

A Zaydī Creed from Yemen: *The Sound Creed*

*Al-‘Aqīda al-ṣaḥīḥa*¹

By Imām al-Mutawakkil ‘alā Allāh Ismā‘īl b. al-Qāsim²

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful [p. 9]

Call to the way of Your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way (Q. 16:125)

From the Servant of God, Commander of the Faithful, al-Mutawakkil ‘alā Allāh (the Mighty, the Merciful) Ismā‘īl, son of the Commander of the Faithful, al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh al-Qāsim, son of Muḥammad, to whomever among the Muslims this reaches: Peace be upon you! Truly we praise God on your behalf. This is our creed, the creed of our predecessors in this religion. It is the ship of salvation for the believers, such that whoever clings to it has grasped the secure handle (*al-‘urwa al-wuthqā*), and whoever refuses to accept it, without a clear proof, will ruin himself and his family. God willing, we will accept it, by means of a clear proof. May God explain it to us and divulge it to us—there is no power nor might save by God, the Lofty, the Tremendous—and May God shower Our master Muḥammad and his family with blessings and greetings of peace.

[p. 10]

In the Name of God, the Beneficent the Merciful.

All praise belongs to God, Who has guided us to this—we would not have been guided had it not been for God’s guidance of us (Q. 7:43). I testify that there is no god save God, singular is He, no partner has He, and I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.

¹ This short work was edited by Muḥammad Yaḥyā Sālim ‘Izzān and published by Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islāmī in Ṣa‘da and Dār al-Turāth al-Yamanī in Ṣan‘ā’, Yemen in 1995. This translation was made by Scott Lucas during Ramadan 1436/ July 2015 in Tucson, Arizona.

² Zaydī Imām and ruler of Yemen from 1054-1087/1644-1676.

[I ask God to send down] blessings and greetings of peace upon Muḥammad and upon the family of Muḥammad, who are the callers of humanity to the truth, and the ships of salvation.

To continue:

This is the creed of the saved sect, and the party that holds steadfastly to the truth, which is the religion God legislated to Muḥammad, the Chosen One (*al-muṣṭafā*), designated to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. [God] resolutely decreed that all humanity must adhere to it and uphold it, and forbade disagreeing and dividing over it.

[Our creed] is that God, Who created the worlds, is Allāh, the One, the Singular—there is no god save Him—the Living, the Sustainer, Knower of the unseen [p. 11] and the manifest. He is the First and the Last, and He is powerful over everything. He is the Mighty, the Wise, the Hearing, the Seeing, the Self-sufficient, the Praised One.

Furthermore, *Naught is as His likeness* (Q. 42:11) and *Vision grasps Him not, but He grasps (all) vision. He is the Subtle, the Aware* (Q. 6:103).

[God] is Just—Your Lord does not wrong anyone, nor does He will wrongdoing (*ẓulm*) on the part of humans. *Lo! God wrongs not humanity at all; but humans wrong themselves* (Q. 10:44). He does not requite anyone save for their deeds. He does not punish anyone save for [the sins] he has accrued, nor does He reward anyone save for [the good deeds] they have earned.

[God] is truthful regarding His promise and His threat—*Who is more true in statement than God* (Q. 4:87)? The sentence that comes from Him cannot be changed, and He is in no way a tyrant to the servants.³ [p. 12] Likewise, *no laden one shall bear another's load,⁴ and man has only that for which he makes effort* (Q. 53:39-40).

³ This sentence echoes Q. 50:29: *The sentence that comes from Me cannot be changed, and I am in no way a tyrant to the servants.*

⁴ The “load” here is generally understood to mean “sins.”

God does not obligate any soul beyond its scope, and He only obligates that which it can bring forth.⁵

Deeds are to be ascribed to the people to whom God ascribes them, like in His statement (Exalted is He): *Whoever does right, it is for his soul, and whoever does wrong, it is against it* (Q. 41:46).

God does not obligate us to do anything we are incapable of doing, like He said (Exalted is He): *Fear God as best you can* (Q.64:16). The disobedient sinner is he who did not do [what God obligated him to do], while he was capable of doing the opposite of what he did, like how God described the hypocrites: *They destroy their souls, and God knows that they verily are liars* (Q. 9:42).

