



COUNSEL FOR KINGS

Naṣīhat al-Mulūk



ABŪ ḤĀMID AL-GHAZĀLĪ



THE ROYAL ISLAMIC STRATEGIC STUDIES CENTRE

ENGLISH ISLAM SERIES • BOOK NUMBER 34

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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ḤUJJĀT AL-ISLĀM
ABŪ ḤĀMID AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Translated by Khalid Williams



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by Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Al-Ghazālī¹ authored the *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* in Persian towards the end of his life; a personal letter attributed to him gives the year of composition as 503/1109-10, which would place it among the last of his works. The identity of the patron of the treatise is a matter of debate. Several manuscripts of the Arabic translation known as *al-Tibr al-Masbūk* confidently state that the work was dedicated to Sultan Muḥammad ibn Malikshāh, ruler of the Seljuk Empire from 1105-1118, but the extant manuscript of the Persian original does not name the patron and addresses the treatise only to the 'King of the East', which many take to mean Malikshāh's brother Sanjar, who ruled in Khorasan before succeeding Malikshāh in 1118.

According to the historian Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), the Arabic translation *al-Tibr al-Masbūk* was the work of ʿAlī ibn Mubārak of Erbil, a nephew of the historian and minister Ibn al-Mustawfī (d. 637/1239). By Mamluk and Ottoman times the Persian original had been all but lost,

¹ Most of the material for this introduction is drawn from *Ghazālī's Book of Counsel for Kings*, translated by F.R.C. Bagley, Oxford University Press 1964, pp ix-lxxiv; Kenneth Garden, *the First Islamic Reviver*, Oxford University Press 2014, pp 213-214; Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam*, pp 115-121, as well as the introductions to Jalāl al-Dīn Humā'ī's Persian edition and Muḥammad Damaj's Arabic edition (see below). See particularly Safi, *Politics* for a discussion of the debate around the attribution of the work to al-Ghazālī.

while the Arabic translation remained in circulation. In the early 20th century several Persian manuscripts were found, including one in Tehran which became the chief source of Jalāl al-Dīn Humā'ī's 1937 edition. The manuscript was incomplete, however, and Humā'ī was forced to rely on the many available manuscripts of the Arabic translation and occasionally also on passages from other Arabic and Persian works in order to breach the gaps in the Persian text.

The authenticity of the *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* has long been a matter of contention. The debate focuses chiefly on the second part of the text, which differs palpably from the first part in both style and content. The first part presents a familiar Ghazālian perspective, depicting the role of political leadership as a religious responsibility which the ruler must discharge piously for the sake of his immortal soul as well as the welfare of his subjects. Much of the material in the first half is drawn from al-Ghazālī's prior works, particular the *Kīmīyā-yi-Sa'ādat*, the author's Persian recasting of his Arabic magnum opus *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. In contrast, some have found the second part to be somewhat worldly, or to have an 'Iranian' perspective in contrast to the 'Islamic' perspective of the first part. One of the difficulties here is that the *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* is essentially a genre work, following after many other 'Mirrors for Princes' that had been written over the ages. When an author writes in an established genre, it is only natural that his style will differ from that of his other works due to the conventional demands of that genre. Furthermore, as Omid Safi has noted, even the undisputedly authentic first part of the text contains material which contrasts with al-Ghazālī's earlier writings, indicating that his political thought had undergone some development. Nevertheless, some of the material in the

second part does seem somewhat out of place, especially the final section on women which does not appear to be addressed to a sultan or any sort of political figure at all, but rather to the common man. One wonders if perhaps an early copyist found the work too short and decided to supplement it with some extra material to round it out. In the absence of an early Persian manuscript (Humā'ī's text, although written in an early Persian style, was copied at the very late date of 1267/1850), there is little to do but speculate.

This translation follows Prof Humā'ī's 1937 Persian edition based on the Tehran manuscript,² and Dr Muḥammad Damaj's 1987 Arabic edition based on three Arabic manuscripts: one from the American University in Beirut and two from the National Library in Damascus.³ 'Alī ibn Mubārak's Arabic translation diverges frequently from the extant Persian text. Sometimes this is in the interest of presenting the reader with a more natural Arabic-feeling text, at which the translator succeeded admirably (to the degree that in later times many took the Arabic to be al-Ghazālī's original). Other differences seem more substantive, whether because Ibn Mubārak's source differed from the extant text or because he indulged in some editorialising. The uncertainty is compounded by the gaps in the extant Persian text, where Prof Humā'ī had to rely on the Arabic to produce something intelligible for the Persian reader. In cases where the divergence between the texts seems substantive, notes have been added to clarify this, and substantial

² Majlis Press, Tehran 1315 solar/1937-1317/1939.

³ *Al-Mu'assassa al-Jāmi'iyyal-Markaz al-Islāmī lil-Buḥūth*, Beirut 1407/1987.

material found in one but not the other has been placed between brackets. One notable difference between the Persian and Arabic texts is the frequency with which, in the anecdotes given in Part 2, the Persian gives a barebones account of the story while the Arabic contains many embellishments. The more embellished versions in the *Tibr* often correspond, sometimes word-for-word, with versions found in other texts such as the *Arabian Nights* and *Kalīla wa Dimna*. Perhaps the translator, finding stories that were familiar to him, drew from other versions to which he had access, or perhaps his own embellished versions were the ones that later passed into wider lore. Closer scrutiny of this question would lie beyond the scope of translation, to say the least.

Hadiths cited in the work also posed a problem, since they were translated into Persian in the original and then retranslated back into Arabic rather than cited from the sources, which at times led to some shifts in meaning. In this translation priority was given to the authenticity of the texts of the hadiths themselves; wherever possible, the source for the hadith was found and then the text was translated directly into English from it, rather than following the Persian word-for-word. Where no source could be found, the Persian was followed.

COUNSEL FOR KINGS



Naṣīhat al-Mulūk

PART I

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds. May peace and blessings be upon the Master of Messengers Muḥammad ﷺ, and upon his pure goodly family and all who follow him ﷺ. The shaykh and imam, the Proof of Islam and the Glory of the Faith Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī al-Ṭūsī said, addressing Sultan Muḥammad ibn Malikshāh:¹

King of the East,² know that God has graced you with many favours and boons for which you are obliged to give thanks. When a person does not give thanks for God's graces, he is liable to lose them, and on the Day of Resurrection he will stand disgraced and ashamed at having fallen so short. The wise set no store in any blessing that ends with death; for no matter how long a life may be, what use are such blessings once it is over? Noah, upon him be peace, lived for over a thousand years, but five thousand years have passed since his death, and now it is as though he never was. What matters is the blessing that endures forever, which is the blessing of faith, the seed for eternal happiness and endless bliss.

God Almighty has graced you with this blessing and planted the seed of faith in your pure heart. He has given

¹ Sultan Ghayyāth al-Dīn Abū Shujā' Muḥammad ibn Malikshāh (1082-1118), also known as Muḥammad Tāpār I, ruler of the Seljuk Empire from 1105-1118.

² The Arabic has "Sultan of the World, King of the East and the West."

you the means of nurturing that seed, and commanded you to water it with the water of justice and obedience so that it becomes like a tree with its roots in the earth and its branches in the heavens, as He says: *Have you not seen how God sets forth a similitude? A goodly word is as a goodly tree, its root set firm and its branches in heaven* (Q. 14:24). But if the roots of the tree of faith are unsecure and its branches undeveloped, there is risk that at the final moments of life the wind of death will sweep it away, leaving the servant to stand before God entirely devoid of faith—God forbid!

Know, King, that the tree of faith has ten branches and ten roots. Its roots are the beliefs of the heart, its branches the actions of the body. With the acceptance and encouragement of the High Council, this servant will explain these ten roots and ten branches in order that the King of Islam³ may set about tending to this tree. This will require devoting one day of the week to worshipping God. This ought to be Friday since that is the festival-day of the faithful, and on that day there is an hour in which anyone who beseeches God with an attentive heart will have their prayers answered. Is it asking a lot that you devote one day out of the week to serve God. Suppose that you had a slave to whom you said, ‘Serve me for one day of every week, and I will excuse your remissions on the other six days,’ and suppose that he disobeyed. What would you think of him? Yet he is not your creation, and indeed he is only your slave in a figurative sense, while you are the true creature and slave of God. Why do you not hold yourself to that standard?

³ Arabic: “Sultan of the World.”

On the eve of Friday, make the intention to fast; and if you can do so on Thursday as well, then all the better. Rise before dawn on Friday and perform a full purificatory bath (*ghusl*), then put on clothes which have the following three characteristics: they must be lawful, suitable for prayer, and not made of fine silk. In summer wear clothes of *dabīqī*,⁴ *qaṣab*,⁵ lace, or linen. In winter wear fur, [non-silken] brocade, or wool. Any clothing that does not satisfy these requirements is not approved by God. Perform the dawn prayer in congregation. Afterwards, do not engage in conversation or turn away from the Qibla until the sun has risen. Glorify God with the help of a rosary and say one thousand times, ‘There is no god but God, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.’ Once the sun has risen, have someone read this book out to you. Do this every Friday until you have committed it to memory. Once he has read the entire book to you, perform four cycles of prayer and glorify God until midmorning. The reward for this is immense, especially on Friday.

After that, whether you return to the royal court or remain in solitude, say repeatedly, ‘Dear God, bless Muḥammad ﷺ and the family of Muḥammad ﷺ.’ After the midmorning prayer⁶ say also, ‘I ask forgiveness of God and repent to Him.’ Give whatever charity you are able to. If you spend this one day of the week serving God, God will attend to your business for the rest of the week.

⁴ Fabric from Dabīq in Egypt.

⁵ A kind of embroidered fabric.

⁶ This is the *Ḍuḥā* prayer (*Chāshṭ* in Persian), a voluntary prayer performed any time after the sun has fully risen over the horizon until noon.

CHAPTER I

THE PRINCIPLES OF CREED, WHICH ARE THE ROOT OF FAITH



First principle: [God's Existence]

Know, King, that you are a created being and that you have a Creator, Who is the Creator of all the world, and everything in the world is from Him. He is One, for He has no equal. He has always existed, for he has no beginning; and He will always exist, for He has no end. His existence has always been and will always be necessary, for it is impossible that He could not exist. He is self-existent, for He needs no cause while all other things need Him. He exists through Himself, and all other things exist through Him.

Second principle: God's Transcendence

Know that God has no image, body, or form, nor is it possible for Him to descend into any form. He is beyond quantity, measure, or modality, for He resembles nothing and nothing resembles him. Whatever notions may occur to the mind, the imagination, or the fancy regarding His measure or modality, He transcends them. He does not share the qualities of any created being. He is neither in any place nor on any place, for he neither occupies space nor is occupied by it. Everything in the world is under His Throne, and His Throne is under His power and control. The Throne does not carry Him; rather, the Throne and its bearers are

carried by His subtlety and power. Before the Throne was created He transcended spatiality and had no need for it, and after creating the Throne He remained as He was before, for it is impossible for Him or His Attributes to undergo change or substitution. [His *istiwā'* (settling) upon the Throne is just as He says it, in the way in which He says it, and with the meaning by which He intends it, transcending all notions of physical settling, contact, stability, localization, or translocation. He is above the Throne and above everything else to the farthest reaches of the earth, yet even so He is nearer than anything in existence, closer to every person than their jugular vein, whether they be near or far. He has power over all things, and is witness over them, and He may do as He wills. Eternally His are the attributes of Beauty and the qualities of Majesty, and He transcends entropy and translocation, and is completely perfect beyond any possibility of increase.]⁷ He utterly transcends the attributes of created beings. In the next world He will be seen in a manner that goes beyond questions of 'how?' or 'what?', for that vision will not be of the same order as vision in this world. [*Nothing is like unto Him, and He is the Seeing, the Hearing* (Q. 42:11).]⁸

Third principle: His power

He is powerful and capable, and nothing is like Him. All things are subject to His power, and His capability is total, for it is impossible that He could be incapable, lacking, or weak. He may do as He will, and all that He wills He does.

⁷ What is between brackets is in the Arabic only, and may have been added by the translator as it closely resembles passages from al-Ghazālī's creed in the *Ihyā'*.

⁸ Arabic only.

The eight heavens,⁹ seven earths, the Throne, the Footstool, and everything else in existence are in the grasp of His power, and no part of them are in the hand of any other.

Fourth principle: His knowledge [and will]

He knows everything there is to know, and His knowledge encompasses all things. From the highest heights to the lowest lows, nothing escapes His knowledge; for all things proceed from Him and are made manifest by His power. He knows the number of grains of sand in the desert, leaves on the trees, thoughts in hearts, and specks of dust in the air, just as He knows the number of stars in the sky. Everything in the world exists by His will and desire. Everything that exists, whether few or many, small or large, good or bad, benefit or harm, increase or decrease, ease or distress, health or sickness, proceeds only by His predestining and will, and by His decree and ordain. If all the humans, jinn, devils, and angels in the world came together and attempted to move, fix, increase, or decrease a single atom in the universe against His will, they would be unable to do so. Everything that He wills, is; everything that He does not will, is not. Nothing and no one can repel His will. Everything that is, was, or ever shall be has been predestined and directed by Him.

⁹ The Arabic has ‘seven heavens’, which is the term al-Ghazālī usually uses in his writings and the more common one in Islamic cosmology. However, a Hadith describes Paradise as having eight gates, and the traditionally depicted seven layers of Paradise corresponding to the cosmic heavens was in the later tradition sometimes re-envisioned as eight, with the special station of the Prophet ﷺ counted as an additional layer. The term *Hasht Bibisht* (Eight Paradises) appears frequently in Persian literature and architecture, although here the term used is *āsmān*, which means ‘sky’ or ‘heaven’ rather than ‘paradise.’

Fifth and sixth principles: [His hearing and seeing]

Just as He knows everything there is to know, He also hears and sees everything there is to hear and see. The near and the far are equal to His hearing; the light and dark are equal to His sight. The footfalls of an ant on a dark night do not escape His hearing, nor does the colour and shape of a worm beneath the earth escape His sight. His actions are not performed by means of instruments. [His hearing is not by means of an ear, nor is His sight by means of an eye. Just as His knowledge is not the product of thought, His actions are not performed by means of instruments. He says to a thing, ‘Be!’, and it is.]¹⁰

Seventh principle: His speech

His command is active and binding upon all creation. All of His proclamations, promises, and warnings are true. His Command is His speech. Just as He is powerful and capable, and just as He sees and hears, He also speaks. His speech is not effected by means of a windpipe, a tongue, or a mouth. The Torah, Gospel, Psalms, Qur’an, and all the other scriptures of the Prophets ﷺ are His speech, and His speech is His attribute, and all of His attributes are eternal, having always existed. Human speech consists of phonemes and sounds, which the speech of God entirely transcends that.

Eighth principle: His acts

Everything that exists in the world is His creation, and no other shares in His power of creation; there is but one Creator, and He has no partner. Such created things as pain, poverty, incapacity, and ignorance were all created

¹⁰ Arabic only.

by Him in justice, for it is impossible for Him to be unjust. Injustice means to usurp the property of another, and it is impossible for Him to usurp the property of another, since all things belong to Him. Everything that is, was, and ever shall be belongs to Him, and He is without equal or partner. Therefore none of His creatures have the right to object to His ordain, but only to acquiesce and surrender.

Ninth principle: the hereafter

He created the world from two types: soul and body. He made the body a lodging for the human soul, that it may take from the world provision for the hereafter. He assigned to every soul a limited duration to remain in the body. The end of that duration is the appointed time (*ajal*) for that soul, which cannot be hastened or delayed. When the appointed time comes, He separates the soul from the body. When the body is placed in the grave, He allows the soul to re-join the body in order to answer the interrogation of Munkar and Nakīr. These are two [terrifying and mighty]¹¹ persons who will ask him about God and the Messenger. If he cannot answer, they will punish him in the grave and fill it with snakes and scorpions.

At the Resurrection, which is the Day of Reckoning and Recompense, He will once more return the soul to the body. He will resurrect all, and everyone will see their deeds written in a record and be reminded of them all, and they will be shown the measure of their obedience or disobedience by means of a scale in which their deeds will be weighed. Then they will all be commanded to cross the Bridge, which will be narrower than a hair and sharper than a sword. All those who walked the right way and followed

¹¹ Arabic only.

the straight path in this world will cross over the Bridge. Those who did not follow the right way and were not obedient will fail to cross it, and plunge into Hell. All will be brought to the Bridge and questioned about everything they have done. The righteous will be asked about the true nature of their righteousness; the hypocrites and pretenders will be exposed and disgraced. One group will be reckoned harshly, another will be reckoned gently, and another still will enter Paradise without being reckoned at all. Finally the unbelievers will be sent to Hell, never to leave it, and the obedient and the Muslims will be taken to Paradise. The disobedient will be sent to Hell, but those who receive intercession from the Prophets ﷺ, the imams, the scholars, and the saints will be pardoned. Those who have none to intercede for them will remain in Hell to be punished in accordance with their sins, but in the end they will be taken to Paradise as long as they died as believers, God willing.

Tenth principle: the Prophet, upon him be peace

Given that God decreed that some of man's deeds and affairs would be the cause of salvation and others the cause of damnation, and given that man was incapable of determining one from the other on his own, in His mercy and grace God created angels and sent them to certain people whom He had destined salvation for in pre-eternity, namely the Prophets ﷺ, to convey unto them this secret. He gave them messages and sent them to mankind in order to make plain to them the paths to salvation and damnation, so that no one would have any argument against God. Last of all He sent our Prophet ﷺ to mankind, whose Prophethood He raised to such a degree of perfection that there was no room for any further additions. For this reason He made

him the Seal of the Prophets, for there will be no Prophet after him. He commanded all of creation, jinn and mankind alike, to follow him, and He made him the master of all Prophets and his companions the best of all companions of the Prophets ﷺ. May God's blessings and abundant peace be upon him and upon all the Prophets and Messengers ﷺ, and upon his righteous pure family and companions.

CHAPTER II

THE BRANCHES OF THE TREE OF FAITH



Know, King, that the knowledge and belief that lie in the heart constitute the root of faith, while all the justice and obedience that proceed from the seven body parts¹² constitute the branches of faith. If the branch is withered, this indicates that the root must be weak and that the tree will not stand firm at the moment of death, but will topple. The deeds of one's body reveal the condition of one's faith. The deeds which constitute the branch of faith are these: to stay clear of anything that is forbidden, and to fulfil everything that is obligatory. This is divided into two categories: the first is that which is between you and God, such as prayer, fasting, and refraining from drinking wine and committing sin. The other is that which is between you and other people, which means being just to your subjects and avoiding injustice. The chief principle of this is that for everything between you and God, offer the same obedience as you would expect your servants to offer to you; and for what is between you and other people, act as you would hope your ruler would act if you were the subject and someone else were the sultan.

¹² In *Bidāyat al-hidāya* the author lists these as the eyes, the ears, the tongue, the stomach, the loins, the hands, and the feet, and links them to the seven gates of Hell mentioned in Q. 15:44.

Know also that the things that are between you and God are more likely to be forgiven, but that any injustices done towards other people will not under any circumstance go unnoticed at the Resurrection. The danger of this is immense, and no ruler can escape it except for the one who treats his subjects justly. This being so, it is vital that we clarify the principles of justice in order that [the King] may be aware that he will be accounted for his justice and equity on the Day of Resurrection. There are ten principles of justice and equity towards subjects.

First principle

First of all you must be aware of the value, and also the danger, of rulership (*wilāyat*). Rulership can be a blessed thing, since the ruler who fulfils its due will attain happiness that is unsurpassed; but the ruler who fails to do so will fall into a state of wretchedness second only to the wretchedness of unbelief. Sufficient proof of the great value of this blessing is the fact that the Messenger of God said, ‘A single day’s justice from a just ruler is better than sixty¹³ years of worship.’¹⁴

He also said, ‘There are seven whom God will shade with His shade on the Day when there is no shade but His: a just ruler, a youth who grew up worshipping God, a man whose heart is attached to the mosques, two men who love each other for God’s sake and meet and part for that reason, a man who is beckoned by a woman of high status and beauty but says, “I fear God”, a man who gives charity so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right

¹³ Arabic: “seventy.”

¹⁴ Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr* 11932; Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab* 6995.

hand spends, and a man who remembers God in solitude and his eyes fill with tears.’¹⁵

The Messenger ﷺ also said, ‘The most beloved of people to God on the Day of Resurrection, and the nearest seated to Him, will be the just ruler; and the most hateful of people to God on the Day of Resurrection, and the most severely punished, will be the unjust ruler.’¹⁶

The Messenger ﷺ also said, ‘By Him in Whose hand is Muḥammad’s soul, every day deeds are lifted to heaven on behalf of the just ruler which are equal to the deeds of all his subjects; and every prayer he prays is worth seventy thousand prayers.’

Given this, there is no greater blessing than for God to grant the rank of rulership to someone, so that one hour of his life becomes equal to the entire lifetime of another person. But if a ruler does not recognize the value of this blessing and instead engages in injustice and decadence, it is to be feared that God will make him His enemy.

The great peril of rulership is illustrated by the narration of Ibn ‘Abbās ؓ,¹⁷ who stated that the Messenger of God took hold of the ring on the door of the Ka‘ba, where there were some men of Quraysh sitting, and said, ‘The imams and sultans will be of Quraysh, as long as they do three things: when they are asked for mercy, they give it; when they are called upon to judge, they are just; and when they promise something, they do it. Any of them who do not do so will incur the curse of God, His angels, and all mankind,

¹⁵ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 1423.

¹⁶ Tirmidhī, *Sunan* 1329.

¹⁷ ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās (d. 86/688) was a companion of the Prophet ﷺ and a renowned scholar and interpreter of the Qur’an.

and no deed will be accepted from them, whether voluntary or obligatory.’¹⁸

[He also said, upon him be peace, ‘If someone judges between two people unjustly, the curse of God will be upon the unjust.’]¹⁹

The Messenger ﷺ also said, ‘There are three people upon whom God will not look on the Day of Resurrection: a dishonest king, an elderly adulterer, and an arrogant pauper.’²⁰

The Messenger of God ﷺ also said to his Companions, ‘The lands of the east and west will be conquered for you, but all those who govern them will be in Hell except for those who fear God and fulfil their trust.’²¹

He ﷺ also said, ‘If any ruler is given authority over Muslim subjects and died while he is cheating them, God will forbid Paradise to Him.’²²

He ﷺ also said, ‘Anyone who is given rulership over the Muslims but does not protect them as well as he does his own family, let him take his seat in Hell.’

He ﷺ also said, ‘Two men of my Community will not receive my intercession: an unjust tyrant ruler, and someone who goes to such extremities in the religion that he goes right out of it.’²³

He ﷺ also said, ‘Of all people, the one punished the most severely on the Day of Resurrection will be the unjust ruler.’²⁴

¹⁹ Arabic only.

²⁰ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 172.

²¹ Aḥmad, *Musnad* 23109.

²² Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 7151.

²³ Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr* 496.

²⁴ Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ* 1595.

He ﷺ also said, ‘There are five people with whom God is wroth; if He wills, He may discharge His wrath upon them in this world, but otherwise He will send them to Hell in the hereafter: a ruler who takes his due from his subjects but does not treat them fairly or protect them from injustice; the leader of a people who obey him, but who does not treat the strong and the weak equally and judges by caprice; a man who does not tell his wife and family to obey God or teach them their religion; a man who hires a worker and exploits his labour without paying him; and a man who denies his wife her dowry.’²⁵

One day ‘Umar ؓ was about to lead a funeral prayer when another man went ahead of him and performed the prayer. After the deceased had been buried, that man placed his hand on the grave and said, ‘Dear God, if You punish him, then so be it, for he disobeyed You. And if You have mercy on him, then he is certainly needy of that. Congratulations to you, dead man! For you were never a ruler, nor an overseer, nor a secretary, nor a bailiff, nor a tax-collector!’ Then the man suddenly disappeared. ‘Umar ordered a search for him, but he could not be found. Umar ؓ said, ‘He was Khidr!’

The Messenger ﷺ also said, ‘Woe betide the rulers! Woe betide the overseers! Woe betide the trustees! On the Day of Resurrection, some people will wish that they had been hung by their forelocks from the stars, suspended between heaven and earth, and that they had never had any authority.’²⁶

The Messenger of God ﷺ also said, ‘Any man who is given authority over ten or more persons will be brought

²⁵ Dhahabī, *al-Kabā’ir* p. 106.

²⁶ Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* 20224.

before God on the Day of Resurrection, with his hand chained to his neck. If he was righteous he will be freed from his chain; if he was sinful another chain will be added.²⁷

‘Umar²⁸ ﷺ said, ‘Woe unto the judge of those on earth from the Judge of those in heaven on the day when they meet Him—save for those who lead with justice and judge by the truth, not by caprice or nepotism, nor desire or fear, and who make the Book of God a mirror in front of their eyes.’

The Messenger of God ﷺ said, ‘The rulers will be brought forth on the Day of Resurrection, both those who were too lenient and those who were excessive. He will say, “You were the keepers of My earth and the shepherds of My servants, and I charged you to uphold My will.” Then He will say to the one who was too lenient, “Why did you do as you did?” He will reply, “Out of mercy.” God will say, “Are you more merciful to My servants than I am?” Then He will say to the one who was excessive, “Why did you do what you did?” He will reply, “Out of wrath.” God will say, “Are you more wrathful than Me?” Then God will say, “Take them away and stuff them into a corner of Hell!”²⁹

Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān said, ‘I never praise a ruler whether they are good or bad, for I heard the Messenger of God ﷺ say, “The rulers will be brought forth on the Day of Resurrection, the just and the unjust alike, until they stand upon the Bridge over Hell. God will say, ‘It is you

²⁸ The Arabic has “Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.’ The saying is attributed to ‘Umar by Aḥmad (*Zuhd* 663), Bayhaqī (*Sunan* 20359) and Ibn Abī Shayba (*Muṣannaḥ* 22962).

²⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wal-Nihāya* 12686.

³⁰ Hindī, *Kanz al-Ummāl* 14769.

whom I seek!' Then every ruler who was unjust in his rule, or who accepted bribes for his judgements, or treated two parties unequally, will fall into Hell for seventy years."³⁰

It is said that David ﷺ used to go out at night when no one could recognize him, and ask everyone he met about to share with him their private opinions about David's ﷺ character. One day Gabriel ﷺ appeared before him in the form of a man.

He asked him his opinion of David ﷺ, and Gabriel ﷺ replied, 'David is a fine man, except that he takes his livelihood from the treasury instead of working for it.' David ﷺ went to his prayer-room weeping and said, 'Dear Lord, teach me how to work for my own livelihood!' So God taught him how to make chain mail.

Likewise, 'Umar ؓ used to take the place of his night watchman and go out walking, so that if he saw anything amiss he could correct it. He said, 'If a mangy sheep were left by the waterway and not rubbed with oil, I fear that I would be asked about it at the Resurrection.'

[Consider, Sultan, how despite his circumspection, justice, and unmatched piety and righteousness, 'Umar ؓ used to think with fear about the terrors of the Day of Judgment, while you have sat there oblivious to the affairs of your subjects, without a thought for the people under your protection! 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar ؓ and several people from his family said, 'We used to pray to God to allow us to see 'Umar in our dreams. After twelve years, I finally saw him. He looked as though he had just bathed, and was wearing a loincloth. I said, "Commander of the Faithful, how has your Lord treated you, and for which of your good deeds has He rewarded you?" He replied, "'Abd Allāh, how long has it been since I left you?" I replied, "Twelve years."

He said, “My reckoning has been going on since I left you. I feared that I would be ruined, but God is Forgiving and Merciful, Kind and Generous.” Such was ‘Umar رضي الله عنه, though in his lifetime he possessed none of the instruments of governance, except for his whip!]³¹

The Byzantine Emperor once sent some envoys [to ‘Umar رضي الله عنه] to observe what kind of man he was and how he lived. When they arrived in Medina they asked, ‘Where is your king?’ They replied, ‘We do not have a king, but a commander (*amīr*). He has gone outside the city.’ The envoys went outside the city and found him sleeping on the ground in the sun, his whip beneath his head, the ground beneath his wet with his sweat. Upon seeing this their hearts were stricken with awe, that a man whose fearsome reputation kept the kings of the world awake at night, while he himself slept like this. ‘You are just, without doubt,’ they said, ‘and that is why you sleep so soundly. Our king is unjust, and that is why he is always anxious. We bear witness that your religion is the true one. Were it not that we have come as envoys, we would become Muslims now. But we will return later, and then we will become Muslims.’

Such is the peril of rulership. This science takes a long time to learn, but the ruler will be safe as long as he keeps the company of religious scholars, for they will teach him the way of justice and remind him constantly of the perils of his role.

Second principle

The ruler must always be eager to keep the company of genuine religious scholars and keen to ask their counsel. He

³¹ Arabic only.

must avoid those scholars who covet the world, for they will praise him, flatter him, and seek his approval in order to appropriate the base riches of the world through trickery and deceit. The genuine religious scholar is the one who has no designs on the treasury, but offers his knowledge out of honesty and goodwill.

It is said that Shaqīq al-Balkhī,³² may God have mercy on him, once encountered Hārūn al-Rashīd,³³ who said to him, ‘Are you Shaqīq the ascetic?’ He replied, ‘I am Shaqīq, but not the ascetic.’ Hārūn said, ‘Give me counsel.’ Shaqīq replied, ‘God has placed you in the seat of [Abū Bakr] al-Şiddīq ﷺ, and He requires truthfulness (*Şidq*) from you like his. He has placed you in the seat of [ʿUmar] al-Fārūq ﷺ, and He requires that you differentiate (*farq*) between truth and falsehood as he did. He has placed you in the seat of Dhul-Nūrayn,³⁴ and He requires from you modesty and generosity like his. And He has placed you in the seat of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ, and He requires from you knowledge and justice like his.’ Hārūn said, ‘Go on.’ Shaqīq replied, ‘Very well. God has an abode called Hell, and He has made you the doorkeeper of that abode. He has given you three things: the treasury, the sword, and the whip, and has commanded you to keep people away from Hell with them. When a needy person comes to you, do not withhold those funds from him. When someone disobey God’s commands, use that whip to correct him. When one person kills another wrongfully, kill him with that sword if the victim’s kin demand it. If you do not do this, then you will be at the

³² An early Sufi of Khorasan (d. 194/810).

³³ The Abbasid caliph, renowned in the Muslim world for his justice and piety (d. 193/809).

³⁴ ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, called Dhul-Nūrayn (He of the Two Lights) because he married two daughters of the Prophet.

vanguard of the denizens of Hell, and others will follow in your footsteps.’ Hārūn said, ‘Go on.’ Shaqīq replied, ‘You are the wellspring, and your subordinates are the streams that flow from it. If the wellspring is pure, any impurities in the streams will do no harm; if the wellspring is foul, there is no hope that the streams will be pure.’

Anecdote: Hārūn al-Rashīd once went out with ‘Abbās³⁵ to visit Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ.³⁶ When they arrived at his door they found him reciting the Qur’an, just reaching the verse, *Or do those who commit evil deeds suppose that We shall treat them as those who believe and do righteous deeds, equally in their life and in their death? Evil indeed is their judgement!* [Q. 45:21]. Hārūn said, ‘If we came here for counsel, then this is enough!’ Then he said, ‘Knock on the door.’ ‘Abbās knocked and said, [‘Open for the Commander of the Faithful!’ Fuḍayl said, ‘What does the Commander of the Faithful want with me?’ ‘Abbās said,]³⁷ ‘Obey the Commander of the Faithful, and open the door!’ Fuḍayl set down his lamp, since it was night-time, and then opened the door. Hārūn groped around in the darkness until he found Fuḍayl’s hand, and shook it. Fuḍayl said, ‘Alas for this soft hand, unless God grants it salvation!’ Then he said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, ready yourself to answer God Most High on Resurrection Day, when you will be brought face to face with every Muslim and questioned as to how fairly you treated them!’ Hārūn wept. ‘Abbās said, ‘Hush, or you will be the death of the Commander of the Faithful!’ Fuḍayl replied, ‘Hāmān,³⁸ you and your people have already destroyed him, yet you tell me

³⁵ This is most like ‘Abbās ibn Aḥnaf (d. 192/809), a court poet of al-Rashīd.

³⁶ A renowned religious scholar and sage (d. 187/803).

³⁷ Arabic only.

³⁸ Hāmān is the name of the high priest of Pharaoh as told in the Qur’an.

that I might kill him!’ Hārūn said, ‘They call you Hāmān because you have made a Pharaoh of me!’ Then he presented him with a thousand dinars and said, ‘This is lawful wealth, from my own mother’s dowry and estate.’ Fuḍayl said, ‘I tell you to give back what you possess [to its rightful owner]³⁹ and to seek refuge with your Lord, but you offer it to me instead!’ Then he rose and left him, and did not accept the gift.

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz⁴⁰ once asked Muḥammad ibn Ka‘b al-Qurazī,⁴¹ ‘Describe justice to me.’ He replied, ‘Be a father to younger Muslims, a son to older ones, and a brother to those of your age.⁴² Punish every offender in proportion to his offence.⁴³ Beware of striking a single blow in anger, lest you go to Hell on account of it.’

It is related that a certain ascetic once visited a caliph, who said to him, ‘Counsel me.’ He replied, ‘Once I was travelling in China. Their king had become deaf, and wept a great deal. He said, “I do not weep because of losing my hearing; I weep because a victim of injustice may come to my door and cry out, yet I will not hear him. But I am grateful that my eyesight still works.” So a herald called out that anyone complaining of injustice should wear red clothes. Every day he would ride out on an elephant’s back, and if he saw any person wearing red clothes he would summon them and hear them out. Commander of the Faithful, such

³⁹ This gloss is based on the longer version of this tale which al-Ghazālī gives in *al-Mustaẓhirī*. The version in *Kīmīyā-yi Sa‘ādat* has ‘and give it to God.’

⁴⁰ The 8th Umayyad caliph, renowned among Muslims for his piety (d. 101/720).

⁴¹ A Muslim of the second generation (Tābi‘ūn) and a respected scholar and exegete (d. 108/726).

⁴² This is following the Arabic translation and also the *Mustaẓhirī*; the Persian here has ‘a brother to the older’ and no mention of ‘a brother to those of the same age’, which must be a scribal error.

