

125 Someday, be it close or distant, I hope to sit down with Ghazālī in a quiet corner of heaven. We shall have many things to talk about, if indeed in heaven one can be “distracted” from the Vision of God. I shall want to thank him—him and so many others of his co-religionists, such as Rābiʿa and al-Bisṭāmī and al-Ḥallāj. I cited in the beginning of this Introduction the words of Macdonald: “With the time came the man.” Let me conclude by saying: The time is gone; but the man remains, and will remain, for you, for me, and for all men.

126 I must mention a few pedestrian details. The basis of my translation has been the precious manuscript which I have already mentioned. In the “Notes to the Translation” I have tried to avoid the extremes of an irritating minimum and a maddening maximum. I can only hope that the general reader will find them informative and helpful. I have added an “Annotated Bibliography,” since I feel that some of my readers may wish to further their acquaintance with Ghazālī. Translations of verses of the Qurʾān are sometimes those of Arberry, sometimes my own. And of course I am very grateful to ever so many persons who have helped me in ever so many ways! To paraphrase Peguy: One man is no man. My undertaking has been a labor of love—and not, I trust, a love’s labor lost!

DELIVERANCE FROM ERROR

*In the Name of God
Most Gracious and Merciful*

*I trust in the Living, Who dieth not!*¹

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

Praise be to God, Whose praise should preface every writing and discourse! And God’s blessing be upon Muḥammad the Elect, divinely gifted with prophethood and apostleship, and upon his kin and companions, who guided men away from error!²

2 *Now then:* You have asked me, my brother in religion,³ to communicate to you the aim and secrets of the sciences and the dangerous and intricate depths of the different doctrines and views. You want me to give you an account of my travail in disengaging the truth from amid the welter of the sects, despite the polarity of their means and methods. You also want to hear about my daring in mounting from the lowland of servile conformism⁴ to the highland of independent investigation;⁵ and first of all what profit I derived from the science of *kalām*;⁶ secondly, what I found loathsome among the methods of the devotees of *taʿlīm*,⁷ who restrict the attainment of truth to uncritical acceptance of the Imam’s pronouncements; thirdly, the methods of philosophizing⁸ which I scouted; and finally, what pleased me in the way pursued by the practice of sufism.⁹ You also wish to know the quintessential truth disclosed to me in the tortuous

course of my inquiry into the views expressed by various men; and what led me to quit teaching in Baghdad, though I had many students there; and what induced me to resume teaching in Nishapur much later.

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

4 You should first of all know—God give you good guidance and gently lead you to the truth!—that the diversity of men in religions and creeds, plus the disagreement of the Community of Islam¹⁰ about doctrines, given the multiplicity of sects and the divergency of methods, is a deep sea in which most men founder and from which few only are saved. Each group alleges that it is the one saved, and "each faction is happy about its own beliefs."¹¹ This is the state of affairs which the truthful and most trustworthy Chief of God's envoys—God bless him!—ominously promised us when he said: "My Community will split into seventy-odd sects, of which one will be saved."¹² And what he promised has indeed come to pass!¹³

5 In the bloom of my youth and the prime of my life, from the time I reached puberty before I was twenty until now, when I am over fifty, I have constantly been diving daringly into the depths of this profound sea and wading into its deep water like a bold man, not like a cautious coward. I would penetrate far into every murky mystery, pounce upon every problem, and dash into every mazy difficulty. I would scrutinize the creed of every sect and seek to lay bare the secrets of each faction's teaching with the aim of discriminating between the proponent of truth and the advocate of error, and between the faithful follower of tradition and the heterodox innovator.¹⁴ I would never take leave of an interiorist¹⁵ without wanting to learn about his interiorism, or of a literalist¹⁶ without wanting to know the substance of his literalism, or of a philosopher without seeking to become acquainted with the essence of his philosophy, or of a *mutakallim*¹⁷ without endeavoring to discover the aim of his discussion and polemic, or of a sufi without eagerly trying to obtain knowledge of the secret of his serenity,¹⁸ or of a devout worshiper¹⁹ without looking into the source and substance of his piety, or of an irreligious nihilist²⁰ without attempting to find out his background and motivation in order to become aware of the reasons for his bold profession of nihilism and irreligion.

