This article is an attempt to depict the way early Šīʿī sources portray the life cycle of a Šīʿī believer, from creation to the Afterlife. Its main focus is the religious aspects of the principal stages through which the believer passes during both his spiritual and physical existence. It is not the intention here to describe the legal aspects of everyday Šīʿī life but rather to offer some comments on the perception of the world that the believer adopts and develops during his lifetime in light of his awareness of the Šīʿī tradition. This world perception is analyzed with reference to the five crucial stages of life:

a. Creation.

b. Birth.

c. Existence in this world.

d. Death.

e. The Afterlife.

The main source for this article is *Kitāb al-Šafqa wa l-Nūr wa l-Raḥma* (the book of the chosen ones, the light and the mercy) by Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqī, which constitutes the fourth sub-book in the published version of *Kitāb al-Mahāsin*. The reason for choosing this text is its strong emphasis on religious doctrines and creeds.
In a collection of traditions such as this, it would be natural to expect an ideal picture of the world to be drawn. However, a careful study of these traditions reveals the great gap that in reality exists between doctrines or beliefs and their implementation in everyday life. Where ideal and reality conflict, an attempt will be made to show some of the ways in which certain traditions are used in order to resolve such contradictions. The broad picture, however, is of a stable, well-nigh inflexible world view that is relevant to all stages of life.

Despite the great importance of Kitāb al-Maḥāsin within early Şīʿa literature and the fact that it served as a major source for later Şīʿa literature, this work has not received sufficient scholarly attention. Except for Andrew J. Newman, who in the fourth chapter of his book, The Formative Period of Twelver Shiʿism—Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad, provides an account of al-Barqī’s biography and briefly describes the main ideas expressed in the fourth and in the fifth sub-books of Kitāb al-Maḥāsin, no western scholar has focused on this book as his main object of research. Traditions from Kitāb al-Maḥāsin are, however, occasionally cited in western studies of Şīʿism.

In his book, Le guide divin dans le shiʿisme originel: Aux sources de l’esotérisme en Islam, the author, Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, deals thoroughly with the Şīʿa perception of the world, the heart of which is the imam. He examines the Şīʿa faith while focusing on the role of the imam as the main axis around which the faith develops and as a necessary condition to its very existence. Within his research, Amir-Moezzi also deals with the different stages of life which this article describes (creation, birth, life in this world and the Afterlife), but the present analysis of these stages will be different in two crucial aspects:

a. The Şīʿa world perception is presented as it is in the eyes of the believer, or as the Şīʿa tradition attempts to portray it for him, i.e. the believer rather than the imam is the central object of examination.

b. Unlike Amir-Moezzi who based his research on a large number of sources, this article is mainly the result of an in-depth analysis of the traditions in the fourth sub-book of Kitāb al-Maḥāsin.

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3 For the structure and the contents of Kitāb al-Maḥāsin see also below under: I. Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqī and his book Kitāb al-Maḥāsin.