⁴³ *Al-Mustaẓhirī* adds ‘and in proportion to his body.’

was that unbeliever's compassion for God's servants. You are a believer, and of the House of the Prophet too. Ask yourself if your own compassion is up to measure.'

It is related that Abū Qilāba⁴⁴ once came to 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, who asked him for counsel. He replied, 'From the time of Adam until today, no caliph remains but you.' He said, 'Go on.' He replied, 'You will be the next caliph to die.'⁴⁵ He said, 'Go on.' He replied, 'If God is with you, why should you fear? If He is against you, what refuge do you have?' He said, 'That is enough.'

One day Caliph Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik⁴⁶ thought to himself, 'How many comforts have I had in the world, but how shall I fare at the Resurrection?' So he sent a message to Abū Ḥāzim, the foremost ascetic and scholar of the day, saying, 'Send me some of what you use to break your fast.' He sent him some cooked bran, saying, 'This is what I shall dine on today.' When Sulaymān saw it he wept and his heart was deeply moved. He fasted for three days, eating nothing at all, and then on the third night he broke his fast with that bran. It is said that on that night he lay with his wife and that she conceived 'Abd al-'Azīz, who would go on to sire 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz,⁴⁷ who was unique in his

⁴⁴ Abū Qilāba al-Jarmī, a scholar and grammarian of Basra (d. 225/840).

⁴⁵ Or, 'Do you suppose you will be the first caliph to die?'

⁴⁶ The Umayyad caliph (d. 99/717)—but this is likely a misattribution (see note below).

⁴⁷ This is also how al-Ghazālī tells the story in *al-Mustazhiri*, but the grandfather of the caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz was not Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik but rather Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam. The editor of *al-Mustazhiri* Muḥammad 'Alī al-Quṭb suggests that it must mean some other 'Umar and not the famous caliph, but this is highly improbable given the description that follows, which can only refer to the caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. Given this, it seems safe to assume that al-Ghazālī made a historical error here and that this story is actually about Marwān, not Sulaymān.

age and whose justice resembled that of his namesake ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. It is also said that this was the result of the righteous intention he had for eating that food.

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was once asked, ‘How was it that you came to repent?’ He replied, ‘Once I was about to beat a slave when he said to me, “Remember the night whose morn will be the Day of Resurrection!” His words affected my heart.’

One of the saints⁴⁸ saw Hārūn al-Rashīd at ʿArafāt standing bareheaded and barefooted on the hot gravel, his hands raised in supplication, saying, ‘Dear Lord, You are You, and I am I. My nature is to always be sinning, and Yours is to always be forgiving. Have mercy on me!’ The saints say,⁴⁹ ‘See how the supreme ruler on earth beseeches the Supreme Ruler in heaven!’

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz once asked Abū Ḥāzim, ‘Counsel me.’ He replied, ‘Lie down and place death beneath your pillow. Ask yourself what you would like to be doing when death comes to you, and do it now; and ask yourself what you would hate to be doing when death comes to you, and avoid it now. For perhaps death is near.’

The ruler ought to keep such anecdotes in mind and accept these counsels which were offered to others before him. Whenever he sees a religious scholar, he ought to ask him for counsel; and every scholar who meets a ruler ought to give him this sort of advice rather than flattering him and suppressing the Word of God. Otherwise, they will be guilty in any injustice that the ruler commits.

⁴⁸ *Al-Mustaẓhirī* identifies him as one Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Khurāsānī.

⁴⁹ In the account in *al-Mustaẓhirī* it is the aforementioned ʿAbd Allāh who says this to his son Ibrāhīm.

Third principle

The king must understand that it is not enough only to refrain from injustice himself, but he must also keep his slaves, servants, and aides in check. He must not approve of any injustice on their part, for he will be held to account for the injustice of his retinue just as he will be for his own.

Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ once wrote to Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī⁵⁰ ؓ when he was governor of Ray, saying, ‘The happiest ruler is the one whose subjects are happy with him, and the unhappiest is the one whose subjects are unhappy with him. Beware of being extravagant or your officials will do the same, and you will become like a sheep who sees grass and eats greedily until it grows so fat that its fatness becomes the cause of its destruction, for that is why it is killed and eaten.

It is related in the Torah that if the ruler learns of any injustice done by an official of his but is silent about it, then the injustice is his own, and he will be held to account for it.

The ruler must understand that there is no one more delusional and foolish than the one who trades his religion and his afterlife to another person in exchange for worldly advantage. All officials and servants work to attain worldly advantage for themselves, and they entice the ruler into committing injustice, thereby sending him to Hell in order to achieve their ends. What worse enemy could you have than one who seeks to destroy you for the sake of a few ill-gotten pieces of silver?

In sum, the ruler must act justly towards his subjects

⁵⁰ A Companion of the Prophet ؓ who served at different times as governor of Basra and of Kufa (d. 62/665).

while also keeping all his retinue, household, and children in line. No one can achieve this except for one who first of all observes justice within his inner being. What this means is to restrain injustice, appetite, and irascibility⁵¹ and to make them the prisoners of intellect and religion, rather than making intellect the prisoner of injustice, appetite, and irascibility. Most people use the intellect in service of appetite and irascibility, contriving schemes to achieve their ends. They do not understand that the intellect is the army of God Most High, while appetite and irascibility are the armies of Satan. If a person makes the army of God captive to the armies of Satan, how can he hope to treat other people justly? The sun of justice rises first in the ruler's heart, and then the rays of its light shine upon the members of his household and his closest courtiers, before finally reaching his subjects. It is useless to expect there to be rays when there is no sun.

[The ruler must understand that justice arises from the perfection of the intellect, and the perfection of the intellect lies in seeing things as they truly are and perceiving the truth of what lies within them, and not being deceived by their outward appearance. For example, if someone is unjust for the sake of worldly gain, let him consider what it is that he desires from the world. If what he desires is to eat fine food, then he should be aware that he is an animal dis-

⁵¹ Appetite (*shahwa*) in Ghazālian terms is the faculty governing bodily desires such as hunger and sexual lust, while irascibility (*ghaḍab/khashm*) governs feelings such as anger, fear, and pride. It is unusual that al-Ghazālī here speaks of 'restraining injustice (*ẓulm*)' to the intellect as well as these two faculties, since elsewhere he does not refer to *ẓulm* as a faculty of the soul but rather as a product of these faculties. The Arabic translator must have been puzzled by this too, since he has entirely skipped *ẓulm* from his rendition (though it is an Arabic word) and simply referred to *shahwa* and *ghaḍab*.

guised as a human, since gluttony is the way of wild animals. If his desire is to wear luxurious clothing, then he is a woman disguised as a man, since self-adornment is the way of women. If his desire is to vent his wrath upon his enemies, then he is a beast disguised as a human, since giving way to anger and leaping upon people and tearing them apart is the way of beasts. If his desire is that other people serve him, then he is an ignoramus disguised as an intelligent man, since if he had any intelligence he would know that all people serve their own bellies, appetites, and lusts, and that they are only using him as means to obtain their desires, and that when they bow down to him, they are really bowing down to themselves. Proof of this is that if they heard a rumour that the rulership were to be taken from him and given to another, they would all forsake him and flock to that other ruler to serve him. Wherever they suspect gold and silver are to be found, they will go there and bow down in service. In reality they are not serving him, but mocking him. The intelligent man is the one who sees the true nature and the spirit of things, not only the outward appearance; and the true nature of all of these pursuits is exactly as has just been described. Anyone who does not know this cannot be intelligent, and anyone who is not intelligent cannot be just, and his abode will be Hell. That is why all happiness ultimately lies in intelligence.]⁵²

⁵² This passage is not found in the extant Persian manuscripts but only in the Arabic. It is, however, found in the Persian *Kīmīyā*, where it follows the exact same passage as it follows here. The translation given here is based on the passage as given in the *Kīmīyā*.

⁵³ Both the Arabic translation and the equivalent passage in the *Kīmīyā* have here ‘rulers are usually prideful.’

Fourth principle

The ruler must not let pride dominate him,⁵³ for pride gives rise to anger, which in turn leads to vengefulness. Anger is the ghoulish which haunts the intellect,⁵⁴ the blight that scourges it; the remedy for it is described in the Book of Anger in the Quarter on The Ways to Perdition (*Rub^c al-muhlikāt*) in *The Revival of Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*). When anger becomes dominant, the ruler must in all things strive to incline towards the side of mercy and to make a habit of generosity and lenience, [so that he becomes like the Prophets and the saints, and not to let anger become his norm],⁵⁵ lest he become like a wild beast.

Anecdote: Abū Jaʿfar Maṣṣūr⁵⁶ once ordered a man executed for treason. Mubārak ibn Faḍāla,⁵⁷ who was present, said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, will you first hear something from the Messenger of God ﷺ?’ He replied, ‘Go on.’ Mubārak said, ‘Ḥasan al-Baṣrī⁵⁸ related that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, “On the Day of Resurrection all mankind will be gathered upon one plain, and a herald will cry, ‘Let anyone who has a favour to call from God now stand!’ No one will stand except for those who have pardoned others.”’ The Caliph said, ‘Let him go. I have pardoned him.’⁵⁹

Most rulers are so given to anger that if a man so much as speaks ill of them, they will shed his blood. At such a

⁵⁴ This is a favoured expression of al-Ghazālī’s, occurring several times in the *Iḥyā’* and elsewhere.

⁵⁵ Arabic only.

⁵⁶ The second Abbasid caliph (d. 158/775).

⁵⁷ A hadith narrator of Basra (d. 164/780).

⁵⁸ An influential preacher and ascetic from Medina who settled in Basra (d. 110/728).

⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī relates this in *al-Mustaḥirī* as a saying of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī himself rather than a hadith.

time they ought to remember that Jesus ﷺ said to John ﷺ son of Zachariah ﷺ, ‘Whenever someone talks about you and tells the truth, be thankful; and if he tells a lie, then be all the more thankful, because a good deed will be added to your account without any effort on your part.’ That is, an act of worship performed by that person will be added to your account.

Once a man was mentioned to the Prophet ﷺ who was said to be very strong. He ﷺ asked, ‘How so?’ They replied, ‘Any man he wrestles with, he throws down. He is always the victor.’ The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘The strong man is not the one who wrestles; the strong man is the one who can restrain himself when angry.’⁶⁰

The Prophet ﷺ also said, ‘If a person possesses three things, his faith is complete: when he is angry, his anger does not cause him to slip into falsehood; when he is pleased, his pleasure does not cause him to stray from truth; and when he has power, he does not take more than he is due.’⁶¹

‘Umar ﷺ is reported to have said, ‘Do not be deceived by a person’s character until you have seen him angry, nor in his religion until you have seen him desire something.’

[It is related that Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ﷺ once heard that a man had been speaking ill of him. So he took a platter of fresh dates and personally carried them to the man’s house and knocked on the door. The man opened it, and when he saw Ḥusayn standing there with the dates he said, ‘What is this, son of the Prophet’s ﷺ daughter?’ He replied, ‘I heard that you have donated some of your good deeds to me, so take this as payment.’]⁶²

⁶⁰ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 2608.

⁶¹ Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-Īmān* (7976) with a similar wording. ⁶² Arabic only.

⁶³ ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, the grandson of Imam ‘Alī (d. 95/713).

‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn⁶³ was once on his way to the mosque when someone called out an insult to him. His servants made for the man, but he said, ‘Leave him be.’ Then he said to him, ‘There are worse things about us that you do not know. Now, is there anything that you need from us?’ The man was ashamed. Then ‘Alī gave him the cloak from his back and a thousand dirhams. The man said as he left, ‘I bear witness that you are the true scion of the Prophet!’

It is also said that Zayn al-‘Ābidīn once summoned a slave twice but received no answer. Finally he said, ‘Did you not hear?’ He replied, ‘I did.’ He said, ‘Then why did you not answer?’ He replied, ‘I knew your good character well enough to trust that you would not be annoyed with me.’ He said, ‘Thanks be to God that my slave knows me well!’ Then he set him free. On another occasion,⁶⁴ one of his slaves once broke his sheep’s leg. He said, ‘Why did you do that?’ The slave replied, ‘I did it on purpose to make you angry.’ He said, ‘Then I will make angry the one who taught you to do it,’ meaning Satan. Then he set the slave free. On another occasion a man insulted him, so he replied, ‘My good man, there is a narrow pass between Hell and Paradise. If I cross it, why should I care what you say? And if I fail to cross it, then I must be even worse than you say I am!’

The Prophet ﷺ also said, ‘A man might reach the rank of those who pray and fast merely by being forbearing and forgiving; and another man might be written down as a tyrant even if his authority extends no further than his own

⁶⁴ In an otherwise identical passage in *al-Mustaḥbirī* the author attributes the two following anecdotes to Abū Dharr rather than ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn, while in the *Kīmiyā* the attribution is the same as here.

⁶⁵ Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ* 6273.

⁶⁶ Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-Īmān* 7978.

household.’⁶⁵ He also said, ‘Hell has a door through which none will enter but those who give vent to their anger by disobeying God.’⁶⁶

It is related that Satan once came to Moses and said, ‘Moses, [I will teach you three things if you will ask God for one thing for me.’ Moses replied, ‘What are those three things?’ He replied, ‘Moses,]⁶⁷ beware of quick temper, for I play with a quick-tempered man like children playing with a ball. And beware of women,⁶⁸ for of all the traps I set for humans there is none so reliable as women. And beware of greed, for I ruin the greedy man’s worldly life and his religion too.’

The Messenger of God ﷺ also said, ‘When someone restrains his anger though he is able to act on it, God fills his heart with security and faith. When someone refrains from wearing extravagant clothing out of humility before God though he is able to wear it, God dresses him in the robe of honour.’⁶⁹ He ﷺ also said, ‘Woe betide the one who gets angry but forgets God’s anger!’⁷⁰

Someone once asked the Messenger of God ﷺ, ‘Teach me a deed by means of which I will enter Paradise,’ He ﷺ replied, ‘Do not get angry, and Paradise will be yours.’ He said, ‘Give me more.’ He ﷺ replied, ‘Do not ask anything of anyone, and Paradise will be yours.’ He said, ‘Give me more,’ He ﷺ replied, ‘After the afternoon prayer, ask forgiveness of God seventy times, and God will forgive you for

⁶⁷ Arabic, also in *al-Mustazhiri* and *Kīmiyā-yi Sa‘ādat*.

⁶⁸ Prof. Humā’ī here gives *zabān* (the tongue) rather than *zanān* (women), with a note stating that the manuscript was unclear. However, the Arabic translation gives *nisā’* (women), as does the equivalent passage in the *Mustazhiri*, and the Persian *Kīmiyā* also has *zanān*.

⁶⁹ Kharā’iṭī, *Masāwi’ al-Akhlaq wa-Madhmūmuhā* no. 326.

⁷⁰ ‘Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-Khafā’* no. 2976, attributed to al-Daylamī.

the sins of seventy years.’ He said, ‘But I do not have seventy years’ worth of sin.’ He ﷺ replied, ‘Then for your father.’ He said, ‘Nor does my father.’ He ﷺ replied, ‘Then for your mother.’ He said, ‘Nor does my mother.’ He ﷺ replied, ‘Then for your brothers.’⁷¹

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd ﷺ related that the Messenger of God ﷺ was once distributing some property when a man said, ‘This distribution is not for the sake of God’, meaning that it was not fair. Ibn Mas‘ūd ﷺ told the Prophet about this. He became angry and his blessed face reddened, but he said no more than, ‘May God have mercy on my brother Moses! He was offended worse than this, but he held his temper.’⁷²

This collection of narrations and anecdotes ought to provide sufficient counsel to any person of authority. If the roots of faith are in place, then it will be effective. If it is not effective, then this is a sign that the heart has become devoid of faith and that nothing is left but talk without substance. I do not know what sort of faith lies in the heart of an official who accepts thousands of dinars [every year unlawfully]⁷³ and gives it to others, remaining accountable for it all; for on the Day of Resurrection they will all demand it back from him, and the benefit of it will pass to others while he will be subjected to torment and punishment. Such is the height of negligence and un-Islamic conduct.

Fifth principle

In every situation that arises, the ruler should imagine that he is the subject and someone else in the ruler: if he would

⁷¹ Bazzār, *Musnad* 9245; Abū Nu‘aym, *Akhhbār Aṣḥabān* 316.

⁷² Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 3405.

⁷³ This gloss is based on the passage as given in the *Kīmiyā*.

not accept something for himself, he should not accept it for the Muslim population either. If he does, then he is guilty of defrauding and betraying his authority. On the day of the Battle of Badr, the Prophet was sitting in the shade when Gabriel said, ‘Messenger of God, you are in the shade while your Companions are in the sun!’, by way of rebuking him.⁷⁴

The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘Whoever would like to be saved from Hell and to enter Paradise, let him ensure that when his death comes, he bears witness that there is no god but God; and let him treat his fellow Muslims as he would like to be treated.’⁷⁵ He ﷺ also said, ‘If a person rises in the morning with his aspiration fixed upon anything but God, he is not a man of God; and if he does not care about the welfare of the Muslims, he is not one of them.’⁷⁶

Sixth principle

The ruler should never disdain to receive petitioners at his court, and he should be aware that it is perilous to do so. As long as any Muslims have need for him, he should not engage in supererogatory worship, since to tend to the needs of the Muslims is more meritorious. One day ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz tended to people’s affairs until it was time for the noon prayer. He went home to rest for a while, but his son said to him, ‘How can you be sure that death will not come while there is still someone in the court waiting to make his petition, and you are remiss in your duty to him?’ He replied, ‘You are right,’ and got up and went back.

⁷⁴ Hindī, *Kanz al-‘Ummāl* 24832.

⁷⁵ Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ* 474I with a similar wording.

⁷⁶ Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ* 471.

Seventh principle

The ruler must not make a habit out of wallowing in his base appetites—wearing luxurious clothing, eating fine foods—but instead should cultivate a permanent attitude of contentment, for without contentment there can be no justice.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ﷺ once asked Salmān ﷺ,⁷⁷ ‘Have you heard anything about my conduct of which you disapprove?’ He ﷺ replied, ‘I have heard that you put two loaves of bread upon your plate, and that you own two garments, one for the night and the other for the day.’ ‘Umar ﷺ said, ‘Is that all?’ He ﷺ replied, ‘Yes.’ ‘Umar ﷺ said, ‘By God, I will give them both up.’

Eighth principle

As much as he is able, the ruler should strive to be gentle, not cruel. The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘If a ruler is gentle with his subjects, God will be gentle with him on the Day of Resurrection.’⁷⁸ He also said in a supplication, ‘Dear God, be gentle with any ruler who is gentle with his subjects, and be harsh with any ruler who is harsh with his subjects.’⁷⁹ He also said, ‘Rulership is a fine thing for the one who fulfils its duties, and a terrible thing for the one who neglects its duties.’⁸⁰

The caliph Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik once asked the great scholar Abū Ḥāzim, ‘How can one attain salvation

⁷⁷ Prof. Humā’ī has ‘asked a Muslim’ (*musalmān*) here, while the passage in the *Kīmiyā* has ‘asked Salmān’, and the *Mustaḥḥirī* contains a more detailed account also mentioning Salmān. Salmān al-Fārisī was a Persian Companion of the Prophet (c. 33/652).

⁷⁸ *Kanz al-‘Ummāl* 14591;

⁷⁹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 1828 with a slightly different wording.

⁸⁰ Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ* 4831.

while fulfilling this task?’ He replied, ‘Ensure that every dirham you receive is from a lawful source, and that you spend it on a lawful recipient.’ Hishām said, ‘But who could manage that?’ He replied, ‘Only someone who is unable to endure Hell and would rather go to Paradise.’

Ninth principle


The ruler must strive to ensure that his subjects are pleased with him, while remaining within the bounds of the sacred law. The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘The best rulers⁸¹ are those whom you love and who love you; the worst rulers are those whom you hate and who hate you, and whom you curse and who curse you.’⁸² The ruler should not assume that just because people may come to him and praise him to his face, this means that all of his subjects are happy with him; for it could well be that they simply fear him. He ought to have reliable people whom he can dispatch to carry out reconnaissance and ask the populace their opinions of him, so that he may learn where his faults lie.

Tenth principle

The ruler must not seek to please anyone if it means disobeying the sacred law. If a person is displeased by the sacred law, then his displeasure will be of no harm. ‘Umar ﷺ used to say, ‘Every day when I wake up, half of mankind are displeased with me; for if two people bring me a dispute, I cannot please them both.’ It is sheer folly to seek to please people by displeasing God. Mu‘āwiya ﷺ once wrote to ‘Ā’isha, may God be pleased with her and with her father

⁸¹ Reading *a’imma*, (rulers) from the *Kīmiyā* rather than *ummat-i man* (of my community) as in Humā’ī’s edition.

⁸² Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 1855.

and all who love her, saying, 'Give me some advice that is short and to the point.' She  wrote back, 'I heard the Messenger of God say, "When someone seeks to please God even if it displeases people, God will be pleased with him and make the people pleased with him. When someone seeks to please the people by displeasing God, God will be displeased with him and will make the people displeased with him."''

CHAPTER III

THE TWO SPRINGS THAT WATER THE TREE OF FAITH



After learning of the roots and branches of faith, one should understand that there are two springs of knowledge from which the tree draws its water.

The first spring is knowledge of the world here-below: what it is, and why man was created in it. The world is a waystation, not a permanent abode. The human being is like a traveller in the world; his first stop is his mother's womb, his final stop is the grave, and his true abode comes afterwards. Every year that passes of his life is like another stage of the journey, every month a rest stop, every week a village encountered on the road, every day another league on the journey, every breath another step. Every breath he takes draws him closer to the hereafter. This world is like a bridge. If a traveller came to a bridge and, instead of crossing it and moving on, became absorbed with it and forgot all about his destination, he would be a fool. The intelligent person is the one who does no more in the world than ready his provisions for the journey, taking no more from the world than what he needs. To amass anything beyond that is deadly poison, and at the moment of death he will wish that all his treasuries had been filled with ashes instead of gold and silver. However much he amasses, his destined share of it will not exceed his needs, and the rest

will bring nothing but anguish at the moment of death, and make his parting from the world all the more difficult—and that is if his wealth was lawfully earned, let alone if it was unlawfully acquired, in which case the torment he experiences in the hereafter will be worse than his present anguish. He will not be able to bear parting with the world without great difficulty. But if his faith is true then he need not despair, for perhaps in the end he will be forgiven, God willing.

The ruler must also know that the comfort of the world last only a few days, and even that short time is marred by troubles and mixed with difficulty. It is neither endless nor unspoiled, and will cease when the hereafter arrives, which is a kingdom without end. It therefore ought to be easy for the intelligent person to bear patiently for a few days for the sake of repose that is unending. If one were to say to a man who is besotted with a woman, ‘If you can bear patiently tonight, she will be yours for a thousand nights, without any difficulty or danger.’ Regardless of how intense his love may be, he will find it easy to be patient for one night in return for a thousand. Now, this world is not merely a thousandth of the hereafter; it is entirely incommensurable with it, for the hereafter is eternal and the mind cannot comprehend its duration. We have already written a book about the description of this world,⁸³ and so here we shall suffice with depicting the nature of the world with ten allegories.⁸⁴

⁸³ This likely refers to *Iḥyāʾ*, Quarter 3, Book 26: Condemnation of the World (*Dhamm al-dunyā*), where much of the material of this section is found and expanded upon.

⁸⁴ Most of these allegories are found in almost identical versions in the *Kāmiyā*, Introduction, Part 3, Section 4, and in substantially different wordings in the *Iḥyāʾ*, Book 26.

First allegory

The world has various ways of enchanting man. The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Beware the world, for it is more sorcerous than Hārūt and Mārūt.'⁸⁵ The first of its enchantments is that it shows itself to you in a manner that makes you think that it is motionless and stable; you look at it, and it seems to be the same old world as ever. Yet in fact it is constantly fleeing from you, but doing so gradually, atom by atom, breath by breath. It is like a shadow which appears to be stationary when you look at it, yet is actually always moving. The fact is that your life is always moving in just the same way, bidding you farewell as it goes, though you do not realise it. [A poet said:


No matter how great its delights, the world is
like a mirage:
Its blisses pass away, and it floats off like a cloud.]⁸⁶

Second allegory

Another of its enchantments is that it shows you kindness so that you fall in love with it, and it acts as though it is on your side and not on the side of another, but then suddenly leaves you and goes to your enemy. It is like a wanton mendacious woman who lures men to her and makes them fall in love with her, and then takes them home and kills them. It is related that Jesus ﷺ had a vision of the world in the form of an old woman. He asked her, 'How many husbands have you had?' She replied, 'Too many to count.' He ﷺ asked, 'Did they die, or were you divorced?' She replied,

⁸⁵ Two angels mentioned in Q. 2:102 sent to test humanity by offering to teach them sorcery.

⁸⁶ Arabic only.

‘I killed them all.’ He  said, ‘How strange that they keep coming! They can see what you did to the others, but they pay no heed.’

Third allegory

The world decorates its outward appearance and hides all of its trials and tribulations, so that the ignorant person looks upon its outward appearance and becomes deluded. It is like an ugly old woman who covers her face and puts on beautiful clothes and decorates herself with many ornaments, so that from a distance all who see her are enchanted with her, but when they draw back her veil they are dismayed to see her vile appearance. Tradition states that on the Day of Resurrection the world will be brought forward in the form of an ugly old woman with green eyes and protruding teeth. When people lay eyes on her they will exclaim, ‘We seek refuge with God! What is this vile and hideous thing?’ The reply will come: ‘This is the world on account of which you envied and hated one another, shed innocent blood, and cut family ties, so deluded were you by it.’ Then it will be taken to Hell, whereupon it will say, ‘Lord, where are my lovers?’ God will command that they be sent to Hell to join it.

Fourth allegory

Consider how much time passed before you came into the world, how much time will pass after you leave it, and the few days of your existence between time immemorial and time everlasting. Anyone who does so will see that the world is but a traveller’s road that begins in the cradle and ends in the grave, between which there are a few stops, each year like a stage, each month like a league, each day like a

mile, each breath like a step. It is always passing by; some have a league left to go, others less, others more, yet all of them sit there tranquilly as though they will be there forever, making plans for things ten years in the future though they may have less than ten days left to live.

Fifth allegory

The delights of the world which worldly people enjoy, compared to the torment that awaits them in the hereafter, may be illustrated by the example of a person who eats so much rich and sweet food that it upsets his stomach. He grows conscious of the disgusting state of his stomach, his bad breath, and his bodily functions, and he becomes ashamed and remorseful now that the pleasure is gone and the disgrace remains. The more lavish food he eats, the fouler his waste will be. Just so, the more enjoyment one takes from the world, the worse one's punishment will be. This will become clear at the moment of death: those who have amassed the most wealth—gardens and orchards, concubines and slaves, gold and silver—will experience greater pain upon being separated from them at the moment of death than will those who possess fewer things. Nor will that pain and suffering end with death, but only grow worse, since such love [for the world] is an attribute of the heart, and the heart remains in place and does not die.

Sixth allegory

The affairs of the world often seem to be simple and limited, and people may suppose that a single action of theirs will not last long, but in fact that one action may give rise to a hundred others which will absorb them for the rest of their lives. Jesus ﷺ said, 'The seeker of the world is like a

man who drinks sea water: the more he drinks, the thirstier he gets, and he will go on drinking until he dies without ever quenching his thirst.’ The Messenger of God ﷺ said, ‘It is no more possible to become involved in the world without being contaminated than it is to dive into the sea without getting wet.’

Eighth allegory

People in the world are like guests invited by a host who prides himself on keeping his mansion well-presented for his guests, and to invite them one group after another. When they arrive, he places before them a tray of jewels and gold and a silver censer filled with oud and incense so that they may perfume themselves. Then they pass by the tray and the censer so that the next group may come in. Those who are familiar with the host’s customs and possessed of intelligence will burn the oud and incense and enjoy the scent, and then pass on happily, expressing their gratitude and going on their way. Someone who is foolish and ignorant, however, will imagine that the tray and the censer are being gifted to him to take with him, and when the time comes to leave and they are taken from him, he will be offended and hurt and will cry out in indignation. The world is just like this guesthouse, a stop upon the road where passers-by⁸⁷ may take provisions without coveting the things in the house.

Eighth allegory

People who are devoted to the affairs of the world and forgetful of the hereafter are like passengers on a ship who

⁸⁷ Reading *rāhguzaryān* (passers-by) from the *Kīmīyā* rather than *rah-i gidāyān* (beggars’ road) as in Humā’ī’s edition.

stop by an island and go ashore to relieve themselves and perform ablutions. The crew call to them that they must not stay long, but only perform their ablutions and return, as the ship will soon depart. The passengers on the island then divide into several groups. The intelligent ones quickly perform their ablutions and return to the ship, which they find empty, allowing them to claim the most spacious and comfortable seats. Others remain on the island to view its sights and marvel at its wonders, gazing at its beautiful flowers,⁸⁸ tuneful birds, and colourful strange-shaped stones. By the time they return, there are no seats left and they must endure the discomfort of whatever cramped and gloomy places they can find to sit. Others do not merely look at those beautiful colourful stones, but pick them up and bring them back to the ship where, finding no seats, they sit in cramped spots with the stones hanging around their necks. After a day or two the stones change colour and become dull, and a foul odour emits from them, but they can find nowhere to throw them. They become filled with regret, the stones still hanging uncomfortably around their necks. Another group are so enthralled by the wonders of the island that they wander too far from the ship to hear the crew calling for departure, and it leaves without them. They remain on the island, some dying of hunger, others devoured by wild beasts.

The first group represent the ascetic believers, the last group the unbelievers who forget all about God and the hereafter and give themselves over entirely to the world. *They have preferred the present life to the hereafter* [Q. 16:107]. The intermediate groups are like the sinners who

⁸⁸ Reading *shukūfabā* (flowers) from the *Kīmiyā* rather than *kūshkhā* (palaces) as in Humā'ī's edition.

hold to faith but cannot relinquish the world; one group enjoy it but are poor, while the other enjoy it and are so wealthy that they become overburdened.

Ninth allegory

Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه said, ‘The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said to me, “Abū Hurayra, shall I show you the world and all that it contains?” I replied, “Indeed do, Messenger of God صلى الله عليه وسلم.” He took my hand and led me to a valley in which was a refuse dump containing human skulls, scraps of old cast-off clothes, decaying bones, and human waste. He said, “Abū Hurayra, these human heads that you see here were once like yours, full of desire for the world, hoping for long lives just as you do, that they might thrive in the world and amass wealth. Today only their bare bones remain, as you see before you. Those rags were the clothes they wore for adornment and comfort, but the wind has carried them off and dropped them in filth. Those bones are what remains of their mounts, upon the backs of which they travelled all over the world. That waste is the fine food which they attained by deception and stole from one another, and then expelled from their bodies as that foul stuff which none can stand to approach on account of its stench. The whole of the world is what you see here. Whosoever would weep for the world, let him weep for this.”’ Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه later recalled, ‘All who were present wept.’⁸⁹

Tenth allegory

In the time of Jesus عليه السلام, three men were travelling on a road when they found some treasure. They agreed that one of

⁸⁹ Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī noted in his examination of the narration of the *Iḥyāʾ* that he could find no source for this hadith.

them should go and bring food for them to eat. The one chosen for the task went off to buy food. While he was gone he thought to himself, ‘I should poison the food so that they eat it and die, and then the treasure will be all mine.’ Meanwhile, the other two men agreed that when he returned they would kill him and claim the treasure for themselves. When he came back with the poisoned food, they killed him and then ate the food and died. Jesus ﷺ happened to pass by. He said to his disciples, ‘Behold the world! Three men killed one another for its sake, and it outlived them all.’

This is what all seekers of the lower world ought to know about what they seek.



The second spring is awareness of death, the final breath. Human beings are divided into two groups. One group prefer the lower world and entertain high hopes, and give no thought whatsoever to death. The other group—the intelligent ones—always have the thought of death in mind: when will it come? Will they manage to secure their faith in time? What will they take with them into the grave? What will their enemies claim after they have gone and left it behind? Everyone should entertain such thoughts, especially kings and powerful people, for often they have sent out their minions to harass God’s servants, instilling much dread and fear into their hearts. Yet God Almighty too has a minion named Azrael ﷺ, also known as the Angel of Death, and no soul will evade his grasp. The agents of kings seize silver and goods, while this agent seizes only souls. Those agents may be moved by intercession and pleading, but this agent will not be moved. Those agents may grant

respite of a day or two, but this agent grants respite to no soul. His wonders are manifold, but we shall illustrate them with five anecdotes.⁹⁰

First anecdote

Wahb ibn Munabbih, a Jewish scholar who became Muslim, related that one day a mighty king decided to ride out with all the commanders of his army to display his sovereignty and might to the world. Magnificent clothes were brought for him to wear and beautiful horses were presented to him, but he withheld his approval until a horse of unsurpassed finery was brought before him. At last he mounted up and, with all ceremony, rode out among his army. Then the Devil came along and placed his mouth upon the King's nose and blew the wind of pride into it. He said to himself, 'Have I an equal in all the world?' He rode out, pridefully disdaining to look upon anyone. Then a man wearing old rough clothes came before the King and greeted him, but he gave no reply, so the man took hold of his horse's reins. 'Do you know whose reins you are holding?' said the King. The man replied, 'I need something from you.' 'Wait until I return,' said the King. The man replied, 'I want it now.' The King asked, 'Tell me what it is.' The man replied, 'No one else must know. I have a secret which is for your ears only.' The King said, 'Then tell me.' The man put his head to the King's ear and whispered, 'I am the Angel of Death.' 'Give me a moment,' said the King, 'so I may go home and say farewell to my wife and children.' The angel replied, 'No, by God. Never again will you see

⁹⁰ These anecdotes are found in Book 40 of the *Iḥyā'* (On the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife), except for the fifth which is found in Book 27 (On the Condemnation of Miserliness and Love for Wealth).

your home, your wife, or your children. There was but one more breath left in your life, and now it is done.' In that instant he took the King's soul, and he fell from his horse to the ground.