6 The thirst for grasping the real meaning of things was indeed my habit and wont from my early years and in the prime of my life. It was an instinctive, natural disposition placed in my makeup by God Most

High, not something due to my own choosing and contriving. As a result, the fetters of servile conformism²¹ fell away from me, and inherited beliefs lost their hold on me, when I was still quite young. For I saw that the children of Christians always grew up embracing Christianity, and the children of Jews always grew up adhering to Judaism, and the children of Muslims always grew up following the religion of Islam. I also heard the tradition related from the Apostle of God—God's blessing and peace be upon him!—in which he said: "Every infant is born endowed with the *fitra*.²² then his parents make him Jew or Christian or Magian."²³ Consequently I felt an inner urge to seek the true meaning of the original *fitra*, and the true meaning of the beliefs arising through slavish aping²⁴ of parents and teachers. I wanted to sift out these uncritical beliefs, the beginnings of which are suggestions imposed from without,²⁵ since there are differences of opinion in the discernment of those that are true from those that are false.²⁶

7 So I began by saying to myself: "What I seek is knowledge of the true meaning of things. Of necessity, therefore, I must inquire into just what the true meaning of knowledge is." Then it became clear to me that sure and certain knowledge is that in which the thing known is made so manifest that no doubt clings to it, nor is it accompanied by the possibility of error and deception, nor can the mind even suppose such a possibility.²⁷ Furthermore, safety from error must accompany the certainty to such a degree that, if someone proposed to show it to be false—for example, a man who would turn a stone into gold and a stick into a snake—his feat would not induce any doubt or denial. For if I know that ten is more than three, and then someone were to say: "No, on the contrary, three is more than ten, as is proved by my turning this stick into a snake—and if he were to do just that and I were to see him do it, I would not doubt my knowledge because of his feat. The only effect it would have on me would be to make me wonder how he could do such a thing. But there would be no doubt at all about what I knew!

8 I realized, then, that whatever I did not know in this way and was not certain of with this kind of certainty was unreliable and unsure knowledge, and that every knowledge unaccompanied by safety from error is not sure and certain knowledge.²⁸

*The Avenues to Sophistry and Skepticism*²⁹

9 I then scrutinized all my cognitions and found myself devoid of any knowledge answering the previous description except in the case of

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

76 My present aim is not to show the wrongness of their doctrine, for I have already done that: (1) in my book *al Mustazhiri*¹⁴⁸ (2) in my book *The Proof of the Truth*,¹⁴⁹ an answer to some of their arguments proposed to me in Baghdad; (3) in my book *The Detailed Exposition of the Disagreement*,¹⁵⁰ which contains twelve sections, and is a reply to arguments proposed to me in Hamadhān; (4) in my book *al-Drj al-marqūm bil-jadāwil*,¹⁵¹ which deals with some feeble arguments of theirs proposed to me in Tūs; (5) in my book *The Correct Balance*, an independent work aimed at explaining the scale for weighing knowledge and showing that he who fully understands it has no need of an infallible Imam.

77 Rather, my main point here is that the Ta'limites have no cure which saves anyone from the darkneses of conflicting opinions. On the contrary, despite their inability to establish a sound proof of the designation of the Imam, for some time we went along with them and assented to their assertion of the need for authoritative teaching and an infallible teacher, and we agreed that he was the one specified. Then we questioned them about the lore they had learned from this infallible one and proposed to them some problems. These they did not understand, to say nothing of attempting to solve them! Then, when they were unable to do so, they referred to the hidden Imam and said: "There is no alternative to making the journey to him." The amazing thing is that they waste their life in seeking the authoritative teacher and in boasting of having found him, yet they have learned nothing at all from him! They are like a man smeared with filth who wearies himself looking for water: then, when he finds it, he does not use it, but remains smeared with foulness!

78 Among them was one who claimed to know some of their lore. But the substance of what he mentioned was a bit of the feeble philosophy of Pythagoras.¹⁵² The latter was one of the early ancients, and his doctrine is the feeblest of all philosophical doctrines. Aristotle had already refuted him and had even regarded his teaching as weak and contemptible. Yet this is what is followed in the book of the Brethren of Purity, and it is really the refuse of philosophy. One can only marvel at a man who spends a weary lifetime in the quest for knowledge and then is content with such flaccid and thin stuff! Yet he thinks he has attained the utmost reaches of knowledge!

79 These also we have tested thoroughly and probed inside and out. The substance of their doctrine comes down to deceiving the common folk and the dim-witted by showing the need for the authoritative teacher, and to disputing men's denial of the need for authoritative teaching by strong and effective argument. So it goes until someone tries to help them about the need for the authoritative teacher by saying: "Give us some of his lore and acquaint us with some of his teaching!" Then the disputant pauses and says: "Now that you have conceded to me that much, do you seek him for yourself!"¹⁵³ For my aim was to tell you only this much." For he knows that, were he to add anything more, he would be put to shame and would be unable to solve the simplest problem. Nay, but he would be unable to understand it, let alone give an answer to it!

This, then, is the true nature of their situation. So try them, and you will hate them!¹⁵⁴ Thus, when we had had experience of them, we also washed our hands of them!

