Hayy ibn Yaqzan

IBN TUFAYL

c. 1105–1185

Hayy ibn Yaqzan

حي بن يقظان

Translated from the Arabic with AI (Claude) and edited

FORAGE
forage.com

Hayy ibn Yaqzan · Ibn Tufayl (c. 1105–1185)

Translated from the Arabic with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/ibn-tufayl/hayy-ibn-yaqzan

Arabic text: *Risālat Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Idārat al-Waṭan, 1299 AH (1882; public domain), pp. 2–60, transcribed for this edition from the Internet Archive scan (archive.org/details/1882_20251116), in modern spelling and with modern punctuation added (transcription CC BY-SA 4.0); the publisher's colophon is omitted. English: translated from the Arabic with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The 1882 printing has no headings or paragraphs: the division into an introduction and the stages of the story, and the part titles, are ours; margin numbers are part and paragraph, numbered for this edition.

The original text is in the public domain. This translation is free to share and adapt under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0): creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

Set in Source Serif 4, Noto Naskh Arabic.

CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Introduction 1

The blind man who gains his sight 4

The philosophers before him 7

The Island and Hayy's Birth 13

The chest set adrift 15

A child formed from clay 17

Childhood among the Deer 21

The Death of the Doe 25

Opening the doe's chest 27

The ravens and the burial 29

Fire, Anatomy and the Arts 31

The discovery of fire 31

Body, Form and the Maker 37

Heaviness, lightness and form 41

Matter and form 45

The Heavens and their Mover 49

Eternal or created? 52

After in essence, not in time 54

The Soul and the Three Imitations 59

The fate of souls after death 60

The three imitations 67

The Vision 73

Whose is the kingdom today? 74

The chain of mirrors 78

Asal and Salaman 83
Hayy meets Asal 85
Two questions about the Law 89
Hayy's apology 92

Conclusion 95

INTRODUCTION

Abu Bakr ibn Tufayl (c. 1110–1185) was a physician, astronomer and philosopher from Guadix in Andalusia, court physician and adviser to the Almohad caliph Abu Yaʿqub Yusuf in Marrakesh, where he introduced the young Averroes to the caliph. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*—"Alive, son of Awake"—is his only surviving work. It takes the form of a letter to a friend who had asked about the "oriental wisdom" of Avicenna, and it borrows its hero's name from an allegory by Avicenna.

After a preface surveying the philosophers of Islam, Ibn Tufayl tells the story of a child who grows up alone on an equatorial island—cast ashore in a chest, or born from the fermenting clay—and is suckled by a doe. When the doe dies he cuts her open to find what has left her; from there, in stages of seven years, he works out by himself the arts of life, the anatomy of animals, the theory of matter and form, the motions of the heavens, the existence of an incorporeal Maker, the immortality of the soul and, at last, the mystic's vision of God. At fifty he meets Asal, a hermit from a neighbouring island whose revealed religion turns out to teach in symbols the truths Hayy has found by reason—but when the two try to share those truths with Asal's people, they fail.

Translated into Hebrew, Latin (by Edward Pococke, as *Philosophus autodidactus*, 1671) and then into English, Dutch and German, the book was read across Enlightenment Europe as a tale of natural reason and has been compared with *Robinson Crusoe*. It is at once a novel of education, a compact summary of Arabic philosophy, and a meditation on the limits of what can be said and taught.

Introduction

The letter to a friend: the "oriental wisdom" of Avicenna, the state of mystical vision, and what the philosophers of Andalusia, al-Farabi, Avicenna and al-Ghazali had and had not written about it.

1.1 The Shaykh, the jurist, the imam, the learned, the excellent, the accomplished, the knower of God Abu Jaʿfar ibn Tufayl (may God have mercy on him) said: Praise be to God, the Mighty and the Mightiest, the Eternal and the Most Ancient, the Knowing and the Most Knowing, the Wise and the Wisest, the Merciful and the Most Merciful, the Generous and the Most Generous, the Forbearing and the Most Forbearing, who "taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know," and "God's bounty to you has been great." I praise Him for the abundance of His graces and thank Him for the succession of His favors. I bear witness that there is no god but God alone, who has no partner, and that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger: the man of pure character, of dazzling miracle, of overpowering proof and of the drawn sword. God's blessings and peace be upon him, upon his family and his Companions, men of great aspirations, of virtues and renown, and upon all the Companions and those who followed them until the Day of Judgment; and may He grant them abundant peace.[1]

1.2 You have asked me, noble brother, my sincere and dear friend (may God grant you everlasting life and make you happy with eternal happiness), to convey to you what I can of the

1 Abu Jaʿfar ibn Tufayl (d. AD 1185/6) was an Andalusian physician and philosopher at the Almohad court in Marrakesh. Quran 96:4–5; 4:113.

secrets of the Eastern wisdom of which the Shaykh, the Imam, the Chief Master Abu Ali ibn Sina spoke. Know, then, that whoever wants the truth without obscurity must seek this wisdom and strive earnestly to acquire it. Your question stirred in me a noble thought, and that thought led me (praise be to God) to witness a state I had never witnessed before. It brought me to a point so strange that no tongue can describe it and no exposition can do it justice, for it belongs to a stage other than theirs and a world other than theirs.[2] Yet that state brings such joy and gladness, such delight and happiness, that no one who has reached it and come to any of its limits can keep it hidden or conceal its secret. Rather, he is seized by such rapture and liveliness, such exuberance and expansiveness, that he is driven to disclose it in general terms, without detail. If he is one whom the sciences have not trained, he speaks of it without precision. So one of them said in this state, "Glory be to me, how great is my standing!" Another said, "I am the Truth," and another, "There is nothing in the robe but God." The Shaykh Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (may God have mercy on him), on reaching this state, quoted this line: "Then came what came, which I will not relate; / So think the best, and do not ask for the tale." He spoke so only because learning had disciplined him and the sciences had trained him.[3]

1.3 Consider also what Abu Bakr ibn al-Sa'igh says in the passage that follows his discussion of the nature of conjunction: "When the meaning intended in that book of his is understood, it becomes clear that none of the sciences commonly pursued can be of its rank. One who conceives it, by understanding that meaning, reaches a rank in which he sees himself as distinct

2 Abu Ali ibn Sina is Avicenna (d. AD 1037). "Eastern wisdom" (*al-ḥikma al-mashriqiyya*) is his "Eastern" or "illuminative" philosophy, which he set apart from the Aristotelian system of his main works.

3 Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. AD 1111) was the theologian, jurist and Sufi whose books are discussed below. The first saying is attributed to Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. c. AD 875), the second to al-Hallaj (executed AD 922), and the third circulated among the ecstatic sayings of the early Sufis. Al-Ghazali quotes the line, by the poet Ibn al-Muʿtazz, in *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*Deliverance from Error*).

from everything that came before, holding other convictions that are not material and are too exalted to be ascribed to natural life. Rather, they are states of the blessed, free of the composition of natural life; states of the blessed, indeed, worthy to be called divine states, which God, glory be to Him, Most High, grants to whomever He wills of His servants." This rank to which Abu Bakr points is reached by way of theoretical knowledge and rational inquiry, and there is no doubt that he reached it and did not go beyond it.[4] The rank to which we ourselves first pointed is different from it, though it is the same in this sense: nothing is unveiled in it that contradicts what was unveiled in the other. It differs only by greater clarity, and in that it is witnessed by something we call a "faculty" only metaphorically. For neither in the language of the general public nor in the terminology of specialists do we find names for that by which this kind of witnessing is witnessed.

1.4 This state we have mentioned, of which your question stirred in us a *dhawq*, a taste, is one of the states the Shaykh Abu Ali pointed to when he says: "Then, when will and spiritual exercise have brought him to a certain point, delightful glimpses of the rising light of the Truth come upon him, like flashes of lightning that gleam on him and then die away. Then these visitations come upon him more often as he persists in his exercise. Then he goes so deep into it that they come upon him even when he is not exercising: whenever he glimpses something, he turns from it to the court of holiness, recalls something of its affairs, and is overcome, so that he almost sees the Truth in everything.[5] Then exercise brings him to a point where his moment turns to tranquility: what was snatched away becomes familiar, the gleam becomes a clear blaze, and he gains a settled acquaintance, like an abiding companionship." He goes

4 Abu Bakr ibn al-Sa'igh is Ibn Bajja (Avempace, d. AD 1139), the Andalusian philosopher. "Conjunction" (*al-ittiṣāl*) is the union of the human intellect with the Active Intellect.

5 *Dhawq*, "tasting," is direct experience: the Sufis' term for knowledge gained by living a state rather than by argument. The quotation is from Avicenna's *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* (*Pointers and Reminders*), on the stations of the knowers.

on to describe how the stages rise one after another and end in attainment, when the seeker's inmost self becomes a polished mirror that he turns to face the Truth. Then the highest pleasures pour down on him, and he rejoices in his self for the trace of the Truth he sees in it. At this rank he looks at the Truth and looks at himself, still wavering between the two. Then he becomes absent from himself and beholds the court of holiness alone; or if he beholds himself, it is only insofar as his self is beholding. There arrival is truly achieved. These states that he described (may God be pleased with him) he meant to be his by *dhawq*, by tasting, not by way of theoretical apprehension derived from syllogisms, the laying down of premises and the drawing of conclusions.

THE BLIND MAN WHO GAINS HIS SIGHT

A man born blind who later sees illustrates how the saints' vision differs from the theorists' knowledge.

1.5 If you want an example that will show you the difference between the apprehension of this group and the apprehension of others, imagine someone born blind, but with a fine natural disposition, strong intuition, a firm memory and a sound mind. He grew up from the start in a certain city, and through his other kinds of perception he kept getting to know its people one by one, many kinds of animals and inanimate things, the city's streets and lanes, its houses and markets, until he could walk through that city without a guide and recognize at once everyone he meets and greets. Colors alone he knew only through the explanations of their names and some definitions that indicated them. Then, after he had reached this stage, his eyes were opened and he gained sight. He walked through the whole city and went all around it. He found nothing contrary to what he had believed, and nothing in it struck him as strange; he met the colors just as the descriptions given him had truly portrayed them. Yet in all this two great things happened to him, one following from the other: greater clarity and brightness, and great

delight. The state of the theorists who have not reached the stage of sainthood is the blind man's first state. The colors, known in that state through the explanations of their names, are those things which Abu Bakr said are too exalted to be ascribed to natural life, and which God grants to whomever He wills of His servants. The state of the theorists who have reached the stage of sainthood, to whom God Most High has granted that thing we said can be called a faculty only metaphorically, is the second state. Rarely there is someone who is like a man whose insight has always been piercing and his eyes always open, with no need for speculation. By the apprehension of the theorists—may God honor you with His friendship—I do not mean here what they apprehend of the natural world, nor by the apprehension of the friends of God what they apprehend of what lies beyond nature. These two objects of apprehension are utterly different in themselves, and one cannot be confused with the other. What we mean by the apprehension of the theorists is what they apprehend of what lies beyond nature, as Abu Bakr did, on condition that this apprehension of theirs be true and sound. Then a comparison can be made between it and the apprehension of the friends of God, who are concerned with exactly those same things, but with greater clarity and immense delight.

1.6 Abu Bakr found fault with these people for speaking of this delight, claiming that it belongs to the imaginative faculty, and he promised to describe in a clear and explicit account what the state of the blessed ought to be at that point. One should say to him: do not call sweet the taste of a thing you have not tasted, and do not step over the necks of the truthful saints. The man did none of this and never kept that promise. Perhaps he was prevented by what he himself mentioned, shortness of time and being busy with his journey down to Oran. Or perhaps he saw that if he described that state, the argument would force him to say things that would reflect badly on his own way of life, and would give the lie to what he had laid down in urging people to amass wealth, to hoard it and to use every kind of stratagem to acquire it.

[1.7] Our discussion has strayed somewhat from what your question moved us to, as necessity required. It has become clear from this that what you seek cannot go beyond one of two aims. Either you are asking about what is seen by the people of vision, tasting and presence at the stage of sainthood; and this cannot be set down in a book as it truly is. Whenever anyone attempts it and forces it into speech or writing, its reality is transformed and it passes into the other, theoretical class. For once it is clothed in letters and sounds and brought near the visible world, it no longer remains as it was in any way or respect. Expressions of it differ widely; some people's feet have slipped from the straight path because of it, and others are thought to have slipped when they have not. This is so only because it is something without limit, in a presence of wide expanse, which encompasses and is not encompassed. The second of the two aims beyond which, as we said, your question cannot go, is that you seek to understand this matter in the manner of the theorists. This—may God honor you with His friendship—is something that can be set down in books and put into words. But it is rarer than red sulfur, especially in this region of ours, for it is so strange that only one person here and another there obtains even a little of it; and whoever obtains any of it speaks of it to people only in symbols. For the upright religion of Abraham and the Law of Muhammad have forbidden delving into it and warned against it.

THE PHILOSOPHERS BEFORE HIM

He judges the books of Aristotle, al-Farabi, Avicenna and Ibn Bajja insufficient for what his friend seeks.

1.8 Do not suppose that the *falsafa* that has reached us in the books of Aristotle and Abu Nasr and in *al-Shifāʾ* (*The Healing*) meets the aim you have in view, nor that anyone in al-Andalus has written anything adequate on it. Those of outstanding natural gifts who grew up in al-Andalus before logic and philosophy spread there spent their lives on the mathematical sciences. They reached a high level in them but could achieve nothing more. Then came after them a later generation who went beyond them with some logic. They studied it, but it did not bring them to true perfection, and one of them said: "It torments me that the sciences of humankind
Are two, and nothing more beyond them lies:
A truth whose full attainment is beyond us,
A falsehood whose attainment is no prize."[6]

Then came after them yet another generation, sharper in reflection and closer to the truth. None of them had a more penetrating mind, sounder reflection or truer judgment than Abu Bakr ibn al-Sa'igh. But worldly affairs kept him busy until death carried him off before the treasures of his knowledge came to light and the hidden things of his wisdom were made known. Most of the works of his that can be found are incomplete and cut off at the end, such as his book on the soul, *Tadbīr al-mutawaḥḥid* (*The Regimen of the Solitary*), and what he wrote on logic and natural science. His complete works are short books and hastily snatched letters. He himself admitted as much. He stated that the meaning whose *burhān*, or demonstration, he intended in *Risālat al-ittiṣāl* (*Letter on Conjunction*) is not conveyed clearly

6 *Falsafa* is philosophy in the Greek tradition: Aristotle and his Arabic followers. Abu Nasr is al-Farabi (d. AD 950); *al-Shifāʾ* is Avicenna's great philosophical encyclopedia.

by that discourse except with difficulty and great strain; that in some places the arrangement of his wording does not follow the most perfect way; and that if he had had time, he would have been inclined to change it.[7] Such is the state of what has reached us of this man's knowledge; we never met him in person. As for his contemporaries who were not described as being of his rank, we have seen no writings of theirs. As for those who came after them, our own contemporaries, they are either still growing, or have come to a halt short of perfection, or are people whose true condition has not reached us.

1.9 Of the books of Abu Nasr that have reached us, most are on logic, and those on philosophy are full of doubts. In *al-Milla al-fāḍila* (*The Virtuous Religion*) he affirmed that wicked souls survive after death in endless pain, a survival without end. Then in *al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya* (*The Political Regime*) he declared that they dissolve and pass into nothing, and that only perfect souls survive. Then in *Kitāb al-akhlāq* (*The Book of Ethics*) he described something of human happiness, saying that it exists only in this life, in this world, and then added words to this effect: "Everything said apart from this is raving and old wives' tales." This makes all creatures despair of God Most High's mercy and puts the virtuous and the wicked on one level, since it makes nothingness the end of all. It is a slip that cannot be pardoned, a stumble beyond repair.[8] On top of this there is the bad belief he openly professed about prophecy—that, as he claims, it belongs to the imaginative faculty alone—and his ranking of philosophy above it, along with other things we have no need to mention.

1.10 As for the books of Aristotle, the Shaykh Abu Ali took it upon himself to set forth what is in them. In *al-Shifāʾ* he followed Aristotle's doctrine and took the path of his philosophy. But he stated at the opening of the book that for him the truth was something else; that he had composed that book only according to the doctrine of the Peripatetics; and that whoever wants the

7 *Burhān* is demonstration in Aristotle's sense: proof from certain premises.
8 *Kitāb al-akhlāq* is probably al-Farabi's lost commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

truth without obscurity must turn to his book on the Eastern philosophy. Whoever takes the trouble to read *al-Shifāʾ* and the books of Aristotle will find that they agree on most matters, even though *al-Shifāʾ* contains things that have not reached us from Aristotle. And if one takes everything the books of Aristotle and *al-Shifāʾ* offer in its outward sense, without grasping its secret and inner sense, it will not bring one to perfection, as the Shaykh Abu Ali indicated in *al-Shifāʾ*.[9]

1.11 As for the books of the Shaykh Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, because he is addressing the general public he binds in one place and loosens in another, condemning certain views as unbelief and then adopting them himself. Among the things for which he declared the philosophers unbelievers in the *Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*) was their denial of the resurrection of bodies and their affirming reward and punishment for souls alone. Then he said at the opening of the *Mīzān* (*Mīzān al-ʿamal*, *The Criterion of Action*) that this is, without question, the belief of the Sufi masters. Then he said in *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl wa-l-mufṣiḥ bi-l-aḥwāl* (*Deliverance from Error and Exposition of the States*) that his own belief is like that of the Sufis, and that he settled on it only after long inquiry. There is much of this kind in his books, as anyone who leafs through them and studies them closely will see.