The Angel of Death then moved away and went over to a believer with whom God was pleased. He exchanged greetings with him and then said, 'I have a secret for you.' 'Tell me,' the man replied. 'I am the Angel of Death,' he said. The man replied, 'Welcome. Praise be to God that you have come, for I have long been awaiting you. There is no one in the world whom I have been longing to see more than you.' The angel said, 'If you have anything to attend to, do it now.' He replied, 'I have nothing more important to do than to meet God.' The angel asked, 'How would you like me to take your soul? For I was commanded to take it in whatever way you desired.' The man replied, 'Give me a moment to perform ablutions and pray. When I touch my head to the ground in prostration, take my soul.' The Angel of Death did just that, and then bore him to the mercy of God Almighty.

Second anecdote

It is related that there was a very rich man who desired to amass every kind of wealth that God has created, that he might live to see his every desire fulfilled. He accumulated all of that wealth and built a magnificent tall palace in which he installed two doors, and appointed formidable slaves to guard it. One day he ordered for a sumptuous banquet to be prepared, inviting his family and retinue to dine with him. He sat himself upon his throne and, reclining upon it, said to himself, 'You have accumulated the riches of the world. Now you may sit back and enjoy a long life

of ease.’ No sooner had this thought come to him than he saw outside the palace a man wearing tattered clothes with a sack hanging about his neck like a pauper begging for bread. He gave a tremendously loud knock upon the door, alarming everyone who was present. The guards leaped up and said, ‘What is this foolishness?’ He replied, ‘Tell your master to come out. I have business with him.’ They said, ‘Who are you to demand that he come out to you?’ He replied, ‘Tell him.’ They went and told their master. ‘Why did you not get rid of him?’ he said. Then the stranger gave an even louder knock upon the door, and they leaped up again and rushed to him. ‘Silence,’ he said, for I am the Angel of Death.’ Upon hearing this they became terrified, and their tongues and feet were frozen. Their master said, ‘Ask him if he will take another instead of me.’ He replied, ‘Tell him this: “I have come for you. Do what you will, but I have come to separate you from all of the riches you have amassed.”’ The man gathered all of his wealth, his heart overcome with woe, and said, ‘Curse you, wealth! You deceived me and kept me from worshipping my Lord! I always thought that you would be to my advantage, but today you have brought me only pain, tribulation, and woe. I go away empty-handed, while you stay behind for my enemies!’ Then God gave his wealth the power to reply to him, and it said, ‘Why do you curse me? Curse yourself! God Almighty created you and me from dust, then placed me in your hand that you might prepare for your hereafter, give charity to the poor, and build mosques, bridges, and hospices, that I might aid you in the next world. But you hoarded me, spent me on your vain desires, and guarded me, and so today you pass me on to your enemies, taking with you nothing but woe and regret. Is that my fault?’

Then the Angel of Death took his soul and he tumbled headfirst from his throne.

Third anecdote

Yazīd al-Raqāshī⁹¹ related that among the Israelites there was a tyrant king who one day was sitting upon his throne when he saw entering the palace a man with a gruesome and frightful appearance. Everyone leaped out of their seats in fear of him. He said, 'Who are you?' He replied, 'I am one whom no doorman can turn back, one who fears no king, one from whose grip no tyrant can escape.' When the King heard this he fell upon his face trembling and said, 'Are you the Angel of Death?' He replied, 'Yes.' 'For God's sake,' said the King, 'give me a day's respite, that I might repent and seek forgiveness, and that I might return the wealth in my treasury to its rightful owners.' The angel replied, 'It must be now, for the days of your life have been counted out and there are none left.' 'Then give me but an hour,' said the King. The angel replied, 'The hours of your life have been counted out and there are none left. All of them passed by while you were heedless.' The King asked, 'If you bear me to the next world now, what will I take with me?' He replied, 'You will take with you only your deeds.' He said, 'But I have done no good deeds.' The angel replied, 'Then only Hell and God's wrath await you.' Then he took his soul, and his body collapsed, and a great hue and cry arose in his kingdom. Had they known what would befall him, their wails and cries would have been all the louder.

⁹¹ A Basran narrator of the second generation of Muslims (Tābi'ūn), frequently cited in the *Iḥyā'* (d. 119/737).

Fourth anecdote

It is said that one day the Angel of Death came to Solomon ﷺ and fixed his eye upon one of his close companions. After he left, the companion said, 'Messenger of God, who was that who kept staring at me?' Solomon ﷺ replied, 'The Angel of Death.' He said, 'I fear that he will come to take me away. Help me escape from him now: command the wind to carry me off and bear me to the land of India, that I might be reprieved for a while.' So Solomon ﷺ commanded the wind to carry him off to farthest India. Just then the Angel of Death came to Solomon ﷺ, who asked him, 'Why were you staring at that man?' He replied, 'I thought it strange that I had been commanded to take his soul in the land of India, though he was so far away from there. I kept on wondering this until lo and behold, by God's command the wind carried him there at your signal, Messenger of God; and it was there that I claimed his soul.'

Fifth anecdote

It is said that Dhūl-Qarnayn came to a people who were entirely without possessions. He saw that they had dug graves at the doors of their houses, and that they went to those graves every day to pray. They had nothing to eat but grass. Dhūl-Qarnayn sent a man to summon their king, but the King would not come, saying, 'I have no business with Dhūl-Qarnayn, nor anything to ask of him.' Dhūl-Qarnayn went to him and said, 'What has happened to you?' The King asked him what he meant by that. He replied, 'You people do not seem to have any possessions. Why do you not amass gold and silver and use it for your benefit?' The King replied, 'Because no one is ever satisfied with it, and in the hereafter it always leads to loss.' Dhūl-Qarnayn

asked, 'Why have you dug these graves?' The King replied, 'So that we are constantly reminded of the road to the hereafter, and we never forget death, and this world never becomes dear to our hearts, and we remain devoted to worship.' Dhūl-Qarnayn asked, 'And why do you eat grass?' 'So as to avoid turning our stomachs into graves for food,' the King replied, 'for the pleasure of food goes no further than the throat.' Then the King took out a human skull and presented it to him, saying, 'Dhūl-Qarnayn, do you know who this was? It was an earthly king who ruled unjustly and devoted himself to amassing wealth while oppressing his subjects. Then God Almighty saw his tyranny and seized his soul and cast him into Hell; and here is his head!' Then he took another skull and presented it to him, saying, 'Do you know who this was? It was a just and righteous king who treated his subjects with compassion and mercy. When God took his soul, he sent him to Paradise.' Then he placed his hand upon Dhūl-Qarnayn's head and said, 'And here is your head: soon it will be one of these two.' Dhūl-Qarnayn wept at those words and said to him, 'Will you come with us and be our minister? I will give you half of my kingdom.' 'No', replied the King. 'Why?' he asked. The King replied, 'All of mankind are enemies to you because of your power and wealth. To me they will always be friends, because of my contentment and poverty.'

These anecdotes amply illustrate the final breath. One must know that heedless people do not like to hear mention of death, for they fear that it will spoil their enjoyment of the world. Tradition states that when a person remembers death and the grave much, the grave will be for him a meadow of Paradise; and when a person is heedless of it and declines to remember it, the grave will be for him a pit

of Hell. Tradition also states that one day the Messenger of God ﷺ was describing the reward of the martyrs slain in God's cause. 'Ā'isha ؓ said, 'Messenger of God ﷺ, is it possible for someone who does not die a martyr to reap such a reward?' He replied, 'Yes. Anyone who remembers death twenty times a day will receive the reward of the martyrs.'⁹² The Messenger of God ﷺ also said, 'Remember death much, for it expiates sins and promotes asceticism towards the world.'⁹³

Once he ﷺ was asked, 'Who are the cleverest people?' He ﷺ replied, 'Those who remember death the most, and prepare for it the best.'⁹⁴ Such are the cleverest and wisest people, for they will attain nobility in the world and honour in the hereafter.

All who understand the world in the manner we have described here, and who keep the thought of the final breath fresh in their hearts, the work of the world will become easy for them. The tree of faith will stand firm upon strong roots, its branches reaching upwards, carrying them safely to the presence of the Real on High, Allah willing.

May God the Glorious and Majestic grant the King of the East illuminated vision, that he may see the world and the hereafter as they truly are, and work for the sake of the hereafter, and treat God's creatures well. For he has a thousand thousand subjects or more, and if he rules them justly they will all intercede for him at the Resurrection, and he will be saved from reproach and punishment. But if he rules them unjustly, they will be his adversaries; and to have so

⁹² 'Irāqī noted that he was not able to find a source for this hadith. Aḥmad and al-Ṭabarānī narrated hadiths with a similar meaning.

⁹³ 'Irāqī attributes this narration to Ibn Abī Dunyā in *al-Mawt*.

⁹⁴ Ibn Mājah, *Sunan* 4259.

many adversaries is tremendously dangerous. When intercessors become adversaries, there can be nothing but trouble. And Allah knows best what is right.

PART II

CHAPTER I

ON THE POLITY AND JUSTICE OF KINGS, AND THEIR CHRONICLES



Know that God Most High has chosen two groups from among the children of Adam ﷺ, endowing each of them with superiority over the rest of humanity. The first are the Prophets, upon them be blessings and peace; the second are the kings. He sent the Prophets ﷺ to His servants to show them the way to Him, and sent kings to protect them from one another and ensure their welfare in life, by His wisdom. He conferred a high rank upon them, for as tradition says, ‘The sultan is God’s shadow upon earth’,⁹⁵ which evinces the ruler’s high rank as God’s delegate to mankind. It therefore must be acknowledged that the one to whom this sovereignty and divine glory (*farr-i īzadī*)⁹⁶ is granted is owed obedience, love, and fealty from his subjects. It is improper to dispute with kings and forbidden to oppose them, for God Almighty says, *Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you* [Q. 4:59]. Everyone to whom God has given religion must therefore love and obey their sovereign and recognise that this sovereignty is granted by God to whomever He wills, as He says: *Say*: ‘O

⁹⁵ Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab* 6984.

⁹⁶ An important expression in Persian political thought, somewhat analogous to the European notion of the divine right of kings. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, entry for FARR(AH).

Allah, Master of the Kingdom, you give the Kingdom to whom You will, and seize the Kingdom from whom You will. You exalt whom You will, and You abase whom You will. In Your hand is good. Truly You have power over all things [Q. 3:26]. He exalts whom He wills through His favour, and abases whom He wills through His justice. The true sovereign is the one who rules God's servants justly and refrains from injustice and corruption. The unjust sovereign is ill-omened and will not last, for as the Prophet said, 'Sovereignty may remain with unbelief, but it will not remain with injustice.'⁹⁷

Chronicles state that the Magians ruled this world for almost four thousand years, during which sovereignty remained in their dynasty. It endured because they were just to their subjects and allowed no tyranny or oppression in their tradition, thriving in the world thanks to justice and equity. It is related that God Most High revealed to the Prophet David ﷺ, "David! Tell your people not to speak ill of the people of Persia, for they have made the world thrive so that My servants might live in it." It must be understood that the world may thrive or fall to ruin depending upon its kings. If the king is just, the world will thrive and the citizens will be safe, as it was in the times of Ardashīr, Farīdūn, Bahrām Gūr, Kisrā Anūshirvān, and other kings like them. If the king is a tyrant, the world will be ruined as it was in the times of Ḍaḥḥāk, Afrāsiyāb, and others like them.

If anyone should find difficulty with this and say, 'How could it be possible that the Magians could be given rule

⁹⁷ A popular saying attributed to many sages and sometimes presented as a hadith, as here, but apparently without foundation.

over the world for four thousand years, ruling justly without perpetrating oppression or injustice?’, then here in this book we shall explain the details of those kings: the lengths of their reigns, their lives, characters, and stories, and how they treated their subjects. Anyone who reads this will find the difficulty removed from his heart. What is more, he will know how many years each of them ruled, when they departed, who succeeded them, as well as their order from first to last. The history of each of them shall be given in the correct order, Allah willing.⁹⁸

The Genealogies, Characters, and Histories of the Kings

Tradition relates that after Adam ﷺ, upon him be peace, had sired many sons, he chose two of them, Seth and Kayūmarth,⁹⁹ and gave them forty pages of the Great Scripture to guide their actions. He appointed Seth guardian of the affairs of religion¹⁰⁰ and the Hereafter, and Kayūmarth guardian of the affairs of this world and kingship. He thus became the first of the kings of this world, and ruled for 30 years. After him was Hūshang, who ruled for 90/40¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ The list of kings that follows is missing in some Arabic manuscripts and has been omitted from all contemporary printed editions of the *Tibr* except for that of Dr Muḥammad Damaj. The manuscripts on which Prof Humā’ī relied for the Persian edition were missing a great many names from the list, as well as other details which meant that Prof Humā’ī was not able to reconstitute the greater part of the names and was forced to leave them blank. This translation follows Dr Damaj’s Arabic edition for these, although it seems unlikely that the author’s original text has been preserved as originally written. For a lively account of the traditional history of Persian kings, see Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, translated by Dick Davis, Penguin Classics 2007.

⁹⁹ Kayūmarth is a figure of Persian and Mazdean mythology, traditionally held to be the first king of Iran, or even the first human being. See Mansour Shaki, “GAY MART,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. X, Fasc. 3, pp. 345-47; online edition, 2000.

¹⁰⁰ The Arabic has *dunyā*, ‘this world’, while the Persian has *dīn*, ‘religion.’

¹⁰¹ Henceforth when two numbers are given for the length of a king’s reign, the first refers to the Persian text, the second the Arabic text.

years. Then came Ṭahmūrath, who warred against the jinn and ruled for 930/30 years. Then came Jamshīd, who introduced weapons and saddles and did many great works, and ruled for 770/700 years. Then came Bayvarāsp, also known as Ḍaḥḥāk, he of the two serpents, who was given to trickery, deceit, and sorcery. He was a terrible tyrant and despot, and ruled for 1000 years. Then came Afrīdūn, who had a good name and an excellent character, and who ruled for 500 years. Then came Minūchihr, a man of knowledge who achieved many royal endeavours and great feats and ruled for 120 years. After him was Nawzar, who ruled for twelve years.¹⁰² Next was Afrāsiyāb, who ruled Iran and whom the Turks called Alp Er Tunga.¹⁰³ He was a man of great valour who would march his armies through the night and cause disturbances with his men and horses. He ruled Iran for 12 years, and in Turkistan, Samarkand, and Bokhara his descendants rule even still. After him came Zav son of Taḥmāsp, a man of valour and good character who reigned for 3/50 years. [Next came Garshāsp, who ruled for 8 years.]¹⁰⁴

Then came Kay Qubād, who raised great armies and deployed troops, and was merciful to his subjects. He ruled for 100/120 years. After him was Kay Kāvūs, a high-minded king who reigned for 120 years. Then came Kay Khusraw, who discharged his responsibilities well and

¹⁰² This king is omitted in the Persian but present in the Arabic and in the *Shāh-nāmāh*.

¹⁰³ The name is unclear in the Persian and Arabic manuscripts, being given variously as ‘Altakā Alp’, ‘Kask Alt’, ‘Kalkā Alb’, etc., but the Turkic hero Alp Er Tunga, identified in tradition with Afrāsiyāb, must be the one meant.

¹⁰⁴ Prof Humā’ī places this between brackets, usually indicating that it is taken from the Arabic, but Dr Damaj does not mention it as being in any of the Arabic manuscripts. Perhaps it is borrowed from the *Shāh-nāmāh*.

knew how to hold back once his aim was achieved. He ruled for 60 years. Then came Luhrāsp, a king of great majesty and glory, who ruled for 110/120 years.¹⁰⁵ After him was Gushtāsp, who followed the religion of Zoroaster and reigned for 110/120 years. Then came Bahman son of Asfandiyār, who was rancorous and belligerent and ruled for 112 years. After him was his daughter Shamīrān, known as Humāy, who was possessed of sound judgement and discretion and who reigned for 30/17 years. Then came Dārā, whose reign was characterized by defeat, panic, and distress; he ruled for 40/41 years. [Then came Dārā son of Dārā, who raised armies, administered order, and allocated provinces.]¹⁰⁶ Then came Alexander the Greek,¹⁰⁷ who is Dhūl-Qarnayn, who roamed the earth and travelled widely, saw many wonders, conquered many lands and overthrew many kings, and ruled for 12/36 years.¹⁰⁸

Then the kingship passed to the kinds of the factions (*ṭawā'if*), among whom the group called the Ashkānians [Parthians] won out. The first of the Ashkānian kings was Ashk ibn Hurmuz, who ruled for 13 years and one month [...].¹⁰⁹ Then Ardashīr son of Pābak son of Sāsān rose and wrested the kingdom from them, ascending to glory, greatness, and success. The kingship remained with his family

¹⁰⁵ The Arabic adds here 'then came Tamnāsp [?], who was a sage and who reigned for 120 years, then Asfandiyār, who ruled for 93 years.'

¹⁰⁶ Not in Persian.

¹⁰⁷ The Persian has here 'Ardashīr (Dārāniyūsh) son of Dārā', but the description matches that of Alexander in the Arabic and even gives a more accurate length for his reign. As Bagley suggests, this may refer to the legend promulgated in the *Shāh-nāmah* and elsewhere that Alexander was really the son of Dārā.

¹⁰⁸ The Arabic skips from here to Ardashīr, omitting the fragmented history of the Parthians.

¹⁰⁹ Here follows in the Persian a list of Parthian kings but with all of the names omitted and only the years of rule retained.

until it passed to the Muslims. The early kings from Kayūmarth to Kay Qubād were called the Pīshdādians, and those from Alexander to Ardashīr were called the Ashkānians.¹¹⁰ Ardashīr ruled for 44 years, of which 30 were spent waging war and setting the world aright, and 14 were spent in peace. After him came his son Shāpūr,¹¹¹ who ruled for 33 years. Then came Hormizd, who ruled for 30 years and 3 months. Then came Bahrām son of Bahrām, who ruled for 4 months.¹¹² Then came Narseh, who ruled for 9 years. After him was his son Hurmuz, who ruled for 70 years and 5 months. Then came Shāpūr Dhūl-Aktāf,¹¹³ who ruled for 70 years. After him came his brother Ardashīr, who ruled for 20 years. Then came Shāpūr son of Shāpūr, who ruled for 5 years. Then came his son Bahrām, who ruled for 12 years. Then came Yazdgird the Sinner, who was tyrannical, unjust, and corrupt, and who reigned for 30 years. After him was Bahrām Gūr, who cared well for his subjects and was given to archery, hunting, sport, feasting, and drinking; he ruled for 33 years. Then came his son Yazdgird, who ruled for 80 years. After him was Hurmuz, who ruled for 11 years. Then came his son Pīrūz, who ruled for 11 years. Next was Balāsh,¹¹⁴ who ruled for 5 years and 2 months. After him was Kay Qubād, who ruled for 40 years. Then came Jāmāsp the Wise, who was well-versed in astrology and ruled for 1 year and 6 months. Then came Khusraw

¹¹⁰ The kings from Kay Qubād to Dārā II are traditionally known as the Kayānian dynasty.

¹¹¹ From here onwards the Persian is lacking all the kings' names, and the Arabic has been followed.

¹¹² This must refer to Bahrām III, skipping Bahrāms I and II.

¹¹³ 'The Shoulder-Piercer', so known among the Arabs for his cruelty.

¹¹⁴ The Arabic manuscripts have 'Ashk' or 'Askar' here, which Bagley suggests may be a copyist error for Balāsh, though there is little resemblance between them in the Arabic script.

Anūshirvān, who reigned with justice, equity, and beneficence for 48 years. After him was Hurmuz, who ruled for 12 years. Then came Khusraw Parvīz, who was unequalled in dominion, funds, resources, treasures, and enjoyments of pleasure and music, which would be long in the telling if we were to describe it; he ruled for 38 years. Then came Shīrūyah son of Khusraw, who ruled for 7 months and was treacherous and disloyal. Then came Ardashīr, who ruled for 1 year and 6 months. After him was Gurāz [Shahrbaraz], who ruled for 25 days. Next was Pūrāndukht, who ruled for 6 months, then Azarmīdukht, who ruled for four months, then Farrukh Zād, who ruled for 1 month. Then came Yazdgird son of Shahriyār, the last of the Persian kings, who ruled for 20 years.

After him the Muslims defeated the Persians and took sovereignty out of their hands, and by the blessing of the Prophet, Allah bless him, power and authority passed to the Muslims. [That was during the caliphate of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him.]¹¹⁵

Know that all of those kings we have mentioned were masters of the world. They achieved their ends and had their day, and then they departed, and their names and deeds remained as we have recounted. After men have gone, talk of them remains, and every man is remembered for what he did. If he was good, he will be remembered for goodness; if he was evil, he will be remembered for evil. It is therefore essential that men, especially kings, should sow the seeds of virtue and stay clear of vice and vileness, so that their good names will endure and people will not speak ill of them. [A poet said:]

¹¹⁵ Arabic only.

Flee from evil, and leave sin alone,
And if you slip, repent and atone.
Keep yourself away from vice;
Be fearful, lest you pay the price!
Once you're gone, only talk will remain;
Be sure to make yourself a good name!

It is said that the memories a good man leaves after him are like a second life for him in this world. It is therefore essential for the intelligent person to study the histories of the kings and to observe the state of this fickle world, that he might see it for what it is and avoid pinning his heart to it; for it will not remain for anyone, whether they are good or bad. He must strive to ensure that he does not make many enemies, for enemies are very difficult to deal with. God Most High is just, and at the Resurrection He will ensure justice for every adversary. It is therefore most unwise to make enemies for the sake of worldly gain, as the following anecdote illustrates:

It is said that Abū ʿAlī Ilyās, a military commander of Nishapur, once came to Abū ʿAlī Daqqāq.¹¹⁶ Abū ʿAlī Ilyās was a very virtuous man. He knelt down before him and said to him, ‘Counsel me.’ ‘Commander,’ said Daqqāq, ‘let me ask you something, and answer me truthfully.’ He agreed. ‘Tell me,’ said Daqqāq, ‘what do you love more: your gold, or your enemy?’ The commander replied, ‘I love my gold more.’ ‘Then why,’ said Daqqāq, ‘will you leave behind what you love in this world, and take your enemy with you to the next world, though you love him not?’ The

¹¹⁶ A Sufi of Nishapur (d. 405/1015), teacher and father-in-law of Imam Qushayrī.

commander wept and said, ‘In these words of counsel you have given me, all counsel and wisdom are summed up.’

God Most High sent the Prophet so that by his blessing the abode of unbelief would be transformed into the abode of Islam, and so that the world would thrive with justice and equity. At that time the king was Anūshirvān, who surpassed the kings who preceded him in justice, equity, and polity. This was due to the blessing of the Messenger ﷺ because he was born in his time; after the birth of Muḥammad ﷺ, Anūshirvān lived another two years. The Prophet ﷺ took pride in this and said, ‘I was born in the time of the just king’,¹¹⁷ attesting to his justice. His rule is still renowned for its justice, and of all kings he is known most of all for justice and equity. His good name is known all over the world, despite his being an unbeliever. But the kings who preceded him were also concerned with justice; they developed the world and governed their subjects with sound polity. The remains of their development are still to be found in the world, and every city is named after a king. They built villages and dug irrigation channels so that water that otherwise would have gone to waste could be directed towards cultivated land. It was with justice that Anūshirvān developed the world.

[**Anecdote:** It is said that once during his rule Anūshirvān the Just feigned illness, and charged his trusted servants with the task of travelling all across the lands of his kingdom in search of an old brick from a ruined village for him to use as medicine. He told them that this was what the physicians had prescribed. After travelling throughout his kingdom, they returned and told him that they had not found a single ruined village or old brick. Anūshirvān was

¹¹⁷ This hadith is unanimously considered by Muslim scholars to be inauthentic.

delighted with this and gave thanks to his God, saying, ‘I only did this to test my kingdom and to discover if there were any ruins left in my domain, so that I might rebuild them. But now I see that everywhere is developed and thriving. The affairs of the kingdom are all in order, and things are ordered right, and it is as prosperous as can be.’¹¹⁸

The efforts these kings made to make their lands prosper were motivated by the knowledge that the more the kingdom thrived, the longer their reigns would be and the more their populations would grow. They also knew that what the wise say is true: ‘Religion depends upon the monarchy, the monarchy upon the army, the army upon wealth, wealth upon prosperity, and prosperity upon justice. They would not tolerate any injustice, whether great or small, for they knew beyond doubt that a population subjected to injustice and oppression will not be stable, and that cities and towns will go to ruin, people will flee and settle in other kingdoms, settled land will be left uninhabited, the kingdom will suffer losses, revenues will decrease, treasuries will empty, and the quality of life will suffer. No populace can love an unjust king, and they will always pray that evil befalls him. There are two kinds of injustice: one is the injustice of a ruler to his subjects, or of the strong to the weak, or the rich to the poor. The other is the injustice that you do to yourself, namely sin. Do not be unjust to yourself, and God will keep injustice from you, as it is said:

Anecdote: Among the Israelites there was a fisherman who would catch fish to support his family. One day to his delight a huge fish got caught in his net. ‘I will take this fish and sell it to pay our expenses’, he said. On the way a bailiff

¹¹⁸ Arabic only.

approached him and said, 'Is that fish for sale?' The fisherman thought to himself, 'If I say yes, he will not give me a good price.' So he replied, 'No, it is not for sale.' The bailiff became enraged and beat him on the back with his club, and took the fish from him without paying for it. 'Dear Lord,' said the fisherman, 'You created me weak, and him strong. Take my due from him in this world, for I do not have the patience to wait until the next!' The bailiff took the fish home and told his wife to grill it. She grilled it, set it on a tray, and served it to her husband. One account says that he ate the fish and then his finger began to ache and became infected. Another account states that when he reached out his hand to eat, the fish opened its mouth and bit his finger, which became infected. The physician told him that his hand would have to be amputated before the infection spread to the arm. He amputated the hand, but the pain returned and the arm became infected. The physician prescribed the amputation of the arm, and it was done, but the pain returned and the infection worsened. The man wandered out into the desert, wailing. He saw a tree and went and sat under it and fell asleep, and dreamed that someone said to him, 'Before you lose the other hand too, make amends with your adversary!' He woke up and thought to himself, 'I took that fish unjustly, and now it has bitten me back!' He went to the city and found that man and fell before his feet weeping, offering everything he had to him. The fisherman was satisfied, and at once the pain subsided. That night he went to sleep, and in the morning God Almighty had returned his hand to him. Revelation then came to Moses saying, 'Moses! If he had not satisfied his adversary, then I Who am God would have gone on tormenting him for as long as he lived.'

Anecdote: Moses, may Allah's blessings be upon him, once held intimate discourse with God Most High. 'My God,' he said, 'show me Your justice!' 'Moses,' He said, 'can you not be patient?' 'Lord,' Moses replied, 'with Your grace I can.' He said, 'Then go to such-and-such spring and sit there in concealment.' So Moses went there and did as he was told to. A rider came to the spring and drank some water and performed ablutions, removing the purse from his belt. Then he left, leaving the purse behind. Then a child came along, took the purse, and left. Then a blind man came along and performed ablutions, then stood in prayer. Suddenly that rider returned and said to the blind man, 'I left a purse here and then you came along. No one else could have come here in the meantime. Give me back the purse.' The man replied, 'I am blind. I have not seen any gold.' The rider became angry and drew his sword, and struck down the blind man dead. Then he searched for his gold, but did not find it. 'My Lord,' said Moses ﷺ, 'I must know the truth!' Gabriel ﷺ came down and said, 'God the Mighty and Majestic says: "There are things I know which you know not. As for the child who took the purse, he was taking what was his. The money in it belonged to his father, who was in the employ of that rider. All of the pay which he had accumulated was in that purse. Now that child has taken what was rightfully his. As for the blind man, before he became blind he murdered that rider's father. Now the rider had exacted his just retribution. Behold, Moses! That is our justice."'

The purpose of relating this anecdote is so that the wise reader may understand that nothing is hidden from God Most High, and that He delivers justice to those who are wronged in this world. But we are oblivious to this, which

is why when tribulation comes we do not consider what caused it.

Dhūl-Qarnayn was asked, ‘What in your kingdom pleases you the most?’ He replied, ‘Two things: one is justice, and the other is that I am able to reward those who are kind to me by being even kinder to them.’

Tradition: The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘God has prescribed excellence for all things. When you kill, kill well; and when you slaughter, slaughter well. One should sharpen one’s blade, and put the slaughtered animal at ease.’¹¹⁹

Tradition: Ibn ‘Umar ؓ related that the Messenger of God ﷺ said,¹²⁰ ‘God has not created anything upon earth greater than justice. Justice is God’s balance upon earth; He will admit anyone who holds to this balance into Paradise.’

Tradition: Ibn ‘Umar ؓ related that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, ‘There is a place in Paradise for those who do good, including the one who does good to his family and dependents.’

Qatāda said regarding the verse *That you transgress not in the balance* [Q. 55:8], ‘This means justice: Children of Adam, be good and just, even as you would wish justice to be done unto you.’

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar ؓ narrated¹²¹ that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, ‘When God Most High commanded Adam to go down to earth, he told him four things, saying: “Adam, you and all of your children must act upon these four things. One is for Me alone, another is for you, another is between Me and you, and another is between you and other people. The one that is for Me is that you

¹¹⁹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 1955.

¹²⁰ The Arabic has ‘Moses said.’

¹²¹ The Arabic has ‘Umar narrated.’

worship Me alone. The one that is for you is that I shall reward you. The one between Me and you is that it is for you to pray, and for Me to answer. The one between you and other people is that you treat them justly and equitably.”¹²²

Qatāda said that there are three kinds of injustice: that which is unforgivable, that which cannot last, and that which is forgivable. The injustice which is unforgivable is idolatry; God says, *Truly idolatry is a tremendous wrong* [Q. 31:13]. The injustice which does not last is that which people do to one another. The injustice which is forgivable is that which a man does to himself through sin; but when he repents and returns to God Most High, God forgives him and admits him into Paradise.

The quality which kings need most is correct religion, for kingship and religion are like brothers. Whether in good or ill health, the king must strive to observe his religion, performing his obligations in their proper times, keeping far from heresy and innovation, and shunning injustice and impropriety. If he hears that anyone in his kingdom is suspect in his religion, he should summon him and question him until he repents, or else punish him or exile him from his domain. With this he will ensure that his kingdom is free of heretics and innovators, and that Islam prevails. He must keep the frontiers prosperous by dispatching troops there. He must seek to strengthen Islam and maintain the vigour of the Sunna of the Prophet ﷺ. This will earn him praise and make him mighty in the eyes of his subjects and formidable to his enemies, and his esteem and status will grow.

¹²² Ṭabarānī, *Du‘ā’* 16; Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab* 10671 with a similar wording, addressed to the Children of Adam rather than to Adam ﷺ directly, and ending with ‘and that you want for others what you would want for yourself.’

The righteousness of the people depends upon the virtuous conduct of the king. The king must observe the activities of his subjects both great and small, and must not indulge them in their misdeeds. He must honour the righteous and reward the virtuous, and restrain the evildoers and punish them for their wickedness without prejudice. This will make people incline towards virtue and steer clear of evil. If a king fails to uphold the law and tolerates evildoers, his affairs will be corrupted along with theirs. The wise say that the character of the populace follows that of the king, and that commoners and nobles alike become good or bad based upon what they hear of their king's conduct. Consider examples from history, such as how it is related that the caliph Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik¹²³ was chiefly concerned with the development of his domain, while Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik was given to eating and excess, and ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was devoted to worship. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Faḍl said, as was related by Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, 'I never thought that the actions of the populace were led by the actions of the ruler. But then in the rule of Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik people were gripped with the desire to make gardens, orchards, and mansions; and in the rule of Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik they became obsessed with eating fine foods and would ask one another what they had cooked and what they had eaten; and in the time of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz they became devoted to worship, reciting the Qur'an, giving charity, and doing good deeds.' This shows that in every age people follow the example of their ruler. [Every person's character has the propensity for envy, vain desire, malice, greed, and self-indulgence. When kings give them a free hand, they will pursue those

¹²³ The sixth Umayyad caliph (46-96/674-715).

ends; but when the king is righteous, they will exercise self-control and refrain from pursuing them. It is as we have heard:]¹²⁴

Anecdote: It is said that during the rule of Anūshirvān the Just, a man bought a house from another man and then found some treasure in it. He went at once to the seller and said, ‘You sold me the place, and whatever is in it belongs to you.’ After a long debate they went to Anūshirvān, who asked, ‘Do you have children?’ One answered, ‘I have a son’, the other, ‘I have a daughter.’ The King said, ‘Then become family to each other at once, and it will belong to you both and to your children too.’ That is what they did, and they lived happily together. Now, imagine that those two had lived during the reign of a tyrant king. Each would have claimed the treasure for himself. But since they knew their king to be just, they strove to do the right thing.

Aphorism: The wise say that kings are like a market. Every merchant takes to market the wares he knows are in demand, not the ones he knows are not in demand. Those two men who debated about the treasure knew that their king was possessed with piety, justice, and righteousness, and that he was interested in buying such wares; and so they went before him and presented their wares to him, and were happy with the result. [But in these times everything that transpires at the hands of our rulers and the tongues of our governors is our own reward and just deserts; our deeds are base and vile, and we are treacherous and untrustworthy, and our rulers are wicked tyrants.]¹²⁵ A phrase that one often hears from the people of our age is, ‘We get the rulers we deserve.’ Which is to say that if we are guilty of

¹²⁴ Persian only.

¹²⁵ Arabic only.

evil, treachery, and wrongdoing, they will be unjust like us. However, in our view this is incorrect because we have observed and verified that people are virtuous because of their kings, and that the conduct of the populace follows the ruler's conduct. Do you not see that sometimes a city is described as a place whose inhabitants have no complaints about one another, nor anything bad to say about their ruler? That is not due to their own merits, but rather due to the ruler's own unimpeachable conduct. Even if the ruler should happen to receive a complaint at some juncture, the fact remains that before then his populace had nothing to complain about.

Thus the wise say, 'People resemble their kings more so than they resemble their times.' It is also stated in a tradition that 'People follow the religion of their kings.' Anūshirvān's leadership was such that if a man left a donkey-load of gold somewhere, no matter how long it remained there no one but its rightful owner would dare to take it. Yūnān Dastūr, the vizier of Anūshirvān, once said to him, 'Do not brook any injustice, or your kingdom will go to ruin and your subjects will become impoverished, and in place of this glory you will become a prince of paupers, ruler of ruins.' Anūshirvān wrote letters to his officials saying, 'If I ever discover that any tract of land has been left uncultivated, unless it is uncultivable, I will have the official hanged there.' When a nation falls to ruin, the cause is one of two things: the king is either incompetent, or a tyrant. Both of these have dire repercussions for the landowning class. In days gone by kings would envy one another on account of the prosperity of their kingdoms.

