

Ibādism in History

Volume I: The Emergence of the Ibādī School

By

‘Alī Yahyā Mu‘ammar

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Volume 1: The Emergence of the Ibāḍī School
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*In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
The final outcome is in favour of the God-fearing, and hostility is only towards
wrong-doers. O God, bless Muḥammad and his family, and make Muḥammad
and his family fortunate, just as You blessed, were compassionate towards, and
made fortunate, among all creation, Abraham and his family. You are All-
praiseworthy and Magnificent.*

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Kahlan Al-Kharusi
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Introduction

My aim in presenting these brief reflections is to elucidate Ibādism for the educated general readership among the *ummah*. The information has not been hard to gather, nor required long, extensive investigative inquiry and research. It is readily available to any well-intentioned seeker after truth with a sincere resolve to study the sources of the Sharī‘ah of the Ibādīs, to examine the books of *sīrah* and the historical compilations that provide information about the Ibādīs, whether written by those who agree with them or those who oppose them.

The Ibādī school is not a secretive one, nor one whose founding principles depend on elusive or unknown matters, nor are its members from among those who conceal their identity or go into hiding. In this life, the Ibādīs give no weight to anything but God, and they await no recompense for their deeds except from God, following only the truth in their behaviour.

It is a school of thought that has filled the world with truth, justice and uprightness, setting the best example for probity and integrity through several periods in history; it will do so once again when God permits it. In saying that, I do not mean the sort of fantastical notions that the Shī‘a hold about the imāmate, nor the idea of an awaited Mahdī. What I mean is that the Ibādī school derives its strength from Islam, which the Creator has chosen as a universal religion for mankind, as it was brought by Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, and through which no extremism or excess turns any away from the straight path of God. No superstition has been spread in it, as in certain schools by shaykhs who seek, through religion, the things of this world. It has not become stagnant through jurists controlling minds and mental faculties so far as to prohibit *ijtihād*, confining it to an epoch or to a group to whom only they themselves have access. That approach obstructs all aspects of knowledge and understanding; it denies the right to research and inquire freely, thereby preventing the judgments that are needed. The excuse is that the gates of *ijtihād* have been closed, and the keys to these gates are kept by these jurists hidden in a place unknown, one that researchers cannot find.

As I have said, the Ibādī school of thought derives its strength from Islam itself, since it preserves the pure source from which the latter springs. Only when Muslims recover their senses and return to the religion of their Lord — the religion untainted by *bid'ah* (heretical innovation) and superstitions, extremism and stagnation, and by the sort of falsehoods which, through man's ignorance, have become associated with God's upright religion — only then will Muslims find themselves on the path of true Islam. It is this path that spread mercy, justice, uprightness, integrity and truth in this world. It is on this path that those, whom history has called the Ibādī school, have remained to this day. Though history has ascribed to the Ibādīs an imām in the same way other schools of the community have their different imāms, the fact is that their true imām, the only one they recognize and whose guidance alone they follow, is none other than Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh, may God bless him and grant him peace. No other person can have a rightful claim to the imāmate unless he sets the proper example and follows the righteous and praiseworthy Sunnah. Unconditional belief in the fact that the guidance of God's Messenger in precept and practice, may God bless him and grant him peace, is the path of guidance upon which God commanded the *ummah* of Muḥammad to proceed. If Ibādīs did indulge historians and trace their origins to 'Abd Allāh b. Ibād, thereby adopting for themselves a label just like all the other schools, that does not mean that they venerate whatever their leading figures say, or follow their authority blindly, raising them to the status of perfection, a status which only the elect prophets of God can attain. Rather, they are careful not to take their religion except from those whose trustworthiness in words and deeds they are sure about.

Ibādīs do not hallow mere men, nor take them as an indication of what is true. They do not grant authority to anyone who is not protected from error, nor follow anyone unless legal proof has shown him to be of proper conduct, or unless his following the guidance of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, is demonstrated by a narrative text — like the noble ḥadīth with 'Ammār, may God be content with him, and some of the Companions, may God be content with them. The pride of the *mujtahids* Quṭb al-A'imma,¹ may God exalted have mercy on him, said in *al-Radd 'alā al-'Uqbī*: 'If you mean to say that they are heedless and have no imām, then you have overlooked the fact that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, is their imām.'

¹ This honorific expression is used by the author to refer to the famous Muḥammad Aṭfayyish; literally 'the pole of the imāms', it means 'the leading authority among the imāms'.

Only that believer who clings to the stirrup of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and follows the sincere path, day and night, is considered great by the Ibādīs. Whatever the degree of a man's knowledge or achievement, there will always be in his teachings something to reject and something to accept, except the one about whom the Holy Book said: *Nor does he speak out of caprice. This is naught but a revelation revealed* [*al-Najm*, 3-4]; *You have had a good example in God's Messenger* [*al-Aḥzāb*, 21].

It is in this realistic way that Ibādīs regard their imāms — as human beings not protected from error, whose words and deeds are affected by error, negligence and forgetfulness. For this reason, it is wrong to give authority either to their deeds or words. One gives their words authority, and follows the example of their actions only when they supply such proof for these as leaves no room for ambiguity. To follow their words and sayings is not to accord absolute authority to them, but to follow those whom they follow, to accord authority to the one whose example they follow, the one by whose guidance they are guided, and to whose judgment they refer themselves.

This book

As its title indicates, this book deals primarily with the historical issues concerning this school as one among many Muslim schools spread across the world. It deals also with this school across the territories in which it appears. The sole motive for presenting this work was to reveal some of the brighter aspects of the history of the great Muslim *ummah*, with a focus on one group from among its many groups and one region from among the many regions of its ample territories.

I do not intend, in writing about this particular Muslim school or some other, or about some particular location where Islam thrives, to spread propaganda in support of this school or to detract from other schools. For it is my belief that all these schools are merely different sides of the one community or *ummah*, and that all those locations are different directions for the Muslim peoples. It is also my belief that, just as distinguished figures are found among other schools in other places, so too can they be found among this school. It is my belief that there have been men of genius throughout the various schools that make up the Muslim *ummah*; that within the lands shared by the Muslim peoples there

is a fertile soil that produces glory and greatness such that no pen can enumerate and no researcher can encompass.

Although it was decreed that the Muslim *ummah*, over many periods of history, should become divided into different religious groups, I think I can claim that all these groups have one goal, despite the different paths they have taken. Further, I would say that each of these groups has had geniuses and notable persons who rendered noble services both to Islam and to mankind. Again, although it was also decreed that the one Muslim land should become divided into several smaller lands governed by different regimes, I am certain that each of these smaller lands has produced outstanding figures that stand out as the pride of mankind.

Even if certain regimes that control Islamic lands have been carried away by political currents deviant from the Muslim mainstream, the greater Muslim community continues, and will always continue, to deliver its message. The Muslims, individually and collectively, continue to guard its message with reverence and pride. This means that the struggle for truth, virtue and happiness continues, and will always continue so long as there are Muslims on this earth who believe in the value of divine law for the benefit of mankind.

The courteous reader should know that the motives for this book, the limiting of its inquiry to one among many Muslim schools, and its focus on specific individuals and places, do not derive from any partisan prejudice that seeks to undervalue the intellectual contribution of all schools to God's religion, nor does it derive from any fixed emotional attachment to a defined homeland, such as cannot accommodate all the lands of Islam. The motives for this book arise, simply, from the fact that I have studied the origins of this school and know more about its history than I do that of the other schools.

Moreover, certain writers (who did not undertake research in order to uncover the truth) have committed errors in trying to understand the doctrines of this school. While this school has had to bear the burden of these errors — errors in understanding the motives for the research and errors in understanding the causes of historical events — the authors of such errors have escaped blame.

What is important for me in this book is to clarify the confusion that has come about as a result of such erroneous writings. We are in dire need of removing from the history of the Islamic *ummah* in all its different groups and schools the sort of falsehoods that tendentious and erroneous writers have inserted into it. When the true history of the community is revealed, the different schools will be cleared of all that has been said about them (whether through good or bad intentions) that is incompatible with their origins, principles, legal or historical sources.

Then the *ummah* will be liberated from all the interpolations inspired by scorn, mistaken opinions and bias, regardless of whether these were the result of external machinations that found their way into the Muslim heritage, and which simple minds accepted, unaware of the animosity contained in them, or the result of internal scheming propagated by tongues uninformed by the profession of the *shahādah*, so that, motivated by worldly concerns and limited material gains, they spread false sayings.

When the glorious history of Islam asserts itself, with the members of each of the Muslim schools expounding in a clear, honest fashion their particular creed and historical development and how they relate to their original source, and when the tendentious, ignorant and negligent propaganda attached to them has been erased, then the members of these schools across the Muslim lands, will find that they are very similar to one another in their efforts to promulgate the eternal message entrusted to them. They will find that, whether they are travelling the same or different paths, their destination is one and the same.

The return to the way of Islam

Muslims have strayed far from their religion, contravened in their behaviour the way of their righteous ancestors, gone to excess in their withdrawal from God's path and become distant from it.

The men of knowledge have become distant from it as a result of the temptations offered by Western paganism and the explosion of apostasy that is invading the globe, disseminated in the minds of people by those who neither believe in religion, nor follow a tradition, nor consider as sacred the morals and behaviour decreed upon the earth by the heavens.

Those of simple mind have become distant from it too on account of what the shrewd supporters of the Israeli movement and evil scholars have inserted into Islam of fantasy and *bid'ah*, and which gullible jurists have accepted, leaving people to think it part of God's religion. A ground for happiness and hope is the fact that certain blessed authors have taken it upon themselves to defend Islam, alike from the hostility of its enemies and of their evil followers.

(1) As for the hostility of its enemies, propagated by colonialism and Zionism in all sorts of ways and directions, it is as follows:

- Hostility towards Muslim morality, by providing ready access to moral disintegration and forbidden pleasures, belittling the sinfulness of doing what God has forbidden with regard to one's body, honour and wealth; by encouraging narrow ethnic groups so as to loosen the strong bonds of Islam; by calling for freedom and equality in all religions until false religions, irreligious paganism and apostasy that rejects God eclipse Islam in a Muslim country, the Muslims separate from one another for fear of upsetting a minority that is following a creed that leads to perdition, or until a group with a false creed takes up arms against Islam in its own homeland.
- Hostility towards noble Islamic ideas, through the propagation of social and political movements, set up with specific goals and intentions in mind, spurred on by the interests of a group of people or a regime. Subsequently, the founders of such movements have assumed a revered status such that their sayings and opinions are used as proofs in arguments against the ḥadīths of those protected from error and against the Book to which *no falsehood can come from before it or from behind it a sending down from an All-wise an All-praiseworthy [Fuṣṣilat, 42]*.
- Hostility towards Islamic legislation and its noble principles, which the Creator of man sent to make man contented, through all sorts of narrow-minded and restrictive legislation put forward by human beings unworthy of reliance.
- Hostility towards the Islamic creed, which liberates man from any servitude to anything other than God and gives dignity to all mankind equally, through ridiculous ideas about the origins of species, the story of nature and all those tempting ideas about evolution put forth by Darwin's followers.

(2) As for the hostility of those who follow (the colonialists and the Zionists), it stems from their lack of knowledge of its inner meanings, rejection of its truths, shunning of its teachings, staying away from its guidelines, refusing to enforce it and take counsel from it or to accept its rulings in matters of dispute between them.

Certain blessed authors have worked towards the dissemination of a religious consciousness among Muslims that seeks to reveal the noble achievements of Islamic history, which the common Muslim knows nothing about, and which are feared by those enemies who do know about them but pretend not to know. In a determined and steadfast manner, these authors counter the defamation directed against God's religion, defamation disguised in tendentious propaganda and in poisonous remedies for problems faced by the East, and under the cloak of preparing

its young generations to join the dynamic current that is quickly dominating all spheres of activity.

I am pleased to acknowledge these Muslim authors, who draw their strength from the spirit of Islam. They are striving to repel the hostility of aggressors, the machinations of colonialists, the scheming of Zionists and Crusaders. They are striving to uncover the falsifications made by the frivolous, the absurdities propagated by the ignorant, the obstinacy of the intellectually-stagnant, and the aloofness of those who have been deceived. They are striving to call the children of the community of Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, to hold fast to his religion as he brought it.

I am pleased to call attention to the authors of these blessed works of resistance, and to all that is taking place in this field of effort, such as those who each day put into effect a *sunnah* and render obsolete *bid'ah*, thus protecting Islam from the inaccuracies put about by its enemies.

By mentioning those living authors who are fighting for the cause of God, it is not my intention to deny the merits of others who have struggled to promote the word of God. The struggle for God's cause cannot be denied by anyone who believes in God, but it is not feasible to be comprehensive in such a work as this. I do not forget the merits of the master imām (Muḥammad 'Abduh), who instilled the spirit of Islam in his pupils, nor those of his pupils (whether students of his classroom or of his ideas), who have freed the minds of Muslims from absurdities, *bid'ah* and stagnation, and fended off the attacks of the conspiring elements left over from the fanatical crusader wars. Nor do I forget the merits of the imām (Ḥasan al-Bannā), who instilled in the souls of young Muslims the spirit of self-esteem, nobility and struggle, and the spirit of martyrdom, referred to by Ibādīs as the way of *shirā'* (literally, 'selling one's life in return for God's reward'), and considered by them as a manifestation of a Muslim's nobility and the glory of Islam at a time when tyrannical and unjust regimes are in power. To God belongs all glory, and to His Messenger and to the believers.

I forget the merits neither of these nor those of others, whom I have left out in this short tract, in which I have turned specifically to those blessed authors alive today and struggling on the field of battle for the cause of God against tyranny: the tyranny of the enemy outside, and that of the enemy within.

There is also the tyranny of wealth, which has instilled in some people such a sense of hauteur that they claim to have inherited the thrones of the gods. Then there is the tyranny of poverty, which has instilled a sense

of submissiveness and docility in the hearts of other people, making them slaves of their fellow humans.

Moreover, there is the tyranny of atheistic science that acknowledges only material being, believes only in proofs derived from experiments, recognizing only that which is tangible. Yet the atheistic scientist remains ignorant of the truth closest to him, of the facts nearest to him, ignorant of the very life that is all around him, and understanding nothing of the secrets of the human spirit, which he strives to serve, and never coming close to learning anything about the life-spirit that the Creator deposited in humans, animals and plants.

Finally, there is the tyranny of ignorance that breeds unbelief and obscures the light (of guidance), so that the truth which the heavenly messages command — with the purpose of raising mankind high among the realm of God — cannot be clearly made out, while the satans of the earth go on whispering falsehoods with the purpose of keeping man eternally stuck in the mud and mire of this earth.

Why I wrote this work

Certain individuals, who have some education but know nothing of the facts of history or the fundamentals of science or the main principles of any doctrine, take pleasure in distancing themselves from the common people and whatever holds them up above the circles of educational illiteracy. They take pleasure in presenting themselves as men of knowledge and speaking the language of scholarly researchers. They discuss events of the past and present in order to pronounce definitively about them, support generalizations with firm opinions but without recourse to convincing argument or proof, except that they have stumbled upon some brief article in a magazine or newspaper, or a book here or there. Yet the topic might be one that would require a serious student to undertake extensive and painstaking inquiry and to consult dozens of references before he could venture an opinion.

I once listened to a discussion held by such individuals, in which they debated the question of Muslim sects, their merits and demerits, and the question of guidance and error. They turned to Ibādism and some said, ‘The Ibādīs are a sect of the Khawārij’, because they had read it somewhere in a history book. Others said: ‘No, they are from the

Mu'tazilah, because they believe that the glorious Qur'ān was created'. Some even said that they are from among the Ash'ariyyah, because they had heard that the Ibādīs believe that all that is destined to happen, the good and the bad, is from God. Not one of these people who were involved in the discussion, exchanging views and passing judgments on several Muslim sects at random, was concerned to offer reasons for the judgment he gave or the proofs upon which he based his opinions, except what he offered in the way of naive argumentation on certain points, which was neither intellectually persuasive, nor qualified as the basis for the opinion given.

I thought it worthwhile to examine, as best I can, one of the topics around which that discussion turned, and try to provide some answers to the puzzling questions that were exchanged in conversation. I will also try to talk about the principles upon which the Ibādī school of thought was founded, and from which its creed developed and its proofs and arguments were taken.

The meaning of the term Khawārij

Is the Ibādīyyah a sect from among the Khawārij?

The question can only be answered after the term Khawārij has been defined. Some historians use the term Khawārij to denote those who seceded from the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, after he accepted the arbitration agreement, since, in their view, he had thereby broken the oath of allegiance to which they were bound and had abandoned a legitimate imāmate.

A group of theologians, when dealing with the origins of creeds and sects, use the term to denote the 'abandoning of religion'. They take their argument from the saying of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace: 'A group of people from among my community shall pass through religion as the arrow passes through its quarry...' This ḥadīth has been transmitted in more than one report and in different versions.²

² In the ḥadīth compilation of al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb (2nd imp. 1349 AH), part I: 12; it is transmitted thus: Abū 'Ubaydah—Jābir b. Zayd—Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī:

I heard the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, say: 'A

A third group take the term to mean fighting for the cause of God, basing their argument on His words: *And whosoever departs from his home emigrating to God and His Messenger, and then death catches up with him, his reward shall be fixed for him by God...*[*al-Nisā*, 100].

Certain historians have permitted themselves the use of the term *Khawārij* to refer to all those who clung to 'Alī's imāmate, insisting that it was a lawful right which cannot be disputed, that 'Alī himself had no right to doubt an imāmate that had the consensus of the community, or treat it as a light matter and put it up for bargaining, given that Mu'āwiyah and his followers were the aggressors, who were under obligation, according to the text of the Book, to return, willingly or unwillingly, within the fold of the imāmate and the community. If 'Alī complied with the wishes of the aggressors, and doubted what was a certain truth, forsaking the duty entrusted to him by the community, and on the basis of which it had pledged its allegiance to him, then that pledge of allegiance could no longer be binding upon them, and they had the right to withdraw.

If, as I said, certain historians have permitted themselves the use of the term *Khawārij* to refer to this last group, then we should be permitted to pause and reflect with care so that we may ascertain the right path, and so that the right approach may become clear.

We should reflect with care so that justice may be done to those whom certain historians have labelled *Khawārij*, and whose fellow Muslims attacked them with true and false propaganda. Indeed, they fought them more bitterly than their own enemies at that time, and persecuted them more vigorously than they did atheists and infidels. We should reflect with care so as to avoid any injustice towards these *Khawārij*, and so as to explain their stance at that time — before (our knowledge of) that stance was permeated by tendentious historical accounts and prejudice towards them. We should reflect with care so as to avoid the sort of false propaganda that distorts historical truth in a way unacceptable to sound judgment and proper reason, the sort that was circulated both by impudent Umayyad authoritarians and by radical Shī'ī extremists. So that we may explain the stance of these people and obtain for ourselves a clear

people will emerge from among you so that you will think ill of your prayer compared to theirs, of your fasting compared to theirs, of your good deeds compared to theirs. They will recite the Qur'ān but the farthest it will go will be their throats. They will pass through religion as the arrow passes through its quarry. You will look at the arrow-shaft and see nothing. You will look at its feathers and see nothing. And you will be doubtful [of discerning any sign of the quarry] on the notch [the base of the arrow].'

account of it, and be in a position to make proper comparisons, and deduce what is closer to the truth and factual accuracy, we must examine the nature of revolutionary³ movements from the earliest days of Islam.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, led a continuous campaign against that idolatry which held sway in the world, and maintained a persistent struggle against a mass of forces opposed to the launch of the movement that would liberate man from his worship of all that is not God. After *God's assistance and victory arrived and people entered God's religion in droves* [*al-Naṣr*, 1-2], and God made His blessing on the community of Muḥammad complete, and was pleased that they should have Islam for their religion, God's Messenger passed away. He had relayed the message, and fulfilled the trust. People then gave their oath of allegiance to Abū Bakr as a successor to him. However, immediately after this act of allegiance, the first revolt in Islam took place. Those who participated in that revolt had professed the oneness of God and the truth of Muḥammad as His Messenger. Some of them withdrew and retreated, rejecting what they had professed. Others held their material possessions to be dearer to them than Islam and refused to pay the alms-tax (*zakāh*).

The stern and resolute response adopted by the successor of the Messenger of God towards these individuals, despite the opposition of some Companions, was an acknowledgement of God's law, and an enforcement of Islam's position, as well as a supporting of God's religion and an irrevocable judgment upon the roots of this rebellion or sedition and those who had mounted it. Subsequently, security was re-established and the situation stabilized and Muslims continued to fulfill the message, to which Muḥammad had summoned, throughout the caliphates of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, that glorious era (rightly) considered an extension of the era of the Prophet. Then 'Uthmān assumed the caliphate. The first six years matters continued much as they had under the two caliphs before him. Thereafter matters began to change and new problems arose. Caliphal rule ran into difficulties as the caliph's actions were publicly criticized and his behaviour openly questioned and disparaged in social circles. Barely another six years had passed when the untamable revolt that ended 'Uthmān's life took place with many Companions present. This was

³ I have used the term 'revolution/revolt' in this book to denote an activity that individuals take part in when they desire to change a situation, be it religious, political, social or economic, which they find unsatisfactory, whatever the motives behind such a movement may be: by using this term I am not referring to the kind of fundamental change in a community's creed or way of life that the term might evoke.

the second revolt to occur after the death of God's Messenger, blessings and peace upon him.

The Muslims gave their oath of allegiance to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to become Commander of the Faithful. The first to do so were Ṭalḥah b. 'Abd Allāh and al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām. But the oath of allegiance had scarcely been given when Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr took up the banner of rebellion together with some of the leading Companions, seeking support also from the mother of the believers, 'Ā'ishah. The Caliph, however, adopted a firm and resolute stance against the rebels. A significant number of Muslims were killed in this destructive revolt, including Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, while the mother of the believers backed down and returned, along with the remaining rebels, into the fold of the imāmate and the community. This was the third revolt in Islam.

This destructive war had scarcely ended, and peace and stability returned to the land, when Mu'āwiyah, learning of the failure of the revolt and realizing his imminent removal from the governorship of Greater Syria, was proclaiming a revolt in that province. At the time he was just one of the many agents of the Caliph, but he claimed to be seeking revenge for the blood of 'Uthmān. The Commander of the Faithful prepared to put down this revolt just as he had done the previous one. He prepared a strong army and set off towards Syria where he met the rebel army in the well-known spot called Ṣiffīn and fighting ensued. Fighting continued with signs of victory becoming manifest, and the Caliph's army on the verge of taking the battle. It was only a matter of time before this defiant revolt would be crushed: al-Ashtar al-Nakha'ī called it 'the death rattle of the she-camel'. The rebels then resorted to trickery and deception, and they plotted and schemed, raising copies of the Qur'ān and shouting, 'People of Iraq, the Book of God is between us!'

The rebels called for a truce and proposed, to the legitimate Caliph and his army, the appointment of two arbiters to produce a judgment. The Commander of the Faithful and several of his men realized the deception involved in this call for a truce. However, instead of standing firm in his resolve and continuing with his war against the rebels until he was granted victory — the signs were already there — and the aggressors put down their weapons and returned within the fold of the community, from which they had seceded and against which they had transgressed, he gave in to the plea that would bring disaster. He took the advice of the meek ones, most of whom had been promised some reward by Mu'āwiyah or 'Amr b.

al-‘Āṣ,⁴ accepted the arbitration and the truce, and ordered an immediate halt to the fighting.

Thus, this fourth revolt paused in this indecision — putting ‘Alī’s right to the caliphate on the same level as that of Mu‘āwiyah, and putting the aggressors who rebelled against the right way on the same footing as the army from among the community that had fought for a caliphacy that had been legitimately instituted through consultation and effected through oaths of allegiance.

Those companions of ‘Alī who had seen through the trickery intended by the truce came together to warn him against accepting it. They informed him that to accept such a truce was to doubt his own caliphacy and renounce it. They insisted that a legitimate caliphacy was something that could not be doubted, nor retracted, nor put up for bargaining.

When it came to ‘Alī to accept the appeal of those among his army, and of those plotters from among his enemies, that would lead him to defeat; when he doubted his own self and the truth of that which he held in his hand; when he renounced the honour that had been accorded to him by the Muslims, and put himself on an equal footing with one of his agents in a matter with regard to which the community had given him a compact, and in return for which he made with them a covenant — when he did this, he yielded to the arbitration of mere men a matter on which God had sent down His judgment.

Those who refused to recognize the arbitration came together to warn ‘Alī against accepting it. They believed that Mu‘āwiyah was an aggressor without any right. When ‘Alī agreed to the truce and accepted the arbitration, they believed that the pledge of allegiance given to him had been broken: there was no longer any allegiance or covenant incumbent upon anyone. They called each other to separate from ‘Alī’s army and sought refuge in a place called Ḥarūrā’, awaiting the turn of events and the action that the community would take in the light of what was happening to the caliphacy. This separation from ‘Alī’s army may be considered as the fifth revolt. Initially, this revolt involved only passive resistance, since its members had taken up a neutral stance and were awaiting the turn of events. But events soon got out of hand. No sooner had the appointed time arrived, as agreed by the two sides for the end of the truce, and the people assembled, than Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, ‘Alī’s representative, was proclaiming that ‘Alī had been removed from the

⁴ Abū l-‘Abbās al-Shammākhī said in his *Siyar*, 48: ‘Mu‘āwiyah used to make empty promises to them’ [i.e. in the manner of politicians seeking support].

office of caliph, leaving the matter open for Muslims to choose what they wanted by consultation.

Those who had adopted a neutral stance awaited the turn of events, the actual outcome, for they saw Mu‘āwiyah as an aggressor trying to impose himself through deceit and trickery. For this reason they gave no weight to the calls to remove him from office, since at the time he had not been appointed caliph, whether by force or consultation: it was nonsense to remove him from a position that he did not hold. Similarly, they gave no weight to the appointment of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ, since the Muslims had not made him a delegate of the Commander of the Faithful. As for what concerned ‘Alī, they had been expecting that the two arbiters would agree to the affirmation of his rule, whereupon the legal nature of that which he had relinquished in order to reaffirm would be his again. It was incumbent on Muslims at that point to unite themselves in obedience to him, so long as he ruled according to God’s Book. The representative, however, chosen by ‘Alī, in this unjust matter, announced that he had distanced ‘Alī from the affairs of the Muslims, and that the matter was now one of election by consultation. Consequently, the position of these neutrals was enhanced as more of those who had stood by ‘Alī up until that point began to join their ranks. In the light of the fact that Muslims no longer had a caliph, they discussed the matter among themselves: on the one hand, there was Mu‘āwiyah the unjust aggressor who could not be given the leadership of the Muslim community, on the other hand, there was ‘Alī renounced by the very representative he himself had appointed for the arbitration. All that was left was for them to choose. They chose ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī and gave him the pledge of allegiance as Commander of the Faithful and caliph of the Muslims, and successor to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; in their view he was lawfully the fifth caliph.

