
Tahera Qutbuddin | ORCID: 0000-0002-9315-2040
Professor of Arabic Literature, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago
(from July 1, 2023: AlBabtain Laudian Professor of Arabic, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford)
b tq@uchicago.edu

Aziz Qutbuddin | ORCID: 0000-0002-4036-7953
Research Associate, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Chairman, Qutbi Jubilee Scholarship Program, Mumbai
aziz@qutbuddin.com

Abstract

The 177-verse Arabic Poem of the Intellect (Qaṣīdat al-ʿAql) composed by the Indian Fatimid-Ṭayyibī Dāʾī al-Muṭlaq Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin (d. 1385/1965) breaks new ground in substance and form. In form, the poem creatively amalgamates the genres of qaṣīdah (poem), risālah (treatise), and waṣiyyah (testament) to produce an eloquent and innovative hybrid text. In content, it uniquely combines a philosophical exposition on Islamic theology and ethics with a road map to living a Pure Life. After an opening frame that provides a philosophical foundation, the poem’s three large thematic sections draw on the Qurʾan, the Prophet’s Hadith, and the sermons of Imam ʿAlī to describe principles of belief and approach, articles of character and deeds, and the grounding of both—abstract philosophy and concrete instructions—in love for and allegiance to the divine guides, the Imams and Dāʾīs, who are “God’s rope.” It has a gentle tone, preaching harmony between all people on earth, tranquility in one’s life, cheerfulness and positivity, and an atmosphere of love and caring. The closing section brings the poet directly into the frame of reference, stating that he, as the incumbent Dāʾī, is himself the manifestation of God’s rope in the current time, and those who
follow his guidance will return to Paradise. The present article provides a window into Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s remarkable poem, translating and analyzing it against the backdrop of Fatimid and Ṭayyibi theological works and, briefly, the colonial and post-colonial fabric of early 20th century India, to explore a significant and largely unknown chapter of Arabic poetry.

**Keywords**


The Fatimid-Ṭayyibīs’ rich heritage of prose and poetry offers myriad explications of theology and numerous discourses of counsel, but the focus is usually on one or the other. Within this tradition, the 177-verse Arabic Poem of the Intellect (Qaṣīdat al-ʿAql) composed by the Indian Fatimid-Ṭayyibī Dāʾī al-Muṭlaq Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin (d. 1385/1965) is exceptional in combining esoteric doctrine and ethical preaching, with a detailed application of high philosophy to lived human experience. In addition to its intertwining of abstract and practical aspects of guidance, moreover, the poem is also unique on a literary plane in its creative amalgamation of the formal genres of qaṣīdah (poem), risālah (treatise), and waṣiyyah (testament). The present article analyzes Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s Poem of the Intellect—against the backdrop of Fatimid and Ṭayyibi theological texts, and alongside the societal forces of early 20th-century India—to highlight the intricate interplay of these disciplinary aspects, and the delicate blend of these formal genres.

Scholars often characterize Fatimid-Ismāʿīlī philosophy as Neoplatonic, referring to the philosophy expounded by the ninth- or tenth-century Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, or Treatises of the Pure Brethren (which Ṭayyibīs believe were authored by the progenitor of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs, Imam Aḥmad al-Mastūr), and to the works of Fatimid Dāʾīs including Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī

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1 “Neoplatonism” is a term coined by mid-19th century German scholars to refer to a philosophical and religious system tracing its origins to the teachings of the Greek philosopher Plato (d. 347 BC), through the interpretation of the Egyptian philosopher Plotinus (d. 270 AD), essentially speaking of self-purification as a pathway for the human soul to return to its source in the realm of divinity. Medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theology engaged strongly with Neoplatonic ideas.
(d. after 361/971) and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020). It is indeed correct to state that the Fatimid philosophy of the intellect contains echoes of this ancient Greek tradition, and the Fatimid-Ṭayyibīs themselves do not deny the affiliation—but they turn it on its head. They claim that their philosophy is the one true philosophy brought by the earliest Prophets and Imams and which continues through all time. They believe that this ancient prophetic philosophy is the source of Greek tradition, and also the source of their own Islamic-Qur’anic exposition. Verse 114 of Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem refers to this tenet, “Every religion contains at least one word from the people of truth carried over from ancient times.” Fatimid-Ṭayyibī philosophy focuses on the intellect as the original creation of the Creator, explaining the evolution of the Sound Intellect in this world, and its return to its original realm. This doctrine—termed in their works as the doctrine of The Origin and The Return (al-mabda’wa-l-ma’ād)—unequivocally underpins Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s poem. Within this theological frame, however, the focus of the poem is entirely on how to live a Pure Life of virtue and piety in this world. And this philosophy, this teaching, is enshrined in limpid, deep Arabic verse.

Opening with the framing line, “The intellect is the essence of the human” (al-ʿaqlu fī l-insānī aʿlā l-jawharī), Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem immediately goes on to speak of the primordial intellect’s origin in the realm of God’s first creation, and—after its fall to corporeality—its realization in the nether world as Sound Intellect (ʿaql salīm). The poem explains that this realization takes place through the guidance of God’s chosen messenger, a living guide in every age, each of whom is the embodiment of pure intellect: The Prophet, his Legatee, and the Imams in their line. It declares that the divine messengers guide humans to develop Sound Intellect by living a Pure Life (ḥayāh ṭayyibah,


3 The standard translation for the philosophical term jawhar—translated here as “essence”—is “substance.” We have used “essence” because its commonly understood meaning of “quintessence” or “core” lies within the semantic field of the technical philosophical meaning and is also clear to non-specialists, whereas “substance” to a lay reader would (incorrectly) signify physical matter.
The poem charts this path in terms of true belief, right approach, virtuous character, and good action, a path that ultimately leads humans back to their original home in the realm of first creation, to the ether of pure intellect.

Most Ṭayyibī works remain unpublished, and Ṭayyibī poetry in India, including the prolific oeuvre of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin, remains largely unscrutinized.⁵ Saifuddin composed the Intellect Poem toward the end of his life in 1382/1962, during his Golden Jubilee Celebrations, at which time it was published through chapbooks and public recitations in the Ṭayyibī community. It was also recited in Al-Azhar University, Cairo, in 1965, during an assembly awarding the 52nd Dāʿī Sayyidna Mohammed Burhanuddin (d. 2014) with its Honorary Doctorate, and the faculty and students of Al-Azhar responded with vocal appreciation. It has continued to be studied in Ṭayyibī seminaries, recited in their assemblies, and cited in their lectures, but it has not been more widely disseminated outside community settings before. The poem is published for the first time here in an academic venue, alongside what we hope is a lucid English translation, and an introduction to the tradition and the poet, accompanied by analysis of the poem's core message and commentary on its contents. Focusing primarily on the Intellect Poem itself, the analysis also draws on Saifuddin's other poems and treatises, on the works of the Fatimid Chief Dāʿī al-Muʿayyad al-Shirāzī (d. 470/1078) which greatly influenced him,⁶ and on expositions of Ṭayyibī doctrine in the present time that

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4 Reference to Qur’an, Nahl 16:97: مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنَّى وَهُوَ أَوْصَىٰ مِّن ذَكَرٍ عَمِلَ مَنْ أَجْرُهُم بِأَحْسَنِ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ “Any man or woman who performs good deeds, if they are believers, we shall grant them a Pure Life and reward them in accord with their best deeds.”


are inspired by Saifuddin's teachings. The notes point out the poem's abundant allusions to verses from the Qur'an, the Prophet Muḥammad's hadith, and the words of Imam 'Ali. Overall, the article delineates Saifuddin's holistic Islamic philosophy of the intellect as seen in the poem, in both the metaphysical and the physical world, that prompts all humans to strive to regain the glory of the realm of original creation and pure intellect.

1 The Tradition: The Fatimid-Ṭayyibīs, Their Philosophy of the Intellect, and Their Tradition of Daʿwah Poetry

The Ṭayyibīs are a community of Shiʿi Muslims based in India belonging to the Mustaʿli-Ṭayyibī branch of the Fatimid-Īsmāʿīlīs. They profess allegiance to the son of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Āmir (r. 495–524/1101–1130), Imam Ṭayyib (b. 524/1130), who they believe has gone into physical concealment, and to the concealed Imam in his line, whom they know by the name of his forebear as the Ṭayyib of the Age. The ancestors of the Indian Ṭayyibīs converted to Islam at the hand of missionaries sent from Cairo to India by the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Mustanṣir (r. 427–487/1036–1094) in the eleventh century.

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Like that of the Fatimids, their religious institution is termed *Daʿwah*, from the Qur'anic verse, “The true *Daʿwah* (call) belongs to God.”8 Their leader is believed to be Taʾyyib Imam’s spiritually guided vicegerent, and he holds the rank of *Dāʿī* (one who calls to God); the full title is *al-Dāʿī al-Muṭlaq* (*Dāʿī* with full authority). In India, the community is often called “Bohra,” a Gujarati word meaning “honest merchant,” presumably referring to the profession of the earliest Hindu converts. In everyday communication they speak Gujarati, infused with an Arabic and Persian lexicon, called *Lisān al-Daʿwah* or *Daʿwat nī zabān* (language of the *Daʿwah*), but their primary language of written scholarship has remained Arabic. Over the centuries, several Taʾyyibi denominations have branched out based mostly on their belief in the legitimacy of different lines of *Dāʿī*s. Our poet was *Dāʿī* of the majority Taʾyyibī Bohra denomination called Dāʾūd Bohra, and “Taʾyyibi” in the present publication refers to them. Today, they reside mostly in India and Pakistan, with a small indigenous community in Yemen and diaspora communities worldwide.