Anecdote: It is said that the King of India sent an emissary to Anūshirvān saying, 'I am a worthier king than you.'

Pay tribute to me!’ Anūshirvān arranged lodgings for the emissary. The next day he held an audience with the major figures of his nation and the emissary, and said, ‘Here is the answer to the message you have brought.’ Then Anūshirvān had a chest brought forward, out of which he took a small golden box, from which he produced a handful of capers. He gave these to the emissary, saying, ‘Do you have these in your country?’ ‘Yes,’ replied the emissary, ‘we have plenty.’ ‘Then go to the King of India,’ said Anūshirvān, ‘and tell him that first of all he ought to ensure that his own kingdom prospers, since it has clearly gone to ruin and is infested with weeds! Once that is done, he may turn his designs to other prosperous kingdoms. If you go around my kingdom in search of a caper bush, you will not find a single one. And if I heard that there was a single caper bush in my kingdom, I would have the official responsible for it hanged!’

A king ought to walk in the footsteps of those righteous kings who preceded him, and he ought to read the books of wise counsel in which they are chronicled, for they lived long lives and had many experiences from which they learned how to distinguish right from wrong. Despite his great righteousness, even Anūshirvān used to read the books of the ancients, seek out their stories, and follow their ways. It is all the more fitting that the kings of this age should do the same, as the following anecdote illustrates.

Anecdote: Anūshirvān once said to Yūnān Dastūr, ‘Tell me of the ways of my predecessors.’ He replied, ‘Would you like me to praise them for three things, two things, or one thing?’ Anūshirvān asked, ‘What are the three things?’ Yūnān Dastūr replied, ‘I never once saw in them ignorance, dishonesty, or anger.’ Anūshirvān asked, ‘What are the two

things?’ [He replied], ‘They were always eager to do good, and anxious not to do evil.’ Anūshirvān asked, ‘What is the one thing?’ He replied, ‘Their kingship and courage depended more on themselves than on others.’ Anūshirvān called for wine and said, ‘Here’s to those noble men who will come after us and inherit the crown, the throne, and the cap, and who will remember us even as we remember those who came before us!’

The most unfortunate person is the one who becomes deluded by his own kingship, and fails to make his kingdom prosper, or to find happiness, or to learn how to live. He will suffer through this life and leave a poor reputation behind him when he leaves it, and in the next world he will be plunged into regret, despair, and eternal torment.

The point of all this is that the ancients strove to make their kingdoms prosper so as to leave a good name behind; for a true man is the one who leaves behind a good name, as the following anecdote illustrates.

Anecdote: Anūshirvān had a garden known as the Garden of a Thousand Delights [Bāgh-i Hazār Kām]. Once the Caesar, the Emperor [of China], the Khagan, and the King of India had come and were sitting in that garden as honoured guests of Anūshirvān. Caesar said, ‘There is nothing in the world better than a good name, such that people remember a man and say of him, “How can we be like him?”’ Anūshirvān said, ‘Come, let us do good works and think good thoughts!’ The Emperor said, ‘When you think good thoughts, you will do good works. When you achieve goodness, you will succeed.’ The Khagan said, ‘First think a good thought, and then do it, and you will be praised.’ The King of India said, ‘May God protect us from thoughts which would shame us if they were revealed, and embarrass

us if they were spoken, and make us regretful if we were to act upon them.’ Caesar asked Anūshirvān, ‘What thing do you like best?’ He replied, ‘To help someone in need.’ The Khagan said, ‘What I like best is to be without sin, that I may be without fear.’

Consider the words of those kings, and behold how just they were to their subjects. As for the conduct of the kings of Islam, so much can be said of how just and righteous they were that talk of their justice will remain upon people’s tongues until the Resurrection.


It is related that the Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ was so devoted to justice that he subjected his own son to the punishment decreed by God’s law, and that he died as a result.¹²⁶ Whenever he sent an agent somewhere, he would tell him, ‘Purchase your horse, weapon, and luggage with your own funds and do not touch the Muslims’ treasury. Keep your door open to the needy.’



Anecdote: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf¹²⁷ ؓ said, ‘One night the Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar ؓ summoned me and said, “A caravan has halted by the gate of Medina. When they go to sleep, no one must be allowed to take any of their things.” I went with him. When we got there, he

¹²⁶ This anecdote is frequently cited as an example of ‘Umar’s ؓ fervent commitment to justice, but according to Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī and others it is a common misconception caused by the conflation of two separate events, one in which ‘Umar’s ؓ son ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was flogged in Egypt for drunkenness by the governor ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, and the other in which after returning home to Medina ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was berated privately by his father ‘Umar. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān fell ill and died a month later, but a rumour circulated around Iraq that he had died as a result of his flogging. (Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣāba*, 5/35.)

¹²⁷ A Companion of the Prophet ؐ and one of the Ten Promised Paradise (d. 32/654).

said to me, “You go to sleep.” Then he kept watch over the caravan all night until morning.’

Aphorism: The Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar  once said, ‘I must travel to see to the needs of the people, for there are many vulnerable people in the country who cannot come to me. I must go around the country in order to observe the agents and inquire about their conduct, and to see to the needs of the needy. This will be the worthiest year of my life.’

Anecdote: Zayd ibn Aslam¹²⁸ said, ‘One night I saw ‘Umar  accompanying the night watchman on his rounds. I began to walk with him, saying, “Commander of the Faithful, permit me to join you on the patrol.” “Very well,” he replied. So off we went. When we went outside Medina, we saw a fire in the distance. “Perhaps someone is camped there,” we said. When we got there we saw a woman with two or three small children, who were crying. The woman was tending to a pot over the fire and saying, “May God exact justice from ‘Umar! He eats his fill, while we go hungry!” When ‘Umar heard this, may Allah be pleased with him, he went forward and gave a greeting, then said, “May I approach?” The woman replied, “As long as you mean well, you may.” ‘Umar approached and questioned the woman. “We came from afar,” she replied, “and arrived here hungry and exhausted. We are too troubled by our hunger to sleep.” The Commander of the Faithful  asked, “What is in the pot?” She replied, “Only water. I did it to make the children calm down.” ‘Umar went back, and that very night he went to a flour-seller’s shop and bought a sack of flour which he hung around his neck. Then he went to a grocer’s shop and bought some fat. “Commander of the

¹²⁸ A Follower and prolific narrator of hadiths (d. 136/753).

Faithful,” I said, “give them to me and I will carry them.” He replied, “If you carry this burden, who will carry the burden of my sin, and who will avert that woman’s curse from me?” Then he wept, and set out. When he got to them, the woman said, “May Allah reward you well! You are better suited to looking after the Muslims than ‘Umar is!” Then he put some fat into the pot along with some flour, and stoked the fire under it. Whenever the fire died down he blew on it, till his face and beard were covered in ash. When it was cooked he put it into a bowl and said to the children, “Eat!” Then ‘Umar ﷺ said to the woman, “Do not pray against ‘Umar, for he was unaware of your plight.” This he said, and then he departed.’¹²⁹

‘Umar ﷺ was the first person ever to be called ‘Commander of the Faithful.’ Abū Bakr was known as ‘Caliph of the Messenger of Allah’, and when ‘Umar’s ﷺ turn came they called him ‘Caliph of the Caliph of the Messenger of Allah.’ ‘Umar ﷺ said, ‘If every subsequent one is called “Caliph of the Caliph...”, it will be too much. But I ask you, people, am I your commander?’ They replied, ‘Indeed you are.’ He said, ‘Then call me Commander of the Faithful. Yet I am still the same son of Khaṭṭāb as I ever was.’

It is related that the treasurer of the public funds was once asked, ‘Did the Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar ﷺ ever utilize the public funds improperly?’ He replied, ‘If ever he did not have anything to eat, he would take whatever amount he needed, and he would repay it as soon as he was able to.’

One day he said in a sermon, ‘People! In the time of the

¹²⁹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā’il al-Ṣaḥāba* p. 291, where Zayd relates it from his father, who was ‘Umar’s freedman.

Prophet when the revelation was still coming, he knew the inward and outward states of people and whether they were good or bad. But now that the revelation has ceased to come, we must look to people's outward appearances, and God Almighty knows best what is hidden within them. I myself shall endeavour to ensure that neither I nor my agents ever take anything from anyone [unrightfully], or give to them [unrightfully].'

If you would like to know how justice, righteousness, and equity are what give a ruler a good name, then study the reports about 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, for no other descendant of Marwān or the Umayyads could match his merits, nor did any of them earn such prayers and praise from the populace as he did. This was due to his piety, virtue, and compassion, as is illustrated by the following account.

Anecdote: It is said that during the rule of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz there was a drought, and a number of Bedouins came to 'Umar's court and put forward one of them to plead their case. He said, 'Our skins have shrivelled upon our bodies due to lack of food, and our relief lies in your treasury. The wealth in the treasury can only be one of three things: they belong to God, or to God's servants, or to you. If it belongs to God, then God has no need for it, so give it to His servants! If it belongs to God's servants, then give it to them! And if it belongs to you, then *Be charitable to us. Truly God rewards the charitable* [Q. 12:88].' 'Umar's eye filled with tears and he said, 'What you have said is true.' Then he ordered that their needs be met from the treasury. When the Bedouin requested permission to leave, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz said, 'Sir, just as you pleaded the case of God's servants to me, will you plead my case to God Most High?' The Bedouin turned his face to the sky

and said, ‘Lord, by Your glory and majesty, do for ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz what he has done for Your servants!’ At once a cloud appeared and it began to rain. Amid the rain a large hailstone fell down, landed upon a brick, and broke apart. A document came out of it which read, ‘Here is an absolution from Allah the Almighty to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, declaring that I have spared him from the fire of Hell.’

Anecdote: It is said that one night ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was sitting up reading accounts from the daily report on his subjects by the light of a lamp, when a servant came in and began speaking about some domestic matter. ‘Umar said, ‘Put out the lamp, and then speak! The oil is from the public treasury, and it ought only to be used for matters that concern the public.’ When a king is just, such will be the degree of his self-discipline, as the following account illustrates:

Anecdote: ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had a servant who administered the public treasury. ‘Umar had three daughters. On the Day of ‘Arafa his daughters came to him and said, ‘Tomorrow is Eid. The women and daughters of the populace insult us and say that the daughters of the Commander of the Faithful are so lowly that they do not own so much as a single white garment to wear!’ Then they wept, and ‘Umar’s heart was moved. He summoned the treasurer and said, ‘Give me one month’s stipend in advance from the treasury, and to see to their needs with it.’ The treasurer said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, before you take a month’s advance from the treasury, consider this: are you certain that you have a month left to live?’ ‘Umar said, ‘Allah bless you, you are right!’ Then he said to his daughters, ‘You must suppress your desires, for no Muslim

can reach Paradise without effort.’ When rulers are of this calibre, their retinue and servants will be also.

Perfect justice means to treat an unknown and undistinguished litigant exactly the same as one who is of high repute and worldly prestige when you arbitrate between them, and to look upon both with the same eye without favouring one over the other. In the next world, the jewel and the potsherd will be of equal value; and no wise man will condemn himself to Hell for the sake of another man’s prestige. For example, if a lowly person raises a grievance against a king, the king ought to recuse himself from his authority and defer to the ruling of God Most High, then give justice and satisfaction to the plaintiff. He ought to hold himself to the standard of the words of God Most High, *Truly God enjoins justice and virtue* [Q. 16:90]. The true meaning of this is that if he has a rightful claim over someone else, whether financial or otherwise, he should graciously forgo it without expecting anything in return. He should instruct his agents and trusted attendants to do the same so that they hold to this model and act in accordance with it, lest he be questioned about his subjects [at the Resurrection]. It is related from the Messenger of God ﷺ that every shepherd will be questioned about his flock, and every king about his subjects. That is the way of things.

Anecdote: It is related that the Emir of Khorasan Ismā‘īl ibn Aḥmad¹³⁰ once halted at Merv. His custom was that wherever he halted, a herald would call out that none of his troops was to bother any of his subjects. Then one of his donkey-drivers went into a vegetable garden and took a small amount of something. The gardeners went to the

¹³⁰ The Samanid Emir of Transoxiana and later Khorasan (d. 295/907).

Emir's door and complained. The Emir had the donkey-driver summoned and said to him, 'Do you not receive a wage?' He replied, 'I do.' The Emir asked, 'Did you not hear what my herald said?' He replied, 'I did.' 'Then why,' asked the Emir, 'did you steal from my subjects?' He replied, 'I made a mistake.' He said, 'I cannot risk going to Hell on account of your mistakes.' Then he ordered that his hand be amputated.

Anecdote: Another story about Ismā'īl [ibn Aḥmad] Sāmānī is told in *Kitāb Siyar al-Mulūk* (The Book of the Chronicles of Kings).¹³¹ This time he was by the brook of Mūliyān,¹³² and each time he crossed the water he would send out a herald to announce it, and then after the afternoon prayer he would remove the curtain and dismiss his chamberlain and doorman so that any victim of injustice could come and stand at the edge of the carpet and plead his case to him, and then go away satisfied. He would remain there, arbitrating like a government agent, until all the cases were settled. Then he would rise, take hold of his beard and turn his face to the sky with tears in his eyes, and say, 'Lord, I have made my effort. I do not know if any of Your servants have suffered injustice on my account, but You know that my intention was not to allow that to be so. Lord, forgive me for that ignorance!'

Given Ismā'īl's righteous conduct, it was inevitable that his rule would be prosperous. His whole army consisted of only a thousand men, while 'Amr ibn Layth¹³³ had a

¹³¹ The subtitle of the *Siyāsat-nama* of Nizam al-Mulk.

¹³² A waterway in Bukhara, famously elegized by the poet Rūdākī in his poem beginning, 'The perfumed scent of Mūliyān now wings to me; / Memories of beloved friends it brings to me.'

¹³³ The second Saffarid ruler, defeated in battle by Ismā'īl Sāmānī in Balkh in 900.

hundred thousand armoured in iron and well-equipped. Yet due to the blessing of his justice and equity, God Most High gave him victory over ‘Amr ibn Layth. Having won power, he was kind to ‘Amr, who sent an envoy to him saying, ‘I have much wealth in Khorasan and Iraq. I will write a document and send it to you, and if no one else has taken it yet, it will be yours.’ When Ismā‘īl heard this, he laughed and said, ‘Umar ibn Layth is still not being honest with us! He means to ensure that all of his sins and misdeeds are hung around my neck, thereby lessening his own burden before he goes to the next world.’ Then he said, ‘Tell ‘Amr ibn Layth that I have no need of that.’ Then he sent ‘Amr to Baghdad, and became himself the Emir of Khorasan, receiving a robe of honour from the Commander of the Faithful. The rule remained in his family for the next hundred and thirty years. Then the rule passed to the juveniles,¹³⁴ who treated their subjects unjustly, and so power was taken from them.

A tradition from the Messenger of God ﷺ states that one hour of a just Sultan’s rule is better than sixty years of worship.¹³⁵ He also said, ‘Helping the victim of injustice is the purifying charity (*zakāt*) of the mind.’ He also said, ‘He who draws the sword of injustice will have the sword of defeat drawn against him, and he will be beset by woe.’ A poet said:

A glum face is ever made cheerful
By the sight of injustice being overturned.

¹³⁴ *Kūdakān*, ‘children’, apparently a reference to the Ghaznavids who arose from the slave class of the Samanids.

¹³⁵ The Arabic has ‘one day’ and ‘seventy years’ here respectively; the hadith is cited with ‘one day’ and ‘sixty years’ in Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr* 11932, and Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab* 6995.

Say only what you would wish to hear,
And kill not, unless you wish to be killed!

Anecdote: One day David was looking at the sky when he saw something like chaff falling like rain. He said, ‘My God, what is that?’ Revelation came in response: ‘David, that is My curse, which I rain down upon the houses of the oppressors!’

Anecdote: When Anūshirvān was king, his minister Yūnān Dastūr wrote a letter to him saying, ‘My king, the conduct of man¹³⁶ is of three kinds. One does justice to others but does not seek it for himself, which is the highest level of justice. Another does justice to others and seeks it for himself too, which is plain justice and the middle level. Another does not do justice to others, but seeks it for himself; this is the level of oppression. Now consider which of them you would like to be, and choose. I know that our king will not choose to be unjust.’¹³⁷

Anecdote:¹³⁸ Anūshirvān was asked, ‘Who is the most commendable king?’ He replied, ‘He whose enemies fear him the most, and who best ensures that the roads of his domain are kept safe, and who most securely shelters his subjects in the shade of his justice.’

Anecdote: One day Shabīb ibn Shabba¹³⁹ went to al-Mahdī and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, God Most High has given the whole world to you. Since you enjoy such comfort, give a little of the world to your subjects.’ He

¹³⁶ Arabic has ‘kings.’

¹³⁷ The Arabic adds some lines of poetry here which essentially rephrase the content of Yūnān’s letter.

¹³⁸ This anecdote is not found in the Arabic.

¹³⁹ A poet and preacher, contemporary of the third Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī (d. 169/785).

asked, 'What should I give them?' He replied, 'Justice and equity. If the subjects can sleep soundly thanks to you, you will sleep soundly in the grave.' Then he said, 'Commander of the Faithful, beware the night which has no dawn, and beware the day which no night follows. Be as just as you are able to be; for in doing justice, justice will be done to you; and in tyrannizing, you too will be tyrannized. Clothe yourself in righteousness; for at the Reckoning, no one will lend you his garment.' A poet said:

You must clothe yourself in righteousness,
For you cannot borrow it from another.
[The hand of kindness never withers, so grasp it,
And you will profit much, while retaining your
capital.]¹⁴⁰

Anecdote: Anūshirvān once received a letter from the Caesar of the Romans which said, 'Wherein lies the stability of a kingdom?' He replied, 'I never issue a thoughtless order; but when I issue orders, I see them done, and I never abandon them due to hope or fear.' What he meant was that whether he had cause to hope or fear, he would carry out what he had said he would, and not turn from it.

Anecdote: Aristotle was asked, 'Is it permitted to give the title of king to anyone but God Most High?' He replied, 'The one in whom you find certain qualities, even if no others.' Then he said, 'First is knowledge, then forbearance, mercy, compassion, generosity, and the like.' This is because kings are only kings due to divine glory (*farr-i īzadī*), radiance of soul, purity of self, abundance of intellect and knowledge, greatness of heredity, and the ancient authority vested in their family.

¹⁴⁰ Arabic only.

The meaning of *farr-i īzadī* is twelve things:¹⁴¹ intellect, knowledge, sharpness of mind, perception, perfect physique, refinement, horsemanship, chivalry, diligence, valour, courage, deliberation, good temper, justice to the weak and strong alike, amiability, magnanimity, forbearance, tolerance where appropriate, sound judgement and administrative sense, eagerness to study the accounts of the early Muslims and the lives of the kings, and inquisitiveness into the histories of the kings of old. For the present world is the continuing legacy of those who came before; kings came and went, each one leaving the name by which he would be remembered. Both this world and the next have their treasures; the treasure of the next world is righteous action, and the treasure of this world is a good name among mankind.

Aphorism: Alexander once asked Aristotle, ‘What is better: valour or justice?’ He replied, ‘When a king is just, he has no need for valour.’

Anecdote: One day Alexander was camped with his army when one of them said, ‘God Most High has granted you a vast kingdom. Take many wives so that you may have many children, and your legacy will endure in the world.’ He replied, ‘Legacy is not a matter of children, but of righteous customs and virtuous ethics. It is not fitting that a man should conquer the world, only to be conquered by women!’

Anecdote: Alexander once removed one of his high ranking officials from his post and reassigned him to a trivial position. Later on that man happened to meet with Alexander, who asked him, “How are you finding your new

¹⁴¹ The Arabic has ‘sixteen’; the list itself could be enumerated in several ways depending on which items are grouped together as pairs.

job?” He replied, “Long live the king! A man’s greatness does not lie in his work, but the honour of work lies in the virtue of the man who does it, through good conduct, equity, and justice.” This pleased Alexander greatly, and he reinstated and promoted him.

Aphorism: Socrates said, “The world is held together by justice. When injustice appears, it cannot hold firm.”

Aphorism: Buzurgmihr¹⁴² was asked, “Wherein lies the king’s strength?” He replied, “In three things: keeping watch over the regions of his kingdom through travel, defending himself against his enemies, and honouring scholars and people of virtue.”

When a king is unjust, insecurity will arise; and no matter how much prosperity there may be, it will be of no use to the subjects as long as there is no security. Conversely, even if there is little prosperity, as long as there is security they will not be discontent but will be happy, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: A pilgrim once became lost in Syria and found himself in the desert. He went on until he came to a tent in which there was an old woman, and a dog sleeping by its entrance. The pilgrim called a greeting and asked the old woman for some food. ‘Go and fetch some snakes,’ she replied, ‘and I will roast them for you to eat.’ The man said, ‘I do not dare to catch a snake!’ She replied, ‘Then I will come with you.’ So she took the pilgrim and the dog with her and made for the edge of the sandy desert, where she caught several snakes and then roasted them for the pilgrim to eat. ‘Mother,’ said the pilgrim, ‘do you have any water?’ She replied, ‘There is a spring over yonder. Go and drink.’

¹⁴² Buzurgmihr (d. 580s) was a sage and minister at the courts of the Sasanian kings Kavad I and his son Anūshirvān.

The pilgrim went to the spring and found that the water was salty and bitter, but he had no choice but to drink it. Then he went back to the woman and said, 'I am baffled by what you do. How can you stand to live in such a place, with such food and water?' She asked him, 'Tell me about your own home.' He replied, 'We have lovely homes and gardens, fine foods, rich meats, and all sorts of other comforts and fruits.' 'I have already heard about all that,' the woman said, 'but tell me: isn't there someone who rules over you and oppresses you, and has total power over you? If you commit an offence, does he not seize your wealth and property?' The pilgrim replied, 'Yes, that is so.' 'Well,' said the woman, 'then all those fine foods, sweet desserts, and fresh waters are poisoned by fear, worry, and injustice. My food is made wholesome by security, which is the antidote to that poison. Have you not heard that the greatest blessings, after religion and Islam, are health and security?'

The security of the world depends upon the disciplined governance of the king, and therefore the sultan must govern with discipline, for he is the vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of God Almighty. The sultan ought to be a figure of such awe that his subjects do not dare to rise if they see him from afar. This is all the more vital in this age, for the people of today are not like the people of old. This is an age of shamelessness, discourtesy, and mercilessness. If—God forbid—the sultan were weak in the midst of such men, the world would go to ruin, and both religious and worldly affairs would be corrupted. A hundred years of a sultan's injustice could not do the damage that the populace could do in a single hour by oppressing one another. Therefore when the populace are unjust, God Most High appoints a ruthless ruler over them, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: It is said that Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf¹⁴³ was once sent a note which read, ‘Fear God Most High, and cease oppressing the people so.’ Ḥajjāj, who was very eloquent, ascended the pulpit and said, ‘People! God Most High has unleashed me upon you. If I die, you will not escape oppression after me if you carry on as you are now. God has many other servants like me. If I go, one who is even worse than me will come.’ [A poet said,

Every hand has the Hand of Allah above it,
And every tyrant will be tried with a
worse tyrant.]¹⁴⁴

Anecdote: Buzurgmihr was once asked, ‘Which ruler is most innocent?’ He replied, ‘The one from whom the innocent feel safe, and whom the guilty fear.’

A sultan who does not govern with discipline will not inspire awe in the eyes of his subjects, and so they will be unhappy with him and will constantly speak critically about him. Consider how when a commoner is appointed to an official post, the first thing he will do is attempt to assert his position by means of authoritarian speech and disciplinary action, for he knows all too well that the public still see him as a commoner.

Anecdote: It is said that Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb¹⁴⁵ had a son whom the people called Ziyād ibn Abīh (Ziyād, son of his father) because he had been born during the Age of Pagan Ignorance and his father had disowned him and

¹⁴⁴ Arabic only. The verse is attributed to the celebrated Abbasid-era poet al-Mutanabbī (d. 654/965).

¹⁴⁵ Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb ؓ (d. 31/653) was a Companion who converted to Islam at the Conquest of Mecca after having long opposed the religion. His son Mu‘āwiya ؓ founded the Umayyad caliphate.

denied his parentage of him. When Mu^ʿāwīya¹⁴⁶ ﷺ came to power, he brought Ziyād close to him and made him governor of Iraq. At that time the people of Iraq were an unruly lot, everywhere engaged in rebellion, robbery, and all other manner of corruption. Ziyād went to the mosque one Friday and delivered the sermon from the pulpit. Afterwards he said, ‘By Allah, if I find anyone out of doors after the evening prayer, I will have his head! Let those of you who are present here convey this to those who are absent. I will allow three days of grace.’ Then he returned to the governor’s residence and remained there. When the days of grace were over, he rode out with a large group of horsemen and went around the city, then returned home. After night fell, he waited a while until part of the night had passed and then went out and made another round. He saw a Bedouin man with some sheep standing by a gate. ‘Where have you come from?’ he asked him. ‘I have just arrived,’ he replied, ‘and am now waiting here until I can sell these sheep.’ Ziyād said, ‘I know that you are telling the truth, but if I let you go then word will go around that Ziyād does not do as he says. My governance will be impaired, and my aura of authority will be compromised. But Paradise will be better for you than this place.’ Then he had the man beheaded, and they moved on and meted out the same punishment to everyone else they found. By the time morning came they had taken the heads of fifteen hundred men and gathered them up in a great heap by the gate of the governor’s residence. The populace were stricken with terror at the sight of this. The next night they found three hundred

¹⁴⁶ Mu^ʿāwīya ibn Abī Sufyān ﷺ (d. 60/680) was a Companion and later the first Umayyad caliph.

people, and beheaded them all. After that, no one dared to go out after the evening prayer.

The next Friday he spoke from the pulpit again, saying, 'Do not lock the doors of the shops at night. If any of you suffers a loss, I will reimburse him.' From the night onwards, they did not dare to lock their shops. Then one day a money-changer came and said, 'Four hundred dinars have been stolen from me.' Ziyād said, 'Are you prepared to swear to this?' He replied, 'I am.' He swore to it, so Ziyād gave him four hundred dinars in compensation and told him to keep it secret. Then on Friday after the prayer he went up the pulpit and said, 'Four hundred dinars were stolen from the shop of So-and-So the money-changer. Everyone is gathered here. Either you produce the money, or I shall prevent anyone from leaving and order that everyone in this mosque be put to death. Immediately they seized the one who had committed the theft and who had been under suspicion, and handed him over to Ziyād. They also recovered the money. He ordered that the man be punished on the spot. A while later Ziyād enquired as to what place in Basra was the least safe, and was told that it was the quarter of the Banū Azd. He ordered that a valuable garment be dropped there without anyone seeing. The garment was dropped several times, but nobody dared to pick it up. His advisors told him, 'Discipline is all well and good, but your ruthlessness has cost many lives.' Ziyād replied, 'I obtained evidence against them three days earlier. These people cannot give up their evil ways. The harm that has beset them is the result of their own misdeeds.'

Counsel: It is not appropriate for the king to be always engaged in playing backgammon and chess, wine-drinking, or ball games, for they will keep him from his duties. Every

task needs time, and when there is no time profit becomes loss and joy becomes sorrow. The kings of old would divide the hours of day and night into four parts. One part they reserved for worshipping God and engaging in virtuous acts. Another they reserved for attending to their kingdoms, redressing injustices, managing their affairs under the guidance of the learned and the wise, issuing edicts, writing dispatches, sending emissaries, and other such matters of state. The third part they devoted to food, sleep, and other such worldly needs and pleasures. The fourth part they reserved for hunting, polo-playing, and other such pursuits.

Bahrām Gūr¹⁴⁷ is said to have divided his days into two halves: one half for serving the populace, and the other half for rest. Throughout his kingdom, no one ever worked the whole day through. Anūshirvān ordered that the religious clerics should go up to a high place and observe from which houses no smoke was rising, and go and enquire as to why that was. If they found the occupants were in distress, they gave them relief.

No king should ever allow any of his agents to oppress any of his subjects. This is illustrated by the following account.

Anecdote: It is said that one of Anūshirvān's agents sent to Anūshirvān one million¹⁴⁸ dirhams in excess of the land tax. Anūshirvān ordered that the excess funds be returned to their owners, and had the agent hanged.

A king who unjustly takes anything from his subjects and puts it in the treasury is like someone who builds the foundation for a wall and then puts up the wall before the

¹⁴⁷ Bahrām V Gūr ('The Wild Donkey') (d. 438) was a Sasanian king famed for his love of hunting and gallantry.

¹⁴⁸ Arabic: 'three thousand.'

wet foundation has dried. Neither the foot nor the top of the wall will remain standing. A king ought to treat his kingdom like he does his own house, so that it will prosper. He must ensure that whatever he takes and whatever he gives, he does so in a reasonable measure. Each thing has its own limit and measure, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: One day al-Ma'mūn¹⁴⁹ appointed four governors. One he made governor of Khuzestan, another governor of Egypt, another governor of Khorasan, and the other governor of Armenia. To each of them he gave a robe of honour and three thousand dinars. Then he summoned the Zoroastrian high priest (*mūbad*) and said, 'My good sir! When your kings ruled the land of Persia, are you aware that any of them ever awarded so handsome a robe of honour? I have heard tell that they never gave anything above four thousand dirhams.' The priest replied, 'Long live the Commander of the Faithful! Nevertheless, those kings had three things which you do not. One is that whenever they took or gave, they did so in a measured way. Secondly, they took where appropriate and gave where appropriate. Thirdly, none but the guilty had any cause to fear them.' Al-Ma'mūn said, 'You have spoken true', and said no more.

It was due to this that al-Ma'mūn sought out Anūshirvān's tomb and opened it, finding his face to be fresh and his clothing fresh too, and on his finger a ring with a red ruby the like of which al-Ma'mūn had never laid eyes on. On it was inscribed, 'The better is the greater, not the greater the better' (*bih mih, na mih bih*). Al-Ma'mūn ordered that he be covered with a cloak of gold. One of his servants took the ring from his finger and made off with it.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Ma'mūn (d. 833) was the seventh Abbasid caliph.

When al-Ma'mūn was informed of this, he had the servant executed and the ring returned to Anūshirvān's finger, saying, 'That servant would have disgraced us! Until the Resurrection it would have been said that al-Ma'mūn stole the ring off Anūshirvān's finger!'

Anecdote: Alexander asked his sages when he was about to set out on a journey, 'Show us the way to make our affairs secure.' The foremost of the sages replied, 'My king, do not let your heart be taken by love for anything, nor hatred for anything. The heart acts after its name: in Arabic they call it *qalb*, for its nature is to turn (*taqallub*), and it is always turning about this way or that. Absorb yourself in thought, and make thought your advisor and wisdom your companion. Strive to keep awake at night. Never do anything without seeking counsel. At times where justice and equity are demanded, harbour no bias. If you do all this, all your affairs will proceed as you desire.'

A king must be wise and not hasty. The wise say that three traits in three kinds of people are especially vile: rashness in kings, desire for wealth in scholars, and miserliness in the rich.

Anecdote: Yūnān Dastūr once wrote a letter to Anūshirvān offering him some advice. He said, 'My king, there are four things which you must always have: justice, wisdom, patience, and modesty. And there are four things which you must never have: envy, pride, resentment, and hatred. My king, those who came before you are all gone, and others will come after you. Until they arrive, strive to ensure that every king and every subject will look up to you.'

Anecdote: It is said that one day in spring Anūshirvān went out for a ride. He rode through the meadows viewing

the fruit-laden trees and flourishing gardens. As he was looking at them, he fell from his horse. At once he prostrated in thanks to God Most High, keeping his face pressed to the ground for a long while. When he finally lifted his head, he said to his companions, "The fruitfulness of each year depends on the justice and equity of the king, and upon his goodness and kindness to his subjects. Thanks be to God, Who has made our goodness to our subjects manifest!" He said this because he had been put to the test in the past, as the following account shows.

Anecdote: It is said that one day Anūshirvān went hunting and became separated from his retinue. As he came over a rise, he saw a village. Being very thirsty, he entered the village and went to a house to ask for water. A young girl came out of the house and saw him there. She went back inside and crushed some sugarcane and put the juice into a cup and took it to Anūshirvān. He saw some specks of dust in the cup, but picked it up and drank it slowly. [Then he said to the girl, 'Bless you! How nice it would have been if not for the dust!']¹⁵⁰ 'I put the dust in on purpose,' she said. Anūshirvān asked, 'But why?' She replied, 'I saw that you were thirsty and hot-livered. If there had been no dust in the cup, you would have gulped it down and harmed yourself.' Amused at her cleverness, Anūshirvān asked, 'How many sugarcanes did you use to get all that juice?' She replied, 'Just one.' Astonished even further, Anūshirvān returned home and enquired into the tax returns from that village. When he saw that it was low, he said, 'Would a village where they get so much juice from a single sugarcane really have such low income and pay such low tax?' So he raised their taxes. Some time later he passed through that

¹⁵⁰ Arabic only.

village again and asked for water. The same girl came out and went back into the house to fetch some juice. She took a long time, and Anūshirvān complained and asked why it was taking so long. The girl replied, ‘One cane did not give enough juice for you; I had to use three to get as much as one used to give.’ Anūshirvān asked, ‘What has caused this misfortune?’ She replied, ‘I do not know. Perhaps the king has become ill-disposed towards us. I have heard that when subjects lose the king’s favour, the blessing goes out of everything.’ Anūshirvān was astonished at this and became well-disposed towards the village once more, and made the girl his wife due to her cleverness.

Aphorism: Three kinds of men are truthful: Prophets, kings, and madmen. They say that drunkenness is madness, and that the madman fears the drunkard because the delirium of the madman is within the body, while the delirium of the drunkard comes from outside. Woe to the one who keeps himself insane with wine!¹⁵¹ A poet said:

He who thoughtlessly gets drunk on wine
Will feel no shame once he’s sober again;
But he who is drunk upon royal power
Will only sober up when his kingdom is lost.