God does not will wrongdoing or oppression for the servants, nor does He like corruption (*fasād*). He is not pleased by His servants who disbelieve (in Him). He does not decree, save according to the Truth. He did not [p. 13] create the jinn and humans except for them to worship Him. He wishes neither sustenance [from them] nor for them to feed Him.⁶

Whoever transgresses the boundaries (or laws) God established will be in the punishment of the Hellfire forever. Intercession is [only] for whoever has earned His pleasure, *while there will be no friend for the wrong-doers, nor any intercessor who will be heeded* (Q. 40:18). The Garden is for whoever fears God, while the Hellfire is for whoever exceeds all bounds. *And truly God will raise those who are in the graves* (Q. 22:7). Truly God will requite whoever did evil deeds, and [the evildoer's] desires will not benefit him, *save him who repents and believes and does righteous deeds* (Q. 25:70).

Whomever God puts in the Hellfire will be there eternally, *and they will not emerge from the Fire* (Q. 2:167). *Is he on whom the word of punishment is fulfilled (to be helped), and can you (O Muhammad) rescue him who is in the Fire* (Q. 39:19)? *And they say: The Fire (of*

⁵ This sentence echoes Q. 2:286 and Q. 65:7.

⁶ These last two sentences echo Q. 51:56-57. The jinn are invisible creatures created from fire, some of whom are believers, and some of whom reject God; see Q. 72 (The Jinn).

punishment) will not touch us save for a certain number of days. Say: Have you received a covenant from God - truly God will not break His covenant - or say you concerning God that which [p. 14] you know not? Nay, but whoever has done evil and his sin surrounds him; such are rightful companions of the Fire; forever they will abide therein (Q. 2:80-81). It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor the desires of the People of the Book. He who does wrong will have the recompense thereof, and will not find against God any protecting friend or helper (Q. 4:123).

Whoever enters the Garden will be there eternally, and they shall have everlasting delights.

Any bounty that a created being has is from God, and the provisions (*arzāq*) are from God.

Faith is belief in the heart, speech of the tongue, and action by the limbs. It increases and decreases. *As for those who believe, [each new sūra] has increased them in faith (Q. 9:124).*⁷

The prophets (May God's blessings be upon them) are a reality. God's books are a reality. *And whoever seeks as religion other than the Surrender (to God; al-islām) it will not be accepted from him (Q. 3:85).*

Muḥammad (May God shower him and his family with blessings and greetings of peace) is the seal of the prophets, [p. 15] *Nor does he speak of (his own) desire—it is naught save an inspiration that is inspired (Q. 53:3-4).*

The prophets (God's blessings upon them) are protected from sin (or disobedience), and had they opposed [God's command], they would have been punished, like He said (Exalted is He): *Say: I fear, if I rebel against my Lord, the retribution of an Awful Day (Q. 6:15).* God also said (Exalted is He): *And if We had not made you wholly firm, you might almost have inclined to (the disbelievers) a little. Then had we made you taste a double (punishment) of living and a double (punishment) of dying, then had you found no helper against Us (Q. 17:74-75).*

⁷ Reading this as a direct Qur'ānic citation (*fa-zādathum*) instead of the printed text of *fa-zādahum*.

The Qur’ān is inimitable, and nobody can bring forth [a book] like it, or even a sūra like it.

It is God who made it an Arabic Qur’ān. *Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or from behind it. (It is) a revelation from the Wise, the Owner of Praise (Q. 41:42).*

God made [the Qur’ān] a warning to whoever receives it and is legally responsible (*min al-mukallaḥīn*).⁸ He made it an inheritance to those whom He chooses, among His servants, and they are the heirs of His Prophet, just as He put prophethood and scripture among the descendents [p. 16] of Abraham. Likewise, [God] put the Imāmate and scripture among the descendents of Muḥammad (May God shower him and his family with blessings and greetings of peace). His Prophet (May God shower him and his family with blessings and greetings of peace) made both [the Book and the Imāmate] his twin successors (*khalīfatayhi*), for he said: “I am leaving among you two mighty things—if you adhere to them, you will never go astray after me: The Book of God and the descendents of my family (*‘itratī ahl baytī*). Truly, the Subtle, the Aware has informed me that these two things will never divide, till the day they are brought before the Basin [in the Hereafter].”⁹

[p. 17]