As mentioned earlier, the Taʾyyibiš have inherited a strong philosophical tradition that speaks of the original creation in the world of intellect and light, the fall into corporality, and then, for those who answer God’s call, the return to the realm of first creation. They trace these doctrines to the teachings of Prophet Muḥammad and the expositions of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, whom they believe to be his Legatee and appointed successor. They continue to trace these doctrines through the aforementioned pre-Fatimid empire Treatises of the Pure Brethren. Fatimid Dāʾīs, including Sijistānī, Kirmānī, and Muʿayyad who were mentioned earlier, recorded these doctrines in texts of higher metaphysics using deliberately cryptic language; Muʿayyad’s student, the Central Asian Fatimid Dāʾī Nāṣir Khusraw (d. between 465/1072 and 471/1078), also composed important Persian works that reflected his master’s hermeneutic, but these were not known in the Arabic-focused Taʾyyibī tradition.9 Taʾyyibī Dāʾīs in Yemen, including Sayyidna Dhūʾayb ibn Mūsā (r. 532–546/r. 1138–1151), Sayyidna

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8 Qur’an, Ra’d 13:44: (لا دعوة الا لله).
Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥāmidī (r. 546–557/1151–1162), Sayyidna Ḥātim ibn Ibrāhīm (r. 557–596/1162–1199), Sayyidna ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Walīd (r. 605–612/1209–1215), Sayyidna ‘Alī ibn Ḥanẓalah (r. 612–626/1215–1229), and Sayyidna al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad (r. 627–667/1230–1268), transcribed Fatimid doctrines of the Intellect more explicitly and in more detail after Imam Ṭayyib’s concealment.

A grandson of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin and his namesake, the present Dāʾī Sayyidna Taher Fakhruddin expounds these doctrines to non-specialists in Lisān al-Daʾwah, Arabic, and English in a public online forum. Following Fatimid-Ṭayyibī practice, his discourses are titled “Majālis (sing. Majlis) al-Ḥikma” (=Majālis al-ḥikmah) or Assemblies of Wisdom. In a Majlis titled “What is the origin of the Intellect?”, another titled “What is the philosophy of Dawatul Haqq?”, and yet one more titled “Do we have free will?”, Fakhruddin draws on the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī heritage, and explicitly on Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem, to discuss the intellect’s origin and nature, and the rationality of faith. Since Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem focuses on divine guidance and the importance of virtue, Fakhruddin’s Majlis titled “Why do humans need a divine guide?”, and another titled “Why is virtue compulsory?” also connect directly with the Poem of the Intellect.

Metaphysics of Morals” (ibid., 91–101). Nāṣir died during Mustanṣir’s Imamate, approximately twenty years before the 487/1094 Mustaʿlī-Nizārī split.


Taḥyībī poetry is “committed” poetry, which, following Mu’ayyad’s tradition of “Fatimid Da’wah poetry,” employs literary techniques to advance its cause.12 Some long poems in rajaz meter are versifications of doctrine, but the Taḥyībī poets’ larger oeuvre, though undoubtedly instructional, draws on aesthetic techniques of imagery and wordplay from the classical Arabic poetic tradition to propagate its philosophical and devotional aims. In India, we also see hybrid stanzaic forms develop through engagement with local Persianate-Urdu poetic traditions, and clear influence in performance and recitation.13

In philosophy, theme, and genre, Taḥyībī poems are rooted in the Da’wah poetry tradition, whose main proponents are the following: Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭāb b. al-Ḥasan (d. 533/1138), Dāʾī ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walid (d. 612/1215), Dāʾī Idrīs Ḥmād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468), and Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh Fakhr al-Dīn (d. 886/1481) in Yemen; and in India, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥakīm al-Dīn (d. 1142/1730), Dāʾī ‘Abd-i ‘Alī Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1232/1817), Dāʾī ‘Abd al-Qādir Najm al-Dīn (d. 1302/1885), Muḥāsir ‘Abd-i ‘Alī Ḥmād al-Dīn (d. 1271/1854), scholar ‘Abd-i ‘Alī Muḥyī al-Dīn (d. 1326/1908), and his student, our poet, Dāʾī Taḥer Saifuddīn.14 Each of these savants produced major Dīwāns of poetry,15 and each has his own

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15 Khaṭṭāb’s Dīwān is published (Al-Sulfān al-Khaṭṭāb, ed. I. Poonawala, 1967), and also, Dīwān al-Dāʾī ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walid al-Anf, ed. ‘Amr b. Mu’dikārib Ḥusayn al-Hamdānī,
distinctive style and focus; in terms of their overall trajectory, however, Ṭayyibi poets voice the denomination's doctrines and follow Mu'ayyad's conventions.

2 The Poet: Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin (1888–1965)

Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin was the fifty-first Dāʿī al-Muṭlaq of the Ṭayyibi Dāʿūdi Bohra community. He was born in Surat in 1888, became Dāʿī al-Muṭlaq in 1915, moved to Mumbai in 1932, and died there in 1965.16 His magnificent shrine in Mumbai, Raudat Tahera (al-Raudhah al-Ṭāhirah), its pure white marble walls inscribed in goldleaf with the entire Qurʾan, is now also the final resting place of his successor, Sayyidna Mohammed Burhanuddin (r. 1385–1435 / 1965–2014), and is visited daily by thousands of devotees. Son of the fortieth Dāʿī, Saifuddin came from a long line of Dāʿīs and savants descended from Rājā Tārmal, vizier of the Rajput ruler of Gujarat Siddharāja Jayasimha (r. 1094–1143 AD). Tārmal, along with his brother Rājā Bhārmal and Siddharāja himself, was among the first converts to Fatimid Shiʿi Islam in the Indian subcontinent in the eleventh century AD. Tārmal’s son and Saifuddin’s forebear, Sayyidi Fakhr al-Dīn al-Shahīd (fl. twelfth century AD), was among the earliest local missionaries appointed by the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Mustanṣir in India.

Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin held the post of Dāʿī for half a century from 1915 until his death in 1965, and his tenure saw great advancements in social welfare and the education of men and women in the Ṭayyibi Bohra community. Well-known in India and Pakistan as a scholar, visionary, and creator of harmony among religious and denominational groups, he served five consecutive terms as the unanimously elected Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University until his demise. On his first visit to Aligarh in 1953, Dr Zakir Husain—then Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University and later the third President of India—said in his welcome speech that earlier Chancellors had been rulers with sikkah (coin)

struck in their names, while this Chancellor, who ruled no worldly territory, possessed “a sikkah stamped on the hearts of the Muslims of India.”

Saifuddin was a prolific author and poet. He wrote more than forty Arabic books, the series titled Rasā’il (sing. Risālah) Ramaḍānīyyah (Ramaḍān treatises), one every year between 1335/1917 and 1384/1964. They range from about one hundred pages in the earliest tracts to six hundred in the later ones. He also composed more than ten thousand verses of Arabic religious poetry, and

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17 From a verbal account in multiple teaching sessions by Sayyidna Khuzaima Qutbuddin, noted by the authors. The speech does not appear to be published. Several photographs of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin with Dr Zakir Husain are published in A Golden Panorama, 80, 89, 98.


a handful of poems in Lisān al-Da‘wah. The vast collection of his transcribed Lisān al-Da‘wah sermons through his fifty-plus years of preaching are also preserved in Da‘wah archives, as are transcripts of some Urdu speeches given to various Muslim communities. In his prose works, Saifuddin incorporated a large portion of the Ṭayyibi prose and poetic heritage, presenting excerpts prefaced with literary introductions in rhymed prose. In both prose and poetry, he elucidated doctrine, history, and law, offered counsel for living a godly life and preparing for the hereafter, and praised the Prophet Muḥammad, ‘Ali, Fāṭimah, the Imams, the Dā‘īs, and other spiritual savants. His Dīwān also contains elegies for Imam Ḥusayn and for Saifuddin’s predecessors, as well as three very long poems, one that is autobiographical and describes the milestones of his tenure as Dā‘ī, another that praises the Imams and offers counsel, and the poem at hand, the Intellect Poem that he composed during the celebrations of his Golden Jubilee (al-‘Id al-dhahabī) commemorating fifty years of his tenure as Dā‘ī, toward the end of a long and fruitful career just three years before he died.

As mentioned at the outset, Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin was greatly influenced in his thought and writing by al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī, Chief Dā‘ī of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Mustanṣir, and this influence manifests clearly in the Poem of the Intellect as we shall see shortly. Mu‘ayyad’s Majālis Mu‘ayyadiyyah, a set of eight hundred assemblies that he wrote and read out weekly to Fatimid devotees in Cairo, contain detailed expositions of Fatimid philosophical doctrines. Saifuddin himself explicated the entire corpus to Ṭayyibī audiences in weekly sessions, twice-over. Scholars in the community hailed Saifuddin as the second Mu‘ayyad, paying homage to his erudition and recognizing in his teachings a continuity from the original Mu‘ayyad.

Influenced by the style and language of the classical tradition of Arabic poetry, Saifuddin’s poems contain echoes of the poetry of Imru’ al-Qays (d. ca.