1.12 He excused himself for doing this at the end of *Mīzān al-ʿamal*, where he explains that opinions are of three kinds: an opinion one shares with the general public in what they hold; an opinion shaped by the way one addresses each questioner and seeker of guidance; and an opinion held between a person and himself, which no one sees except someone who shares his belief. Then he said: “Even if these words did nothing but make you doubt your inherited belief, that would be benefit enough. For whoever does not doubt does not reflect; whoever does not reflect does not see; and whoever does not see remains in blindness and bewilderment.” Then he quoted this line: “Take what

9 The book meant is Avicenna’s *al-Ḥikma al-mashriqiyya* (*The Eastern Wisdom*), which survives only in part.

you see, and leave what you have heard; / The rising sun is enough to spare you Saturn."[10] Such is the character of his teaching. Most of it is symbol and allusion, of benefit only to one who has first discovered these things by his own insight and then heard them from him, or to one prepared to understand them, of outstanding natural gifts, for whom the slightest hint is enough. He mentioned in *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān* (*The Jewels of the Quran*) that he had books to be withheld from those unworthy of them, and that in them he set out the truth plainly. To our knowledge none of them has reached al-Andalus. Instead, books have arrived which some people claim are those withheld ones, but this is not so. Those books are *al-Maʿārif al-ʿaqliyya* (*Rational Knowledge*), *al-Nafkh wa-l-taswiya* (*The Breathing-in and the Fashioning*), and some other collected questions. Though these books contain allusions, they add little by way of unveiling to what is scattered through his well-known books. Indeed, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* (*The Highest Aim*) contains things more obscure than what is in those books, and he himself declared that *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* is not one of the withheld books. It follows that these books that have arrived are not the withheld ones. A certain later writer took from some words of his at the end of *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*The Niche of Lights*) a grave idea that threw him into an abyss from which there was no escape. These are the words: after listing the classes of those veiled by lights, al-Ghazali passes on to those who have arrived and says that they discovered that this mighty Being is qualified by an attribute incompatible with pure unity. From this the man wanted to make him out to believe that the Truth, glory be to Him, has some multiplicity in His essence. God is exalted high above what the wrongdoers say! We have no doubt that the Shaykh Abu Hamid was one of those who attained the utmost happiness and reached those noble and holy places of arrival. But his withheld books, which contain the knowledge of unveiling, have not reached us.

1.13 We ourselves would not have arrived at the truth we have reached, the limit of our knowledge, except by following his

10 The line is by the poet al-Mutanabbi (d. AD 965).

words and the words of the Shaykh Abu Ali, setting the two against each other, and adding to them the opinions that have sprung up in our own time and that certain people who profess philosophy talk of constantly. In this way the truth became clear to us, first by way of inquiry and reflection; and now we have found from it this small taste by direct vision. Then we saw ourselves fit to compose something that might be handed down from us, and it became our duty that you, my questioner, should be the first to whom we present what we have and show what lies with us, because of your true friendship and pure sincerity. Yet if we laid before you the final results we have reached before establishing their first principles with you, it would give you nothing more than a vague matter of *taqlīd*, of following authority—and that only if you think well of us out of affection and friendship, not because we deserve to have our word accepted.[11] We are not content with this rank for you, and will accept for you nothing less than what is higher, for it does not guarantee salvation, let alone the winning of the highest degrees. What we want is to lead you along the paths we have already traveled and to swim with you in the sea we have already crossed, so that it brings you to where it brought us. Then you will witness of it what we witnessed, verify by your own insight all that we verified, and no longer need to tie your knowledge to what we know. This requires a definite span of time, and no short one, freedom from distractions, and devoting all one's resolve to this discipline. If this resolve of yours is sincere and your intention firm to gird yourself for this quest, then at morning you will praise your night's journey and gain the blessing of your effort. You will have pleased your Lord, and He will have pleased you, and He will bring you to whatever you want of your hopes, whatever you aspire to with all your resolve and your whole being. I hope to guide you along the most direct road, the safest from hazards and harms. But if for now you would like a brief glimpse to stir your longing and urge you to set out on the way, I will tell you

11 *Taqlīd* is accepting beliefs on authority rather than by one's own understanding.

the story of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, Asal and Salaman, whom the Shaykh Abu Ali named. For in their story there is a lesson for those of understanding, and a reminder "for whoever has a heart, or lends an ear and is present to witness."[12]

12 Hayy ibn Yaqzan means "Alive, son of Awake"; Avicenna wrote allegories called *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and *Salaman and Absal* (Absal is also the form in some editions of this book). Quran 50:37.

The Island and Hayy's Birth

An island on the equator; two accounts of Hayy's origin—a princess's child cast adrift in a chest, or a child formed from fermenting clay—and the doe that answers his cry.

2.1 Our pious forebears (may God be pleased with them) relate that one of the islands of India lying beneath the equator is the island where human beings come into being without mother or father. There are trees there that bear women as fruit, and these are what al-Masʿudi called the maidens of the Waqwaq. This is because that island has the most temperate climate on earth, and is the most perfectly disposed to receive the rising of the supreme light upon it. This runs contrary to the view of most philosophers and the great physicians, who hold that the most temperate part of the inhabited world is the fourth clime. If they said this because they had established that there is no habitation on the equator owing to some obstacle on the earth, then their claim that the fourth clime is the most temperate region of the earth has some point. But if they meant that what lies on the equator is extremely hot, as most of them state outright, that is an error, and demonstration proves the contrary.[1] For it has been demonstrated in the natural sciences that heat has no causes but motion, contact with hot bodies, and illumination. It has also been shown there that the sun in itself is not hot, nor does it have any of these qualities of temperament. It has fur-

1 The Waqwaq islands are a semi-legendary land of Arabic geography, said to have trees bearing human fruit; al-Masʿudi (d. AD 956) was a historian and geographer. Arab geographers divided the inhabited world into seven latitudinal "climes," the fourth being the middle one.

ther been shown there that the bodies that receive illumination most fully are polished, non-transparent bodies; next to them in receiving it are dense bodies that are not polished; while transparent bodies with no density at all do not receive light in any way. This last point alone was demonstrated by the Shaykh Abu Ali in particular; none of his predecessors mentioned it. Once these premises are complete and sound, it follows from them that the sun does not heat the earth in the way hot bodies heat other bodies in contact with them, since the sun in itself is not hot. Nor does the earth grow hot through motion, since it is at rest and in one and the same condition when the sun rises on it and when it sets, while its heating and cooling at these two times differ plainly to the senses. Nor does the sun first heat the air and then heat the earth by means of the air's warmth. How could that be, when we find that in hot weather the air close to the earth is far hotter than the air higher up? It remains, then, that the sun heats the earth by way of illumination and nothing else. For heat always follows light, so much so that when light is intensified in a concave mirror, it sets fire to whatever is opposite it.

2.2 It has been established in the mathematical sciences by conclusive demonstrations that the sun is spherical in shape, and so is the earth; that the sun is much larger than the earth; that the part of the earth lit by the sun at any time is more than half of it; and that in this lit half of the earth the light is always most intense at the center. That is because the center is the place furthest from the darkness at the circumference of the circle, and because it faces many parts of the sun. The nearer a place is to the circumference, the less light it has, until it reaches darkness at the circumference of the circle, whose place on the earth receives no light at all. A place is at the center of the circle of light when the sun stands directly over the heads of those who live there, and then the heat in that place is at its most intense. If a place is one where the sun stays far from being directly overhead, it is extremely cold; if it is one where the sun is always overhead, it is extremely hot. It has been established

in astronomy that in the regions of the earth on the equator the sun is directly overhead only twice a year: when it enters the head of Aries and when it enters the head of Libra. For the rest of the year it is six months to the south of them and six months to the north. So they have neither excessive heat nor excessive cold, and their conditions are therefore uniform. This statement needs more explanation than suits our present purpose; we have drawn your attention to it only because it is one of the things that bear witness to the soundness of what was said about the possibility of a human being coming into being in that place without mother or father.[2]

THE CHEST SET ADRIFT

A princess secretly bears a son, seals him in a chest and casts it into the sea.

2.3 Some of them state the matter decisively and affirm without qualification that Hayy ibn Yaqzan was one of those who come into being in that spot without mother or father. Others deny it and tell a story about him, which we shall relate to you. They say that opposite that island lay a great island, broad in its reaches and rich in resources, well peopled, and ruled by one of its men, a man of fierce pride and jealousy. He had a sister of dazzling beauty and grace. He kept her from marrying and turned away all suitors, for he found no one worthy of her. He had a kinsman named Yaqzan, who married her secretly, in a manner lawful under the rite well known among them in their time. She conceived by him and bore a child. Fearing that her affair would be exposed and her secret revealed, she placed him in a chest and sealed it tightly, after giving him his fill of milk. At nightfall she went out with him to the seashore, with some of her servants and trusted companions, her heart burning with love for him and fear for his sake. Then she bade him farewell and said: "O God, You created this child when he was nothing worth mentioning. You provided for him in the darkness of the

2 That is, at the spring and autumn equinoxes.

womb and cared for him until he was complete and fully formed. Now I have entrusted him to Your kindness and placed my hope for him in Your bounty, out of fear of this oppressive king, tyrannical and stubborn. So be with him, and do not abandon him, Most Merciful of the merciful." Then she cast him into the sea.[3]

2.4 As it happened, the water was then running with the force of the flood tide, and that same night it carried him to the shore of the other island mentioned above. The tide was then at its utmost reach inland, a point it reaches only once a year. With its force the water carried him into a thicket of dense trees and sweet soil, sheltered from wind and rain and screened from the sun, which inclined away from it when it rose and turned aside when it set. Then the water began to ebb and fall away from the chest that held the child, and the chest stayed where it was. The blowing winds raised the sand and piled it up until it blocked the entrance of the thicket over the chest and filled in the channel by which the water entered, so that the tide no longer reached it. The chest's nails had been wrenched loose and its boards shaken apart when the water flung it into that thicket.[4]

2.5 When hunger pressed hard on the child, he cried, called for help and struggled to move. His voice reached the ear of a doe that had lost her fawn: it had wandered out of its covert and an eagle had carried it off. When she heard the voice she took it for her fawn and followed the sound until she reached the chest. She scraped at it with her hooves while he strained from within, until a board flew off the top of the chest. The doe was moved with tenderness and took him as her own. She gave him her teat and let him drink his fill of sweet milk, and she went on tending him, raising him and keeping harm away from him. This is the beginning of his story according to those who deny that he was generated from the earth. We shall describe later how he was

3 "Nothing worth mentioning" echoes Quran 76:1.

4 The sun that "inclined away" from the thicket echoes Quran 18:17, on the cave of the Sleepers.

raised and how he passed from one state to another until he reached his great attainment.

A CHILD FORMED FROM CLAY

The other account: fermenting clay gives rise to a heart, brain and liver, and finally a child.

2.6 As for those who claim that he was generated from the earth, they say that in a hollow of that island's ground a mass of clay fermented over the passing years, until hot mixed with cold and moist with dry in a mixture whose powers were balanced and in equilibrium. This fermented clay was very large, and some parts of it surpassed others in the balance of their temperament and their readiness to form the mingled drops of generation. Its middle was the most balanced part of all and the closest in likeness to the temperament of a human being. The clay began to churn as if in labor, and because of its great viscosity something like the bubbles of boiling appeared in it. In its middle there arose a viscous spot and a very small bubble, divided into two parts with a thin membrane between them and filled with a subtle, airy body of the utmost balance proper to it. At that moment the spirit that is of God's command attached itself to it and clung to it so tightly that it can hardly be separated from it, whether by sense or by the intellect.[5]

2.7 For it has been shown that this spirit flows unceasingly from God, mighty and majestic is He, and that it is like the light of the sun, which flows unceasingly over the world. Some bodies are not lit by it at all: this is the very transparent air. Some are lit by it to a degree: these are the dense bodies that are not polished. They differ in how they receive light, and their colors differ accordingly. And some are lit by it to the utmost: these are polished bodies, such as mirrors and the like. If such a mirror is concave and of a particular shape, fire arises in it from the excess of light. In the same way, the spirit that is of God's command flows forever over all existing things. In some of them its

5 "The spirit that is of God's command" echoes Quran 17:85.

effect does not appear, for lack of disposition: these are the inanimate things that have no life, and they correspond to the air in the example above. In some its effect appears: these are the kinds of plants, each according to its dispositions, and they correspond to the dense bodies in the example. In some its effect appears abundantly: these are the kinds of animals, and they correspond to the polished bodies. Now among the polished bodies there are some that, beyond receiving the sun's light intensely, also reproduce the sun's form and likeness. Likewise there is an animal that, beyond receiving the spirit intensely, also reproduces the spirit and takes on its form—and that is man alone. This is what the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) alluded to when he said: "God created Adam in His image." If this form grows so strong in him that all other forms fade away before it and it alone remains, and the radiant splendors of its light burn up everything they reach, then he is like a mirror turned back upon itself, burning everything else. This happens only to the prophets (God's blessings be upon them all). All this is explained in the places proper to it.

2.8 But let us return to the rest of their account of that formation. They say: when this spirit attached itself to that cavity, all the powers submitted to it, bowed down before it, and were made subservient to it, by command of God Most High, for its perfection. Then opposite that cavity another bubble formed, divided into three cavities with thin membranes and open passages between them. It filled with an airy body like the one that filled the first cavity, only subtler. In these three chambers, divided out of one, there settled a group of the powers that had submitted to it. They took charge of guarding and tending it, and of reporting to the first spirit, attached to the first cavity, whatever arose in them, subtle or gross. Then, also opposite this cavity, on the side facing away from the second, a third bubble formed, filled with an airy body coarser than the other two; and in this cavity a company of the submissive powers settled, charged with preserving and tending it. These first, second and third cavities were the first things formed from that great fer-

mented clay, in the order we have described, and each needed the others. The first needed the other two as one needs servants and subordinates; the other two needed the first as the governed need their governor and the managed their manager. Yet each of the two is a ruler, not ruled, over the organs formed after them; and of the two, the second rules more completely than the third.

2.9 When the spirit attached itself to the first of these and its heat flared up, it took on the pine-cone shape of a flame. The dense body surrounding it took the same shape and became firm flesh, and over it formed a thick sheath to protect it; and the whole organ was called the heart. Since heat brings dissolution and consumes moisture, it needed something to replenish and nourish it and to make good, continually, whatever it lost; otherwise it could not last. It also needed to sense what suited it, so as to draw it in, and what was contrary to it, so as to repel it. So one organ, through the powers in it that had their origin in the heart, took charge of one of these needs, and the other organ, through what was in it, took charge of the other. The one charged with sensation was the brain; the one charged with nourishment was the liver. Each of these two in turn needed the heart to supply it with its heat and with the powers peculiar to each, which had their origin in the heart. So for all these purposes passages and channels were woven between them, some wider than others as necessity required: these were the arteries and veins. They then go on to describe the whole formation and all the organs, just as the natural philosophers describe the formation of the fetus in the womb, leaving nothing out, until his formation was complete, his organs perfected, and he had reached the point at which the fetus leaves the womb. In describing how this was completed they relied on that great fermented clay, saying that it had become ready to form everything needed in the creation of a human being, such as the membranes enveloping the whole body and the rest. When he was complete, those membranes split away from him, much as in childbirth, and the rest of the clay cracked apart, for it had dried. Then, when the matter that fed him was used up and his

hunger grew strong, the child cried for help, and a doe that had lost her fawn answered him.

Childhood among the Deer

Raised by the doe, the boy imitates the animals, feels his nakedness and weakness, and clothes and arms himself; at about seven he makes a garment from an eagle.

3.1 From this point on, what these people describe and what the first group described about his upbringing are the same. Both say that the doe that took charge of him happened on rich land and luxuriant pasture, so that she grew plump and her milk flowed abundantly, and it nourished the child as well as could be. She stayed with him and left him only when she had to graze. The child grew so attached to her that if she was slow in coming back his crying grew loud, and she would fly back to him. There were no beasts of prey on that island. So the child grew and thrived, nourished on the doe's milk, until he was two years old. He learned to walk step by step and cut his teeth, and he would follow the doe. She was gentle and tender with him, and took him to places with fruit trees, where she fed him the sweet, ripe fruit that had fallen; and those with hard shells she cracked open for him with her molars. Whenever he wanted milk again she let him drink his fill; whenever he was thirsty she led him to water; when the sun beat down on him she shaded him; when he was cold she warmed him. When night fell she brought him back to his first place and covered him with her body and with feathers that were there, from those that had lined the chest when the child was first put in it. In their goings out in the morning and their returns at evening a herd of deer had grown used to them; it grazed with them and spent the night where they did.