With this development, the Muslim community became divided into three camps: one led by Mu‘āwiyah (even though at the time no one had given him any pledge of allegiance to that effect); a second led by ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, for whom the arbitration had been a failure, and who re-acknowledged the original pledge of allegiance given to him, ignoring the fact that his representative in the arbitration Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī had removed him from office; and a third state led by ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī, following the pledge of allegiance given to him by a large number of those who had stood apart from ‘Alī’s side when he agreed to the arbitration, and following the arbiter’s announcement that ‘Alī had been removed from office. Within the ranks of each of these factions there were

a considerable number of eminent Companions, some of them from among those promised Paradise.⁵

But there was a fourth camp who distanced themselves from these debates that had preoccupied the Muslims, and from the matter of the caliphate, neither seeking to acquire it for themselves, nor supporting any of those claiming it. Among them were the following eminent Muslims: Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar, Muḥammad b. Maslamah al-Anṣārī and Usāmah b. Zayd.

When the imām 'Alī had regrouped his forces, including those soldiers who had remained loyal to him, he thought he would recommence the fight against Mu'āwiyah in the hope of extinguishing his rebellion and forcing his submission. Some of his companions, however, suggested that he should fight 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī, who had become caliph through a pledge of allegiance, which is the lawful way to acquire the caliphal office.

'Alī agreed with this suggestion, abandoning the fight against Mu'āwiyah in favour of that against 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb. The followers of 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb believed that their imām was the lawful imām, and that both 'Alī, after the arbitration and his removal, together with Mu'āwiyah, were rebels who were under obligation to return within the fold of the imāmate and the *ummah*.

The foregoing is a summary of the revolts that took place during that period, as a result of which thousands of Islam's heroes lost their lives. I have tried as far as possible to be brief and to clarify the issue from the point of view of those whom the books of history and literature would call Khawārij. They are those who believed that they were the people of truth, and that the only lawful pledge of allegiance after the arbitration was that given to 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī, the caliph to whom an entire section of the community had sworn allegiance to, including prominent Companions and those promised Paradise.

⁵ Among those promised Paradise is 'Ammār b. Yāsir, may God be pleased with him, who was killed at Şiffin while fighting for 'Alī. When the copies of the Qur'ān were raised, he refused to accept the truce and fought vigorously until he was killed. When Mu'āwiyah was informed of this he said: 'The one who made him go out is the one who killed him'. Also among those promised Paradise is Ḥurqūş b. Zuhayr al-Sa'dī. It was reported by 'Ā'ishah that the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, once said, 'The first to come through the door will be from among the people of Paradise'; Ḥurqūş b. Zuhayr al-Sa'dī then came in with his beard wet. This happened three days in a row. Ḥurqūş b. Zuhayr was killed together with others who rejected the arbitration.

If we turn to the starting point of this inquiry and seek to identify a faction from among those that revolted who would fully qualify for the label of Khawārij both in a political and religious sense, 'secessionists against the caliphate and against religion', and for whom the ḥadīth that we mentioned earlier would be fitting, then to which of these rebellious factions can we apply the label Khawārij, in the sense of 'those who have seceded from Islam', fully confident of the soundness of our judgment, and the logic of such a deduction, and without following any of the established trends of historical writing?

Most of the early historians were either pro-Shī'a or pro-Umayyad, each trying to please those of his party. Finding it a painless endeavour, they chose to apply the label Khawārij to the enemy common to both the Umayyads and the Shī'a. They applied it to that faction of Muslims who separated themselves from 'Alī at the time of the arbitration and pledged their allegiance to 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb as imām, and who rebelled against tyranny and the corruption of the Umayyad government, and against all those who would follow similar paths after them deviating from the way of the rightly-guided caliphs. In order to gain wider acceptance for their use of the term, these historians confounded the political sense of the term *khurūj* with its religious sense. State and propaganda in both the Shī'ī and Umayyad movements conspired to disseminate this usage and these opinions, to the extent that hundreds of false ḥadīths against the Khawārij were put into circulation, accusing them or certain leading individuals among them of deviation and apostasy. Al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufrah, the general who forfeited his religion in exchange for the worldly things of the Umayyad regime, was one of the most prolific falsifiers of anti-Khawārij ḥadīth, so far so that people began to notice this and when they would see him going out they would exclaim: 'He is off to spread lies'.⁶

The Umayyads and the Shī'a tried their utmost to attach the label 'Khawārij', having interpreted it as 'secession from religion', to those rebels who were calling vociferously and persistently for just principles in the matter of the caliphate. The Shī'a for their part were ingeniously

⁶ In his *Fajr al-Islām* (6th edition), Aḥmad Amīn wrote: 'One of the ways in which al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufrah fought them was by forging ḥadīths against them; he used to do this in order to encourage the spirit of his fighting forces and in order to mitigate the severity of the Khārijī cause, proclaiming, "war is trickery". When some Azdīs saw al-Muhallab going out they would say, "He is off to spread lies". One of them used to recite about him the following: "O you man of exemplary manhood! If only what you speak were the truth."' Such anecdotes probably explain the reason why there are so many anti-Khawārij ḥadīths in the books of history and literature.

trying to restrict the caliphate to the descendants of 'Alī. Other aspirants to it used to make it conditional on the person being a Hāshimī or a Qurashī or an Arab, each according to their particular political gain at a particular point in time. All these currents conspired together against the stance adopted by the followers of 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī, the just stance that saw all Muslims as equal with regard to rights and duties: ...*The noblest of you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you...* [*al-Ḥujurāt*, 13] and 'an Arab has no superior merit over a non-Arab except in God-fearing.'

Earlier in this piece I observed that several revolts had taken place from the time of the death of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, up to the end of the caliphate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. So, which of these revolts most qualifies its proponents for the label 'Khawārij', with 'secession from the caliphate' and 'apostasy against religion' in mind? To make the answer easier, I shall divide these revolts into three categories:

- 1 A revolt that has no justification or cause, except for a lack of Islam in the hearts of those that take part in it, and the lack of a proper faith in accordance with Muḥammad's message. This is apparent in the first revolt where one group renounced the faith and another refrained from paying alms.
- 2 A revolt without apparent cause, whose true underlying purpose involves a struggle for government office, whether that of a caliphacy or a regency. This is most evident in the third revolt instigated by Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, and the fourth revolt instigated by Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān.
- 3 A revolt resulting from apparent and obvious causes that seem reasonable to the observer. This is the case in the second revolt in which 'Uthmān was killed, and in the fifth revolt in which some of 'Alī's soldiers separated themselves from him because of the arbitration in which Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī renounced him.

Now, if what is intended by the term Khawārij is those who secede from a caliph to whom a pledge of allegiance has been granted legally, then it is more apt and suitable for this term to be applied to the likes of Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr, or to Mu'āwiyah and his followers, or to those who rebelled against 'Uthmān. But if the term is taken in its political and religious sense, then it cannot be applied to them, and even less to those who had separated themselves from 'Alī. The reason for this last is that those rebels, whether they belong to the second or third category, did not rebel against one of the principles of Islam nor did they reject as false any

of the facts of religion through necessity, having among their ranks prominent Companions, among them some who were promised Paradise.

On the basis of this then, the *murūq* ('piercing through') ḥadīths, if they are authentic, can only be directed against those of the first revolt, the ones that seceded from Abū Bakr's caliphate rejecting the Shari'ah or one of its tenets. It is to these that the researcher can confidently apply the term *Khawārij*, in its religious and political sense, since they had seceded from a caliphate on which there was consensus and had rejected Islam *in toto* after their acceptance of it, together with one of its chief principles, established by the Book, the Sunnah and the consensus. This rejection merited their being fought implacably by the first successor to God's Messenger, in accordance with his saying, peace be upon him, 'If I catch up with them, I would surely kill them in the way Thamūd was killed', assuming the ḥadīth to be authentic; in the end his successor, may God be pleased with him, killed them in the way Thamūd was killed, confirming his report, peace be upon him.

One becomes confident of such an opinion on account of his expectation, may God bless him and grant him peace, that he would live to see them. This proves that they were close in time to his lifetime, since he was hoping to exact revenge from them for God. However, God's will required that they should come after his time, and that they would act as a test of the fortitude of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, and that they would receive punishment at the hand of the truthful one, may God be pleased with him.

Just as one becomes more confident of this meaning on account of this ḥadīth, one is more confident about the ḥadīth of 'piercing through' in the version that runs, 'there will go out' or 'there will pierce through', since the use of the [Arabic] letter *sīn* (*sa-yakhruj* or *sa-yamruq*) indicates the proximity in time of that which will take place: nothing was closer in time to God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, than this rebellion which al-Ṣiddīq crushed, and whose members he fought in the way Thamūd were fought.

I devote a substantial section to these ḥadīths that talk about Muslim groups 'piercing through' religion, even if I do not at this point in time have any reason to doubt their authenticity.

Judging by the sequence of events, it seems that these ḥadīths that talk about 'secession' (*khurūj*) were not known at the time of the earliest revolts: otherwise, how could it be that they were not being narrated and that they were not used with reference to the rebels at the time of the caliphates of Abū Bakr, 'Uthmān and 'Alī? Or with reference to the apostates at the time of al-Ṣiddīq? Why should they lie dormant, with neither the supporters nor the opponents of the caliphate, during four defiant revolts in which many Muslim heroes lost their lives, making use of

them? This indicates strongly that such ḥadīths were not known at the time of these revolts, but were composed later in order to denigrate the people of Nahrawān and encourage ‘Alī to fight and eradicate them without concern for their lives, and without second thoughts about killing them, without stopping to reason and consider whether they might have a just cause.

‘Alī was very severe on himself when he reckoned his deeds, giving lots of thought to his actions and weighing up the events that confronted him. There is evidence for this in Abū l-‘Abbās’s important book, *al-Siyar*, where he wrote: ‘Al-Ash‘ath said: He struggled against the people, but every time they spoke to people they would turn them against us’.⁷ The Shī‘a who surrounded ‘Alī were anxious, in their efforts to create their state, lest the people of Nahrawān should establish relations with the rest of the people and convince them with arguments and proof that the acceptance of arbitration had been a political mistake, that ‘Alī’s caliphacy (after the arbitration and his removal from office) was no longer valid, that the oath of allegiance to him was no longer binding, and that the real caliph was ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī, who was given the oath of allegiance by a good number of Muslims. The Shī‘a feared that those at Nahrawān would establish contact with the people, and it was for this reason that they wanted to eradicate their opinions, lest they be disseminated among people, who might then understand them and become convinced of their validity.

It was only possible to eradicate these opinions by eradicating the people who held them. Had ‘Alī hesitated in this matter and avoided bloodshed, everything would have been lost. Thus, he had to be pushed to take this decisive and crucial step by any means possible.

They were able to convince him through al-Ash‘ath. He took the step, initiated the fight and eradicated the people of Nahrawān. But he was not able to eradicate the idea that they proclaimed, that idea which has filtered through with its truth and reality into the minds of many, until it became a principle that its upholders defend with patience, courage and resilience.

In sum, this inquiry suggests that the term *Khawārij* was used by certain historians to refer exclusively to the followers of ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī in a historical and literary sense. It does not require lengthy research. There is nothing significant about using a particular term to refer to a group of individuals, if the aim is simply identification.

⁷ *Siyar*, 52.

However, if the term is being used in a religious sense then it is advisable to think very carefully before passing such a serious judgment — the kind of judgment passed crudely and harshly in biased historical accounts against the leaders of certain Muslim factions — when we discover that these Muslim factions believe in Muḥammad's message, and in its completeness and its contents and give support to their opinions and theories from the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, and back up their arguments with what has been sent down, and what has been reported of the protected one and the consensus of the community that can never agree on an error, even if they have deviated in the understanding and erred in interpretation.

Some readers might suppose that I mean to defend the Khawārij, and to justify their actions and correct the mistakes written about them. In fact, I have not intended anything of that. I was simply driven to this discourse by the reasoning that I found in their discussions and opinions on the issue of the caliphate. I have tried as far as possible to reconstruct the events and the reasons for them during the period in question without succumbing to any particular mode of thought, so that my judgments might be more precise and less affected by the kind of politics, emotion or self-interest that affected historians and researchers of doctrines in the past. God is the One Who gives success in attaining the proper path.

I would like to state at the end of this section that I esteem highly the Companions of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and that I do not make comments about them, in obedience to his commands, peace be upon him. I have only praise for them, for I know that even if one of us were to spend as much in gold, he would not be worth half one of them. It is enough honour for them that God chose them as Companions for God's Messenger, and that they were the first batch to carry the torch of Islam. Perhaps God chose to forgive them, in the same way as those of the Battle of Badr, as he, peace be upon him, said. As for those whose behaviour or sayings are criticized in some ḥadīths, I skip over them, leaving it as the responsibility of the report's narrator. I ask God forgiveness for any oversight and beseech Him to forgive me any slip of the pen that might displease Him: He is the One Who provides success and guidance.

The Khawārij according to Ibādīs

Who are the Khawārij according to the Ibādīs?

The Ibādīs think that in the application of the term Khawārij to refer to a particular Muslim faction, the sense of political rebellion should not be taken into account, regardless of whether that rebellion was legal or illegal. For this reason, they never used it to refer to ‘Uthmān’s murderers, or to Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr and their followers, or Mu‘āwiyah and his army, or Ibn Fandīn together with those of his supporters who rejected the imāmate of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Rustamī. The only sense they take into account is the religious one, as denoted by the ‘piercing through’ ḥadīth in all its variant forms.

Secession (*khurīj*) from Islam is: either the rejection of its fixed and definitive laws, or the committing of acts that contravene what has been defined in scriptural passages as binding law for religious practice, so that the act is potentially a rejection and a denial of the former. The Muslim sect that comes closest to this definition is the Azāriqah and its supporters, who deem lawful the shedding of Muslim blood, the capture of their possessions, and the enslavement of their women and children. The scholar Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm in his work *al-Dalīl wa-l-Burhān* (‘The Proof and the Evidence’) wrote:⁸ ‘The real error of the Khawārij was that made by Nāfi‘ b. al-Azraq and his men when they interpreted God’s saying, may He be exalted, *And if you obey them you verily are surely polytheists* [*al-An‘ām*, 121] as confirming that Muslim believers became polytheists when they committed sins, if they were very minor.’ Elsewhere in the same book he says, ‘as for those who ‘pierce through religion’, they claim that the person who disobeys God, may He be exalted, whether by way of minor or grave sins, is a polytheist against God the Great; they cite [as proof for this] God’s saying, exalted and glorified, *If you obey them you verily are polytheists*. They thus used this term to refer to all those who disobey God, exalted and glorified is He, saying that the person who does so is a polytheist. They then took to laws, deeming lawful the killing of men, the seizure of possessions and the capturing of children: it is enough for them to be warned of what God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: ‘[Some] people from my *ummah* will pass through the religion [as] the arrow passes through the quarry; then you will look at the arrowhead (*naṣl*) and see nothing; then you will look at the arrow shaft and see nothing; and you will be doubtful about the notch.’ No group

⁸ *Al-Dalīl li ahl al-‘uqūl*, 15.

from among the *ummah* of Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, fits the above report more than them. For, they have inverted the Shari‘ah and turned it upside down, and they have changed the terms and the laws: the Muslims at the time of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, used to commit sins but they were not subject to the laws for polytheists. How is it possible not to know for whom the *ḥudūd* (‘legal prescriptions’) were sent down, Muslims or polytheists? They invalidated stoning, lashes and the cutting off of limbs, as though they did not belong to the *ummah* of Muḥammad, peace be upon him. They became cross-eyed and saw that God’s commands for Muslims, in respect of fighting the enemy, as being intended for polytheists. They, thus, used it against Muslims.’

In the same book,⁹ he also said, ‘As for those who ‘pierce through religion’, they are the Khawārij. It is no secret to any reasonable person how they behaved towards Muslims, behaving in the same way as Muslims did towards pagans and idolaters. It is as if some other prophet and not Muḥammad, peace be upon him, was sent to them. The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: ‘[Some] people from my *ummah* will pass through religion [as] the arrow passes through the quarry; then you will look at the arrowhead (*naṣl*) and see nothing; then you will look at the arrow shaft and see nothing; then you will look at the (*qadīdah*) and see nothing; and you will be doubtful about the notch.’ And in another ḥadīth: ‘There will spring forth from the stock of this person people who will pass through religion as the arrow passes through the quarry.’¹⁰

That is the Ibādīs’ true and clear opinion about the Khawārij. It concurs with the community with regard to the name, but disagrees with regard to the justification: the Azāriqah are Khawārij because they misinterpreted the verses of the Book, which in turn led them to commit acts of wickedness, and to invalidate laws. They are not Khawārij because they seceded from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib after the arbitration, or because they rebelled against the Umayyads. The Ibādī understanding of the term Khawārij excludes the sense of ‘revolution’, and rationalizes it only with regard to a religious context. The term Khawārij can only be applied to those who secede from religion. As for secession from the imām, and rebellion against him, whatever the reasons for the rebellion, it cannot be understood as secession from religion (*khurūj min al-dīn*) or renunciation of Islam (*murūq min al-islām*). Such a harsh and terrible judgment cannot

⁹ *Al-Dalīl*, I, 30.

¹⁰ *Al-Dalīl*, II, 52.

possibly be made against those who undertake such action, even if they are deemed disobedient and aggressors, who have to be reprehended, if need be fought against, until they return to the community. Historical fact is the best witness to this opinion: as far as I know, nothing in it suggests that anyone ever accused any of those who rebelled against legitimate caliphs of having renounced religion, neither in the rebellion against ‘Uthmān, or that against ‘Alī, or that against ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb or others. During all these events the supporters of the caliphate defended the unity of the community and fought the aggressors forcefully in order to reeducate them and have them return within the fold of the imāmate, but they never judged them to have renounced Islam. So why is it then that this designation is applied exclusively to those that separated themselves from ‘Alī?

The Ibādīs think that this designation has nothing to do with revolution or secession from any imām, and certainly cannot be applied to those that separated from ‘Alī. Instead, it can be applied to groups that have tried to interpret verses from the Book of God and succeeded in interpreting them incorrectly. Their lack of understanding and bad behaviour led them to the denial and rejection of some of Islam’s binding principles, even if this was from the viewpoint of practice. Thus, they deviated from Islam, and the ḥadīth of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, applied to them: they became Khawārij in their deeds and doctrines, but not through their rebellion.

After this clarification and explanation, is it necessary for me to restate that the Ibādīs are not Khawārij: you have seen their true understanding of who the Khawārij were, their judgment of them and their justification for it.

Agreement in opinion

In this section, I would like to make the following simple observation: if individuals or groups happen to agree on one particular point, it does not necessarily follow that they should agree on each and every other point. When this simple thing is forgotten, unfounded suspicion gives rise to the claim of some people that Ibādīs belong with the Khawārij, or with other Muslim sects. The reason is that Ibādīs criticized the decision to arbitrate and considered ‘Alī to have erred in accepting it, and in making his right

to the caliphacy a matter of dispute between himself and Mu'āwiyah. Moreover, he accepted the arbitration, even though the two arbiters removed him from office and he was wrong to fight 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb al-Rāsibī and the people of al-Nahr. This opinion was not confined to the Ibādīs or Khawārij but shared by many prominent Companions and Successors.¹¹ The fact that Ibādīs shared it with the Khawārij does not make them Khawārij, just as it does not make the Khawārij Ibādīs. To further clarify this point I shall give the following example:

The Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites both agree on the principle of eliminating anthropomorphic elements from the conception of the Creator: does this mean that the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites are one group? Some Mu'tazilites agree with the Shī'a that the office of caliphate should be restricted to individuals from the family of Hāshim: does this make the two one group? The Ibādīs agree with the Khawārij on the issue of the caliphate, and with the Mu'tazilites on the issue of God's attributes, and with the Ash'arites on the issue of predestination: does this make Ibādīs, Khawārij, Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites all one group? Yes, they are all one group in the sense that they go back to one source: Islam. Yet, this does not mean that different groups cannot have their individual points of view on certain matters, according to their particular understanding of the Book and the Sunnah. The extent of divergence in opinion among groups depends on the nature of the principles in question, whether they are those of religion or those of jurisprudence, and which the group in question adopts, according to its validity, as a basis for its doctrine and conduct.

I believe that these preceding remarks provide a convincing response to the confusion of those who associate Ibādism with Khārijism, and suffice to persuade those who want to see the Ibādiyyah as a sub-group of the Mu'tazilah, of the Ash'ariyyah or any other of the many Muslim schools of thought. It is clear from this that Ibādīs share some opinions with Khawārij, Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites, but do not belong to any of these groups, since they disagree with each of them on matters concerning doctrine and conduct. They certainly disagree with all these groups on matters in which the latter have departed from the spirit of Islam.

The Ibādīs, in respect of the foundational principles of their practice, their relationships with the Muslims who differed with them, and what history has recorded of their actual stories, may be considered as the

¹¹ From the Companions: 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar and Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās, neither of whom took part in the Battle of Şiffin; and from the prominent Successors: al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Jābir b. Zayd.

Muslim school furthest from the Khawārij. This will become clear in the coming sections of these series, and from the stories of the heroes whose glorious history we shall examine, and from those periods in which the Ibādī state existed and was governed according to the foundations of this upright school of thought. So, who are the Ibāḍiyyah? How did this school of thought develop? What are the principles and theories that distinguish it from other sects and schools of thought? Is it true that of all the schools of thought they are the closest to the Sunnīs? The answers to these questions will be given in the following sections.

The criteria for right and wrong with regard to Muslim sects

Many of those that have dealt with Ibādism, in the past and present, whether they were researching doctrines or historical events, have written that ‘the Ibāḍiyyah are the closest group to the Sunnīs’. The Sunnīs are one among the many Muslim schools, with their own established opinions and principles forming the basis of their school of thought.¹² They make use of the same sources upon which all Muslim schools of thought base themselves: the Book, the Sunnah and the consensus. It is, for obvious reasons, unreasonable that the extent of similarity to a single group should constitute the measure for right or wrong, according to which the correctness of all the other schools of thought is judged. For, the members of each of the Muslim schools think that they are the ones who are right, that their way is the true way, that the religion they practice for God is the only proper religion, that the principles derived from this [religion] are the firmest. Accordingly, they consider that the group that has the most principles in common with their own is the group closest to correctness. All schools of thought claim this, but in reality it is invalid. The real criteria for measuring right and wrong, and the proper scales that we should use to weigh up doctrines, schools of thought, opinions and conduct, in order to know their validity, and their proximity to correctness, are the scales put in place by God’s Messenger, may God bless

¹² See below: the passages about the Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā‘ah in the section entitled ‘The Ibāḍiyyah as leaders of the community’.

him and grant him peace: 'I have left you that which, if you hold onto it, you shall never stray after I am gone: the Book of God and my Sunnah'. This is the true measure, the one that is always constant and that cannot be doubted or mistaken, and which *no falsehood can come from before it or from behind it* [*Fuṣṣilāt*, 42]. Whoever wants to know the validity or falseness of a particular doctrine, its proximity to or distance from the truth, let him apply this measure to it, let him judge accordingly, leaving aside the issue of how close or far the different groups or schools are from one another, and abandoning labels. All of that avails nothing against the truth. In my reading I have come across something similar to this, written by the Libyan historian, the learned al-Ṭāhir al-Zāwī, on the subject of the Ibāḍiyyah. When he wrote this, it seems that he was influenced by the opinion of Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī. In fairness to al-Zāwī I must say that he dealt with the subject of the Ibāḍiyyah in a very precise, prudent and sensitive way, doing his best in that section to adopt a just and neutral stance, by which he sought to appeal for the community to be restored to good order, to abandon disagreement and all its causes, whatever these were and whatever the motives behind them. When I recall this noble stance of his here I do so in the hope that he will adopt it as a principle to which he invites others, and which he offers to God. I also recall that both his books *The History of the Arab Conquest of Libya (Tārīkh al-fath al-‘arabī fī Lībyā)* and *The Holy Struggle of the Heroes (Jihād al-abṭāl)* contain criticisms and manifest prejudices against the Ibāḍiyyah, and a departure from the noble impartiality of the historian. I shall examine these issues, God willing, in another section.¹³

The *ummah* divided

It is reported that God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said:¹⁴ 'My *ummah* will be divided into 73 sects (*firqah*), all of them will be in Hell except for one that will be saved; and every one of them will

¹³ *Tārīkh al-Fath al-‘Arabī fī Lībyā*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif), 106.

¹⁴ See al-Rabī‘, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 13, section on 'the community of Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace': Abū ‘Ubaydah—Jābir b. Zayd—Ibn ‘Abbās—the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace: 'My community will be divided into... [to the end of the ḥadīth]’.

claim to be that one'. The ḥadīth has been reported in many different versions. In one of them the text states that the saved sect is the one that follows the way of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and his Companions, may God be satisfied with them. In another it is said that all these sects will be saved except one that will perish, but this report appears to be weak (*da'īf*).

The ḥadīth states that each of these sects will claim that it is saved. The claim of every sect that it alone is the saved one is only natural: only a madman would insist on following a sect that will perish. The members of each of the sects have tried hard to prove that they follow the truth and are on the right path, the one followed by Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, and his Companions and that all others have strayed from the way of God, in both doctrine and conduct.

The imām (Muḥammad 'Abduh) has examined this ḥadīth and debated the claims of each sect and the proofs offered by it to show that it is the saved sect. He then demonstrated that they are equally likely to be on the right path according to God or on the wrong one. His conclusion was that none of these sects can be the saved one, since that is the one that follows the way of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and which is divided among all the sects. They are the believers who are not misled by the sayings of mere mortals and who do not follow the ways of error and who only hold onto the guidance of the protected one and his Companions, who are like the stars, 'whichever of them you follow you shall be guided'.

What the learned imām said is of value and his understanding of the inner values of the Islamic Shari'ah in this age, his attachment to the truth, defence of God's religion reminds one of the earliest age when truth was the utmost goal of the believer, searching for it wherever it leads and standing by it wherever it appears.