20 Published earlier in the Risālah Ramadāniyyah of their year of composition, Saifuddin’s Arabic poems were posthumously collected in his Dīwān under the title Jawāhir al-balāghah al-ladunniyyah (Dīwān), 2 vols. (Dubai: Ṭayyibī Da‘wah Publications, 1414/1993). Texts, translations, and audio links of some poems are published online at the community’s “Fatemi Dawat” website, <https://www.fatemidawat.com/prayers/qasidas-marsiyas-and-salaams/> cf. “Qaṣidas,” “Nohas” and “Munajaats”). Published earlier as individual chapbooks, Saifuddin’s Lisān al-Da‘wah poems are anthologized in Dhikrā shahādat al-Ḥusayn (Surat: Ṭayyibī Da‘wah Publications, Jāmi‘ah Sayfiyyah, 1404/1984), 64–70, 81–114, 186–196.

First draft and original composition of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem in his own hand, from the Ṭayyibi Da’wah archives. Facsimile published in A Golden Panorama, 147
The Intellect is the Essence of the Human

550 AD), al-Mutanabbî (d. 354/965), al-Sharîf al-Raḍî (d. 406/1015), and Abū Tammâm’s (d. 231/845) thematic anthology of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah. Steeped in the Fatimid-Tayyibī Da’wah poetry tradition, they propagate its deep philosophy and values.

3 The Poem of the Intellect: Text and Translation

The following is the full text and translation of the poem:

The intellect is the loftiest essence of the human—it gleams in his soul like the moon.

The intellect is the first thing to be created—it is the addressee of God’s command: “Come forward,” “Go back.”

The intellect comprehended itself, by itself, in the first beginning—its origin is virtuous, its source pure.

The intellect is an essence that comprehends all generated things, all created beings, and all crafted forms.

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22 The text of the poem is inscribed from Saifuddin, Jawāhir al-balāghah, 1:400–412.
23 “The moon” renders Ar. al-azhar.
24 Hadith reference: “The first thing God created was the intellect. He said to it ‘Come forward!’ and it came forward. He said to it ‘Go back!’ and it went back. Then he said, ‘I swear upon my might and my grandeur, I have not created any creature grander than you. Through you, I reward. Through you, I punish.’” Muhammad b. Ahmad, al-Majālīs al-Mu’āyyadīyyah, 1:4, Majlis 1.
Using his intellect, the human can see the reality in all things with full perception.

The intellect is an elixir inside the human that transforms his copper base into red gold.

The intellect in the human needs the light that shines forth from the luminous station.\textsuperscript{25}

Just like the eye which cannot see unless light which dispels darkness aids it.

With the radiance of the sun of revelation—may its light keep shining!—illumine your intellect, O human.

The intellect is the best of everything when it is free of unjust impulses.

But if desire takes over, it drives the intellect toward a watering-hole where all things perish, either in their coming or their going.

Like color: in grey light, colored objects appear grey to the eye.

The intellect can be beset by so many blights—arrogance, coercion, and tyranny.

\textsuperscript{25} This verse and the next two echo Mu‘ayyad, al-Majālis al-Mu‘ayyadiyyah, 1:101, Majlis 23.
If you wish to live a Pure Life, make your intellect commander of your affairs.

If you recognize your soul, you will recognize your Lord, the one beyond the reach of all thinkers.

If you gain power over something humans before you did not control, know the majesty of the one who gave you that power.

If you soar through the world with your intellect, recognize the splendor of the one who made the world, who runs the world.

If you contemplate creation, you will recognize the Creator, the lofty one ensconced in the highest gallery.

If you meditate upon the power of the atom, you will learn the power of the one who gave it that power.

If you recognize this, then acknowledge the power of your highest lord, and distance yourself from those who deny him.

Glory to the Creator of all things, who is not himself a thing! Do not ever deny his power.

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26 Reference to Qur’an, Nahl 16:97.
Glory to the lord who granted you this marvelous intellect! Recognize him, do not ever deny him.

Gain strength through the intellect he has bestowed on you, and with the intellectual strength earned by his creatures through their realization of his existence.

Know that the power of the Creator of all things is the fulcrum of existence for all things.

Reflect upon their mystery and master their wonders. Do not be shaken, do not lose interest, do not become impatient.

Illumine your soul with the light of knowledge. Seek it assiduously. Cut open the truths of creation and examine them.

Know that even the intact intellect is perplexed by the Creator's grandeur.

Understand the value of the intellect bestowed on you, O human. Direct your deepest care toward your soul.

Reference to Hadith in which the Prophet says to his Companion [Jābir b. ‘Abdallāh al-Anṣārī]: “You will live until you see the son of the son of my [grand]son [al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī]. When you see him, convey to him my greeting, and say to him: O Slayer of knowledge, cut it open (يا باقر العلم ٱبقره).” Mu‘ayyad, al-Majālis al-Mu‘ayyadiyyah, 2:454, Majlis 72.
The man who does not recognize his worth perishes. He has failed to appreciate his potential.

Praise your Creator, O human, and thank him, for he has shaped you as an upright human.

How many blessings and favors has he granted you! Thank him and remember.

His grace flows continuously, just as the sun’s rays flow through the ages.

If a system follows the system of God’s creation, it will stay on the smooth path.

If a system goes against the system of God’s creation, its foundations will be assaulted by destructive winds.

Religious life and worldly life are twins, if you would but view them with a perceptive eye.

If you conduct your worldly affairs in accord with God’s religion, they will become radiant as Jupiter.

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30 Reference to Qur’an, Infiṭār 82:7.

31 Reference to Qur’an, A’râf 7:69.
God’s servants will then enjoy a good life in which their world blooms like a verdant garden.

If harmony prevails in the world, all lives will be pure and happy.

The Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali, famously known as Haydar, said the following about the world:

It is an abode of truth for those who are truthful. It is an abode of well-being for those who discern.

It is a mosque for God’s loved ones, those who are pious, who prostrate before him and praise him constantly.

It is a place of prayer for the noble, pure angels, who possess a splendid stature.

It is the place where revelation from the lord of the high heavens, lord of the earth and seas, descends.

For God’s elect, it has become a place to transact and earn the abode of bliss.

O human, stand up, exert effort, be energetic, and tighten your drawstring for both transactions.

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Vv. 40–44 paraphrase ‘Ali’s sermon. Source references for ‘Ali’s sermon are provided later in the analysis in note 98.
Don the robes of God’s religion. Wear the mantle of God-consciousness.33

Religion in this world is like the soul in the body. Understand this well, test it and scrutinize.

The world is your home. You live here. Bring to it the honor of the highest station, for a home’s honor derives from the one who resides therein.

Use the world’s services, do not become the world’s servant, and you will receive respect and esteem among people.

Following the religion of right guidance means cultivating the prosperity of this world and the hereafter. Stand up and cultivate both!

If you are a leader, cultivate God’s lands for God’s servants. Do not tyrannize.34

Fear only God, who is great of majesty, both in your private and public actions.35

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33 Reference to Qur’an, Muzzammil 73:1, Muddaththir 74:1. This is an example of a Qur’anic reference that is interpretive and exegetical (tafsīr), a common feature in Saifuddin’s poetry and prose.

34 Or: subjugate, or: colonize (Arabic: wa-lā tasta‘mir).

35 Reference to ’Ali’s sermon. Raḍī, no. 3.120.
Wear the robe of high virtue. Don the cloak of lofty character.

Walk with dignity and calm. Do not swagger in arrogance.36

Be modest in your walk and lower your voice.37 Preserve the face of your dignity, and do not grovel in front of people with your cheek in the mud.

Be gentle, practice sound judgment, return to God in repentance, and always smile—but with dignity.

Greet everyone with a happy face, and they will appreciate and respect you.

Sow seeds of love in people’s hearts with virtue and affection.


Spend your wealth wisely, with economy and planning. Do not be a wasteful spendthrift, nor a tight-fisted miser.

36 Reference to Qur’an, Luqmān 31:19.
37 Reference to Qur’an, Isrāʾ 17:37.
Spend your wealth to help people, and you will earn their approval and gratitude.

Give gifts with an open, happy heart, all for the sake of God’s pleasure. Do not seek gain through your gifts.  

Give to whoever asks, as much as you are able. Answer the cries of the destitute and the helpless.

Foster charity and kindness. Intend good for all.

If any ask for protection, protect them. If any ask for help, help them.

If someone who has wronged you acknowledges his fault, forgive him. If someone who has made a mistake offers an excuse, excuse him.

In mature behavior, be like a deeply entrenched mountain. In giving gifts, be like a pouring raincloud.

Do not lie. Do not perjure. Do not break an oath. Do not betray. Do not cheat. Do not deceive.

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38 Reference to Qur’an, Muddaththir 74:6.
Do not transgress limits. Do not break through doors. Do not climb over walls.

 Traverse the straight path with steady deliberation. Ask God to protect your feet from slipping.

Soothe people with soft words and apply balm to their wounds. Face bitter hardships bravely for the sake of God.

With knowledge and good deeds, procure the comfort of a Sound Intellect, one that possesses comprehension and discernment.

Whoever harms another incurs harm. Beware of hurting God’s creatures.

If a mendicant comes to you, give him something with a smile, and do not repulse.