3.2 The child stayed with the deer in this way, imitating their calls with his voice until one could hardly tell them apart. He also imitated all the birdsong and the cries of every other kind of animal he heard, and with great accuracy, so strongly was he moved by whatever he set his mind on. Most of all he imitated the calls the deer use to cry for help, to seek company, to summon and to ward off, for animals have different calls for these different situations. So the wild creatures grew used to him and he to them; they did not shun him, nor he them. Once the images of things had settled in his soul after they had passed out of his sight, he came to feel desire for some and aversion to others. All the while he looked at the animals and saw them clothed in fur, hair and feathers of every kind. He saw their speed in running and their strength in fighting, and the weapons they had ready to fend off whoever contended with them: horns, tusks, hooves, spurs and claws. Then he would turn to himself and see how naked he was, unarmed, slow in running and weak in fighting, when the animals contended with him for the fruit, seized it for themselves and got the better of him; he could neither defend himself nor flee from any of them. He saw his companions among the fawns grow horns where there had been none, and grow strong in running after being weak, yet he saw nothing of the kind in himself. He thought about this and did not know its cause. He looked at those with defects and deformities and found none like himself among them. He also looked at the outlets of waste in all the other animals and saw that they were covered: the outlet of the coarser of the two wastes by tails, and that of the finer by fur and the like; and their organs were better concealed than his. All this distressed and grieved him.

3.3 When his worry over all this had lasted long—he was then nearly seven years old—and he despaired of ever making up the lack that so troubled him, he took broad leaves from the trees and put some behind him and some in front. From palm fronds and esparto grass he made something like a belt around his waist, and hung the leaves from it. Before long the leaves withered, dried up and fell off, so he kept taking new ones and

stitching them together in double layers. Sometimes this made them last longer, but in any case they did not last long. From the branches of trees he made sticks, trimming their ends and straightening their shafts, and he would brandish them at the animals that contended with him, charging the weak ones and holding off the strong. This raised his opinion of himself somewhat, and he knew that his hand had a great advantage over their forelimbs: with it he could cover his nakedness and make the sticks with which he defended his ground, and so he no longer needed the tail and the natural weapons he had longed for.

3.4 Meanwhile he grew up and passed seven years of age, and the labor of renewing the leaves that covered him wore on him. He longed to take a tail from one of the dead animals and fasten it on himself, but he saw that living animals shunned their dead and fled from them, so he could not bring himself to do it. Then one day he came upon a dead vulture and saw how to get what he wanted from it. He seized the chance, since he saw that the animals did not shy away from it. He went up to it and cut off its wings and tail whole, just as they were, spread their feathers and smoothed them, and stripped off the rest of its skin and divided it into two pieces. One he tied on his back, the other over his navel and what lay below it. He hung the tail behind him and fastened the wings to his upper arms. This gave him covering and warmth, and inspired such awe in all the animals that they no longer contended with him or stood in his way. None of them came near him except the doe that had nursed and raised him. She never left him, nor he her, until she grew old and weak; then he would seek out rich pastures for her, gather sweet fruit for her and feed her.

The Death of the Doe

The doe grows old and dies; looking for the cause, he opens her chest, finds the empty cavity of the heart, and concludes that what moved her has left; the ravens teach him burial.

4.1 Emaciation and weakness gained on her, one after another, until death overtook her. All her movements ceased and all her functions stopped. When the boy saw her in this state he was overcome with grief, and his soul nearly poured out in sorrow for her. He called to her with the call she always answered when she heard it, and shouted as loudly as he could, but he saw no movement or change in her. He looked at her ears and her eyes and saw no visible harm in them; he looked at all her limbs and likewise saw harm in none of them. He hoped to find the place where the harm lay and remove it, so that she would return to what she had been; but he could not manage it, nor was it in his power.

4.2 What led him to this idea was what he had observed in himself earlier. He had noticed that when he closed his eyes or covered them with something, he saw nothing until the obstruction was removed; that when he put his fingers in his ears and blocked them, he heard nothing until he took them out; and that when he held his nose with his hand, he smelled nothing until he opened it again. From this he concluded that all her perceptions and actions might have obstacles hindering them, and that once those obstacles were removed, the actions would return. When he had examined all her outer limbs and found no visible harm in them, and yet saw that the stoppage had spread over her whole body and was not confined to one limb rather than

another, it occurred to him that the harm that had befallen her must lie in an organ hidden from sight, lodged deep within the body, an organ that none of these outer limbs could do without in its own function; so that when harm befell it, the damage became general and the stoppage spread everywhere. He hoped that if he found that organ and removed what had befallen it, its condition would be set right, its benefit would flow over the rest of the body, and the functions would return to what they had been.

4.3 He had observed earlier, in the carcasses of animals and other creatures, that all their limbs were solid, with no cavity except the skull, the chest and the belly. So it came to him that an organ of the kind he was looking for could only be in one of these three places. He strongly suspected that it was in the middle one of the three, since he was convinced that all the limbs needed it, and so its dwelling had to be in the middle. Besides, when he turned to himself, he felt such an organ in his chest. He would consider his other limbs—hand, foot, ear, nose, eye, head—and imagine being parted from them, and it seemed to him that he could do without them. He imagined the same of his head and thought he could do without it. But when he thought of the thing he felt in his chest, he could not conceive of doing without it for the blink of an eye. So too, when he fought the animals, it was his chest above all that he guarded against their horns, because he sensed the thing within it.

4.4 When he had firmly concluded that the organ in which the harm lay was in her chest, he resolved to search and probe for it, hoping he might find it, see its harm and remove it. Then he feared that this very act might be worse than the harm that had first befallen her, so that his efforts would work against her. Then he thought: had he ever seen an animal or anything else fall into such a state and then return to its former condition? He could think of none. So he despaired of her returning to her former state if he left her alone, while some hope remained of her return if he found that organ and removed its harm.

OPENING THE DOE'S CHEST

He cuts open the dead doe, finds the heart, and sees that its left chamber is empty.

4.5 So he decided to split open her chest and search what was inside. From splinters of hard stone and slivers of dry cane he made something like knives, and with them he cut between her ribs until he had severed the flesh between them and reached the membrane lining the ribs. He found it strong, which strengthened his belief that such a membrane could belong only to such an organ, and he hoped that once he got past it he would find what he was looking for. He tried to cut it, but it was hard for him, since he lacked tools: they were only of stone and cane. So he sharpened them again, and again, and worked carefully at piercing the membrane until it gave way. He came to the lung, and at first he thought it was what he was seeking; he kept turning it over and looking for the place of the harm in it. At first he had found only the half of it that lies on one side. When he saw that it leaned to one side—and he had already concluded that the organ must be in the middle across the body's width, just as it is in the middle along its length—he kept searching in the middle of the chest until he found the heart. It was wrapped in an extremely strong membrane and bound by extremely firm ligaments, and the lung surrounded it on the side where he had begun to cut. He said to himself: "If this organ has on the other side what it has on this side, then it is truly in the middle, and without doubt it is what I seek—all the more given what I see of its fine placement, its beautiful shape, its compactness and the firmness of its flesh, and that it is screened by a membrane like this one, the like of which I have seen for no other organ."

4.6 He searched the other side of the chest and found there the membrane lining the ribs, and the lung just as he had found it on this side. So he judged that this organ was what he sought. He tried to tear through its covering and slit open its sac, and only with toil and strain, after exhausting all his efforts, did he man-

age it. He laid the heart bare and saw that it was solid on every side. He looked to see whether there was any visible harm in it, and saw none. Then he pressed it with his hand and found that there was a cavity in it. He said: "Perhaps my ultimate object is inside this organ, and I have not yet reached it." He cut into it and found two cavities, one on the right side and the other on the left. The right one was full of clotted blood; the left was empty, with nothing in it. He said: "What I seek must dwell in one of these two chambers." Then he said: "As for this right chamber, I see nothing in it but this clotted blood, and no doubt it did not clot until the whole body had come to this state." For he had observed that whenever blood flows out it clots and congeals, and this was only blood like any other. "And I see this blood present in all the other organs; it is not peculiar to one rather than another. What I seek is not something of this kind. What I seek is the thing peculiar to this place, the thing I find I cannot do without for the blink of an eye, and toward which I was drawn from the start. As for this blood, how often have the animals wounded me in fighting, and much of it has flowed from me, yet it did me no harm and deprived me of none of my functions. So what I seek is not in this chamber. "As for the left chamber, I see that it is empty, with nothing in it, and I do not think it is there for nothing. For I have seen that every organ exists for a function proper to it. How could this chamber, noble as I have seen it to be, be for nothing? I can only think that what I seek was in it and has departed and left it empty, and that at that moment this body was struck by the stoppage that struck it, so that it lost perception and was deprived of movement."

4.7 When he saw that the one dwelling in that chamber had departed before the house collapsed, leaving it intact, he became certain that it was all the less likely to come back now that the house had been so ruined and torn. The whole body then became, in his eyes, a base thing of no worth compared with that thing which, he believed, dwelt in it for a time and afterwards departed. So he confined his thought to that thing. What is it? How is it? What bound it to this body? Where has it

gone? Through which door did it leave when it left the body? What drove it out, if it left unwillingly? And what made the body hateful to it, so that it left, if it left by choice? His thoughts were scattered over all these questions. He forgot that body and cast it aside. He knew that his mother, who had been tender to him and nursed him, was in truth that departed thing; that all those actions had issued from it, not from this lifeless body; and that the whole body was only like a tool for it, like the sticks he had made for fighting the animals. So his attachment passed from the body to the body's owner and mover, and he longed for nothing but that.

THE RAVENS AND THE BURIAL

Watching one raven bury another, he learns to bury his mother.

4.8 Meanwhile the body began to rot and gave off foul smells, which increased his aversion to it, and he wished he did not have to see it. Then two ravens came into his view, fighting until one struck the other down dead. The living one began scratching at the ground until it had dug a hole, and in it buried the dead one with earth. He said to himself: "How well this raven has done in burying its companion's corpse, even though it did wrong in killing it! I had more reason to be guided to do this for my mother."[1] So he dug a hole, laid his mother's body in it and heaped earth over her. He went on thinking about that thing which had governed the body, not knowing what it was. But he looked at all the individual deer and saw that they had his mother's shape and form, so he came to suppose that each of them was moved and governed by something like the thing that had moved and governed his mother. And so he felt affection for the deer and a tender longing for them, because of that likeness.

1 The scene recalls Quran 5:31, where God sends a raven to show Cain how to bury his brother.

Fire, Anatomy and the Arts

He discovers fire, guesses that the animal spirit is a fiery vapour, dissects living animals, and learns to clothe himself, build, hunt and ride—to his twenty-first year.

5.1 He remained like this for some time, examining the kinds of animals and plants and roaming the shore of the island, searching to see whether he could find anyone like himself, just as he saw that every individual animal and plant had many others like it. But he found nothing of the kind. He saw that the sea surrounded the island on every side, and so he believed that there was no land in existence besides that island of his.

THE DISCOVERY OF FIRE

He finds fire, carries it home, learns to cook, and guesses that the animal spirit is fiery.

5.2 It happened once that a fire broke out in a thicket of reeds through friction. When he caught sight of it, he saw a spectacle that terrified him, a creature he had never known before, and he stood marveling at it for a long while. Little by little he kept drawing closer, and he saw the fire's piercing light and overpowering action: whatever it caught hold of, it consumed and turned into itself. His wonder at it, together with the boldness and strength that God Most High had set in his nature, led him to stretch out his hand toward it, meaning to take some of it. But when he touched it, it burned his hand and he could not grasp it. Then it came to him to take a brand that the fire had not entirely seized. He took hold of its unburnt end, with the fire at

the other end, and this worked. He carried it to the place where he used to shelter, for he had taken to living alone in a hollow he had earlier found good to dwell in. From then on he kept feeding the fire with grass and thick firewood, tending it night and day out of delight in it and wonder at it. His fondness for it grew at night, because it stood in for the sun, giving him light and warmth. So his attachment to it became intense, and he believed it was the best of all the things he had. He always saw it moving upward and seeking the heights, so he came to think it was most likely one of the heavenly substances he used to see. He would test its power on all sorts of things by throwing them into it, and he saw it overcome each of them, quickly or slowly, according to how strong or weak the body he threw in was in its disposition to burn. Among the things he threw into it to test its power was a kind of sea creature that the sea had cast up on its shore. When the fire had cooked that creature and the smell of roasting rose from it, his appetite was stirred. He ate some of it and found it good, and so he grew used to eating meat. He applied his ingenuity to hunting on land and at sea until he became skilled at it. His love for the fire increased, since through it he had come by kinds of good nourishment that had not been open to him before.

5.3 As his passion for the fire grew stronger, because of the fine effects he saw it produce and the strength of its power, it occurred to him that the thing which had departed from the heart of his mother, the doe who had raised him, was of the substance of this being, or of something akin to it. He was confirmed in this by what he saw of the warmth of animals throughout their lives and their coldness after death—this held always, without fail—and by the intense heat he felt in his own chest, at the spot corresponding to where he had cut open the doe. So it occurred to him that if he took a living animal, cut open its heart, and looked into that cavity which he had found empty when he cut into his mother the doe, he would see it, in this living animal, full of the thing that dwelt there. Then he would know for certain whether it was of the substance of fire, and

whether it had any light and heat in it or not. So he took one of the wild animals, tied it up securely, and cut it open in the same way he had cut open the doe, until he reached the heart. He went first to its left side and cut it open, and he saw that empty space filled with a vaporous air like white mist. He put his finger into it and found it so hot that it nearly burned him, and the animal died at once. So it was established for him that this hot vapor was what had moved this animal, that every individual animal had something like it, and that whenever it separated from the animal, the animal died.

5.4 Then a desire stirred in him to investigate the rest of the animal's organs: their arrangement, their positions, their sizes, how they are connected with one another, how they draw on this hot vapor so that their life continues through it, how this vapor lasts as long as it does, where it draws its supply from, and why its heat is not used up. He pursued all of this by dissecting animals, living and dead, and he kept examining them closely and thinking hard, until in all of it he reached the level of the great natural scientists. It became clear to him that every individual animal, many as it is in its organs and varied in its senses and movements, is one by virtue of that spirit. Its origin lies in a single seat, and its distribution through all the organs issues from there. All the organs are only its servants or its agents. The place of that spirit in governing the body is like that of someone who fights his enemies with a full set of weapons, or who hunts every kind of game on sea and land and prepares for each kind a tool to catch it with. The weapons he fights with divide into those with which he wards off others' blows and those with which he deals blows to others; the hunting tools likewise divide into those suited to sea creatures and those suited to land animals; and the instruments with which he dissects likewise divide into those suited to cutting, those suited to breaking, and those suited to piercing. The body is one, and it puts these to many kinds of use, according to what each tool is good for and according to the ends sought by that use. In the same way the animal spirit is one. When it works through the instrument of the eye,

its act is sight; when it works through the instrument of the ear, its act is hearing; when it works through the instrument of the nose, its act is smell; when it works through the instrument of the tongue, its act is taste; when it works through the skin and flesh, its act is touch; when it works through the limb, its act is movement; and when it works through the liver, its act is nourishing and being nourished. Each of these has organs that serve it, and none of them achieves its act except through what reaches it of that spirit along the pathways called nerves. Whenever those pathways are cut or blocked, the act of that organ ceases. These nerves draw the spirit from the ventricles of the brain, and the brain draws the spirit from the heart. The brain holds many spirits, because it is a place where many portions are distributed. So whichever organ is deprived of this spirit, for whatever reason, its act ceases, and it becomes like a discarded tool that the agent no longer wields or makes use of. And if this spirit leaves the body altogether, or perishes, or dissolves in any way, the whole body ceases to function and passes into the state of death.

5.5 His inquiry had reached this point at the end of three weeks of years from his birth—that is, twenty-one years. During this period he devised all sorts of contrivances. He clothed himself in the skins of the animals he dissected and made shoes from them. He made threads from hair and from the bark of the stalks of marshmallow, mallow, hemp, and every fibrous plant; what first led him to this was that he took fibers from esparto grass. He made awls from strong thorns and from reeds sharpened on stones. He was led to building by what he saw the swallows do, and so he made a storeroom and a pantry for his surplus food, and secured it with a door of reeds tied together, so that no animal could get at it while he was away from that spot on some business of his.[1] He tamed birds of prey to help him hunt, and kept domestic fowl to make use of their eggs and chicks. From the horns of wild cattle he made something like

1 The Arabic plays on *khaṭāṭīf*, which means both "awls" (or "hooks") and "swallows."

spearheads and fixed them on strong canes and on staves of beech and other woods, working them with fire and with the edges of stones until they became something like spears; and he made shields of layered hides. All this he did because he saw that he lacked natural weapons, and saw that his hand could supply him with all that he lacked of them. None of the animals, of whatever kind, could stand up to him, but they would flee from him and outrun him. So he thought about how to get around this, and he saw no better way than to befriend some of the swift-running animals and treat them kindly with food suited to them, until he could ride them and chase the other kinds with them. There were wild horses and wild asses on that island, so he took those that suited him and trained them until they fully served his purpose. From straps and hides he made for them things like bits and saddles, and so he achieved what he had hoped for: hunting down the animals he had found hard to catch. He developed all these skills while he was occupied with dissection and with his eagerness to learn the particular properties of the animals' organs and how they differ—that is, during the period whose end we have set at twenty-one years.