Blessed is the king who remains sober and does not grow drunk upon power, and whose officials are honest, and whose companions offer him sound counsel. The sign that a king is drunk upon power is this: he appoints a needy man as his minister and then keeps him until he is no longer needy, and then deposes him and replaces him with another.

¹⁵¹ Arabic: ‘Woe to the one who always remains in the drunkenness of heedlessness,’ which perhaps better suits what follows.

This is like someone who finds a small child and looks after him as long as he remains small, but then when he grows up and becomes competent, he kills him.

It is said that kings have four duties: To keep their kingdoms free of ignoble men; to make their kingdoms flourish by keeping the counsel of wise men; to respect the righteous and pay heed to experienced elders; and to better the kingdom by decreasing the number of wicked men.

It is related that when ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz came to power he wrote a letter to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī saying, ‘Lend me the assistance of your companions.’ Ḥasan replied, ‘Anyone I could send you would either be a seeker of this world, or a seeker of the next. Those who seek this world will have no good advice for you, and those who seek the hereafter will have no desire for your company. But look to those who are noble born, for even if they are not pious they will at least be generous. A noble origin never does any harm.’ Thus the king must never entrust his affairs to the unqualified, but ought to entrust them to those who have worthy origins. If he entrusts them to the unworthy, he will throw his kingdom to the winds, and his realm will fall to ruin and become beset with all manner of problems from every direction. A poet said:

When the soil beneath a house becomes rotten,
Bit by bit, its walls collapse from below.
If you would like to see your kingdom fall,
Entrust its affairs to unworthy men.

Any person who would serve kings must possess three qualities if he is to be worthy of that task. Some Arabic verses:

If you would serve kings, you must don
The finest robes of discretion.
When you go in to them, be blind,
And when you go out, be deaf!¹⁵²

Anyone who serves a king but acts with indiscretion will only harm himself. Even a king's own children must not be too familiar with him, for it is simply improper to behave that way with a king. A poet said:

Though you be the son of a king,
Be wary of him, if you would keep your head!

The one who is indiscreet around a king is like a snake-charmer who keeps snakes around him all the time, even when he sleeps, or like someone with a lion for a neighbour, or like someone who swims in water infested with man-eating sharks. All of them put their lives at risk.

Aphorism: A wise man said, 'Woe to him who has the misfortune of serving a sultan! They have no friends, no family, no children, no respect, and no sympathy. They show no one sympathy or charity unless they wish to take advantage of his learning or his chivalry; and once they have what they need, they will have no further affection for him, nor any loyalty or shame. Most of their interactions involve hypocrisy. They make little of their own offences, but even the slightest offence done to them is an enormity in their eyes.'

Sufyān al-Thawrī¹⁵³ said, 'Do not keep the company of a sultan. If you are obedient he will exhaust you, and if you

¹⁵² The author then presents a Persian rendition of these Arabic lines, which read essentially the same except with "close your eyes" and "close your lips" rather than "be blind" and "be deaf."

¹⁵³ A major scholar and ascetic of Khorasan (d. 161/778).

are disobedient he will kill you.’ Kings should not be approached without permission, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: Once Bahrām [Gūr] the son of Yazdegerd¹⁵⁴ went to his father at a time when no one was permitted to see him. The king said to Bahram, ‘Be gone, and give So-and-So the chamberlain thirty lashes and banish him from the court, and appoint So-and-So the nobleman in his stead.’ Bahrām was thirteen years old at the time. The nobleman knew why his predecessor had been banished. On another day [at the same time] Bahrām came wanting to go in. The chamberlain barred him with his hand and said, ‘If I ever see you here again at this time, I will give you sixty lashes, even if you are the king’s son—thirty lashes for that deposed chamberlain, and another thirty lashes to cure your insolence and prevent you from putting me at risk of being lashed and humiliated!’¹⁵⁵

It is best that a king not take part in warfare in person as it does not befit his position, for many lives depend upon his and it is in the interest of his subjects that he remain alive. He must therefore not be unjust to himself, just as he allows no injustice to be done to his subjects. He must not make his own work too difficult, nor too easy. Every night he should have someone else sleep where he is supposed to sleep, while he himself goes to some secret place, so that if enemies should come to make an attempt on his life they

¹⁵⁴ The names of the persons in this story are somewhat confused in both Persian and Arabic texts, beginning ‘Yazdegerd son of Shahryār’ but then immediately switching the name of the son to Bahrām. The story appears in Jāhīz’s *Kitāb al-Tāj* (p. 125-126) beginning with ‘Bahrām the son of Yazdegerd’, and this has been followed here.

¹⁵⁵ Jāhīz adds, “When Yazdegerd heard of this, he summoned the new chamberlain and gave him a robe of honour.”

will find someone else in his place and be unable to touch him, as this account illustrates:

Anecdote: It is said that when Khusraw the Victorious fled from Bahrām Chūbīn,¹⁵⁶ he said, ‘Although it is disgraceful to flee, I do so to save thousands of lives; for if I am slain, thousands will die because of it.’

The reason we have said so much on this subject is that the present age is a very wicked one. The people are evil, and the rulers are much preoccupied with the affairs of the world. Wicked men cannot be set right by tolerance and lenience. As the Arab saying goes, ‘A slave is corrected by the rod, while a free man needs no more than a rebuke.’ This proverb could also be said about the noble and the ignoble. There have been times when a single man could keep the whole world in check with his whip, as did the Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ. But if the subjects of this era were treated in that way, no good would come of it and corruption would arise.

The ruler of today must be able to inspire awe and govern with discipline, so that everyone is able to go about his business while being secure from his fellow men. Let us now relate something on this subject which may be of benefit to the reader.

Anecdote: The Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ؓ was asked, ‘Why is it that people do not benefit from sound advice?’ He replied, ‘It is known that at the hour of his death the Messenger ﷺ made a testament and gestured with three fingers, saying, “Do not ask me about

¹⁵⁶ Khusraw II (Parvīz, ‘the Victorious’) (d. 628) was a king of Iran, the last major Sasanian ruler before the Muslim conquest. Bahrām Chūbīn (d. 591) was a leading military figure in Iran who briefly managed to usurp power in Iran before Khusraw II defeated him and seized his late father’s throne.

these.” They took this to mean three months, three years, or thirty years, while the learned said three hundred years. In other words, “Do not ask me about the state of those who will come three hundred years after me.” Given this, what is the use of advising them?’

On another occasion when asked the same question he replied, ‘In the beginning the people were asleep but the learned were awake. Now the learned are asleep, and the people are dead. What use is the advice of the sleeping to the dead?’

In the present age the mentality of the people has become corrupted, and they have all fallen to evil in both conduct and intention. Unless the ruler inspires fear and instils discipline, the people will not be obedient or righteous.

It is related that the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘Justice is the might of the religion and the strength of the ruler; in it lies the welfare of the elites and the masses.’ He said [in Persian], ‘Justice is the might of the religion, the strength of the ruler, the welfare of the subjects, and the wellbeing of the masses. It ensures that life proceeds with security and good health.’¹⁵⁷

All deeds are weighed in the balance of justice. God Most High says, *And the heaven He raised, and the balance He set* [Q. 55:], meaning the balance of justice. Elsewhere He says, *God it is Who sent down the Book with the truth and the Balance* [Q. 42:17]. The person most suitable for power and kingship is he whose heart is a home for justice, whose house is a resting-place for men of religion and wisdom, whose mind is a treasury for the learned, and who

¹⁵⁷ The author gives this tradition first in Arabic, and then again in Persian in a more elaborate version; Humā’ī suggests that something may have been lost from the Arabic in the manuscript. I have not been able to find a source for this hadith.

keeps the company of men of intelligence and sensitivity.
As a poet said:

His hand is a treasury of generosity,
His heart a treasury of intellect,
The door of his palace is open
Unto all those who seek virtue.

Anecdote: It is related that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, may God have mercy on him, said, ‘If a king values religion highly, his subjects will value him highly. If a king comes to know God, all mankind will seek to know him.’ Thus a poet said:

When a man attains knowledge of God,
Everyone will seek to know him;
Blessed is he who, in this world,
Comes to know God first of all.

Aphorism: Buzurgmihr said, ‘A king must tend to his kingdom more attentively than a gardener does to his garden, lest the sweet basil be usurped by weeds.’

Aphorism: Plato said, ‘The signs that a king will be victorious over his enemy are that he be strong of body, silent of tongue, contemplative of mind, and wise; that he be honoured in his kingdom and beloved to the hearts of his subjects; that he has learned from the experiences of the past; and that to his enemies he appear talented and faultless. When he perceives that strength and power are from God Most High, not from men, victory will be his in the end no matter how strong his enemies may be.’ [This evokes the words of Allah Almighty: *How many a little band has overcome a multitude, by God’s leave; and God is with the patient* [Q. 2:249].]¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Arabic only.

[**Aphorism**]: It is related that Socrates said, ‘The signs that a king’s reign will be long-lasting are that religion and justice be beloved to his heart, such that he will be beloved to the hearts of his subjects; that wisdom be his close companion, such that the wise will draw near to him; that he be a seeker of knowledge, such that the learned will recognize this; that he esteem the arts, such that artisans will be esteemed; that he patronize men of letters, such that literature will flourish; and that he banish the pursuers of vice, such that vices are expelled.’ A king who lacks these qualities will not have a successful reign. Even if his inner circle and companions do possess these qualities, if he lacks them, their ruin will come at his hand; for ruin lies in ignorance, and all vice springs from the lack of wisdom. A poet said:

Wise was the man who offered this advice:
Do not strut through the meadows like a lion.
Look after your body and protect your eyes,
For an ill-judged glance may enrage a king.
Do not act like a sultan in the sultan’s court,
And when he is angry, stay out of his way.
No matter your innocence, his wrath will be the judge,
And will rule you guilty and condemn you to death.
I have heard tell that the wine of irritation
Will make a king drunk from a single drop.

Aphorism: Mu‘āwiya asked Aḥnaf ibn Qays,¹⁵⁹ ‘Abū Yaḥyā, how will this present age fare?’ He replied, ‘The age is you: if you are righteous, the age will be righteous. If you are corrupt, the age will be corrupt.’

¹⁵⁹ Aḥnaf ibn Qays (d. 67/687) was an early convert to Islam, known for his wisdom as well as his military expertise, which contributed to the Muslim conquest of Persia.

Aḥnaf ibn Qays also said, ‘Just as the world is made to flourish by justice, it is brought to ruin by injustice; for justice shines its light a thousand leagues all around itself, while injustice spreads darkness a thousand leagues around itself.’

Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ said, ‘If I were granted a prayer that was guaranteed to be answered, I would pray for none other than the ruler; for in his wellbeing lies the wellbeing of the world and the prosperity of the people.’

It is related in a tradition that ‘Those who do justice for the sake of Allah the Exalted and Majestic in the world will be upon pulpits of pearl on the Day of Resurrection.’¹⁶⁰

Aphorism: One day Alexander was sitting upon his throne holding an audience when a thief was brought before him. He ordered that he be hanged. The thief said, ‘O king, I did steal, but it was not my wish to do so, nor did my heart desire it.’ Alexander replied, ‘Just so, you will be hanged, though it is not your wish, nor does your heart desire it.’

The king must be just and ensure that justice is done. He must give due deliberation and ensure that the discipline which he commands is carried out by his agents such as his vizier, viceroy, and others. Otherwise, much of the ruler’s justice, direction, and discipline may be undermined by bribery, which is the result of undue lenience and negligence on the part of the ruler, who must therefore strive to see that such corruption is unearthed, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: King Gushtāsb¹⁶¹ had a vizier by the name of

¹⁶⁰ Aḥmad, *Musnad* 6485; Nasā’ī, *Sunan* 5917.

¹⁶¹ Gushtāsb was a legendary figure in Zoroastrian lore, known as the patron of Zoroaster.

Rāst Ravishn (Right Conduct). Because of this name, Gushtāsb took him to be a righteous man and would not pay heed to anyone who spoke ill of him, and was unaware of his conduct. Rāst Ravishn said to the king's deputy, 'The subjects have become insolent due to our excessive justice. I can see that their impudence will lead to disaster, so they must be chastised before that disaster comes. This punishment should have two sides: kill the bad ones, and do not kill the good ones but seize their property.' So it was that every man the deputy arrested, Rāst Ravishn took a bribe from him and had him released. This went on until the entire populace became impoverished and the treasury was emptied. After some time, an enemy rose against Gushtāsb, who found that there was nothing in his treasury to fund his army. Driven to distraction, he rode out into the wilderness to think. In the distance he spied a flock of sheep, so he rode over to it and found a tent pitched there with the sheep sleeping nearby. Then he saw a gallows on which a dog was hanging. As he neared the tent, a man came out and greeted him and offered him what food he had. Gushtāsb said, 'First tell me about that dog, and then I will break bread with you.' The young man replied, 'The dog used to be my sheepdog, but then he became fond of a she-wolf. Whenever he slept, the she-wolf would come and carry off a sheep and eat it. After this had been going on for some time, the governor of the district came and demanded that I pay the dues for pasturing. [Seeing that my sheep were fewer than expected],¹⁶² I sat down to think. As I observed the flock, I saw the wolf come and take a sheep without the dog raising a sound. I realized that disaster had

¹⁶² Arabic only.

befallen my flock on account of that dog, so I hanged it.' Gushtāsb went away thinking, 'Our subjects are our flock. We might suffer the same fate as he has.' Upon his return he requested to inspect the records and found that they were replete with accounts of Rāst Ravishn's intercessions. He coined a phrase, 'He who is deceived by a fancy name will go without his daily bread!' Then he ordered that Rāst Ravishn be hanged. This story is told in the books of history. A poet has said:

Sir, I am not deceived by your impressive title;
Your name is but a trap for snaring your daily bread.
A man who catches his food with his name
Will happily snare your life to do the same!

Anecdote: It is said that 'Amr ibn Layth had a relative and close friend named Abū Ja'far ibn Zaydūyah whom he loved very dearly, so dearly that one day a hundred red camels were sent to him from Herat, each of them laden with goods. 'Amr had sent this to Abū Ja'far's house saying, 'It is to supply his kitchen.' Later, 'Amr was informed that Abū Ja'far had knocked down a slave and dealt him twenty blows of the rod. 'Amr ordered that Abū Ja'far be brought before him. When he arrived, 'Amr ordered that all the swords in the treasury be brought out and presented before Abū Ja'far. And said, 'Pick out the best of these swords.' Abū Ja'far selected one hundred swords. 'Amr said, 'Now choose two out of these hundred.' This he did. Then 'Amr said, 'Now order that these two swords be placed into a single scabbard.' Abū Ja'far replied, 'Emir, two swords cannot fit in one scabbard!' 'Amr said, 'Nor will two emirs fit in one kingdom.' Abū Ja'far realized his error, and fell down and kissed the ground and cried, 'I have done wrong!'

Amr said, ‘Were it not for the claim of kinship that you have upon me, I would not pardon you for this error. Such matters are ours. Leave them in our hands! But just this once I shall pardon you.’

Counsel: Ardashīr said, ‘The ruler who finds himself incapable of putting right the elite should know that he is also incapable of putting right the masses.’ This is why God Most High says, *And warn your nearest kinsfolk* [Q. 26: 214]. The Arabs say that there is nothing more damaging to the populace and more ruinous to the king than for the king to hold himself aloof and inaccessible. Conversely, there is nothing that more inspires awe of the king in the hearts of his subjects and officials than for the king to make himself readily accessible. When the subjects know that the king is readily accessible, the officials will be unable to oppress them, nor will the subjects be able to oppress one another. Also, by making himself available the king will be able to access all the information he requires; for the king must never be oblivious if the dignity of his office is to be preserved and if he is to rule undisturbed. The following account illustrates this.

Anecdote: It is said that Ardashīr was so observant of happenings that when his inner circle came to him in the morning, he would be able to tell each of them what they had dined on the previous evening, or which wife or concubine they had spent the night with, or whatever else they had done. So accurate was his information that people began to suspect that an angel was visiting him from heaven and informing him; but of course that was not the case, and it was merely a matter of his keen attentiveness and interest in the affairs of his subjects. Sultan Maḥmūd,¹⁶³ may Allah have mercy on him, was also this way.

Aphorism: Aristotle said, ‘The best ruler is he who is like a vulture with corpses all around him, not he who is like a corpse with vultures all around him.’¹⁶⁴

Aphorism: King Alexander said, ‘The best king is he who transforms the bad customs of his realm into good ones; the worst king is he who transforms the good customs of his realm into bad ones.’

Aphorism: Parvīz [Khusraw II] said, ‘There are three kinds of men whose crimes a king must never overlook: those who covet his position; those who covet his harem; and those who fail to keep his secrets.’

Anecdote: Sufyān al-Thawrī said, may Allah have mercy on him, ‘The best ruler is he who keeps the company of people of knowledge, understanding, and righteousness.’ He also said that all things acquire value through men, while men acquire their value through knowledge and wisdom. There is no finer adornment than knowledge and wisdom. When a king comes to have glory and prosperity by means of knowledge and wisdom, the glory will last and the prosperity will remain. Wherever there is knowledge and wisdom, twelve other qualities will follow: temperance, courtesy, piety, trustworthiness, honesty, modesty, mercy, kindness, fidelity, patience, tolerance, and composure.

¹⁶³ Maḥmūd of Ghaznī (d. 421/1030) was the second Ghaznavid sultan.

¹⁶⁴ The Arabic here has, ‘The best king is the one with the keen sight of an eagle, and whose companions are like eagles, not hawks.’ It then adds the following commentary: ‘If the ruler is keen-sighted, and aware of goings-on, and mindful of consequences, and if his inner circle and the elites of his realm are likewise, the affairs of his kingdom will be well-ordered.’ This may be an attempt by the Arabic translator to rework the aphorism. Jāmī cites this saying in his *Bahāristān* (Part 3), also with the attribution to Aristotle, in the same form as that given in the Persian text above and adding the comment: ‘This means that the king must be aware of the affairs of those around him while they are unaware of his, not the other way around.’

Certain things must be paired together in order to be sound: wisdom must be paired with knowledge, fortune with gratitude, kindness with sweetness, effort with good fortune. When good fortune comes, all the others must come with it, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: It is said that in the time when Ya‘qūb ibn Layth¹⁶⁵ rose to power and renown and conquered Kirman, Sistan, Persia, and Khorasan, he next turned his designs on Iraq. Mu‘tamid, who was then the caliph in Baghdad, wrote a letter to Ya‘qūb saying, ‘You were once a coppersmith. Where did this royal acumen come from?’ Ya‘qūb replied, ‘The same Lord who granted me good fortune granted me royal acumen.’

In the Testament of Ardashīr it is written, ‘Any glory which is not laid upon the carpet of knowledge will become humiliation. Any justice which is done without fear of God, no matter its seeming virtue, will become regret.’

[**Aphorism:** ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhīr said one day to his father,¹⁶⁶ ‘How long will this good fortune remain among us, and remain in our house?’ He replied, ‘As long as the carpet of justice and fairness remains spread upon this floor.’]¹⁶⁷

Anecdote: One day al-Ma‘mūn was holding court when a certain matter was brought before him. He referred the case to his vizier Sahl ibn Faḍl, saying, ‘Settle this matter at once. This wheel turns so swiftly that it never stays the same, and cannot satisfy everyone.’

¹⁶⁵ Ya‘qūb ibn Layth al-Ṣaffār (d. 265/879) was the founder of the Saffarid dynasty of Sistan. His father was a coppersmith (*ṣaffār*), hence the dynasty’s name.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhīr (d. 229/845) was a military leader, the son of Ṭāhīr ibn Ḥusayn (d. 207/822), a general and governor under the Abbasids.

¹⁶⁷ Arabic only.

The author of this book states that it is the duty of wise and noble kings to study these accounts, that they may make the most of their good fortune by giving redress to the victims of injustice and helping the needy. They must know with certainty that this wheel never stops turning, and that good fortune cannot be relied upon, and that fate cannot be turned back by great armies or rich fortunes. When the pendulum of fate swings the other way, all things are reduced to nothing, and regret is of no use. The following account serves to illustrate this.

Anecdote: It is said that Marwān, the last of the Umayyad caliphs, once inspected his army. There were three hundred thousand men in all, all equipped and armed. His vizier said, ‘It is a mighty army.’ Marwān replied, ‘Hush! When the time runs out, this equipment will be useless; when the final fate comes, this huge army will seem small. Even if we conquered the whole world, in the end it would be taken from us. To whom was the world ever true, that it should be true to us?’

Anecdote: Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ahwāzī¹⁶⁸ said in his book *Farā'id wa-Qalā'id* (Gems and Necklaces), ‘The world does not refresh the one who drinks it, nor remain in the possession of the one who owns it. Take provisions today for tomorrow, for soon there will be neither today nor tomorrow.’

They say that upon the grave of Ya‘qūb ibn Layth were written these lines:

[Peace upon the dwellers of the graves,
Long gone, as if they never sat together,
As if they never drank cool water,

¹⁶⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ahwāzī (d. 466/1055) was a Persian theologian and Qur’an reciter.

As if they never ate foods dry and moist.
Death came to me with its terrible sting;
My million horsemen^ḍ offered no protection.
Visitor to my grave, take good heed,
And seek your comfort not in this world.]¹⁶⁹
Khorasan I ruled, the lands of Persia too,
Nor was the kingdom of Iraq out of my reach.
Farewell to the world and its sweet breezes,
As if Ya‘qūb had never dwelled upon it!

Anecdote: A king who had lost his kingdom was asked, ‘How was it that fortune forsook you?’ He replied, ‘I became deluded by my own fortune and power, overconfident in my own knowledge, and negligent of seeking counsel. I appointed the wrong men to the wrong posts. I failed to employ strategy when it was needed, and to deal with things at the proper time. I hesitated and dithered when haste was required. I allowed the needs of the people to go unmet.’ They asked him, ‘Which unworthy people do the most harm?’ He replied, ‘Envoys who commit treachery for their own benefit. The kingdom’s ruin is entirely due to them.’ As Ardashīr said, ‘How much blood they have spilled! How many armies they have defeated! How many harem veils they have torn asunder! How much wealth they have plundered! How many oaths they have violated through their treachery and unworthiness!’

The Persian kings were much concerned with this, and would not send out an untried man as an envoy. The following account illustrates this.

Anecdote: They say that when the Persian kings wished to send out an envoy to another king, they would send a

¹⁶⁹ These lines are in the Arabic only.

spy with him to write down all that the envoy said and heard. When the envoy returned, they would compare his report with the spy's record. If they matched, they would know that the man was worthy, and only then would they send him on missions to enemies.

Anecdote: They say that Alexander once sent an envoy to Darius the Younger. When the envoy brought back the response, Alexander doubted a single word of it and said to the envoy, 'I have doubts about that particular word. Are you certain that you heard it from his lips?' The envoy replied, 'I heard it from him with my own ears.' Alexander ordered that the message be written down and given to another envoy to take back and be presented to Darius. When Darius reached the word that Alexander had doubted, he called for a knife and cut that word out, then sent it to Alexander along with a letter in which he said, 'A kingdom's wellbeing rests upon the king's sound intention and good nature; and the king's wellbeing rests upon the accuracy and truthfulness of his envoys. For the envoy speaks from the lips of the king, and bears the reply to his ear. I cut out that word because it was not my word, and I did not have the opportunity to cut out your envoy's tongue.' When the envoy returned and Alexander read the letter, he summoned the first envoy and said to him, 'What was it that made you seek to ruin a kingdom with a single word?' The envoy confessed and said, 'They treated me badly, and I was aggrieved on account of it.' Alexander replied, 'Why did you imagine that we sent you out to work for your own benefit, to undermine our interests, and to put your countrymen's blood at risk?' Then he ordered that the man's tongue be pulled out of his neck.

Counsel: When his subjects suffer misfortune or distress,

it is the ruler's duty to aid them, especially at times of drought or economic downturn. The king should give them food and assistance from the treasury, and not allow any of his officials to oppress them. Otherwise, people will become impoverished and quit the country, and the ruler's income will be devastated, and hoarders will take advantage, and the ruler will incur curses and a bad reputation. The kings of old were therefore very careful to avoid such situations, and would provide aid to their subjects from the treasury, as the following account shows.

Anecdote:¹⁷⁰ It is said that the custom of the Persian kings was to hold public audiences on the days of the spring and harvest festivals (Nowruz and Mehregan). A few days before the festival, the kings' herald would announce, 'Prepare for the coming day! Let every man prepare his case, set it down in writing, and rehearse his plea! Let anyone with a dispute be aware that he may make his complaint to the king, so let him prepare his case!' When the day arrived the herald would stand by the gate of the palace and cry, 'Should any man bar another from this gate, the king will be innocent of his blood!' Then the written pleas would be taken from the people and presented to the king, who would examine them one by one. If any plea was a complaint about the king himself, he would summon the chief Mobed—which was what they called the chief judge—to sit on his right side. Then the king would rise and go and kneel before the chief Mobed, sitting opposing his adversary, and would say, 'Before the other cases, hear this man's case against me and give him justice, and show no bias or sycophancy.' Then the king's herald would cry, 'Let all who have a complaint against the king sit together, that first of all their cases may be dealt with justly.' So the king would

kneel with his adversary before the chief Mobed, to whom he would say, 'No sin against God Almighty is graver than the sins of kings. The debt which kings owe to God in return for His favour upon them is repaid by their looking after their subjects, assuring justice for them, and protecting them from oppressors. If the king is unjust to others, for the sake of God this must not be forgotten.'¹⁷¹ O Mobed, pay heed to yourself! Be sure that you do not favour me to your own detriment! For whatever God will ask of me, I will ask it of you, and lay it upon your neck!' Then the Mobed would say, 'When God grants fortune to His servants, he chooses the best man of the time as their ruler; and when He wishes for His servants to see the value of that vicegerent in His sight, He causes him to utter such words as you have just uttered.' Then the Mobed would examine the case. If he would see that the plaintiff had a valid complaint, he would rule in his favour and give him full redress. If anyone brought a false complaint against the king and produced no proof, he would punish him. Then he would proclaim, 'This is the reward of any who seek to defame the king and the kingdom!' When the king had finished with the pleas, he would return to the throne and don his crown, then turn to his retinue and officials and say, 'I began with myself so that no one would entertain any hope of oppressing another. If any of you have adversaries, you must give them satisfaction.'

On that day, those who had been closest to the king became farthest, and those who had been strongest became

¹⁷¹ Humā'ī notes that the *Siyāsat-nāma* has here 'If the king is unjust, the whole army will be unjust, and they will forget God.' He therefore suggests that the text here might be corrupted and that it ought to be, 'If the king is unjust to others, they should not forget God on account of it.' The Arabic omits this part entirely.

weakest. Such was the custom of the kings until the rule of Yazdegerd the Sinner,¹⁷² who changed the customs of the Sasanians and ruled unjustly until one day there came through the gate of his palace a horse more beautiful than anyone had ever seen. Upon seeing the horse's beauty, all who were present in the palace tried to catch hold of it, but they could not. The horse made its way to Yazdegerd and came to a standstill there in front of him, at the end of the hall. Yazdegerd approached it saying, 'Back, all of you! This is God's gift to me!' He gently laid his hand upon the horse and stroked its head and face. The horse was silent. Yazdegerd called for a saddle and placed it upon the horse's back with his own hand, tightening the strap. Then he stepped behind the horse to put the crupper in place. The horse kicked him right in the heart, and Yazdegerd fell down dead on the spot. The horse ran out, no one knowing where it had come from or where it had gone. Some said it was an angel sent by God Almighty to free them from that tyrant.

Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf¹⁷³ related, 'One day Yaḥyā ibn Khālid al-Barmakī¹⁷⁴ was in court when a Magian came in and filed a complaint against him. I asked him to produce a witness, but he did not have one. Then [the Magian] said, "Make him swear an oath." So I made him swear, and the Magian left [satisfied]. I put the Magian on the same footing as

¹⁷² Yazdegerd I (d. 420) was a Sasanian king who became known as 'the Sinner' (*Bezeḡgār*) because of his suppression of Mobed priestly authority.

¹⁷³ Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī (d. 182/798) was a major scholar of the Ḥanafī school, and served as chief judge of Baghdad under Hārūn al-Rashīd.

¹⁷⁴ Yaḥyā ibn Khālid al-Barmakī (d. 190/805) was a vizier to Hārūn al-Rashīd, exercising great influence over the caliph for seventeen years until his family suddenly fell out of favour with al-Rashīd and he was imprisoned, dying three years later.

Yaḥyā, as Islam requires. I was never biased in favour of anyone, for I feared that God Most High would question me about it.’

Much more could be said about this subject, but I do not wish to go on any further. This amount is sufficient to illustrate to the reader the value of dignitaries and commoners alike, so that he does not oppress his subordinates. Likewise, the subjects must honour the rights of their ruler and not disobey him in any manner, in accordance with the words of God Almighty which we have already mentioned: *Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you* [Q. 4:59]. When God grants someone such an immense status that obedience to him should be mentioned in connection with obedience to God and to the Messenger ﷺ, it is only proper that such a man should be obeyed. And in order to show gratitude for that immense blessing, the ruler must obey his Lord and heed His commandments to be just and good, and to refrain from oppressing his subjects and show mercy to the victims of injustice. As the saying goes, ‘Beware the man who seeks justice with tears’, for the prayer of the oppressed cannot be repelled, and is always answered, especially those entreaties which are uttered in the small hours of the night. As they say:

As long as you have power, do not be keen
to oppress,
For in the end it will lead to sin and fear
of punishment.
While you lie sleeping, the oppressed man
is awake;
The man who prays to the Almighty does
not sleep.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘I lamented the deaths of four unbelievers: Anūshirvān for his justice, Ḥātim al-Ṭā’ī for his generosity, Imru’ a-Qays for his poetry, and Abu Ṭālib for his decency.’¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ I have been unable to find a source for this hadith.

CHAPTER II

ON THE POLITY OF VIZIERATE AND THE CONDUCT OF VIZIERS



A king will prosper with the help of a virtuous, worthy, and competent vizier; for no king can rule without a minister, and any ruler who attempts to manage his affairs alone will undoubtedly fail. As you know, despite the greatness of the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, God Most High commanded him to consult his intelligent and learned companions by saying: *Seek their counsel* [Q. 3:159]. Elsewhere He tells us that Moses said, upon him be peace, *Appoint for me a minister from my family: Aaron my brother. Bolster through him my strength, and let him share my task* [Q. 20:29-32]. If even the Prophets could not do without ministers and administrators, then this is all the more true of us.

Ardashīr was asked, ‘Which companion is best for a king?’ He replied, ‘A minister who is virtuous, wise, diligent, and trustworthy, with whom he may exchange opinions and share secrets. A good minister is able to appraise the king’s affairs.’

When dealing with his vizier, a king must bear three things in mind. First, if he makes a mistake he must not punish him rashly. Second, if he becomes wealthy he must not covet his wealth. Third, if he needs something, he must grant it to him. Likewise, there are three things that the king

must grant the vizier: First, he must be allowed to see the king when he needs to. Second, he must not listen to what detractors say about him. Third, he must not keep secrets from him. A good vizier is his king's secret-keeper. He is entrusted with the maintenance of business, income, the prosperity of the realm, and the treasury, and it is through him that the kingdom acquires repute, prestige, and power. His role is to provide advice and answer questions, and to please the king's friends and frustrate his enemies. Of all people, the vizier is most deserving of appreciation and esteem. It is related that Anūshirvān¹⁷⁶ advised his son, 'Treat your vizier well, for if he ever saw you take an unworthy course of action, he would not join you in it.'

The vizier must be someone who inclines towards good and shuns evil. If he finds that his king is good-hearted and kind to his subjects, he will help him with this; and with a little capital, he will eventually bring a good return. [If the king is hard-hearted or lacking in sound polity, the vizier must gradually and ever so gently guide him to the virtuous path.]¹⁷⁷ He must also be aware that the king's stability depends upon the vizier, and the world's stability depends upon the king. He must know that all of his thoughts and deeds must be righteous, and that of all people the king needs him the most.

Bahrām Gūr was asked, 'How many things does a king need in to ensure a sound reign and an untroubled life?' He replied, 'Six things: [1] A good vizier with whom to entrust his secrets and exchange opinions; [2] a good horse to carry him to safety should the day ever come; [3] good weapons and swords; [4] great wealth that weighs little but is worth

¹⁷⁶ The Arabic has 'Luqmān.'

¹⁷⁷ Arabic only.

much, such as jewels, pearls, rubies, and suchlike; [5] a beautiful wife to console him; [6] a skilled chef who, when the king is frustrated, can cook something to soothe him.’

Ardashīr said, ‘Every king should seek four things, and take good care of them once he finds them: [1] A trustworthy vizier; [2] a learned secretary; [3] a compassionate chamberlain; [4] a sincere advisor. If the vizier is trustworthy, the king will be safe. If the secretary is learned, the king will be wise. If the chamberlain is compassionate, people will [be encouraged to] bring their pleas to the king. If the advisor is sincere, things will go smoothly.’

The chief Mobed in the time of Anūshirvān said, ‘Kingship requires good and helpful companions, but even they will do no good unless the king himself is pious; for the root must be good first, and then the branch.’ The meaning of piety in a king is rightness (*rāstī/ṣiḥḥā*); that is, all of his actions must be right, and he must command in both word and deed that all of his subjects and retinue be as righteous as he is. He must set his heart right with God Most High, and must bear in mind that his power and wealth, his achievements, his triumphs over his enemies, and all of his success, is from God. For disaster lies in complacency, as the following account shows.

Anecdote: Once the Prophet Solomon ﷺ was sitting on his throne when suddenly the wind came and lifted him up into the sky. As he looked down upon his kingdom, he felt pleased as he thought the obedience that was rendered to him by the wind, the jinn, and his fellow man, and of his greatness and power. Suddenly his throne began to topple. ‘Right yourself, throne!’ he cried. The throne replied, ‘Right yourself first, and then we shall do the same!’