As for the favors of the Almighty, speak of them. As for the orphan, do not treat him with harshness.

40 The term used, “creatures” (makhlūq), is broad, going beyond just humans to all of God’s creation, including, presumably animals, plants, and the environment.
41 Reference to Qurʾān, Dūhā 93: 13.
42 Reference to Qurʾān, Dūhā 93: 9, 11.
Make beneficial knowledge the vizier of your belief. Make mature behavior the vizier of your knowledge.\textsuperscript{43}

With deep thought, reflection, and vision, acquire knowledge that benefits.

Acquire knowledge with thoroughness, learn it assiduously, act upon it, and then disseminate it.\textsuperscript{44}

Distance yourself from black ignorance. Do not let its filth touch you. Illumine yourself with the light of beneficial knowledge.

Be bold in acquiring virtues and lofty characteristics. Hold back from vices and places of perishing.

Do not deem any deed you perform to be great. Do not deem any sin you incur a trifling.

\textsuperscript{43} Reference to Hadith: “The best vizier of belief is knowledge. The best vizier of knowledge is mature behavior. The best vizier of mature behavior is kindness. The best vizier of kindness is gentleness.” (Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin, \textit{Risālah Ramaḍāniyya: Zahr al-riyād al-azaliyyah} (Bombay: Leaders Press, 1338/1920), 41.

\textsuperscript{44} Reference to Hadith: “Four things are mandatory for every person who possesses thought and intellect from my community—listening to knowledge, remembering it, acting upon it, and disseminating it.” (Aḥāda’ al-Maʿālim, ed. Asaf Fyzee (Beirut: Dār al-Aḏwā’, 179).)
If an evil is in front, do not go forward. If a good is in front, do not hold back.

O seeker of good, come forward with eagerness. O seeker of evil, go back and desist.45

Wake up and earn noble traits. Seekers of elevation keep vigil in the nights.46

Wish for others what you wish for yourself. Choose the path of virtue in all that you do.47

Be gentle, compassionate, and kind to all living beings. Never turn into a raging tiger.

Acquire virtues, excellent virtues, whose fragrance wafts through the world like redolent musk.

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45 Reference to words by Imam Bāqir and Imam Ṣādiq: (وَعَنِّي وَعَنِّي ابِنِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ صَلَواتِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِما) إنما قال: إذا كانت ليلة الجماعة أمر الله عز وجل ملكا فنادي من أول الليل إلى آخره، ونادي في كل ليلة غير ليلة الجمعة: هل من سائل فاعطيه، هل من تائب فاتوب عليه، هل من مستغفر فاغفر له، يا طالب الخير أقبل، يا طالب الشر أقصر. Nu‘mān, Da‘īqa al-Islām, 1:180.

46 Reference to verse of poetry by al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820): “According to your efforts, you will earn high qualities. Whoever seeks elevation keeps vigil in the nights.” (تُكتَسَبُ بِقَدَرِ الْـكَدّ المعالي–وَمَن طَلَبَ العُلا سَهَرَ الليالي.) Shāfiʿī, Dīwān al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī, ed. ‘Umar Fārūq al-Ṭabbā (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam, 1995), 97.

Perfume yourself with the fragrance of a pure character. Anoint yourself with a bouquet of lofty qualities.

Be humble, never haughty, or arrogant, or proud.

God raises the station of those who humble themselves. He lowers all those who are proud and overbearing.  

Do not break the heart of a friend, a companion. Accompany him, associate with him, be one who proves worthy when tested.

Do not delay in fulfilling a pledge when you have set a day. Do not break a guarantee of security you have sworn to uphold.

Do not frolic in fruitless pursuits, O friend of intelligence. Do not turn away from truth for it shines as bright as day.

Forbid people from wrongdoing, O possessor of discernment. Command good always.

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49 Reference to Qur’an, Al-Imrân 39.

50 Reference to Qur’an, Luqmân, 31:17.
Speak words that are sound and salutary. Do not mock, or ridicule, or prattle.

Disdain crime, all types of it. Purify yourself of sin, all kinds of it.

Give thanks for God's continuous gifts. Endure any hardships that befall you with patience.

A dwelling is either prosperous or a wasteland. Cause it to prosper, then, by careful planning and execution.

If a righteous man fights for truth, his fighting will waft ambergris.

O human, if you are someone who shapes things, then believe in the best shaper of all.\(^{51}\)

Sell him your life and your property, O human, and buy from him the everlasting garden.\(^{52}\)

O human, fulfil your vow.\(^{53}\) Purify your robe.\(^{54}\) Glorify your Lord.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{51}\) Reference to Qurʾan, Taghābūn 64:3, Ghāfir 40:64.

\(^{52}\) Reference to Qurʾan, Tawbah 9:111.

\(^{53}\) Reference to Qurʾan, Baqarah 2:40.

\(^{54}\) Reference to Qurʾan, Muddaththir 74:4.

\(^{55}\) Reference to Qurʾan, Muddaththir 74:3.
From all things, take what is pure and good. Leave off what is turbid.

Trust in God, seek his aid, request his protection, take refuge in him, solicit his succor, and ask him for victory.

Man is compelled in every situation he faces in this world, all the while wearing the garment of one who is free to choose.

In religion, however, he is indeed free to choose. Choose for your soul what is good for it.56

O human, whenever Satan tries to seduce you, seek God's protection, and refuse to be seduced.57

Drunkenness numbs the intelligent person's intellect. O intelligent one, do not approach an intoxicating drink.

O insightful one, if you wish to live long in ease and plenty, do not gamble.

Do not transact except in things that are lawful and pure. Do not cheat, do not hoard, and do not speculate.

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56 Cf. Fakhruddin, “Do we have free will?”
57 Reference to Qurʾan, Naḥl 16:98.
If you seek a thing using its travelled paths, you will obtain it with ease.

وَإِذَا أَخَذْتَ الشَّيْءَ وَلَئِنْ يَتَيَسَّرُ أَخْذِهٖ فِيْ مَسْلُوْكَةٍ

If you seek a thing without following its beaten paths, you will find it difficult to obtain.

وَإِذَا قُرِيْكَ مَا يُرَجِّهِ فَلا تَنَاوُلُهَ

If something you wish for eludes you, do not grieve, do not be distressed.

تَأْسَفُ عَلٰى مَا قَاتَ لَا تَتَحَسَّرَ عَلٰى مَا فَاتَ تَأْسَفْ

Every religion contains at least one word from the people of truth, carried over from ancient times.

اِلَّا وَفِيْهَا كِلْمَةٌ مَا مِلَّةٌ قَدِيْمِ الْاَدْهُرٖ مِنْ حَقٍّ اَهْلِ

Whoever seeks clear truth with pure intent and strives for it, finds it, and finds success.

بِنِيَّةٍ يَطْلُبِ الْحَقَّ الْمُبِيْنَ وَيَظْفَرٖ يَنَلْهُ لَهُ وَيَسْعَ صَدُقَتْ

God commands his servant to be just, kind, and generous to deserving relatives.

اللهٗ يَأْمُرُ عَبْدَهٗ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَالْإِيْتَاءِ إِحْسَانِ ذَا الْقُرْبَى الْحَرِيّ إِحْسَانٌ وَالْإِيْتَاءُ ذَا الْقُرْبَى الْحَرِيّ

God forbids lewdness, treachery, and abominations.

اللَّهُ جَلَّ جَلَاَّةَ جَلِّي عَنِ الْمُحَشَّاءِ ثُمَّ الْبَغْيِ بِعَصَيْةٌ بَعْدَ الْمُنْكَرٖ ثُمَّ الْبَغْيِ

The age is corrupt, or so they say. In fact, if you test this thesis, it is not correct.

إِنَّ الزَّمَانَ بِفَسَادٍ هَكَذَا قَالُوا وَلَيْسَ كَذَاكَ عِنْدَ الْمَخْرِجِ

Rather, the condition of the age has changed due to the tyranny and changing condition of its people.

لَكِنَّ أَحْوَالَ الزَّمَانِ تَعْبِرُتْ يَعْبِرُ فِيْ أَهْلِهِ وَتَعْبِرُ

58 Reference to Qur’an, Nahl 16:90.
59 Reference to Qur’an, ‘ Ankabūt 29:45.
60 Reference to Qur’an, Ra’ād 13:11.
Speak right, speak true, and do not fear the censurer. Do not lie, do not make up stories.

Act in a way that will please God and benefit humans. Be energetic, not lazy.

If you possess knowledge and eloquence, and if your people wish it, then climb atop the pulpit.

Reiterate for them words of pure counsel. Persuade their souls to implement them.

Behave in one way both in private and in public. What you conceal should be what you manifest.

Be brave and heroic, valiant and faultless. Do not oppress, do not be cowardly, do not rush headlong into danger.

Give preference to others over yourself, even if you are in a state of poverty. Do not misappropriate everything to your benefit.

Give the mandatory rites their full due. Do not be remiss or fall short.

Pray the ritual prayer; whoever wishes to pray the ritual prayer for the Merciful Lord must also perform ablutions.
O human, believe in God with sincerity. Before this, reject the false Ṭaghut.61

As for God, fear him. As for his creatures, benefit them. As for your soul, shape its form with the declaration of God’s unity.

In God’s eyes, Islam is the true faith.62 He gave it the most suitable name.