Discussion of the Ways of the Sufis

80 When I had finished with all those kinds of lore, I brought my mind to bear on the way of the sufis. I knew that their particular Way¹⁵⁵ is consummated [realized] only by knowledge and by activity [by the union of theory and practice]. The aim of their knowledge¹⁵⁶ is to lop off the obstacles present in the soul and to rid oneself of its reprehensible habits and vicious qualities in order to attain thereby a heart empty of all save God and adorned with the constant remembrance of God.

81 Theory was easier for me than practice. Therefore I began to learn their lore from the perusal of their books, such as *The Food of Hearts* by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī¹⁵⁷ (God's mercy be upon him!) and the writings of al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibī,¹⁵⁸ and the miscellaneous items handed down from al-Junayd¹⁵⁹ and al-Shiblī¹⁶⁰ and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī¹⁶¹ (God hallow their spirits!) and others of their masters. As a result I came to know

the core of their theoretical aims and I learned all that could be learned of their way by study and hearing.

82 Then it became clear to me that their most distinctive characteristic is something that can be attained, not by study, but rather by fruitional experience¹⁶² and the state of ecstasy¹⁶³ and “the exchange of qualities.”¹⁶⁴ *How great a difference there is between your knowing the definitions and causes and conditions of health and satiety and your being healthy and sated!* And how great a difference there is between your knowing the definition of drunkenness—viz. that it is a term denoting a state resulting from the predominance of vapors which rise from the stomach to the centers of thought—and your actually being drunk! Indeed, a drunken man, while he is drunk, does not know the definition and concept of drunkenness and has no knowledge of it.¹⁶⁵ But a physician¹⁶⁶ knows the definition and the elements of drunkenness, though he is experiencing no actual drunkenness. So also, when a physician is ill, he knows the definition and causes of health and the remedies which procure it, though he is then actually bereft of health. Similarly, too, there is a difference between your knowing the true nature and conditions and causes of asceticism and your actually practicing asceticism and personally shunning the things of this world.

83 I knew with certainty that the sufis were masters of states, not purveyors of words,¹⁶⁷ and that I had learned all I could by way of theory. *There remained, then, only what was attainable, not by hearing and study, but by fruitional experience and actually engaging in the way:* From the sciences which I had practiced and the methods which I had followed in my inquiry into the two kinds of knowledge, revealed and rational, I had already acquired a sure and certain faith in God Most High, in the prophetic mediation of revelation, and in the Last Day. These three fundamentals of our Faith had become deeply rooted in my soul, not because of any specific, precisely formulated proofs, but because of reasons and circumstances and experiences too many to list in detail.¹⁶⁸

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

85 Next I attentively considered my circumstances, and I saw that I was immersed in attachments which had encompassed me from all sides.

I also considered my activities—the best of them being public and private instruction—and saw that in them I was applying myself to sciences unimportant and useless in this pilgrimage to the hereafter.¹⁶⁹ Then I reflected on my intention in my public teaching, and I saw that it was not directed purely to God, but rather was instigated and motivated by the quest for fame and widespread prestige.¹⁷⁰ So I became certain that I was on the brink of a crumbling bank and already on the verge of falling into the Fire, unless I set about mending my ways.

86 I therefore reflected unceasingly on this for some time, while I still had freedom of choice. One day I would firmly resolve to leave Baghdad and disengage myself from those circumstances, and another day I would revoke my resolution. I would put one foot forward, and the other backward. In the morning I would have a sincere desire to seek the things of the afterlife; but by evening the hosts of passion would assail it and render it lukewarm. Mundane desires began tugging me with their chains to remain as I was, while the herald of faith was crying out: “Away! Up and away! Only a little is left of your life, and a long journey lies before you! All the theory and practice in which you are engrossed is eyeservice and fakery!”¹⁷¹ If you do not prepare now for the afterlife, when will you do so? And if you do not sever these attachments now, then when will you sever them?”

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

88 Thus I incessantly vacillated between the contending pull of worldly desires and the appeals of the afterlife for about six months, starting with Rajab of the year 488 (July, 1095 A.D.). In this month the matter passed from choice to compulsion. For God put a lock upon my tongue so that I was impeded from public teaching. I struggled with myself to teach for a single day, to gratify the hearts of the students who were frequenting my lectures, but my tongue would not utter a single word: I was completely unable to say anything. As a result that impediment of my speech caused a sadness in my heart accompanied by an inability to digest; food and drink became unpalatable to me so that I could neither swallow broth easily nor digest a mouthful of solid food. That led to such

a weakening of my powers that the physicians lost hope of treating me and said: "This is something which has settled in his heart and crept from it into his humors; there is no way to treat it unless his heart be eased of the anxiety which has visited it."¹⁷²