God Most High says in the Holy Qur’an: *God does not*

change a people's lot unless they change what is in themselves [Q. 13:11]. Abū 'Ubayd says in his *Amthāl* (Proverbs),¹⁷⁸ 'He who walks the straight path will not stumble.' The vizier therefore should be learned, wise, and old. A young vizier may be intelligent, but as long as he is not old he will lack experience. There are things which men learn from life that cannot be taught by anyone. The good vizier is the ornament of the kingdom, and the ornament must be pure and good. It is said that a vizier must possess five things if his work is to be acceptable and good: [1] awareness, so that whatever he gets involved in, he can see the way out;¹⁷⁹ [2] knowledge, so that obscure things will become clear to him; [3] courage, so that he will not fear anything that ought not be feared, and will not be timid; [4] honesty, so that he treats all people correctly; [5] the ability to keep secrets forever, even to the grave.

Ardashīr said that a vizier ought to be calm, well-spoken, courageous, bighearted, good-looking, modest, and taciturn. He must be pious in order to steer the king away from all that is unseemly. He must be experienced in order to ensure that the king's affairs go smoothly. He must be attentive so that he may see where events are heading and take precautions to protect himself from the turns of fate. Whenever a king has an honest faithful vizier, that vizier will have more enemies than friends. The king, therefore, must not give ear to those who speak ill of him, lest friends become bitter and enemies spiteful. The vizier must possess such tact that if he observes some bad characteristic developing in the king, he is able to guide him back to the right

¹⁷⁸ Abū 'Ubayd Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 223/837) was a philologist and theologian from Herat.

¹⁷⁹ Or 'he can see how it will turn out.'

course; for if a headstrong king is spoken to in a manner he dislikes, he will only get worse. Proof for this is that when God Most High sent Moses to Pharaoh, He said to him: *Speak to him gentle words, that perhaps he may be mindful, or fear* [Q. 20:44]. If God Himself commanded that gentle words should be spoken to His enemy, it is all the more right that others be spoken to gently as well. If the king replies roughly, the vizier must not take it to heart; for the king's power loosens his tongue and makes him speak his mind. No matter how faithful, truthful, and righteous the vizier may be, he must never seek credit from the king for this or act as though the king is indebted to him. It is common knowledge that if you do someone a favour and then condescend to them about it, you may as well not have done it at all. This is all the more true when it comes to kings. The vizier and the rest of the king's retinue ought to be aware that whatever good they do, it is thanks to the king's divine glory that they do it, and so in fact it is they who are indebted to him. Conversely, the worst disasters that can befall a king result from two things: from the vizier, or from [the king's own] evil intent.

Anūshirvān said, 'The worst vizier is the one who goads the king into war when it would be better not to fight.' [That is because war always leads to a decrease in the treasury, as well as despoiling the nobility of men's souls and violating their spirits.]¹⁸⁰

Aristotle¹⁸¹ said, 'If a king's vizier is ignorant, his reign will be like a cloud that passes by without giving rain.' He also said in his book of maxims that any act of clemency or severity which another person does on your behalf,

¹⁸⁰ Arabic only.

¹⁸¹ The Arabic has 'he [i.e. Anūshirvān] also said.'

provided it is according to your desire and brings you no ill-repute, is better than for you to do it yourself. [As the sages say, ‘Better to use someone else’s hand to catch the snake!’]¹⁸²

The wisest vizier is the one who fights his battles on the field of correspondence and diplomacy as much as he is able to, and strives to avoid outright war. If his diplomatic stratagems are unsuccessful, he will try to keep the peace by offering tributes. If the enemy is defeated, he will pardon them and not rush to slaughter them; for a living man can be killed, but a man once killed cannot be brought back to life. A man becomes a man at the age of forty, and only one man out of every hundred is worthy. If a man from the king’s army is taken prisoner, the vizier ought to ransom him so that his fellow soldiers remain hopeful and strong-hearted. He must ensure that each man receives the proper rations, and is properly trained and equipped. He must address them respectfully and civilly, for many viziers were slain by their armies in the days of old.

Truly fortunate is the king to whom God Most High grants a vizier who is worthy, honest, and faithful. The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘When Allah desires good for an emir, He grants him an honest vizier to remind him when he forgets, and to help him when he remembers.’¹⁸³

The author of this book says that throughout history, God Most High is always making His omnipotent power manifest in the world by choosing certain groups of His servants such as kings, viziers, and scholars for the sake of the world’s prosperity. One example of the wonders of the world is the story of the Barmakids, the like of whose

¹⁸² Persian only.

¹⁸³ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* 2932.

generosity and largess the world has never seen, such was the extent of their power and their revenues. Then the offices of the nobles and the royal viziers declined after them and lost their status and lustre, until God Most High revived them through the glory of the rule of Nizām al-Mulk al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Ishāq, raising them to the level of the viziers of old and indeed even higher, such that in all the world, from the wealthy and cultured to the alien and poor, from the noble to the lowly, none have been deprived of their benevolence. The reason we have noted this is so that all who read this may understand how great the disparity is between those who are worthy and those who are not.

Aphorism: Buzurgmihr said, ‘Not all things are comparable with others. The substance of man is greater than every other substance, for the entire world has been adorned by man.’ God Most High does not make mistakes. He grants this worthiness to whomever He will, and He knows what is suitable for each individual. Kings, viziers, and nobles must be of this sort, and they must preserve the ways of the ancients. Whatever funds they claim from their subjects for the welfare of the kingdom, they must do so only at the proper times and seasons. They must be aware of custom, and charge the populace only with those burdens which they are able to bear. They must be like hunters of cranes, not hunters of sparrows; that is, they must not take from the poor. They must not covet the wealth of the deceased as long as they have heirs; and they must shun such greed entirely, for it is devoid of blessing [as well as forbidden].¹⁸⁴ They must keep the hearts of subjects and officials happy by granting them benefits and seeing to their

¹⁸⁴ Arabic only.

needs. They must be aware that their prestige, status, competence, and worth are bound up with the welfare of the populace, that they might earn a good name in this world, and forgiveness and acceptance in the world to come.

CHAPTER III

ON THE CONDUCT OF SECRETARIES AND THE ART OF THE PEN



The learned say that there is nothing mightier than the pen, for with it all the events of the past may be reconstructed. One signifier of the pen's greatness is that God Himself swears an oath on it, saying, *Nūn. By the pen and what they write* [Q. 68:1], and that elsewhere He says, *Recite: and your Lord is the Most Generous, Who taught by the pen* [Q. 96:3-4]. The Messenger of God ﷺ said, 'The first thing God created was the pen. He told it, "Write!" and it wrote all that shall be until eternity.'¹⁸⁵


It is related that 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās ؓ said, commenting on the verse of the Qur'an in which God quotes Joseph as saying, *Place me in charge of the storehouses of the land. Truly I am a skilled custodian* [Q. 12:55], that it means, 'I am a secretary and an accountant.' He also said, 'The pen is the goldsmith of speech.' He¹⁸⁶ ؓ also said, 'The heart is the mine, wisdom is the jewel, and the pen is the jeweller.' And: 'The pen is the physician of speech.' And: 'The pen is a great talisman.' One of the kings of Greece said, 'The affairs of the world are governed by two things, one of which is beneath the other. They are nothing

¹⁸⁵ Tirmidhī, *Sunan* 3319.

other than the sword and the pen, and the sword is beneath the pen.’

The pen is the art and the capital of the learned; by it, the opinions of all people, whether near or far, may be known. No matter how much experience of life men may have, they will never become wise unless they read books; for it is clear that only a little experience may be acquired from this short life, and that only a little may be memorized. If not for the sword and the pen, this world would not stand upright; and the two of them preside over all things.

Secretaries, however, must know other things aside from penmanship if they are to be worthy to serve great men. The sages and kings of old said that the secretary must know ten things: [1] how deep water lies under the ground for the purpose of digging irrigation ditches; [2] the lengths of day and night in winter and summer; [3] the courses of the moon, stars, and sun and their conjunctions and oppositions; [4] arithmetic; [5] geometry; [6] the calendar; [7] agriculture [8] medicine and pharmacy; [9] the southerly and northerly winds; and [10] poetry. In addition to all this, the secretary must have a pleasant and agreeable character. He must know how to sharpen the pen and how to handle it, and how to use its nib to express whatever thought his mind can conceive. He must be able to guard himself from the iniquities of the pen. He must know which letters to elongate, which to round, and which to join. His writing must be clearly legible, and he must give every letter its due, as the following story illustrates.

Anecdote: ‘Umar  had a secretary who once wrote a letter to ‘Umar¹⁸⁷ in which he did not write the letter S in

¹⁸⁷ The Arabic has ‘to ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ.’

Bismillāh legibly. He summoned him and said, ‘First write the S in *Bismillāh* legibly, and then get on with your work.’

The first thing a secretary must know is how to cut his [reed] pen. When a man knows how to cut his pen, his handwriting will always be better, as the following account shows.

Anecdote: It is said that the king [of Ray] had twelve viziers, one of whom was Ṣāḥib Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Abbād.¹⁸⁸ All the other viziers ganged up against him and maligned him in the presence of the king. [They said, ‘Ṣāḥib does not even know how to cut his pen!']¹⁸⁹ When Ṣāḥib learned of this, he gathered them all together and said, ‘What skill do you all possess that I do not, such that you should badmouth me so in front of the king? My father taught me viziership, not merchantry! The least of my skills is pen-cutting. Who among you can cut a pen, dip it once into the inkwell, and write a whole line?’¹⁹⁰ None of them could manage it. The king said, ‘Now you do it!’ Ṣāḥib cut a pen and wrote [a full line], and they all acknowledged his merit.


When it comes to reeds, the best ones [for pens] are straight, slender, and yellow. Nibs slanted to the right are used for Persian, Arabic, and Hebrew [which are written right-to-left], while for other languages [which are written left-to-right] a nib slanted to the left is used. Secretaries must have the best of pens such as those described by Yaḥyā ibn Ja‘far al-Barmakī in a letter he wrote to Muḥammad ibn Layth:¹⁹¹ ‘A pen neither thick nor brittle

¹⁸⁸ Ṣāḥib Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Abbād (d. 385/995) was a Persian scholar who served as vizier to the Buyid rulers of Ray and Isfahan.


¹⁸⁹ Arabic only.

¹⁹⁰ The Arabic phrases the challenge differently: ‘Who among you could write a whole letter with a pen with a broken nib?’

but slender in the middle, and straight.’ The knife for cutting the pen must be sharp. The pen must be cut in the shape of a crane’s bill, slanting to the right. The block on which it is cut must be very firm. The ink must be from Pars, of good quality and light. The paper must be smooth and even. The ink must be thoroughly mixed. Any word containing more than three letters must not be elongated, as this looks ugly. The letters must be proportionate to one another. This requires an intelligent mind and a well-practised hand.

Anecdote: ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rāfi^c, the secretary of the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī  said, ‘I was once writing a letter when the Commander of the Faithful said to me, “‘Abd Allāh! Mix your ink, lengthen your pen, leave spaces between the lines, and make the letters well-rounded.”’

Anecdote: ‘Abd Allāh ibn Jabala was a skilled secretary. He used to say to his apprentices, ‘Your first choice for a pen ought to be a water-reed; if none is available, then a rocky-reed.¹⁹² Cut the knot well, lest you find yourself tied up in knots.’¹⁹³

No letter should be sent without a seal. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās  said that in the verse *A noble letter has been delivered to me* [Q. 27:29], ‘noble’ means ‘sealed.’ The

¹⁹¹ The Arabic has ‘Yaḥyā ibn Layth.’ ‘Yaḥyā ibn Ja‘far’ seems to be a scribal error for ‘Yaḥyā ibn Khālid’ (see above).

¹⁹² The Persian here has ‘If you have any pen, make it a *baḥrī* pen; if not, it will be a burden (*bārī*).’ Bagley takes this to be a play on words between *baḥr* and *bār*. However, the Arabic has ‘or otherwise let it be yellow (*ṣufr*)’, which is most likely a misreading of *ṣukhrī*, meaning a reed which grows on rocky ground, as contrasted with a *baḥrī* pen, which is made from a reed which grows beside water. It is therefore possible that *bārī*, ‘a burden’, in the Persian is a misread of *barrī*, ‘of the land’, since the pairing of *baḥr* and *barr*, ‘sea and land’, is very common in Arabic. See the entry for Kalam in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. IV.

¹⁹³ The traditional reed pen was made of a tube of reed cut between two knots.

Prophet ﷺ once wanted to send a letter to the Persians. When informed that they would not accept a letter without a seal, he adopted his signet-ring on which was inscribed, ‘Muḥammad the Messenger of Allah.’

Narration: Ṣakhr ibn ‘Amr al-Kalbī¹⁹⁴ related that when the Prophet ﷺ wrote a letter to the Negus, he dropped it onto the dust before sending it. When the Negus saw the Prophet’s ﷺ letter, he became Muslim. Then when he wrote a letter to Kisrā, he did not drop it onto the dust, and he did not become Muslim. The Prophet ﷺ then said, upon him be peace, ‘Dust your letters, for it will lend success to your efforts.’ He also said, ‘Dust letters, for dust is blessed.’¹⁹⁵


After writing a letter, one must read through it before folding it so as to discover any mistakes. The secretary must try to avoid writing too much, and keep his words short and to the point. He must avoid repetition and the use of overwrought expressions if his writing is to be well-received. Much more could be said on the subject of the secretary, but let this be sufficient, or else the book will become too long. As the (Arabic) saying goes, ‘The best speech is that which is short, meaningful, and interesting.’ Which means (in Persian) that the best speech is that which takes the least time to say while being as meaningful and helpful as possible, so that the hearer does not become bored or tired, but is eager to take it to heart.

¹⁹⁵ Similar hadiths are found in Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ*, 2347; Hindī, *Kanz al-‘ummāl* 29308, 29309.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE HIGH-MINDEDNESS OF KINGS



Anecdote: It is related that the Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb  said, ‘Strive to ensure that you are not low-minded. I have not seen anything more degrading in men than low-mindedness.’ ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ likewise said, ‘A man is wherever he places himself.’ That is, if he dignifies himself he will be elevated, and if he abases himself he will be lowered. The meaning of high-mindedness (*himma*) is self-control and self-assurance. High-mindedness in great men comes from self-awareness and self-respect. A man will never be respected by others as long as he does not respect himself; no one will value him unless he values himself. Self-respect entails not associating with dishonourable people, not fraternizing with unworthy people, not engaging in actions that are beneath one’s station, and not saying things which others would find offensive. But high-mindedness and self-assurance belong most of all to kings and nobles, for God Most High has endowed them with these qualities. Any king who lacks them will have to learn the hard way from his retinue and ministers, as the following accounts illustrate.

Anecdote: Abū al-Dawānīq¹⁹⁶ once ordered that five hundred dirhams be awarded to a certain man. Aḥmad ibn al-Khaṣīb¹⁹⁷ said, ‘A king should never reckon in amounts

less than a thousand.’ Similarly, Hārūn al-Rashīd was riding in his procession one day when one of his soldiers fell off his horse. Hārūn said, ‘Award him and give hundred dirhams.’ Yaḥyā¹⁹⁸ gave him a reproachful glance. After they had dismounted, Hārūn asked him, ‘What did I do wrong to make you look at me like that?’ He replied, ‘No sum less than a thousand¹⁹⁹ dirhams ought to pass the king’s lips.’ Hārūn said, ‘But what if a situation arises where more than five hundred would not be appropriate?’ Yaḥyā replied, ‘Order that he be awarded a horse with all the usual accoutrements. That will save you from seeming petty-minded.’

It was for this reason that the caliph al-Ma’mūn removed his heir-apparent ‘Abbās from the succession. What happened was that one day al-Ma’mūn passed by his son’s door and heard him saying to a servant, ‘I saw some fine-looking leeks by the Ruṣāfa gate. Take a half-dirham of silver and fetch me some.’ Al-Ma’mūn said, ‘So now you know that there is such thing as a half-dirham! You shall not be my heir. No one would do well under you.’

Anecdote: It is related that Shāpūr son of Ardashīr wrote²⁰⁰ in his testament to his son: ‘Whenever you wish to give something to someone, raise yourself above that thing by awarding it to him with your own hand, or having it awarded to him in your presence and before your gaze. Try to ensure that your gift is not worth less than the income of a town, so that the recipient will become wealthy and

¹⁹⁶ A nickname for the caliph Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr, meaning ‘the Penny-Pincher.’

¹⁹⁷ This most likely refers to Abū al-Khaṣīb, the chamberlain of al-Manṣūr. Aḥmad ibn al-Khaṣīb was a minister to al-Muntaṣir a century later.

¹⁹⁸ Meaning Yaḥyā al-Barmakī; see above.

¹⁹⁹ The Persian has ‘a hundred thousand’, which Humā’ī notes must be an exaggeration.

²⁰⁰ The Arabic has ‘that Ardashīr wrote.’

free of want, and so that his descendants will be well-off thanks to you for as long as they live. In this way you will continue to be counted among the living, not among the dead. Make sure that you never have any interest in engaging in commerce, for that is beneath the dignity of a king.’

Anecdote: It is related that one of the ministers of Hurmuz son of Shapur²⁰¹ wrote a letter to the king saying, ‘Some merchants arrived by sea bringing pearls, rubies, and other jewels. I have purchased one hundred thousand dinar’s worth of jewels from them on behalf of the king. Now another merchant has offered to purchase them for one hundred thousand dinars and a hundred more.’ He replied, ‘It is not a sum that need concern us. If we became merchants, then who would run the kingdom? Mind that you do not do such a thing again. Do not mix my assets with a single penny of commercial profit, for that only harms the good name and reputation of the king, and leaves him a bad name after he dies.’

Anecdote: Amir ‘Umāra ibn Ḥamza²⁰² was sitting in the court of Abū Dawānīq (al-Manṣūr) one day; it was the day when grievances were taken before the caliph. A man came forward and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, I have been wronged by ‘Umāra ibn Ḥamza, who has usurped my land.’ Abū Dawānīq said, ‘‘Umāra! Rise and take your seat facing your adversary, and speak your case.’ ‘Umāra said, ‘I am not his adversary. If the land is mine, I hereby gift it to him. I will not rise from my place, for the caliph has honoured me by placing me here. I will not trade my rank and station for a tract of land!’ His words impressed the other nobles who were present with his high-mindedness.

High-mindedness and ambition are something that everyone possesses. For some it lies in generosity, for others

in knowledge, for others in worship and asceticism, and for others in pursuit of worldly profit. As for high-mindedness in generosity and munificence, it ought to be as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote:²⁰³ Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd al-Barmakī was riding home one day from the palace of Hārūn al-Rashīd. When he got home, a man came forward and said, ‘Abū Jaʿfar! I have a need of you, and I have made God my intermediary to you!’ Yaḥyā ordered that a place be prepared for him in his home and that every day he be given a thousand dirhams. After a month had passed and he had been given thirty thousand dirhams, the man took the silver and departed. Upon being informed of this, Yaḥyā said, ‘I swear by God that had he not left, that would have been his pension for the rest of his life.’

Anecdote: It is related that Jaʿfar ibn Mūsā al-Hādī²⁰⁴ had a slave-girl named Badr al-Kabīr, who was more fair of face and sweet of temper than anyone else of her time. She had mastered the arts of lute-playing, singing, and several others. Muḥammad ibn Zubayda²⁰⁵ heard about her and offered to buy her from Jaʿfar, who replied, ‘As you must know, it does not befit one such as me to engage in selling. If she were not my housekeeper, I would gift her to you.’ A few days later Muḥammad ibn Zubayda came to Jaʿfar’s house to attend a gathering. Badr al-Kabīr played for them, and Muḥammad too sang and made merry, and

²⁰³ This anecdote, along with the two which follow the one after it, are found in the *One Thousand and One Nights* in the same order with much the same content, in Nights 392-393 in the Bolaq edition.

²⁰⁴ Mūsā al-Hādī (d. 170/786) was the fourth Abbasid caliph and the brother of his successor Hārūn al-Rashīd; Jaʿfar was one of his sons.

²⁰⁵ Muḥammad ibn Zubayda al-Amīn (d. 198/813) was the sixth Abbasid caliph, the son of Hārūn al-Rashīd and his wife Zubayda.

plied Ja‘far with drink. Then Muḥammad carried the girl off to his own house, but did not lay a finger on her. The next day Muḥammad invited Ja‘far to be his guest. When they sat down to drink, he told Badr al-Kabīr to give a performance from behind a curtain. Ja‘far, being high-minded, did not say a word or show any reaction. Muḥammad then ordered that the boat in which Ja‘far was to return home should be filled with dirhams. It is said that two million purses of dirhams were loaded onto the boat, totalling twenty million dirhams. The boatmen were told to carry all this to Ja‘far’s house. It is said that no king ever paid such a high price for a slave. Such was the high-mindedness of that age.

Anecdote: One of the wise was asked, ‘Who of all people is worst²⁰⁶ off?’ He replied, ‘The one who is most high-minded, knowledgeable, and intelligent, but whose circumstances are most straitened.’ They asked, ‘To whom should he turn to find relief from his bad luck and dire straits?’ He replied, ‘To kings, nobles, and the high-minded.’ [As it is said, ‘Make your neighbour an ocean, or a king.’]²⁰⁷ The following account illustrates this.

Anecdote: Sa‘īd ibn Sālim al-Bāhili²⁰⁸ said, ‘In the time of al-Rashīd²⁰⁹ I got into dire straits and accumulated debts which I could not repay. With creditors at my door baying for redress, I became desperate. I went to ‘Abd Allāh ibn

²⁰⁶ The Arabic has ‘best off’ here, but Humā’ī argues convincingly that this must be an error given the context.

²⁰⁷ Arabic only.

²⁰⁸ Sa‘īd ibn Sālim al-Bāhili was a courtier under al-Rashīd and later governor of Khorasan under al-Ma’mūn.

²⁰⁹ The Persian has here ‘said to Hārūn al-Rashīd’, while the Arabic version accords with the one found in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, and has been followed in the translation here.

Mālik al-Khuzāʿī²¹⁰ to ask his advice. ʿAbd Allāh said, “None but the Barmakids could save you from this wretched plight.” I protested, “But who can bear their pride and arrogance?” He replied, “You must bear it, for your own good!” So I went to Faḍl and Jaʿfar the sons of Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd al-Barmakī and explained to them my plight, but all they said was, “May God help you!” I returned to ʿAbd Allāh with a heavy heart and told him what they had said. “Remain with us today,” he said, “and let us see what God has in store.” So I sat with him for a time, and then my servant appeared and said, “There are several laden mules at our door, along with a man who says he is the agent of Faḍl and Jaʿfar!” ʿAbd Allāh said, “I hope that relief has come. Go home and see.” I rushed home and saw a man there. He presented to me a note on which was written: “After you left, I went to the Caliph and informed him of your situation. He instructed me to take one million dirhams from the treasury and give it to you. I said to him, ‘He will use that silver to pay off his creditors. But how will he cover his living expenses?’ So he added a further eight hundred thousand dirhams. I have also added a million dirhams of my own funds. So here are two million and eight hundred thousand dirhams with which to set your affairs in order!”

Anecdote: It is said that at one of Anūshirvān’s banquets, one of his close friends stole a gold cup encrusted with jewels. Anūshirvān happened to witness the theft. When the wine-server could not find the cup, he announced that a jewel-encrusted cup had gone missing, and that no one would be permitted to leave until it had been produced. But Anūshirvān said, ‘The one who stole it will not return

²¹⁰ ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mālik al-Khuzāʿī was chief of the palace guard under al-Rashīd.

it, and the one who witnessed the theft will not tell. Let them go!’

Wherever there is generosity and high-mindedness, it is a sign of noble origins.²¹¹ An ignoble person cannot hide his origins, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote:²¹² It is said that during the time in which Hārūn al-Rashīd had become ill-disposed towards the Bar-makids, he summoned [his guard] Šāliḥ and told him, ‘Go to Manṣūr ibn Ziyād and tell him that he owes us ten million dirhams and that we demand that he pay it immediately. If he does not pay by sunset, take his head and bring it to me. Ask no questions.’ So Šāliḥ went to Manṣūr and made the situation known to him. Manṣūr lamented, ‘Alas, I am ruined! I swear that my entire property amounts to no more than one hundred thousand dirhams. How can I possibly raise ten million?’ Šāliḥ replied, ‘You must come up with something. There is not much time, and I have my orders.’ Manṣūr said, ‘Take me home, that I may say goodbye to my wife and children and make my last testament.’ So Šāliḥ took him home. Manṣūr said his farewells to his family, who began to weep and wail loudly. Upon witnessing this, Šāliḥ said to Manṣūr, ‘Let us go to Yaḥyā ibn Khālid. Perhaps he will help you.’ As they headed off to Yaḥyā, Manṣūr began weeping. Yaḥyā asked him what was the matter, and Manṣūr explained his situation. Yaḥyā fell into a morose silence for a moment, then lifted his head and summoned his treasurer. ‘How much silver do we have in the treasury?’ he asked. The treasurer replied, ‘Five million dirhams.’ He ordered that it be brought out. Then he sent

²¹¹ Arabic: ‘there will be comfort and wellbeing.’

²¹² This tale is also found in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, Night 305 in the Bolaq edition.

a message to Faḍl saying, ‘You are always saying that you would like to buy an estate for a million dirhams. I have just found a handsome estate in perfect condition which has always made good yields. Send the silver!’ So Faḍl sent it. He sent another message to Ja‘far saying, ‘I have some important business. Send two millions dirhams.’ Ja‘far sent it at once. [Yaḥyā said, ‘Manṣūr, here is eight million dirhams.’ Ṣāliḥ said, ‘I cannot accept anything but the full amount, or dare to go before al-Rashīd without it.’]²¹³ Yaḥyā hung his head for a moment, then looked up and said, ‘Servant! Go to Danānīr.’ She was a slave-girl whom the Commander of the Faithful had gifted to him, having also gifted the girl a very valuable jewel. Yaḥyā sent the servant to her asking her to send that jewel. The servant fetched the jewel. Yaḥyā said to Ṣāliḥ, ‘The Commander of the Faithful went to great trouble to purchase this jewel, through the mediation of merchants, for two hundred thousand dinars, then gifted it to Danānīr. He will recognize it when he sees it. That makes another two million dirhams.’ For at that time, the dinar was worth ten dirhams. Then he said, ‘That covers Manṣūr’s debt in full. Tell the Commander of the Faithful to release Manṣūr to us.’ Ṣāliḥ took the money and the jewel to al-Rashīd. On the way, Manṣūr recited a line of poetry which appalled Ṣāliḥ with its vileness and low-mindedness:

It was not out of love that you aided me,
But only that you feared to be shot with arrows!²¹⁴

²¹³ The Arabic departs from the Persian here and has, ‘Manṣūr said, “Sir, I have come to you for aid, knowing that no one but you can save me and repay the rest of my debt.”’ The version in the *One Thousand and One Nights* is similar.

²¹⁴ The first hemistich is corrupted in both the Arabic and the Persian. Humānī cites several different versions of the line as cited in similar accounts in other

What this means is, ‘He did not do me that kindness out of friendship, but only because he feared that I might also shoot my arrow.’ Şāliḥ took offence at this and turned his face to Manşūr and said, ‘Today there is no one upon the face of the earth better than those men, or worse than you! They gave up all this money for you to save your life, and you showed no gratitude, and now look at what you are saying!’ So Şāliḥ went before al-Rashīd and told him what Yaḥyā had done, as well as what Manşūr had said. Al-Rashīd was astounded at Yaḥyā’s generosity and Manşūr’s depravity. He ordered that the jewel be returned to Yaḥyā, saying, ‘We do not take back our gifts.’ Şāliḥ went to Yaḥyā and told him about Manşūr. Yaḥyā said, ‘When a man is desperate, cornered, and in dire straits, the things he says are not from the heart’, and he began to offer excuses on behalf of Manşūr. Tears fell from Şāliḥ’s eyes and he said, ‘Heaven will never again produce a man such as you! Alas that a man of your quality should ever be buried beneath the earth!’

Anecdote: It is said that there was once an enmity between Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd al-Barmakī and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālīk al-Khuzā‘ī which they kept secret. The cause of it was that Hārūn al-Rashīd greatly loved ‘Abd Allāh, to such an extent that Yaḥyā and his sons used to say that ‘Abd Allāh had bewitched the Commander of the Faithful. Time passed with this rancour remaining in their hearts, until it happened that al-Rashīd appointed ‘Abd Allāh governor of

works, all of them with the same gist (an insinuation that the Barmakids feared treachery from Manşūr now that al-Rashīd had turned against them), except for one which changes the focus of the line: ‘It was not love that carried me to them, but only that I feared to be shot with arrows.’ This latter version is the one found in the *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Armenia and sent him there. Then a certain well-educated and cultured man of Iraq who had fallen into financial trouble contrived a scheme. He forged a letter from Yaḥyā to ‘Abd Allāh, knowing nothing about the resentment between them. Then he travelled to Armenia and delivered the letter to ‘Abd Allāh’s chamberlain, who took it to ‘Abd Allāh. Recognizing the letter to be a forgery, ‘Abd Allāh had the man who delivered the letter brought before him. After the man came before him and paid his respects, ‘Abd Allāh said, ‘You went to a lot of trouble and embarked upon a long journey, only to deliver a forged letter! But be of good cheer. I will not disappoint you when you have come to me filled with hope.’ The man cried, ‘Long live the Emir! If my coming has caused you difficulty, there is no need to disguise it. God’s earth is vast, and God will provide me with my daily bread. But the letter which I have brought is not a forgery.’ ‘Abd Allāh said, ‘I will give you two options. One is that I will write to my agent in the capital instructing him to enquire about this letter which you have brought. If it is genuine, I will make you governor of one of my cities. Or if you would rather have an award, I will award you one hundred thousand dirhams, and horses and trappings to go with it. If the letter is forged, I will have you shaved and beaten with two hundred strokes of the rod. Meanwhile, I shall have you detained, and ensure that you are well provided for until the reply to my letter arrives. Or, if you wish, I will simply let you go.’ The man replied, ‘I would rather that you ascertain whether or not the letter I brought was genuine.’ So ‘Abd Allāh had the man detained in a room and have his needs taken care of. Then he wrote a letter to his agent in Baghdad saying, ‘A man came to me with a letter purportedly from Yaḥyā ibn Khālid. I

am suspicious about this letter. You must investigate the matter and write back to me.’

When the agent received the letter, he rode out to Khālid ibn Yaḥyā, finding him with a group of close friends. He passed the letter to Khālid, who read it and said to the agent, ‘Come back tomorrow so I may write a reply.’ Then he turned to his friends and said, ‘What ought to be the recompense of a man who forges a letter from me to my enemy?’ Each of them suggested a particular kind of punishment. ‘You are all wrong,’ said Yaḥyā, ‘and your suggestions are born of meanness and low-mindedness. You all know how close ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mālīk is to the Commander of the Faithful, and how there is ill-feeling between him and me. [The devil often desired that I should seek to cause him to fall from his position of grace and favour, but without success. That is why the enmity developed between us. Had I known that this enmity would rise between us, I would have paid a million dirhams or more.]²¹⁵ But now God Most High has sent us this man and made him a means of grace, that his actions may lead to twenty years of rancour being erased from our hearts, and our affairs being set right. You must surely see that I am duty bound to fulfil his hopes and not to disappoint his expectations of me. I will write a letter [to ‘Abd Allāh] telling him to treat him well and give him his due.’ When Yaḥyā’s friends heard this they were amazed. Then he called for paper and ink and wrote with his own hand: ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Especially Merciful. May God grant you a long life! Your agent, may Allah ennoble him, brought me a letter. I read it and was pleased to see that you are

²¹⁵ Not in the Arabic, nor in the version in the *One Thousand and One Nights*.

well. You suspect that the gentleman may have committed forgery. In fact, the letter is mine and not forged. I hope that you will fulfil the gentleman's hopes and do what you can for him. Be assured that whatever you do for him, you will have done for me.'

He sealed the letter and gave it to the agent, who sent it to 'Abd Allāh. When he received it, 'Abd Allāh called the man before him and said, 'Of the two options I presented to you, which would you rather have?' The man replied, 'I would rather have the award.' So 'Abd Allāh ordered that he be given two hundred thousand dirhams, ten Arab horses of which five with saddles and five with litters, twenty wardrobes of clothing, and ten mounted slaves, along with an apt complement of precious jewels. He then sent him on his way.

When he reached Baghdad he went to the palace of Yaḥyā ibn Khālid and requested an audience. The chamberlain came saying, 'There is a man at the door who has come from afar, requesting an audience.' Yaḥyā replied, 'Show him in.' The man came in and kissed the ground before him. Yaḥyā said, 'Who are you?' He replied, 'I am a man who was dead, but then you brought me back to life. I am the one who took your letter to 'Abd Allāh ibn Mālik.' Yaḥyā said, 'How did he treat you?' He replied, 'He treated me exceptionally well, and everything he did for me, he did for your sake. I could not think of taking accommodation before first bringing it all to you, that you may dispose of it as you wish; for it all belongs to you.' Yaḥyā said, 'My fellow, I owe you a great debt of gratitude for what you have done. I consider you one of my nearest and dearest, and now that you have brought all this to me and expressed such gratitude, it would be unchivalrous of me to send you

away without giving you gifts equal to those which he gave you.’ So he ordered that an equivalent fortune be awarded to the man.

We have related this story here in order to show the reader that high-minded people are never permanently ruined by misfortune, but rise again just as that gentleman did after he had fallen into dire straits. Had he been a mean-natured man, he would have resorted to low-minded action and sought refuge with dishonourable people. But because he was high-minded, he was bold enough to approach great men of high-mindedness and generosity. The result of this boldness was not only that he achieved his aim, but also that those two men achieved even greater renown.

Anecdote: There were once two freedmen,²¹⁶ one of the Banū Hāshim and the other of the Banū Umayya, who argued with each other about whose masters were nobler. They agreed to put this to the test. The freedman of the Banū Umayya went to one of his masters and complained that he was in financial difficulty. He gave him ten thousands dirhams. Then he went to another, who also gave him ten thousand, then another, until he had called on ten men and received a total of one hundred thousand dirhams from them. Then he said to the freedman of the Banū Hāshim, ‘I have received one hundred thousand dirhams from my masters. Now you go and see.’ So the freedman of the Banū Hāshim went to Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, upon him be peace, and told him of his difficulties. Ḥusayn gave him one hundred thousand dirhams. Then he went to ‘Abd Allāh

²¹⁶ The Persian has *mawlā*, an Arabic word which can mean ‘slave’, ‘freed slave’, or ‘client’ in the sense of a non-Arab Muslim who is adopted by an Arab tribe, as was the custom in the early Islamic period. The Arabic translation has here ‘*abd*’, which means simply ‘slave.’

ibn Ja‘far, who also gave him a hundred thousand. Then he went to ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rabī‘a, who gave him the same amount. He then took the three hundred thousand and returned to the freedman of the Banū Umayya, who said, ‘You masters have learned high-mindedness from mine! Now let us return to them and give them back their money.’ So they returned to their masters. The freedman of the Banū Umayya went and told his masters, ‘It turns out that relief had already come from elsewhere.’ They took back their silver, each taking his share. The freedman of the Banū Hāshim took their silver back to them, telling them the same, but they replied, ‘We do not take back our gifts. If you have no need for that silver, give in charity to whom-ever wants it.’