For if one truly ponders its essence, it encompasses peace, commitment, and submission.63

The foundation of Islam’s pillars is in the Sound Intellect—master their knowledge, learn them well.64

Islam’s beauties are manifest throughout the world. When the sun appears, it cannot be concealed.

61 Reference to Qur’an, Baqarah 2:256.
62 Reference to Qur’an, Āl ʿImrān 3:19.
63 The three-letter root from which all three words derive—slm (peace), islām (commitment), and taslīm (submission)—is the same: slm.
64 In the Fatimid-Ṭayyibi tradition, these are seven (two more than the Sunnī five) “pillars” of Islam: (1) belief in one God and Muḥammad as His Messenger, and allegiance to ‘Ali, the imāms, and the dā’īs (walāyah), (2) ritual purity (tahārah), (3) ritual prayer five times a day (ṣalāh), (4) annual alms-levy (zakāh), (5) fasting during Ramaḍān (ṣawm), (6) pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj), and (7) struggle against evil (jihād). Nu’mān, Daʿāʾim al-Islām, 1:2, from Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir.
The Shari'ah is based on the rational intellect. Learn this from the most knowledgeable philosopher.\(^{65}\)

If the intellect adheres to the conditions that have been placed on the essence of its origin, it becomes true essence.

Man's intellect is in a state of potentiality. If it trains with knowledge, it emerges into actuality.

O human, safeguard the essence that your Great Lord has gifted you.

Remember the Creator of all the worlds—blessed be his names!—and remain rapt in his remembrance.

Praise him, thank him, chant the litany of his highest name—lofty be its greatness!—and ask for forgiveness.

The Qur'an contains true knowledge, a treasure of priceless jewels.

\(^{65}\) Reference to al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī and his expositions in *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah*, 1:1–9, Majlis 1–2, and passim.

\(^{66}\) Reference to Qur'an, Alā 87:1.
God—lofty be his greatness!—has made the Qur’an simple to grasp for one who would take heed.67

There is nothing wet and nothing dry except that it is contained in the luminous Book.68

If you wish to learn the meaning of a revealed verse from the Remembrance, [the Qur’an], then seek the children of the Remembrance, and ask for its meaning.69

Do not scatter pearls of knowledge before people who do not acknowledge their splendor.

Whoever engages in a transaction urged by the Remembrance,70 will always earn a profit, and never incur loss.

Always thank God for his favors, and you will gain more and more of his bounties.

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67 Reference to Qur’an, Dukhān 44:58.
68 Reference to Qur’an, An’ām 6:59.
69 Reference to Qur’an, Nahl 16:43: “Ask the family of the Remembrance (ahl al-Dhikr) if you do not know.” The “Remembrance” (al-Dhikr) is one of the names of the Qur’an. In Fatimid-Ṭayyibi doctrine, the deeper meaning of “the Remembrance” is the Prophet Muhammad himself (cf. Qur’an, Talaq 65:10–11: “We have sent to you a Remembrance, a Messenger (ذِكْرًا رسولًا إلَيْكُمْ َّهُ أَنزَلَ الْقَدْ”), and “children of the Remembrance (bani-al-Dhikr)” —like “family of the Remembrance (ahl al-Dhikr)” — refers to the Imāms in his line. See detailed exposition in Mu’ayyad, Mu’ayyad, al-Majālis al-Muṭawaddiyah, 1:400–402, Majlis 82, 473–74, 154, 231, Majlis 13, 27, 49, and passim. The interpretation is made explicit in the present poem in v. 149.
70 The Remembrance, as mentioned above, is one of the names of the Qur’an.
O my people, hold fast to God’s rope and do not disperse, and you shall win resounding victory.\textsuperscript{71}

The Remembrance is linked with the “family of the Remembrance”—descendants of the pure messenger from Baṭḥâ\textsuperscript{72}.

They are stars in the sky of Mukhtâr’s prophecy,\textsuperscript{73} bright star rising after bright star.

Prophet Ṭāḥâ Muṣṭafâ is the best of people. The lord of the throne has gifted him the pool of Kawthar.\textsuperscript{74}

Muṣṭafâ is the city, medina, of knowledge. Its gate, bāb, is the master of the world, conqueror of Khaybar.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{71} Qur’an, Āl ‘Imrān 3:103. The true meaning of “God's rope” in Fatimid-Ṭayyibî doctrine is the unbroken chain of divine guides, who lead humankind to God and godliness. The next lines are a representation of that “rope.” Explained further below in section 5.2.3.

\textsuperscript{72} Baṭḥâ—lit. large area of flat land—is another name for Mecca.

\textsuperscript{73} Reference to the Prophet Muḥammad. Mukhtâr (lit. the chosen one) is one of his names.

\textsuperscript{74} Reference to Qur’an, Kawthar 108:1. Ṭāḥâ (Qur’an, Ṭāḥâ 203) and Muṣṭafâ are two additional names of the Prophet Muḥammad. In Ṭayyibî doctrine, Kawthar is an esoteric reference to Muḥammad’s Legatee, ‘Alî. This verse paraphrases the opening line of Saifuddin’s own earlier well-known poem in praise of the Prophet, “لا حظو بر الفريد في سماء نبوة الله مختار يطلع نير عن نير طه النبي المصطفى خير الورى أعطاه ذو العرش العظيم الـكوثرا...” (“Prophet Ṭāḥâ Muṣṭafâ is the best of creation. The lord of the throne has gifted him Kawthar.” Saifuddin, Jawâhir al-balâghah, 347.)

\textsuperscript{75} Reference to Hadith: “I am the city of knowledge and ‘Alî is its gateway.” (أنا مدينة العلم وعلي بابها) cited by al-Qâḍî al-Nu’mân, Sharḥ al-akhbâr fî fadâ’il al-a’immah al-athâr (Qum: Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islâmî, 1991), 189; cited also by several canonical Sunni sources, including al-Tirmidhî, Sunan al-Tirmidhî, ed. Ahmad Muḥammad Shâkir (Cairo: Muṣṭafâ al-Bâbî l-Ḥalabî, 1937), no. 3720.
Medina’s honor is lofty because it is the resting place of that *medina*. The *bāb*’s grave has bestowed honor to the earth of Gharī.\(^{76}\)

Their sons, sons of Fāṭimah al-Batūl, are Imams whose virtues cannot be counted.

They are the people of the robe, the robe of purity.\(^{77}\) Whoever supports them is purified from all forms of filth.

They are Imams who have suckled the milk of revelation.\(^{78}\) Trustees of the lord of the throne. Intercessors on the day of resurrection.

They are the truthful ones (*ṣādiqūn*) whose truthfulness is attested by all the people. Their purity (*ṣafā*) symbolizes [the Ḥajj rites of] Ṣafā and Mashʿar.

People call the Prophet Muṣṭafā’s hadith “elevated” when they narrate it on the authority of [Muḥammad] al-Bāqir or Jaʿfar [al-Ṣādiq].\(^{79}\)

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\(^{76}\) Gharī is the ancient name for the city of Najaf, home to ‘Alī’s shrine.

\(^{77}\) Reference to Qur’an, Ḥzāb 33:33. The report about the occasion of revelation of this verse, and the Prophet’s enveloping himself, ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, Hasan and Husayn in the “robe of purity” is explained in Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾīm al-Islām*, 1:35, 37.

\(^{78}\) Reference to their mother, the Prophet’s daughter Fāṭimah. Cf. Saifuddin, *Jawāñir al-balāğah*, 2:230 in a praise poem for her son, the Prophet’s grandson, al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Ali: “You have suckled from Fāṭimah Zahra’ the milk of revelation.”

\(^{79}\) I.e., they do not cite the narrators between these Imam’s and the Prophet, because they trust the authority of these Imams entirely.
They are the arks of salvation. Whoever embarks upon them is saved from the raging, stormy sea of primordial matter.\textsuperscript{80}

They are the Fatimids, magnanimous chieftains. How many rivers of beneficial knowledge did they make flow!

Each Imam is a guide for the people in his age, following on from the Hashimite Prophet, the Warner.\textsuperscript{81}

The Imams have appointed \textit{Dāʿī}s with full authority, who are overflowing, unending seas of true knowledge.

Each \textit{Dāʿī} is a philosopher skilled in running the \textit{Daʿwah}, his virtue is great.

He is an exemplar for the learned and the choicest among them. He is the most honorable manifestation for the radiance of the light of knowledge.

I am the Imams' \textit{Dāʿī} who walks their rightly guided, luminous, and well-trodden path.

\textsuperscript{80} Reference to Hadith: "My kin are like Noa's Ark—those who climb aboard are saved, those who waver are drowned" (مَثَلُ أهل بيتي مِثْلُ سفينة نوح من ركب فيها نجى ومن تَغَرَّقَ). Qudāʿi, \textit{Kitāb al-Shihāb}, no. 11.1.

\textsuperscript{81} Reference to Qur'ān, Raḍ 13:7.
I am Taher Saifuddin, who calls (dāʿī) God’s creatures toward abundant good.

And toward comprehensive security in the cradle of wellbeing, and toward a fruitful life.

I have tested the conditions of the age, experiencing them through time with deliberation and patience.

High waves of the storm of deviation clashed and billowed like mountains, yet I was not perplexed.

Rather, I remained firm in my perfect certainty of victory from the Great God.

I have offered sincere service to the descendants of the Prophet, who is the best giver of glad tidings.

