

Introduction to *The Psalms of Islam (Al-Sahīfat Al-Sajjādiyya)*¹

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Al-Sahīfat Al-Sajjādiyya is the oldest prayer manual in Islamic sources and one of the most seminal works of Islamic spirituality of the early period. It was composed by the Prophet's great grandson, `Ali ibn al-Husayn, known as Zayn al-'Ābidīn ('the adornment of the worshippers'), and has been cherished in Shi'ite sources from earliest times. Zayn al-'Ābidīn was the fourth of the Shi'ite Imams, after his father Husayn, his uncle Hasan, and his grandfather 'Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law. Shi'ite tradition considers the Sahīfa a book worthy of the utmost veneration, ranking it behind only the Qur'an and Ali's *Nahj al-Balāgha*.

Ali Ibn Al-Husayn

Ali ibn al-Husayn was born in Medina, according to most sources in the year 38/658-9.² He may have been too small to have remembered his grandfather 'Ali, who was killed in 40/661, but he was brought up in the presence of his uncle Hasan and his father Husayn, the Prophet's beloved grandchildren. Many Shi'ite sources state that his mother was Shahrbānū, the daughter of Yazdigird, the last Sasanian king of Persia.³ Thus, he was said to be 'Ibn al-Khiyaratayn', the 'son of the best two', meaning the Quraysh among the Arabs and the Persians among the non-Arabs. According to some accounts, his mother was brought as a captive to Medina during the caliphate of 'Umar, who wanted to sell her. Ali suggested instead that she be offered her choice of the Muslim men as husband and that her dower be paid from the public treasury. 'Umar agreed and she chose Ali's son Husayn.⁴ She is said to have died shortly after giving birth to her only son Ali.

There is no need to recount here the tragedy at Karbala in 61/680, when al-Husayn and many of the male members of his family were killed by the forces of the Umayyad caliph Yazid, an event which shook the Islamic world and precipitated the nascent Shi'ite movement. Zayn al-'Ābidīn accompanied his father on the march toward Kūfa, but he had fallen deathly ill and was lying on a skin in a tent. Once the Umayyad troops had massacred Husayn and his male followers, they looted the tents, stripped the women of their jewellery, and even took the skin upon which Zayn al-'Ābidīn was prostrate. The infamous Shamir (Shimr) ibn Dhi'l-Jawshan was about to kill Zayn al-'Ābidīn in spite of his helplessness, but al-Husayn's sister Zaynab threw herself on top of him to save him, and 'Umar ibn Sa'd, the Umayyad commander, told Shamir to let him be. Zayn al-'Ābidīn was taken along with the women to the caliph in Damascus, and eventually he could return to Medina.

Several accounts are related concerning his grief over this tragedy. It is said that for twenty years whenever food was placed before him, he would weep. One day a servant said to him, 'O son of God's Messenger! Is it not time for your sorrow to come to an end?' He replied, 'Woe upon you! Jacob the prophet had twelve sons, and God made one of them disappear.

¹ Extracts from 'Translator's Introduction', *The Psalms of Islam*, Muhammad Trust, London, 1988, pp. xv – xlvi. **The complete article** is available at <https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zaynul-abidin/translators-introduction> and at <http://www.duas.org/sahifasajjadialinebelowline.htm#Toc241394195>

² Other dates mentioned are 33/653-4, 36/656-7, 37/657-8, 50/670.

³ Her name has also been given as Shāhzanān, Sulāfa, Ghazāla, and Shahrbānūya, among others.

⁴ Muhsin alAmīn, *A 'yan al-shi'a*, Damascus, 1935-, iv, 189.