God restricted political authority (*al-wilāya*) to the believers, according to His statement (Exalted is He): *Your guardian can be only God; and His messenger and those who believe, who establish worship and pay [p. 18] the alms tax, while bowing down (in prayer) (Q. 5:55).*

Political authority—which is the Imāmate—is for him whom God has made it and described as *paying the alms tax while bowing down*, and nobody did this except the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (upon him peace). He is the son of [the Prophet’s] paternal uncle, by his father and mother, *and those who are kin are nearer one to another in the decree of God (Q. 8:75).* He was the brother of the Messenger of God (May God shower him and his family with

⁸ “Legally responsible” is generally understood as someone who has attained puberty, knows what is lawful and forbidden according to Islam, and is sane.

⁹ A variation of the *ḥadīth*, which just has *ahl al-bayt* and not *al-‘itra* in it, is found in Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb faḍā’il al-ṣaḥāba: Bāb min faḍā’il ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (4). For numerous references for this *ḥadīth* and most of the ones that follow it, see the editor’s footnotes to *al-‘Aqīda al-ṣaḥītha*, 16-26. I have only indicated a few places among the canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections where these reports are found.

blessings and greetings of peace) when he assigned brotherhood [between the Emigrants and the Helpers during the early Medinan period.]¹⁰

[p.19]

[‘Alī] is of the same status with [the Prophet] as Aaron was to Moses,¹¹ and [the Prophet] summoned him when the verse of mutual cursing was sent down.¹² He ransomed himself to [the Prophet],¹³ and he was the first to pray with him.¹⁴ For whomever [the Prophet] was his protector, ‘Alī was his protector.¹⁵ He was the fifth of the people of [p. 20] the garment, whom God purified from impurities.¹⁶ He is [the Prophet’s] legatee (*waṣiyy*) and successor (*khalīfa*), and the father of his descendents. He married his daughter, Fāṭima, [p. 21] who was designated for him to marry. None of the [Prophet’s] companions ever commanded him [in battle]—there was never a raid, in which the Messenger of God (May God shower him and his family with blessings and greetings of peace) was not present, except that he was its commander. He never tarried or stayed behind in any of the campaigns in the path of God, except when he stayed behind at the raid on Tabūk, and [the Prophet] said to him what he said.¹⁷ Abū Bakr withdrew from him, according to the *ḥadīth* concerning [the Sūra of] the Acquittal (al-Barā’a; Q. 9), when [the Prophet] said, “Only a man from among my family can proclaim [what is revealed to me].” [The Prophet] shared his sacrificial camels (for the pilgrimage) with [‘Alī] [p. 22] and he did not share them with anyone else. The year of the pilgrimage, [the Prophet] confided in him that he was going to pass away that year. Nobody other than [‘Alī] acted in accordance with the verse requiring a payment in exchange for a private meeting with [the Prophet] prior to its

¹⁰ This is mentioned in Abū ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī’s *al-Jāmi’* (= *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*), *Kitāb al-manāqib: Bāb 21*.

¹¹ The prophetic *ḥadīth* that states this is found in several Sunni collections, including Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb faḍā’il al-ṣaḥāba: Bāb min faḍā’il ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (4).

¹² This is a reference to Q. 3:61, part of which reads: *Come! We will summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then we will pray humbly (to our Lord) and (solemnly) invoke the curse of Allah upon those who lie.* According to most exegetes, the Prophet summoned ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, as his family after its revelation; see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb faḍā’il al-ṣaḥāba: Bāb min faḍā’il ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (4).

¹³ The editor of *The Sound Creed* explains that this is an allusion to the famous story of the Prophet’s emigration, when ‘Alī slept in his bed the night the Meccan polytheists planned to assassinate him.

¹⁴ Tirmidhī includes a *gharīb ḥadīth* that describes ‘Alī as the first to pray with the Prophet; see his *al-Jāmi’*, *Kitāb al-manāqib: Bāb 21*.

¹⁵ This is the first part of the well-known *ḥadīth* of Ghadir Khumm, found in several Sunni and all Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* collections; see, for example, Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi’*, *Kitāb al-manāqib: Bāb manāqib ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (20).