Aphorism: A wise man said that respect for the noble is a sign of nobility, and disrespect for people is a sign of ignobility. High-mindedness without means is folly, while high-mindedness with wealth is efficacious. If a man possesses high-mindedness but not wealth, he will only become lowly; but if he possesses much wealth, he will achieve great high-mindedness. It is also said that all actions must be measured: there is no use having high-mindedness which reaches all the way to Baghdad if one only has enough provisions to travel two leagues.

Anecdote: It is related that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān²¹⁷ the Emir of Egypt was out riding one day when he passed by a man who called out to his own son, ‘‘Abd al-‘Azīz!’ Upon hearing this, the Emir ordered that the man be awarded ten thousand dirhams for the welfare of the child.

²¹⁷ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān (d. 85/754) was an Umayyad governor of Egypt under his father Caliph Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam.

When word of this went around Egypt, that year every new-born boy was named ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz.

Anecdote: Conversely, when Tāsh²¹⁸ the high chamberlain of the Emir of Khorasan was passing one day by the money-changers of Bukhara, he heard a man calling to his servant who was named Tāsh. He ordered that they be arrested and fined, saying, ‘You were trying to mock me!’ Observe, then, the great gulf between the free nobleman of Quraysh and the silver-bought slave.

Much more could be said of this subject, but it would be too long in the telling. What matters is that even if high-mindedness is slow in coming to fruition, in the end it does bring men what they seek, as the poet said:

If I sought my daily bread by serving kings,
I would never be sure of attaining it.
Instead I seek nobility, for I know
That bread will come even if I do not seek it.

The correct course is not to allow one’s ambition to exceed one’s means, for otherwise one will live in constant anxiety. As the poet says:

If you were content with whatever you had,
No one could ever live more happily than you
But if one day your desire rose beyond this,
The world and all its contents would never
satisfy you.
What is the use of lofty ambitions,
If they do not help you to attain what you desire?

²¹⁸ Ḥusām al-Dawla Tāsh (d. 377/987) was a military commander and governor under the Samanids.

CHAPTER V

THE WISDOM OF THE SAGES



Wisdom²¹⁹ is a gift from God which He grants to whomever He will. Socrates said that someone who is granted wisdom but complains of lack of wealth is like someone who enjoys wellbeing and security but complains of a lack of suffering and hardship. The fruit of wisdom is wellbeing, while the fruit of wealth is hardship and suffering.

Ibn al-Muqaffa²²⁰ related that one of the kings of India owned so many books of wisdom that they had to be carried upon elephants. He therefore instructed some sages to produce a summary of them. All of the scholars agreed that wisdom may be summarized in four maxims: one for kings, namely justice; one for subjects, namely obedience; one for the body, namely not to eat unless one is hungry; and one for the soul, namely not to look beyond itself.

Aphorism: It is related that a sage said, ‘Men are of four kinds: There are those who know, and who know that they know; these are the ones to learn from. Then there are those who know, but do not know that they know; these are the ones who have forgotten, and you must remind them. Then there are those who do not know, and who know that they

²¹⁹ The Persian omits the chapter heading here and begins with ‘Socrates said...’; Humā’ī takes this to be a scribal error and suggests that a copyist may have mixed up the attributions of the next few aphorisms, placing the attribution to Socrates as though it were the chapter heading. The Arabic has been followed here.

²²⁰ Ibn al-Muqaffa^c (d. 139/756) was a celebrated Persian scholar and author who translated many works of Middle Persian into Arabic.

do not know; these are the ones who seek guidance, and whom you should guide. Then there are those who do not know, and who do not know that they do not know; these are the ignorant, and you must keep away from them.'

Aphorism: A sage was asked, 'What thing is nearest?' He replied, 'Death.' They asked, 'What thing is farthest?' He replied, 'Hope.'

Aphorism: Aḥnaf ibn Qays²²¹ said, 'There are two things which cannot be tricked. When a venture is moving forwards, no one can make it go backwards; and when it is heading backwards, no one can trick it into going forwards.'

Aphorism: Luqmān said to his son, 'Take care of two things, and spare not a thought for the rest: religion for the next world, and funds for this one.'

Aphorism: Anūshirvān was asked, 'Why is it that a friend can be turned into an enemy, but an enemy cannot be turned into a friend?' He replied, 'It is easier to ruin a building than to rebuild a ruin, and easier to break a glass than to mend one.' He also said, 'It is better to have a healthy body than to drink medicine, and better not to sin than to ask for forgiveness, and better to repress desire than to suffer guilt, and better to restrain the body's lusts than to go to Hell.'

Anecdote: A sage of old spent years travelling the world teaching people six maxims: 'He who lacks knowledge lacks the glory of both worlds; he who lacks forbearance will benefit nothing from his knowledge; he who lacks piety

²²¹ This anecdote is missing from the Arabic.

²²² Humā'ī's Persian source lacks the final three of the six, for which he relies on the Arabic, although the first three in the Arabic are slightly different: 'He who lacks knowledge lacks glory in this world and the next; he who lacks patience lacks security in his religion; he who is ignorant will not benefit from his deeds.'

lacks nobility in God's sight; he who lacks generosity lacks any share of his own wealth; and he who lacks obedience lacks an argument before God.'²²²

Aphorism: Buzurgmihr was asked, 'What kind of glory is joined with degradation?' He replied, 'The glory of serving kings.'²²³

Anecdote: Buzurgmihr was asked, 'How should the foolish be disciplined?' He replied, 'By placing them behind closed doors.' They asked, 'How should slaves be disciplined?' He replied, 'By commanding them to engage in much labour so that they have no opportunity to engage in idle curiosity.' They asked, 'How should low-minded people be disciplined?' He replied, 'By humiliating them so that they become aware of their lowness.' They asked, 'How should free men be disciplined?' He replied, 'By ceasing to meet their needs.' They asked, 'Who is a gentleman?' He replied, 'The one who gives and then forgets that he has given.'²²⁴

Aphorism: Mālik Dīnār²²⁵ was asked, 'Why do men destroy themselves for the sake of wealth?' He replied, 'Because they think that wealth is better than other things, and they do not realize that the things for which wealth is needed are better than wealth itself.' They asked, 'Is there

²²² Humā'ī's Persian source lacks the final three of the six, for which he relies on the Arabic, although the first three in the Arabic are slightly different: 'He who lacks knowledge lacks glory in this world and the next; he who lacks patience lacks security in his religion; he who is ignorant will not benefit from his deeds.'

²²³ The Arabic adds: 'and glory attained with avarice, and glory accompanied by foolishness.'

²²⁴ This paragraph appears faulty in both Persian and Arabic editions; the translation attempts to follow the more legible and contextually sensible parts of each.

²²⁵ Mālik Dīnār (d. 131/748) was an early Sufi of Basra who travelled to India to preach Islam and died there. The Arabic does not mention Mālik Dīnār, but presents this paragraph as a continuation of the dialogue with Buzurgmihr.

anything that is more precious than life itself, for which men will happily trade their lives?’ He replied, ‘Three things are more precious than life: religion, spite,²²⁶ and relief from hardship.’ On another occasion they asked him, ‘How are knowledge, generosity and courage adorned?’ He replied, ‘Knowledge is adorned with truthfulness, generosity with cheerfulness, and courage with clemency after victory.’

Aphorism: Yūnān Dastūr said, ‘Among the gravest of tribulations are four things, may God protect us: many dependents and few means, a bad neighbour, an unfaithful wife, and an unworthy son.’

The people of the world agree that the occupations of the world are twenty-five in number.²²⁷ Five of these are a matter of fate and predestination, namely the desires for a spouse, children, wealth, power, and life. Another five require effort, namely knowledge, writing, horsemanship, Paradise, and deliverance from Hell. Another five are matters of temperament, namely loyalty, courtesy, humility, generosity, and truthfulness. Another five are a matter of habit, namely walking, eating, sleeping, sexual intercourse, and excretion. Another five are inherited, namely physical beauty, good character, high-mindedness, arrogance, and meanness.

[When it comes to the hardships of the world, there are four things which intelligent people must not forget: the end of the world, the vicissitudes of time, the cruelty of time, and the faithlessness of time.]²²⁸

²²⁶ The Arabic has ‘wisdom.’ A similar passage in the *afarnāma* attributed to Ibn Sīnā also has ‘spite’ (*kīm*); the Arabic version may be a misread for *kīsh*, ‘religion.’ The *Zafarnama* attributes these quotations to Buzurgmihr.

²²⁷ Humā’ī notes that these twenty-five occupations further divided into five categories are listed in the *Jāvidān Kbirad*, a traditional collection of Sasanian ethics, where it is attributed to a sage named Āzarbād.

²²⁸ In Persian only.

Aphorism: Six things would be cheap even if they cost the world: nourishing food, a healthy child, a pleasant friend, a compassionate ruler, perfect speech, and perfect wisdom.

Aphorism: A sage said, ‘The five most wasteful things are: lamps in sunshine, rain upon a marsh, a beautiful wife to a blind husband, fine food served to a man who is full, and the Word of God in the heart of a tyrant.’

[**Anecdote:** A woman asked Buzurgmihr a question. He replied, ‘I cannot remember the answer to your question just now.’ She said, ‘You receive a great deal of money from the Sultan on account of your learning, yet you do not know the answer to my question?’ He replied, ‘I am paid by the king for what I know. If I were paid for what I do not know, all the money in the world would not foot the bill!']²²⁹

Anecdote: Alexander was asked, ‘Why do you hold your teacher dearer than your father?’ He replied, ‘My father was the cause of my ephemeral life, while my teacher is the cause of my eternal life.’ He also said, ‘If time does not move for you, you must move for time; for men are slaves to time, and time is not a slave to man. Every breath he takes draws him closer to death and further from life.’ He also said, ‘If all things proceed by the decree of God, then there is no use in struggling.’

It is related that a group of sages once asked Buzurgmihr, ‘Teach us something of wisdom which will benefit us in body and soul, that we might act upon it and be well rewarded by God.’ He replied, ‘You should know that four things sharpen the vision, and four things dull it; and four things fatten the body, and four things weaken it; and four

²²⁹ In Persian only.

things make the body sound, and four things break it; and four things enliven the heart, and four things kill it. The four things which sharpen the vision are fresh vegetables, running water, children, and seeing friends. The four things which dull the vision are eating salty food, pouring hot water over the head, looking directly at the sun, and seeing enemies. The four things which fatten the body are wearing soft clothes, living without worry, smelling pleasant fragrances, and taking the siesta.²³⁰ The four things which weaken the body are eating dry meat, too much sex, spending too much time in hot baths, and sleeping too early in the evening [and wearing rough clothing].²³¹ The four things which make the body sound are eating at the proper time, observing moderation in all things, avoiding strenuous labour, and not worrying unnecessarily. The four things which break the body are walking in uncomfortable shoes,²³² travelling on rough roads, riding excitable horses, and sex with old women. The four things which enliven the heart are keen intelligence, a learned teacher, a trusted partner, a pleasant wife, and a helping friend.²³³ The four things which kill the heart are freezing cold, terrible heat, unpleasant smoke, and fear of speaking.²³⁴

Aphorism: Socrates the sage said, “Five things bring men to ruin: betraying friends, ignoring scholars, self-contempt, suffering unworthy braggarts, and pursuing the heart’s caprice.”

²²⁹ In Persian only.

²³⁰ The Arabic has ‘sleeping in a warm place’; the Persian *garm-gāhī* can mean ‘a warm place’ or ‘midday’, which Humā’ī affirms is the intended meaning here.

²³¹ This extra item is found only in the Persian.

²³² Arabic: ‘walking when tired.’

²³³ Both the Persian and the Arabic list five items here; perhaps the keen intelligence and learned teacher could be counted as one thing?

²³⁴ The Arabic has ‘fear of an enemy.’

Aphorism: Hippocrates said, “Five things never have their fill of five things: the eye of looking, females of males, fire of kindling, the earth of rain,²³⁵ and scholars of knowledge.”

Aphorism: A sage was asked, ‘What is the bitterest thing in the world, and what is the sweetest?’ He replied, ‘The bitterest things are listening to harsh words from unworthy people, incurring debts, and falling into dire straits. The sweetest things are having children, hearing pleasant talk, and being comfortable.’

[A sage was asked, ‘What is death?’ He replied, ‘Sleep is light death, and death is heavy sleep.’]²³⁶

Aphorism: A sage was asked, ‘What is wealth?’ He replied, ‘Contentment.’ They asked, ‘What is love?’ He replied, ‘Sickening in the soul and dying of woe.’

Aphorism: Aristotle was asked, ‘Which friend is most loyal, and which companion is kindest?’ He replied, ‘The venerable friend is most loyal, and the oldest companion is kindest, and the counsel of the wise is best.’

Aphorism: Galen said, ‘Forgetfulness is caused by seven things, hearing pleasant words²³⁷ but not engraving them upon the heart, cupping on the vertebrae of the neck, urinating in standing water, eating too many sour things, looking into the face of a dead person, sleeping too much, and looking too much at ruins.’ Galen also said in the Book of Medicines that forgetfulness is caused by eight things: phlegm, boisterous laughter, salty food, fatty meat, too much sex, exhaustion due to lack of sleep, and consuming all manner of cold and wet substances, which are harmful and cause forgetfulness.

²³⁵ The Arabic has ‘the ear of information.’ ²³⁶ In Arabic N only.

²³⁷ The Arabic has ‘harsh words’.

The sage Abū al-Qāsim²³⁸ said, ‘Civil strife has always been caused by three kinds of people: those who tell tales, those who seek them, and those who receive them. The teller and the seeker are not free from sin, and the receiver is rarely unscathed.’

Aphorism: A sage said, ‘Three things do not go well with three others: lawful food with avariciousness, kindness with tetchiness, and truthfulness with talkativeness.’

Counsel: Buzurgmihr said, ‘If you wish to be among the Substitutes,²³⁹ you must become childlike.’ When asked to explain, he replied, ‘Children have five qualities which would raise adults to the ranks of the Substitutes if they had them. They do not worry about their daily bread; when they fall ill, they never complain about God Most High; however nice their food is, they share it together; when they quarrel, they do not take it to heart, but make up quickly; at the slightest alarm, they take fright and tears come to their eyes.’

Aphorism: Wahb ibn Munabbih said, ‘In the Torah are written four things: every civil servant²⁴⁰ who is not pious is the same as a thief; every man who lacks intelligence is the same as a beast; every rich man who does not relax is the same as a labourer; every poor man who is humble before a rich man due to his wealth is the same as a dog.’²⁴¹

Aphorism: A sage said, ‘Greatness lies in deliberation, error lies in haste, and disgrace lies in stinginess.’

²³⁸ This may be Abū al-Qāsim Ishāq al-Samarqandī (d. 340s/950s), a sage and scholar of Samarqand.

²³⁹ The Substitutes (*Abdāl*) are a category of saint in traditional Islam, so called because whenever one dies, God replaces him with another. As Bagley notes, it is unusual to find the term attributed to Buzurgmihr.

²⁴⁰ The Persian has *āmīl*, meaning an agent of the state or tax-collector; the Arabic has ‘*ālim*, ‘scholar.’

²⁴¹ The Persian and most Arabic manuscripts lack the latter two items.

[A sage said, ‘A man should not be servile in his heart, proud in his outward bearing, or foolish in his habits; he should avoid both luxury and sordidness. He should listen to wisdom even from the unwise, for a man may sometimes hit the target without aiming at it.’]²⁴²

Aphorism: A sage said, ‘You must look at three things with three eyes: look at the poor with the eye of humility, not the eye of pride; look at the rich with the eye of goodwill, not the eye of envy; look at women with the eye of compassion, not the eye of lust.’

Aphorism: Wahb ibn Munabbih said, ‘I read in the Torah that the mothers of sin are three things: pride, avarice, and envy. Their children are five: overeating, oversleeping, bodily comfort, love of the world, and praising people.’ He also said, ‘He who escapes three things will go to Paradise: expectation of gratitude (*minna*), burdensomeness (*mu ūna*), and blame (*malāma*). When he does someone a favour, he must not expect gratitude; he must not burden others with his troubles; and when someone is at fault, he must not blame them.’

Counsel: Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, ‘A tiresome man has no friends; a liar has no loyalty; an envier has no peace; a mean man has no chivalry; an immoral man has no greatness.’

Dhul-Riyāsatayn²⁴³ said, ‘A man once complained to Alexander about another man. Alexander said, “Would you like me to hear what you have to say about him, on condition that I also hear what he has to say about you?” This alarmed the man. Alexander said, “Be on your way, and

²⁴² Arabic only. As Humā’ī notes, from here until the end of the chapter the Arabic breaks from the Persian in the arrangement of the text.

²⁴³ Dhul-Riyāsatayn, ‘He of the Two Leaderships’, was the nickname of Faḍl ibn Sahl (d. 202/818), the vizier of al-Ma’mūn.

keep your evil away from other people so that you may be safe from their criticism.”’

Aphorism: Buzurgmihr said, ‘There are four kinds of wellbeing: wellbeing of religion, of body, of property, and of family. Wellbeing of religion lies in three things: not pursuing base desire, obeying the Law, and not deceiving²⁴⁴ anyone. Wellbeing of body lies in three things: eating little, sleeping little, and speaking little. Wellbeing of property lies in three things: avoiding pettiness,²⁴⁵ fulfilling trusts, and discharging duties. Wellbeing of family lies in three things: being content, supporting one another, and obeying God Most High.’

Hātīm al-Aṣamm²⁴⁶ was asked, ‘Why is it that we do not find the same things that people found in times of old?’ He replied, ‘Because you lack five things: a wise teacher, a helpful friend, constant effort, lawful income, and a blessed era.’

It is related that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, ‘Alī, turn your face to me, and empty your ears and your heart, and eat, and clothe, and give, and gather, and hold fast.’ Alī said, ‘Messenger of Allah, what do those words mean?’ He replied, ‘Alī, swallow your anger, conceal your brother’s faults, forgive the sins of wrongdoers, gather yourself for the narrow dark grave, and hold fast to Islam.’

Counsel: A sage was asked for advice. He replied, ‘Observe His decree (*qaḍā*), seek His approval (*riḍā*), and avoid His wrath (*jafā*).’

Aphorism: A sage was asked, ‘What is greatest among mankind?’ He replied, ‘Deliberation and knowledge.’ He also said, ‘People covet all things except three: no one

²⁴⁴ The Arabic has ‘envying.’

²⁴⁵ The Arabic has ‘meticulousness’, without ‘avoiding.’

²⁴⁶ Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Hātīm al-Aṣamm (d. 237/851) was an early Sufi of Khorasan.

covets poverty, for all people desire wealth; no one covets sadness, for all people desire happiness; and no one covets death, for all people desire life.'

[Abū al-Qāsim the sage said, 'Man's ruin lies in two things: sin, and independent opinions.']*²⁴⁷

Luqmān the sage said, 'Anyone who despises three people will miss out on three things: the one who despises the ruler will miss out on this world; the one who despises scholars will miss out on the Hereafter; the one who despises his neighbour will miss out on prosperity.'

Aphorism: Tribulation is caused by three kinds of people: wayward scholars, ignorant reciters, and malicious commoners.'

It is said, 'Do not expect honesty from ambitious men, or demand loyalty from low-born men.'

A sage said, 'Two things are rare in these times: religiosity and poverty.'

A sage said, 'If you keep four things, you will be a man: keep your private life such that if people found out about it, you would not mind; keep your public life such that if people copied you, you would not mind; treat others such that if they treated you the same way, you would not mind; and behave around others such that if you saw them all behaving likewise, you would approve.'

Aphorism: Ardashīr said, 'Beware the noble man when he is hungry, and the dishonourable man when he is full.'

It is related that Ibn al-Qirriyya,²⁴⁸ who was one of the great men of learning and wisdom of his time, once visited al-Ḥajjāj. Al-Ḥajjāj asked him, 'What is unbelief?' He replied, 'Boasting of one's blessings, and despairing of mercy.' He asked, 'And what is contentment?' He replied, 'Acceptance of what God decrees, and patience in the face of

adversity.’ He asked, ‘And what is patience?’ He replied, ‘Suppressing anger and bearing discomfort.’ He asked, ‘And what is forbearance?’ He replied, ‘Showing mercy after gaining the upper hand, and calming oneself after becoming angry.’ He asked, ‘And what is nobility?’ He replied, ‘Keeping friends and fulfilling their due.’ He asked, ‘And what is satisfaction?’ He replied, ‘Being content with simple food and simple clothing.’ He asked, ‘And what is wealth?’ He replied, ‘Seeing the small to be great, and the little to be much.’ He asked, ‘And what is delicacy?’ He replied, ‘Achieving much with few resources.’ He asked, ‘And what is might?’ He replied, ‘Standing over those who are below you.’ He asked, ‘And what is courage?’ He replied, ‘Strength in the face of the enemy, and standing firm when others would flee.’ He asked, ‘And what is wisdom?’ He replied, ‘Being truthful and seeking to make others content.’ He asked, ‘And what is justice?’ He replied, ‘Not indulging the heart’s whims, and speaking the truth.’ He asked, ‘And what is fairness?’ He replied, ‘Impartiality in judging disputes.’ He asked, ‘And what is degradation?’ He replied, ‘Sickness occasioned by empty-handedness, and depression due to scant provisions.’ He asked, ‘And what is avarice?’ He replied, ‘Seeking to satisfy every whim.’ He asked, ‘And what is trustworthiness?’ He replied, ‘Fulfilling obligations.’ He asked, ‘And what is treachery?’ He replied, ‘Delaying for no good reason.’ He asked, ‘And what is intelligence?’ He replied, ‘Contemplation and looking deeply into things.’

Aphorism: Eight things bring men humiliation: sitting at someone’s table uninvited; giving orders to the master of the house; hoping for favours from enemies; eavesdropping on someone else’s conversation; despising the ruler; sitting above one’s station; speaking to someone in a manner one

would not accept from him; and befriending unworthy people.

Aphorism: Buzurgmihr was asked, ‘What is something that is true, but should not be uttered because it would be vulgar to say it?’ He replied, ‘Praise of oneself.’

Counsel: You will never see a stingy man who is praised, nor an angry man who is happy, nor a wise man who is covetous, nor a generous man who is envious, nor a hopeful²⁴⁹ man who is rich, nor a tiresome man who has friends.’

Aphorism: A sage said, ‘Five people will regret five things: the lazy man when opportunities pass him by; the one who has cut his ties with his brethren, when misfortune befalls him; the one who gets the upper hand over the enemy but then finds himself unable to act; the man who has divorced a good wife and then finds himself burdened with a bad one; and the good man who becomes brazen about committing sins.’

A sage said, ‘A straightforward rebuke is better than hidden resentment.’

[Buzurgmihr was asked, ‘Does wealth change the hearts of learned men?’ He replied, ‘He whose heart is changed by wealth is not a learned man.’]²⁵⁰ Buzurgmihr [also] said, ‘There are three kinds of mournful and sorrowful people: he who is separated from the one he loves, the caring father who loses his child, and the rich man who becomes poor.’

[**Aphorism:**²⁵¹ A sage said, ‘Five men hold wealth dearer than their own souls and spirits: the professional soldier,

²⁴⁹ Humā’ī suggests that this should be ‘hopeless.’ The Arabic has ‘nor a rebellious man who is hopeless’ (*‘utiyyan qunū an*); Humā’ī suggests that *‘utiyyan*, ‘rebellious’, might be read as *ghaniyyan*, ‘rich.’

²⁵⁰ In Arabic only.

²⁵¹ Humā’ī notes here that a page appeared to be lost from his Persian manuscript. The paragraphs between brackets up to the aphorism of Luqmān are taken from the Arabic only.

the digger of wells and channels, the seafaring merchant, the snake-charmer who catches snakes with his hands, and the one who consumes poison for a wager.]

[**Aphorism:** ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dīkarib²⁵² said, ‘Gentle words soften hearts harder than the hardest rocks. Harsh speech roughens hearts which are softer than silk.’]

[A sage said, ‘Sorrow is the sickness of the heart, just as pain is the sickness of the body. Joy nourishes the spirit just as food nourishes the body.’]

[A sage once asked a man to lend him a dinar. He refused, so the sage said, ‘By refusing, you have only made me blush once out of embarrassment. Had you given it to me, my face would have paled not once but a thousand times for all the times you asked for it back!’]

[**Aphorism:** Other sayings of the sages include: ‘He who sows when the soil is wet will not amount to anything’; ‘A man without pith or dignity is like a tree without fruit’; ‘He who unsheathes the sword of injustice will kill himself with it’; ‘He who is not true to himself will never be without grief’; ‘When a man stretches out his hand to give, his face shines with light’; ‘He who does not guard against sin will become attached to it’; ‘Youth is the foster-brother of madness, and old age is the partner of dignity and tranquillity’; ‘Take ample provisions for the journey, and you will fear no setbacks.’]

Aphorism: Luqmān the sage was walking down the road when he saw a man wearing sack-cloth. He said, ‘Who are you?’ The man replied, ‘A human being.’ He asked, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘Whatever I am called.’ He asked, ‘What is your job?’ He replied, ‘To not cause offence.’ He

²⁵² ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dīkarib al-Zubaydī (d. 16/637 or 21/641) was an early Islamic poet and warrior from Yemen.

asked, 'What do you eat?' He replied, 'Whatever I am given.' Luqmān said, 'How happy you must be!' The man replied, 'What prevents you from having the same happiness?'

A sage said, 'Three things dispel sadness from the heart: the company of the learned, repayment of debt, and seeing loved ones.' He also said, 'Two things worsen the sadness of the heart: placing one's hope in unworthy people,²⁵³ and joking with vulgar people.'

A sage said, 'Avoid four things to be safe from four things: avoid envy to be safe from sorrow; avoid immoral companions to be safe from censure; avoid sin to be safe from punishment; and avoid becoming wealthy to be safe from making enemies.'

[If you degrade yourself for the sake of a passing pleasure which incurs the Lord's wrath, then you are nothing but a dog in temperament, lowliness, and mindlessness. Woe betide the one who resembles a dog!]²⁵⁴

Another sage said, 'Four things are so evil that those who commit them are punished in this world as well as the next; and if the punishment does not reach them in this world, it will undoubtedly reach their children. The first is backbiting other people; it is said that backbiting is a rider who is swiftly caught up with. The second is despising the scholars; it is said that anyone who despises the scholars will himself be despised. The third is ingratitude towards the gifts of God Most High. The fourth is shedding blood without just cause, whether by rulers or by subjects.'

[The saints and sages of old had a proverb: 'All who kill will be killed sooner or later.']²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Arabic: 'hoping for generosity from the stingy.'

²⁵⁴ In Arabic manuscript K only. ²⁵⁵ Not in Persian.

A poet said:

Once Jesus saw the body of a slain man on
the road.

Horrified, he gnawed the tip of his finger,
And said, 'Whom did you kill, to end up killed
yourself?

He who killed you today will be killed in
the end.'²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Humā'ī notes that these lines have been attributed to Nāṣir Khusraw, but in his opinion are more likely to be by Rūdakī.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE VIRTUE OF INTELLIGENCE



A tradition states that God created the intellect in the finest state. ‘He told it to advance, and it advanced. He told it to withdraw, and it withdrew. Then He said, “By My glory and My majesty, I have created nothing nobler in My sight than you! Through you shall I reward, and through you shall I punish.”’²⁵⁷ The truth of this becomes plain when one considers how God Most High issues directives to His servants in two form: commandments and prohibitions, both of which require intelligence. Thus He says in His Book: *Be conscious of God, O people of pith!* [Q. 5:100]. ‘People of pith’ (*ulūl-albāb*) means ‘those who possess intelligence.’ The Arabic word for intelligence, *‘aql*, is derived from the word *‘iqāl* (head-band), and they call a fort at the top of a mountain which cannot be assailed due to its strength and stability a *ma‘qil*.²⁵⁸ Some men of Pārs were asked why intelligence is called *khirad*, and they replied, ‘Because intelligent people purchase (*kharand*) it from both worlds.’

Anecdote: The Prophet²⁵⁹ ﷺ said, ‘The intelligent man may be recognized by seven²⁶⁰ signs: he overlooks the of-

²⁵⁷ Ibn Abī Dunyā, *Makārim al-akhlāq* 111.

²⁵⁸ The Persian here has *‘iqāl* again, which as Humā’ī notes must be an error. The Arabic has *ma‘qil*.

²⁵⁹ The Arabic attributes this saying to ‘a sage of Persia’, apparently combining it with the previous anecdote which is cut short.

fences of those who wrong him; he treats lesser men humbly; he outdoes those who are supposed to be his betters in good works; he always remembers God Most High; he speaks with knowledge; he knows the right words for the right occasions; and when hardship befalls him, he seeks refuge with God. The unintelligent man too has signs: he wrongs people; he treats his lesser poorly; he holds himself above his superiors; he speaks without knowledge; he is silent when he ought to speak; when hardship befalls him, he destroys himself; when he witnesses good deeds, he turns his face away.'

Aphorism: Sa'īd ibn Jubayr²⁶¹ said, 'I have never seen a finer garment on a man than intelligence. If he breaks, it mends him; if he is degraded, it dignifies him; if he stumbles, it picks him up; if he falls into an abyss, it pulls him out; if he is impoverished, it enriches him.'

The first thing an intelligent person needs is knowledge coupled with intelligence, as this story from the days of al-Ma'mūn illustrates.

Anecdote:²⁶² It is related that among the Abbasid caliphs, there was no caliph more learned in all of the sciences than al-Ma'mūn. Two days of every week, he would hold debates at which the jurists, imams, and theologians would gather. One day a black man wearing tattered clothes came to Ma'mūn's assembly and took an inconspicuous seat at the back of the room. Their custom was that when a topic was

²⁶⁰ The Persian and several Arabic manuscripts have 'four', others 'seven', and indeed seven things are listed.

²⁶¹ Sa'īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714) was a hadith narrator of the Second Generation of Muslims.

²⁶² This story is also found in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, nights 307-308 in the Bolaq edition.

introduced for discussion, they would pass it around the assembly so that all who had something to add could say their piece. On this occasion, when the first topic reached the stranger he gave a better reply than anyone else had. Impressed, al-Ma'mūn ordered that he be given a more auspicious seat in the assembly. When the second topic reached him, he once again gave the best answer of them all, and al-Ma'mūn had him moved to an even more auspicious seat. When his was the best reply to the third topic too, al-Ma'mūn had him seated near him. When the debate ended, water was brought and they washed their hands and broke bread together. Then the jurists and theologians departed, but al-Ma'mūn called the stranger to sit and dine with him. When the wine was served to him, he rose and said, 'The Commander of the Faithful saw well, and knows well, that this humble servant was unknown among the company at his assembly. Then the Commander of the Faithful raised me to this illustrious station on account of the small amount of intelligence which God the Exalted has granted me. Having so honoured me, is this what he now commands? I do not reproach the Commander of the Faithful for so exalting intelligence, but if I were to drink wine, my intelligence would stray from me and courtesy would desert me, and I would disgrace myself in the Commander of the Faithful's company and render myself contemptible before the eyes of his courtiers. It is to be hoped that he will command what is right, and that he will not wrest this jewel from me, out of his lordly grace and favour.' When al-Ma'mūn heard this, he was pleased and invited the man to sit back down. Then he ordered that he be given one hundred thousand dirhams from the treasury along with a horse, clothing, and finery. At every assembly he held he

sat him in a more auspicious seat, until he was above all the others.

We have related this story to illustrate how those who achieve high status do so by means of intelligence, knowledge, and courtesy.

Anecdote: One day a man came to the palace of al-Manṣūr Abū al-Dawānīq and said to the chamberlain, 'Tell the Commander of the Faithful that a man named Ḥāṣim with whom the Commander of the Faithful spent a year at school has come from Syria and wishes to offer his greetings.' He was shown in and they exchanged greetings, and the Caliph asked after him and invited him to sit down, although he felt somewhat affronted by the man's lack of courtesy. He asked him why he had come, and he replied, 'To see the Commander of the Faithful, on account of our old companionship.' He ordered that he be given a thousand dirhams, and the man left. A year later the man returned. The Caliph's son had recently died, and he was in mourning. The Caliph asked him why he had come. He replied, 'I am the man with whom you were at school in Syria. I have come to console you for your loss.' He ordered that he be given four hundred dirhams, for Abū al-Dawānīq was always mean-spirited when it came to gifts. No Abbasid was so miserly as he, which is why he was known as Abū al-Dawānīq (the Penny-Pincher). The man went on his way. Then a year later he returned once more. This time he could find no pretext for an audience, but managed to get in when a large audience was being held, and sat down in front of the Caliph, who asked him why he had come. He replied, 'Commander of the Faithful, I am the man who used to write down hadiths with you in Syria. Once we wrote down a certain supplication which, when anyone

recites it, his need will be fulfilled. But I have lost that supplication, so I have come to the Commander of the Faithful to ask for it.' The Caliph said, 'Don't bother. I have already recited that supplication many times, hoping that God Most High might rid me of you! If it were truly guaranteed to bring an answer, I would be rid of you.' The man was mortified upon hearing this.

We have related this story to show that no matter how much knowledge a man may have, if he has no intelligence he will never attain status and rank.