Body, Form and the Maker

The unity and multiplicity of things; heaviness and lightness; matter and form; from the change of forms he concludes that every form needs a maker—to his twenty-eighth year.

6.1 After that he took up another line of inquiry. He examined all the bodies in the world of generation and corruption: animals of every kind, plants, minerals, the various kinds of stone, earth, water, vapor, snow, hail, smoke, ice, flame, and embers. He saw that they had many attributes, different actions, and movements that agreed and conflicted. He looked into this closely and carefully, and saw that they agree in some attributes and differ in others; that insofar as they agree they are one, and insofar as they differ they are distinct and many. At times he would look at the properties of things and at what sets each apart from the others, and then things multiplied for him beyond counting, and existence spread out before him beyond any grasp.[1] His own self, too, became many for him, because he looked at the diversity of his organs, each with an act and an attribute of its own; and he looked at each organ and saw that it could be divided into a great many parts. So he judged his own self to be many, and likewise the self of every thing. Then he would turn to another view by a second path, and see that his organs, though many, were all joined to one another, with no separation between them at all, so that they counted as one. They differed only according to the difference of their acts, and that difference came only from the power of the animal spirit reaching them—

1 The world of generation and corruption: Aristotle's term for the realm below the heavens, where things come to be and pass away.

the spirit his inquiry had arrived at first. That spirit is one in itself and is also the reality of the self, while all the other organs are like instruments. In this way his self became one for him.

6.2 Then he would pass on to all the species of animals and see each individual among them as one by this kind of view. Then he would look at a single species—deer, horses, asses, and the birds kind by kind—and see that the individuals of each species resembled one another in their outward and inward organs, their perceptions, movements, and inclinations, and he saw no difference among them except in small things compared with what they had in common. He judged that the spirit belonging to that whole species was one thing, differing only in having been divided among many hearts. If all of it that was dispersed in those hearts could be gathered and put into a single vessel, it would all be one thing—like a single water, or a single drink, poured out into many vessels and then gathered together again: in both states, divided and gathered, it is one thing, and multiplicity has merely befallen it in a certain respect. So by this view he saw the whole species as one, and he regarded the multiplicity of its individuals like the multiplicity of the organs of a single individual, which were not really many.

6.3 Then he would call to mind all the species of animals together and consider them, and see that they agree in that they sense, take nourishment, and move by will in whatever direction they please. He already knew that these acts are the ones most proper to the animal spirit, and that the other things in which they differ, beyond this agreement, are not closely proper to it. So it became clear to him through this reflection that the animal spirit belonging to the whole genus of animals is truly one, even though it has slight differences that belong to one species and not another. It is like a single water divided among many vessels, some cooler than others, while in origin it is one; whatever is at a single degree of coolness corresponds to the animal spirit as it is particular to a single species. And just as that water is all one, so the animal spirit is one, even if multipli-

city has befallen it in a certain respect. So by this kind of view he saw the whole genus of animals as one.

6.4 Then he would turn to the species of plants in all their variety, and see that in each species the individuals resembled one another in branches, leaves, flowers, fruit, and actions. He compared them with animals and knew that they had one thing in common, which was for them what the spirit is for animals, and that by that thing they were one. In the same way he looked at the whole genus of plants and judged it to be one, by what he saw of the agreement of its action: it takes nourishment and grows. Then he would bring together in his mind the genus of animals and the genus of plants, and see that both agree in nourishment and growth, except that animals surpass plants in having sensation, perception, and movement besides—though something like it sometimes appears in plants, such as flowers turning their faces toward the sun, roots moving toward nourishment, and the like. So it became clear to him through this reflection that plants and animals are one thing, because of one thing they share, which in one of them is more complete and perfect, while in the other something has held it back. It is like a single water divided into two parts, one frozen and the other flowing. So plants and animals became one for him.

6.5 Then he would look at the bodies that do not sense, take nourishment, or grow—stones, earth, water, air, and flame—and see that they are bodies with a measure of length, breadth, and depth, and that they differ only in that some have color and some have none, some are hot and some cold, and other such differences. He saw that the hot among them becomes cold and the cold becomes hot; he saw water become vapor and vapor become water, and burning things become embers, ash, flame, and smoke; and smoke, if in rising it meets a vault of stone, condenses on it and becomes like the other earthy things. So it became clear to him through this reflection that they are all really one thing, even if multiplicity attaches to them in a certain respect, just as multiplicity attached to animals and plants.

6.6 Then he would look at the thing by which plants and animals had become one for him, and see that it is a body like these bodies, with length, breadth, and depth, either hot or cold, like any of these bodies that neither sense nor take nourishment. It differs from them only in its acts, which appear from it through the organs of animals and plants, and in nothing else. Perhaps those acts are not its own by essence, but flow into it from something else; and if they flowed into these other bodies, those bodies would be like it. So he would look at it in itself, stripped of these acts that at first sight seem to issue from it, and he would see that it was nothing but one of these bodies. So it became clear to him through this reflection that all bodies are one thing—the living and the inanimate, the moving and the still—except that some of them appear to have acts performed through organs, and he did not know whether those acts were their own by essence or flowed into them from something else. In this state he saw nothing but bodies. So by this path he saw all existence as one thing, while by the first view he saw existence as a multiplicity without limit or end. He remained under the sway of this state for some time.

6.7 Then he considered all bodies, living and inanimate—which to him were at times one thing and at times infinitely many—and saw that each of them is bound to do one of two things. Either it moves upward, like smoke, flame, and air when it is under water; or it moves in the opposite direction, downward, like water, parts of earth, and parts of animals and plants. None of these bodies is ever free of these two movements, and it comes to rest only when something blocks its path, like a falling stone that meets the hard surface of the earth and cannot break through it; if it could, it would evidently not turn aside from its movement. That is why, when you lift it, you find it pressing down on you with its inclination downward, seeking to descend. Likewise smoke, as it rises, does not turn aside unless it meets a hard vault that holds it in. Then it bends to the right and left, and once it gets free of that vault it pierces the air as it rises, for the air cannot hold it back. He saw, too, that when a leather skin

is filled with air, tied, and plunged under water, it seeks to rise and presses against the one holding it under, and keeps doing so until it reaches the place of air by coming out from under the water. Then it comes to rest, and the pressure and upward inclination it had before leave it. He looked to see whether he could find a body that was at some time free of either of these two movements, or of the inclination toward one of them. He found none among the bodies around him. He sought it only because he hoped that, by finding it, he would see the nature of body as body, without any of the attributes that are the source of multiplicity attaching to it.

HEAVINESS, LIGHTNESS AND FORM

Every body has corporeality plus something added to it; these additions are the forms of things.

6.8 When this defeated him, he looked at the bodies that carry the fewest attributes, and saw that they too were in no way free of one of these two attributes, which are called heaviness and lightness. So he considered heaviness and lightness: do they belong to body as body, or to some notion added to corporeality? It became clear to him that they belong to a notion added to corporeality. For if they belonged to body as body, no body would exist without having them both. Yet we find that lightness is not found in the heavy, nor heaviness in the light, and both are undoubtedly bodies. Each of them has a notion of its own, not shared with the other and added to its corporeality, and that notion is what makes each differ from the other; were it not for that, they would be one thing in every respect. So it became clear to him that the reality of the heavy and of the light is each composed of two notions. One is what both have in common, the notion of corporeality. The other is what sets the reality of each apart from the other—heaviness in the one and lightness in the other—joined to the notion of corporeality: that is, the notion that moves the one upward and the other downward. In the same way he looked at all other bodies, inanimate and liv-

ing, and saw that the reality of the existence of each is composed of the notion of corporeality and of something else added to corporeality, either one thing or more than one. So the forms of bodies in their variety dawned on him. This was the first of the spiritual world to dawn on him, for these are forms not perceived by the senses but grasped only by a kind of intellectual reflection.

6.9 Among the things that dawned on him from this was that the animal spirit, whose dwelling is the heart—the one described earlier—must also have a notion added to its corporeality, which makes it fit to perform the remarkable acts peculiar to it: the various kinds of sensation, the different modes of perception, and the sorts of movement. That notion is its form and its differentia, by which it is set apart from all other bodies, and it is what the theorists call the animal soul. Likewise the thing that in plants takes the place of the innate heat in animals has something peculiar to it, which is its differentia, and this is what the theorists call the vegetative soul.[2] Likewise all inanimate bodies—whatever in the world of generation and corruption is neither animal nor plant—have something peculiar to them, by which each performs its own particular act, such as the various kinds of movement and the sensible qualities that issue from them. That thing is the differentia of each of them, and it is what the theorists call nature.

6.10 By this inquiry he grasped that the reality of the animal spirit, for which he had always longed, was composed of the notion of corporeality and of another notion added to corporeality; and that the notion of corporeality was shared by it and all other bodies, while the other notion joined to it belonged to it alone. Then the notion of corporeality became of little account to him, and he set it aside. His thought fastened on the second notion, the one called the soul, and he longed to know it with certainty. So he kept his thought fixed on it, and he made the starting point of his inquiry an examination of all bodies, not

2 Differentia (*faṣl*): in logic, the feature that marks off a species from others within the same genus.

insofar as they are bodies, but insofar as they have forms from which follow properties that distinguish them from one another. He pursued this and gathered it all in his mind. He saw that bodies as a whole share in forms from which acts issue. He saw that one group within the whole, while sharing that form with the rest, goes beyond them with another form, from which acts peculiar to it issue. And he saw that a part of that group, while sharing with it in the first and second forms, goes beyond it with a third form, from which acts peculiar to that part issue. For example, all earthly bodies—earth, stones, minerals, plants, animals, and all other heavy bodies—make up one whole that shares in a single form, from which movement downward issues so long as nothing prevents their descent; and whenever they are moved upward by force and then let go, they move downward by their form. One group within this whole, namely plants and animals, while sharing that form with the whole just described, goes beyond it with another form, from which nourishment and growth issue. Nourishment is the nourished thing's replacing what has actually been dissolved from it, by means of the nutritive faculty. That faculty takes the food that is nourishment in potential, which arrives by means of the attractive faculty and has reached full disposition through the digestive faculty, and transforms it into the likeness of the substance of the nourished thing, to preserve the individual and to complete its size. Growth is increase by means of the faculty of growth, which enlarges the dimensions of the body—length, breadth, and depth—in natural proportion, through the food it brings into its parts. These two acts are common to plants and animals, and they undoubtedly issue from a form they have in common, the one called the soul. And a part of this group, namely animals alone, while sharing with the group just described in the first and second forms, goes beyond it with a third form, from which sensation and movement from one place to another issue. He saw that each species of animal has a property by which it stands apart from the other species and is set off as distinct from them. So he knew that this issued from a form peculiar to it,

added to the notion of the form it shares with all other animals; and the same holds for each of the species of plants.

6.11 So it became clear to him that, of these sensible bodies in the world of generation and corruption, the reality of some is made up of many notions added to the notion of corporeality, and that of others of fewer. He knew that knowing what has fewer is easier than knowing what has more, so he sought first to grasp the reality of the thing whose reality is made up of the fewest things. He saw that the realities of animals and plants are made up only of many notions, because of the variety of their acts, so he put off reflecting on their forms. Likewise he saw that some parts of the earth are simpler than others, so he turned to the simplest of them he could find. And likewise he saw that water is something of little composition, because few acts issue from its form; and he saw the same of fire and air. It had already occurred to him earlier that these four change into one another, and that they have one thing they share, namely the notion of corporeality. That thing, he thought, must be free of the notions by which each of the four is distinguished from the others. So it could not move upward or downward, nor be hot or cold, nor moist or dry, for none of these attributes is common to all bodies, and so they do not belong to body as body. If, then, a body could exist with no form in it added to corporeality, none of these attributes would be in it, and no attribute could be in it except one common to all bodies, whatever kinds of form they have taken on. So he looked to see whether he could find a single attribute common to all bodies, living and inanimate. He found nothing common to all bodies except the notion of extension, present in all of them in the three dimensions called length, breadth, and depth. So he knew that this notion belongs to body as body. But his senses never presented him with a body having this attribute alone, with no notion in it added to that extension, and wholly free of all other forms.

MATTER AND FORM

A ball of clay reshaped shows that body is composed of matter and form.

6.12 Next he considered this extension in the three dimensions. Is it the very meaning of body, with nothing else besides? Or is it not? He saw that behind this extension there is something else, the thing in which the extension exists. Extension alone cannot subsist by itself, just as the extended thing cannot subsist by itself without extension. He tested this on some of the sensible bodies that have forms, clay for instance. He saw that if a shape is made from it, say a ball, it has a length, breadth and depth of a certain measure. If that same ball were then taken and reshaped into a cube or an egg, the length, the breadth and the depth would change and take on a measure different from the one they had before. Yet the clay would remain one and the same, unchanged. Still, it must have some length, breadth and depth, of whatever measure, and cannot be stripped of them. Because these succeed one another in it, it became clear to him that they are a thing in their own right. Because it is never wholly stripped of them, it became clear to him that they belong to its reality. This reflection showed him that body, as body, is in truth composed of two things. One plays the part the clay plays for the ball in this example. The other plays the part of the ball's length, breadth and depth, or the cube's, or those of whatever shape it has. Body cannot be understood except as composed of these two, and neither can do without the other. But the one that can change and take many guises in succession, extension, resembles the form that all bodies with forms possess. The one that stays in a single state, which stands in place of the clay above, resembles the corporeality that all bodies with forms possess. This thing that is like the clay in this example is what

the theorists call matter and prime matter (*hylē*), and it is entirely bare of form.[3]

6.13 When his reflection reached this point, he had in some measure left the sensible behind and stood on the borders of the intelligible world. There he felt lonely and longed for the world of the senses he was used to. So he drew back a little and set aside body in the absolute, since it is something the senses cannot perceive or grasp. He took up instead the simplest sensible bodies he had observed, the four on which his reflection had already dwelt. He looked first at water. He saw that when it is left to what its form requires, it shows a perceptible coldness and a tendency to move downward. When it is heated, by fire or by the heat of the sun, the coldness leaves it first, while the tendency to descend remains. When it is heated to excess, the tendency to descend leaves it too, and it begins to tend upward. So the two properties that had always issued from it and from its form were altogether gone. He knew nothing more of its form than that these two actions issued from it. So when these two actions were gone, the form's rule was annulled. The form of water left that body once actions issued from it that belong by nature to another form. Another form came to it that had not been there before, and through that form actions issued from it that could not issue from it while it had its first form.

6.14 So he knew of necessity that everything that comes into being must have something that brings it into being. By this reflection there was imprinted in his soul a maker of the form, imprinted in general terms and without detail. Then he went through the forms he had come to know before, one by one, and saw that they had all come into being and must all have a maker. Next he looked at what forms are in themselves, and saw that they are nothing more than the body's disposition for a given action to issue from it. Water, for instance, when heated to excess, becomes disposed and fit to move upward, and that disposition is its form. For here there is only a body; things per-

3 *Hayūlā*, from the Greek *hylē*, is the philosophers' term for prime matter, the formless substrate that underlies all bodies.

ceived to come from it after they were not, such as qualities and motions; and a maker who brings them about after they were not. A body's fitness for some motions and not others is its disposition by its form. The same became apparent to him in all forms. So it became clear to him that the actions issuing from them are not really theirs. They belong to a Maker who performs through them the actions attributed to them. This idea that dawned on him is what the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) said: "I am his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees." And in the clear verses of the Revelation: "You did not kill them, but God killed them; and you did not throw when you threw, but God threw."[4]

6.15 So much had dawned on him about this Maker, in general and without detail, and he now felt an urgent longing to know Him in detail. Since he had not yet left the world of the senses, he began to look for this freely choosing Agent by way of sensible things, not yet knowing whether He was one or many. He examined all the bodies around him, the ones that had always occupied his thought, and saw that they all come into being at one time and perish at another. Where he had not seen a whole perish, he had seen its parts perish. Water and earth, for instance: he saw their parts perish by fire. Air too he saw perish by intense cold, until snow formed from it and then melted into water. So it was with all the other bodies around him: he saw none that was free of coming into being and of needing the freely choosing Agent. So he set them all aside, and his thought moved on to the heavenly bodies. He reached this stage of reflection at the end of four weeks of years from his birth—that is, twenty-eight years.