¹⁶ This is an allusion to Q. 33:33, the final clause of which reads: *God’s wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O people of the House, and purify you with a thorough purification.*

¹⁷ The editor of *The Sound Creed* indicates that this was the occasion at which the Prophet said to ‘Alī, “You are of the same status with me as Aaron was with Moses, except that there are no prophets after me.”

abrogation.¹⁸ He is the one who gave his ring in charity, while he was bowing (in prayer), which led to the sending down of the verse, *Count you the slaking of a pilgrim's thirst and tending of the Inviolable Place of Worship as (equal to the worth of) him who believeth in Allah and the Last Day* (Q. 9:19)? (This is the intended meaning of His statement.) [p. 23] He is also the intended person in His statement (Exalted is He), *And feed with food the needy wretch, the orphan and the prisoner, for love of Him* (Q. 76:8). He is the one whom [the Prophet] gave the standard at the Battle of Khaybar, in the report "I will give the standard to [someone whom God loves and who loves God]."¹⁹ He is the one associated with the bird meat.²⁰ Only a believer will love him and [p. 24] only a hypocrite will hate him.²¹ He is the most skilled judge among the Companions,²² and the gate of the city of knowledge.²³ Nobody other than he combined such close blood ties, close marital relations, and companionship [with the Prophet]. The Messenger of God (May God shower him and his family with blessings and greetings of peace) sealed the doors of the mosque (to his apartments), except for 'Alī's door (upon him peace).²⁴ He is the bearer [p. 25] of the standard of Praise (*liwā' al-ḥamd*), owner of [the sword] of Dhū'l-Fiḳār, and protected (*ma'ṣūm*) from diverging from the Truth. Nobody killed as many [polytheists] as did he, and he was turned to for guidance, while he never turned to anyone else. *Is He Who leads to the Truth more deserving that He should be followed, or he who finds not the way unless he (himself) be guided* (Q. 10:35)?

When the Prophet (May God shower him and his family with blessings and greetings of peace) emigrated, he did not appoint anyone to respond to the alliances and other things, except him (upon him peace). When it was time for his campaign [p. 26] against Byzantium, which was his

¹⁸ This is an allusion to Q. 58:12, which was abrogated by Q. 58:13.

¹⁹ This is reported in Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections; see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba: Bāb min faḍā'il 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (4).

²⁰ This is an allusion to a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet had some bird meat, said, "O God, bring me the most beloved of Your creation to eat this bird with me," and 'Alī came in and ate it with him. Tirmidhī includes a *gharīb ḥadīth* of this incident; see his *al-Jāmi', Kitāb al-manāqib: Bāb 21*.

²¹ A *ḥadīth* reporting this is found in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-īmān: Bāb al-dalīl 'alā anna hubb al-anṣār wa-'Alī (raḍiya Allāh 'anhum) min al-īmān wa-'alāmātihi wa-bughḍahum min 'alāmāt al-nifāq* (78). The title of this chapter in English is "The indicator that love of the Helpers and 'Alī (May God be pleased with them) is among the indicators of faith, and that hatred of them is among the indicators of hypocrisy."

²² According to Bukhārī, the Caliph 'Umar described 'Alī as "the best judge among us (*aqḍānā*)," see his *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-tafṣīr: Bāb qawlihi mā nansakh min āya aw nansa'hā* (7).

²³ Tirmidhī includes a suspect (*munkar*) *gharīb ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says, "I am the house of wisdom, and 'Alī is its gate;" see his *al-Jāmi', Kitāb al-manāqib: Bāb 21*. A variation with the "city of knowledge" is found in al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī's *Mustadrak*.

²⁴ A *gharīb ḥadīth* of this from Ibn 'Abbās is found in al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi', Kitāb al-manāqib: Bāb 21*.

longest, most distant campaign, and he was in need of a deputy [in Medina], who was the most qualified and most excellent person, unlike his deputy in the case of a short, local campaign, [the Prophet] did not select anyone other than him (upon him peace) as his deputy. None of the scholars disputed [the legitimacy] of his caliphate²⁵ after him (upon him peace), when it came to him, unlike the other caliphs. The sun's setting was reversed only for him (upon him peace) and no one else. He received two portions of spoils from the Tabūk raid, one of which was designated to him by the Angel Gabriel (upon him peace). [p. 27] He was steadfast at the Battle of al-Mihrās, when all of the Muslims were facing defeat, except him.²⁶ He washed [the Prophet's] body [when he died] and lowered him into his grave (May God's blessings and greetings of peace be upon him). He is the most excellent among the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*); the family of the Prophet is the best family [among the Arabs]; and they are the best people after the Prophet (May God shower him and his family with blessings and greetings of peace). The most excellent [person] has the best claim to being the Imām, according to the consensus of the Companions of the Prophet. [Abū Bakr and 'Umar] used this argument against the Helpers [to restrict the caliphate to the Quraysh] and they assented.²⁷ However, ['Alī] was better and the most deserving among [the Quraysh], according to this criterion.