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

90 Thereupon people got involved in devising explanations of my conduct. Those at some distance from Iraq thought I was acting so because I was afraid of the authorities. But those close to the authorities, who saw their attachment and devotion to me, and how I shunned them and paid no attention to what they said, were saying: "This is something supernal: its only cause is an evil eye which has afflicted Muslims and the coterie of the learned!"¹⁷³

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

92 Then I entered Damascus and resided there for nearly two years. My only occupation was seclusion and solitude and spiritual exercise and combat with a view to devoting myself to the purification of my soul and the cultivation of virtues and cleansing my heart for the remembrance of God Most High, in the way I had learned from the writings of the sufis. I used to pray in seclusion for a time in the Mosque, mounting to its minaret for the whole day and shutting myself in.¹⁷⁴ Then I traveled from Damascus to Jerusalem, where I would go daily into the Dome of the

Rock and shut myself in.¹⁷⁵ Then I was inwardly moved by an urge to perform the duty of the pilgrimage and to draw succor from the blessings of Mecca and Medina and the visit to the tomb of the Apostle of God—God's blessing and peace be upon him!—after finishing my visit to the Friend of God¹⁷⁶—God's blessings and peace be upon him! So I traveled to the Ḥijāz.¹⁷⁷

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

94 For ten years I remained in that condition. In the course of those periods of solitude things impossible to enumerate or detail in depth were disclosed to me. This much I shall mention, that profit may be derived from it: I knew with certainty that the sufis are those who uniquely follow the way to God Most High, their mode of life is the best of all, their way the most direct of ways, and their ethic the purest. Indeed, were one to combine the insight of the intellectuals, the wisdom of the wise, and the lore of scholars versed in the mysteries of revelation in order to change a single item of sufi conduct and ethic and to replace it with something better, no way to do so would be found! For all their motions and quiescences, exterior and interior, are learned from the light of the niche of prophecy. And beyond the light of prophecy there is no light on earth from which illumination can be obtained.¹⁷⁸

95 In general, how can men describe such a way as this? Its purity—the first of its requirements—is the total purification of the heart from everything other than God Most High. Its key, which is analogous to the beginning of the Prayer,¹⁷⁹ is the utter absorption of the heart in the remembrance of God. Its end is being completely lost in God.¹⁸⁰ But the latter is its end with reference to its initial stages which just barely fall under the power of choice and personal acquisition.¹⁸¹ But these are really the beginning of the Way, and everything prior to it¹⁸² is like an antechamber for him who follows the path to it.

96 From the very start of the Way revelations and visions begin,¹⁸³ so that, even when awake, the sufis see the angels and the spirits of the prophets and hear voices coming from them and learn useful things from

them. Then their "state" ascends from the vision of forms and likenesses to stages beyond the narrow range of words: so if anyone tries to express them, his words contain evident error against which he cannot guard himself. But speaking in general, the matter comes ultimately to a closeness to God which one group almost conceives of as "indwelling,"¹⁸⁴ and another as "union,"¹⁸⁵ and another as "reaching":¹⁸⁶ but all that is wrong. We have already shown why it is wrong in our book *The Noblest Aim*.¹⁸⁷ But really one intimately possessed by that state ought not to go beyond saying:

There was what was of what I do not mention:
So think well of it, and ask for no account!¹⁸⁸

97 Generally speaking, anyone who is granted nothing of that through fruitional experience grasps, of the reality of prophecy, only the name. The charisms of the "saints"¹⁸⁹ are in reality the first stages passed through by the prophets. Such was the initial state of the Apostle of God—God's blessing and peace be upon him!—when he went to Mount Ḥirā',¹⁹⁰ where he would be alone with his Lord and perform acts of worship, so that the Arabs of the desert said: "Muḥammad indeed passionately loves his Lord!"¹⁹¹

98 This is a state which one following the way leading to it will verify by fruitional experience. But one to whom such experience is not granted can acquire certain knowledge of that state through experience of others and hearsay, if he frequents the company of the sufis so as to have a sure understanding of that from observing the circumstances accompanying their ecstatic states. Whoever associates with them will derive this faith from them, for they are the men whose associate is never wretched.¹⁹² But whoever is not favored with their company must learn the certain possibility of such mystical states through the evidence of apodeictic demonstration in the way we have mentioned in "The Book of the Marvels of the Heart," one of the books of *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*.¹⁹³

99 Ascertainment by apodeictic proof leads to knowledge. Intimate experience of that very state is *fruitional experience*. Favorable acceptance of it based on hearsay and experience of others is *faith*. These, then, are three degrees, or levels, of knowledge—"God raises in degrees those of you who believe and those to whom knowledge is given" (58.12/11).¹⁹⁴

100 In addition to the men with such levels of knowledge there are a number of ignorant men who deny its very foundation and are astonished

at such words. They listen and scoff, saying: "Extraordinary! How they rave!" Of such as these God Most High said: "And among them (infidels) are those who listen to you, then, when they have left you, they say to those who have been given knowledge: 'What did he just say?' Those are men whose hearts God has sealed and who follow their own vain desires" (47.18/16)—so God renders them deaf and blinds their eyes.