This poem contains compelling insights, arising from the experiences of one who was given command, and a long life, through a long age.

It is the fruit of knowledge whose rivers flow amply from the spring of right guidance.

It contains good words that will benefit people. Utter them if you can or write them down.
Store treasures of love of the Prophet and his radiant, well-contented descendants, for your religion, your worldly life, and your afterlife.

Perform good deeds as much as you can, and you will be given the gardens of paradise and beautiful, colored carpets. ⁸²

May God shower blessings on the Prophet and his pure descendants, the people of the house, the most honorable assembly.

4 Analysis of the Poem’s Philosophical Content and Literary Form

4.1 The Poem’s Core Message

The term “intellect” (ʿaql) has layers of meaning in Fatimid-Ṭayyibī metaphysical tradition. The term is used 28 times through the 177 lines of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem, often occupying the position of first—and thus accentuated—word in a line. Initially in the poem, it refers to the primordial intellect, but through the bulk of the poem, it refers to the human intellect. In some places, it refers to both or either, emphasizing the fact that the human intellect is a trace of the primordial intellect.

If we parse Saifuddin’s uses of the word, the poem’s core philosophy reveals itself: The primordial intellect is pure and self-aware, perfect, complete, and divine (vv. 2–3, 27). The human intellect—while currently far below the station of the primordial intellect—has the potential to achieve full realization and eternal bliss (vv. 136–37). If sound, it is itself the highest essence (v. 1), an elixir that has the potential to transform a human intellect’s copper base into red gold and enable its return to original perfection (v. 6). All this is achieved

⁸² Reference to Qur’an, Raḥmān 55:76.
through the Imam’s guidance (v. 7), which teaches it to lead a Pure Life (vv. 10, 14), comprehend the meaning of religion, train it through knowledge, and safeguard its essence (vv. 133–35). It is interesting to note that 28—the number of times the word ‘aql is used in the poem—is the same number of letters in the Islamic creed of faith, Lā ilāha illā llāh, “There is no god but God.” In the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī tradition, these denote the 28 rank-holders who guide humans to God.83 But though the human intellect has the potential to become angelic, it could also go the opposite way, to perdition. It is susceptible to blights of arrogance, coercion, and tyranny (v. 13). If base desires take over, they drive the intellect toward a watering-hole where all things perish (v. 11). It could, for example, be numbed by alcohol (v. 108), portrayed as an enemy of rationality and a serious impediment to the human intellect’s movement from potentiality to actuality.

In light of this parsing of the uses of the poem’s core word, “intellect,” we can paraphrase Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s central message in his Poem of the Intellect as follows: You, O human, have the potential to rehabilitate your human intellect and return to the realm of the primordial intellect, which is your original home. If you cultivate Sound Intellect by following the guidance of the divinely guided Imam, himself a pure intellect, if you lead the Pure Life that he teaches you to live, with the right approach and actions, by cultivating virtues and rejecting vices, if you do this, as I have taught you to do in this poem, you will earn salvation.

As we have seen, Saifuddin’s Poem of the Intellect refers to some of the higher mysteries of Fatimid-Ṭayyibī metaphysics. Its framing and much of its philosophical content echoes the Fatimid Chief Dāʾī Muʿayyad’s Majālis: for example, several verses echo Muʿayyad’s assertions about the creation of the first intellect.84 However, being a public exposition rather than a closely guarded text of the higher truths (ḥaqāʾiq), the poem refers to these mysteries briefly in veiled, mystical language, while focusing more explicitly and lengthily on the practical application of the Imam’s divine guidance, and of the human intellect’s realization of its potential of good through that guidance. Thus, the larger part of the poem—frequently citing the Qurʾan, the hadith of

83 See Muʿayyad, al-Majālis al-Muʿayyadiyyah, 1:38–42, Majlis 10. This may have happened naturally, as result of poetic inspiration combined with long experience and profound knowledge of the tradition. If so, it offers even more meaning.
the Prophet Muḥammad, and the sayings of Imam ‘Alī— is devoted to counsel about how to lead a Pure Life.

To turn this last point around, however, the Pure Life that Saifuddin advocates, the practical application of the Imam’s guidance that he emphasizes, is grounded in the vital role ascribed to the human intellect. As he says in verse 135, “The Sharīʿah is based on the rational intellect.⁸⁵ Learn this from the most knowledgeable philosopher.” The larger part of the poem may be devoted to practical applications, but it directly follows from the philosophical framing. It is important to note the absolute primacy of reason in Saifuddin’s philosophy. This may be obvious from even a cursory look at the poem, from the opening line itself, but it is essential to mark the stark difference between this philosophy and between the approaches of many other Muslim denominations through the centuries that subtly sideline or even explicitly de-emphasize reason. For Saifuddin, intellectualism is not an elitist enterprise. Rather, it is the life force for all humans. For him, it is not separate from action and belief. Rather, it is the driving force for all action and belief. In the Fatimid-Ṭayyibi view expounded by this poem, the whole point of human existence is to get back to the realm of pure intellect, and the way to do that is to develop Sound Intellect through the guidance of the Imam, who is himself pure intellect.

With the goal of rehabilitation and return for all God’s creation, the poem takes a positive and broadminded attitude toward human life, and indeed, for all of creation, animate and inanimate. Saifuddin, following Imam ‘Alī’s famous sermon (v. 39 ff., details follow in section 5.2.2), praises the world as “an abode of truth” (v. 40), as the place where humans are given a chance to earn eternal life. Presenting religion and worldly life as twins (v. 35), he declares that for those who live a Pure Life on this earth, the earth turns into Jupiter (v. 36), the star of auspiciousness in the astrological system of the Fatimid-Ṭayyibis. Saifuddin promotes harmony between all people on earth, tranquility in one’s life, cheerfulness and positivity, and an atmosphere of love and caring. It is significant to observe that he is reiterating these timeless Islamic and humanitarian values in the wake of the oppression of colonialism, and the

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⁸⁵ This verse and vv. 4, 5 echo Mu’ayyad’s assertions that religion is grounded in reason (Mu’ayyad, al-Majālis al-Mu’ayyadiyyah, 13–9, Majlis 1 and 2). For an analysis of the Fatimid-Ṭayyibi doctrine that the Sharīʿah is based on reason, and its rationality is understood through the symbolic “taʾwil” explication of the Imams, see T. Qutbuddin, “Principles of Fatimid Symbolic Interpretation (Taʾwil),” 163–165, and passim. The most important Fatimid text expounding the taʾwil of the Sharīʿah is al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān, Taʾwil al-Daʿāʾim, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Aẓāmī. 2 vols., Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1982.
ravages of World War II. His poem attempts to show the way to an uplifting mode of life for his Muslim community, and for humanity as a whole.

Significantly, although the poem exalts the intellect, even the human intellect (vv. 1–6, and passim), it also reminds the reader that it is Almighty God who has bestowed on him this most precious gift. Verse 22 declaims: “Glory to the lord who granted you this marvelous intellect! Recognize him, do not ever deny him.” It reminds him that the human intellect is dependent on the sun of revelation to function well (vv. 7–9), that it is beset by arrogance, coercion, and tyranny (v. 13), and that true intellectual strength is earned by recognizing God (v. 23).

4.2 The Text as a Generic Hybrid between Ḍaṣīdah Poem, Formal Testament, and Theological Treatise

The Intellect Poem is a hybrid text, showcasing a unique adaptation of three well-known genres, the ḍaṣīdah poem, the formal testament (wāṣīyyah) and theological treatise (risālah). In terms of formal literary features, it is a standard two-hemistich ḍaṣīdah poem with monorhyme and monometer, in the traditional and common Arabic kāmil meter: mutafāʿilun mutafāʿilun mutafāʿilun, with an R rhyme. But it is not simply a discourse versified in meter and rhyme, such as Ibn Mālik’s medieval grammar text, the thousand-verse Alfiyyah. Rather, it imaginatively combines core features of these three genres to produce a unique literary work that is recited and performed in community gatherings, studied and cited in academies of learning, and implemented in action on the ground (complete audio recitation: https://soundcloud.com/aziz-qutbuddin/the-intellect-poem). The Intellect Poem, together with Saifuddin’s experimentations with hybrid Arabic and Indian metrical forms, showcases his mastery of, and originality in, the Arabic literary tradition.

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86 This hybridity extends to another of Saifuddin’s poems, also composed in 1962, that creatively combines and adapts the features of ḍaṣīdah with autobiography (sīrah). See details in A. Qutbuddin, “The ḍaṣīdah-Autobiography,” 12–29.

87 In the terminology of the Western Classical tradition, the metrical feet may be expressed in the following sequence of long (×) and short (-) syllables: < - - × - × / - - × - × / - - × - × >.


89 On hybridity in Saifuddin’s poetry, see T. Qutbuddin, “Karbala Mourning,” 39–43.
In the context of the *risālah* or treatise tradition, the Intellect Poem offers a clear thesis and persuades its audience to pursue a Pure Life. It establishes the foundation of this life in the author’s philosophy of the intellect, and the origins and purpose of creation. Towards the conclusion, the poet presents this way of life as the path to salvation (vv. 175–176). The poem is thus a concise repository of a metaphysical theory of creation, existence, and purpose, and it is a practical, persuasive manual for leading a moral and purposeful life.