4 The first is a saying the Prophet reports from God about the servant God loves. The verse is Quran 8:17.

The Heavens and their Mover

The finitude and roundness of the heavens; unable to decide whether the world is eternal or created, he finds that either way it needs an incorporeal, all-powerful maker—to his thirty-fifth year.

7.1 He knew that the heaven and the stars in it are bodies. They are extended in the three dimensions of length, breadth and depth, and none of them is without this property. Whatever is never without this property is a body, so they are all bodies. Then he wondered whether they extend without end, stretching forever in length, breadth and depth. Or are they finite, bounded by limits where they stop, beyond which there can be no extension at all? He was somewhat perplexed by this. Then, by the strength of his reflection and the sharpness of his mind, he saw that an infinite body is absurd, an impossibility, a notion that cannot be conceived. This judgment was strengthened for him by many arguments that occurred to him in his private thoughts. He reasoned like this: "This heavenly body is finite on the side next to me, the side my senses have reached. Of that I have no doubt, since I perceive it with my eyes. As for the opposite side, where doubt creeps in, I also know that it cannot extend without end. Suppose I imagine two lines starting from this finite side and running through the body's thickness without end, as far as the body extends. Then I imagine that a large piece is cut from one of the two lines at its finite end. What remains is taken, and the end where the cut was made is laid against the end of the uncut line, so that the shortened line lies along the uncut one. Then the mind travels with them in this way toward

the side said to be infinite. Either we find the two lines stretching on forever without end, neither falling short of the other, so that the line from which a piece was cut equals the line from which nothing was cut—which is absurd. Or the shortened line does not stretch on with the other forever. It stops short of its course and ceases to extend alongside it, and so it is finite. Then, if the piece first cut from it, which was itself finite, is restored to it, the whole line becomes finite. Now it neither falls short of the other, uncut line nor exceeds it. So it is equal to that line, and it is finite; therefore that line too is finite. So the body in which these lines are supposed is finite. These lines can be supposed in any body, so every body is finite. If, then, we suppose a body to be infinite, we have supposed something absurd and impossible."

7.2 His superior natural disposition had awakened to an argument of this kind, and it was now established for him that the body of the heaven is finite. So he wanted to know what shape it has and how it is bounded by the surfaces that limit it. He looked first at the sun, the moon and the other stars, and saw that they all rise in the east and set in the west. Those that passed directly overhead he saw tracing a great circle. Those that inclined from the zenith to the north or the south traced a smaller circle. The farther a star lay from the zenith toward either side, the smaller its circle compared with that of a nearer one. In the end the smallest circles on which the stars move were two: one around the south pole, the circuit of Canopus, and the other around the north pole, the circuit of the two Calves.[1] Because he lived on the equator, as we described at the start, all these circles stood upright on the plane of his horizon, alike in the south and in the north, and both poles were visible to him. He would watch. When one star rose on a large circle and another on a small circle, and they rose together, he saw them set together. This held for him for all the stars and at all times. So it became clear to him that the sphere is shaped like a ball.

1 Canopus (Suhayl) is the bright southern star; the two Calves (al-Farqadān) are the two stars that guard the pole in the Little Bear.

This belief was strengthened when he saw the sun, the moon and the other stars return to the east after setting in the west. He also saw that they looked to his eye one and the same size when rising, at their highest point and when setting. If their motion were not spherical, they would inevitably be nearer his eye at some times than at others. Then their sizes and magnitudes would vary to his eye, and he would see them larger when near than when far, since their distances from the center would vary, as they do not on the first supposition. Since nothing of the kind happened, the spherical shape was confirmed for him. He kept examining the motion of the moon and saw that it goes from west to east, and so do the motions of the planets. In this way a good deal of astronomy became clear to him. It became evident to him that their motions can only come about through many spheres, all contained within a single sphere, the highest, which moves the whole from east to west in a day and a night. To explain how he progressed and what he came to know would take long. It is set down in books, and for our purpose we need only as much as we have given.

7.3 So he arrived at this knowledge. He grasped that the sphere as a whole, with everything it contains, is like a single thing whose parts are joined to one another. All the bodies he had studied earlier, such as earth, water, air, plants and animals, lie within it and not outside it. The whole most resembles an individual animal. The shining stars in it are like the animal's senses. The various spheres joined to one another are like its limbs. The world of generation and corruption inside it is like the various wastes and fluids in an animal's belly, in which animals are often generated too, just as they are in the greater world.

ETERNAL OR CREATED?

He cannot decide whether the world had a beginning, but finds both views require an incorporeal Agent.

7.4 It was now clear to him that the whole was in truth like a single individual, standing in need of a freely choosing Agent. Its many parts had become one for him by the same kind of reflection through which the bodies in the world of generation and corruption had become one. So he reflected on the world as a whole. Had it come into being after it was not, emerging into existence after nonexistence? Or had it always existed in the past, never preceded by nonexistence in any way? He was in doubt about this, and neither judgment outweighed the other for him. Whenever he resolved to believe in its eternity, many objections confronted him. There was the impossibility of an existence without end, shown by the same kind of reasoning through which an infinite body had proved impossible for him. He also saw that this existence is never free of things that come into being, so it cannot precede them; and what cannot precede the things that come into being has itself come into being. Whenever he resolved to believe that the world had come into being, other objections confronted him. He saw that its coming into being after it was not can only be understood to mean that time preceded it. But time is part of the world and inseparable from it, so the world's coming after time cannot be understood. He also said: "If it came into being, it must have something that brought it into being. Why did this maker bring it into being now and not before? Was it because of something that befell Him, when there was nothing there but Him? Or because of a change in His essence? If so, what brought that change about?" He went on reflecting on this for several years. The arguments kept canceling one another out, and neither belief outweighed the other for him.

7.5 When this had worn him out, he began to consider what follows from each of the two beliefs; perhaps what follows from

both would be one and the same. He saw that if he believed the world had come into being and emerged into existence after nonexistence, certain things necessarily followed. It could not emerge into existence by itself, so it must have an Agent who brought it into existence. That Agent could not be perceived by any of the senses. If He were perceived by any of the senses, He would be a body. If He were a body, He would be part of the world, He would have come into being, and He would need a maker. If that second maker were also a body, it would need a third, and the third a fourth, and so on in an endless chain—which is absurd. So the world must have an Agent who is not a body. If He is not a body, there is no way to perceive Him by any of the senses, for the five senses perceive only bodies or what attaches to bodies. If He cannot be sensed, He cannot be imagined either, for imagining is nothing but calling up the forms of sensible things after they are gone. If He is not a body, all the attributes of bodies are impossible for Him. The first attribute of bodies is extension in length, breadth and depth, and He is far above it and above all the attributes of bodies that follow from it. And if He is the Agent of the world, He is surely able to make it and knows it: "Will He who created not know, when He is the Subtle, the All-Aware?"[2]

7.6 He also saw what follows if he believed the world to be eternal, not preceded by nonexistence and always as it is. Then its motion is eternal, without end on the side of its beginning, since no rest preceded it from which it could have begun. Every motion must necessarily have a mover. The mover is either a power pervading some body, whether the moving body itself or another body outside it, or a power that neither pervades a body nor is spread through it. Every power pervading a body and spread through it is divided when the body is divided and doubled when it is doubled. Take the weight in a stone, which moves it downward. If the stone is split in two, its weight is split in two. If another stone like it is added, the weight increases by as much again. If the stone could keep increasing without end,

2 Quran 67:14.

the weight would increase without end. If the stone reached some size and stopped, the weight would reach that limit and stop too. But it has been demonstrated that every body is necessarily finite. So every power in a body is necessarily finite. If, then, we find a power that performs an action without end, it is a power that is not in a body. Now we find that the sphere moves forever, with a motion that has no end and no break, since we have supposed it eternal and without beginning. It follows that the power that moves it is neither in its own body nor in a body outside it. It belongs, then, to something free of bodies and not described by any attribute of corporeality. In his first reflection on the world of generation and corruption it had dawned on him that the true existence of every body comes from its form, which is its disposition for various kinds of motion. The existence a body has from its matter is weak and barely perceptible. So the existence of the whole world comes from its disposition to be moved by this Mover. This Mover is free of matter and of the attributes of bodies, too exalted to be perceived by the senses or reached by the imagination—glory be to Him. And since He is the Agent of the motions of the sphere in all their variety, acting without flaw or flagging, He is surely able to do it and knows it.

7.7 So by this path his reflection arrived where it had arrived by the first, and his doubt about whether the world was eternal or had come into being did him no harm. On either supposition it was established for him that there exists an Agent who is not a body. He is neither joined to a body nor separate from it, neither inside it nor outside it. Joining and separation, inside and outside, are all attributes of bodies, and He is far above them.

AFTER IN ESSENCE, NOT IN TIME

All things depend on the Agent as a held object follows the moving hand.

7.8 The matter of every body needs form, for it subsists only through form and has no reality without it. Form can exist only

through this freely choosing Agent. So it became clear to him that all existing things depend on this Agent for their existence, and that none of them subsists except through Him. He is therefore their cause and they are His effects. This holds whether they came into existence after being preceded by nonexistence, or have no beginning in time and were never preceded by nonexistence. In either case they are effects, dependent on the Agent, their existence bound to Him. Were it not for His permanence, they would not endure. Were it not for His existence, they would not exist. Were it not for His eternity, they would not be eternal. And He, in His essence, has no need of them and is free of them. How could it be otherwise? It has been demonstrated that His power and might are infinite, while all bodies are finite and come to an end, as is whatever is joined to them or bound up with them even slightly. So the whole world is His act and His creation, with its heavens and earth and stars, and what lies between them, above them and below them. It comes after Him in essence, though not in time. It is as when you take some body in your grasp and then move your hand. The body inevitably moves, following the motion of your hand. Its motion comes after the motion of your hand in essence, though not in time, for both begin together. In the same way the whole world is the effect and creation of this Agent, without time: "His command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it 'Be!' and it is."[3]

7.9 Once he saw that all existing things are His act, he went through them again from that standpoint, reflecting on the power of their Maker. He marveled at the wonder of His workmanship, the subtlety of His wisdom and the precision of His knowledge. In the least of existing things, let alone the greatest, he found such traces of wisdom and marvels of workmanship that he was filled with wonder. It was confirmed for him that this could issue only from a freely choosing Agent of utmost perfection: "not an atom's weight escapes Him in the heavens or on earth, nor anything smaller than that or greater." Then he considered all the kinds of animals, and how He gave each thing its

3 Quran 36:82.

form, then guided it to use it. Had He not guided the animal to use the limbs created for it for the benefits they were meant to serve, it would have got no good from them, and they would have been a burden to it. From this he knew that He is the most generous of the generous and the most merciful of the merciful.[4] From then on, whenever he looked at any existing thing that had beauty, splendor, perfection, strength or any excellence whatsoever, he reflected and knew that it came from the outpouring of that freely choosing Agent, majestic is His majesty, from His generosity and from His action. So he knew that what belongs to Him in His essence is greater than it, more perfect, more complete, more beautiful, more splendid and more lasting, and that there is no proportion between the one and the other. He went on tracing all the attributes of perfection. He saw that they belong to Him and issue from Him, and that He is more entitled to them than anyone else who is described by them. He traced all the attributes of deficiency, and saw that He is free of them and far above them. How could He not be free of them, when deficiency means nothing but sheer nonexistence or what is bound up with nonexistence? And how could nonexistence have any connection with, or any hold on, Him who is pure Existence, the Necessarily Existent by His essence, who gives every existing thing its existence? There is no existence but He. He is existence, He is perfection, He is completeness, He is beauty, He is splendor, He is power, He is knowledge, He is He, and "everything perishes except His face."[5]

7.10 His knowledge reached this point at the end of five weeks of years from his birth—that is, thirty-five years. What had taken root in his heart concerning this Agent now kept him from thinking of anything but Him, and he lost interest in examining and investigating existing things. His eye could no longer fall on anything without his seeing in it the trace of the workmanship. At once his thought would pass to the Maker, leaving the thing made. So his longing for Him grew intense. His heart was wholly

4 Quran 34:3. "Gave each thing its form, then guided it" echoes Quran 20:50.
5 Quran 28:88.

torn away from the lower, sensible world and attached itself to the higher, intelligible world.

The Soul and the Three Imitations

He knows God by an immaterial self that cannot perish; the fate of souls after death; and the three ways he must imitate the animals, the heavenly bodies and the Necessary Being.

8.1 He had now gained knowledge of this exalted Being, whose existence is firm and has no cause, while He is the cause of the existence of all things. Next he wanted to know by what he had gained this knowledge, and by what faculty he had perceived this Being. He went through all his senses: hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch. He saw that none of them perceives anything but a body or what is in a body. Hearing perceives only sounds, which arise from the waves set up in the air when bodies strike one another. Sight perceives only colors; smell perceives odors; taste perceives flavors; touch perceives hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness. Likewise the faculty of imagination perceives nothing that lacks length, breadth and depth. All these objects of perception are attributes of bodies, and these senses can perceive nothing else. That is because they are faculties spread through bodies and divided when the bodies are divided, so they perceive only a divisible body. When such a faculty is spread through something divisible, whatever it perceives is necessarily divided as it is divided. So every faculty in a body perceives only a body or what is in a body. Now it has become clear that this Necessarily Existent Being is free of the attributes of bodies in every respect. So the only way to perceive Him is by something that is not a body, nor a faculty in a body, and has no connection of any kind with bodies. It is neither inside them nor outside them, neither joined to them nor separate from them. It

had already become clear that he had perceived Him by his own essence, and that knowledge of Him had taken root in him. So it became clear to him that the self by which he perceived Him is something incorporeal, to which no attribute of bodies can apply. All the corporeal things he perceived on the outward side of his self are not the reality of his self. The reality of his self is that thing by which he perceived the absolute Being, the Necessarily Existent.

8.2 Once he knew that his self was not this corporeal thing that he perceived with his senses and that his skin enclosed, his body as a whole became of little account to him. He began to reflect on that noble self by which he had perceived that noble, Necessarily Existent Being. With his self he examined that noble self: could it perish, or be corrupted and pass away, or does it last forever? He saw that corruption and passing away belong only to bodies. A body casts off one form and puts on another, as when water becomes air and air becomes water, or a plant becomes earth or ash and earth becomes a plant. That is what corruption means. But a thing that is not a body, that needs no body in order to subsist, and that is wholly free of everything bodily—its corruption is utterly inconceivable.

THE FATE OF SOULS AFTER DEATH

Souls that knew God and turned away suffer; those that turned toward Him enjoy endless pleasure.

8.3 Once it was established for him that his true self could not be corrupted, he wanted to know what its state would be when it cast the body aside and left it, for it had already become clear to him that it casts the body aside only when the body is no longer fit to be its instrument. So he examined all the perceptive faculties. He saw that each of them perceives at one time potentially and at another actually. When the eye is shut or turned away from what can be seen, it perceives potentially—and "perceives potentially" means that it does not perceive now but will perceive in the future. When it is open and facing what can be

seen, it perceives actually—and "perceives actually" means that it is perceiving now. Each of these faculties, likewise, is now potential, now actual. If one of them has never perceived actually, then as long as it remains potential it does not yearn to perceive its particular object, for it has not yet come to know it—like someone born blind. But if it has at some time perceived actually and then become potential, then as long as it remains potential it longs to perceive actually, because it has come to know that object, grown attached to it and come to yearn for it—like someone who could see and then went blind: he never stops longing for the things of sight. The more perfect, splendid and beautiful the object perceived, the greater the longing for it and the sharper the pain of its loss. That is why one who loses his sight after having seen suffers more than one who loses his sense of smell: the things sight perceives are more perfect and more beautiful than those smell perceives. So if among things there is a thing whose perfection has no limit, whose beauty, loveliness and splendor have no bound, a thing beyond splendor and beauty, such that there is no perfection, beauty, splendor or loveliness in existence that does not issue from it and overflow from it—then whoever loses the perception of that thing after having come to know it must, so long as he is deprived of it, suffer pains without end; just as whoever perceives it constantly enjoys a pleasure that is never broken, a bliss with nothing beyond it, a joy and gladness without end.

8.4 It had already become clear to him that the Necessarily Existent Being is qualified by every attribute of perfection, exempt and free from every attribute of deficiency; and that the thing by which one attains the perception of Him is unlike bodies and is not corrupted when they are. From this it became evident to him that when someone with such a self, fitted for such perception, casts off the body at death, his case is one of these. Either, before that, during the time he was governing the body, he never came to know this Necessarily Existent Being, never attained conjunction with Him and never heard of Him. Such a one, on leaving the body, does not attain conjunction

with that Being, nor does he suffer at its loss. As for the bodily faculties, they all cease when the body ceases, so he does not long for what those faculties demanded either, nor yearn for it, nor suffer at its loss. This is the state of all the beasts that lack reason, whether they have human form or not. Or, before that, during the time he was governing the body, he came to know this Being and learned of His perfection, majesty, sovereignty and power, but turned away from Him and followed his own desires until death came upon him in that condition. Then he is deprived of the vision while still longing for it, and he remains in long torment and pains without end. Either he is freed from those pains after a long struggle and beholds what he had longed for, or he remains in his pains forever—according to his disposition toward one or the other during his bodily life. But whoever came to know this Necessarily Existent Being before leaving the body, turned to Him with his whole being, held fast to reflection on His majesty, beauty and splendor, and never turned away from Him until death came upon him while he was turned toward Him in actual vision—such a one, on leaving the body, remains in pleasure without end, in bliss, gladness and lasting joy. For his vision of that Necessarily Existent Being is unbroken, and that vision is free from all clouding and taint; and he is rid of the sensory things that these bodily faculties demand, which, compared with that state, are pains, evils and hindrances.