His eyes turned white from constant weeping, his head turned grey out of sorrow, and his back became bent in gloom [cf. 12: 84], though his son was alive in this world. But I watched while my father, my brother, my uncle, and seventeen members of my family were slaughtered all around me. How should my sorrow come to an end?⁵

Zayn al-'Ābidīn resided in Medina until his death in 95/713-4 (or 94/712-3). He was the object both of great sympathy because of the massacre of his family and of veneration as the great grandson of the Prophet. He dedicated his life to learning and worship and became an authority on prophetic traditions and law, but he was known mostly for his nobility of character and his piety, which earned him his sobriquet already in his lifetime.⁶ The details that have reached us about his life in Medina mainly take the form of anecdotes affirming his constant preoccupation with worship and acts of devotion. He fathered fifteen children, eleven boys and four girls.⁷

After Karbala, there were several different factions in the Shi'ite community, not all of which supported Zayn al-'Ābidīn as the rightful Imam of the Muslim community.⁸ Many Shi'ites, such as those involved in the 'Tawwābūn' movement, felt that the Umayyads had to be overthrown and that it was the duty of the Imam to lead a revolt. But Zayn al-'Ābidīn himself refused to become involved with politics. After his death, a split occurred between his eldest son and designated successor Muhammad al-Bāqir, the fifth Imam, and his second son, al-Bāqir's half brother Zayd, who advocated active resistance to Umayyad oppression and gained a large number of followers as a result. Al-Bāqir continued to pursue his father's policy of rejecting any sort of involvement with political movements until his death (probably in 117/735).⁹ Zayd revolted toward the beginning of the imamate of al-Bāqir's son Ja'far al-Sadiq and was killed in Safar 121/January 739; his son Yahya, who plays an important role in the preface to the Sahīfa, continued in his father's path and was killed three years later at the age of eighteen. The Zaydi Shi'ites, still strong in the Yemen today, trace the lineage of their imams back to Zayd.

Al-Sahīfat Al-Sajjādiyya

The title *Al-Sahīfat al-Sajjādiyya* means simply 'The Book of al-Sajjād'. Al-Sajjād is one of the titles given to Zayn al-'Ābidīn and signifies 'the one who constantly prostrates himself in prayer'. The book is often called *Al-Sahīfat al-Kāmilat al-Sajjādiyya*, that is, 'The "Perfect", or "Complete", Book of al-Sajjad'. According to its commentator Sayyid 'Alikhān Shirazi, the word *kāmila* refers to the perfection of the style and content; some sources state that the adjective was added to differentiate it from another, incomplete version of the work, which is known among the Zaydīs, but this seems less likely, given the manner in which the title is

⁵ From Shaykh as-Sadūq, al-Khisāl; quoted in al-Amīn, A'yan, IV, 195. The same is quoted from Ibn Shahrāshūb's Manāqib in Bihār al-Anwār, XLVI, 108; Cf. similar accounts, Ibid, pp. 108-10

⁶ This title is said to have been bestowed upon him by the great jurist and traditionist Ibn Shihāb az-Zuhrī (S.H.M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*, Beirut, 1979, p. 246), who also called him the best of the Hashimites and narrated many *hadīth* from him (W. Madelung, art. Ali ibn Al-Hosayn', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, I, 850.)

⁷ The most detailed collection of accounts concerning him is found in *Bihār Al-Anwār*, XLVI, 2-209. See also Al-Mufid, *Kitāb Al-Irshād*, transl. I.K.A. Howard, London, 1981, pp. 380-92.

⁸ Cf. Jafri, *Origins*, pp. 238 ff.

⁹ Other dates given range from 112/731-2 to 126 743-4 (Jafri, *Origins*, p. 255)

employed in the preface (verse 20).¹⁰ The Sahīfa has been called by various honorifics, such as ‘Sister of the Quran’, ‘Gospel of the Folk of the House’, and ‘Psalms of the Household of Muhammad’.

According to Shi’ite tradition, Zayn al-‘Ābidīn had collected his supplications and taught them to his children, especially Muhammad al-Bāqir and Zayd. In later times the text became widely disseminated among Shi’ites of all persuasions. The specialists in the science of hadith maintain that the text is *mutawātir*;¹¹ in other words, it was generally known from earliest times and has been handed down by numerous chains of transmission, while its authenticity has never been questioned.