The saved and the damned of the sects

On the face of it the ḥadīth that we mentioned about the division of the community in its different versions suggests that 72 of the Muslim sects will perish and only one be saved. If we take this as is, and suppose that Muslims were indeed divided into 73 sects and that this number is real and finite, can we look into this matter from a different perspective?

Every one of these sects contains millions of Muslims, only God knows their number. All these millions vary in their levels of knowledge, education, intellect and religious consciousness to an extent that cannot be measured or defined. Within each of the sects the number of people who have concerned themselves with the origins of the doctrinal principles upon which the community became divided, such as predestination, divine justice and the attributes of the Creator, is a very small minority.

As for the remainder of those who conform to one or other of these sects, they know next to nothing about these profound questions that require special qualifications. They perform their religious duties according to the manner in which they were taught to do so, believing in God and His Messenger, peace be upon him, and what he brought with him as a whole and in its details, seeking closeness to God through their deeds, and not having the educational qualifications that would allow them to discuss Qur'ānic verses or study the question of the 'clear' and 'obscure' verses of the Holy Book. Their limited intellectual capacity does not permit them to access the sort of research carried out by the scholars of theology (*'ulamā' al-kalām*). It would never occur to the common Ash'arī, Ibādī or Mu'tazilī to inquire into the problem of predestination; he naturally believes that nothing in this universe takes place without God's will. The common man from among these sects does not comprehend terms like 'Essence' or 'Attributes', or if the 'Attributes' are identical with the 'Essence', and other issues that require knowledge and sharp wits. Can all these Muslims of different sects who believe in God and perform good deeds be of those who go to hell? For, on the face of it the ḥadīth divides Muslims into 73 sects, consigning 72 of them to hell.

Many jurists have talked about the faith of old women, saying that their approach to faith should set the example for Muslims, since, it is a faith in God that cannot be shaken nor succumb to any uncertainty, however great it may be. This believer is, despite his naivety and simplicity, a strong believer. It is said that some of the Companions asked a woman once in the presence of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, about God and she replied, 'He is in the heavens'. He, peace be upon him, then said, 'Leave her alone, she is a believer'. He did not ask them to give her a long lecture about the impossibility of the Creator, exalted and glorified is He, being contained or indwelling (in some created thing), since her intellectual capacity does not allow her to absorb such issues. Are all these old women — who get away with their faith unscathed, who know their Lord, perform their duties, preserve their religion, and avoid what God has forbidden — bound for hell, just because they belong to one of those sects which the ḥadīth, on the face of it, has condemned to painful chastisement? Does Islam require that all the

followers of the sects, men and women, investigate the origins of these sects and their doctrines, in order to discover which is the saved one and enter it, in order that the mercy of God and His satisfaction may enfold them?

I think that such an obligation is beyond human nature and that the tolerant nature of Islam would not require such an arduous task, one that would not be within the ability of the average Muslim who believes in God and thinks of Him when going about his work, and who fears Him and obeys His prohibitions.

What God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said ('he will be successful, if he has spoken the truth')¹⁵ about the man who swore that he would not perform any acts of worship beyond the obligatory ones, provides an example of the tolerance of Islam and its forbearance and its acceptance of a believer's deeds without any requirement that he delve into questions of philosophy or the divisions between schools of thought.

God is satisfied with Islam as a religion for the community of Muḥammad, making it the last of His messages to (the people of) the earth. He has made this community the best community brought forth for mankind. The community of Muḥammad is the community that shall have fulfillment: those of the community that are true to the religion of God — whatever sects they belong to — hope for God's mercy and they fear His torment, and they are the ones most worthy of God encompassing them with His mercy and enclosing them in forgiveness, except those that persist in disobedience or bury themselves in discord.

Before concluding this section, I think it appropriate to cite some selections from Abū Ya'qūb's sayings about the division of the community and the way to reconcile God's saying, exalted is He, *You were the best community brought forth for people...* [Āl 'Imrān, 110], and the ḥadīth of the 73 sects ('My community shall be divided into 73 sects...'). He said:¹⁶ Judging by what we have seen of this community's extension into the eastern and western limits of the earth, and provided that God, exalted is He, protects them from idol-worship and taking other than Him as Lord, and that there will always be people of the right path among them, then salvation is [their] natural destiny, except for two classes: those that innovate in the religion of God, may He be magnified and glorified, and those that persist

¹⁵ See al-Rabī', *Ṣaḥīḥ*, chapter on 'belief, islām and holy laws', 16.

¹⁶ *Al-Dalīl*, 1: 9.

in disobedience to Him and are distant from Him: neither of these two have any chance of going to Paradise.

In another place, he writes:¹⁷ *Bid'ahs* are many: the *bid'ah* that seeks to destroy the foundations of Islam is the worst in general, since it is all-encompassing, affecting the young and old; as for the one that is limited to reports and does not aim to destroy the foundations of Islam, for example, disagreement over the (application of) terms such as *mu'min* or *muslim*, *kāfir* or *fāsiq*, *mushrik* or *munāfiq* in Islamic law, or over the Qur'ān and the divine attributes. Since these concepts for the most part harm the person that speaks them and not the one that hears them, as long as he does not believe them as a religion for the worship of God, exalted is He, or as a way of cutting off the excuse of a Muslim who differs, or with the intention of destroying a principle of Islam: in such instances, no excuse for him. As for the one who restricts himself to the principles of Islam: the profession of the faith (*shahāda*), prayer, the alms-tax, fasting, and, if he is able, the pilgrimage, then perhaps, perhaps . . . (he will be excused). Similarly, for the one confined to remote places in enemy territory, whose imām conveyed to him only the basic pillars of Islam and did not convey anything of the disputes within the *ummah*, and did not explain (all that) to him. Even if he did understand (all that), he cannot be denied the profession of the faith or opinions against other men. As for women, dependents, the simple-minded and the very young, they are not affected by this. Similarly again, Islam was not preached to the people of Africa until 500 years after the Hijrah, and so they were not acquainted with the disputes and divisions between the doctrines and sects: God's compassion and mercy is beyond that He requite one for another's sin. He has said, exalted is He: *No soul shall bear the burden of another* [*al-Isrā*, 15].¹⁸

The formation of Muslim schools of thought

Some people in this day and age think that the formation of religious schools of thought is akin to the formation of political parties, where several people come together under the leadership of an individual and

¹⁷ Ibid, 1: 12.

¹⁸ See the comments of Abū Ishāq on the *Kitāb al-Waḍ'*, 2.

establish for themselves specific principles on which they agree and which they proclaim to others, promoting them and defending them with enthusiasm and effort. In reality, the difference between the formation of religious schools of thought and political parties is a huge one.

Political parties are formed as a result of particular circumstances and during specific times and involve the demand of certain rights, or the establishment of guidelines for how a state is to be run, so that a group of people from the community or the nation, on the basis of the agreed principles, comes forward to make such demands.

As for religious schools of thought, these are formed gradually and steadily over long periods of time, depending on the nature of the development of new ideas and opinions in life, and on the events and incidents that take place, which are then submitted for analysis under the principles of established religious law (the Qur'ān, the Sunnah and the consensus) in order for a legal judgment to be produced, whether such a judgment affects dogma or conduct.

We can document historically to the day, month and year the formation of a (political) party, but we cannot apply the same precision to the formation of a religious school of thought, since the development of the latter takes place in accordance with events and as a result of opinions which may be distant from each other in time. Moreover, these opinions and events to which legal principles are applied and from which judgments are issued, whether they are close in time or not, require varying lengths of time, such that the formulating legist (*mujtahid*) can fully examine them and apply to them the proofs from religious law, and make a sound and valid judgment concerning them. This, naturally, cannot happen in a short space of time. For new events in life, whether they affect the intellect, thought or conduct, cannot be bundled together and presented to a scholar so that he may give the required judgment. When judgments are issued by formulating legists as a result of the events of their time, the aim is not the creation or formation of a sect or a school of thought.

Those notable individuals who left such great legacies for the Muslim way of life were not counting on others afterwards imitating them or hallowing their opinions or attributing to them schools of thought; especially since Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, had already come with the true school of thought and the noble way.

They were first-class teachers, since, they were trying, with all that they were given of strength and ability, to direct the hearts of people towards a sincere belief in God, and a proper understanding of the contents of the holy law, and of right conduct according to Islam. They

interpreted the ambiguous parts of the glorious Qur'ān and the noble Prophetic ḥadīths for those whose intellects do not grasp their meaning and whose mental faculties are not fit to realize what is required. They sought to explain the meaning of religion to those whose being foreign prohibited them from knowing the proper meaning of the Arabic tongue required for an understanding of the Esteemed Book.

These notable individuals were teachers who dedicated themselves and their efforts to scholarship. They took care to benefit people of all social levels in mosques, in the street and in the markets. They did not conceal what God had given them through His favour, nor did they abstain from imparting what they had learnt to the serious student in search of knowledge. They did not seek worldly gain or social repute thereby. For this reason they were very careful to teach only that which they were certain about through evidence, and whose validity they knew from proof: guiding men to God's religion, teaching them the contents of His holy law and illuminating their hearts and vision with the light of God was for them the best way to achieve closeness to God, the purest of deeds and, among duties, the dearest to their hearts.

People trusted them and gathered round them to hear their sayings and put questions to them about their problems. They asked them for formal legal opinions (*fatwās*) on matters that befell them; they referred to them any uncertainties that affected their sentiments, their belief or their behaviour. Thus, each of these teachers was surrounded by a halo of admirers, giving rise to what in literature and philosophy today is known as a 'school'.

Each of these scholars was surrounded by a group of students and listeners who admired the teachings and opinions of their master, and who were convinced by his arguments and proofs, and believed in the soundness of the principles upon which he constructed his judgments, and followed his way with regard to thought, doctrine and conduct, and implemented his proofs and evidence, seeking to promote these things of his and persuade others of them. In this way, a school of opinions and beliefs distinct from that of others grew around them. At one time there were famous schools of repute in every principal Muslim city: Makkah, Madinah, Basrah, Kufah, Egypt, Amman, Damascus and others were all cultural centres illuminating the Islamic world with the light of knowledge and guidance. The scholars from among the Companions and the eminent Successors who lived on, such as 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, 'Ā'ishah the mother of the believers, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar, Anas b. Mālik, Jābir b. Zayd, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib, 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ and others used to work in these centres, assuming the task of disseminating Islamic knowledge.

When this excellent generation of Companions and Successors had gone, they were succeeded by another generation, each of whom had been influenced by one of those notable individuals, followed in his footsteps and issued *fatwās* according to his method. Another generation then succeeded and followed the same path. All the while and during the time of each of these generations, events were taking place and opinions appearing. The formulating legists would study these matters and refer them to the established principles peculiar to them. With the passing of time, and as a result of religious ignorance becoming widespread and the establishment of groups of intellectually stagnant jurists, who hallowed the opinions of individuals and interfered in the affairs of people, calling them to follow a particular opinion and to grant authority to an imām they viewed as more knowledgeable than others and more accurate in his judgments, schools of thought began to form. These schools attracted fanatical adherents of no understanding, who would wage war against others out of persistent obduracy and stupidity. They then adopted as authoritative those imāms they trusted as if they were protected from error and holy, and affiliated themselves to them in confidence and pride.

The development of religious and educational schools of thought during the early period of Islam and the differences of opinion between the formulating legists with regard to some of the principles [of jurisprudence] and its branches testified to the tolerance of Islam and its ability to accommodate all minds and mental faculties, and to move beyond the stagnation of literal meanings of texts, and to allow minds to think and deduce freely. This religious freedom, however, whose limits the predecessors understood, and that Islamic tolerance, which permitted mighty intellects to soar high in the realms of inquiry, research and investigation, later became pretexts for enmity, disagreement and feuding. Ignorance held sway over people's minds and implacable fanaticism blinded the light of vision. The capricious decisions of government and politics played around with the proper basis for the teachings of noble religion. Tyrants and despots exploited leaders in order to entice, through those whom the people trusted, and to whom religious matters were delegated, those of weak soul and weak conviction. Thus, the living spirit was extinguished and religious truths, together with the principles upon which creeds and modes of conduct are based, became controversies of use only in debates but not in action, an arena for competition between students seeking scholarly reputation for the sake of show and not for the sake of truth, for people and not God. Religion then became just another of life's conveniences, to which people took for the sake of inheritance and as a matter of habit and familiarity, but not for the sake of faith, creed

or conduct. They performed their duties just like Christians do at church and the sort of outward behaviour that people adopt out of habit without any true feeling or sense of faith: they are duties to be carried out in a perfunctory manner, and which when a person completes them he enjoys a sense of relief of the kind he enjoys after completing other tasks.

It is this calamity that has struck Muslims and distanced them from their religion and sapped the spirit that the light of truth instils in the hearts of believers. Then they no longer respect in their actions the limits prescribed by the truth. They do not stop to think when the forbidden and the lawful became indistinguishable. They do not reckon with themselves for the distance that has grown between them and the religion of God, nor do they fear the fact that there is little faith in their hearts.

Schools of thought in religion and in philosophy

Do schools of thought in religion form in the same way as those in philosophy?

I have already indicated above that many simple-minded people assume that religious schools of thought form in the same way as political parties. I would now like to reject outright any similarity between religious schools of thought and philosophical schools of thought. A philosophical school is built around human ideas about issues of life and what comes after life, one idea after another, one issue after another, and each is liable by its nature to contradiction. Many have adopted theories invented by human reason, on the foundation of invalid conjecture, mistaken perceptions and limited knowledge.

As for religious schools, although their primary principles were largely formed only gradually, these primary principles refer back to the one same fundamental sources that are not liable to contradiction, error or invalidation, since their creator is the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible. It is from these firm sources, sent down from the heavens, that the schools of thought derive their directions, and acquire religious judgments for their creeds, modes of worship and conduct, and for the organization of their everyday existence, rules, and relationships with regard to other religions.

In fact, the divergence of the schools is merely differences of opinion over the understanding and interpretation of the import of those fixed, unchangeable and ever-valid sources. No Muslim schools claim to derive their principles from any other sources, even those most extreme in their reliance on (human) reason.

The truth that should not be disputed is that Islam, the religion which the Creator of man chose as a system that would guarantee man's happiness in this life and the next, has established the bases for a happy life for man, at any period in time. Since, a book cannot possibly comprise all the minute details of everyday events, new intellectual and scientific theories, economic and civil systems that appear throughout the ages during man's long existence, Islam was content simply to establish the principles from which one can derive the bases of creed and conduct and to which minds and mentalities can be directed for support. With this Islam specified the point of departure and the direction for development of human thought, and with this Islam sought to open the way for research and inquiry, to allow ample space for selection and comparison, and to grant man a large measure of freedom with regard to creed, conduct and thought. Islam abhors nothing in the way it abhors the worship of other than God; and it combats nothing the way it combats tyranny, arrogance and injustice and the elevation of man over his fellow-men.

When did the Muslim schools of thought first appear?

An educated person once asked me, 'Did the Muslim schools of thought first appear at the time of the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace?' At first I was surprised that such a question would occur to a Muslim, but when I had given the matter some thought, I supposed — even though supposition avails nothing against the truth — that the person who asked the question had perhaps been led to believe this on account of some of the discussions between the Companions, may God be satisfied with them, and God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and their constant reference to him. Either that or the questioner had absorbed it from some of the books that raise the same

points. For example, al-Shahrastānī did this.¹⁹ Judging by his introduction, the impression given is that many of the specious arguments held by the erring sects had their origins in the time of the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. In carrying on this narrative I admit that the scholar al-Shahrastānī's investigations go far deeper than such a simple question. In any case, I am certain that this question is far removed from reality. At the time of the Messenger, blessings and peace be upon him, Muslims lived without the need to work out religious precepts or to compete intellectually or to establish bases for doctrines, since none of that concerned them: the Revelation would come down every time a precept was needed. Moreover, the Messenger, blessings and peace be upon him, used to clarify all that was ambiguous through his sayings and actions and used to respond to all that was put to him in a way that sufficed and satisfied. It may happen that occasionally Muslims became hesitant and unconvinced by some issue or matter and would go over some of his responses, some of which they were not easily persuaded by, when certain incidents clouded their thoughts. They might accept the Messenger's command even though some doubts still ran through their minds. In such instances, the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, would try to convince them through certain deeds, showing them how the results confirmed his rulings and responses. Perhaps, the best example of this was at al-Ḥudaybiyyah (following the pact with the idolaters): the Muslims thought that they had committed a dishonourable act in their religion and experienced a loss such as they had never experienced before, so much so that 'Umar kept going back to consult God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him much peace, and Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, until the latter, may God be satisfied with him, said to him: 'Woe unto you 'Umar! Hold onto his stirrup, he is a Prophet inspired by revelation.'

Researchers, however, cannot really claim that such incidents were the nucleus of the formation of the schools of thought, or that they constituted a rejection of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. All that can be said is that such consultations were merely to acquire peace of mind, as when al-Khalīl (the Prophet Abraham), peace be upon him, asked his Lord to show him how He brought the dead back to life.

After the death of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, Abū Bakr and then 'Umar succeeded as his caliphs, and their caliphates were an extension of the age of Prophethood, except for the

¹⁹ *Al-Milal wa-l-Niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Fahmī (1st edition), 4th preface, 11.

sense of saddening separation brought about by the death of God's Messenger and the end of Revelation that gripped the souls of Muslims and overshadowed their gatherings. Otherwise, the word of Muslims remained one. Sometimes, a matter would be discussed over which opinions diverged, until a Companion provided a response, learnt from God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. Controversy would then cease and any hubbub would die out, or else the majority would agree on a ruling and the minority would accept it. Thus, consensus would form as it did at the time of the pledge of allegiance to Abū Bakr. Muslims would persist in their struggle against oppression and for the dissemination of God's religion and in their fight for His cause. They did not find time to be still or leisure for rest. Then, with the stimulus of new circumstances and events that require a ruling, the Muslim men of standing and knowledge would respond to the matter, always ready and prepared to search out principles from the Book of God. If their search came to nothing, they would turn to the Sunnah of God's Messenger, failing that, the consensus of the Muslims and failing that, they would look to similar cases and analogies in which a ruling had previously been given from the (proper) principles.

Time passed and Islam spread to extensive regions of the earth. The number of Companions who had lived in the age of Prophethood and witnessed Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, and the sending down of Revelation, decreased. Into Islam came people who did not know the Arabic tongue or the proper meanings of Islamic Shari'ah as understood by the earliest Companions. It was imperative that the Glorious Qur'ān be interpreted for them and the Noble Ḥadīth explained to them, and the proper meanings of the Islamic Shari'ah be clarified for them. From these lessons, and from the questions and discussions that were carried back on the tongues of the new Muslims — those that had not witnessed the sending down of the Revelation, and had not seen the powerful personality of the Messenger, which convinced one of the sublimity of the Message — the schools of thought originated.

The formation of the Ibādī school

If we seek to document the history of the Muslim schools of thought with regard to their early teachers, who influenced the spirit and culture of

people to the greatest extent, then we may say that the Ibādī school was among the first to form and its first teacher was Jābir b. Zayd, one of the eminent Successors who disseminated Islamic teaching during the first century of the Hijrah. This great imām lived from 21–96 after the Hijrah of the Prophet, may the best blessing and purest greeting be upon him.

The majority of controversies in which the community was involved developed during the last two-thirds of the first century. The scholar al-Shahrastānī grouped these controversies under four principal headings, as follows:²⁰

- 1 The (Divine) Attributes and the Divine Unity (*al-ṣifāt wa-l-tawḥīd*).
- 2 Predestination and Justice (*al-qadar wa-l-‘adl*).
- 3 The Promise and the Threat (*al-wa‘d wa-l-wa‘īd*).
- 4 Hearing [i.e. Revelation] and Reason, the Message and the Trust.

He then proceeded to explain the implications that issue from these controversies. Among them, our concern here is with what developed during the first century, upon which the Ibādīs based their school of thought, with recourse to unshakable evidence and the clear verses of the Holy Book of God.

Among the matters that arose during that century were problems concerning predestination (*qadar*) and the attributes, the promise and the threat (*al-wa‘d wa-l-wa‘īd*), as well as the question of the caliphate, which exhausted the energies of the men of knowledge and power of that age. The Ibādīs, Jābir b. Zayd foremost among them, examined these issues, as did other Muslim scholars, and ended up with the opinion or school of thought, of whose validity and correctness they were convinced, in accordance with the Book of God and the Sunnah of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace.

One of the first principles upon which the Ibādīs founded their school concerned the Creator, may He be glorified and exalted: by declaring the Exalted One above comparison with creation through recourse to the clear verses of God’s Book. As for that in the Glorious Qur’ān which can draw one into anthropomorphism, one must believe that it is from God and to understand such verses in accordance with the meaning required by the context, for example, by taking ‘the rising to’ (*istiwā’*) to mean ‘the domination of’ (*istilā’*), and ‘hand’ (*yad*) to mean ‘power’ (*qudra*), and so on.

As regards predestination (*qadar*), the Ibādī opinion has been, ever since that time, that faith cannot be complete until man believes that

²⁰ *Al-Milal wa-l-nihal*, I: 2nd Introduction, 4.

predestination, both the good and the evil of it, is from God: *God created you and that which you do [al-Şāffāt, 96]; ...Verily to Him belongs creation and command...[al-A'rāf, 54]; ...Is there a creator other than God...? [Fātir, 3]; God created everything...[al-Zumar, 62].* As for the servant, his entitlement is doing (the deed) and choosing (the deed). Ibādī opinions concerning most of the controversial questions were similarly based on principles derived from the Glorious Qur'ān and the Noble Ḥadīth of the Prophet. At the time, some of the Companions of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, were still alive. On many of these questions, the great imām consulted the opinions of the Companions, such as 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās and 'Ā'ishah mother of the believers. One such example was the question of the seeing of the Creator during the nocturnal journey (*laylat al-isrā'*). She said, 'Whoever claims that Muḥammad saw His Lord has committed a great calumny against God'.²¹

From this section, it should be clear to the reader that the Ibādī school acquired its noble principles, upon which it founded its doctrines and mode of conduct, during the best of centuries.²² A time when those who survived from among the Companions of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, were still disseminating the knowledge that they possessed, making clear the guidance of Muḥammad through their conduct, and promoting God's religion through their guidance, direction and counsel. When controversies arose and *bid'ah* appeared, and notable scholars would stop to ponder them, Jābir, may God be pleased with him, used to study them in his capacity as an inquiring believer. If the proper way out would not reveal itself to him, he would refer to his teachers, those who received the inner meanings of Islam and its true spirit in a way that others did not, and he would put these matters to the Interpreter of the Qur'ān, or to the rose-complexioned one, about whom he, peace be upon him, said, 'Take from her half of your religion', or to Anas b. Mālik, the servant of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant peace, or to 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar, may God be satisfied with both of them, or to any of those others of wisdom whom the Messenger, blessings and peace upon him, sanctioned to teach and to guide.

²¹ Cited in the *Şaḥīḥ* of al-Rabī', chapter 10 'Polytheism and unbelief' (*fī dhikr al-shirk wa-l-kufr*), 17, 'Abū 'Ubaydah—Jābir b. Zayd—'Ā'ishah wife of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'Whoever claims that Muḥammad saw His Lord has committed a great calumny against God.'

²² Understanding 'century' (*qarn*) in its temporal sense as it is commonly understood from the ḥadīth of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace: the best of centuries is my century, then those following... (to the

After the establishment of Ibādī doctrine, during differing lengths of time, the other schools began to emerge and spread in certain corners of the Muslim world. The Mu‘tazilah and other schools embraced by a large number of Muslims today began to form.

As such, the Ibādī school was the first moderate school to emerge and the closest in time to the age of Prophethood and the best of centuries, and best understood the spirit of Islam, the proper ways to create laws and the guidance of Muḥammad and his Companions. For these very reasons, we shall in the following sections examine some of the orientations that are peculiar to it or mark it out.

The issue of the caliphate

When the eminent scholars from among the Successors used to convene study sessions, in which they would expound the Book of God and relate to people what they had learnt from the precepts and practice of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and give people rulings on questions that troubled them, the issue of the caliphate was among the most popular questions. People held different opinions regarding it, each according to the proofs that convinced them or the principles upon which they relied.

Jābir b. Zayd al-Azdī, one of these scholars, had taken up residence in Basrah. He sought to spread knowledge there, teaching and writing in turn, and looking after the affairs of Muslims. The question of the caliphate was among the questions that he came across and which he studied at length and in depth. He came to a conclusion based on the spirit of Islamic justice and derived from the Glorious Qur’ān, and supported by the conduct of the predecessors from among the Companions of the Prophet, blessings and peace upon him.

He believed that the caliphate was one of the pillars of the state, the best manifestation of the community and the authority most capable of executing God’s commands and putting into effect the precepts of the Holy Book. As such, it cannot be subject to nepotism nor be monopolized by any one race, clan, dynasty, or complexion. For it is necessarily

end of the ḥadīth)’.
46

conditional on an absolute competence — competence in religion, in moral character, in practice, and in intelligence. If a number of individuals are equal in these competencies, then one may consider (being a) Hāshimī, Qurayshī or an Arab as a basis for preference among them, or an argument in favour, otherwise nothing else counts.

People knew that such was the point of view of Jābir b. Zayd, as they knew it was that of many other scholars contemporary with him, and that of many of the Companions of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. His students used to disseminate this teaching of his and report it. On this point the opinions of Ibādīs and Khawārij converge. But it is here that some historians slipped up, thinking that Ibādīs were a sub-sect of the Khawārij, without taking the trouble to examine other principles and opinions. I have already mentioned elsewhere in these sections that the convergence of two groups upon a point of view does not make them one. It may be true that the question of the caliphate is one of the major points of agreement between Ibādīs and Khawārij, but otherwise, Ibādīs are the people furthest from Khawārij in their understanding of Islam and their execution of its commands.

I do think, however, that the only option for the Muslim *ummah*, after all these bitter experiences and now that history has distanced it from specific influences that led it in certain directions, is to see eye to eye with Ibādīs on the matter of the caliphate: Muslim scholars cannot give preference to any other opinion. If it is the destiny of the Muslim community to be united again and to return to God's judgment and to undo the legal codes put in place by colonialism so as to distance this Muslim community from the Book of God, and if destiny decrees that the Muslim caliphate should look after the affairs of Muslims as God commanded — if all that is decreed, and if the community had to choose a leader for its state, in whose hands the fates of all those of the community would be, it can only return to the principles of this school of thought in order to choose the caliph or head of the state in accordance with the conditions mentioned above. Then, no weight can be given to [being] a Hāshimī, a Qurashī or an Arab. By God, preference can only be made if all the characteristics and qualifications come together. This will not happen in a community made up of a million different points of view, mentalities and morals.