8.5 So it became clear to him that the perfection and pleasure of his self lie only in the vision of that Necessarily Existent Being, constantly, in actual vision forever, without turning away from Him for the blink of an eye—so that death would find him in a state of actual vision and his pleasure would continue with no pain coming between. It was to this that al-Junayd, the master and leader of the Sufis, alluded at his death, when he said to his companions: "This is a moment to be seized. God is greatest!" and entered into prayer. Then Hayy began to consider how he might keep up this actual vision, so that no turning away would occur. He held fast to reflection on that Being every hour.

But no sooner did some sensible thing cross his sight, or the cry of some animal pierce his hearing, or some image present itself to him, or a pain strike one of his limbs, or hunger, thirst, cold or heat afflict him, or he need to get up to relieve himself, than his reflection was disrupted and he fell from the state he had been in; and he could return to his state of vision only with effort.[1] He was afraid that death might take him unawares while he was turned away, and that he would pass into lasting misery and the pain of the veil. His condition troubled him, and he could find no remedy.

8.6 So he began to survey every species of animal, observing what they did and what they strove for, in the hope of noticing that some of them had become aware of this Being and were striving toward Him, so that he might learn from them what would save him. But he saw that they all strove only to obtain their food and satisfy their appetites—for food, drink, mating, shade and warmth—and toiled at this night and day until their death and the end of their span. He saw none of them turn from this course or strive for anything else at any time. From this it was plain to him that they had not become aware of that Being, nor longed for Him, nor come to know Him in any way, and that all of them were headed for nonexistence, or for a state like nonexistence. Having reached this judgment about animals, he knew that it applied all the more to plants. Plants have only some of the perceptions that animals have, and if the more perfect in perception did not attain this knowledge, the less perfect was even less likely to attain it. Besides, he saw that the activities of plants go no further than nourishment and reproduction.

8.7 After that he looked at the stars and the spheres. He saw that their motions were all ordered, running in regular sequence, and that they were transparent and luminous, far from admitting change or corruption. So he strongly conjectured that they have essences besides their bodies, which know that Necessarily Existent Being, and that these knowing

1 Al-Junayd of Baghdad (d. AD 910), revered by later Sufis as the master of their path.

essences are not bodies, nor imprinted in bodies—like his own knowing self. For how could they not have such essences, free of corporeality, when someone like himself has one—weak as he is, in great need of sensible things, one of the bodies that perish? With all his deficiency, nothing had prevented his self from being free of bodies and incorruptible. From this it became clear to him that the heavenly bodies have a better claim to such a self, and he knew that they know that Necessarily Existent Being and behold Him constantly and actually. For the hindrances that cut him off from constant vision—the accidents of the senses—have no counterpart in the heavenly bodies.

8.8 Then he wondered: why, among all the species of animal, had he been singled out for this self, by which he resembled the heavenly bodies? From the elements and their transformation into one another, it had earlier become clear to him that nothing on the face of the earth keeps its form; generation and corruption succeed each other in it forever. Most of these bodies are mixed, compounded of contrary things, and that is why they end in corruption. None of them is pure; and whatever comes close to being pure and unmixed, without admixture, is very far from corruption, like the substance of gold and of ruby. The heavenly bodies, by contrast, are simple and pure; that is why they are far from corruption, and forms do not succeed one another in them. It also became clear to him that among all the bodies in the world of generation and corruption, some have their reality constituted by a single form added to the notion of corporeality—these are the four elements—while others have it constituted by more than that, like animals and plants. The fewer the forms that constitute a thing's reality, the fewer its activities and the farther it is from life; if it lacks form altogether, it has no path to life and is in a state like nonexistence. The more the forms that constitute its reality, the more its activities and the deeper it has entered into life. And if its form is such that it can never be separated from the matter proper to it, then life is at its utmost in manifestness, permanence and strength. The thing wholly without form is prime matter, or

matter. There is no life in it at all, and it is like nonexistence. The things constituted by a single form are the four elements. They occupy the lowest rank of existence in the world of generation and corruption, and from them are compounded the things that have many forms. These elements have very feeble life, since each moves with only one motion. Their life is feeble because each has a contrary in open opposition to it, which runs counter to the demands of its nature and seeks to change its form; so its existence is insecure and its life weak. Plants have stronger life, and animals more manifest life.

8.9 For when one of these compounds is dominated by the nature of a single element, that element, by its strength in it, overpowers the natures of the other elements and cancels their powers, and the compound then counts as the dominant element. So it merits only a little life, just as that element merits only a little, feeble life. But when a compound is not dominated by the nature of any one element, the elements in it are balanced and equal in strength. None cancels the power of another more than that other cancels its own; rather, they act on one another equally, so that the action of no element is more manifest and none gains mastery over the compound. It is then far from resembling any one of the elements; it is as though its form had no contrary, and so it becomes fit for life. And the greater this equilibrium—the more complete and the farther from deviation—the further it is from having any contrary, and the more perfect its life.

8.10 Now the animal spirit, whose dwelling is the heart, is highly balanced: it is finer than earth and water and coarser than fire and air. So it stands as a mean and is not clearly contrary to any of the elements, and that is what disposed it for the form of animality. He saw, then, that it must follow that the most balanced of these animal spirits would be disposed for the most perfect life possible in the world of generation and corruption; that such a spirit would come close to being said to have no contrary to its form, and in this would resemble those heavenly bodies whose forms have no contrary. The spirit of that animal,

being truly a mean between the elements, would move neither absolutely upward nor downward. Indeed, if it could be placed midway between the center and the highest point that fire reaches upward, without suffering corruption, it would stay there, seeking neither to rise nor to fall. If it moved from place to place, it would move around the center, as the heavenly bodies move; if it moved where it stood, it would turn upon itself; and it would be spherical in shape, for nothing else is possible. So it closely resembles the heavenly bodies.

8.11 He had considered the conditions of the animals and seen nothing in them to suggest that any had become aware of the Necessarily Existent Being, while he knew of his own self that it had become aware of Him. So he concluded with certainty that he was the animal with the balanced spirit, resembling all the heavenly bodies. It became clear to him that he was a species distinct from all other species of animal, created for another end and prepared for a great matter for which no other species of animal had been prepared. It was honor enough that the lower of his two parts, the bodily, should be the thing most like the heavenly substances, which lie outside the world of generation and corruption and are free from the accidents of deficiency, transformation and change. As for the nobler of his two parts, it is the thing by which he knew the Necessarily Existent Being. This knowing thing is lordly and divine. It does not change, and corruption does not touch it. It cannot be described by anything that bodies are described by; it is not perceived by any of the senses, nor imagined; and there is no instrument for knowing it other than itself—it is reached through itself. It is the knower, the known and the knowing; it is the one who knows, the knowledge and the object of knowledge. There is no distinction in any of this, for distinction and separation are properties of bodies and of what attaches to them; and there is no body there, nor any property of body, nor anything attached to body.

8.12 When it had become clear to him in what respect he alone among all kinds of animal resembled the heavenly bodies, he saw that it was his duty to take them as his model, to emulate

their actions and to imitate them as far as he could. He saw likewise that by his nobler part, by which he had known the Necessarily Existent Being, he bore some likeness to Him, inasmuch as that part is free of the attributes of bodies, just as the Necessarily Existent is free of them. So he saw that he must also strive to acquire His attributes for himself in whatever way he could: to take on His character, to follow His actions, to labor at carrying out His will, to surrender all to Him, and to accept all His decrees wholeheartedly, outwardly and inwardly—so that he would rejoice in them even when they brought pain or harm to his body, or destroyed it altogether. He saw likewise that by his base part, which belongs to the world of generation and corruption, he bore a likeness to all the other species of animal. This is the dark, dense body that demands of him every kind of sensible thing—food, drink and mating. He saw that this body had not been created for him in vain, nor joined to him for no purpose, and that he must look after it and keep it in good order; and he could look after it only by actions resembling those of the other animals.

THE THREE IMITATIONS

He must imitate the animals, the heavenly bodies and the Necessarily Existent Being, each in its measure.

8.13 So the actions he had to perform came, in his view, to aim at three ends: an action by which he imitates the animals that lack reason; an action by which he imitates the heavenly bodies; and an action by which he imitates the Necessarily Existent Being. The first imitation is required of him insofar as he has a dark body, with divided limbs, different faculties and manifold impulses. The second is required of him insofar as he has the animal spirit, whose dwelling is the heart and which is the source of the rest of the body and of the faculties in it. The third is required of him insofar as he is himself—that is, insofar as he is the self by which he knew that Necessarily Existent Being. He had already understood that his happiness, and his escape from

misery, lay only in constant vision of this Necessarily Existent Being, so that he would never turn away from Him for the blink of an eye.

8.14 Then he considered how he might achieve this constancy, and his reflection showed him that he must labor at these three kinds of imitation. The first imitation brings him none of this vision. On the contrary, it diverts him from it and stands in its way, since it is a dealing with sensible things, and all sensible things are veils that come between him and that vision. This imitation is needed only to preserve the animal spirit, through which the second imitation, of the heavenly bodies, is achieved. Necessity calls for it on that account, even though it is not free of that harm. The second imitation brings him a great share of constant vision, but a vision mixed with some admixture: for whoever beholds constantly in that manner is, along with that vision, aware of his own self and turns his attention to it, as will become clear later. The third imitation brings pure vision and complete absorption, with no attention in any way to anything but the Necessarily Existent Being. One who beholds this vision has lost his own self—it has vanished and come to nothing—and so too all other essences, many or few, except the essence of the One, the True, the Necessarily Existent, majestic, exalted and mighty is He.

8.15 So it became clear to him that his ultimate goal was this third imitation; that he could attain it only after long training and labor in the second; and that he could sustain that long labor only by means of the first. He knew that the first imitation, though a hindrance in itself, is a help incidentally, not essentially—and in any case necessary. So he bound himself to allow himself no share of this first imitation beyond what necessity required: the bare sufficiency without which the animal spirit cannot survive. He found that necessity, for the survival of this spirit, called for two things. One supplies it from within and replaces what it has lost: this is food. The other protects it from without and wards off every kind of harm—cold and heat, rain, the scorching sun, harmful animals and the like. He saw that if

he took what he needed of these at random, however it came, he might fall into excess and take more than enough, and so, without realizing it, work against himself. He saw that prudence lay in setting himself limits he would not pass and measures he would not exceed. And it became plain to him that these rules must concern the kind of thing he ate—what it should be—its quantity, and the interval between one return to it and the next.

8.16 First he considered the kinds of thing he could eat, and found them to be of three sorts. There are plants not yet fully ripe, that have not reached their full completion: the various fresh greens that can serve as food. There are the fruits of plants that have reached their completion and put forth their seed, so that another of their kind may grow from it and their kind be preserved: the various fruits, fresh and dried. And there are animals of the kinds that are eaten, whether of land or sea. He was already certain that all these kinds were the work of that Necessarily Existent Being, nearness to whom, and the effort to resemble Him, had proved to be his happiness. Eating them inevitably cuts them off from their perfection and comes between them and the end intended for them. That would be an interference with the work of the Agent, and such interference runs counter to the nearness to Him and resemblance to Him that he was seeking. He saw that the right course, were it possible, would be to abstain from food altogether. But that was not possible for him, for if he abstained, his body would be corrupted, and that would be a graver interference with his Maker than the first, since he was nobler than those other things whose corruption is the cause of his survival. So he accepted the lesser of the two harms and allowed himself the lighter of the two interferences. He decided that when these kinds were not all to be had, he would take whichever of them came easily to hand, in the amount that will be explained below. If they were all to be had, however, he should take care and choose from them what could be taken with no great interference with the Agent's work: for instance, the flesh of fruits that have reached full ripeness, whose seeds are ready to produce their like—on condition that

he preserve those seeds, neither eating them nor spoiling them nor throwing them where nothing can grow, such as bare rock, salt flats and the like. If fruits with nourishing flesh of this kind —apples, pears, plums and the like—could not be found, he might take either fruits of which only the seed itself is eaten, like walnuts and chestnuts, or greens that had not yet reached their full growth. The condition for him in both cases was to seek out the most plentiful and the most prolific, and neither to tear up their roots nor to wipe out their seed. If these were lacking, he might take animals or their eggs. The condition for him in the case of animals was to take from the most plentiful and never to wipe out a species entirely. This is what he decided about the kinds of thing he would eat.

8.17 As for quantity, he decided it should be just enough to stop the gap of hunger and no more. As for the interval between one return and the next, he decided that once he had taken the food he needed, he would rest content with it and seek nothing more until he felt a weakness that kept him from some of the actions required of him in the second imitation, which will be described below. As for what necessity required, for the survival of the animal spirit, to protect it from without, that was an easy matter for him. He was clothed in skins and had a dwelling that sheltered him from whatever came at him from outside. He was content with that and saw no need to busy himself with it; and in his eating he kept to the rules he had laid down for himself, which have been set out above.

8.18 Then he took up the second action: imitating the heavenly bodies, following their example, taking on their qualities and tracing their attributes. He found that these fell into three kinds. The first kind: their attributes in relation to the world of generation and corruption beneath them—what they give it: heating, essentially, and cooling, incidentally; illumination; rarefying and condensing; and all the other effects they produce in it, by which it is made ready for spiritual forms to flow upon it from the Necessarily Existent Agent. The second kind: their attributes in themselves, such as being transparent, luminous and pure,

free of all turbidity and every kind of defilement, and moving in circles, some about their own center and some about the center of another. The third kind: their attributes in relation to the Necessarily Existent Being, such as beholding Him in constant vision and never turning away from Him, longing for Him, acting by His decree, being made to serve the fulfillment of His will, and moving only by His wish and within His grasp. So he set about imitating them as far as he could in each of these three kinds.

8.19 As for the first kind, his imitation of them in it was this. He bound himself never to see any animal or plant in need, afflicted, harmed or hindered, when he was able to relieve it, without relieving it. So whenever his eye fell on a plant that something had screened from the sun, or that another plant had wound itself around and was harming, or that was so parched it was close to ruin, he removed the screen if it was the kind of thing that could be removed. He separated it from what was harming it with a barrier that would not hurt the harmer, and he saw to its watering as far as he could. Whenever his eye fell on an animal that a beast of prey had run down, or that something had caught hold of, or that had thorns stuck in it, or that had something hurtful fallen into its eyes or ears, or that was suffering thirst or hunger, he took it upon himself to remove all of that from it as best he could, and he fed it and gave it water. Whenever his eye fell on water flowing to give drink to a plant or an animal whose course had been blocked by some obstacle, such as a stone that had fallen into it or a bank that had collapsed on it, he cleared it all away. He kept going further and further in this kind of imitation until he reached its utmost limit.

8.20 As for the second kind, his imitation of them in it was this. He bound himself to constant purity. He removed dirt and filth from his body, washed with water most of the time, and cleaned his nails, his teeth and the hidden folds of his body. He perfumed them with whatever fragrant plants and aromatic resins he could find, and he kept his clothing clean and scented, until

his whole person shone with beauty and loveliness, cleanness and fragrance. Along with this he took up the various kinds of circular motion. At times he would walk around the island, circling its shore and roaming its outer reaches. At times he would circle his house, or some hillock, a set number of rounds, either walking or at a trot. And at times he would spin around on himself until he lost consciousness.

8.21 As for the third kind, his imitation of them in it was this. He would keep his thought fixed on that Necessarily Existent Being. Then he would cut his ties to sensible things, close his eyes, stop his ears, and turn away with all his strength from following the imagination, striving with all his power to think of nothing but Him and to associate no one with Him. To help himself in this he would spin around on himself and drive himself on in it. When he spun hard, all sensible things vanished from him. The imagination weakened, along with all the other faculties that need bodily organs, and the activity of his essence, which is free of body, grew strong. At certain times his thought would be cleared of all admixture, and through it he would see the Necessarily Existent Being. Then the bodily faculties would come back at him, spoil his state and throw him back down to the lowest of the low, and he would start all over again. If weakness overtook him and cut him off from his aim, he would take some food under the conditions already described, and then go back to his business of imitating the heavenly bodies in the three ways described.[2] He kept at this for some time, struggling with his bodily faculties as they struggled with him, contending with them as they contended with him. At the times when he got the upper hand over them and his thought was cleared of admixture, something of the states of those who attain the third imitation would dawn on him.

2 "The lowest of the low" echoes Quran 95:5.