Nevertheless, the arrangement of the text allows us to draw a certain distinction between the fifty-four supplications which make the main body of the text and the additional supplications which make up the fourteen addenda (including the prayers for the days of the week) and the fifteen *munājāt* or ‘whispered prayers’. The original fifty-four supplications show an undeniable freshness and unity of theme and style, while the latter, especially the *munājāt*, add a certain orderliness and self-conscious artistry which may suggest the hand of an editor. The addenda are said to have been collected and added to the text by Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Makkī, known as al-Shahīd al-Awwal (the ‘first martyr’), the famous author of *Al-Lum‘at al-Dimashqiyya* in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) who was killed in Aleppo in 786/1384.¹² The fifteen *munājāt* have been added to several modern editions of the Sahīfa and seem to have been brought to the attention of the main body of Shi’ites by ‘Allāma Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110/1689-9 or a year later), author of the monumental compilation of Shi’ite *hadīth*, *Bihār al-Anwār*.¹³

Many supplications have been handed down from Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn in addition to those recorded in the text of the Sahīfa as given here, and various scholars have collected these together in a series of works known as the ‘second Sahīfa’ the ‘third Sahīfa’ and so on. The second Sahīfa which is about as long as the Sahīfa itself, was compiled as the ‘sister’ of the Sahīfa by Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Hurr al-‘Amīlī (d. 1104/1692-3), author of the famous *Wasa’il al-Shi‘a* in the year 1053/1643.¹⁴ A third Sahīfa was put together by the author of *Riyad al-‘ulama’* Mirza ‘Abd Allah ibn Mirza ‘Isa Tabrizi, known as Afandī and a student of Majlisī. The longest of the published versions is *Al-Sahīfat al-Sajjādiyya al-khamisa* (‘The Fifth Sahīfa of al-Sajjad’) by Muhsin al-Amin, the well-known contemporary author of *A‘yan al-shi‘a*.¹⁵ It includes all the supplications included in the previous Sahīfas; 130 of these are found

¹⁰ For the first opinion, Cf. Sayyid ‘Alikhān, *Riyad Al-Salikin*, commentary on the preface of the *Sahīfa*, verse 20; for the second, Cf. Āqā Najafī in his introduction to the *Sahīfa* mentioned in the following note.

¹¹ Cf. the introductions of Sayyid Muhammad Mishkāt and Sayyid Shihab al-Dīn Mar‘ashī (Āqā Najafī) to *Al-Sahīfat al-kāmilat As-Sajjādiyya*, Tehran 1361/1942; same text with Persian translation of text and introductions by Sadr al-Dīn Balāghī, Tehran 1369/1950.

¹² Cf. Majlisī, *Bihār*, LXXXVII, p. 133-4.

¹³ In *Bihār Al-Anwār* (XCI 142-53), Majlisī quotes these fifteen *Munājāt* from *Al-Kitāb Al-‘Atīq Al-Gharawī*. In his introduction (*Bihār*, 1, 16) he explains that this is a prayer book which he found in Gharī (the district of Najaf where Imam Ali is buried) and that it was compiled by one of the ancient authorities in Hadith (‘*ba’d Qudama’ Al-Muhaddithīn*).

¹⁴ Lithographed in Iran as well as in Bombay (1311/1893-4).

¹⁵ Damascus, 1330/1912. A fourth Sahīfa was compiled by Mirzā Husayn Bin Muhammad Taqī Nurī (d. 1320/1902) and was printed in Iran, and a sixth by Muhammad Sālih Al-Māzandarānī Al-Hā’-irī (for these six, see Āghā Buzurg Tehrānī, *Al-Dhārī Ilā Tasanīf Al-Shi‘a*, s.v. *Sahīfat As-Sajjādiyya*). Others have been compiled by such contemporary scholars as

in the first and second Sahīfas and 52 are added.¹⁶ In her sympathetic study of Islamic prayer manuals, *Muslim Devotions*, Constance Padwick made use of this fifth recension of the text, which fills more than six hundred pages.

Any serious attempt to sort out the relative historical reliability of the individual supplications found in all the versions of the Sahīfa on the basis of modern critical scholarship would be an undertaking of major proportions. The result of such a study - if one can judge by studies of other ancient texts - would probably be that, after years of toil, we would have a series of hypotheses, leaving varying degrees of doubt.

This would be of interest to Western scholars and modernized Muslims, both of whom, in any case, have no personal involvement with the contents and teachings of the Sahīfa. But the attitude of most Muslims has been to look at the content of the texts established by the authority of tradition and not be too concerned with who actually wrote the words in 'historical fact'. In this regard the saying of 'Ali is well known: 'Look at what has been said, not at who has said it', since only the truth or untruth of the words is of real concern.

From this point of view, if the author of the Sahīfat al-kāmila was not Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn, he - or they - would in any case have to have been a spiritual authority of equal rank, so the whole exercise leaves us where we started: with a text which expresses the highest aspirations of the Muslim soul.

However, this may be, we can be satisfied to have the core text which has been attributed to Zayn al-'Ābidīn by centuries of Shi'ite tradition. In other words, in the fifty-four basic prayers of the Sahīfa we have the Zayn al-'Ābidīn who has been known to Shi'ites for more than a thousand years and who has helped give to Shi'ism its specific contours down to the present day. Scholars may eventually reach the conclusion that the Zayn al-'Ābidīn of 'historical fact' differs from the Zayn al-'Ābidīn of tradition, but this will remain a hypothesis, since at this distance 'historical facts' are impossible to verify and as open to interpretation as literature. Whether or not historians accept the text as completely authentic will not change the actual influence which Zayn al-'Ābidīn and the Sahīfa have exercised upon Islam over the centuries, nor is it likely to change the way they continue to influence practising Muslims. The 'real' Zayn al-'Ābidīn is the figure enshrined by the text as it now stands.

The opinion of the writer of these lines concerning the authenticity of the Sahīfa - admittedly based only upon an intimate acquaintance with the text gained through many months spent in translation - is that the original fifty-four prayers go back to Zayn al-'Ābidīn, that the addenda are nearly as trustworthy, and that the *munajat* may have been worked upon by others. But the Sahīfa in its larger forms probably contains a good deal of material from later authors. It is interesting to note Padwick's comments on the Sahīfat al-khamisa: 'The great body of devotion attributed to him is characterized by a deep humility and sense of sin, and by an intransigent, undying resentment against the foes of his house.'¹⁷ Only the first half of this statement is true about the present Sahīfa. Though the Imam makes a number of allusions to the injustice suffered by his family and the fact that their rightful heritage has been

Haj Shaykh Muhammad Bāqir Bin Muhammad Hasan Bīrjandī Qā'inī, Shaykh Hadi ibn 'Abbās Āl-i Kāshif Al-Ghitā Najafī, and Hajj Mīrzā Ali Husaynī Mar'ashī Shahrīstānī Hāirī (Cf. Āqā Najafī's introduction to the *Sahīfa*)

¹⁶ Tehrānī, *Al-Dhari'a*, s.v. *Sahīfat al-Sajjādiyya*.

¹⁷ *Muslim Devotions*, London, 1961, p. xvi.

usurped,¹⁸ no one can call this a major theme of the Sahīfa or an 'intransigent, undying resentment'. In the one instance where Zayn al-'Ābidīn speaks rather explicitly of the injustice suffered by the Imams (48.9-11), this is accompanied by an admission of God's wisdom in His ordainment.

The Arabic Text

The Arabic text of the *Sahīfat al-kāmila* which forms the basis for the translation was established by al-Shahīd al-Awwal. The modern Iranian editions are based mainly on the version of this text transmitted by the father of the above-mentioned Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, Mullā Muhammad Taqī Majlisī (d. 1070/1659-60), also an important scholar of the Safavid period. and another son, Mulla 'Abd Allah (d. c. 1084/1673); but at least one of these editions goes back to the famous Safavid jurist, philosopher, architect, poet, and mathematician Shaykh-i Bahā'i (d. 1031/1621-2).¹⁹ The elder Majlisī had at his disposal numerous manuscripts of the text, which he had received from the foremost Shi'ite authorities of his day. In one of his works he refers to all the chains of transmission by which he had received the Sahīfa, and, we are told, these number more than a million.²⁰

The question naturally arises as to why Majlisī chose the particular chain of transmission mentioned in the preface out of the many he had at his disposal, especially since the chain itself is exceedingly weak (as indicated by the commentators and recorded in the notes to the translation). The reason for this seems to be the accuracy of this particular version going back to al-Shahīd al-Awwal, as confirmed by another 'special' route through which Majlisī received the *Sahīfa*. This special route is worth mentioning in detail, since it provides a good example of the aura which has surrounded the text in Shi'ite circles.

One day, lying in bed half asleep, Majlisī saw himself in the courtyard of the 'Atīq mosque in Isfahan, and before him stood the Mahdī, the Twelfth Imam. Majlisī asked him about several scholarly problems which he had not been able to solve, and the Mahdi explained their solutions. Then Majlisī asked him for a book which he could put into practice, and the Mahdi directed him to seek out Mawlānā Muhammad al-Tāj. In his vision Majlisī found the book, and it appeared to be a book of supplications. Waking up, he saw that his hand was empty, and he wept until morning at his loss. At daybreak it occurred to him that perhaps the Mahdi had meant Shaykh Muhammad Mudarris, calling him by the title 'Tāj' (the 'crown') because he was so famous among the scholars. Hence, he went to see Shaykh Muhammad, and, entering his circle, saw that he held a copy of the Sahīfa in his hand. He went forward and recounted his vision to Shaykh Muhammad, who interpreted it to mean that he would reach high levels of gnostic and visionary knowledge. But Majlisī was not satisfied with this explanation, and he wandered around the bazaar in perplexity and sorrow. Upon reaching the melon market, he met a pious old man known as Āqā Hasan, whom the people called, Tājā ('Crown'). Majlisī greeted him, and Āqā Hasan called to him and said that he had a number of books which were consecrated for religious purpose (*maqfā*) but that he did not trust most of

¹⁸ For references to the 'right' of the Prophet's Household to the Imamate to their special Cf. Supplication 26.1; 42.5

¹⁹ A note appended to Sha'rānī's edition and translation tells us that it was copied from a manuscript written, collated, corrected, and signed by Shaykh-i Bahā'i; the text is identical to that which goes back to Majlisī.

²⁰ Cf. Mishkāt's introduction to *As-Sahīfat al-kāmilat Al-Sajjādiyya*

the students to put them to proper use. 'Come', he said, 'and take whichever of these books which you think you can put into practice.'

Entering Āqā Hasan's library, Majlisī immediately saw the book he had seen in his dream, so he said: 'This is enough for me.' It was a copy of the Sahīfa. He then went back to Shaykh Muhammad and began collating his newly acquired copy with that of Shaykh Muhammad; both had been made from the manuscript of al-Shahīd al-Awwal. In short, Majlisī tells us that the authenticity of his copy of the Sahīfa was confirmed by the Mahdī himself.

At least forty commentaries and glosses have been written on the *Sahīfa* mostly during the period extending from the Safavid era (907-1125/1502-1722) to the present. Among famous Safavid scholars who wrote commentaries are Shaykh-i Baha'i, the philosopher Mīr Dāmād (d. c. 1040/1630), and the younger Majlisī. The most well-known of the commentaries is *Riyād al-sālikīn* by al-Sayyid 'Alikhān al-Husayn al-Hasan al-Shīrāzī (d. 1120/1708-9).

The Sahīfa And Islamic Spirituality

Despite studies that have rejected the idea, many people in the West still believe that 'true Islam' lies in simplicity, austerity, legalism, formalism, and a God perceived as Just and Transcendent. Hence those elements of Islamic civilization which demonstrate complexity, subtlety, warmth, love, inwardness, spirituality, and a God of mercy, compassion, and immanence are seen as largely extraneous to or reactions against Qur'anic Islam. Scholars such as Massignon have pointed out that a person of spiritual sensitivity only needs to read the Qur'an for such ideas to be dissolved. But few people who have adopted the old stereotypes possess this sort of sensitivity or would be interested in changing their preconceived ideas, lest sympathy be stirred up in their hearts. It is not my aim here to reject, as so many have done before me, these common biases concerning the nature of 'true Islam', but I would like to point out that a work like the *Sahīfa* brings out an inward dimension of Islam which may be much more difficult to perceive in other early texts.