It is indeed a pleasure for me to cite from Professor Muḥammad al-Ghazālī the following remarkable lines with which I conclude this section:

We ask ourselves: why all this dispute? How can such and such a genealogy be of use or harm to us? How does being an African or an Asian make us better or worse? How is 'Abd Shams better than Tutenkhamen? Or Taḥtemis [better than] 'Antarah? Why does

one not say in short that a black Muslim is better than a Hāshimī hypocrite, and that the cause of Palestine concerns Islam and Muslims before (it concerns) Arabs and colonialists? And that the bearer of the great Message said: 'Nations will entertain pride in their deceased ancestors, whereas they are but the coals of hell-fire: before God they will be more worthless than the dung-beetle that rolls faeces into balls with its nose. God has rid you of that disgrace — haughtiness — from the time of Jāhiliyyah. One is either a God-fearing believer or a corrupt one who will be damned. All of mankind are children of Adam, and Adam was created from dust'.

The Ibādī stance on public debate

Among the qualities that distinguish Ibādīs is that they do not join in much disputation, and they are not at ease with empty protestations and obstinate antagonism. They do not preoccupy their time with repeating opinions or with protracted conversations, since the fundamentals of religion taught them to believe in the value of the idea and not of words. They find strength of demonstration in action, not in speech; and they know that proof by conduct is stronger than proof by assertion. For this reason, when you look back at the arenas of debate and the discussions of theology during the long history of Islam, you will find that, among the schools of thought, the Ibādīs are least in speech and most in action, lightest in speaking and heaviest in faith, furthest from assertion and nearest to guidance.

When discussions left the stage of seeking the truth and the right way, and the authentication of the creed, for another stage — namely, convening sessions for controversy, and assemblies for competition and games with words, and disputation just for the pleasure of triumph in heated rhetorical battles whose purpose is rather display than any search for truth — then, on the horizon of the life of Muslims, there appeared a party that wanted to fill the world with clamour and distract the minds of the people with talk.

When the life of Muslims became thus, the Ibādīs, believing in the correctness of their school and the soundness of their doctrines, having scrutinized it in detail and founded it upon the principles of the Book of God and the Sunnah of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant

him peace, free of any *bid'ah* or false ideas, proceeded to examine all these problems according to the scales put in place by the Great Legislator, before disputatiousness increased among people. They looked into their souls and reckoned their deeds according to what each knew and with it they proceeded with light from God's religion, spreading in a balanced and calm manner what, for them, was proven by evidence and did not require interpretation. They did not concern themselves with the drone of clamour that produces no results, nor did they throw themselves headlong into verbal battles whose only aim is the manifestation of glory and worldly possessions. Despite all this, they were the most zealous of all people in establishing what is true and providing the proofs for it. When the situation required a response to the falsehoods of pretenders, the lies of innovators and the false accusations of liars, Ibādī scholars were always the quickest to destroy the sort of falsehood made to be broadcast or the sort of false accusation dressed up as true argument by its propagator. No sooner are they finished destroying falsehood and dumbfounding its propagators, than they return to the path which they set up, and to the mode of conduct chosen by them: good deeds for the sake of God and the community, a strong attachment to the Book and the Sunnah and sustained effort to raise high the Word of God. They command each other to do good and bid each other to avoid what is evil; they follow the way of God as it is defined by Islam and made clear by the guidance of Muḥammad, peace be upon him. Theirs is a struggle without noise, the giving of aid without there being a call for it beforehand, and without its being followed by boasting, pride or vainglory. Their method of debating is lively but peaceful, without bellowing or cursing, blocking the path of rebellion (against God) through capriciousness and heresies, and forcing falsehood to wither and not become public, and to weaken so that it cannot come to light.

Wāṣil b. 'Atā', the imām of the Mu'tazilah, used to yearn for debate with Abū 'Ubaydah Muslim and prepare for it, until one day the opportunity presented itself and they met somewhere.

Wāṣil asked Abū 'Ubaydah: 'Are you the one who says, "God punishes according to what He has predestined, what is to happen (*yu'adhdhib bi-l-qadar*)"?''

Abū 'Ubaydah replied: 'No. What I say is that God punishes according to fate, what has happened (*yu'adhdhib bi-l-maḡdūr*).'

Abū 'Ubaydah said to Wāṣil: 'Are you the one who says, "God is disobeyed unwillingly"?''

Wāṣil could not answer. Someone later on said to him, 'How is it that you asked him and he got out of it, and then when he asked you, you did

not respond?’ Wāṣil replied: ‘I have been preparing an edifice [of arguments] for him for thirty years: he managed to demolish it by just standing there’.²³ The Mu‘tazilah were the foremost of all Muslim groups in their penchant for disputation, never missing an opportunity to contend with another Muslim school. A group of them challenged some of the people of this (Ibādī) school and set up a session for the debate. That Mu‘tazilī who had spent long nights preparing his questions and responses called out, ‘O ‘Abd Allāh!’ No one responded, since there were several individuals called ‘Abd Allāh present at the session. He then called out: ‘I meant ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Lamaṭī the Ibādī!’ The named individual responded.

The Mu‘tazilī asked him: ‘O ‘Abd Allāh, is a person able to go from a place in which he is not to another in which he is?’

‘Abd Allāh said: ‘No.’

The Mu‘tazilī then asked: ‘Is a person able to go from a place in which he is to a place in which he is not yet?’

He replied: ‘If he so wishes.’

The other said: ‘You have escaped, O Ibn al-Lamaṭī.’²⁴

Thus, all that the Mu‘tazilī had constructed, prepared and thought out during long dark nights was demolished.

Some thoughts about predestination occurred to al-Ḥajjāj and disquieted him, so he brought it up with his secretary Yazīd b. Muslim. Yazīd then wrote to Jābir to ask him, since he admired Jābir and had confidence in him. The latter responded, ‘Tell the emir that he should keep repeating his sermon to himself, for in it lies the answer to his question’. Al-Ḥajjāj went over his sermon repeatedly and pondered it at length until he noticed that it contained the following saying of the Almighty: *He whom God guides shall be guided and whom He chooses to lead astray shall be the losers* [*al-A‘rāf*, 178]. In this glorious verse lay the answer to al-Ḥajjāj’s perplexity. He said to Yazīd: ‘Woe unto you Yazīd! Your friend is very knowledgeable.’²⁵

A group of Khawārij, who sanctioned the seizure of Muslims’ property and of their women and children, disputed with Jābir.

He said to them: ‘Did God not forbid shedding the blood of Muslims as part of the religion?’

²³ *Salam al-‘āmma wa-l-mubtadi’īn*, 6, n. 1.

²⁴ *Al-Siyar*, 222. The story is also mentioned by Ibn al-Ṣaghīr and al-Bārūnī in *al-Azhār*.

²⁵ See Shammākhī, *Siyar*, and Quṭb al-Umma, *Sharḥ ‘aqīdat al-tawḥīd*.

They said: 'Yes'.

He said: 'Did He not forbid dissociation from them as part of the religion?'

They said: 'Yes'.

He said: 'Did He not make shedding the blood of the enemy lawful as part of the religion after He had made it unlawful as part of the religion?'

They said: 'Yes.'

He said: 'Did He not forbid association with them as part of the religion after He had commanded it as part of the religion?'

They said: 'Yes'.

He said: 'Did He make lawful anything other than this as part of the religion?'²⁶

They did not respond.

In this way, he was able to lead them by the hand step by step to the true way and teach them that the precepts made for Muslims cannot be implemented in the same way as the precepts made for polytheists; and that when a person professing belief in the oneness of God commits an act that makes him liable to be killed, that is not sufficient cause for his property, women and children to be seized in addition.

The blood of a person that professes the oneness of God may become lawful when one of God's prescribed rulings has to be enacted as punishment for political or social crimes, such as murder or adultery, piracy or aggression. The purpose of these rulings is, first, as a punishment for that person for committing the crime and, second, to dissuade people from committing similar sinful acts. Punishment according to the legislations of the Shari'ah is only carried out when necessary and it is founded upon reasons that justify it, and carried out in a specific manner that does not involve excess or exaggeration.

Thus, the limits set out for it should not be overstepped. For some people this concept is too subtle to understand. Some asked 'Alī during a discussion of the Battle of the Camel, '(How is it that) you have made lawful the blood of a people but you have forbidden us their property?'

The same question was put to Abū l-Khaṭṭāb 'Abd al-A'lā by one his fighters during the invasion of al-Qayrawān. Abū l-Khaṭṭāb repudiated the question and rebuked the questioner for it, and said to him: 'If we were to

²⁶ See the two sources mentioned above (n. 24).

do such a thing, then we would certainly deserve that God throw us with them into the Fire.²⁷

Ijtihād

Many Muslim schools of thought decided that with the passing of a certain age the gates of *ijtihād* should be closed, thinking that there will never be people of the calibre of previous *mujtahids* and that no field in religion required *ijtihād* anymore.

When such stagnant minds prohibited the minds and intellects of Muslims to think freely and to soar in the wide expanses allowed by the Holy Book's call to believers to liberate themselves and think freely, when they did this and halted the currents of thought, they froze Islam in a way in another mind-set, climate and period.

Ibādīs sensed from the first that such a stagnant approach did not go hand in hand with the spirit of Islam, which is valid for all places and times. Islam, having defined the boundaries that should not be overstepped, wanted Muslims to give free reign to their abilities, intellects, knowledge and mental faculties in all aspects of life, to explore unknown things and open up closed gates, and to illuminate the way for the multitudes of human beings during all periods and in all cities. Islam did not deny the last of the community access to that which the first of them enjoyed. Muslims of whatever period are only better than one another in the extent of their fear of God, their faith, their good deeds, and their continuous struggle for the cause of God. The only exception is the pride of place given to the Companions, those people chosen by God to be companions of Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace and

²⁷ *Siyar*, 129: 'May God have mercy on him, he conducted himself properly when he defeated them: he did not finish off any wounded man, nor did he chase after a fleeing one. Khālid al-Liwātī said to him: Shall we take of their property what they took of ours?. Abū l-Khaṭṭāb said to him: Then we certainly deserve that God cast us into the Fire with them: *Whenever any nation enters, it curses its sister-nation; till, when they have all successively come there, the last of them shall say to the first of them, 'O our Lord, these led us astray; so give them a double chastisement of the Fire'. He will say, 'Unto each a double, but you know not' [al-A'rāf, 38]*; and then he went off.'

to that first generation that carried the torch of guidance for the good of erring mankind.

The need of the Muslims for *mujtahids* in later periods and for their inquiries into these many problems to which the community has been exposed by the different civilizations, is more severe than was their need for them in earlier periods. The ability of those of the community seeking *ijtihād* to acquire all the sources needed to assist them in their research and discussion in this age is greater, given the facility of transport and the ability of scholars to communicate. Ibādīs believed that what God had made open for the first of this community cannot be denied to the last of it, and that the gate of *ijtihād*, left wide open by Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, can only be closed by a jurist of no understanding. Therefore they began to discuss the question of *ijtihād* and the level of scholarship required for someone to carry such a burden. Can a person qualify for it if he has only acquired full competency for *ijtihād* in some and not all domains? The idea is that talents and aptitudes in one sphere of life or knowledge should not be impeded if such minds and talents were only available in another sphere.

What the learned al-Sālimī wrote in this respect seems to point this out and identify it. Listen to what he has to say as I point out the conditions that a *mujtahid* needs to fulfil: knowledge of language, fundamentals of religion, the science of jurisprudence and the sources for proofs such as the Book, the Sunnah and the consensus, 'if some of these conditions are not fulfilled, so that he is well-versed in certain things to the exclusion of others, for example, if he was well-versed in the requisites for marriage, but not in those of other things, or in the conditions for commercial transactions, but not in others, and so on and so forth, and if he was fully knowledgeable in that which he specialized in, would it be permissible for him to practice *ijtihād* in order to make deductions from the precepts he was familiar with? Or is it not permissible for him until he acquires knowledge of all the precepts of the Book and the Sunnah?'

The imām al-Kadmī, may God be satisfied with him, permitted this and such an attitude was ascribed to most of the experts in *uṣūl al-fiqh*. It is also said that one cannot practice *ijtihād* solely in certain topics, even if one was well-versed in the proofs associated with the precepts of such a topic. This matter is defined by them as the 'division of *ijtihād*'. The imām is right to permit such (practice). For if we suppose total competency in *ijtihād* in any field, in such a way that the *mujtahid* is not ignorant of the sources for any issue, then the *mujtahid* would have to have knowledge of every issue concerning *ijtihād*, because of the completeness of his knowledge of the sources for any issue. Otherwise, he would fall short. Mālik b. Anas was questioned about forty different matters, but he only

responded to four of them, adding that he does not know about the others. If practising *ijtihād* in one question to the exclusion of others was not permitted, he would not have responded only to some of these matters. Thus, it has been reported about some Companions, like Mu‘ādh and Ibn ‘Umar, that they did not respond to questions about legal commands, and similarly some Successors and their successors, to the extent that this became a distinguishing mark of scholars of the later period, men whose bones have decayed, whose eyes have been extinguished, and who died many centuries ago.²⁸

In this way, with much tolerance, clarity and open-mindedness, they used to discuss problems with reference to the actions of Companions and Successors, and the way of life of the righteous predecessors. They do not deny access to that which knowledge has opened up, nor do they deem illicit that which religion has made licit, nor do they let the problems of successive generations accumulate at the gates of *ijtihād*, closed by idiotic mentalities, so that these problems fall back once again and require rulings from scholars whose bones have decayed, whose eyes have been extinguished and who died many centuries ago.

What brings cheer to the hearts of believers is that the majority of Muslim scholars today have realized the rightness of this Ibādī opinion and have set about breaking the chains that have bound many Muslim groups for ages, smashing down the closed gates that prohibited free flight in the realms of thought and *ijtihād*, and penetrating this prohibited domain, which rigid perspectives set up as a museum of the dead, and making lawful for Muslims what God made lawful for them, in fact, what He told them in detail to hasten to when He said: *...But why should not a party of every section of them go forth, to become learned in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them, that haply they may beware?* [*al-Tawbah*, 122].

Certainly, it is not required of such a party summoned to carry forth God’s Message, to make Muslims learned in religion, and to warn them, once it is filled with those ready to invite others to faith, knowledge and good deeds. It is not required of this party that they bear crude messages or issues that have been handed down as given, which they then store in rigid minds, like repeated editions of books committed to memory. Such people do not deserve to be associated with being learned and are not capable of warning nor are they fit to carry forth the Message of God.

The learned imām was probably one of the first to destroy intellectual stagnation, and to carry forth the flag of revolution against the religious

²⁸ *Sharḥ Ta’at al-shams*, 2: 278.

regression that has taken hold of Muslims of many centuries, and which has put a halt to their progress. He watched closely, and with perplexity and anxiety, as the procession of life pervaded mankind through the ages, and called for emancipation from the bonds with which the ignorant jurists restrained a deep Muslim understanding of events of time and developments in life.

Ibādīs from the earliest times perceived this reality and understood the spirit of Islam to which the call was made by the Holy Book and by the guidance of its noble Messenger in the way he guided his companions, may God be satisfied with them, the way he, peace be upon him, did with Mu‘ādh b. Jabal, such that sang the praises of God for giving success to the messenger of the Messenger of God. They did not allow such bonds to enslave them or such hindrance to detain them or such rigidity to control their minds, understandings and knowledge. For, they see that all people are equal in faculties and talents, and just as the earliest centuries produced giants of knowledge, so later and future centuries can produce the same, provided that the sources on which the first individuals drew are the same as the sources from which later individuals draw, in addition to the facilities of communication, inquiry and knowledge that exist.

This is the second issue that is almost unique to Ibādīs and which goes hand in hand with the spirit of Islam, the reality of life and the nature of existence. Many followers of the other schools of thought are unaware of this and have not been able to understand the truth of it until this age, where now Muslims have begun to brush off themselves the dust of ignorance, rigidity and regression and to pursue that which is permitted by Islam’s tolerant nature and to which the best of mankind, blessings and peace be upon him, called.

Islam is belief, words and deeds

One of the points almost unique to the Ibādīs — and this is a fundamental principle without which Islam cannot be fruitful — is their insistence on works for Islam to be complete: *For God's religion is Islam...*[*Āl ‘Imrān*, 19].

Islam can only be complete with both words and deeds: words, meaning the declared profession of belief (*al-shahādah*), and deeds, meaning the fulfilment of all that is obligatory, the avoidance of all that is forbidden and suspension of judgment on uncertainties. Profession of the

shahādah incorporates a person into the geographical boundaries of Islam, thus his life and property are protected, together with the honour of his women and children, as he, peace be upon him, said: ‘I was commanded to keep fighting the enemy unless they said, “there is no god but God (*lā ilāha illā l-lāh*)”’. If they say this, then they have been spared (*ḥaqanū*), their persons and their possessions, except for what is permitted by law’. People asked: ‘What is permitted by law, O Messenger of God?’ He said: ‘[The legal punishment for] apostasy after belief, adultery after marriage, and murder of a person’.²⁹ But for a person merely to be satisfied with the profession of these words, and to neglect what God has made obligatory is incomplete faith and is not valid action. The essence of Islam requires that a person believe in God and His Message, declare his faith and proceed to perform deeds according to the Message, in which he has believed.

If you look at the Muslim world today, brimming with millions of human beings, bearing witness that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is God’s Messenger, proud that they are Muslims, chosen by God to be the last of the believing communities and the one whose holy law would abrogate all the heavenly laws; if you look at these Muslims and see what they do, you will be stunned by what you see and upset by the difference (between what is professed and what is done).

When God sent Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, with the laws of Islam, He wanted the Muslim to be totally God’s and for him not to take any partner with God. God needs no partner, and if a believer chooses not to devote his heart, words and limbs to God, then God has no need for him. What is the point of lips uttering the words expressing Oneness while the heart is filled with the love of other than God, and his limbs hasten to commit all that God has forbidden, abandoning what God has made obligatory for them?

What is the worth of a Muslim who avoids prayer, or does not acknowledge the alms-tax, or performs the pilgrimage only for show? What is the worth of a Muslim who enters a bar and drinks himself senseless? Or a casino to lose all his money? Or a brothel only to waste his health and degrade himself? What is the worth of such a Muslim before God? What is the worth of the Muslim who walks in the street with a rosary around his fingers just so that people can see him, his lips mumbling,

²⁹ Al-Rabī’, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, chapter ‘Miscellany on fighting for the cause of God’ (*jāmi‘ al-ghazw fī sabīl Allāh*), 2:19, worded thus: Abū ‘Ubaydah—Jābir b. Zayd—Ibn ‘Abbās: the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace said: ‘I was commanded to keep fighting the enemy unless they said, “there is no god but God (*lā ilāha illā l-lāh*)”’; if they said this they have protected (*‘aṣamū*) their persons and their possessions from me, except what is permitted by law.’

'there is no god but God', while his eyes roam all over seductive sights forbidden by God, and who, when he sees people are not looking, commits a vile deed or acquires illegitimate money, and then sets out to cover up his corrupt behaviour with a superficial image of dignity so that people think him a believer?

What is the worth of a Muslim who uses the arguments of philosophers against the words of God and responds to the Sunnah of God's Messenger with Freudian theories, cherishing Marxist philosophy over that of Islam and impeding (the application of) the precepts of the Book through laws established by Jean-Paul Sartre, John Dewey or Karl Marx?³⁰

What is the worth of such a Muslim before God? What is the worth of the Muslim who spends his money on every cause except the cause of God and good in general, and who takes part in every project except for a good-will project, and encourages against every gathering except that of forbidden things? What is the worth of such a Muslim before God? What is the worth of the Muslim who deceives people through the guise of religion, getting them to part with their money by manifesting righteousness and then steals it when it should go to charity? What is the worth of such a Muslim before God? What is the worth of the Muslim who enslaves other people and their money through the freedom of the right of property, and makes them subservient to him like servants by claiming that he is their guardian, controlling them by stultifying, impoverishing and demeaning them? What is the worth of such a Muslim before God? What is the worth of that Muslim who discovered secularism and then adopted it, or the one who was told about communism and then became communist, or who was called to adopt socialism and then did so? What is the worth of such a Muslim before God?

These characteristics are not limited to individuals, they are also found among states. They certainly describe well all those confused factions in Muslim countries, each one thinking that it is a state in its own right, seeking refuge in 'Arabhood' and abandoning Islam, cherishing race and neglecting religion, putting the enemies of God and its own enemies in positions of authority and rejecting the methods of

³⁰ These names are merely examples of the dozens of individuals to whom wisdom or philosophy is ascribed, and whose sayings and opinions are adopted in the place of God's laws, so that if you were to say, 'God says' or 'The Messenger of God says', the response would be, 'Freud said' or 'Marx said' or, 'Darwin said' or 'Sartre said', or any one of these, admiration for whom fills the hearts of those infatuated by them.

government established by God, and in the end declaring itself enemy of those of its own, and seeking the assistance of the enemies of God against its brethren before God, making use of their opinions and experience, together with their weapons, ammunition, strategies and plots.

What is the worth of such states before God?

You can find millions of different portrayals for all human beings, all professing the words of Oneness, but who otherwise are not Muslims. Can the faith of all of these be complete? Can they be counted as Muslims? If such were complete in the way that God willed it, and the faith of all those worthless individuals were like the faith of those valiant ones who believe that works are necessary for the fulfilment of faith, then the whole world today would be on the path of God's law. When Islam was made up of faith, words and deeds, ten thousand Muslims were able to guide millions to God's religion through their conduct above all, before guiding them with words or swords. Those few thousands were able to establish the rule of God in the lands of God so that it was firm and flourishing, despite the fact that the inhabitants were non-Muslims. This was because, those few were true Muslims in their hearts, in their words and in their actions. I make the claim — and this may be wrong — that nothing damaged Islam, made it insignificant for its followers, encouraged Muslims to forsake its obligations, debase it and neglect its laws, more than the calling of a person a complete Muslim merely on the profession of 'there is no god but God'. Some jurists, exploiting what they have learnt without any real understanding of it, make every effort to please the public and the ignorant folk by making it easier for them to be disobedient, and who abuse rhetorical skill in the name of schools of thought, saying — 'Hell-fire was not created for people who believe in the oneness of God, even if they have no (good) works (to their credit); whoever professes "there is no god but God" shall go to Paradise, even if he should fornicate or steal' — being unaware of the meaning of this last sentence. Such are the methods by which things are severed from their proper meaning, and with which they deceive people with regard to themselves, their religion and their Lord, dressing it up and labelling it 'Islam', denying them [access to] good deeds which the Holy Book has made a necessary part of belief in God, since wherever faith in it is mentioned it is accompanied by good deeds and benevolent action.

This is the third point which has been almost unique to Ibādīs since the beginning of Islam and according to which they have conducted themselves in the way Muḥammad did, may God bless him and grant him peace, and the way his Companions did, may God be satisfied with them. They did not distinguish between words and deeds and they did not divide up God's religion, nor did they give hope of God's mercy to those who

persist in disobedience without repentance, whether their disobedience is through commission of evil deed or omission (of what is obligatory).

Now that Muslims have awoken from their long slumber and have returned to their Lord's Book and to the guidance of their Prophet and the way of conduct of their predecessors, seeking from it inspiration, direction and the way to guidance, they realize that works are the fundamental condition of proper faith. For this reason, blessed pens have set forth calling people to hold fast to the firm bond that is God's Book, to adorn themselves with the noble manners with which Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, adorned himself, and to proceed into the arenas of that eternal jihād, the jihād of the self. For, he who cannot defeat the satan within himself will not be able to defeat the enemy on his land. So long as Muslims deviate from the straight path of God, they will not be reinforced with God's support. When Muslims understand Islam properly, apply it again as individuals and communities, nations and states, submit their souls, lips and limbs to God, only then, will God open up their hearts to Islam, grant them relief from every distress, a way out of every problem, and grant them the glory He promised them: *To God belongs all glory, and to His Messenger and the believers [al-Munāfiqūn, 8]*, and, 'My servant keeps drawing himself near to Me through his voluntary worship until I love him, and if I love him I will be the hearing with which he hears and the sight with which he sees and the hand with which he strikes'.

Walāyah, barā'ah and wuqūf

In his *al-Shāmil*, Quṭb al-A'imma states: '*walāyah* (maintaining good relations) and *barā'ah* (severance of relations) in respect of groups are both obligations according to the Book, the Sunnah and the consensus, on every obligated individual of legal age if proof is presented to him'. Then, after a discussion of the subject, he adds: 'As for *walāyah* and *barā'ah* in respect of individuals, they are both duties by analogy with the other two, and on account of ḥadīths that require brothers in God to love one another, and on account of the praise of such love in the Qur'ān'. Following another discussion, he then says, 'except where the two are not duties'.

I saw fit to commence this section with these truths proclaimed by Qutb al-A'imma, may God have mercy on him and be satisfied with him. He is one of those few free thinkers, with whom this new age has favoured us. As well as being from among those, whose powers of insight God has opened up so that they understand the proper meanings of Islamic laws, in whose hearts He has placed the light of wisdom and knowledge, whom He has strengthened for the struggle for the cause of God, and for whom he has facilitated the way to serve His religion in times of corruption and darkness, by applying the laws derived from the Book and the Sunnah and establishing firmly what vacillated between one or more opinions. In addition to his ongoing work, his literary output — which, to my mind, no other author has equalled — his teaching, guiding and counselling activities, he is also an encyclopaedia of all branches of knowledge. He lived in his age, a life in touch with reality, aware of events taking place in the world. News of cultural activities and the abuses directed against Islam used to reach him, and he would respond to them and criticize them according to the extent of their severity or mildness.

It is not my concern here to write a biography of this inquisitive scholar, who was a living example of the way a Muslim should be. He fixed his heart upon his Lord, raised himself above worldly contentments, seeking the contentment promised by God. He stood firm in the struggle for the cause of God, battling against the machinations of Zionists and Crusaders and their agents, and the methods the colonialists contrive. He fought against the plots of this-worldly scholars, who ingratiate themselves with those in power so as to acquire immediate benefits. He pulled down the deceptions of rigid jurists and the trickeries of Sufi shaykhs, who numb the senses of Muslims so that their will becomes dormant, and who contaminate the thoughts of the believers of the community through *bid'ah* and false ideas so that they become negligent. Your Lord alone knows the true facts.