In the context of the *waṣiyyah* or testament tradition, the Intellect Poem draws on the Qur’an, hadith of the Prophet, and sayings of the Imams, and counsels the reader to inculcate virtues and reject vices; it catalogs a detailed list which we have discussed in the Summary Distillation that follows shortly. In this context too, Saifuddin brings in an expression of self as a sincere and experienced guide, and, in his role as the Imam’s appointed representative, as the manifestation of God’s rope among the people in the present day. As he says in verse 172, “This poem contains compelling insights, arising from the experiences of one who was given command, and a long life, through a long age.”

In the context of the *qaṣīdah* or formal poetry tradition, in addition to maintaining its formal features, the Intellect Poem harnesses three of the *qaṣīdah* tradition’s major conventions to its philosophical and homiletic aims: metaphorical language, remembrance of the beloved (*dhikr al-ḥabīb*), and a journey (*rahīl*). Harnessing the *qaṣīdah* tradition’s emphasis on metaphorical language, the Intellect Poem evokes the higher mysteries of Fatimid-Ṭayyibi metaphysics through allusion (*kināyah*), metaphor (*istiʿārah*), and simile (*tashbīh*), which are important characteristics of the *qaṣīdah*; here, they are meant to be understood fully only by the initiated. Harnessing the *qaṣīdah* tradition’s remembrance of the beloved, the Intellect Poem urges the reader to remember the Creator, to ponder His words which themselves constitute the Wise Remembrance (*al-Dhikr al-Ḥakīm*), and to seek their meaning from...
God’s chosen saints, the Imams who are the “family of the Remembrance” (vv. 139–149). Harnessing the qaṣīdah tradition’s theme of journey, the Intellect Poem charts a journey—with the Imam as guide—from this world, where the intellect has fallen, back to its original home in the primordial realm, where it was first created. The traditional Arabic qaṣīdah is set in the particular context of desert-based, nomadic-life pre-Islamic conventions; the Intellect Poem echoes the main idea of these conventions without engaging with its particular motifs. It reimagines those traditional components to serve its own goals. Framed by the allusion to the creation of the primordial intellect, we see the poem moving to the flowering of the human intellect in this world. Here, through right approach, right action, and the guidance of the divine guide, the human intellect—a trace from the primordial intellect—evolves into a Sound Intellect, leads a Pure Life, and comes full circle to achieve salvation and reintegrate into the world of the primordial intellect. This transformative rehabilitation is expressed in many verses, perhaps in none so clearly as in the following two: “If the intellect adheres to the conditions that have been placed on the essence of its origin, it becomes true essence. Man’s intellect is in a state of potentiality. If it trains with knowledge, it emerges into actuality” (vv. 136–137). These two verses echo and amplify the poem’s opening line, “The intellect is the loftiest essence of the human—it gleams in his soul like the moon.”

5 Contents: Summary and Commentary

Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s Poem of the Intellect may be divided into the following sections:
- The first, framing section provides a philosophical foundation for the poem (vv. 1–14).
- This is followed by three broad thematic sections describing fundamentals of a Pure Life: abstract principles of true belief and right approach (vv. 15–50), specific points of virtuous character and good actions (vv. 51–147), and the grounding of both the abstract and the specific in love for the Imams and Dāʿīs who are the divine guides and the “rope of God” (vv. 148–164).
- The poem’s closing section provides an expression of self and a declaration that leading a Pure Life, as he has outlined—with virtues, good deeds, and love and allegiance for the Imams and Dāʿīs—will lead to salvation (vv. 165–177, end).

In the following pages, we extract and annotate the main points of Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem.
5.1 Framing Section (vv. 1–14): The Sound Human Intellect and Its Divine Guide

The opening line of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s Intellect Poem—“The intellect is the essence of the human” (v. 1)—signals the humanistic focus of a text grounded in metaphysics. In Saifuddin’s philosophy, the intellect is “the first thing to be created” (v. 2). The human intellect—in the words of the Fatimid Dāʿī Muʿayyad, “a small trace from the world of first creation”92—is a powerful instrument that, for all its potency, is dependent in order to function on illumination from the Imam, the divinely-guided guide, who is “the luminous station (al-maḥām al-azhār)” (v. 7) and “the sun of revelation (shams al-wahy)” (v. 9). Also echoing Muʿayyad’s exposition, Saifuddin uses the analogy of the eye, which, even if perfect in ocular physiology, still needs light from the outside to see (v. 8).93 In a dark room, a person with perfect eyesight and a blind person are equal in their inability to see. To see, you need healthy eyes and outside light. Similarly, for your intellect to function, you need a healthy intellect and illumination from the divine guides.

Moreover, the intellect is the best of creation only if it is sound (ʿaql salīm—the actual term is used and explained later in v. 72 and v. 133). An intellect is sound when it remains in its pure form, the form in which God created it, without being corrupted by injustice and malice (v. 10). These impure drivers are equated in the next verse with animalistic passions, which, if given the reins, lead it to its death (v. 11). Saifuddin presents the example of impure light which corrupts perception—in grey light, all objects appear grey (v. 12). Moreover, he says the intellect can also be corrupted by blights such as arrogance, coercion, and tyranny (v. 13). For a human to live a Pure Life—mentioned explicitly in the verse—it is necessary for his Sound Intellect, guided by the Imam, to be in the seat of control (v. 14).

5.2 Body of the Poem: Components of a Pure Life (Ḥayāh Ṭayyībah) (vv. 15–165)

Echoing the Qurʾānic expression, Saifuddin uses the term, a Pure Life (ḥayāh ṭayyībah), to encompass the life governed by Sound Intellect (ʿaql salīm) (v. 14).94 As mentioned, he characterizes it as one that (1) encompasses true belief and right approach, (2) as well as virtuous character and good actions,

93 Muʿayyad, al-Majālis al-Muʿayyadiyyah, 1:30, Majlis 23.
94 Qurʾān, Nahl 16:97.
and (3) most importantly (and the core of right belief and right approach), it stems from a human’s love and obedience for the Imams and Dā’īs. The body of the Intellect Poem explains details of these three aspects.

5.2.1 True Belief and Right Approach (vv. 15–50)
According to Saifuddin, the basis of a Pure Life is belief in the Creator. Several verses are devoted to addressing aspects of this fundamental doctrine, which may be listed as follows (vv. 15–29):

- If you know yourself, you will know your Lord, who is beyond comprehension (v. 15), echoing a hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad, cited often by Mu’ayyad.95
- If you have the capacity to achieve what humans before you were not able to achieve, then acknowledge the greatness of the one who gave you this ability (vv. 16–17).
- God’s creation is God’s sign—ponder creation and you will recognize the Creator (vv. 17–25).
- Illumine your soul with the light of knowledge, go deep in your search for the Higher Truths (v. 26).
- Know that even the intact intellect is perplexed by the Creator’s grandeur (v. 27).
- Know the value of your own intellect and cultivate your soul (vv. 28–29).

The establishment of the monotheistic creed, and the injunction to seek knowledge about the Creator, segues into the next section on the right approach to leading a Pure Life, characterized by five broad points (vv. 30–50).

- Express gratitude for the Creator who gave you human form, showered you with blessings, whose sun continues to give forth its lifegiving rays to the physical world, and whose grace (fayd) continues to flow to the spiritual world (vv. 30–32). Heading this segment, the injunction to ḥamd—praise and gratitude for God—is a common starting point for Islamic addresses, written and verbal, following the example of the opening line of the Qur’an, “Praise be to God, lord of all the worlds (al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabbi l-ʿālamīn).”
- Follow the “natural way” (fitrāh) of creation, i.e., human instincts to eat, drink, have sex, and live joyfully, in accordance with the Shariʿah. The system that follows this natural way will work smoothly, while the one that goes against it will fail (vv. 33–34). Saifuddin encourages the reader to understand that this world that we live in is part of God’s plan, and that

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religion and worldly life are “like twins” (v. 35). When your natural instincts are governed by God’s Law, when you live your life according to the precepts of God’s religion, when you follow the guidance of God’s vicegerent, your life will be “as radiant as Jupiter,” an auspicious planet in the Fatimid-Ṭayyibi system of belief. You will be happy and content and fulfilled (vv. 36–38).

– Practice “harmony” (wiʾām, v. 38) with your fellow humans—living amicably and affectionately with others, family, community, brethren in faith, fellow citizens, and all the world.

– View your life in this world as an opportunity to gain eternal life. This set of lines (vv. 39–44) explicitly paraphrases a famous sermon by ‘Alī, which praises the world as “an abode of truth ... and well-being” for the truthful and discerning, “a mosque for God’s loved ones,” “a place of prayer for ... the angels,” “a place where [God’s] revelation ... descends,” and “a place where God’s elect transact ... and profit.”

– Strive with enthusiasm for advancement in both realms (v. 45) through god-fearing piety (v. 46), by viewing faith as the spirit energizing your worldly life (v. 47), by taking control and choosing to live a noble life (v. 48), by “using the world’s services and not becoming its servant” (v. 49), and by “cultivating the prosperity of this world and the hereafter” (v. 50).

These injunctions toward the right approach transitions into the next section, which contains specifics of how one should lead one’s life.