101 What became clear to me of necessity from practicing their Way was the true nature and special character of prophecy.¹⁹⁵ So attention must be called to its basis because of the urgent need for it.

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

102 Know that man's essence, in his original condition, is created in blank simplicity without any information about the "worlds" of God Most High.¹⁹⁶ These "worlds" are so many that only God Most High can number them, as He has said: "No one knows the hosts of your Lord but He" (74.34/31). Man gets his information about the "worlds" by means of perception. Each one of his kinds of perception is created in order that man may get to know thereby a "world" of the existents—and by "worlds" we mean the categories of existing things.

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

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

105 Then the sense of hearing is opened,¹⁹⁷ so that man hears sounds and tones.¹⁹⁸

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

107 Then man ascends to another stage, and *intellect* is created for him, so that he perceives the necessary, the possible, the impossible, and things not found in the previous stages.¹⁹⁹

108 Beyond the stage of intellect there is another stage.²⁰⁰ In this another eye is opened, by which man sees the hidden, and what will take

place in the future, and other things, from which the intellect is as far removed as the power of discernment is from the perception of intelligibles and the power of sensation is from things perceived by discernment. And just as one able only to discern, if presented with the things perceptible to the intellect, would reject them and consider them outlandish, so some men endowed with intellect have rejected the things perceptible to the prophetic power and considered them wildly improbable. That is the very essence of ignorance! For such a man has no supporting reason except that it is a stage he himself has not attained and for him it does not exist: so he supposes that it does not exist in itself.

109 Now if a man born blind did not know about colors and shapes from constant report and hearsay, and were to be told about them abruptly, he would neither understand them nor acknowledge their existence. But God Most High has brought the matter within the purview of His creatures by giving them a sample of the special character of the prophetic power: sleeping.²⁰¹ For the sleeper perceives the unknown that will take place, either plainly, or in the guise of an image the meaning of which is disclosed by interpretation.

110 If a man had had no personal experience of dreaming and someone were to tell him: "There are some men who fall down unconscious as though they were dead,²⁰² and their perception, hearing, and sight leave them, and they then perceive what is 'hidden,'" he would deny it and give apodeictic proof of its impossibility by saying: "The sensory powers are the causes of perception. Therefore one who does not perceive such things when his powers are present and functioning a fortiori will not perceive them when his powers are suspended."

111 This is a kind of analogy which is belied by factual experience and observation. Just as the intellect is one of man's stages in which he receives an "eye" by which he "sees" various species of intelligibles from which the senses are far removed, the prophetic power is an expression signifying a stage in which man receives an "eye" possessed of a light, and in its light the unknown and other phenomena not normally perceived by the intellect become visible.²⁰³

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

113 The proof of its *possibility* is its existence. And the proof of its *existence* is the existence in the world of knowledge which could not conceivably be obtained by the intellect alone—such as the knowledge of medicine and of astronomy.²⁰⁴ For whoever examines such knowledge knows of necessity that it can be obtained only by a divine inspiration and

a special help from God Most High, and that there is no empirical way to it. Thus among astronomical phenomena there is a phenomenon which occurs only once every thousand years. How, then, could knowledge of that be obtained empirically? The same is true of the properties of medicaments.

114 From this proof it is clearly within the bounds of possibility that a way exists to grasp these things which the intellect does not normally grasp. This is what is meant by prophecy. Not that prophecy signifies such knowledge only. Rather, the perception of this kind of thing which is outside the things normally perceived by the intellect is one of the properties of prophecy. It also has many other properties; what we have mentioned is a drop from its sea. We have mentioned it only because you have in your own experience an example of it, viz. the things you perceive while asleep. You also have knowledge of the same sort in medicine and astronomy. These, too, belong to the category of the prophets' apologetic miracles—the blessing and peace of God be upon them! But men endowed with intellect have no way at all of attaining such knowledge by intellectual resources alone.²⁰⁵

115 The properties of prophecy beyond those just mentioned can be perceived only by fruitional experience as a result of following the way of sufism. For you have understood that only because of an example you have been given, viz. sleep; were it not for this, you would not assent to that. If, then, the prophet has a special quality of which you have no example and which you in no wise understand, how can you find it credible? Assent comes only after understanding. But the example needed occurs in the first stages of the way of sufism. Then, through this example, one obtains a kind of fruitional experience commensurate with the progress made plus a kind of assent to what has not been attained based on analogy with what has been attained.²⁰⁶ So this single property we have mentioned is enough ground for you to believe in the basis of prophecy.

116 If it occurs to you to doubt whether a particular individual is a prophet or not, certainty will be gained only by becoming acquainted with his circumstances, either through personal observation or from impeccable tradition and hearsay. For when you are familiar with medicine and jurisprudence, you can recognize jurists and physicians by observing their circumstances,²⁰⁷ and also by hearing their dicta, even if you have not seen them yourself. Moreover, you are quite capable of knowing that al-Shāfi'ī²⁰⁸ (God's mercy be upon him!) was a jurist and that Galen²⁰⁹ was a physician—and that with a knowledge based on fact, not on uncritical acceptance of someone's say-so—by your learning something about jurisprudence and medicine and then perusing their writings and works: thus you will acquire a necessary knowledge of their scientific status.

117 Likewise, when you understand the meaning of prophecy and devote much study to the Qurʾān and the traditions, you will acquire the necessary knowledge of the fact that Muḥammad—God’s blessing and peace be upon him!—had attained the loftiest level of prophecy. Then back that up by sampling what he said about the acts of worship and their effect on the purification of hearts. Consider, for example, how right he was—God’s blessing and peace be upon him!—in his saying: “Whoever acts according to what he knows, God will make him heir to what he does not know”;²¹⁰ and how right he was in his saying: “Whoever aids an unjust man, God gives the latter dominion over him”;²¹¹ and how right he was in his saying: “Whoever reaches the point where all his cares are a single care, God Most High will save him from all cares in this life and the next.”²¹² When you have had that experience in a thousand, two thousand, and many thousands of instances, you will have acquired a necessary knowledge which will be indisputable.

118 Therefore, seek sure and certain knowledge of prophecy in this way, not from the changing of the staff into a serpent and the splitting of the moon.²¹³ For if you consider that sort of thing alone, without adding the many, indeed innumerable, circumstances accompanying it, you might think it was a case of magic and deception, and that it was a “leading astray” coming from God Most High, because “He leads astray whom He will and rightly guides whom He will” (16.95/93), and the problems connected with apologetic miracles would confront you.²¹⁴

119 Furthermore, if your faith were based on a carefully ordered argument about the way the apologetic miracle affords proof of prophecy, your faith would be broken by an equally well-ordered argument showing how difficulty and doubt may affect that mode of proof. Therefore, let such preternatural events be one of the proofs and concomitants that make up your total reflection on the matter.²¹⁵ As a result, you will acquire such necessary knowledge that you will be unable to cite its specific basis. It would be like the case of a man to whom many men report an unimpeachable tradition. He cannot aver that his sure and certain knowledge is derived from the statement of one specific individual. Rather, he does not know whence it comes: but it is neither outside the group testimony, nor is it due to pinpointing individuals. This, then, is the strong belief based on knowledge. Fruitional experience, on the other hand, is comparable to actual seeing and handling: this is found only in the way of the sufis.

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

*The Reason for Resuming Teaching
After Having Given It Up*

A. *Doctors of Hearts*²¹⁶

121 For nearly ten years I assiduously cultivated seclusion and solitude.

During that time several points became clear to me of necessity for reasons I cannot enumerate—at one time by fruitional experience, at another time by knowledge based on apodeictic proof, and again by acceptance founded on faith. These points were: that man is formed of a body and a heart—and by the “heart” I mean the essence of man’s spirit which is the seat of the knowledge of God, not the flesh which man has in common with corpse and beast;²¹⁷ that his body may have a health which will result in its happiness, and a malady in which lies its ruin; that his heart, likewise, may have a health and soundness—and only he will be saved “who comes to God with a sound heart” (26.89), and it may have a malady which will lead to his everlasting perdition in the next life, as God Most High has said: “In their hearts is a malady” (2.9/10); that ignorance of God is the heart’s deadly poison, disobedience to God its incapacitating malady, knowledge of God Most High its quickening antidote, and obedience to Him by resisting passion its healing remedy; that the only way to treat the heart by removing its malady and regaining its health lies in the use of remedies, just as that is the only way to treat the body.²¹⁸

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

123 Moreover, just as medicaments are composed of mixtures of elements differing in kind and quantity, some of them being double others in weight and quantity, and just as the difference of their quantities is not without a profound significance pertaining to the kind of the properties, so, likewise, the acts of worship, which are the remedies of hearts, are composed of actions differing in kind and quantity, so that a prostration is the double of a bowing, and the morning prayer is half as long as the afternoon prayer.²¹⁹ This difference is not without a profound significance which pertains to the kind of the properties knowable only by the light of the prophecy. Very stupid and ignorant would be the man who would wish to discover in them a wisdom by means of reason, or who would suppose that they had been mentioned by chance, and not because of a profound divine significance in them which requires them to be such because of the special property in them. And just as in medicaments there are basic elements which are their chief ingredients and additional substances which are their complements, each of them having a special effect on the workings²²⁰ of their basic elements, so, likewise, supererogatory prayers and customary practices²²¹ are complements for perfecting the effects of the principal elements of the acts of worship.