Ibādīs believe that, for the believer who fulfils his religion, is mindful of his duties and keeps himself apart from the forbidden things, whose manners are those of Islam, and who follows the guidance of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, and the legacy of the righteous predecessors, love is incumbent. The Ibādīs believe that if a believer is on such a path, it is incumbent upon other believers to love him, *walāyah* with him should be declared among Muslims, and mercy and compassion from the Lord of the worlds should be petitioned for him.

Consider, dear reader, a society in which there is no mutual love, affection or compassion, except between those believers who have put their fates in the hand of God and who have devoted themselves to raising high the word of God, and for whom the ties between them are the result

of their brotherhood before God. If a devilish insinuation should come to one of them and, failing to seek refuge with God, he proceeds to commit a sin instead of hastening to repent, the bond that ties him to other believers will be severed. The brotherhood established on the basis of religion will be destroyed, until he renews his faith in his Lord and asks God to forgive him his sin, attaching his heart to the Creator of the heavens and earth. Only if he does this will his place among his brothers be restored to what it had been, and his dignity, so far debased, return him: *To God belongs all glory, and to His Messenger and the believers [al-Munāfiqūn, 8]*.

Ibādīs believe that the Muslim who professes in front of people, 'there is no god but God, Muḥammad is God's Messenger' and then has the audacity to go against the commandments of God and neglect his duties, or does what is forbidden and appears before God in an image different from the one he shows to people, or prefers something that humans call to above something in the religion of God, or is degenerate enough to curry favour with a human being, whether dead or alive, so that he seeks from him something which a believer only seeks from God: Ibādīs believe that such a Muslim, whom we nominally call Muslim and incorporate into the people of monotheism, does not deserve to be equated with the righteous and cannot be loved in religion. Instead, he should be regarded with severity by Muslims, rebuked and reprovved; distance from him should be required, *barā'ah* (severance of relations with him) declared, and the interactions with him should be greatly decreased, until the earth with all its ampleness becomes too restricting for him and he can find no refuge from God, only refuge with Him. Then, either God will make his heart open to Islam and open to faith, and his limbs subservient to worship, and he distances himself from disobedience, repents of his deeds, returns within the fold of Islam with good deeds, continuous struggle — the struggle against the self and desire — so that his bonds will be tied to those of others and after guidance and success he becomes a brother in God. Or, he succumbs to Satan, persists in disobedience, thinks himself above repentance, avoids self-reckoning and continues in misguidance and error. Then, those who are friends of God cannot love an enemy of God, nor can they be pleased with one who has made his rebellion (against God) manifest. Believing hearts are ashamed to turn to the King, the Judge to ask him for mercy and compassion on behalf of one who is a slave to covetous desires and to those misguided by Satan: *...You shall not guide those you like, but God guides whom He wills [al-Qaṣaṣ, 56]*. Those sinners who persist in their actions and manifest what they commit in front of people and before God have split themselves off from their Lord on account of their arrogance and they have distanced themselves from the

love of their brethren and have opposed God and His Messenger: *You shall not find any people who believe in God and the Last Day who are loving to anyone who opposes God and His Messenger... [al-Mujādilah, 22]; Surely those who oppose God and His Messenger, those are among the most abject [al-Mujādilah, 20]; Surely those who oppose God and His Messenger shall be frustrated as those before them were frustrated [al-Mujādilah, 5].*

Sincerity, truth and faith were the qualities with which Muslims adorned themselves during the first phase. Then, you only find believers competing against one another in the performance of good deeds or hypocrites, may God make them abject for their hypocrisy, or Muslims one of whom may be touched by Satan and so commits a sin which he keeps secret, concealing his error with hidden anger. His audacity is not such that he makes licit what God has forbidden nor such that he manifests his disobedience of God, nor that he persists in the sin that he has committed, knowing that this was a sin. Instead, he will reckon with himself very seriously for the sin that he has committed and repent to his Lord, fearing that his Friend will reject him, deny him His mercy and forget him.

The Muslims as a society are more concerned with purity than to be aware of the rebellion of a Muslim and then keep quiet about it, then welcome him among them with love, before he hastens to repentance, forgiveness and expiation. It was said to Ibn ‘Umar: ‘This person sends you greetings of peace.’ He said: ‘I am informed that he expresses a view against predestination (*qadar*): if he still does so, then do not carry to him from me greetings of peace.’ The Commander of the Faithful, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be satisfied with him, said: ‘That person in whom we see good and from whom we expect good, we speak well of him and associate with him; and that person in whom we see evil and from whom expect evil, we speak ill of him and dissociate from him.’³¹ The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: ‘Whoever loves for God’s sake, hates for God’s sake, gives for God’s sake and forbids for God’s sake, has fulfilled faith’.³²

That is the fourth point almost unique to the Ibādīs among Muslim schools of thought: they do not treat a God-fearing believer and a doomed sinner equally. They believe that it is incumbent upon Muslim society to pronounce the word of truth with regard to every individual, to oversee the improvement of the recalcitrant, the putting right of the perverted, and the education of the wrong-doers through the means

³¹ See the Introduction to *al-Tawḥīd*, 48, the explanation given by Abū Sulaymān Dāwūd.

³² See *ibid*, 9, the commentary by Abū Ishāq.

legislated by Islam for social pedagogy, such as the commanding of what is good and the forbidding of what is evil, and (*barā'ah*) the rejection of those who shun God.

It is very wrong for us to ignore sinners and place them on a par with true believers. We should rebuke the sinner for his disobedience and declare him an enemy as long as he persists in his deviance from the cause of God, and not treat him and the faithful one equally, nor show him affection or pray for forgiveness for him or treat him well in the way we do the one who is mindful of God when he is alone and in public, who reckons every act whether important or insignificant, not overstepping the boundaries he has drawn for himself: *And let them find in you harshness... [al-Tawbah, 123]; You shall not find any people who believe in God and the Last Day who are loving to anyone who opposes God and His Messenger [al-Mujādilah, 22].*

I take pleasure in concluding this section with the following wonderful statements of the learned Muḥammad al-Ghazālī:³³

'Is religion other than love and hate? Religion is surely that passion enthused by the love of good and good-doers, and aversion to evil and its proponents. It is that effusive and flowing emotion similar to a rising flood that only comes to rest when it has reached its goal, indifferent to covering over a plain or engulfing a mountain peak...Religion is this simple and free emotion: aversion to the behaviour of corrupt individuals, making you withhold your hand from shaking theirs and making your face turn red with rage for their audacity against their Lord, so that if you can either you make the earth collapse from underneath them or move heaven and earth around them. Otherwise, if inability prevents you, you become quiet, overtaken with grief on account of the disgrace that bites at you, but this is not the quiet of an idiot stricken with immobility (inability to act on the decision he has taken).'

With these brief words, the learned al-Ghazālī expounds the system of *walāyah* and *barā'ah*, according to which Ibādīs have conducted relations since the earliest days of history. Ibādīs do not expel the sinners of the community, nor do they judge them polytheists, but they consider it incumbent to dissociate from them and to loathe them, and to make this obvious to them until they desist from their disobedience and repent to their Lord.

³³ *Fī Mawḳib al-da'wah*, 2nd imp., 85.

Unbelief in the bounty of God

Many of those without knowledge reckon that Ibādīs concur with the Khawrārij in calling sinners unbelievers (meaning thereby) the unbelief of polytheism (*shirk*). They are unaware that Ibādīs apply the term unbeliever to sinners of the monotheist community (*‘uṣāt al-muwahhidīn*) who desecrate what God made sacred. They mean by that unbelief in the bounty of God (*kufr ni‘mah*), taking this sense from the noble verses that apply it in this meaning, and with reference to the ḥadīths of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace: *...It is the duty of men to God to make pilgrimage to the House, whoever is able to make his way there. As for whoever unbelieves, God is All-sufficient, nor needs any being [Āl ‘Imrān, 97]. ...When he [Solomon] saw it, he said: This is a bounty from my Lord, to test me, whether I am grateful or ungrateful (unbelieving). Whosoever gives thanks gives thanks only for his own soul’s good, and whosoever is ungrateful (unbelieving) — my Lord is surely All-sufficient, All-generous [al-Naml, 40]; Whoever judges not according to what God has sent down — they are the unbelievers [al-Mā’idah, 44]. Al-Aqra’ b. Ḥābis asked God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace: ‘Is pilgrimage incumbent upon us every year, O Messenger of God?’ He, peace be upon him, replied: ‘If I were to say yes, it would be incumbent upon you, and if it were incumbent on you, you would not be capable of it, and if you were not capable of it, you would have unbelieved.’ ‘He who has abandoned prayer has unbelieved.’ ‘There is nothing that separates a (believing) servant and unbelief except abandoning prayer.’ ‘Beware! Do not revert after me to unbelieving (so that) some of you strike the neck of others.’ ‘Bribing authorities is unbelief.’*

There are many such ḥadīths.³⁴ So far so, some ḥadīth narrators devote chapters to this, under the title ‘chapter on unbelief below unbelief’. People make mistakes and miss the truth because they do not bother to make the effort to research and inquire. When they hear that Ibādīs judge monotheist sinners to be unbelievers, they think that this judgment excludes Muslims from the religion and makes them polytheists, which is what the Khawrārij do, and so they think that Ibādīs are a sub-sect of the Khawrārij. In this way, they come to conclusions based on false and mistaken assumptions, and they get involved in gross error, ascribing to a Muslim faction — one that happens to be one of the most careful in pronouncing truth, following it, one that is more strongly attached to the

³⁴ All the ḥadīths cited in this section are taken from the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Rabī’.

Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger than any other — opinions and sayings that are far removed from what they truly believe and say.

If such people were to turn back to the Book of God, the one which *no falsehood can come from before it or from behind it* [*Fuṣṣilat*, 42], and to the Sunnah of God's Messenger, the one who does not speak out of caprice, *This is naught but a revelation revealed* [*al-Najm*, 4], and were then to consult the written works of this school of thought and discuss their proofs and sources, apply to them the criteria established by Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, in order to understand what Ibādīs mean when they use the term 'unbelief' (*kufr*) in the case of monotheists — were they to do this, they would save themselves the disgrace of being ignorant, and would learn that these people reckon with themselves for every great and small thing, before others do, and that they do not say or do anything unless it is based on a clear verse or a practiced *sunnah*.

I think that the foregoing makes sufficiently clear what is intended by the application of the term 'unbelief' (*kufr*) to sinners: it is that they commit unbelief in respect of the bounty of God (*ni'mah*). There are two reasons for why Ibādīs chose to refer to sinners with this term instead of words like 'hypocrisy' (*nifāq*) or 'corruption' (*fusūq*). Firstly, it is the term used for them by the Holy Book and the Noble Sunnah in many places and in many instances. Secondly, 'hypocrisy' (*nifāq*) has a special sense in the history of Islam, since it famously referred to a group of people at the time of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, who believed outwardly, but whose hearts were not at ease with faith. The Qur'ān used to be sent down in order to rebuke them and to expose some of them and threaten them with painful chastisement in this world and the next, with the result that they became famously identified and known by this term: *The hypocrites, the men and the women, are as one another; they bid to dishonour and forbid honour; they keep their hands shut; they have forgotten God, and He has forgotten them; the hypocrites — they are the ungodly* [*al-Tawbah*, 67]. As a result this term almost became a proper noun for them, whenever it is used, it meant them.

The term 'unbelief' (*kufr*) was applied by the Mighty Book to the hypocrites at the time of the Messenger, blessings and peace upon him, as well as to the sinners of the monotheists. It is used in both senses also in Prophetic ḥadīth. Philologists say that, in this sense, where it means 'ingratitude' (*kufr al-ni'mah*), it is derived from 'unbelief'. The Glorious Qur'ān frequently uses it in the sense of 'polytheism' (*shirk*), whether this 'polytheism' is through rejection (*shirk juḥūd*) or through associationism (*shirk musāwāt*). In sum, when Ibādīs refer to monotheists using the term 'unbelief' (*kufr*), they mean 'ingratitude' (*kufr al-ni'mah*), which others refer to as 'corruption' (*fusūq*) or 'disobedience' (*'iṣyān*): what Ibādīs call

'ingratitude' (*kufr al-ni'mah*) is what Mu'tazilites call 'corruption' (*fusūq*), or which others call 'hypocrisy' (*nifāq*) or 'disobedience' (*'isyān*). All three expressions were used to refer to the hypocrites at the time of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and to those that committed sins openly before God and disobeyed His command. This is a matter for linguistic debate, the difference being a verbal one and the result is that the one who persists in disobedience to God will be recompensed in the same way as the one who does not believe in God. As regards how Muslims should treat one who has deviated from the command of God or who behaves hypocritically in God's religion, or is ungrateful for God's bounty, it should be like the treatment of the degraded sinner — namely, that they should attempt to guide him to (the realization) that it is incumbent upon him to hold fast to his religion, to return to the commands of his Lord, to desist from opposing God and His Messenger. If this person persists in arrogance and is overcome by Satan, then one should dissociate from him and his actions, and Muslims should ignore him, in the manner that was described in the section on *walāyah* and *barā'ah*, until he repents.

The ways of religion

The author of *'Aqīdat al-tawhīd* says:³⁵ 'the ways of religion are four: *manifestation, defence, exposure and concealment*'. Muslim society may have mastery over its enemies, freedom in its own lands, autonomy and may operate according to the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger, applying the precepts of religion and not subject in any way to a foreign element, neither the monopoly of a single ruler nor the object of a governor's despotism. This is the state of *manifestation*. It is the most perfect state for Muslim society. The community should be this way, since it is the state that God was satisfied with for believers: ...*To God belongs all glory, and to His Messenger, and the believers...* [*al-Munāfiqūn*, 8]. If Muslims should fall from this state, become diminished in honour, and come down from the level to which faith in God and trust therein raised them, then they should not make peace with tyranny, or give in to despotism, or allow evil hands to play with the fates within this community and violate their

³⁵ Introduction, 6.

sanctity, come between them and their religion, manipulate their actions and worship, and use their wealth in ways other than those legislated by the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible, and by the guidance that Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, left behind for the sons of Islam.

Should the community fall into this abyss, and be dominated by a foreign enemy, or should the one to whom the community has delegated its trust, and submitted its leadership and in whose hands it has placed its welfare, abandon the trust, and take the community away from the right path, and betray God, His Messenger and Muslims in what has been placed in his hands, then it is the duty of Muslims to stand in the way of such an oppressive state, bid it to do good and forbid it to do evil, forcing it to follow the right path. If it should take pride in error, enjoy the taste of injustice, become too arrogant to submit itself to the command of God, and return to the cause of God, then the second phase of the Islamic codes applies: *defence*. *Defence* as a way of religion is synonymous with what in this present day is called 'revolution'. Revolution against foreign domination, or revolution against internal oppression, is similar to revolution against feudalism, or against moral decay, or deviation from God's religion in all its shapes and manifestations. The head that leads such a revolution is known as the 'imām of *defence*' (*imām al-difā'*), to whom the community owes obedience and compliance as long as the revolution exists. If the situation settles down and peace and stability return, he becomes just another member of the community with regard to rights due to and duties incumbent upon him before them.

The situation may settle down in one of two ways: either the revolution is a success or it is a failure. Its success can be one of two things: either the state concedes to the demands made by the community and returns to the commands of God, which up to this point is all that is required of the revolution, or the despotic rule is brought down and the unjust government is replaced by an Islamic one, consistent with the laws of the Holy Book of God. At such time, the head of the revolution or 'imām of *defence*' enjoys no right to government, unless he is chosen for it by the community, in accordance with the necessary qualifications he is required to possess, after a peaceful process of consultation, reflection and election, in accordance with the rules one follows when electing a commander for the believers.

If Muslims, however, are too weak even for such a situation and fail to heed the call of the leader of the revolution, preferring the path of peace and keeping quiet and at ease, the third way of the ways of religion applies: *exposure*. It is permitted for a minority, if their number comes to forty, to declare revolution against corruption. Even if such a revolution carried

out by a small number of men is not expected to be successful in its struggle against an oppressive and armed state together with a general populace preferring peace and submissiveness, such activity may yet be seen as disruptive for an oppressive state so that it cannot so easily carry out its tyrannical schemes. Its results may be no more than the anxiety that it inflicts upon the tyrants, the fear and dread that permeates their movements and actions. For this reason, the conditions required for such activism are very severe, such as only martyrs can agree to — those who sacrifice their lives for the life of the community. Once they have joined this organization, they cannot return to their homes or stay in one place, nor abandon their message, until they achieve success or are killed, and they are more likely to get killed. If it happens that the situation calls for one of them to return home in order to further the cause of the revolution in some way — perhaps to get supplies — then he is considered in his home a stranger on a journey, so that he performs shortened prayers (*qaṣr al-ṣalāh*). But when he is at the top of mountains or deep in the valleys, disrupting the communications of the tyrants, destroying the bridges used by the locomotives of the oppressors, or razing the foundations of the forts that house the ammunition of the despots, he is considered at home and among his family. Even so, they are not allowed to terrorize those living in security or to behave unjustly towards the peaceful ones. It is a splendid system for the spirit of self-sacrifice in Islam, when oppression sets in, when the servants of Satan are raised to power and the commands of God are replaced by the rulings of men. Abū Ishāq says, ‘*exposure* is one of the characteristics peculiar to Ibādīs’.

If the community is content to be submissive, resigns itself to tyranny and becomes subject to despotic rule, and if there is no one in it who will rise up in revolt for the forsaken honour of Islam, or for the honour of the Message that brought glory to mankind, and if every individual becomes inclined towards passivity and remains in a state of inaction, then there will be no spirit of sacrifice to rob tyrants of their sleep, to remind them that their rule cannot last, that their positions will not remain, that resistance is still the hope of the believers, and that they will face a tough reckoning before God and the community.

If the community is too weak for even such a situation, then the last organizational option remains: *concealment*. During this phase, believers should avoid assisting the oppressors by accepting positions that promote injustice, and their affairs should be looked after by associations that imbue them with God’s guidance, fill their hearts with faith in God, disseminate among them the Islamic culture and knowledge that will open their eyes to God’s religion, so that they have only the most limited of dealings with the oppressors, such as the collection of obligatory taxes for

government. These societies are known in the Ibādī system as the *ḥalaqat al-‘azzābah*.

The ‘Azzābah institution

Meaning of the term al-‘azzābah

Al-‘azzābah is a body consisting of a small number of individuals, representing the best and most knowledgeable men of the country. This body supervises all aspects of Ibādī society: religious affairs, education, social matters and politics. During the *manifestation* and *defence* periods, it represents the council of state of the imām or his agent and his representative; but during the periods of *exposure* or *concealment*, it stands in for the imām and carries out his duties.

The ‘Azzābah body elects a shaykh who becomes known as *shaykh al-‘azzābah*, being the most knowledgeable and the best qualified from among them, but not necessarily the eldest. The Shaykh heads the body during council sessions, represents it in all its functions, speaks in its name, executes its decisions and supervises directly all the affairs of the country or the community. All problems and incidents are reported to him, and after the decision of the council, his ruling in all cases is carried out.

The derivation of the term al-‘azzābah

The term is derived from *al-‘uzūb* or *al-‘izābah*, meaning ‘isolation’ and ‘alienation’, ‘asceticism’, ‘practicing night vigil’ and ‘withdrawal’ into mountain tops. In this case, it denotes ‘withdrawal’ in order to serve the general good, abstention from the pleasures of the self, and separation from life’s distractions in the form of kin, property and children. The ‘Azzābī gives only very little of his time and energy for these, expending all his energies on the cause of God and the service of Muslims, anticipating no remuneration or other reward for his work, since his reward and account shall be from God.

The meaning of the term ḥalaqah

Ḥalaqah is another term for the ‘Azzābah council, indeed synonymous with it. It is derived from *tahlīq*, meaning ‘being ring-like/circular’, for the

'*Azzābah* during their formal meetings sit in the shape of a ring or circle, which is the best arrangement for exchanging opinions and examining different points of view. Moreover, this is the best position for studying and reciting the Qur'ān, and for turning towards God in supplication.

The headquarters of the 'Azzābah

The official headquarters of the '*Azzābah* is the mosque. As such, it is necessary that within the mosque buildings a part is set aside for the '*Azzābah*, preferably away from where people tend to gather, so that their conversations are not overheard. This area is exclusively for them and no one is permitted to enter it. It is the duty of the newer members among them to clean it, guard it, furnish it and maintain it. In it are held all the documents, which must be concealed from everybody else. All the conversations, discussions and inquiries which are conducted inside are considered secret and are not to be taken outside or divulged for any reason, except for executive decisions, which the Shaykh must announce, though he may (on occasion) be represented by any other member. It is not permitted for any members of the '*Azzābah* to discuss anything outside their official headquarters. After they have come to a decision on a particular issue, they have the right to move to another location in order to put that decision into effect, if the matter requires it. If they issue a ruling concerning the social affairs of the community, such as fixing dowries or prices or commencing work in the cultivation season etc., and the populace do not accept their ruling, they take refuge in their headquarters and remain in the mosque, abandoning their usual duties, staying away from shops and towns, until the community does recognize their ruling and puts it into effect. This scenario did not take place among the Ibādīs in Libya, except in one or two cases, where people adopted the '*Azzābah*'s ruling as soon as they could and where, in fact, upon receiving such news from the '*Azzābah*, they used to hurry to convince each other and send back confirmation of their acceptance to the council before it was time for the next prayer, so that things functioned normally.

The number of members in a ḥalaqah

The number of members varies between ten and sixteen. Duties are assigned to them in the following way:

- 1) The Shaykh of the '*Azzābah*: the most knowledgeable of them, the strongest personality and the most capable of solving problems.
- 2) The advisers: they are exactly four, attached to the Shaykh and without whose agreement he cannot execute a decision.
- 3) The imām: one person who leads prayer; this can be one of the four advisers.

- 4) The *mu'adhdhin*: one person responsible for the times of prayer and making the call to prayer; this too can be one of the four advisers.
- 5) Managers of endowments (*wukalā' al-awqāf*): two members are appointed to supervise endowments and the funds of the *ḥalaqah*, to record imports and exports, and the management and development of the endowments. In addition to the general requirements pertaining to membership of the *ḥalaqah*, these two members are required to be of modest means, but not impoverished or destitute.
- 6) Teachers: three or more members, according to need, are assigned the task of supervising education and cultural welfare, organizing classes and looking after students in lectures, which are teaching seminars, or in internal departments, etc.
- 7) The rights of the dead: four or five members are appointed to look after the rights of the dead, supervising the washing of the corpse, funeral preparation, prayers for the dead, burial, the execution of their wills, and the allotment of their bequests according to Islamic law.

If the dead person was one from whom Muslims had dissociated, and who died a sinner, then the 'Azzābah does not look after his rights, since believers are not obliged towards a sinner; but they permit anyone from outside the *ḥalaqah* to carry out these rights, for the performance of duties towards a dead person is a collective duty (*fard kifāyah*), when carried out by a few it cancels the obligation for the remainder.

The conditions for membership

Conditions of membership of the 'Azzābah include the following:

- 1) That the person knows the Qur'ān by heart.
- 2) That he completes all the stages of study in sequence.
- 3) That he adopts the official uniform of students during his studies, and the official dress of the 'Azzābah when he becomes a member.
- 4) That he is refined, cultured, intelligent, diplomatic and skilful in handling matters.
- 5) That he enjoys and seeks study, pursues knowledge and teaches.
- 6) That he is not distracted by many worldly matters, so that he does not frequent shops or mix with the public in a way that would detract from his station and diminish his prestige.
- 7) That he washes himself with water and 'washes his heart with water and *sidr*' ('lotus leaf'): this is an idiomatic expression meaning that a person should be free of handling, consuming or eyeing other people's wealth. He should also be free of all the illnesses of the heart, inwardly as well as outwardly pure.

Abū ‘Ammār ‘Abd al-Kāfi explained this expression thus: ‘As for his body, he should cleanse it of the dirt in human beings, and as for the heart, he should cleanse it of imposture, arrogance and the like which necessarily cancel good deeds.’ As you can see, the expression is very subtle and it carries more than what I have indicated and what the learned Abū ‘Ammār has stated. Ponder it. For, each time you ponder it you will find a new meaning in it.

The elders have stressed the importance of a believer cleansing his heart, since, impurities of the heart are worse than those of the body. For this reason, they deem it necessary for him to wash his body with water and his heart with water and *sidr*, which is a metaphor for making sure that the inside is cleaner than the outside: he whose mind is pure conducts himself purely, and his affairs are upright and he holds himself to account frequently and is wary of his behaviour: success results from this.

The duties of the ḥalaqah

The ‘*Azzābah* council has precise duties for which it is responsible on account of it being a formal body. These duties are as follows:

- 1) Supervision of education and the preparation of facilities for such purposes; facilitating some sort of education for all children, so that they memorize a part of the Qur’ān and acquire sufficient knowledge of their religion. This is the least that can be granted to a child. If the child’s family is too poor to avail itself of such modest efforts, or if it does not have the means to support him for classes, it is their duty to assist him financially.
- 2) Watching over the social affairs of people, facilitating life for the poor and the weak, providing employment for all by demanding from the rich and well-to-do to employ the poor for tasks in return for payment, in most cases agreed by members of the ‘*Azzābah*.
- 3) Solving problems that arise between people, arbitrating in these matters, issuing rulings with regard to disputes and guaranteeing the rights of individuals in such cases.
- 4) Managing the endowments of the mosque, the funds of the *ḥalaqah*, recording import and export, making sure all expenditure is legitimate, promoting the development and maintenance of endowments, and using it properly.
- 5) Supervising markets and protecting them from illegal transactions and dubious or suspicious money.
- 6) Providing national protection for people’s property, such as farmland and livestock so that it is not stolen, seized or damaged.
- 7) Judgment and punishment of sinners and criminals, the declaration of

dissociation from them, and the severing of relations with them until they repent and return to God.

8) Conducting and organizing foreign relations, whether they be for war or peace.

These are some of the tasks incumbent upon the ‘*Azzābah* council on account of it being an official body responsible for society before God and before people. It is also the council’s duty to assign tasks among its members according to the ability and capacity of each: the Shaykh performs this duty after the *ḥalaqah* has given its agreement.

Where is ḥalaqat al-‘azzābah established?

The ‘*Azzābah* can be set up in any country or town: its members are the ones who supervise the private affairs of the country or the town. If an important matter arises or an event that concerns more than the town or country, it is presented before the High Council of the ‘*Azzābah*, headed by the Grand Shaykh or the Mountain District Ruler, as was the case in Jabal Nufūsa. Such a matter may be something like the establishment of borders or what concerns national security or other matters too complicated to be dealt with at local level. The High or General Council of the ‘*Azzābah* is the one headed by the Grand Shaykh, who necessarily heads an ‘*Azzābah* in his own town and stands in for the imām during the *concealment* phase. The members of the ‘*Azzābah* alongside him are the Advisers, who are also the Shaykhs of ‘*Azzābahs* in their own districts: their headquarters are the centre or capital of a country, and they hold regular meetings with the Shaykh, once every three months, or whenever the need arises. The rulings of this council have legal force in all districts and all *ḥalaqahs* are financially or morally obliged to this council, which represents the real authority over Ibādī society. The other *ḥalaqahs* are auxiliary to it and put its rulings into effect. The Grand Shaykh is obliged to have his offices in the centre of the country. If he chooses to reside elsewhere, then he has to rule from the place of government and not his residence, as was the case with Abū Hārūn Mūsā b. Hārūn, Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. Jaldasān al-Lālūtī and Abū Yaḥyā al-Arjānī, and others.

The Shaykh of the ‘*Azzābah* in Ibādī society has the authority of a just imām. He carries out all his duties, every one of them, within the limits permitted by the conditions of life at the time. He is tied to the State Council without whose agreement he cannot issue any decision, except in specific matters in Islamic religion. He is permitted to seek the assistance of another, who acts as a *muftī* to him. The purpose of this *muftī* is the precise formulation of the content of the rulings taken from the noble law and the giving of preference to one opinion in controversial matters where legal views diverge. The purpose of the *muftī* is not to inform the

Shaykh of rulings which he does not know, since, the Shaykh of the ‘*Azzābah* has to be one of the most, if not the most, knowledgeable of all the elders.

At the regular meetings, held every three or six months, representatives from each of the different *ḥalaqāt al-‘azzābah* participate and put forward their problems, and collectively examine the status of the society. They take the necessary decisions in this capacity and make plans for the future. Each *ḥalaqah*, however, has the right to contact the High Council individually and to convene a meeting if there is justified cause; it also has the right to consult the Grand Shaykh over its particular problems and seek his advice and opinion.

Each *ḥalaqah* is represented by its Shaykh and some of its advisers, except in emergencies where he is not able to perform this task.

Choosing the members of the ḥalaqah

When putting together the ‘*Azzābah*, it is important (in addition to individuals meeting the necessary qualifications) that the members represent all the tribes and districts of a country. However, it is not absolutely necessary to have general equality: if in a particular tribe the qualifications for individuals cannot be met, then appointment can be made from another tribe. When the ‘*Azzābah* needs to supplement its *ḥalaqah* with another member, they can acquire him in one of two ways: either they demand from the tribe from which the representative is sought to put forward a number of candidates who fulfil the conditions for membership, have the desired qualifications, a reputation for integrity, God-fearing, chastity, uprightness, benevolence, altruism, self-sacrifice and working for the good of all. The Council then selects one of these. Or, they demand from the *Īrwān* organization (see below) to provide a person for them to fill the vacancy.

When the candidate becomes a member of the ‘*Azzābah*, he is summoned to its official headquarters, where the Shaykh informs him of the conduct and comport that is expected of him, and emphasizes to him that one of the most important duties expected of him is that he practises Islamic conduct and adorns himself with its noble manners, such as uprightness, integrity, chastity, devotion to serving the community, regular attendance at the mosque, abstinence from the pleasures of this world, except out of necessity, devoutness in worship, humility before Muslims, severity towards sinners and criminals; that he sets an example for people in his words and deeds; and that he seeks his livelihood with diligence, choosing farming as a profession, since trade brings him into direct contact with people, where he is more likely to get mixed up in evil. They sum up their position on this in a well-known and often-repeated phrase:

‘that he be not in a mosque, *ḥalaqah* or house other than his’. When he is apprised of all the duties and rights that apply to him, together with his tasks and responsibilities, he is then asked to declare his acceptance or refusal. If he accepts, and this is what actually happens, he is given practical tasks, such as teaching or staffing the mosque, or participating in the supervision of a dead person’s affairs. As far as I know, he is considered the most junior of the ‘*Azzābah*, even if he happens to be older than some of them, and he is obliged to serve them. He then asks his predecessor, that is, the member of the ‘*Azzābah* who was the most junior before this new recruit, to accompany him for three days in order to train him in the service of the ‘*Azzābah*, since he is considered directly above him and when the ‘*Azzābah* convene, he has to sit before him. The arrangement of the seating places of the ‘*Azzābah* is important: the junior one cannot sit before the senior one. The member of the ‘*Azzābah* is considered a chief wherever he goes, having the exclusive right of initiating discourse in public sessions and concluding it, as well as directing the discussion, etc. No student or member of the public can do any of this unless he gives him permission.

The punishment of a member of the ‘Azzābah

A member of the ‘*Azzābah* is expected to set an example of integrity. For this reason, what is considered minor in the way of offences committed by others is deemed grave when committed by him, and he should guard himself against such offences and avoid them. This is the case even in matters concerning manners, and the way he conducts himself with people. If fate decrees that he commits error, the Council will consider his case: if the matter is grave and concerns sin against God, and brings ill-repute to the ‘*Azzābah*, or brings shame to the mosque, and disregards the law etc., they must sever relations with him (*barā’ah*) with witnesses, as is done with other people. Relations are not restored until he declares his repentance openly. Even so, after that he can never return to the ‘*Azzābah* Council, since the person who is expelled from it by *barā’ah* cannot return to it again, even if he repents and his repentance is sound. He becomes like all other Muslims in respect of rights and obligations. If the offence is minor and does not require repentance, a special rehabilitation session is convened for him in secret, which may suspend him from the ‘*Azzābah* Council for a length of time, depending on the nature of the offence committed. His offence is kept secret from the public.

The reason for such action is that the members of the ‘*Azzābah* most exemplify Islam and its manners, something which has been summarized by one of the Shaykhs in the following elegant statement, ‘the person in charge of people is like milk: it can be spoilt by anything that falls into it’.

How did the ‘Azzābah system come about?

In the last decades of the third century of the Hijrah two major events took place which had a significant impact on Ibādīs in Libya, Tunisia and Algeria. The first was the destructive war between the Aghlabids and the Ibādīs in Qaşr Mānū, in which the Ibādīs sustained a heavy blow at the hands of the tyrant Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad b. al-Aghlab. The second was the defeat and destruction of the Rustamid state in Algeria by the Shī‘a.

Given that neither the Shī‘ī nor the Aghlabid state governed according to Islamic law nor followed its precepts, Ibādī scholars tried to devise a system by which they could live while preserving the commands of God in their lands, and by which they could direct the community in the right way, without the need to declare a new state or to attach themselves with a despotic and tyrannical state: they were thus guided to this system. At the beginning, it was followed by people informally. However, towards the end of the fourth century, the great imām Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Bakr formulated it precisely in terms of a canon with articles and instituted it as law in Ibādī lands, in Libya, Tunisia and Algeria, where it is still applied exactly. On the basis of this, historians consider imām Abū ‘Abd Allāh as the founder of the ‘Azzābah system. It is indeed the case that he founded this system since, but for him, we would not have received it in such a sophisticated form. After Abū ‘Abd Allāh, many great scholars dedicated themselves to a thorough study of the system, adding some articles to it. Some of them referred to it as ‘the way of ‘Azzābah’ (*sīrat al-‘azzābah*). Among the scholars that were interested in it and wrote about it are: Abū Zakariyya’ Yaḥyā b. Bakr, Abū ‘Ammār ‘Abd al-Kāfī and Abū l-Rabī‘ Sulaymān b. Yakhlaf al-Mazzātī. The later among these made careful additions to it on the subjects of ‘master and disciple’ (*al-‘ālim wa-l-muta‘allim*), etiquette inside the *ḥalaqat al-‘azzābah* and what should be avoided.

The student of this system, as it is explained by those notable imāms, will find in it on the one hand a unique canon for the organization of education and culture, and [on the other] an explanation of proper conduct for all Muslims, by which they can preserve their morals and religion when they are subject to an evil tyrannical government. This was the case with the Ibādīs of Algeria, despite the efforts of the unjust and despotic colonialists of France.

The power of the ‘Azzābah

The ‘Azzābah were able to sustain this system for many long centuries and to apply its rules to all individuals, without anyone succumbing to corruption or arrogance. So, what is the secret strength that enabled them without difficulty to lead the people so that they would accept their rulings

and commands without trouble or dissension? There are two important reasons for this:

1) The personal authority enjoyed by the 'Azzābah council on account of the excellent qualities of the *ḥalaqah* as a body, and of its members individually. For the believer, when he commits himself to Islamic morals and conducts himself according to their guidance and standards, commands the respect and veneration of people and their obedience, so the reins of leadership are made easy for him when he assumes them in a society or a community.

2) The rule of *walāyah* and *barā'ah* — an important rule and, as far as I know, unique to the Ibādīs among all other schools. *Walāyah* means 'love in God (for God's sake)', and *barā'ah* means 'hate in God (for God's sake)'. *Walāyah* is a duty towards every upright Muslim, in whom fear of God and respect for the boundaries established by God are recognized. *Barā'ah* is a duty on every believer, and he is obliged to declare his dissociation from and hatred of sinners and criminals until they repent to God.

Since the 'Azzābah council is responsible for executing God's commands, it is its duty, when it has proof that a person has deviated from God's religion, to declare dissociation from him. When dissociation from a person is declared, his life quickly changes, for he is denied good treatment by people and loses the radiance that comes from being loved for the sake of God, and his friends, family and relatives avoid him and people sever all relations with him, except in urgent cases. He thus finds himself alienated from society, with no right to a dignified life and is thus forced to repent, to ask forgiveness and openly show regret in the mosque. If the 'Azzābah council is convinced of the truthfulness of a man's repentance, his regret over his error and his return to God, it declares dissociation from him null. Then, all his rights return to him and he enjoys all that he had enjoyed before Satan tempted him, and it is not for anyone after this repentance to mention his error or to mock him on account of his past.

The Īrwān organization

Irwān is a Berber word meaning the scholars who have learnt the Glorious Qur'ān by heart; they are necessarily the ones who carry forth the Book of God, and those that occupy themselves with study. The word is in the plural form. The singular is *irū*. As for the word with *fathā* on the *hamzah* — *arū* — it is used to refer to the animal known as *ḡirbān* (polecat) in Arabic. *Ār* — with a *fathā* on the *hamzah* and *madda* on it, and *sukūn* on the *rā'* — is a lion; in the *Ṣinhāja* Berber dialect it means 'give me'.

This organization is the second most powerful in the country after the ‘*Azzābah*’ with its very own system, practices and duties. It is similar to the Advisory Council auxiliary to the ‘*Azzābah*’, or the Council of Representatives in the case of the Shaykhs. The ‘*Azzābah*’ frequently entrusts the *Īrwān* Council with tasks. (I shall explain its educational aspect in a forthcoming section of this book, ‘Systems of culture and education’: the reader who so wishes may consult the relevant section.)

The above is a simple summary of the ‘*Azzābah*’ system that has been followed by Ibādīs for a long time now in the Islamic West. The ‘*Azzābah*’ system of government was abolished in this century in Ibādī lands in Libya and Tunisia. Ever since its abolition in these lands, perversion has been permeating society. Ibādīs will not be able to return to religion, morality and integrity while they do not adhere to the religion of God and seek protection with Him. Muslims have only suffered what they have suffered because they have deviated from God’s religion and seceded from His way. The later ones of this community will only prosper by that which the earliest of them prospered by.

Preserving of women’s honour

The nature of life in the Muslim community did not allow a woman to be alone with a strange man, nor a man to be alone with a strange woman. This was for fear of temptation, since natural drives can overpower the soul of a man or a woman when they are alone with each other, causing them to approach what is forbidden and commit the vice that they had hitherto avoided. The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, warned against this: ‘Beware of being alone with women. By Him in whose hand my soul is, whenever a man is alone with a woman, Satan is there too’ — or, in another version — ‘Satan comes between them.’ It was also reported from him, may God bless him and grant him peace: ‘Whoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him never be alone with a woman if there is no one or nothing to preserve sanctity between them.’³⁶

³⁶ Imām Aḥmad reported it thus: ‘Whoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him never be alone with a woman if there is nothing to preserve sanctity between them, for Satan will be in their company.’

The reality of life, however, means that a man will often meet women, and women will often come across men by some necessity. Satan will then play his part between them. He strives to deceive them so that they forget themselves, paves the way for their first encounter, setting out for them the means and excuse to commit the sin. He has them believe that they will be joined in the bonds of marriage in the future, and so the man promises the woman marriage, allures her with happy dreams of home and family and lasting domestic bliss, until she feels comfortable with him and imagines that she is about to enter upon a new life and close to making this sweet dream come true. So she submits herself to him, thereby effecting Satan's trick before the marriage itself is effected. There are many such instances, and in most cases the man is not serious in his promises to marry the girl. Even if serious, circumstances beyond his control develop and get in the way of that marriage. The result is profligacy in religion, disgrace in society and loss of a girl whose honour might have been saved with a little prudence and foresight. Some Muslim schools of thought address this problem by forcing marriage between the frivolous man and the woman who has been deceived.

In this age, the young girl has grown up — with no-one watching over her — in the battleground of life, with the fashions of Western city life encouraging her to go out and get to know a man, to live with him, to test his manners and hunt him out as a husband for herself to live with. But she herself is the hunted, the prey of the hunters. In this age, the problems that result from this permissiveness and men and women being alone with each other have multiplied and become too difficult for Western philosophers to solve. Some of them, running away from a solution of these problems in human terms, have tried to explain the problems in animalistic terms: they have resigned themselves to these practices, giving free rein to instinct, making the committing of the sin a harmless thing, and not deeming it a reproachable matter for the female or the male.

The Muslim world has been afflicted with this disease. In some parts of it the young girl has completely given herself up to Satan, while in others, she is pushed to it violently, as the lamb is driven to the slaughterhouse to the same fate as other lambs.

Ibādīs have examined this problem since the best of centuries, and concluded — uniquely, as far as I know — this: they have prohibited the marriage of persons between whom a sin has been committed. In this rule they were reflecting the spirit of Islam which opposes evil deeds. The mother of the believers, 'Ā'ishah, may God be satisfied with her, reported that the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'Any man who has fornicated with a woman and then married her, both of

them are adulterers to the Day of Resurrection.’ This judgment, which prohibits marriage of two between whom there has been an evil act in one way or another, shuts the door to deception for Satan and man, so that no man can approach a woman and tempt and seduce her with the deceitful claim that he will consummate his evil deed with marriage.

This judgment lights up the way for a woman and allows her to judge between the liars and the truthful ones from among those who approach her. Whoever tries to have sex with her before marriage is a sinful liar and wicked trickster, from whom she has the right to escape and distance herself. As for the man who respects her morals and guards her chastity and preserves her honour in himself, he is the truthful man, who sincerely wants to build the nest of marriage and lead a noble life.

If this were the point of view and judgment of all the schools of thought of the community, rarely would a girl deviate from the proper way, and she would preserve her purity and chastity, not overstepping the bounds of innocence — except that one who has become shameless and prepared for herself a life of prostitution and promiscuity. For if she knew that she would be prohibited from marrying the man with whom she will sin, and he prohibited from marrying her, since such a marriage is forbidden by religion, then she will think twice before letting herself go, in the knowledge that no one else will be able to marry her. Who would want to marry a woman with a sullied past?

Ibādīs have tackled the problem of girls being seduced before they fall into that trap. Ponder then, dear reader, this opinion and weigh it in the scales of the noble law, and in the scales of those of wise mind and sound reasoning. If you wish, add to it the important rules laid down by the great imām Mālik b. Anas concerning relations, and which have become famous in the law books under the section heading ‘the blocking of excuses’ (*sad al-dharā’i*).

Inner meanings of the alms-tax (*zakāh*)

Occasionally, one will pass the houses or shops of the rich on the Day of ‘Āshūrā’ and be distracted by the crowds of people at the doors. On asking the reason, one is told: ‘These are poor people waiting for the distribution of alms.’

This scene is a result of the poor knowing that there is a time when alms are dispensed. It often happens that a poor man will ask the rich one not to forget him when the time comes for alms-giving, and the rich one promises and appoints a day for him. In time this becomes the custom, even if no prior contact had taken place between the poor man and the rich one. The poor man knows the habits of the rich man and the time he chooses to distribute alms. So he goes at the appointed time and stands with others, waiting for his share of the alms. The rich man looks out from his window and sees the large crowd awaiting him, satisfied with himself and the spectacle, considering himself a great doer of good seeing so great a number of people benefiting from his wealth. This is one of the ways in which Satan enters a person's heart.

Zakāh is one of the duties in Islam; its performance is obligatory. Those who deserve it have a right to it from the rich person's wealth, and he should make sure it reaches them without them being degraded or humiliated. So why does it take on this appearance of ostentation and hypocrisy? Why are those who have the right to receive alms gathered in this harmful way and their right is given them in this manner of a spectacle?

Is the rich man not capable of distributing that which is incumbent upon him from God for those who deserve it without making them suffer the crowding and the waiting, instead of making sure that it reaches them without any prior agreement between him and them, so that it comes to them unexpectedly as a relief, without their being aware of it and without being subjected to the humiliation of having to ask for it and wait for it?

These scenes that I have described can be found in some of the major cities in Libya, where the poor have become accustomed to reminding the rich of themselves and asking them for that which is their due. On this question, Ibādī scholars adopt a stance inspired by the glory of Islam and the dignity of the Muslim. It does not befit a Muslim to appear degraded like a beggar, waiting on doorsteps for the generosity of hands and the munificence of niggardly souls.

There are many ḥadīths that discourage begging and soliciting. Ibādīs have adopted these noble ḥadīths, prohibiting Muslims from breaking into a sweat and exposing themselves to the humiliation of asking. If his dignity is not dear to him and he sets off to ask people for alms, he is then denied as punishment for debasing himself and so that he will learn not to be in need of others and to take strength from his struggle.

Zakāh is a duty; it must be discharged to those who deserve it without them having to humiliate themselves by asking the rich, and without them always depending on them and counting on them, and without the rich

person displaying that superiority, to which people turn in their need and come in the hope of getting something. Poverty can afflict someone to such an extent that it overcomes his will and obliges him to turn to begging in order to bring himself some relief. Here, another duty of a Muslim community comes to light. The preservation of the dignity of Muslims is a duty. It is not right that the community leaves its children to the humiliations and degradations of poverty. It is the duty of the Muslim community to provide all persons with the means to lead a dignified life, and not to abandon them until dire necessity forces them to beg. It is the community's duty to deal with the problem of poverty by one of a number of noble ways, either by facilitating employment for those able to work, or by taking measures to look after those physically unable so as to shield them from the danger of starvation, and through kindness and compassion providing them with something to lighten the burden of life.

As a result of this Ibādī stance — denying alms to the one who asks for it — you will not find any beggars in Ibādī society roaming the streets and going up to the doors of houses or shops to receive alms. Nor will you find a crowd of poor people at the door of a rich man's house, while he distributes alms to them in conceit and vanity. Alms reach those that need them without the poor man having any prior knowledge of this, and without the rich man feeling that he is doing some favour: he is doing a duty which he fears God may not accept from him, but hoping that through God's mercy it will be accepted from him.

Ibādīs in Jabal Nufūsa organized associations that would collect alms and distribute them in ways that did not make the poor fall into the habit of waiting, and so did not confine alms-collection to certain seasons of the year. These associations collected the alms, safe-guarded them and distributed them in a regulated way to those it was due. Often, they would supplement the collected amounts with additional donations from wealthy individuals, especially during difficult years when the alms-payment on its own was not sufficient for the needs of the poor.

How excellent it would be if the Muslim community followed this kind of system, so that the poor can find dignified work in unrestrained conditions, and so that they are prohibited from soliciting or begging; and by giving according to need, the Muslim is not left to stoop to the lowest levels of humanity.

Such associations, however, are organized only when a Muslim community is ruled by a non-Muslim government. If the state itself is Muslim, then the collection of alms is one of its duties, together with looking after the poor, providing them with the means to lead a dignified life of freedom, and preserving them from humiliation and degradation.

Partisan solidarity

The learned al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad al-Zāwī al-Ṭarābulṣī composed three historical works: *The Struggle of the Heroes*, *The Arab Conquest of Libya* and *The Famous Men of Libya*. I have had the opportunity to consult these books. I appreciate the great effort he has expended on these works, and I thank him for it. However, I would like to say the following about them.

When one reads *The Arab Conquest of Libya*, one gets the impression that the author, when dealing with Ibāḍism, harbours a lot of ill-feeling. He expounded historical issues in this work in a sincere way and did not go about changing the facts. He was not able to find anything in history to criticize the Ibāḍis about, whether in relation to their civil conduct or their political and military actions, since they did not do anything that contravened the precepts of Islam in times of war or in times of peace. Despite all this, when reading his book, the author gives the impression that he harbours a deep-rooted hatred for these people. He imbues his work with his spirit, and this spirit pervades his writing to such an extent that the reader becomes certain that it is a trait which only a few of the great writers have.

Ibāḍīs, like any other school, used to rise up against all kinds of injustice and tyranny committed by the oppressive rulers of the ‘Abbāsid regime, or by others who assumed power without religious legitimacy. The author is at pains to brand Ibāḍī revolts ‘dissensions’ (*fitan*), as if to impress on the reader the idea that these people sought trouble with the government without any justification. He does not use the same terms to qualify the thousands of revolts that took place in the struggle for power, and in which the guilty and the innocent were killed, nor the destructive wars waged by the agents of the ‘Abbāsid regime throughout the Islamic territories, including Libya. It is surprising that this book, despite seeming neutral on the surface, is actually almost a barefaced attempt to ignite discord between Arabs and Berbers and a crude appeal to revive almost extinct abominable racist propaganda. Also, despite the fact that the conquest was a Muslim one rather than an Arab one, and that the Berber resistance to the new religion during the conquest was no fiercer than the wars waged by the Arabs themselves when they sought to resist Islam at the time of the Conquest, nor fiercer than the wars waged by Persians, Turks or Byzantines or other nations when the Message of God reached them, and despite the fact that this resistance against God’s religion was not limited to a single human race, the author of the book tries to make it appear a special trait of Berber character, describing these people as inclined towards recalcitrance and opposition to God’s religion. We are

not concerned with those who oppose a little or much, for all unbelievers are one group — whether they are Berber, Arab or Persian, they belong in hell, together with their supporters of whatever race. The book's very title testifies to the spirit in which al-Zāwī composed this valuable work of history. Instead of the book being called *The Muslim Conquest of Libya*, it is entitled *The Arab Conquest* . . . If the conquest had really been Arab, it would not have been different from the Greek, Roman or Tatar conquest, or a conquest by any other race. Arabs as a race are not more noble before God than Mongols or Anglo-Saxons or Red Indians.

After Islam conquered those lands and the light of Muḥammad's guidance filled those regions, there was no place for Arabs or Berbers, because God had given them a better and more guided label. This was the label chosen by the Holy Book and by which it referred to the followers of Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace: *O you who believe*, or that other label used by their ancestor Abraham the Friend of God, peace be upon him: *...He is the One who called you Muslims...* [*al-Ḥajj*, 78]. So why do we ascribe the conquest to a particular human race, when the conquest was a Muslim one? God makes subservient from among His armies whom He wills. . .

Why do we not explain the real causes of conflicts and revolutions, and admit any error whether it was perpetrated by the state or by those rebelling against it, and ascribe the revolts to the people that actually took part in them, as opposed to their race or ethnic group? I have already said that the author made a point of referring to Ibādī movements as dissensions (*fitan*), and to ascribe them to Berbers, to the extent that he places Ibādīs in the same category with other factions, whom the author deems as inferior in religion and of little faith.

He did not, however, make the effort to justify these judgments that he passed on a Muslim community: he could not find any historical fact to support his belief that Ibādī revolutionary movements were disruptive and sowed discord. Indeed, power in the hands of the Umayyads, first and foremost, except for the brief caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, and in the hands of the 'Abbāsids later, was 'avaricious kingship', as God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, once called it. It was certainly no guided caliphate. Revolution against such avaricious and tyrannical kingship cannot be considered as 'sowing discord' (*fitnah*). Moreover, the rulers and agents of these regimes throughout Muslim lands did not adhere to the precepts of the Book, did not know the meaning of the word justice, and did not respect anyone's rights. As a result, the community was constantly in revolt and did not desist from struggling against all manner of oppression, tyranny and despotism throughout the regions of the Muslim world — in the Arabian Peninsula,

in Greater Syria, in Iraq, in Persia and beyond, in Egypt and the Muslim West. Nevertheless, the author of *The Arab Conquest of Libya* does not want to use the term *fitnah* except in the case of the revolution carried out by those he is careful to call Berbers, to make them an enemy of the Arabs. He struggles to create a barrier between them and Islam, and to ignite flames of hatred between them and their Arab brothers.

The majority of the leaders of the Ibāḍī revolutionary movements that took place in Libya were Arabs, but despite this fact, the author of the book attributes them to Berbers and labels their struggles as 'dissensions' (*fitan*). Ever since those in power began to depart from the Book of God in the way they ruled, revolutions in the Muslim world have been taking place continually. The reason for this is simple and intelligible. Mankind was subject to gods in the form of humans, suffering the tyranny of man until Islam arrived and instilled in Muslims the dignity of being human. It prohibited them humiliation, meekness and servility if they were able to resist. Muslims truly felt this dignity during the period of Prophethood and that of the guided caliphates. But when power was assumed by those who had deviated from religion to this-worldliness, from truth to selfishness, and from justice to tyranny, the freedom fighters rose up in revolt everywhere and they still do today and will do until the Day of Resurrection.

I am surprised by this author, for he writes in an age when Muslims have woken up to acknowledge the mistakes of the past and are very careful to distance that abominable spirit which divided them into parties and sects, and filled the hearts of people with hatred and loathing, and made it easy for them to attack those who disagree whether justly or for no reason. I am surprised that the author permits himself to write in such a manner and in such a spirit, and is satisfied to be a reviver of racial hatred in this age, an age in which the community needs to come together and pool its efforts in solidarity. The author has spent great effort to write about his beloved country, but he has been careful to compose in the same manner and spirit in his book *The Heroes*. There, he uses the terms Arab and Berber in place of any other terms that might in fact have been more accurate and better suited to the matter. It is indeed very strange that an author with the knowledge, cultural insight and hatred of divisive propaganda such as al-Zāwī would put his pen to the service of Jāhiliyya-style attitudes, which God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, shunned, and that he would incite racism among a united people and distinguish between an Arab and a Berber, as if he has forgotten that God, exalted is He, made the Muslim community one and that Islam dissolves nationalities, does not celebrate ethnicities and pays no attention to racial origin: 'All of you are from Adam, and Adam was from dust.'

So why do certain individuals try to revive tribal fanaticism or racial differences when God has freed us from them with Islam? *You are the best community brought forth for people enjoining good conduct, and forbidding indecency, and believing in God...* [Āl 'Imrān, 110]. If an Arab has any merit it is his merit as a Muslim, and if a Berber has any merit it is his merit as a Muslim: *...The most noble of you before God is the most God-fearing...* [al-Hujurāt, 13]. Bilāl the Ethiopian and Şuhayb the Byzantine and Salmān the Persian attained that which 'Abd al-Malik, the Umayyad state after him, Hārūn al-Rashīd and the 'Abbāsīd state under him did not attain: that is, the favour of God. He bestows it upon whom He wills.

If an Arab or a Berber ought to be blamed for anything, or held responsible for committing or forsaking anything, then it is disobedient conduct, the severing of the bonds of religion, the abandonment of Qur'ānic morals, lack of adherence to that which Muḥammad, peace be upon him, called to in the Book, to which *no falsehood can come from before it or from behind it* [Fuṣṣilat, 42], and which is *naught but a revelation revealed* [al-Najm, 4], and in ḥadīth; and in the excellent *sīrah*, which is the epitome of the way Islam should be applied. Whoever chooses to make himself an arbiter and stand over history as a judge and discuss the fates of men, let him, if he is able to do so, put the *sīrah* before him as his scales when he weighs the actions of people. Only God knows the proper weight and the precise account.

This has been a brief commentary on a huge book, whose author expended much time and energy in composing it. If in our objections to some aspects of this huge effort, we point out certain truths, we certainly do not ignore the fact that the author has done a service to his country for which he will be thanked by generations to come. But this praise and appreciation of him does not prohibit us from pointing out those errors: what author is free from fault or has not been criticized or has not had his mistakes pointed out?

If God wills it in time and gives success to my endeavour, I will try to discuss the book in terms of where I think the author has made some errors and where he has strayed from the truth.

The Ibādī adherence to religion

I have pointed out some of the practical principles that distinguish Ibādīs

and on which they base their school of thought. It is best that I now give some detail about the history of this school within the Islamic community, its legacy throughout its existence, the methods used by its members in founding their principles, the rules they stipulated and the principles they followed through history in accordance with the ways of religion we have already discussed. It is not propaganda or bragging to say that Ibādīs are the foremost among Muslim schools in making sure their followers do not overstep the bounds set by religion and that, based on these principles, a Muslim can give a true and proper picture of what Islam prescribes and the record of the righteous predecessors makes clear. None of this means that an Ibādī does not sin; that is simply not the nature of human beings. What it means is that when one of them commits a sin, either it is known to people, or it is kept secret by the individual having been tempted by Satan.

If the sin is of the former kind, Muslims will waste no time in declaring their dissociation from that individual, severing relations with him and being severe towards him — even his family and relatives will do so — until he admits what he has done in front of witnesses and openly professes his repentance to his Lord and his return to Him, making a compact with God that he will not do it again. In this way, the sinner returns once again into the fold of the community, which is cleansed again from the filth of sin, to resume the struggle for the cause of God and the performance of good deeds, after he has purified himself when it was necessary, and determined to lead a good life in a good society.

If the sin is of the second kind, that is, a sin which a person keeps secret, then this makes it easier outwardly with regard to people, although his conscience will keep rebuking him since he does not think that what he has disobeyed God in is slight, as the interpreter of the Qur'ān, may God be satisfied with him, said. Moreover, the person who meets his Lord in such a state will be among the people of hell eternally. That in itself is a reprimand for what he has committed and an incentive for him to refrain from what he has acquired through the whispering of Satan. This is what makes the followers of this school adhere strongly (to proper conduct), individually and collectively. These are some of the rules (of conduct) that distinguish this school from others, such as the duty upon every Muslim: individual and Muslim society as a whole to enjoin good and forbid evil and to apply this through the system of *walāyah* and *barā'ah* and *wuquf* (suspension of judgment), and also the other important rule concerning faith: it is incomplete without works. The sinner, then, can find no reason to justify his action to himself or to people, and he cannot hope to enter Paradise by saying, 'there is no god but God, Muḥammad is God's Messenger' without complementing this with good deeds. Similarly, he

cannot hope to exit from the painful torture if he has met his Lord having been degenerate in his actions and only offering his sins as security: *Not so; whoso earns evil, and is encompassed by his transgression — those are the inhabitants of the Fire; there they shall dwell forever [al-Baqarah, 81]; 'Do not dispute before Me! For I have sent you beforehand the threat. The Word is not changed with Me; I wrong not the servants [Qāf, 28-29].*

On the basis of these premises, which Ibādīs consider as the foundation of religion, their actions are always true reflections of their principles and doctrines. They have been well-known for this throughout history and are identified on this basis. As a society and as individuals they were examples of believers who upheld the duties and morals of God's religion and all the modes of behaviour enjoined therein. They steered clear of all that Islam forbids, or is averse to, in both speech and actions. They hasten to do good and avoid what is unlawful, and suspend judgment where there is doubt, in a manner true to what the Commander of the faithful 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be satisfied with him, said: 'We used to avoid seventy different types of lawful things for fear of committing something forbidden'.

If this is a faithful representation of the way Ibādīs have been from the beginning of history to this day, then the painful truth is that the Ibādīs of Libya, with regard to action, have been corrupted away from these noble ways, which their predecessors adopted and which their forefathers upheld in the manner of believers true to the religion of God. This corruption away from the noble way began when the flames of discord erupted between Muslims during the war against Italy as a result of the schemes that engaged brother against brother, setting one against the other, furnishing both sides with money and weapons covertly and overtly in order to intensify the conflict, provoke secession and divide the community internally, making it easier to occupy the country and control the population.

From that time, one begins to see in Ibādī society individuals who commit sins openly and betray the trust of God; in the light of day, consuming alcohol which God made forbidden, cheating in trade to make more money, not taking God's legal prescriptions seriously so as to be affable to the enemies of God. Even worse, there are some who abandon prayers or avoid paying alms, or fail to fulfil one of the obligations, while claiming to be Muslims and among the followers of 'Abd Allāh b. Ibād. When you try to bid one of them not to commit such wrongs, he replies, without concern, that Ibādism is too strict a religious school and that he has heard that other schools do not bar sinners from entering the gates of Paradise — as if the gates of Paradise or hell were controlled by human

beings, closing them when they want and opening them for whom they wish.

While I mention these painful and sorry truths, seeking refuge in God that He guides my people since they have no knowledge, I am proud and honoured to point out to them that Muslim scholars today are making the call to God's religion in the spirit of this school, as if drawing strength from its principles and methods. This is not surprising, since any Muslim who has zeal for his religion and calls to his Lord's Book will find some affinity with this school; for he draws upon the same pure source from which it draws and which it preserves. If Muslims in all countries took care to be living examples of Islam like Ibāḍīs, their enemies would not find a way between them or a way into their ranks. Colonialism, injustice and tyranny only conquered Muslims when it instilled the temptations of unlawful wealth and pleasures in them, spread indecency and abominations among them and made it easy for them to reject the law of God in favour of the law of humans and to sever the ties between individuals and society, thus giving the individual the freedom to do what he likes from among the things forbidden by God. If society still had control over the behaviour of individuals, then no person professing Islam would be able to visit a brothel or fornicate, nor would a Muslim be able to find a bar in a Muslim country or consume alcoholic beverages. Nor would a person professing Islam be able to find a casino or gamble, nor would a Muslim in a Muslim society be able to find anything to encourage him to do illicit things or to contravene the way of Muslims or any of the morals of believers, because society will keep its eyes on him and hold him to account for anything that he abandons or does, until he returns to the proper way, the path of uprightness and the straight road. If Muslim society still had control over the behaviour of individuals, as was the case during the early period of Islam, and as is still the case with Ibāḍīs today, Muslims would not be corrupted away from Islam, nor would they transgress the Book of God. No merciless enemy would be able to overcome them and corrupt their religion and morals, and then proceed to exploit their labour and their possessions, depriving them of their resources and wealth and ruling them with tyranny and violence.

What you find when you enter a Muslim country today, ruled allegedly by a Muslim government, can only mean separation from God's religion, aversion to God's Book and digression from the guidance of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. You find brothels available for the seekers of carnal pleasures and for the servants of Satan, all because some Western countries think that this is a beneficial thing. You find bars brisk with trade and customers crowding to drink that which God has forbidden and which He commanded His Prophet, peace be

upon him, to destroy in large quantities, just so that this Muslim country can please the enemies of God and receive from them, allegedly, money, which actually is illicit. You find large imposing houses, impressive in structure, furnished in the most exquisite human taste, where the value of work is wasted and the fruit of labour is squandered, so that at its opulent tables is consumed the money that is rightfully the community's, embezzled from it by disrespectful sons, tyrannical rulers and exploitative agents.

These images in their thousands, which can be seen everyday in any Muslim country, must disappear. If only Muslim society still had control over individuals and the state in which individuals live! For these sins that colonialism has spread throughout Muslim lands, in order to get in the way of Muslims and their pure beliefs and sound morals, are the diseases that are destroying every young Muslim. Thus, the dignity of being a man no longer concerns him, forbidden lust has overpowered him to the extent that his honour and physical well-being are squandered in brothels. He stumbles around from bar to bar consuming alcohol, toasting with friends, wasting his time and talents. He then tries to acquire money in the easiest way possible in casinos until gambling does away with his money, nerves and sanity, and forces him out onto the streets a ruin without wealth, honour or religion.

Ibādī society has preserved itself from these diseases and the like throughout history, except for the forty-year interval in the case of Libya as we have mentioned. The reason is that Ibādī society has maintained moral supervision of individuals, and that, in the *concealment* phase, the 'Azzābah system (as I explained in the section entitled 'The Ways of Religion') continually guided Muslims and held them responsible for their actions, indicating to them the path made clear by God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. When colonialists overcame Libya and destroyed the country's 'Azzābah system, preventing scholars from bidding good and forbidding evil, and prohibiting declarations of *walāyah* and *barā'ah* in the cases of those concerned, some people began to acquire a taste for sinful conduct and to adopt the ways of those who fear no covenant with or obligation to God, casting their eyes upon the life-styles of the offending enemies of God and Islam.

However, this calamity that struck Ibādīs and other Muslims too was limited to the Ibādīs of Libya. As for their brethren in other countries,³⁷

³⁷ One example I can give is the Ibādīs of Algeria. They still apply this system today. France (the colonial power), with all that it possessed in the way of corruption and subjugation, managed in the end only to exact from them as a

their mode of life continued undisrupted from the time of the righteous predecessors. No colonial scheme was able to affect them, no neighbourhood could become corrupted, no evil could find its way into their towns, no sin could infiltrate them and no individual's action could escape the judgment of a society that looks after religion, morality and conduct.

Now that colonialism is gone and people are free from it, perhaps, Ibādīs in Libya will now return to the ways of the predecessors cherished in Islam. Perhaps, Muslims will return to the guidance of Muḥammad and reject the embellished speech of the slaves of this world. Perhaps, the state, being a Muslim one, will do away with the laws established by human beings, implement the law sent down from the heavens, for the sake of God desist from seeking favour with the enemies of God, and rid Muslim land from the instruments of sin so that the morals of the young are purified. It is better for a Muslim that Kennedy, Kruschev, Nehru, Ben Gurion, Satan and all their number become angry than God become angry. Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, provoked the anger of Abū Jahl, Chosroes, Caesar and others to please God. God's Messenger is indeed a good model for us!

Ibādīs as leaders of the *Ummah*

In the previous section I said that it was best to give some detail about the record of this school within the Islamic *ummaḥ* and its legacy throughout the latter's eventful history, and about the life of its followers as individuals and as a community.

I have already said that Ibādī society on the basis of the school's principles — such as the duty to enjoin good and forbid evil, the duties of

whole and not individually a limited amount of money. As regards leadership, rule and guardianship over morality, religion, education and society, this was the responsibility of the 'Azzābah body. As a result, their mode of living as an Islamic community was honourable, even during periods of concealment, when it could not function politically. Real faith is emotional fortitude, proper manners and an ability to conduct oneself (correctly). These qualities indicate great character and make it imposing and commanding of respect, even from iron and fire, or those who use them.

walāyah and *barā'ah* in respect of individuals and groups, the belief that faith is incomplete without the good deeds that Islam enjoins, and that the sinner who dies in sin cannot hope for the mercy of God — has faithfully represented a pure Muslim society. It has stood for a creed pure from deviation and *bid'ah*, conduct pure from the filth of sin; a pure morality adorned with that which God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, adorned himself with and called to, and which righteous believers have adorned themselves with in every age.

Muslim factions have been doubly unjust towards Ibādīs. Firstly, when certain tendentious historians lumped them with the Khawārij — when Ibādīs are the furthest people from them — and the other factions accepted this biased representation. The second injustice is that they accepted this judgment against one of the most righteous Muslim factions, without inquiring into the origins of the Ibādī school or its arguments from the Book and the Sunnah, and without looking into the extent to which Ibādīs apply the principles, morals and message of Islam. If these people were to investigate these two issues — creed and its proofs, conduct and its application — they would rethink and change their opinion and realize a truth hitherto concealed from them.

A number of gifted minds in different ages did attempt to do this and found guidance. However, though the truth might have become manifest to one of them, he would refrain from confronting general opinion, which he trusted, with what he had discovered and what had become manifest to him. He would, thus, take a middle line and express this in the well-known statement, handed down through the books of history, 'Ibādīs are the closest group to the Sunnīs'. But the Commander of the Faithful, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, adopted a more honest approach. He promised the people that every day he would establish a *sunnah* and do away with a *bid'ah*. Among the gifted minds who made such an attempt were Mālik b. Anas, 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhirī, al-Shahrastānī,³⁸ al-Ṭāhir al-Zāwī — it is sufficient honour for al-Zāwī that he is included with these eminent great men — and others whose horizons were wide enough for them to understand, inquire and investigate: they were not satisfied with false rumours, biased propaganda or opinions adopted by people who have no knowledge of the writings of this school's followers or who have not observed their mode of conduct and way of life sufficiently to form a true picture and on which to base a judgment.

³⁸ See al-Shammākhī's *al-Qawl al-matīn*; Quṭb's *al-Radd 'alā al-'Uqbī*; al-Sālimī's *al-Lum'a al-marḍiyya*.

Moreover, the average Ibādī has been a true representation of what Islam requires a Muslim to be. Ibādī society has been a good example of a Muslim society that fulfils the rites enshrined by God, upholds the religion of God, and works hard to implement the commands of God, even during the *concealment* phase. Similarly, the Ibādī who assumes leadership over Muslims has been a model of the faithful Muslim, trusted by other Muslims, who refer to him in matters concerning their religion and worldly existence. He holds the community's trust in high esteem and guards this trust given by God.

Although it is not my intention to discuss the political history of Ibādīs — and despite the fact that politics and religion cannot be separated in Islam — this work would not be complete without giving, albeit in the briefest form possible, a summary of Ibādī political movements. Ibādism spread through the Arabian Peninsula, and in neighbouring regions such as Iraq and Egypt, and in North Africa before other religious schools had formed. Ibādism had established many rules and opinions with regard to the principles of religion before Ash'arite schools had come into existence, and before Wāṣil b. 'Atā' had broken with his teacher al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, giving birth to the Mu'tazilite school. The only other Muslim groups in existence at the time were some Shī'ī factions, Khawārij sects and the Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā'ah. By Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā'ah, I do not here mean Ash'arites, as this label is an historical error: it came into use later. The expression *sunniyyah* and *jamā'ah* used to be applied to Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān and his supporters, because they denied the caliphate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and made the cursing of him from pulpits a followed practice (*sunnah*), then called those who followed them Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā'ah.³⁹

Al-Mas'ūdī says: 'The obedience of Mu'āwiyah's companions to him grew so far that they made the cursing of 'Alī a *sunnah*, on which the young were brought up and the old perished, cursing him from the pulpits'. Al-Ḥākim wrote: 'The label *Sunniyyah* stuck to them because Mu'āwiyah ordered the cursing of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and claimed this was a *sunnah*. The term was applied to all those who supported the imāmate of Mu'āwiyah. However, when 'Alī was killed and Mu'āwiyah took complete control, everyone joined him and they added the term *al-jamā'ah* to *al-sunnah* and used it as a title.' Al-Mundhirī stated in his treatise, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*: 'They no longer do this, because 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz was among those who were inclined to legitimize the caliphate of 'Alī and prohibit its rejection. I have come across some books where it is said that

³⁹ See al-Shammākhī's *al-Qawl al-matīn*.

he summoned to him whoever in his time were Ibādīs and promised them that he would make alteration in these *Sunniyyah*'s reprehensible practices, one every day. At that time he censured them for one thing after another — there was no-one in those times who censured them for their reprehensible practices except the Ibādīs — until one day he censured them for cursing 'Alī. Then they stopped doing that for fear of him, knowing his objection to that doctrine of theirs, and [recognizing] his authority over them'.

From all this, it becomes clear that the expression *ahl al-sunnah wa-l-jamā'ah* was not applied to a religious school of thought, but to a political ideology propagated by the Banū Umayyah to wrest the caliphate from the Banū Hāshim. Indeed, this group, who referred to itself with the label most cherished by Muslims, became more fanatical than anyone else as far as I can see from the history books that I have consulted, both those of political history and religious history. Regardless of their radicalism, the followers of this ideology used to make the cursing and slandering of their opponents a *sunnah* followed at every gathering.

I have said that Ibādism spread to most Muslim lands before most of the other Muslim schools had come into being, such as the Ash'arite, Mu'tazilite and other schools. Aside from the brief period in which the imām 'Abd Allāh b. Ibād mounted military manoeuvres to fight Umayyad tyranny, and the duration of the period in which the imām 'Abd Allāh b. Yaḥyā Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq was given the oath of allegiance and then purged the two noble sanctuaries of the wickedness of evildoers, and irrespective of these movements, Ibādī states were set up in all parts of the Islamic world. An independent Ibādī state was established in Oman and has maintained its hold on power until this day: at certain points in history it possessed a fleet of ships that controlled the seas, challenging the two mightiest naval powers in the world at the time, Spain and Portugal. Whoever wants to verify this and discover the glory and grandeur of the Muslim community at a time when Europe was lost in deep slumber and the remainder of the Islamic community was suffering the tyranny of despotic rulers and slaves of riches, and more, let him consult *Tuḥfat al-A'yān* by the scholar al-Sālimī and peruse the writings of the prince of rhetoric Prince Shakīb Arsalān. The reader will also find similar information in one of the volumes of this series: *Ibādism in the Arabian Peninsula*. As regards the Islamic West — by the Islamic West I mean the lands that lie between Egypt and the Atlantic Ocean — there too, Ibādī states were established. These were excellent examples of the way a Muslim state should be, ruling according to God's Book and following the guidance of God's Messenger. Thus began the movement for struggle against injustice, the injustice of the 'Abbāsīd agents in Libya, who used to deviate from the commands of the Qur'ān, who were seduced by the present life so that they became

tyrants and despots, and by the pride of rank and power of government so that they considered people worthless, had no place for justice, and no respect for legal duties a ruler and his subjects. Ibādīs rose in rebellion against this injustice and granted the oath of allegiance for the imāmate to al-Ḥārith b. Talīd al-Murādī, followed by Abū l-Khattāb ‘Abd al-A‘lā b. al-Samḥ al-Ma‘āfirī and Abū Ḥātim Ya‘qūb b. Ḥabīb b. Ḥātim al-Malzūzī. This movement was based in the eastern parts of the Islamic West, that is, in the lands extending from Sirt to al-Qayrawān. I will present some worthy selections from the lives of these great imāms in another volume of this series: *Ibādism in Libya*. When the tyrants pooled their efforts to destroy this revolutionary movement, which sought to return rule to the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger, and prevented it from enforcing its convictions and objectives, the movement relocated to the western parts of the Islamic West. There the Rustamid state was established at Tahert with the following succession of imāms: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, Aflaḥ, Abū Bakr, Abū l-Yaqzān and Abū Ḥātim. These great imāms accomplished what is required from those who rule Muslims. Their stories and reports can be found in history books. I will examine some of these excellent images in the volume of this series entitled *Ibādism in Algeria*.

I have consulted all that has reached me in the way of historical works, whether composed by the followers of this school or by followers of other Muslim schools. In the stories told about them throughout history, I have only been able to find that which is honourable. You will come across destructive wars and heated battles, victories and defeats, and in all of this you will find examples of probity, as was the case with the rightly-guided caliphs: respect for individuals of all Muslim nations, with regard to their persons, possessions and honour; justice towards enemy warriors: slaughter on the battlefield, but not of those who flee or those who are wounded; no violation of honour and no seizure of the possessions of monotheists, regardless of their religious affiliation; compassion, forgiveness and justice at the termination of battle, and no gratuitous violence after victory; no exemplary punishment or the severing of heads to be sent from place to place in order to satisfy a thirst for revenge or to vent anger; and no show of brutish force or violence. They took care to respect the limits that Islam prescribed for them and to make God’s law, the conduct of His Prophet and the exhortations of the rightly-guided caliphs, a minaret to guide them and to which they always referred.

A brief word

In writing these sections it has not been my intention to examine the political aspect of the Ibādī school or to deal with it specifically. In my opinion, the political movements are of less importance than the other aspects. For this reason, I discuss them as phenomena and manifestations of the way in which Ibādīs have implemented principles properly throughout their existence, that is, their practical life. I also mention them to point out the differences between groups whose conduct is a sincere implementation of their doctrines and principles and those in whom you find a stark contrast between their conduct and their claim to follow Islam and to conduct themselves according to its rules.

I am especially concerned in this inquiry to discuss the succession of scholarship of those who carried this school forward; to depict:

the excellent examples of rightly-guided conduct followed by its members throughout the ages and conditions during periods of *manifestation, concealment*, and the intervening periods;

their strong adherence to Islam and its laws in the face of accumulating communal strife (*fitnah*) and trials (*miḥan*) and diminishing security;

the reality of holding fast to God and disdaining [the power of] created beings, however powerful, violent and tyrannical they might be;

the turning away from the material temptations of this world in favour of that which God has;

the narrative of lives filled with good example and integrity of character, and actions such as faith in God enjoins, out of fear of God and for God, and which do not judge any creature, and as a jihād for God and on the path of God, which has not received any mention in this world;

a worthy and persistent effort to construct that which was supported by Islam, erected by the Holy Book and preserved by Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace.

The reader will be able to read about a life full of peace, guidance, rightly-guided conduct and good deeds in the brief biographical sketches that I present in the pages to follow.

Abū l-Sha‘thā’ Jābir b. Zayd al-Azdi⁴¹ was born in 21 AH and died in the year 96. Although Omani by birth, he lived in Iraq and spent most of his blessed life in Basrah, one of the Iraqi centres of scholarship at the time. He spent his life in Basrah — as did most of his eminent fellow Successors — disseminating knowledge in mosques and religious centres, instilling good morals in people, enjoining strong adherence to the noble religion and the preservation of its principles and methods, and pronouncing *fatwās* on problems encountered by the people, to such an extent that Iyās b. Mu‘āwiyah once said: ‘I have been all over Basrah and there is no *muftī* in it besides Jābir b. Zayd.’ The great interpreter of the Qur’ān, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās, may God be satisfied with him, once said, ‘The people of Iraq are strange — why do they need us when they have Jābir b. Zayd?’ When he [Jābir] died, Anas b. Mālik, the Companion of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: ‘The most knowledgeable person on the face of the earth has now died’. Thābit al-Bunānī visited Jābir b. Zayd when he was near death and asked him: ‘Do you desire anything?’ He said: ‘I desire to see al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’. Al-Ḥasan was in hiding out of fear of the tyranny of the Umayyads and their agents. Thābit, knowing his whereabouts, went to al-Ḥasan and brought him to his dear friend, now on the edge of death. The great Muslim Successor spoke to the great Muslim scholar and they exchanged mutual advice in preparation for a long separation in this world and in hope of a happy encounter in the next. Al-Ḥasan said of his colleague, companion and friend who had departed from this world and met with the next: ‘By God, this man was a learned *faqīh*.’

Many others had testified to his knowledge, intellect, religion and forbearance: many Companions, Successors and the following generation. Except that I consider the testimony of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās, Anas b. Mālik and ‘Ā’ishah mother of the believers, who are the most distinguished of the Companions of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, the most knowledgeable of the true and inner meanings of religion, the most versed in the meanings of the Holy Qur’ān and the application of the Sunnah, the best acquainted with his excellent life and noble guidance, in addition to the testimony of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, the best

⁴⁰ See al-Shammākhī, *Siyar* and Quṭb, *Sharḥ muqaddimat al-tawḥīd*.

⁴¹ Reports of Jābir’s date of birth and that of his death vary between 18–96 and 22–93.

of the successor generation and the closest to, and most intimate with, Jābir, I consider this testimony given by the most distinguished of the Companions of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and sealed by the best of the Successors, as the highest, most reliable certificate that could be granted for scholarly knowledge at that time.

Jābir received knowledge from 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, Anas b. Mālik, 'Ā'ishah mother of the believers, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar and other companions. Jābir once said: 'I met 70 of those that fought at Badr and I took on all their knowledge, except for the *Baḥr* ('vast sea' in terms of knowledge)', referring to 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, may God be satisfied with both of them. If this great imām was able, with the energy, intelligence and patience that he was given, to accumulate the knowledge of 70 of those that fought at Badr, then it would not be surprising if he had also acquired knowledge from the remaining Companions, may God be satisfied with them, which, on account of their number and the facility of taking (knowledge) from them, cannot be quantified. Many individuals took knowledge from him, among them Qatādah, the teacher of al-Bukhārī, Ayyūb, Ibn Dīnār, Ḍammām b. al-Sāyib, Ḥayyān al-A'raj and Abū 'Ubaydah Muslim b. Abī Karīmah. Jābir lived as did other great Successors, striving to implement the Sunnah of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, through word and deed, and declaring privately and openly that the Islamic community was obliged to adhere to God's laws in order to be 'the best community brought forth for mankind'. In his seminars and gatherings, he used to criticize those who had deviated from God's religion, given in to their caprices, satisfied their desires and followed the way of Satan. He would give his blessing to resistance movements that sought to bring down injustice and wrest power from the hands of traitors in order to place it in the hands of the trustworthy who guarded the sanctity of God's laws.

Ibādīs used to follow his opinion on many issues, as did many other Muslims. Jābir was not the only Successor, of whom most of the Companions and Successors of that time held such an opinion. The tyranny of the Umayyads and their agents used to persecute these scholars and proponents of religion (*du'āt*) wherever they went. Often, these scholars and men of guidance would flee from tyranny and take their religion with them, away from such despotism. Some of them would fall in harm's way, but endure it patiently for the sake of God.

Jābir was one of the heroes of Islam, intent on informing Muslims about their religion and about the glory and honour that God wanted for them. He used to fight against the tyranny of the despots and the

misguided ideas of the innovators with patience and conviction. He was very capable of exercising self-control and keeping himself on the straight path. Scholarly fame did not tempt him, nor was he deluded by the extent of people's confidence in him and he never revelled in the satisfaction of victory and the defeat of opponents.

Once, he saw one of his students writing something down during a class. He then forbade him to write anything other than a clear verse or an established *sunnah*. As for his own opinion, (he thought that) nothing could be learnt from it, since in the evening he might find a stronger argument than the one he had used that morning, and would reject the former in favour of the stronger argument, while the student would have gone about spreading among people something invalid that he had written down.

Al-Ḥajjāj had a secretary called Yazīd b. Muslim, who loved Jābir very much and admired him greatly. One day, circumstances of everyday life led to Jābir going to visit this admiring secretary. It seems the secretary wanted to please both his master and his friend, and so he set up a meeting without them being aware of it. Al-Ḥajjāj listened to the great imām and, admiring his knowledge and his manners, offered him the position of judge. He said to him: 'You need not seek the pleasure of anyone, we shall appoint you as judge for the Muslims.' This had been the intention of his secretary friend, but Jābir was not one who sought the things of this world. So he said to him: 'I am not up to the task.' Al-Ḥajjāj then asked him: 'What makes you incapable?' He said: 'An evil [a dispute] is occurring between a woman and her servant, but I cannot make peace between them.' Al-Ḥajjāj said: 'That is certainly a weakness'.

In this way, the great imām was able to extricate himself from this prestigious offer, which someone else would have been overjoyed with. It seems, however, that his secretary friend had not understood the imām's purpose in extricating himself (from the offer), desiring to exploit the occasion to the benefit of the imām, and to do him a long-term favour. Thus, he said to al-Ḥajjāj: 'Here is an idea — it is of no burden for the shaykh and of assistance to Muslims: employ him as an assistant to the Treasurer in Basrah'. Al-Ḥajjāj agreed to the suggestion, but the devout scholar did not accept it. He said to Yazīd: 'You have accomplished nothing: do you see me as assistant to the Treasurer?'

The imām did not accept the second offer which this loving and admiring person had brought to him. He avoided employment in an oppressive government: how could it be right for Jābir to assist such oppressors, when he criticized their actions on a daily basis and called for them to grant what is due to those who deserve it, to release payment and

stipend to those who had a right thereto, and to give such jobs to trustworthy and careful people who fear God and dread His reckoning?

When it was time for him to return home after the visit and prepared for the journey, Yazīd ordered his slaves to saddle a horse. But the imām was too ashamed before his Lord to ride a mount picked out for him by luxury-loving tyrants and bestowed upon him by opulent despots. He accordingly excused himself from his friend. A mule was then brought for him. He accepted it and rode off on it, knowing full well that riding on a mule was rougher and less comfortable, as well as being the opposite of prestigious, but it was closer to the Sunnah of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace: the best of creation used to ride on a grey mule called Duldula. Yazīd went to excess in his generosity towards the imām, as the rich and wasteful rulers in an oppressive state are wont to do. He ordered his servants to perfume Jābir's head and beard with musk and ambergris. The great imām made his way to the Tigris and washed his head and beard, scrubbing them hard and saying: 'O God do not make it my fate that I be amid these people.'

It was Jābir's custom to do the pilgrimage each year. In one year, the governor of Basrah sent him a message asking him not leave town that year because people were in need of him for teaching and *fatwās*. Jābir, however, insisted on his custom and informed the governor that he would not abandon a deed for God's cause on account of a command issued by a human being, even if that human being was a governor of the Umayyad state. The governor arrested him and put him in jail.

When the crescent moon began to appear in Dhūl-Ḥijjah, people went to see the governor and pleaded with him: 'May God make the emir good! the new moon of Dhūl-Ḥijjah is upon us and there is almost no time left to make the journey from Basrah to Makkah'. The emir released him. When Jābir got to his house, he began to saddle up a she-camel of his — he would race her to the pilgrimage. He said: *Whatsoever mercy God opens to men, none can withhold* [Fāṭir, 2]. Then he asked Āminah, 'Do you have anything (I can take)?' She said that she did, and presented some provisions in a pair of knapsacks. He asked her not to tell anyone that he was leaving that day. When he arrived at 'Arafāt where the people were standing (in the rite of pilgrimage), his she-camel struck the ground with the front part of her neck and began to tremble. People shouted: 'Slaughter her! Slaughter her!' He then said: 'It is not fitting for a she-camel that has seen the new moon of Dhūl-Ḥijjah in Basrah and reached people in (pilgrimage) sanctity that this be done to her.' The she-camel was unharmed. He travelled on her 24 times to do *ḥajj* and *'umrah*.

It is superfluous for me to talk about Jābir's religiousness and moral character, his fear of his Lord, his adherence to the Sunnah, avoidance of

bid'ah, deep understanding of the Shari'ah, his self-reckoning and the way in which he used to force himself (to do) what the human soul hates to do, if by this he could bring himself closer to God, may He be exalted and glorified. Jābir was well-known for never bargaining in three things: the cost of travelling to Makkah, the price of a slave that he bought in order to set free, and a sheep bought for sacrificial slaughter. He used to say: 'One does not bargain over something through which he seeks closeness to God Almighty.' Whenever a *stūq* came into his possession, he would break it and throw it away, so that no Muslim would be tempted to use it: a *stūq* is a counterfeit dirham.

His heart was filled with faith in God, sincere calls to God's religion were always on his lips and his limbs constantly performed the good deeds that please God. Hind bt. al-Muhallab said, 'Jābir b. Zayd more than anyone used to give much of his time to myself and my mother. Anything that he knew would bring me closer to God, may He be exalted and glorified, he would command me to do, and anything which he knew would make me distant from God, he would forbid me to do; he also used to tell me where to wear the veil'. She used to place her hand on her forehead, indicating the place for the veil on a Muslim woman's face.

If I were to look for similar testimonies of Jābir's knowledge, religion, character, intelligence or genius, there would be many such instances that would require much time and space to relate. It is sufficient here to realize that he, may God have mercy on him, knew better than to leave out anything from God's Book, or from the Sunnah and guidance of His Messenger, that concerned his own behaviour. He was more intelligent than to be deceived by the temptations of *bid'ah*, whether manifest or hidden. He was more fearful of God than to keep quiet about an evil act when he saw it. He was more courageous than to comply with the actions of oppressors or be satisfied with the conduct of tyrants. He was more concerned with fulfilling Islam's message than to weary of the duties of teaching in every place.

He once noticed one of the chamberlains performing prayers on top of the Ka'bah. So, he shouted out to him: 'You, praying on top of the Ka'bah! You are not facing any *qiblah!*' Ibn 'Abbās heard him from another part of the mosque and said: 'Jābir b. Zayd is somewhere in town. That is him speaking.' This gifted teacher knew which of his students had a sound mind, a spark of talent and a keen eye, as well as being concerned for the affairs of Muslims and working to better guide them and direct them to the nobler path.

In addition to all this, Jābir is considered one of the earliest, if not the earliest, authors of Islam. His vast and valuable work, *Dīwān Jābir*, had a resounding effect in early Islam. It was the subject of much competition

between Islamic libraries. The Baghdad Library was able to acquire it for its own use, denying it to other libraries. It only produced one copy of it and the story of how one of the brilliant minds of Jabal Nufūsa fought hard to acquire this copy is a long one, which, God willing, will be told in a forthcoming volume. This book was of great value on account of the knowledge and guidance it contained, its proximity to the age of Prophethood, and its author's direct transmission from Companions, may God be satisfied with them. Its other valuable feature was as a historical relic, in that it was the first large work composed in Islam. It is a shame that such cultural heritage was lost from the library of Baghdad at the time when all those great libraries were set on fire and thousands of precious items were lost. It is also a great shame that the copy that reached Libya should have been lost, along with all the great Islamic heritage that perished, because of people's ignorance, spite and concern for their positions and ranks. There is no greater test for a Muslim community than the loss of its scientific, religious and moral heritage, especially when its present condition can only become upright on the solid foundations its past was built upon. Indeed, this community's present state can only become good through that which made its earlier existence good.

In this section, I have tried to present a biography of Jābir b. Zayd, but must admit that I have not been successful. I have not been able to achieve what I intended and what such a subject requires. I shall not, however, miss the opportunity to conclude this section by borrowing the following (words) from the scholar Qāsim b. Sa'īd al-Shammākhī:⁴²

As regards our school being called the 'Ibādiyyah', that is because 'Abd Allāh b. Ibāḍ, may God be satisfied with him, was the one who struggled and fought openly so that truths might be identified and established, so that issues of reasoning might be rectified, where the followers of polemics and *bid'ah* had originated distortions and falsehoods against the Shari'ah of our Lord. He was zealous in matters concerning God, exalted is He. He held debates with men of expert knowledge and philosophers. He was the overwhelming proof before which all prattlers recoil and retreat. He had some exchanges with 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān; he put terror into the spirit of the tyrant oppressor. The term 'Ibādiyyah' prevailed among those Muslim companions of his who adopted his opinions, and the school was, in this sense, called by his name. However, the leading imām and the rightly-guided agent, the founder and protector of the

⁴² *Al-Qawl al-matīn.*

school, to whose merit is due its construction and the fortification of its supports, was Jābir b. Zayd, may God be satisfied with him. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ibāḍ was his like and his successor. He would not proceed in any case except on his opinion and point of view. After Jābir b. Zayd died, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ibāḍ manifested the clearest zeal for religion, instilling in his companions the principle of being courageous to establish truth and defeat tyrants and oppressors who deviate from the right path. Eventually, this saved sect appeared, the one that is truthful and right in its conduct with regard to existence during periods of both *concealment* and *manifestation*. It is protected by the guardianship of God Almighty: no-one can harm it. They are the workers of miracles, enemies of evil acts and crimes, severe in the face of injustice and its instigators, and hypocrisy and those who engage in it.

Abū ‘Ubaydah Muslim⁴³

Many groups of individuals that spread throughout the east and west acquired knowledge and learnt the founding principles of the school from Jābir b. Zayd.

The greatest of these individuals was the imām Abū ‘Ubaydah Muslim b. Abī Karīmah, who was the undisputed authority for Ibāḍīs after Jābir b. Zayd, even though there were colleagues of his who were just as knowledgeable in God’s religion and its application. Abū ‘Ubaydah Muslim b. Abī Karīmah, the *mawlā* (client) of the Banū Tamīm, was widely known as *al-Qaffāf* (basket-maker), since he used to weave baskets. This was a noble and free profession, with which he and his students were able to earn a legitimate and noble living, through sweat and hard work. He succeeded imām Jābir as teacher, and many people acquired their knowledge from him, in spite of the harassment inflicted upon him by the oppressors. He was kept under tight surveillance and prohibited from teaching and diffusing the spirit of freedom that can withstand injury, but not overlook degradation.

⁴³ See al-Shammākhī, *Siyar*, Quṭb al-Ummah, *Sharḥ muqaddimat al-tawḥīd*.

Under pressure from these tyrants, he, together with his friend and colleague Ḍammām, was forced to carry on his teaching activities in hiding and to conceal his noble school from the eyes of al-Ḥajjāj and his agents — al-Ḥajjāj the despot whose tyranny and oppression few sincere believers managed to escape. Al-Ḥajjāj sought the advice of a Magian concerning them, since he wanted a type of food that would torture the person who ate it but would not kill him. The Magian told him to give them a combination of leeks and oil. This remained their diet until al-Ḥajjāj died and they were released. Many a time the imprisonment and torture would make Ḍammām very weary, but Abū ‘Ubaydah would say to him, with the patience of a faithful believer in God, ‘Whom have you become weary of?’

Imām Abū ‘Ubaydah was released from al-Ḥajjāj’s prison to carry on his message of calling to God, adherence to religion and the implementing of His laws. He was liberated in his thinking, and disseminated proper Islamic principles, such as the dignity of a Muslim, his rejection of debasement and his (duty to) demand integrity of those in power, integrity in religion, in morals, in conduct, and in government. He used to enjoin those in power to adhere to the Sunnah, to follow the way of the righteous predecessors, to establish justice between people, and to implement the commands of God as they are presented in God’s Book. This appeal is what oppressive tyrants of every time and place most hate. For this reason, they mustered all their forces and employed every tactic to obstruct this appeal, and prevent it from reaching people in its true, clear and proper form, so that the community would remain meek and submissive, and the people would go on waiting and enduring, overcome by resignation and patience.

But however powerful injustice may be, however violent tyranny may become and however arrogant and overweening despotism may seem, can all this, and much more, silence truth and extinguish the light of truth? Can it indefinitely prolong the enslavement of people who believe that God’s religion calls for liberation from subservience to human beings, that their Lord’s Book forbids them to accept helplessness and meekness, and that God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, teaches his community that ‘the best jihād is the word of truth (spoken) in the face of an oppressive imām, which leads to the death of its speaker’.

Al-Ḥajjāj, his agents and his leaders did all they could to silence the voice of truth, oppress those that call to dignity and carry forward the holy law, imprisoning, torturing and killing them. They filled the earth with fear and terror. They did all that and much more, but they were only successful in fanning the flames of revolt and bringing about the end of their power. In the end, al-Ḥajjāj perished, along with the state that he used to worship beside God and the powers he set up to fight believers.

The faithful Muslims among the Successors, however, passed away into the mercy of God. Jābir, al-Ḥasan, Ḍammām, Abū ‘Ubaydah and thousands of others who suffered harm, some less, some more, at the hands of al-Ḥajjāj and his assistants, went to meet their Lord. How great the contrast is between what history recorded of these and those others: that which your Lord has is better and endures.

Al-Ḥajjāj with the facilities and powers at his disposal was able to increase the illegitimate wealth enjoyed by those of Banū Umayyah who sought luxuries. He was able to provide them with greater security during their orgies and drinking sessions and to facilitate for them occasions to drink, gamble and commit sinful acts. While the oppressed who had suffered torture were able to nourish the Islamic community with God’s religion, to make sure that Muḥammad’s message reached them in its pure and original form, to envelop their hearts in faith in God alone. They were able to inform the people that only God deserves worship and that all creatures are equal in this duty. Those individuals who had been oppressed and tortured succeeded in teaching the community that caliphs, governors, those employed by the state and the agents of government in all positions and sectors are but bearers of a temporary trust, employed to administer the affairs of the state in exchange for sustenance and clothing, without excess or wastefulness. If they guard this trust well, look after the interests of the community, and give what is due to those to whom it is due, as justice and probity require, then they receive their due from the community in the way that we have just mentioned. As regards their reward for being sincere, trustworthy, hardworking and truthful, that is from God: and your Lord gives the better reward. If, however, they feel that they are not up to safeguarding this trust and fear the consequences of breaking it, let them return the trust to those who are capable, and withdraw unstained and with thanks. But, if they become deluded and Satan overpowers their conscience and desire to take God’s wealth in turns and His servants as friends, to appropriate more than is rightfully theirs, then the community is obliged to confront them and prevent them from their objectives and to demand that they respect the prescribed limits and follow the right path. If they then see the right path and return to it, God will forgive them, and the community will accept this from them. They can then continue to carry out their duties and perform their tasks, preserving the trust that God had placed on their shoulders. If, however, Satan manages to establish himself in them, if wantonness overcomes them, and vainglory seizes them in their sin, and they acquire a taste for power, the community must lie in wait for them and reckon with them for their actions and remove them from their positions, even by lethal force. For the killing of those who seek corruption is better with God than the

corruption of decent individuals, the oppression of believers and toying with the rights of Muslims. This was the call that was enjoined by the believers from among the righteous predecessors and on account of which tyrants in power used to persecute them fiercely in order to silence the voice of truth. In addition to this call to freedom, those great imāms did not desist from disseminating knowledge and spreading praiseworthy morals: they used to devote themselves to educating God's servants about God's religion and explaining to them what they did not know of God's Book or the Sunnah of His Messenger.

Although tight surveillance meant that Abū 'Ubaydah was constantly spied on, and the orders of the oppressors prevented him from teaching, he set up his school in an unknown dungeon that was very long. He placed metal chains at the door, so that if he or his students heard rattling they knew that a stranger was trying to enter. They would, thus, suspend class and go about making baskets, so that the visitor would not suspect them. But when he departed, and they felt secure from the gaze of oppressors, they would resume what they had been doing, going from the administration of a workshop that produced baskets to the administration of one that produced sound hearts, minds and convictions.

Despite all the unrelenting surveillance, constant pressure and ongoing hardship, this great imām succeeded in creating an Islamic school, one that carried forth the light of Muḥammad's guidance to the remotest places. Countless Muslims were educated in it: it is enough that it produced bearers of knowledge that went both eastwards and westwards. In addition to the long and persevering struggle waged by this imām against oppression and those who perpetrate it, he was also waging a long and persistent intellectual and religious struggle against *bid'ah* seductively contrived by the perverted minds and defective insight of Qadariyyah, Mujbirah and Khawārij, minds which in those days were afflicted with the love of dispute and negligent of good deeds.

Abū 'Ubaydah, in addition to his noble religion, his honourable legacy, wide knowledge, adherence to principle, his holding on to the truth, severity towards sinners and steadfastness in the face of misfortunes, was the epitome of modesty, of gentle disposition and a yielding character, who acknowledged the limits of his knowledge and his weaknesses. He was a Muslim in the way he practiced religion, in his character, in his actions and his knowledge. He was one of those charged with making the call to Islam, and who would not be tempted by the material things of this life, nor by the delights of this world: he had no indulgence or leniency for falsehood. He was born to fight: to fight falsehood in all its forms and manifestations, to fight falsehood propagated by power of government, to

fight falsehood created by minds using the logic of *bid'ah*, to fight falsehood in education that results from neglecting the (cultural) heritage of this community, to fight falsehood that is the result of the ignorance stemming from blind imitation, to fight the falsehood of meekness disguised as patience in enduring humiliation, to fight the falsehood of fear in the form of relinquishing steadfastness in order to endure misfortunes and avoid upheaval.

In fighting against falsehood in all its forms and manifestations, he was aware that the life of an individual is too short to establish this Noble Message. For this reason, he worked towards the creation of a generation of conscientious and educated young men, who perceived the truth of the Islamic Message and who understood the inner meanings of its laws. The foremost qualities that a believer in God must possess is to feel powerful because of God, to be humble towards believers, stern towards unbelievers and steadfast in the face of trials in order to uphold God's word.

The notable scholar al-Shammākhī said this of Abū 'Ubaydah: 'He assimilated knowledge and disseminated it, memorized the different ḥadīth reports and mastered them. He is the one, from among all his colleagues, to whom the people looked and around whom they crowded in order to listen to the advice and cautions that echo in the listener's mind. Despite its extensiveness, he always professed (that he had only) limited knowledge.' In spite of the weight of such testimony, the scholarly activities that the imām engaged in are too great to be summarised in a few words. It must suffice to say that he was a source of illumination in Basrah. From that hidden dungeon on whose gates chains used to rattle and in which baskets were piled up with pen and paper, the free and glorious call burst forth in order to preserve Muḥammad's legacy, as Muḥammad bequeathed it. This bursting forth reached to the furthest points of the compass. From that time to this day it has not swerved from striving for the cause of this glorious message until the heedless have become aware and those asleep and those astray have come to their senses and begun to examine themselves and return to their Lord, coming together, united in their ranks to safeguard God's message from new dangers: the dangers of apostasy and unbelief, the worship of human beings hallowed by a false civilization and biased propaganda, whose purpose is to distance this noble religion from daily life, knowing well that the laws of mere humans cannot stand up to the laws of God, and that the laws of philosophy have no value next to the laws of Islam.

A necessary word

Some readers might see in this very modest work, which I add to the rich collection of Islamic works, propaganda for and a spirited defence of a particular religious affiliation. Some colleagues have said that. I hasten to point out the following: as for my spirited defence, it is on account of what I believe to be true, and that is only for the sake of truth, not for the sake of this school of thought. Defence of the truth, whether it is coloured by the perspective of a particular religious affiliation or not, is a duty incumbent upon every Muslim.

As for religious schools, in my opinion, all the different Islamic schools are no more than little streams issuing from the same pure spring, which the Creator of man wanted humans to drink from. This bountiful spring poured out during a period when intellectual and existential thirst overcame the life of humans. People, at that time, drank from it enough to quench and satisfy this burning thirst, and it revived and resuscitated them. People came after them, and each of them dug a canal for himself, to bring good to himself and his kin: it is according to the cleanliness of the canal's current or the purity of its flow that the water reaches those that seek it. The owners of each canal began to claim that their water flowed in the purest and cleanest direction, and that others had to drink from that canal if they wanted good for themselves, since their particular canal was the one that was connected to the original spring. Many of those who claim such things are not aware of what is taking place in these long and winding canals that flow from the one spring, and that these canals undergo many transformations during their flow along the creeks created by the tools of men.

The Muslim community today, with all its differences and factions, is in more need than ever to go back and drink from the original, incorruptible and unchangeable spring. It needs to abandon all these different streams that have been created by individuals who make mistakes. The call to adherence to God's Book, attachment to the guidance of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and the rejection of all other schools and disputes, is the duty of every Muslim who wants good for himself, good for his people, good for his community, and good for mankind.

I summon to seeking refuge with God's religion, a return to His commands on issues relating to individuals, society and mankind as a whole. I summon to this because I believe that this is the only way for mankind to find happiness.

While I call people to seek refuge with God's religion, I am fully aware that I live in an age seduced by a modernity which man claims to have created, forsaking God, through his own ideas, intellect and mode of conduct. In this modernity man has sought to defy the bonds between creatures and their Creator, severing any contact with his Lord and building happiness with his own organization and arrangements.

This is not the first time that misguided man has tried to defy the connections between Creator and creation, to sever all connection with his Lord and dispense with the need for Him. He has, indeed, behaved in this way from the earliest time, and for this reason, the Almighty Creator challenged him: *O tribe of jinn and men, if you are able to pass through the confines of heaven and earth, pass through them! You shall not pass through except with an authority [al-Rahmān, 33].* Man has not been able to pass through them because he does not have the authority. Whether this human experiment is long or short-lived, man will realize that he is too weak to dispense with the need for God, to defy His commands or pass through the confines of the heavens and earth. He must in the end realize that he will only be happy if he returns to the abundance of God, to His shelter and His care, His providence and guidance.

Epilogue

I turn to Him, may He be glorified and exalted, in thanks for His manifest and His hidden blessings. I give praise to Him, may He be magnified and exalted, for facilitating this meagre work as a service to religion and the community. I ask Him that He make it a sincere seeking of His Glorious Countenance. I implore Him, may He be glorified, to make easy for me the composition of the remaining volumes, and to supervise my work and make it successful. He is the best of companions and the best of helpers.

I thought it best to end this volume at this point. Looking back, I can see in it many shortcomings and a failure to fulfil that which I had set out to do. I think that all these sections fall short of the stated objective: to reveal the truths concerning the development of Ibādism. Moreover, the biographical sections on the two great imāms are not satisfactory reflections of their standing in my eyes. My excuse for all this is the paucity of sources, my distance from public and private libraries on the one hand, and the scale of the task I had set for myself on the other.

Those who yearn for more knowledge, and who are not satisfied by this very modest work and whose thirst is not quenched by these trickles, should let their eyes run over the writings of brilliant historians and brilliant Muslim scholars throughout the ages: in these rich gardens they will find gratification of mind, thought and soul.

In concluding these sections, I can only offer my sincere thanks to all those who provided me with assistance during this modest research project. Among them, especially, my loyal friend Aḥmad ‘Alī ‘Askar for facilitating this work. I appreciate all his immense efforts and vigils during long nights.

Glossary

- ahl al-qiblah*— the people of the *qiblah*, i. e. Muslims.
- bid'ah*—heretical innovation. Refers to any act of worship or belief which deviates from the **Sunnah**.
- fatwā*— a formal legal opinion.
- fitnah*— (pl. *fitan*) lit. temptation or trial in moral, political and religious matters; also 'civil strife', commonly used to refer to the first Muslim civil war between Mu'āwiyah and 'Alī (657 CE).
- ḥadd*— (pl. *ḥudūd*): prescribed punishments of certain acts forbidden by the Qur'ān; divine ordinances (*aḥkām* as used in the Qur'ān).
- ḥadīth*— a narrated saying or tradition of the Prophet.
- ijmā'*— consensus: a principle of Islamic law.
- ijtihād*— lit. exertion, the effort of conscience and reason to arrive at judgements in law.
- jihād*— lit. 'struggle': in moral terms, the struggle against worldly desires (*jihād al-nafs*), or simply striving to do good deeds. It is also used to refer to war waged for the cause of God (comparable to 'holy war').
- mujāhid*— one who engages in *jihād*.
- mujtahid*— one who does *ijtihād*, or one who has achieved the juristic competence to do *ijtihād*.
- māriqah*— a group who engage in *murūq*, lit. 'piercing through'; a polemical term used of those whose Islam is superficial; in Sunnī literature, this is used to refer to the Khawārij.
- muftī*— a religious authority who issues *fatwās*.
- muwahḥidūn*— those who profess the Oneness of God, monotheists in general, or those monotheists who profess the *shahādah*.
- qiblah*— the direction of Makkah, the direction of prayer for Muslims.
- shahādah*— the declaration or testimony of faith in Islam, namely: 'There is no deity but God, Muḥammad is His Messenger'.
- Sharī'ah**— religious law based on the Qur'ān and the **Sunnah**.
- sīrah*— conduct, way of life, or memorable action; mainly used to mean the biography of the Prophet.

Sunnah— the example of the Prophet, all his precepts and practices collectively. Also, *sunnah*— a particular practice of the Prophet; recommended action, distinct from *fard/farīdah* (obligatory action).

ummah— the community or society with which Muslims identify, and to which they belong, because they are Muslims.

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