5.2.2  Virtuous Character and Good Actions (vv. 51–147)
In essence, and following the approach taken by its guiding sources, piety and virtue are seen as two sides of the same coin.\(^{99}\) This is the largest segment of the poem, and it contains a wide range of counsels for inculcating virtue and doing good, for humans individually and on a societal plane, grounded in the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī vision of Islam. We have not listed them here for fear of being prolix, and because they are clearly discernible to the reader in the text of the poem provided in this article. As mentioned before, these counsels draw deeply on the Qur’an, as well as on the hadith of the Prophet, and the teachings of Imam ‘Ali. They also combine injunctions to religious piety with directions to humanitarian virtue.\(^{100}\) Among these counsels, some are larger, framing guidelines, and others are smaller, specific instructions, and they encompass a list of virtues, behaviors, and insights that altogether guide the human to lead a Pure Life.

Largely in the form of imperative injunctions, “do this,” “do not do that,” this entire segment is constructed as a conglomeration of commands and prohibitions, an implementation of the Qur’anic injunction to “Command good and forbid evil” (al-amr bi-l-ma’rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar).\(^{101}\) Indeed, verse 94 expressly brings in the Qur’anic injunction, “Forbid people from wrongdoing, O possessor of discernment. Command good always.”

The last few verses in this segment—on Islam, the Shari‘ah, the Qur’an, and giving praise to God—transition into the final segment that comes full circle to reiterate the importance of the divine guide in actualizing the human intellect to its heavenly potential.

5.2.3  Love for the Imams and Dā‘īs: The Rope of God (vv. 148–164)
In this 29-verse closing segment of the Intellect Poem, Saifuddin expounds the Fatimid-Ṭayyibī theory of divine guidance for humankind through the person of a divinely guided guide in every age.\(^{102}\) Beginning with the Qur’an’s

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\(^{100}\) For a summary exposition with synthesis of these sources, see Fakhruddin, “Why is virtue compulsory?”

\(^{101}\) Reference to Qur’an, Luqmān, 31:17.

\(^{102}\) For a summary exposition with synthesis of these sources, see Fakhruddin, “Why do humans need a divine guide?”; Taher Fakhruddin, “How do you recognize the
injunction to “hold fast to God’s rope” (v. 148), he builds on that to explain the true meaning of God’s rope, in the unbroken chain of divine guides.\textsuperscript{103} In the prophetic cycle of the sixth major Prophet, Muḥammad, this rope begins with him (vv. 149–151). He is the “city of knowledge” whose “gate” is the Conqueror of Khaybar, ‘Ali (vv. 152–153), citing Muḥammad’s hadith.\textsuperscript{104} God’s rope then continues in the descendants of Muḥammad, ‘Ali, and Fāṭimah, Imams who are the “People of the Cloak” of Purity (vv. 154–155, citing the Qurʾān),\textsuperscript{105} who have “suckled the milk of revelation” (v. 156), who are truthful and pure (v. 157), who narrate the Prophet’s hadith on the authority of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d.ca. 732) and Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765) (v. 158), who are “arks of salvation” (v. 159), noble “Fatimids” who made rivers of knowledge flow (v. 160), each Imam “a guide for the people after the Warner,” Muḥammad (v. 161), citing the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{106} During the Imam’s concealment, God’s rope continues unbroken through the Imam’s Dāʿīs, who, given the Imam’s full authority and knowledge, fulfill his function of guidance (vv. 162–164).

5.3 Closing Section (vv. 165–77, end): Expression of Self and Promise of Salvation

The closing section of the poem brings the poet directly into the frame of reference. God’s rope is manifest in the present day, says Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin, through his own person. In the next several verses, he speaks of his service for the Imam and his guidance for the flock. He describes himself as the Dāʿī (caller)—naming himself, “I am Taher Saifuddin”—who “calls God’s creatures toward abundant good, toward comprehensive security in the cradle of well-being, and toward a fruitful life” (vv. 165–67). He declares that he has “tested the conditions of the age, experiencing them through time with deliberation and patience” (v. 168). He asserts that “High waves of the storm of deviation clashed and billowed like mountains” but he was not perplexed (v. 169). He has certainty that he will be victorious (v. 170). He iterates his sincere service for the Prophet’s descendants (v. 171). He segues into a characterization of the poem as containing “compelling insights,” from long experience, the “fruit of

\textsuperscript{103} Qurʾān, Āl ʿImrān 3:103. On the unbroken chain of the Imamate, and the Imam’s necessary presence in the world, see T. Qutbuddin’s remarks on Muʿayyad’s poetry, Al-Muʿayyad al-Shirāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry, 149–72.

\textsuperscript{104} Nuʿmān, Sharḥ al-akhbār, 189.

\textsuperscript{105} Qurʾān, Aḥzāb 33:33.

\textsuperscript{106} Qurʾān, Raʾd 137.
“[rightly-guided] knowledge” and “good words that will benefit people,” and enjoins his followers to “speak them or write them down” (vv. 172–174). In the penultimate two lines (vv. 175–176), the poet reiterates his injunction to love the Prophet and his descendants, and to perform good deeds, and this—the actuality of the Pure Life—he declares, will earn you Paradise. The final verse brings formal closure with blessings invoked on the Prophet and his family (v. 177).

6 Concluding Remarks

Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin’s life spanned a period of enormous social change in India—colonialism, modernism, the struggle for independence, and the partitioning of the country into India and Pakistan—with its attendant upheavals in lifestyle and thinking. In verse 51 of the Intellect Poem, he exhorts “do not tyrannize (or: subjugate, or: colonize),” using a verbal form of istiʿmār, a word referring in modern standard Arabic to colonialism. The appeal to the intellect, followed by the remarkable catalog of virtues in this poem may be read as an attempt to reassert time-honored values in the face of the onslaught of modernity and change. Indeed, it forms a continuous aspect of Saifuddin’s philosophy, one that stayed with him during the course of his tenure as Dāʿī—the Dāʿī being seen in Ṭayyibi doctrine as one who safeguards the faith—from the beginning to the end of his stewardship.

Two reports, one a verbal answer, and another a line of poetry, illustrate this point. In 1917, just a year and a half into his tenure, Saifuddin paid a lengthy five-month visit—by train, bullock cart, and horseback—to various towns and villages in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. The Nawab of Bhavnagar’s Diwān (a title similar to vizier), considered an astute and worldly-wise man, paid the young 28-year-old Sayyidna a visit, and thought to guide him, saying, “We should keep our religion in step with our times.” Sayyidna spontaneously answered, “No! We should keep our times in step with our religion.” The Diwān remarked to the Sayyidna’s followers as he left, “I had come to give a gift of counsel, instead I leave having received a gift of counsel.” This approach characterized Saifuddin’s entire tenure as Dāʿī.

107 We thank Stefan Sperl for this observation.
108 From a verbal account in a 2005 teaching session by Sayyidna Khuzaima Qutbuddin, noted by Aziz Qutbuddin.
Toward the end of his life—in 1961, a year before he composed the Intellect Poem—Saifuddin declared the following, in a similar vein, in one of his Supplication Poems (Munājāt):\footnote{Saifuddin, Jawāhir al-balāghah, 2378. Reference to Qurʾān, Fāṭir 35:43 (قلِ نُعِيدُ لَسَنَةَ اللَّهِ تَبَدِّلًا) وَلَن نَتَحْوِيلًا.}

بيقولون لي بدل ولست مبدلًا * فأني بما عاهدت ربي عامل

They say to me, change! But I am not one who will ever make changes. I shall persevere in safeguarding what I have pledged to my lord to safeguard.

In the Intellect Poem, Saifuddin refers to the “high waves of the storm of deviation, like mountains” (v. 169) which he resisted and fought back. Perhaps the poem aims to instill in its listeners that same confidence, that same fortitude, in the face of such waves. Like other modern “Neoplatonic” poems collected by Stefan Sperl and Yorgos Dedes in their excellent volume on the subject, this poem also reacts to a sense of rupture or crisis brought about by the modern age.\footnote{Cf. Stefan Sperl and Yorgos Dedes, eds., Faces of the Infinite—Neoplatonism and Poetry at the Confluence of Africa, Asia and Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), passim.}

But this point needs nuancing. Saifuddin is not advocating a total rejection of modernism, of changes in terms of social empowerment and equity. In fact, during his era, great advancements were made in many aspects of the community’s social life, including his strong push for education, especially the education of girls and women, at a time when this was far from the norm in India. He also harnessed the use of modern technology, for example, the use of the microphone to amplify his sermons, which, though it may seem mundane to us now, was new at the time and not always considered acceptable.\footnote{On the community leadership’s continuing embrace of modern technology in the era of Saifuddin’s successor, Sayyidna Mohammed Burhanuddin (r. 1385–1435 /1965–2014), see Blank, passim.} Hailed by many as a forward-looking visionary, he moved the community’s headquarters from Surat, which had earlier been an important metropolis but was becoming more of a backwater in his time, to Mumbai (then called Bombay), which was the up-and-coming financial hub of India, thus forcefully turning the trajectory of the community toward constructive and open engagement with modernity. As Saifuddin says in verse 49, “Use the world’s services, do not
become the world’s servant.” All in all, the poem is not proposing a dogmatic clinging to an outdated way of life. Rather, it advocates the safeguarding of the immutable principles and values of Islam, of living a Pure Life of virtue and piety in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet, ‘Ali, Imams, and Dā‘īs, while embracing positive aspects of modernism that are compatible with those principles and values.

Acknowledgment

The authors are grandchildren of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin.