Gabriel. After every hour it kicks the tree which is the Spirit of Reflection, and drops different kinds of knowledge which become sustenance for the Spirit [of Reflection] and [for many other] Spirits. Mary is the Spirit of Faith. The green tree is the Spirit of Reflection which is of verdant colour [278]. It contemplates upon the divine sciences without having read or heard [any sciences], and comes to fruition like a date. Gabriel is the Spirit of Invincibility. It is connected with the coming and going between the Conscious [Spirit] and the Azure Dome, and is the Lord of the Extreme Temperament. Beneath it is Jesus, the Sacred Spirit. Mary is the Rational Spirit (*rūh-i nātiqah*); the palm-tree is the Spirit of Faith, and the fountain is the Light of God, the Sublime Spirit. As He the Exalted said, 'And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm-tree. She said 'O, would I that I had died ere this and become a thing of naught, forgotten.' Then [one] cried unto her from below her, saying: 'Grieve not. Thy Lord hath placed a brook beneath thee. And shake the trunk of the palm-tree toward thee, thou wilt cause ripe dates to fall upon thee' [Qur'ān, 19:22–25].

Question XVII

Abu'l-Khālīd Kābilī said, 'O my Lord, what is [the significance of] Muḥammad and his Ascension (*mi'rāj*)?'

Bāqir replied, 'As for the Ascension of Muḥammad, first of all the Exalted King sent Gabriel to the earth. Muḥammad was sleeping. [Gabriel] said [to him], 'Wake up. This is not the time of the night [280] for you to sleep. "O thou wrapped up in thy raiment! Rise, the night ..." [Qur'ān, 73:1–2]. Muḥammad sat on Burāq and went to the Sacred Precinct (*al-Bayt al-muqaddas*). There he put his foot on the rock, and from there he crossed the seven heavens and reached at 'two bows'-length'. From there he ascended to the throne, then to the Pedestal, Tablet, and Pen and then he crossed five thousand veils and reached in the presence of the Exalted King where he spoke and listened to ninety thousand words. Then he returned to his house.