When scholars and other outsiders look at Islam, they naturally perceive what can be seen at first glance, that is, events, written reports and records, social relationships, and so on. It is not easy to look into people's hearts or to investigate their personal relationship with God, nor are most people interested in doing so. If there is a way into hearts, it must come by studying the most inward concerns of individuals as reflected in their outward activities and writings. But those dimensions of Islam which have caught the most attention of outside observers are external and obvious, and they also happen to be relatively devoid of the love and warmth normally associated in the West with spirituality.

Islamic civilization as a whole is much like a traditional Muslim city: The outer walls make it appear dull and sombre, and it is not easy to gain access to the world behind the walls. But if one becomes an intimate with the city's inhabitants, one is shown into delightful courtyards and gardens, full of fragrant flowers, fruit trees, and sparkling fountains. Those who write about Islamic history, political events, and institutions deal with the walls, since they have no way into the gardens. Some of the gardens are opened up through the study of Sufism, art and architecture, poetry, and music, but since all of these have appeared in specific historical forms influenced by the surrounding environment, their deep Islamic roots can easily be lost to sight. The most traditional and authentic gardens of the city, and the most difficult

of access, are the hearts of the greatest representatives of the civilization. It is here that the supplications handed down from the pillars of early Islam can open up a whole new vision of Islam's animating spirit, since they provide direct access to the types of human attitudes that are the prerequisite for a full flowering of the Islamic ideal.

Other Dimensions

This introduction may seem to be suggesting that the *Sahīfa* deals exclusively with Islamic spirituality. But the *Sahīfa* deals with other domains as well. As was pointed out above, the great representatives of Islam bring together all levels of Islamic teachings, just as these are brought together by the Qur'an and the *hadith*. If spirituality has been emphasized in discussing the *Sahīfa*, this has to do with the fact that the work is a collection of supplications, and these presuppose certain attitudes toward the Divine Reality which cannot be understood outside spirituality's context.

But the *Sahīfa* also provides teachings that are applicable on many different levels, from the theological (in the broadest sense of the term) to the social. A thorough analysis of these would demand a book far longer than the *Sahīfa* itself. It is hoped that the publication of this translation will encourage scholars to study the content of the prayers contained in the *Sahīfa* (as well as the prayers left by other pillars of early Islam, the Shi'ite Imams in particular) to bring out the whole range of teachings they contain. The most that can be done here is to allude to some of the other important topics touched upon by the *Sahīfa* and mention a few of the significant questions which these bring up.

Islam is an organic reality possessing three basic dimensions: practice or the *Shari'a* (*al-islām*) faith (*al-īmān* which includes doctrine and intellectual teachings), and spirituality (*al-ihāsān*). In the lived experience of the community, these dimensions are intimately interrelated, even if various institutional forms tend to deal with them separately. The earliest sources, such as the prophetic hadith or Ali's *Nahj al-Balāgha* deal with all three of these dimensions, though different passages can be isolated which stress one specific epic rather than another. But a work like the *Nahj al-Balāgha* converges profoundly from the *Sahīfa* in that it brings together sayings on all sorts of matters, from metaphysics, to the nature of correct government, to the personal flaws of some of Ali's contemporaries. There is no stress on spirituality, since this is clearly one dimension of Islam among others, though a deep spirituality and holiness underly everything that Ali says.

In contrast, the *Sahīfa* by its supplicatory form and content, stresses the innermost dimension of Islam. But at the same time, it also touches upon Islam's other dimensions. For example, the traditional category of 'faith' is concerned with God, the angels, the prophets, the scriptures, the Last Day, and the 'measuring' (*qadar*) of both good and evil. These objects of faith form the basic subject matter of most of Islamic thought as developed in *kalam* philosophy, and theoretical Sufism. Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn discusses all of these in the *Sahīfa* sometimes briefly and sometimes in detail. Thus, he often mentions the angels, while his 'Blessing upon the Bearers of the Throne' (3) provides the best available summary of Muslim beliefs concerning them.