124 In general, then, the prophets (Peace be upon them!) are the physicians for treating the maladies of hearts. By its activity reason is useful simply to acquaint us with this fact, to bear witness to prophecy by giving assent to its reality, to certify its own blindness²²² to perceiving what the "eye" of prophecy perceives, and to take us by our hands and turn us over to the prophets as blind men are handed over to guides and as troubled sick men are handed over to sympathetic physicians. To this point reason can proceed and advance, but it is far removed from anything beyond that except for understanding what the physician prescribes.²²³ These, then, are the insights we gained with a necessity analogous to direct vision during the period of our solitude and seclusion.

B. *The Slackness of Faith*

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

1. A reason stemming from those engrossed in the science of philosophy.

2. A reason stemming from those absorbed in the way of sufism.
3. A reason stemming from those attached to the claim of authoritative teaching.
4. A reason stemming from the behavior of those popularly regarded as pre-eminent in learning.²²⁴

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

127 One man would reply: "If this were a matter one was bound to observe, then the learned²²⁵ would be those most properly bound to do it. But of those most renowned among the learned,²²⁶ so-and-so does not perform the prescribed Prayer, and such a one drinks wine,²²⁷ and another devours the assets of religious endowments²²⁸ and the property of orphans, and another feathers his nest with the lavish largesse of the Sultan without being wary of what is illicit,²²⁹ and another accepts bribes for judgment and testimony, and so on in many similar instances!"

128 A second man would claim to be an adept in the science of sufism and allege that he had attained a degree beyond the need for formal worship. And a third would offer as his excuse one of the specious reasons advanced by the licentious. These are the erring who profess the way of sufism.²³⁰

129 A fourth respondent would have had contact with the Ta'limites. So he would declare: "The truth is doubtful, the way to it hard, there is much disagreement about it, and no one view is preferable to any other. Moreover, rational proofs contradict one another so that no reliance can be placed on the opinion of independent thinkers. But the advocate of authoritative teaching makes categorical pronouncements without needing any proof. How, then, can we give up the certain because of the uncertain?"²³¹

130 A fifth man would say: "I do not do this out of servile conformism, but I have studied the science of philosophy and I have grasped the

real meaning of prophecy. I know that it comes down to what is wise and beneficial and that the aim of its religious prescriptions is to control the common people and to curb them from internecine strife and contention and from unrestrained indulgence in their passions. Hence I am not one of the ignorant masses and therefore subject to commandment.²³² Rather, I am one of the wise, following the way of wisdom and well versed in it, and in my wisdom I can get along without servile conformism!" This is the limit reached by the faith of those who have studied the philosophy of the theistic philosophers: that is known from the books of Ibn Sīnā and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī.

131 These are the men who bedeck themselves with the trappings of Islam. Often you may see one of them reciting the Qur'ān and attending the assemblies and public prayers and paying great lip service to the Shari'a.²³³ But despite that he does not give up his winebibbing and various kinds of depravity and debauchery. If he is asked: "If prophecy is not authentic, why do you pray?" he may reply: "It is an askesis of the body and the custom of the local people and a way to preserve fortune and family."²³⁴ And he may say: "The Shari'a is authentic and prophecy is genuine." Then one should say: "Why, then, do you drink wine?" And he may say: "Wine was prohibited simply because it causes enmity and hatred."²³⁵ But I, by my wisdom, can guard against that. My only aim in drinking is to stimulate my mind."

132 Indeed, Ibn Sīnā went so far as to write in a testament of his²³⁶ that he made a pact with God to do certain things, and that he would extol the ordinances of the Law and would not be remiss in performing the religious acts of worship, nor would he drink for pleasure, but only for medicinal purposes and to promote his health. So the furthest he got respecting purity of faith and the obligation of acts of worship was to make an exception for winebibbing on the score of promoting his health! Such is the faith of those philosophers who pretend to have faith! Many, indeed, have been deceived by them, and their deception has been intensified by the weak arguments of those who opposed the philosophers. For their opposition was to repudiate the sciences of geometry and logic and others which, for the philosophers, are true of necessity, according to the reasoned explanation we have set forth previously.