Anecdote: It is related that during the same period, a man from Medina had come to Abū Jaʿfar [al-Manṣūr] because of the friendship they had shared in bygone days. After al-Manṣūr became caliph, the man came to him. When al-Manṣūr saw him, he recognized him and showed him kindness and brought him close to him. The man possessed intelligence, but not knowledge. He said to the Caliph, 'Commander of the Faithful! I love you dearly and am your faithful and obedient servant, but I am not qualified for the service of kings. How am I best to visit you without breaching etiquette or annoying you?' Al-Manṣūr replied, 'Make your visits rare, so that when you have been away for a while I will feel your absence in my heart, and when I see you I will remember those bygone days. Seat yourself far from me, so that the chamberlain may gradually bring you closer. Do not sit for too long, for that would be discourteous. Do not make requests, lest you annoy me; but when I am kind to you, show gratitude wherever you go, so that I may hear of it and be pleased, and then show you further kindness. Do not tell others of what transpires between us.' The man accepted this advice, and every year he would come twice to offer his greetings,

and the Caliph would award him two thousand dirhams each time.

We have related this story to show that if a person has intelligence but not knowledge, his intelligence will guide him to knowledge; and if a person has knowledge but not intelligence, all his affairs will be frustrated; and if a person has both knowledge and intelligence, he will be unique in the world like a Prophet, imam, or sage. All the goodness, glory, status, and righteousness of this life and the next spring from intelligence. As a poet said:

Intelligence gives a man value and worth,
Intelligence carries a man to the moon,
Intelligence washes man's sins away,
Intelligence gives man a crown and a throne.

Intelligence is the beginning of faith, the middle of faith, and the end of faith. The intelligent man is not the one who strives to get out of a difficulty after having fallen into it; the intelligent man is the one who strives not to fall into difficult situations in the first place.

Counsel: King Parvīz said to his son, 'Take care of your subjects, and intelligence will take care of you. Protect your subjects from harm, and intelligence will protect you. Know that as you judge between men, intelligence judges you. Men will not heed what you command so long as you do not heed what intelligence commands.'

Aphorism: Yūnān Dastūr once wrote a letter to Anūshirvān in which he discoursed about intelligence. When Anūshirvān read it, he approved and wrote back, 'Sage! You did well to write a discourse on intelligence. We and our predecessors were adorned only by intelligence, so how could I oppose it?'

The intelligent are the closest of all people to God Most High. Intelligence, like the sun, illuminates the world. It is good in all people, and best in the best people. [Intelligence in the human body is like moisture in a tree; as long as the tree is moist and fresh, people enjoy and delight in its fragrance, its flowers, its fruits, its splendour, and its freshness; but when its moisture dries up and its splendour wanes, it is good for nothing but uprooting, burning, or cutting. So too is man: as long as his intellect is sound and his body is healthy, his company will be blessed and contact with him will be good and beneficial; but when his intellect fades and ignorance comes to dominate him, he is no longer fit to live, and only death can shelter him.]²⁶³

Anūshirvān said, ‘How could I resist intelligence or fail to do as it commands me, when there is nothing better for a man, be he a king or not, than intelligence? By the light of intelligence does one tell ugly from beautiful, bad from good, false from true. Without intelligence, there cannot be discernment.’

Aphorism: Buzurgmihr said, ‘There are two things which no one can ever have enough of: intelligence and courage.’

Aphorism: Luqmān the sage said, ‘No matter how learned a man may be, if he does not possess intelligence he will not benefit from his learning.’

Aphorism: Anūshirvān said to Buzurgmihr, [‘Which person would you rather be most intelligent?’ He replied, ‘My enemy.’ He asked, ‘Why?’ He replied, ‘So that I might be safe from his evil.’]²⁶⁴ ‘Everything that becomes plentiful

²⁶³ In Arabic only.

²⁶⁴ Missing from the Persian and some Arabic manuscripts.

becomes cheap, except for intelligence: the more one has, the dearer it becomes.’

Aphorism: Buzurgmihr was asked, ‘What thing can no man do without?’ He replied, ‘Intelligence.’ They asked, ‘How much does one need?’ He replied, [‘It is something which no one has enough of, so how could it be appraised?’ A sage said,]²⁶⁵ ‘All things need knowledge, and knowledge needs experience. There is no wealth dearer than intelligence, nor any poverty worse than ignorance. The more learning a man has, the more intelligence he needs. A learned man with low intelligence is like a weak shepherd with a large flock.’

Aphorism: The scholars say that the intellect is a ruler, and its armies are discernment, understanding, memory, and thought. The soul’s happiness depends upon intelligence, because that is what keeps the body stable. The soul is a lamp and intelligence is its light, which shines over the body. The intelligent man is never glum, for he never does anything which causes glumness, nor does he grieve for things which ought not to be grieved for.

Aphorism: Ibn ‘Abbās ﷺ was asked, ‘Is intelligence better, or courtesy?’ He replied, ‘Intelligence, since intelligence is a gift from God Most High, while courtesy is learned from His servants.’

Anecdote: ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mubārak was asked, ‘What is intelligence, and who is the intelligent man?’ He replied, ‘Intelligence is [the aptitude for] learning knowledge. Knowledge means knowing what ought to be done, and intelligence means that when you know, you do it.’

The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘God has not apportioned to His

²⁶⁵ In Arabic only.

servants anything better than intelligence. The eating and sleep of an intelligent man are better than the fasting and prayer of an unintelligent man. The laughter of an intelligent man is better than the weeping of an unintelligent man.’

[A man said to Euclid, ‘I will not rest until I have destroyed your spirit!’ He replied, ‘I will not rest until I have driven the malice from your heart.’ A sage said, ‘Just as the stench of decay rises from a corpse, the stench of ignorance rises from the ignorant man, causing harm to him, his neighbours, and his relatives.’]²⁶⁶

Aphorism: A sage was asked, ‘What is intelligence?’ He replied, ‘Intelligence means tying knots [of separation] between twenty-three²⁶⁷ things; if not for those knots, good would be confused with evil. These knots must be tied between monotheism and polytheism, faith and unbelief, caution and recklessness, heedlessness and submission (*Islām*), doubt and certitude, wellbeing and tribulation, righteousness and iniquity, good character and bad character, meanness and generosity, humility and arrogance, friendship and enmity, praise and blame, effort and despair, decency and indecency, truth and falsehood, deliberation and rashness, light and darkness, obedience and disobedience, remembrance of God and heedlessness, goodwill and envy, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, compassion and heartlessness, and wisdom and ignorance.’

The author of this book says: all the human virtues stem from intelligence, and all knowledge and action has its source in it, as the following story illustrates.

²⁶⁶ Missing from the Persian and some Arabic manuscripts.

²⁶⁷ The Persian has ‘twenty-five’, but the list contains twenty-three items. The Arabic list differs in the order.

Anecdote: It is related that one day the wind was carrying Solomon's throne when a town came into view. Solomon commanded the wind to set him down there. Upon the town gate he saw written: 'The pay for one day's work is one dirham, and the pay for one day's beauty is one hundred dinars, and the value of one hour's knowledge is immeasurable.'

All actions rely upon knowledge, but knowledge is the captive of reason, and reason and intelligence are innate.²⁶⁸ He whom God has granted intelligence has been granted a great blessing, as the poet said:

Whatever your origin and heredity may be,
And however well you may appear to others,
Even if you possess the beauty of Joseph
If you have no intelligence, you'll be despised.

Understand, dear brother,²⁶⁹ the great value of intelligence, and give thanks to God Most High for this blessing. Allah knows best what is right.

²⁶⁸ The Arabic has 'twins', the translator having understood *mādar-zād* to mean 'born of the same mother' rather than 'innate', which seems more likely to be intended here given the context.

²⁶⁹ This address seems out of place in a work which is otherwise addressed to a Sultan.

CHAPTER VII

REGARDING WOMEN AND THEIR GOOD AND BAD ASPECTS



The Prophet ﷺ said that the most blessed and fortunate women are the most fertile, the most beautiful, and those with the least costly dow-ries.²⁷⁰ He also said, ‘If you are able, choose a free woman, for she will be purer and more blessed.’²⁷¹ The Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar رضي الله عنه said, ‘Seek refuge with God from the tribulations of women, and beware even the most pious of them.’

The author of this book says that any man who seeks to make his religion and his household sound should not care about nobility or beauty,²⁷² for a pious woman is better and more blessed. When piety is achieved, wealth and nobility will follow; for a woman without piety is without nobility, while the blessing of piety will bring everything else.

Anecdote: It is related that in Merv there was a man named Nūḥ ibn Maryam, who was the governor and chief judge of the city. He was very wealthy and had a beautiful daughter. Many illustrious men asked for her hand, and her

²⁷⁰ Possibly a reference to the hadith “The woman with the greatest blessing is she with the lowest dowry”, cited in al-Quḍā‘ī, *Musnad*, 123; Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā* 14356.

²⁷¹ Similar to a hadith cited in Ibn Mājah, *Sunan* 1862: ‘He who wishes to meet God pure and purified should marry free women.’

²⁷² The Arabic has here ‘and who does not find a beautiful wife’, the translator having apparently read *na-bāyad*, ‘should not’, as *na-yābad*, ‘does not find.’

father was perplexed and did not know which of them he should approve for her. 'If I give to her to one,' he said, 'I will displease another', and he had no idea what to do. He had an Indian slave named Mubarak. One day he said to him, 'Go to the orchard and keep watch over it.' So he went to the orchard and spent two months there. One day the master came to the orchard and said, 'Boy, bring me a bunch of grapes!' The slave brought some, but they were sour. He sent him to fetch another bunch, but that one was sour too. The master said, 'How is it that from such a large orchard you cannot fetch a single bunch of sweet grapes?' The slave replied, 'I do not know. I have not eaten any grapes from it.' The master asked, 'Why not?' He replied, 'You told me to watch over the orchard; you did not tell me to eat the grapes.' The judge said, 'May God Most High watch over you just as well!' impressed at his conscientiousness. Then he said to him, 'I have plans for you.' The slave replied, 'I am a bought Indian slave, and you are a judge. What could you have planned for me?' The judge said, 'Heed my words well.' He replied, 'As the judge commands.' He said, 'Mubarak, I have a daughter whom many desire for their wife, but I cannot choose between them. What say you?' He replied, 'Master, unbelievers prize nobility, while Jews and Christians prize beauty. In the time of our Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, they prized religion, while today they prize worldly prosperity. Whichever of these four you desire, that is what you should choose.' The judge said, 'I choose religion. Boy, I offer my daughter to you.' He replied, 'Master, I am a bought slave. Even if you offered your daughter to me, she would never desire me for a husband.' The judge said, 'Boy, come home with me now.' When they arrived home, the judge said to

the girl's mother, 'Wife, this slave is exceedingly worthy and pious. I would like to offer our daughter to him. What say you?' She replied, 'I will go and ask the girl.' The mother went to the daughter and told her. She replied, 'I will do as you wish.' So the judge gave his daughter to Mubāarak along with a great deal of gold, and sent them off to live together. After a while a son was born to Mubāarak, whom they named ʿAbd Allāh, whose name became renowned throughout the world and inscribed in books, and whose asceticism and knowledge will be spoken of for as long as the world endures.²⁷³

So when you take a wife, choose a religious woman; for if you seek prestige or wealth, it will end in tribulation. You will find yourself in a hopeless situation, and your wife will not obey you. Nor should you marry for the sake of gratification and lust. Instead, have the intention to produce children, protect yourself from sin, increase your righteousness, and shield yourself from Hellfire.

Anecdote: It is related that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mubāarak was once visited by ten guests, but had nothing to offer them. All he had was a horse which he would ride to war one year and to pilgrimage the next. So he slaughtered the horse and served the meat to his guests. His wife said, 'That horse was all you had. Why would you kill it?' At once he went into the house and collected enough furniture and clothing to match the value of the wife's dowry, gave it to her, and divorced her, saying, 'I cannot remain married to a woman who resents guests.' A short while later, a man came to him

²⁷³ ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mubāarak (d. 181/797) was a renowned hadith narrator and ascetic. The story of his birth is told in several histories, some of which state that his father Mubāarak was a Turk and that his mother was named Hind, which may be why Mubāarak is presented as an Indian here.

and said, ‘Imam of the Muslims! I have a daughter whose mother has died. Every day the girl tears her clothes and wails. She will attend your next assembly. Please give her some advice that will soften her heart.’ So ‘Abd Allāh said something on this topic, and when the girl returned home she said, ‘Father, I have repented. From now on, I will not offend against God Most High. But there is something I need of you.’ Her father said, ‘What is it that you need?’ She replied, ‘You are always saying that many worldly men desire my hand. But I implore you, give my hand to none other than ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mubāarak. For though we have worldly wealth, he has religion.’²⁷⁴ So the man married his daughter to ‘Abd Allāh and gave him a large sum of gold and ten horses. One night ‘Abd Allāh dreamed that a voice said to him, ‘If you divorced an old wife for Our sake, We have given you a young wife; [and if you slaughtered one horse for your guests, We have given you ten horses to replace it,] that you might know that [good deeds are rewarded tenfold in Our presence, and that]²⁷⁵ no one’s deeds are overlooked by Us, nor does anyone suffer loss on Our account.’

Anecdote: Abū Sa‘īd related that in the time of the Israelites there was a righteous man whose wife was pious, thoughtful, and perceptive. Then the Prophet of that time was visited by a revelation which said, ‘Tell that righteous

²⁷⁴ The Persian has ‘religion is his as well as worldly wealth’, which seems incongruent with the detail about ‘Abd Allāh slaughtering his only horse to feed his guests, as Bagley notes. The Arabic versions are inconsistent here, perhaps as a result of the translator noting this incongruity and attempting to correct it. One manuscript has, ‘If he has no worldly wealth, then we have worldly wealth.’ Another has, ‘If we have religion, then he has religion.’ The words *dunyā* (worldly wealth) and *dīn* (religion) are similar enough in Arabic to be confused by a scribe. The translation above seems the most appropriate reading, given the context.

²⁷⁵ In Arabic only.

man that We have decreed that he will spend half his life in poverty, the other half in affluence. Now he must choose whether to be poor in youth or in old age.’ When the man heard this, he went to his wife and said, ‘Dear wife, this is the command which has issued from God Most High. What do you think I should choose?’ She asked him, ‘What would you choose?’ He replied, ‘I would choose to be poor in our youth, so that when hard times come we can bear patiently. Then when we grow old, we will need something to live on so that we may be free to engage in good deeds.’ His wife said, ‘Dear husband, if we are poor in our youth we will not be able to engage in good deeds; and then later, once we have squandered our lives and grown weak, how will we be righteous then? We ought to choose to be wealthy now, so that we may engage in obedience and good works in our youth.’ The man said, ‘You are right. That is what we should do.’ Then it was revealed to the Prophet of that age, ‘Now, since you are eager to obey Us and your intention is good, as your Sustainer, I shall make you spend your whole lives in wealth! Now, strive to obey, and give charity from all of that which I give you, and this world shall be yours, and the Hereafter too.’

The author of this book says: I have related this story to you in order that you might know that a good spouse will benefit you in the affairs of this world and those of the Hereafter too.

Tradition: Ibn ‘Abbās related that the Messenger of God ﷺ once went to the house of Umm Salama ؓ and found her engaged in glorification (*tasbīḥ*), having just prayed the dawn prayer. He said to her, ‘Umm Salama, do you not attend the congregational prayer, or the Friday prayer, or go on pilgrimage, or go to battle, or recite the Qur’an from

end to end?’ She replied, ‘Messenger of Allah, those are the deeds of men.’²⁷⁶ The Prophet ﷺ replied, upon him be blessings and peace, ‘Umm Salama, women have their own deeds which are equal to these.’ She ﷺ asked, ‘What are they, Messenger of Allah?’ He replied, ‘When a woman who fulfils her duties to God and obeys her husband takes her spindle in her hand and turns it, it is as if she were glorifying, praying in congregation, and going to battle.’

As long as a woman’s spindle is turning, her sins are shedding. Turning the spindle is for women what guarding bridges and forts is for men. There are three sounds which reach all the way to the Throne of God: the sound of warriors drawing their bows, the sound of the pens of scholars, and the sound of a virtuous woman spinning in private.

Aphorism: Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, ‘If you want your wife to love you, satisfy her sexually and be kind to her.’ ‘Umar said, ‘Do not speak to women of passionate love (*‘ishq*), or their hearts will be spoiled. Women are like meat left in the wilderness: only God can preserve them.’

Aphorism: Muḡhīra ibn Shu‘ba²⁷⁷ said, ‘I have spent my life with women in three ways: in my youth with sex, in my middle age with conversation and pleasant company, and in my old age with material support.’

As for keeping many concubines, it is not wise to do so unless one is able to fulfil their rights.

²⁷⁶ As Humā’ī notes, not all of these are considered to be reserved for men alone. I have not been able to find a source for this hadith, although it somewhat resembles a hadith narrated by Aḥmad (*Musnad* 1661), al-Ṭabarānī (*Awsaṭ* 8805) and others, and cited by al-Ghazālī in the *Iḥyā’*: ‘If a woman prays her five prayers, fasts Ramaḡān, guards her chastity, and obeys her husband, she will be told, “Enter Paradise through any door you please!”’

²⁷⁷ Muḡhīra ibn Shu‘ba (d. 50/671) was a Companion from the Thaḡīf tribe of ‘ā’if who later served as governor of Kufa under Mu‘āwiya.

Tradition: Salmān al-Fārisī related that the Prophet ﷺ was asked which woman is best, he replied, ‘The one who obeys you in all that you command.’ They asked, ‘And which is worst?’ He ﷺ replied, ‘The one who does not please her husband.’²⁷⁸

Aphorism: A teacher was teaching a girl how to write. A sage passed by and said, ‘That teacher is teaching wickedness to the wicked!’

[It is said that two women were once keeping counsel when a sage passed by and said, ‘Behold! One snake borrowing venom from another!’]²⁷⁹

Aphorism: An intelligent woman was asked, ‘What are the virtues of women?’ She retorted, ‘And what are the faults of men?’ They replied, ‘Stinginess and cowardice.’ She said, ‘Those are the virtues of women.’

Aphorism: A sage married a short woman. They asked him, ‘Why did you not choose a full-statured woman?’ He replied, ‘A woman is an evil thing, and the less of an evil thing, the better!’

Aphorism: A sage said, ‘There are four kinds of wife: a wife who is entirely her husband’s, a wife who is half her husband’s, a wife who is one-third her husband’s, and a wife who is her husband’s enemy. The wife who is entirely her husband’s is the one who is a virgin; the wife who is half her husband’s is the widow with no children; the wife who is one-third her husband’s is the widow with a child

²⁷⁸ Similar to a hadith narrated by al-Nasā’ī (*Sunan* 3231) in which the Prophet ﷺ, upon him be blessings and peace, was asked which woman is best, and replied, ‘The one who makes [her husband] happy when he looks at her, and who obeys him when he commands her, and who does not do anything against his wishes with herself or her property.’

²⁷⁹ In Arabic only.

by her former husband; the wife who is her husband's enemy is the divorcee whose former husband is still living [and with whom she has a child, and to whom her heart is attached].²⁸⁰ Therefore the best wife is the virgin.'

God²⁸¹ Most High has given women certain characteristics as a punishment for Eve having eaten from the tree in Paradise which God Almighty had forbidden to her, which resulted in God subjecting women to eighteen things as a punishment: [1] menstruation; [2] childbirth; [3] separation from her parents and marriage to an outsider; [4] lochia; [5] lack of sovereignty over her own person; [6] a lesser share of inheritance; [7] divorce being out of her hands; [8] being allowed only one husband while men are allowed four wives; [9] having to keep herself at home; [10] having to cover her head [at home];²⁸² [11] that two women's testimony is equal to one man's; [12] that she may not leave the home without a male guardian; [13] that men attend Friday, Eid and funeral prayers [and go to war]²⁸³ while women do not; [14] unsuitability for rulership and judgeship [and scholarship];²⁸⁴ [15] that merit has one thousand parts of which one belongs to women and the other nine hundred and ninety-nine to men; [16] that profligate women will be given half the punishment of the entire Community on the Day of Resurrection; [17] that if her husband dies she must observe a waiting-period of four months and ten days [before remarriage]; [18] that if her husband divorces her

²⁸⁰ In Arabic only.

²⁸¹ The Arabic translator prefixes this paragraph with the phrase *yuqāl*, 'it is said', which conventionally indicates a writer's lack of confidence in the authenticity of what follows. This is likely because the Qur'anic account of the Fall of Man does not place special responsibility upon Eve, but rather depicts the eating from the tree as an act in which Adam and Eve participated equally.

²⁸² Persian only. ²⁸³ Arabic only. ²⁸⁴ Arabic only.

she must observe a waiting-period of three months or three menstrual periods.

Subsection on the nature of women:

There are ten types of women, the character of each of which corresponds to the character of a certain kind of animal. Some are like pigs, others apes, others dogs, others snakes, others mules, others scorpions, others mice, others pigeons, others foxes, and others sheep.

The woman whose character resembles the pig is the one who is adept at eating, breaking things, and filling her belly. She goes around without a care, having no interest in religion, prayer, or fasting. She spares not a thought for death and the Resurrection, reward and punishment, God's promises and threats, His commandments and prohibitions, or His approval and wrath. She is oblivious to her husband's rights or to caring for her children, disciplining them, or teaching them the Qur'an. She always wears filthy clothes and smells rank.

The woman whose character resembles the ape is the one who concerns herself with clothing of diverse colours—green and red and yellow—and with trinkets and jewels, pearls and rubies, gold and silver. She is proud before her relatives, but perhaps her inner self is not as her outward appearance would make it seem.

The woman whose character resembles the dog is the one who, whenever her husband speaks, leaps at his face and barks and snarls. When her husband's purse is full of gold and silver and the home is prosperous, she says to him, 'You are my whole world! May God Most High never let me see evil befall you, and may I die before you!' But if her husband falls on hard times, she abuses him and

chides him saying, 'You are a pauper!' and everything becomes reversed.

[The woman whose character resembles the snake is the one who speaks softly to her husband while meaning him ill and seeing no good in him. She is like a snake, supple but full of venom.]²⁸⁵

The woman whose character resembles the mule is the one who is stubborn and will not budge, obstinate, always going her own way, self-satisfied.

The woman whose character resembles the scorpion is the one who is always visiting the houses of her neighbours to engage in gossip and listen to their conversation so that she might pass it on and cause conflict among them. Like a scorpion, she stings wherever she goes. She does not fear to be among those of whom the Prophet ﷺ said, 'The tale-bearer will not enter Paradise.'²⁸⁶

The woman whose character resembles the mouse is the thief who steals from her husband's purse and hides it in her neighbours' houses. She pilfers barley, wheat, rice, and other sundries and gives it away to spinners.

The woman whose character resembles the pigeon is the one who goes around all day and never rests, and does not tell her husband where she is going or where she has been, nor says anything affectionate to him.²⁸⁷

The woman whose character resembles the fox is the one who sends her husband out of the house and then eats everything in it, then acts as though she is ill and does not

²⁸⁴ Arabic only.

²⁸⁵ In Arabic only; the Persian omits the explanation of the snake altogether.

²⁸⁶ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 6056.

²⁸⁷ The Arabic has, 'and who says to her husband, "Where are you going? You must not want me, you must love someone else, you are heartless and untrue!"'

stir. Then when her husband returns, she starts a quarrel and says, 'You left me all alone when I was ill!'

The woman whose character resembles the sheep is the one who is blessed like a sheep, every part of which is useful. Such is the good woman: she brings benefit to her husband, her family and her neighbours. She is merciful to her kin, compassionate with her household and children, and obedient to God Almighty.

A pious and modest woman is one of the blessings of God Most High, and fortunate indeed is the man who is able to find one, as the following story illustrates.

Anecdote: It is related that a wicked man desired to impose himself unlawfully upon a pious woman. He said to her, 'Dear woman, go and lock all the doors.' She went off and then returned saying, 'I have locked all of the doors except one.' The man asked, 'Which door is that?' She replied, 'The door between us and God. I could not find a way to close that one.' Awestricken by those words, the man repented and returned to God.

Anecdote: Once a nobleman²⁸⁸ who lived in Samarkand was standing by his door when a woman passed by. The street was empty, so he grabbed her hand and pulled her inside the house, intending to have his way with her. The woman said, 'Sir! First answer me one question, and then do as you please.' The nobleman replied, 'Ask.' The woman said, 'If you have your way with me unlawfully and I become pregnant, will the child be a noble or a bastard?' He replied, 'A noble.' The woman said, 'Then you must be one of those kinds of nobles, for the deed you are planning is not something that a pure-born noble would ever do.'

²⁸⁸ *Alawī*, a descendant of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

The nobleman was stricken with shame and took his hand off the woman, swearing to God that he would never treat another woman in that way, whether she were lawful to him or not.

A man ought to be zealous and protective, for religiosity is a matter of zeal. He ought to be so protective of his women that he would not countenance a male outsider hearing so much as the sound of the pestle and mortar in their hands. If a man knocks on the door, a woman ought not answer him with a soft and gentle voice, for the hearts of men can be captivated by the slightest things. If she has to answer, then she ought to put her finger in her mouth when speaking so that she sounds like an old woman. It is not proper for a woman to look at a man outside her kin, even if he is blind. It is related that the Messenger of God ﷺ, upon him be blessings and peace, had a Companion named ‘Abd Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm ؓ, who was blind. One day the Prophet ﷺ came home to find him sitting among the women. The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘‘Ā’isha ؓ, it is not allowed for women to sit with a man outside their kin.’ She ؓ said, ‘But he is blind.’ He ؓ replied, ‘He cannot see you, but you can see him.’²⁸⁹

Anecdote: It is related that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī went to Rābi‘a²⁹⁰ with a group of companions. When they announced their arrival, Rābi‘a said, ‘Wait a moment,’ and had a rug hung up to serve as a curtain. The visitors came in and greeted her, and Rābi‘a responded from behind the curtain. They said, ‘Why have you put up a curtain?’ She

²⁸⁹ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* 4112, with mention of Umm Salama and Maymūna rather than ‘Ā’isha.

²⁹⁰ Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. c. 185/801).

replied, 'So it is commanded', and recited the words of Allah, *Ask them from behind a screen* [Q. 33:53].

A man must not look upon a woman outside his kin under any circumstance, since in addition to the punishment of the next world he will be punished for it in this one too, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: It is related that there was once a water-carrier in Bukhara who for thirty years had carried water to the house of a goldsmith. The goldsmith had a very beautiful and pious wife. One day when the water-carrier brought the water, he saw her standing in the courtyard. Suddenly he went forward, took her hand and squeezed it, and then departed. When the goldsmith arrived home his wife said, 'Tell me: did you do anything today of which God would disapprove?' He replied, 'Nothing, except that this morning I made a bracelet for a woman. As she put it on her arm, I noticed how shapely her arm was, and I took her hand and squeezed it.'²⁹¹ The wife exclaimed, '*Allāhu Akbar!* So that is what you did! The water-carrier, who for thirty years has been coming here without evincing the slightest disloyalty, took hold of my hand this morning and squeezed it!' Her husband said, 'I have repented.' When the water-carrier came the next day, he fell grovelling before the woman and cried, 'Forgive me! The devil led me astray yesterday.' She replied, 'It was not your fault, but my husband's.'

Likewise, a woman ought to remain content with her husband through thick and thin, following the example of

²⁹¹ The Arabic here embellishes the account, adding that the goldsmith cited the following poem:

Upon her arm a bracelet of glimmering gold,
Like fire reflected in running water.
Never did I dream that I would behold
Water girded with a belt of fire!

Fāṭima ﷺ and ʿĀʾisha ﷺ so that she might become one of the ladies of Paradise, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: It is related that Fāṭima ﷺ once complained to ʿAlī ﷺ that her hands were worn out from too much grinding. He said, ‘Tell you father, and perhaps he will procure a maid for you.’ So Fāṭima ﷺ went to the Prophet ﷺ and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, please buy a maid for me. I am worn out from too much work.’ The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘Shall I not teach you something that is more valuable than any servant, and better than the seven heavens and the earth?’ She ﷺ asked, ‘What is it, Messenger of Allah?’ He ﷺ replied, ‘It is this: when you are about to sleep, say three times, “Glory be to Allah”, “Praise be to Allah”, and “There is no god but Allah”, and “Allah is Greatest.” That will be better for you than a servant.’²⁹²

It is also related that all they²⁹³ had was a blanket which was not long enough to cover his family’s feet and their heads at the same time. On the night when Fāṭima ﷺ went to live with ʿAlī ﷺ after their wedding, they slept upon a sheepskin. All Fāṭima ﷺ owned in the world was a blanket and a palm-fibre pillow. Yet on the Day of Resurrection it will be proclaimed, ‘Avert your eyes, that the Lady of Paradise may pass by!’

A wife becomes dear and beloved to her husband firstly by respecting him, then by obeying him when they are behind closed doors, being attentive to what is good for him and what is bad for him, beautifying herself, concealing her-

²⁹² Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 5362, with ‘thirty-three times.’

²⁹³ The Persian has here ‘the Messenger of God ﷺ had’, while the Arabic translation presents this as a continuation of the account of ʿAlī ﷺ and Fāṭima ﷺ, which is more congruent with what is found in the tradition, such as in Aḥmad’s narration of the aforementioned account (*Musnad* 840), which includes this detail.

self from other men, keeping to the home, keeping herself well-presented and fragrant, ensuring that meals are ready at the proper times and cheerfully serving the things that he likes, not making impossible demands of him, not nagging, covering herself at bedtime, and keeping her husband's secrets whether he is present or absent.

The author of this book adds that it is the duty of men to fulfil the rights of their wives and womenfolk with mercy, kindness, and compassion. A man who wishes to become a kind and merciful husband to his wife must bear in mind ten things, which will help him to be fairer to her: [1] she cannot divorce you, but you can divorce her; [2] there is nothing she can take from you, but you can take everything from her; [3] as long as she is your wife, she cannot take another husband, while you can take another wife; [4] she may not leave the house without your permission, but you may leave without hers; [5] you may go out to console bereaved people while she may not;²⁹⁴ [6] she fears you, while you do not fear her; [7] she is pleased with a smile and a kind word from you, while you are not pleased with anything she does; [8] she is taken away from all her family and parents, while you are not separated from anyone unless you wish to be; [9] you may purchase a concubine and give her preference, and your wife must bear this;²⁹⁵ [10] she worries herself to death when you are ill, while you barely spare a thought even if she dies.

For all these reasons, intelligent men must be compassionate with their wives and not mistreat them; for a woman is a prisoner in the hand of a man. The intelligent man must also be patient with women, for as the Prophet

²⁹⁴ This fifth item is missing in the Persian edition, where the numbering skips from 4 to 6 without comment from Humā'ī. The Arabic is not numbered.

²⁹⁵ The Arabic has here instead 'she always serves you, while you do not serve her.'

²⁹⁶ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 304; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 79.

said, upon him be blessings and peace, they are lacking in intelligence and religion.²⁹⁶ No one ought to follow their plans, or he will lose out, as the following account illustrates.

Anecdote: King Parvīz [Khusraw II] was very fond of fish. One day when he was sitting on the terrace with Shīrīn,²⁹⁷ a fisherman brought a large fish and presented it to them. Parvīz awarded him four thousand dirhams. Shīrīn said, ‘It was not right of you to give that fisherman four thousand dirhams.’ Parvīz asked why not. She replied, ‘Because from now on, whenever you award one of your servants and retinue four thousand dirhams, he will think, “You gave me the same as you gave the fisherman!” And if you give someone less, he will think, “You gave me less than what you gave the fisherman!”’ ‘You are right,’ said Parvīz, ‘but it is done now, and it is an ugly thing for a king to go back on his word.’ Shīrīn replied, ‘I have a plan. Call back the fisherman and ask him whether the fish is male or female. If he says it is male, say that you wanted a female. If he says it is female, say that you wanted a male.’ So he called back the fisherman, but he was a clever fellow, and when Parvīz asked him whether the fish was male or female he kissed the ground and replied, ‘The fish is neither male nor female. It is a hermaphrodite!’ Parvīz laughed and awarded the man another four thousand dirhams. The man went to the treasurer and drew eight thousand dirhams, which he placed in his knapsack. As he was passing through the courtyard, a dirham fell out of the knapsack. He set the knapsack down and picked up the coin, as Parvīz and Shīrīn

²⁹⁷ Shīrīn was an Armenian princess and the favourite wife of Khusraw Parvīz. Although little known as a historical figure, she later became a central figure of Persian literature, particularly in Nizāmī’s tragic romance *Khusraw and Shīrīn*.

looked on. Shīrīn turned to Parvīz and said, ‘What a wretched mean man this fisherman is! He drops one dirham out of eight thousand, and his heart will not allow him to let it go!’ Parvīz became affronted and replied, ‘You are right!’ He called the fisherman over and said, ‘What a wretched man you must be, that one dirham out of eight thousand fell from your knapsack, so you flung down the sack from your neck in order to pick it up!’ The fisherman kissed the ground and said, ‘Long live the king! I picked up the coin because of its great importance: on one side the king’s visage is stamped, and on the other his name is etched. I feared that someone might inadvertently step upon it, dishonouring the king’s name and visage, and that I would be to blame!’ Parvīz was pleased by this, and awarded another four thousand dirhams to the fisherman, who went off with twelve thousand dirhams. Then Parvīz said, ‘Anyone who follows the plans of a woman will lose two dirhams for every one!’

The author of this book declares that the prosperity of the world depends upon women, but true prosperity cannot be achieved without planning. Therefore it is the duty of men to be prudent about choosing wives as well as giving their daughters in marriage, especially after they come of age, lest they should fall into disgrace and heartache. In truth, all of the misfortunes, tribulations, and disasters which befall men come from women, and few indeed are those men who succeed in getting what they desire and hope for from them. As a poet said:²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Humā’ī notes that the Persian version of the lines quoted here do not scan very well, suggesting that they may be translated from Arabic verses. However, Damaj notes that in manuscript Q these lines are given in Persian as well as Arabic, unlike the rest of the poetry in the Arabic translation.

A servant sins against God for a woman;
A man incurs the king's wrath for a woman;
A thief risks his life for loot for a woman;
 All of man's woes can be traced to a woman!
Adam was tested, and fell for a woman;
Joseph was locked in a cell for a woman;
Hārūt languished in Babel for a woman,
 Hanging by a hair, wailing for a woman!
Majnūn wandered the wilds for a woman;
Sinbad's tales make us smile thanks to women;
Man's woes in both abodes are from women;
 Dare not expect faithfulness from a woman!



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