The Imam also refers frequently to the domain of Islamic practices, or the *Shari'a* in the wide sense. He emphasizes the absolute necessity of following God's guidelines as set down in the Qur'an and the hadith in both individual and social life. Hence the *Sahīfa* provides

many specific social teachings as well as general injunctions, such as the necessity of establishing justice in society. But since the social teachings deal with the domain of practice, the outermost dimension of Islam, they need to be viewed within the context of the Imam's doctrinal and spiritual teachings. As he makes eminently clear in his 'Treatise on Rights', a hierarchy of priorities must always be observed: The individual comes before the social, the spiritual before the practical, and knowledge before action. Each human being has a long series of social duties, but these depend upon his more essential duties, which are first, faith in God, and second, placing one's own person into the proper relationship with the Divine Reality.

The Translation

The present translation of the Sahīfa follows the Arabic original with as much literal accuracy as could be contrived while maintaining a readable and understandable English text. I have kept Arberry's *Koran Interpreted* in view as the model of how this might be done. I have been particularly concerned with maintaining consistency in rendering terms and preserving the concreteness of the original terminology, feeling that the 'meaning' of the text cannot be grasped without due regard for its form.²¹ It has already been suggested that one of the virtues of the early devotional literature is its ability to speak in a relatively concrete, pre-theological language of great universality. As a result, any move in the direction of rendering concrete terms abstractly, by paying attention to the rational meaning rather than the images conjured up by the linguistic form, will take us in the direction of *kalam* and away from the universe of the Qur'an, the hadith and the intimacy of the supplications themselves. This explains why I have usually preferred more literal terms such as 'Garden' to relatively abstract terms such as 'Paradise'.

Where difficulties arose in interpreting the meaning of the text, I have followed the commentary of Sayyid 'Alikhān Shīrāzī. I have also profited from the excellent Persian translation and commentary by Ali Naqī Fayd al-Islam and the less useful Persian translation of Mīrzā Abu l-Qasim Sha'rānī. I have not tried to be exhaustive in the notes, aiming only to identify proper names, clarify obscurities, and point to a few of the Qur'anic references in order to suggest how thoroughly the text is grounded in the revealed book. In a few cases I have mentioned relevant hadith or discussed the different interpretations offered by the commentators.

The translation of the Sahīfa is followed by a translation of Imam Zayn al-Ābidīn's 'Treatise on Rights', which is the only work attributed to him other than supplications or relatively short sayings and letters. This treatise is especially important for the manner in which it deals with many of the same themes as the *Sahīfa* in a different style and language.

The Arabic text printed here was copied from the Sha'rani edition by Tehzib Husayn Naqvi. It was proof-read by the dedicated and diligent efforts of S. Ata Muhammad Abidi Amrohvi. Agha Ahsan Abbas is also to be thanked for his efforts in coordinating the production of the Arabic text.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my dear friend Wing Commander (ret'd) Qasim Husain, the moving spirit behind the Muhammadi Trust. He caught me in a weak moment and pushed

²¹ It is particularly in this respect that the present translation differs from that of Syed Ahmad Ali Mohani (*The Sahīfat-ul-Kamilah*, originally published in Lucknow in 1929-31; second edition, revised by M. A. H. Khan, Lucknow, 1969-70. Several other editions have also appeared).

me into accepting a project which I never would have undertaken otherwise. His gentle but always firm and forceful pressure has made it possible for me to complete the translation practically on schedule. Without his intervention I would have been deprived of the opportunity to gain an intimate acquaintance with one of the deepest veins of Islamic spirituality. Anyone who comes to appreciate the contents of the *Sahīfa* through the present work would do well to offer a prayer of thanks for the sake of Commander Husain. I also thank Sayyid Ali Mohammad Naqavi, who read the translation and offered a number of useful suggestions for its improvement, and Sayyid Muhammad Husain al-Husaini al-Jalāli, who placed at my disposal a useful bibliography of works concerning the *Sahīfa*.