The Vision

Stripping away everything bodily, he loses himself in the One and sees the separate intellects of the spheres like images of the sun in a series of mirrors—at fifty.

9.1 Then he began to seek the third imitation and to strive to attain it, and so he reflected on the attributes of the Necessarily Existent Being. During his theoretical study, before he began on practice, it had become clear to him that these are of two kinds. Some are positive attributes, such as knowledge, power and wisdom. Others are negative attributes, such as His transcendence above bodily things, what attaches to them, and whatever is connected with them, however remotely. He had also seen that the positive attributes must be held to this same transcendence, so that there is nothing in them of the attributes of bodies, among which is multiplicity. His essence, then, is not made multiple by these positive attributes. Rather, they all come back to a single meaning, which is the reality of His essence.

9.2 So he began to seek how to imitate Him in each of these two kinds. As for the positive attributes, he knew that they all come back to the reality of His essence and that there is no multiplicity in them in any way, since multiplicity is an attribute of bodies. He also knew that His knowledge of His essence is not a meaning added to His essence: His essence is His knowledge of His essence, and His knowledge of His essence is His essence. So it became clear to him that if he himself could know His essence, the knowledge by which he knew His essence would not be a meaning added to His essence; it would be He. He concluded that to imitate Him in the positive attributes is simply to

know Him, without associating with Him anything of the attributes of bodies, and he set himself to this. As for the negative attributes, they all come back to transcendence above corporeality, so he began to strip the attributes of corporeality from his own essence. He had already shed many of them in his earlier discipline, by which he had aimed at imitating the heavenly bodies, but some traces remained. One was circular motion, and motion is among the most distinctive attributes of bodies. Another was his care for animals and plants, his compassion for them and his concern to remove what hindered them. These too are attributes of bodies, since he first perceives such things only through a bodily faculty and then labors over them through a bodily faculty as well. So he set about shedding all of this from himself, since none of it befitted the state he was now seeking. He kept to stillness at the bottom of his cave, head bowed, eyes lowered, turning away from all sensible things and bodily faculties. His concern and his thought were gathered on the Necessarily Existent Being alone, with no partner. Whenever anything else came into his imagination, he drove it out of his imagination as best he could and pushed it away. He trained himself in this and kept at it for a long time, so that several days would pass during which he neither ate nor moved. In the course of this hard struggle, all essences would at times vanish from his memory and thought except his own. That did not vanish from him even when he was absorbed in the vision of the First, True, Necessarily Existent Being. This distressed him, for he knew it was an admixture in the pure vision and a sharing in his contemplation.

WHOSE IS THE KINGDOM TODAY?

His self and all things vanish, and he hears the divine voice and sees the unseeable.

He went on seeking annihilation of his self and purity in the vision of the Truth until it came to him. The heavens and the earth and what lies between them vanished from his memory and

thought, and with them all the spiritual forms, the bodily faculties, and all the powers separate from matter, that is, the essences that know the Existent. His own self vanished among those essences. Everything faded and dissolved and became scattered dust, and nothing remained but the One, the True, the Existent whose existence is firm. And He said, with His speech that is not a meaning added to His essence: "Whose is the kingdom today? God's, the One, the Overwhelming." Hayy understood His words and heard His call, and his not knowing language or how to speak did not keep him from understanding. He was absorbed in this state, and he saw what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has occurred to the heart of man.[1]

9.3 So do not set your heart on a description of something that has not occurred to the heart of man. Many things that do occur to human hearts are hard to describe. How much more so something that cannot possibly occur to the heart, that is neither of its world nor of its level? By "heart" I do not mean the bodily heart, nor the spirit in its cavity, but the form of that spirit, which spreads with its faculties through the human body. Each of these three is called "heart," but there is no way for that thing to occur to any of the three, and only what has occurred to them can be expressed. Whoever tries to express that state attempts the impossible. He is like someone who wants to taste colors as colors and asks that black be sweet or sour. Even so, we will not leave you without hints by which we point to the wonders he saw in that station. They are offered by way of illustration, not as a knock at the door of reality, for there is no way to verify what is in that station except by arriving at it. So lend the ear of your heart now, and fix the eye of your reason on what I am pointing to. Perhaps you will find in it guidance that sets you on the highway of the path. My condition is that you not ask me at this time for any further explanation by word of mouth beyond what I commit to these pages. The field is narrow, and it is dan-

1 "Scattered dust" echoes Quran 25:23; the words heard are Quran 40:16. "What no eye has seen…" echoes a saying of the Prophet in which God describes the reward of the righteous.

gerous to impose words on a thing whose nature is not to be put into words. So I say:

9.4 When he had passed into annihilation, lost to his own essence and to all essences, and saw nothing in existence but the One, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, and had seen what he saw, he returned to regarding other things on coming out of that state, which resembles intoxication. Then it occurred to him that he had no essence by which he differed from the essence of the Truth Most High, and that the reality of his essence was the essence of the Truth. The thing he had at first supposed to be his essence, distinct from the essence of the Truth, was in reality nothing. There was nothing there but the essence of the Truth. It was like the light of the sun falling on dense bodies: you see it appear in them, and though it is attributed to the body in which it appears, in reality it is nothing but the light of the sun. If that body passes away, its light passes away, while the light of the sun remains as it was. It was not diminished when the body was present, nor increased when the body was gone. Whenever a body comes into being that is fit to receive that light, it receives it, and when the body ceases to exist, that reception ceases to exist and has no meaning. This supposition was strengthened for him by what had already become clear to him: that the essence of the Truth, mighty and majestic is He, is not made multiple in any way, and that His knowledge of His essence is His very essence. From this it followed, in his view, that whoever has knowledge of His essence present in him has His essence present in him. He did have that knowledge, so the essence was present in him. But this essence is present to nothing but itself, and its very presence is the essence. Therefore he was that very essence. The same went for all the essences separate from matter that know that true essence. He had at first seen them as many, and by this supposition they became for him a single thing.

9.5 This specious notion was close to taking root in his soul, had God not reached him with His mercy and rescued him with His guidance. He came to know that the notion had arisen in

him only from the remnants of the darkness of bodies and the murk of sensible things. For many and few, one and oneness, plurality, gathering and separation are all attributes of bodies. As for those separate essences that know the essence of the Truth, mighty and majestic is He, they are free of matter, and so one must not say that they are many, or that they are one. Multiplicity comes only from the otherness of essences from one another, and unity too comes only through connection, and none of this can be understood except in composite meanings bound up with matter. Yet expression grows very narrow at this point. If you speak of those separate essences in the plural, as we have just done, it suggests multiplicity in them, though they are free of multiplicity. If you speak of them in the singular, it suggests union, which is impossible for them. I can already picture one of the bats, in whose eyes the sun is darkness, coming upon this passage, stirring in the chain of his madness and saying: "You have gone so far in your subtleties that you have cast off the instinct of reasonable men and thrown aside the judgment of reason. For one of reason's judgments is that a thing is either one or many." Let him slow down in his excess, curb the edge of his tongue and suspect himself. Let him draw a lesson from the base sensible world among whose layers he lives, as Hayy ibn Yaqzan drew one from it. Looking at it from one point of view, Hayy saw it as many, with a multiplicity beyond counting or bounding. Looking at it from another, he saw it as one. He remained hesitating over it, unable to settle on either description to the exclusion of the other. And this though the sensible world is the very source of plural and singular. It is there that their reality is understood, and there that separation and connection, location and otherness, agreement and difference are found. What then does he think of the divine world? Of it one cannot say "all" or "some." No audible word can be uttered about it without suggesting something contrary to the truth. No one knows it but one who has seen it, and its reality is established only for one who has entered it. As for his saying, "you have cast off the instinct of reasonable men and thrown aside the judg-

ment of reason," we grant it to him, and we leave him with his reason and his reasonable men. The reason he and his like mean is only the rational faculty that examines the individual sensible things and hunts out the universal meaning from them, and the reasonable men he means are those who reflect in this way. But the kind of thing we are speaking of is above all this. So let whoever knows nothing but sensible things and their universals stop his ears against it and go back to his own party, who "know an outward part of the life of this world, but of the hereafter they are heedless."[2]

9.6 If you are one of those content with this kind of hinting and pointing at what is in the divine world, and you do not load our words with the meanings that custom usually loads them with, we will tell you something more of what Hayy ibn Yaqzan saw in the station of the truthful, mentioned above. So we say:

THE CHAIN OF MIRRORS

He sees each sphere's separate essence as the sun's image reflected from mirror to mirror.

9.7 After pure absorption, complete annihilation and true arrival, he saw that the highest sphere, which has no body, had an essence free of matter. It was not the essence of the True One, nor the soul of the sphere, nor anything other than them. It was like the image of the sun appearing in a polished mirror: it is not the sun, nor the mirror, nor anything other than them. In the separate essence of that sphere he saw a perfection, splendor and beauty too great to be described by any tongue and too subtle to be clothed in letter or sound. He saw it in the utmost delight and joy, bliss and gladness, in its vision of the essence of the Truth, exalted is His majesty. He also saw that the next sphere, the sphere of the fixed stars, had an essence likewise free of matter. It was not the essence of the True One, nor the separate essence of the highest sphere, nor its soul, nor anything other than these. It was like the image of the sun appear-

2 Quran 30:7.

ing in a mirror to which the image has been reflected from another mirror facing the sun. In this essence too he saw splendor, beauty and delight like those he had seen in the essence of the highest sphere. He also saw that the sphere after this, the sphere of Saturn, had an essence separate from matter. It was none of the essences he had seen before it, nor anything other than them. It was like the image of the sun appearing in a mirror to which the image has been reflected from a mirror facing the sun, and in this essence too he saw the same splendor and delight as in those before it. So he went on seeing for each sphere a separate essence free of matter, which was none of the essences before it, nor anything other than them. It was like the image of the sun reflected from mirror to mirror in ranks ordered according to the order of the spheres. In each of these essences he saw beauty and splendor, delight and gladness, such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has occurred to the heart of man. At last he came to the world of generation and corruption, which is everything contained within the sphere of the moon. He saw that it had an essence free of matter, which was none of the essences he had seen before it, nor anything else. This essence had seventy thousand faces; in each face were seventy thousand mouths, and in each mouth seventy thousand tongues, with which it praised the essence of the True One, hallowed it and glorified it without ceasing. In this essence, which seems to be many but is not, he saw perfection and delight like those he had seen in the essences before it. This essence was like the image of the sun appearing in rippling water. The image had been reflected to it from the last of the mirrors at which the reflection ended, in the order already described, starting from the first mirror, the one that faced the sun itself.

9.8 Then he saw that he himself had a separate essence. If the essence of the seventy thousand faces could be divided into parts, we would say that his was a part of it. Were it not that this essence came into being after it had not been, we would say that it was that essence itself. And were it not that it was bound to his body when the body came into being, we would say that it had

not come into being at all. At this rank he saw essences like his own. Some belonged to bodies that had once existed and then faded away, and others to bodies that still existed alongside him. They were so many as to be without limit, if they may be called many; or they were all united, if they may be called one. In his own essence and in the essences of his rank he saw beauty and splendor, and delight without end, such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has occurred to the heart of man. Those who describe cannot describe it, and none understand it but those who have arrived and know. He also saw many essences separate from matter that were like rusted mirrors overlaid with grime. What is more, they had their backs to the polished mirrors in which the image of the sun was imprinted, and their faces turned away from them. In these essences he saw an ugliness and deficiency such as had never entered his mind. He saw them in pains that never end and regrets that are never wiped away. The pavilion of torment had closed around them, the fire of the veil had burned them, and they were sawn apart with saws between agitation and attraction. Here too he saw essences other than these tormented ones, which would gleam and then fade, take shape and then dissolve. He stood fast and looked at them closely, and he saw a great terror and a mighty matter: swift creation and consummate ordering, fashioning and breathing-in, origination and abolition. But he had stood fast only a little while when his senses returned to him and he woke from that state, which resembled a swoon. His foot slipped from that station. The sensible world appeared to him and the divine world vanished from him, since the two cannot be together in a single state. This world and the next are like two co-wives: if you please one, you anger the other.

9.9 You may say: "From your account of this vision it appears that if the separate essences belong to a body whose existence is everlasting and incorruptible, like the spheres, then they are everlasting. If they belong to a body that comes to corruption, like the rational animal, then they too are corrupted, fade away and dissolve. That is how you illustrated it with the reflecting

mirrors, since the image endures only as long as the mirror endures, and when the mirror is corrupted, the image is certainly corrupted and fades away." To this I say: How quickly you have forgotten the pact and slipped your bond! Did we not warn you beforehand that the field of expression here is narrow, and that words always suggest something other than the truth? What led you into this notion was treating the example and the thing it illustrates as alike in every respect. That should not be done even in ordinary kinds of discourse, so how much less here! The sun, its light, its image and its shape, the mirrors and the images that arise in them, are all things inseparable from bodies. They subsist only by bodies and in them. That is why they depend on bodies for their existence and perish when bodies perish. But the divine essences and the lordly spirits are all free of bodies and of what attaches to them, and they transcend them utterly. They have no bond with them and no attachment to them. For them it is all the same whether bodies perish or endure, exist or cease to exist. Their bond and attachment are only to the essence of the True One, the Necessarily Existent Being, who is their first, their principle, their cause and the giver of their existence. It is He who grants them permanence and supplies them with endurance and everlastingness. They have no need of bodies; rather, bodies need them. If they could cease to exist, bodies would cease to exist, for they are the principles of bodies. In the same way, if the essence of the True One could cease to exist (exalted and hallowed is He above that, there is no god but He), all these essences would cease to exist, bodies would cease to exist, the whole sensible world would cease to exist, and nothing existent would remain, for all of it is bound together, part to part. The sensible world follows the divine world like its shadow, and the divine world has no need of it and is free of it. Even so, it is impossible to suppose that the sensible world ceases to exist, because it follows the divine world. Its corruption is only that it is changed, not that it ceases to exist altogether. That is what the mighty Book declares wherever it speaks of this: the mountains set in motion and made like tufted

wool, people made like scattered moths, the sun and moon rolled up, the seas made to burst forth, "on the day when the earth is changed into another earth, and the heavens too." This is as much as I can point out to you now of what Hayy ibn Yaqzan saw in that noble station. Do not seek more than this by way of words, for that is next to impossible.[3]

9.10 The rest of his story I will relate to you, God Most High willing. When he returned to the sensible world, after roaming where he had roamed, he grew weary of the burdens of life, and his longing for the ultimate life grew strong. So he began to seek a return to that station in the same way he had sought it at first. He reached it with less effort than he had needed the first time, and the second time he stayed in it longer than the first. Then he returned to the world of sense. After that he strove to reach his station again, and it was easier for him than the first and second times, and his stay in it was longer. Reaching that noble station grew easier and easier for him, and his stay in it longer and longer, time after time, until he could reach it whenever he wished and left it only when he wished. He kept to that station and turned from it only for the needs of his body, which he had reduced until nothing less could be found. Through all this he wished that God, mighty and majestic is He, would relieve him of his body altogether, since it called him away from his station. Then he might escape into his delight forever and be free of the pain he felt whenever he turned from his station to the body's needs. He remained in this state until he had passed seven weeks of years from his birth—that is, fifty years. Then it happened that he came to keep company with Asal. What passed between them will be told hereafter, God Most High willing.

3 Quran 14:48, with echoes of 101:4–5 (moths and wool), 81:1 (the sun rolled up) and 82:3 (the seas burst forth).

Asal and Salaman

On a neighbouring island two friends follow a revealed religion; Asal seeks solitude on Hayy's island, teaches him language, and they go together to teach the people—and fail.

10.1 They relate that to an island near the one on which Hayy ibn Yaqzan was born (according to one of the two differing accounts of his origin) there came one of the true religions, received from one of the earlier prophets (God's blessings be upon them). It was a religion that represented all true realities by means of symbols, which give images of those things and fix their outlines in people's souls, as is customary in addressing the general public. That religion went on spreading on that island, growing strong and prevailing, until the island's king took it up and made the people keep to it. Two young men of virtue and goodwill had grown up on that island, one called Asal and the other Salaman. They received that religion and accepted it in the best way. They bound themselves to keep all its laws and to persevere in its practices, and they became companions in this. At times they would study together the expressions of that Law concerning the description of God, mighty and majestic is He, and His angels, and the features of the life to come, of reward and punishment. Asal delved more deeply into the inner sense, came more often upon spiritual meanings, and was more drawn to *ta'wīl*, interpretation. His companion Salaman held more closely to the outward sense, kept further from interpretation, and was more hesitant to use his own judgment and reflection. Both were diligent in outward practices, in calling the soul to account and in struggling against desire. In that Law there were sayings

urging solitude and withdrawal and indicating that success and salvation lie in them, and other sayings urging social life and keeping to the community. Asal took to seeking solitude and preferred the sayings in its favor, because of his natural bent for constant thought, steady reflection on lessons and delving into meanings, and it was mostly in withdrawal that he could fulfill his hopes in this.[1] Salaman held to keeping with the community and preferred the sayings in its favor, because of his natural timidity about thought and independent judgment. For him, keeping with the community was something that wards off evil whisperings, dispels intruding doubts and gives refuge from the goadings of the devils. Their difference over this opinion was the cause of their parting.[2]

10.2 Asal had heard of the island where, as was related, Hayy ibn Yaqzan came into being. He knew of its fertility, its amenities and its temperate air, and that whoever sought solitude could find it there. So he resolved to travel there and withdraw from people for the rest of his life. He gathered what wealth he had, used part of it to hire a ship to carry him to that island, and gave away the rest to the poor. Then he bade farewell to his friend Salaman and took to the sea. The sailors carried him to the island, set him down on its shore and left him. So Asal remained on that island worshipping God, mighty and majestic is He, magnifying Him and hallowing Him, and meditating on His most beautiful names and His exalted attributes. His thought was never broken and his reflection never clouded. When he needed food, he took enough of the island's fruits and game to still his hunger. He stayed in that state for some time, in the most complete happiness and the deepest intimacy, communing with his Lord. Every day he witnessed kindnesses and choice gifts from Him, and found his needs and his food made easy for him. All this confirmed his certainty and gladdened his eye.