C. *My Return to Teaching*

133 I saw, then, that for such reasons as these the faith of the various classes of men had become so weak. Also, I considered myself so

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

134 Thus I sought a compromise between myself and God Most High which would permit me to remain in seclusion, alleging as an excuse my inability to expound the truth with competent argument. But God Most High determined to move the Sultan of the time to act on his own, and not because of any external instigation. He peremptorily ordered me to hasten to Nishāpūr to face the threat of this tepidity. Indeed, so peremptory was his order that, had I persisted in refusing to comply, it would have ended in my disgrace.²³⁷

135 Then it occurred to me that "the reason for excusing yourself has lost its force. Hence your motive for clinging to seclusion ought not to be laziness and ease and self-aggrandizement and protecting yourself from the harm caused by men. Why, indeed, should you try to find license for such conduct in the difficulty of struggling against men? For God—praised and exalted He! says: 'A. L. M. Do men think they will be left to say "We believe" without being subject to tribulation? Indeed We have already tried those who were before them (and assuredly God knows those who speak truly, and assuredly He knows the liars)' (29.1–2/1–3). He also says—Mighty and Glorious He!—to His Apostle, who is the dearest of His creatures: 'Apostles before you have already been given the lie, and they endured the false charge and the injury done them until Our help came to them. Now there is no one who can change the words of God, and there has already reached you some report about those We sent'" (6.34).

136 "The Mighty and Glorious also says: 'In the name of the merciful Lord of mercy: Y. S. By the wise Qur'ān, you are indeed of those We

have sent on a straight way, sent down by the sending of the Mighty, the Merciful, to warn a people whose fathers were not warned, so that they are heedless. True indeed what has been said against most of them, for they do not believe. Assuredly We have placed on their necks iron collars, chin high, so that their heads are held up. We have also put a barrier before them and a barrier behind them, and We have blinded them so that they do not see. All the same to you whether you warn them or do not warn them—they will not believe. You warn only him who follows the Remembrance and fears the Lord of mercy in the unseen' (36.1–10/1–11)."²³⁸

137 Subsequently I consulted on that matter a number of those skilled in discerning hearts and visions and they were of one mind in advising me to abandon my seclusion and to emerge from my religious retirement. In addition to that, certain godly men had many recurrent dreams attesting that this move of mine would be a source of good and a right procedure, and that it had been decreed by God—Praised be He!—for the beginning of this century. For God—Praised be He!—has indeed promised to revivify His religion at the beginning of each century.²³⁹ So my hope was strengthened and I became quite optimistic because of these testimonies.²⁴⁰

138 God Most High facilitated my move to Nishāpūr to undertake this serious task in the month of Dhu'l-Qa'da, 499 (July, 1106 A.D.). My departure from Baghdad had been in Dhu'l-Qa'da, 488 (November, 1095 A.D.). So the period of my seclusion amounted to eleven years. This move to Nishāpūr was decreed by God Most High, and it was one of the marvels of His foreordinations, not a glimmer of which was in my mind during that period of seclusion, just as the possibility of my leaving Baghdad and giving up my position there had never occurred to my mind. But God Most High is the changer of minds and states, and "the heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the Lord of mercy."²⁴¹

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

moved me; and that I did not act, but He acted through me. I ask Him, then, to reform me first, then to use me as an instrument of reform; to guide me, then to use me as an instrument of guidance; to show me the true as true, and to grant me the grace to follow it; and to show me the false as false, and to grant me the grace to eschew it!²⁴²

D. Remedies for the Tepid

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

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

(2) As for the flights of fancy of the licentious libertines, we have listed their specious arguments in seven categories and laid them bare in our book *The Alchemy of Happiness*.²⁴³

(3) For the man whose faith has become corrupt through philosophy to the point that he rejects the very principle of prophecy we have already mentioned the true nature of prophecy and its existence of necessity, adducing the proof drawn from the existence of the knowledge of the special properties of medicaments and of the knowledge about the stars, etc. Indeed, we presented that prefatory discussion precisely for that reason. Moreover, we set forth the proof drawn from the special properties of medicine and the stars simply because that pertains to the philosophers' own science. For to each man versed in a particular science²⁴⁴—e.g. astronomy, medicine, physics, magic, talismans—we expound the proof of prophecy drawn from his own science.

141 He who pays lip service to the existence of prophecy, but equates the prescriptions of revelation with human wisdom, really disbelieves in prophecy. He believes only in a sage with a special star of destiny whose ascendancy demands that he be followed. This has nothing at all to do with prophecy. On the contrary, faith in prophecy is to acknowledge the affirmation of a stage beyond reason: in it an eye is opened by which a special perception of certain perceptibles is had; from the perception of these reason is excluded, just as hearing is from the perception of colors, and sight from the perception of sounds, and all the senses from the perception of intelligibles. If the man in question does not allow the possibility of this, well we have already given apodeictic proof, not only of its