1 *Ta'wīl*: interpretation that takes a text away from its apparent (literal) sense.
2 "The goadings of the devils" echoes Quran 23:97.

HAYY MEETS ASAL

Asal, a devout hermit, meets Hayy, teaches him to speak and learns his story.

10.3 During that time Hayy ibn Yaqzan was deeply absorbed in his noble stations. He left his cave only once a week, to take whatever food came to hand. That is why Asal did not come upon him at first. Asal would wander the reaches of the island and roam its regions, seeing no human being and finding no human trace. This only increased his contentment and set his soul at ease, since he had resolved to go to the utmost in seeking withdrawal and solitude. Then on one of those occasions Hayy ibn Yaqzan happened to come out in search of food just as Asal had come to that spot, and each caught sight of the other. Asal had no doubt that this was one of those devotees who cut themselves off from the world, and that he had come to the island seeking withdrawal from people, as Asal himself had. He feared that if he approached him and made his acquaintance, it might spoil his state and stand between him and his hope. Hayy ibn Yaqzan, for his part, did not know what he was, for he did not see in him the form of any of the animals he had observed before. Asal was wearing a black cloak of hair and wool, which Hayy took to be a natural covering, and he stood marveling at him for a long while. Asal turned and fled, afraid that Hayy would distract him from his state. Hayy ibn Yaqzan followed his tracks, for it was in his nature to search out the realities of things. But when he saw him running hard, he drew back and hid from him, until Asal thought he had gone away and left that place far behind.

10.4 Then Asal began to pray, recite, supplicate, weep, plead humbly and fall into ecstatic transport, until this absorbed him from everything else. Hayy ibn Yaqzan began to draw near him little by little, without Asal noticing, until he was close enough to hear his recitation and his glorification of God and to see his humility and his weeping. He heard a beautiful voice and

ordered sounds unlike anything he had known from any kind of animal. He looked at his shape and his features and saw that he had a form like his own. And it became clear to him that the cloak Asal wore was not a natural skin but a garment made by hand, like his own clothing. When he saw the beauty of his humility, his supplication and his weeping, he had no doubt that this was one of the essences that know the Truth. He longed for him and wanted to see what he had within him, and what had caused his weeping and supplication. So he came closer still, until Asal became aware of him and ran hard. Hayy ran hard after him and caught up with him, for God had given him strength and stature in knowledge and in body. He seized him, held him fast, and would not let him get away. Asal looked at him: he was clad in the skins of furred animals, and his hair had grown so long that it covered much of him. When Asal saw how swiftly he could run and how powerful his hold was, he was seized with terror. He began to plead with him and implore him in words that Hayy ibn Yaqzan did not understand and could make nothing of, except that he could make out in them the signs of fear. So Hayy tried to calm him with sounds he had learned from some of the animals. He stroked his head and his sides, coaxed him, and showed him a cheerful face and delight in him, until Asal's agitation subsided and he knew that Hayy meant him no harm.

10.5 Long before, out of his love for the science of *ta'wīl*, Asal had learned most languages and become skilled in them. So he began to speak to Hayy ibn Yaqzan and question him about himself in every language he knew, trying to make himself understood, but he could not. All the while Hayy ibn Yaqzan marveled at what he heard without knowing what it was; yet he showed him cheerfulness and welcome. Each of them found the other strange. Asal had some provisions left that he had brought with him from the inhabited island. He offered them to Hayy ibn Yaqzan, who did not know what they were, never having seen such a thing before. Asal ate some and motioned to him to eat. Hayy ibn Yaqzan thought of the conditions he had bound him-

self to in taking food. He did not know the origin of the thing set before him, nor whether he was permitted to eat it or not, so he refused to eat. Asal kept pleading and imploring. Hayy ibn Yaqzan had grown fond of him and feared that if he persisted in refusing, he would estrange him; so he ventured upon the food and ate some of it. But when he had tasted it and found it good, he saw how wrong he had been to break his vows concerning the conditions of food, and he regretted what he had done. He wanted to part from Asal and return to his own concern, seeking to go back to his noble station; but the vision would not come to him quickly. So he decided to stay with Asal in the world of the senses until he had learned the truth of his condition and no yearning for him remained in his own soul; after that he would return to his station with nothing to distract him. So he kept company with Asal. Asal, too, seeing that Hayy could not speak, felt safe from any harm he might do to his religion. He hoped to teach him speech, knowledge and religion, and so to gain for himself the greatest reward and nearness to God. Asal began by teaching him to speak. He would point to particular existing things, pronounce their names, repeat them for him and get him to say them; and Hayy would say them while pointing, until Asal had taught him all the names. He led him on little by little until, in a very short time, he could speak.[3]

10.6 Then Asal began to ask him about himself and how he had come to that island. Hayy ibn Yaqzan told him that he knew nothing of his own beginning, nor of any father or mother beyond the doe that had raised him. He described his whole story, and how he had risen in knowledge until he reached the degree of arrival. Asal heard him describe those realities, and the essences separate from the world of the senses that know the essence of the Truth, mighty and majestic is He. He heard him describe the essence of the Truth, exalted and majestic is He, with His most beautiful attributes, and describe, as far as he could, what he had witnessed on arriving: the joys of those who

3 "Taught him all the names" echoes Quran 2:31, where God teaches Adam the names of all things.

have arrived and the pains of those who are veiled. Then Asal had no doubt that everything his Law contained about God, mighty and majestic is He, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, His Garden and His Fire, were symbols of what Hayy ibn Yaqzan had seen. The eye of his heart was opened and the fire of his mind was kindled. What reason grasps and what tradition transmits agreed for him, and the paths of interpretation became easy. No difficulty in the Law remained that did not become clear to him, nothing closed that did not open, nothing obscure that was not made plain; and he became one of those who have understanding. At that he looked upon Hayy ibn Yaqzan with reverence and veneration, certain now that he was one of the friends of God, "on whom there shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." He devoted himself to serving him, following his example, and taking his guidance wherever the practices of the Law he had learned in his religion seemed to him to conflict.[4]

10.7 Hayy ibn Yaqzan in turn asked him to explain his own affairs and circumstances. So Asal described his island and the people in it: how they had lived before the religion reached them and how they lived now that it had. He described everything the Law contained in describing the divine world: the Garden and the Fire, the resurrection and the raising up, the gathering and the reckoning, the Balance and the Bridge. Hayy ibn Yaqzan understood all of it and found nothing in it at odds with what he had witnessed in his noble station. So he knew that the one who had described these things and brought them was right in his description and truthful in his words, a messenger from his Lord; and he believed in him, affirmed his truth and bore witness to his mission. Then he began to ask him about the duties this messenger had brought and the acts of worship he had laid down. Asal described prayer, alms, fasting, pilgrimage and similar outward practices. Hayy accepted them, took them

4 Quran 10:62.

on and bound himself to perform them, in obedience to a command whose speaker he knew for certain to be truthful.[5]

TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LAW

Hayy wonders why the prophet spoke in symbols and permitted wealth and comfort.

10.8 Yet two things remained in his mind that puzzled him, for he could not see the wisdom in them. The first: why had this messenger used symbols for people in most of what he described of the divine world, and refrained from open unveiling? For people had fallen into the grave error of anthropomorphism and believed things of the essence of the Truth from which He is transcendent and free—and likewise in the matter of reward and punishment. The second: why had he confined himself to these duties and set acts of worship, and permitted the acquisition of wealth and indulgence in food, so that people were left free to busy themselves with vanities and turn away from the Truth? His own view was that no one should take anything but what would keep him alive. Wealth meant nothing to him. He looked at the rulings of the Law concerning property—alms and its many branches, sales, usury, the fixed penalties and punishments—and found it all strange, a needless elaboration. He would say: if people understood the matter as it truly is, they would turn from these vanities and toward the Truth, and would have no need of any of this. No one would own property of his own, to be asked for its alms, or for whose theft hands would be cut off, or for whose open seizure lives would be forfeit. What led him into this was his supposition that all people had excellent natures, penetrating minds and resolute souls. He did not know how dull and deficient they were, how poor their judgment and how weak their resolve—that they are "like cattle; no, they are further astray from the way."[6]

5 The Balance, on which deeds are weighed, and the Bridge, which souls must cross over Hell, belong to the Islamic account of the Day of Judgment.
6 Quran 25:44.

10.9 His compassion for people grew strong, and he hoped that their salvation might come about through him. So he formed the intention of going to them, making the truth plain before them and explaining it to them. He discussed this with his friend Asal and asked him whether there was any way for him to reach them. Asal told him how deficient their natures were and how they turned away from God's command. But Hayy could not grasp this, and his heart remained attached to what he had hoped for. Asal, for his part, hoped that God might guide through Hayy a group of his acquaintances, aspirants who were closer to deliverance than the rest; so he supported his plan. They decided to keep to the seashore and not leave it by night or by day, in case God might open a way for them across the sea. They did so, and implored God Most High in prayer to grant them right guidance in their affair. It was the decree of God, mighty and majestic is He, that a ship at sea lost its course and was driven by the winds and the crashing waves to that shore. As it drew near land, those aboard saw the two men on the beach and came close to them. Asal spoke to them and asked them to take the two along. They agreed and brought them on board, and God sent them a gentle wind that carried the ship in a very short time to the island they were making for. The two landed and entered its city, and Asal's companions gathered around him. He told them about Hayy ibn Yaqzan, and they embraced him warmly, made much of him, gathered about him, honored him and revered him. Asal told Hayy that this group were nearer to understanding and intelligence than all other people, and that if he could not teach them, he would be still less able to teach the general public. The head and chief of that island was Salaman—Asal's friend, who held to keeping with the community and maintained that solitude was forbidden.

10.10 So Hayy ibn Yaqzan began to teach them and to spread among them the secrets of wisdom. But no sooner had he risen a little above the outward sense and begun to describe things whose contrary had already taken hold of their understanding than they began to shrink from him. Their souls recoiled from

what he brought, and they resented it in their hearts, though to his face they showed approval, out of courtesy to a stranger among them and regard for the rights of their friend Asal. Hayy ibn Yaqzan kept trying to win them over night and day, explaining the truth to them in private and in public; but this only increased their aversion and recoil. They loved the good and desired the truth; yet because of the deficiency of their natures they did not seek the truth by its proper path, did not take it in the way that leads to its realization, and did not look for it at its door. Indeed, they did not want to know it by the way of those who possess it. So he despaired of reforming them, and lost all hope of their betterment, so little were they receptive.

10.11 After that he surveyed the classes of people and saw that "each party rejoices in what it has." They had "taken their own desire for their god," and their appetites were what they worshipped. They wore themselves out gathering the debris of this world: "rivalry in increase distracted them until they visited the graves." Admonition did not avail them, a good word had no effect on them, and argument only made them more obstinate. As for wisdom, they had no way to it and no share in it. Ignorance had overwhelmed them, and "what they used to earn had rusted over their hearts": "God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a covering, and theirs is a mighty punishment."[7] He saw that the pavilion of punishment had closed around them and the darkness of the veils had covered them. All but a few of them held to nothing of their religion but this world; they had cast its practices, light and easy as they were, "behind their backs and sold it for a small price." Commerce and selling had distracted them from the remembrance of God Most High, and they did not "fear a day on which hearts and eyes will be turned about." Then it became clear to him, and he knew with certainty, that it was impossible to address them by way of open unveiling, and that they could not be charged with more practice than this measure. He saw that what most of the general public gain from the Law lies only in their life in this

7 Quran 30:32, 45:23, 102:1–2, 83:14, 2:7.

world: that each may have his livelihood set in order, and that others may not encroach on what is his. Only the rare exception among them wins happiness in the hereafter—the one who "desires the tillage of the hereafter and strives for it as it should be striven for, being a believer."[8] "But as for him who transgressed and preferred the life of this world, Hell will be his refuge." What toil could be greater, what misery more overwhelming, than that of a man whose deeds, if you examine them from the moment he wakes until he returns to slumber, contain nothing not aimed at some end among these base, sensible things: wealth to amass, a pleasure to enjoy, an appetite to satisfy, anger to vent, rank to secure, or some act of the Law to adorn himself with or to save his own neck? All of these are "darknesses, one upon another, in a fathomless sea"; "and there is not one of you but will come down to it; this is, for your Lord, a decree that must be fulfilled."[9]

HAYY'S APOLOGY

Hayy apologizes to Salaman's people, urges them to keep the Law, and returns to his island.

10.12 Once he understood people's conditions, and that most of them are like animals without reason, he knew that all wisdom, guidance and success lie in what the messengers have spoken and the Law has brought. Nothing else is possible, and nothing more can be borne. For every task there are men, and each is made easy for what he was created for: "the way of God with those who passed away before; and you will find no change in the way of God." So he went back to Salaman and his companions, apologized to them for what he had said, and disowned it before them. He told them that he now held the view they held and followed the guidance they followed. He urged them to keep to what they were doing: observing the limits of the Law and the outward practices, delving little into what did not concern

8 Quran 3:187, 24:37, 17:19 (with "tillage of the hereafter" from 42:20).
9 Quran 79:37–39, 24:40, 19:71.

them, believing in the ambiguous passages of scripture and submitting to them, turning away from heretical innovations and caprices, following the righteous forebears, and leaving aside novelties. He bade them avoid what the mass of ordinary people do—neglecting the Law and devoting themselves to this world—and warned them against it in the strongest terms.[10] He and his friend Asal knew that this group of aspirants, limited as they were, had no salvation except by this way. If they were raised beyond it to the heights of insight, what they had would be thrown into disorder; they would be unable to reach the rank of the blessed, and would waver, relapse and come to a bad end. But if they persisted in what they were doing until certainty came to them, they would win safety and be among the companions of the right hand. "And the foremost, the foremost—those are the ones brought near." So the two bade them farewell and left them, and found a way to return to their island, until God, mighty and majestic is He, made the crossing easy for them. Hayy ibn Yaqzan sought his noble station in the same way he had sought it at first, until he regained it; and Asal followed his example until he came near it, or nearly so. And they worshipped God on that island until certainty came to them.[11]

10 Quran 33:62. "Each is made easy for what he was created for" echoes a saying of the Prophet.

11 Quran 56:10–11. "Until certainty came" echoes Quran 15:99, where certainty is understood as death.

Conclusion

Why the author has broken the custom of keeping these things secret, and an apology to his brothers.

11.1 This, then—may God strengthen us and you with a spirit from Him—is the story of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, Asal and Salaman. It contains a measure of discourse not found in any book nor heard in ordinary speech. It belongs to the hidden knowledge that only those who know God accept, and of which only those deluded about God are ignorant. In it we have departed from the way of the righteous forebears, who guarded this knowledge jealously and were sparing with it. What made it easier for us to divulge this secret and tear away the veil was the appearance in our time of corrupting opinions, brought forth and openly professed by the would-be philosophers of the age, until they spread through the lands and their harm became general. We feared for the weak, who have cast off following the prophets (God's blessings be upon them) on authority (*taqlīd*) and want to follow fools instead: they might think that these opinions were the ones to be withheld from those unworthy of them, and so their love of them and their infatuation with them would grow. So we decided to give them a glimpse of a corner of the secret of secrets, to draw them toward true realization and then turn them away from that path. Even so, we have not left the secrets entrusted to these few pages without a fine veil—one quickly torn away for whoever is worthy of it, but growing thick for whoever does not deserve to pass beyond it, so that he cannot get through.

11.2 I ask my brothers who come upon these words to accept my excuse where I have been lax in explaining and lenient in establishing. I did so only because I had climbed heights from which the eye slips when it looks, and I wanted to bring the discourse on them within reach, so as to encourage and arouse longing to enter upon the path. I ask God for pardon and forgiveness, and that He lead us to the clear waters of knowledge of Him; truly He is bountiful and generous. Peace be upon you, my brother, whose request it is my duty to fulfill, and the mercy of God and His blessings.