The Prophet's descendents (*al-ʿitra*), to whom, along with the Book, Muslims must hold fast, are restricted to the children of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (upon them peace).²⁸ The Prophet (May God shower him [p. 28] and his family with blessings and greetings of peace) said: "al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn are two Imāms, whether they lead actively or passively,²⁹ and their father is better than them."³⁰ Their descendants are restricted to those who descend from the two of them. The verse

²⁵ The Arabic is "Imamāte," although it is clear that the caliphate is what is meant here, because the author is discussing Sunni and Shi'i scholars.

²⁶ This is probably a reference to 'Alī's valor at the Battle of Uḥud, as the editor of *The Sound Creed* suggests.

²⁷ This is a reference to the Saqīfa Affair, immediately following the death of the Prophet, when the Helpers proposed joint-rule with the Quraysh Muslims, but 'Umar and Abū Bakr insisted that only the Quraysh could serve as caliphs, on the basis of their superior excellence and an alleged statement of the Prophet. Zaydīs have long argued that the criterion of superiority or excellence (*faḍl*) for identifying the legitimate caliphate should have favored 'Alī over Abū Bakr and 'Umar, who served as the first two caliphs from 632-644 CE.

²⁸ Imam 'Alī remarried after the death of Fāṭima and had other children, who, according to the Zaydīs, are not considered among the privileged Prophet's descendants, or *ʿitra*. Furthermore, the concept of "family of the Prophet" could also include descendents of his cousin, Ibn 'Abbas and other Hashimites.

²⁹ Literally, "whether they stand or sit (*qāmā aw qa'adā*)."

³⁰ The editor was unable to find this *ḥadīth* in any Zaydī or Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections at his disposal.

of inheritance is evidence in favor of them,³¹ as is the verse of loving-kindness,³² and [the verse] of purification, which refers back to them.³³ They are witnesses against humanity, as indicated by His statement (Exalted is He): *the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He has named you Muslims of old time and in this (Scripture), that the Messenger may be a witness against you, and that you may be witnesses [p. 29] against humanity (Q. 22:78)*. There is no disagreement among any [scholars] that the intended [*witnesses* in this verse] are not any of the other descendants of Abraham—among Jews, Christians, and Quraysh—and that this [verse] is specific just to [the descendants of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn]. They are the most deserving of [the Imāmate],³⁴ and most fit for it, because there is no debate that they work righteously toward this end, unlike other groups, in which there is disagreement. Their qualification (*ahliyyatuhum*) for [the Imāmate] is based on a decisive proof, unlike the case for other [claimants to the Imāmate]. No one is deserving of [the Imāmate] who does not bring together all of the necessary qualities for it, among both the [biologically] inherited and acquired qualities.

It is necessary to embrace (*tawalliyu*) the Companions of the Prophet (May God be pleased with them), all of them. There are neither hypocrites nor major sinners (*fussāq*) among them, according to the *ḥadīth*, “They are not among my Companions, when they innovated matters [in religion].”³⁵ [p. 30]

Commanding the right and forbidding the wrong are both obligatory upon every legally responsible person, and acts of disobedience lead to total ruin. Raising one’s voice above the voice of the Prophet is among [the smallest] acts of disobedience, while the largest one is associating partners with God: *If you ascribe a partner to God, your work will fail and you indeed will be among the losers (Q. 39:65)*.

³¹ The editor identifies this as Q. 35:32: *Then We gave the Scripture as inheritance to those whom We elected of Our servants*.

³² A reference to Q. 42:23: *Say (O Muhammad): I ask of you no fee for [the Qur’ān], save loving-kindness among my kin*.

³³ This is a reference to Q. 33:33, which already has been mentioned above.

³⁴ The text is a bit opaque, but I think the author intends for the feminine object pronoun to refer to the Imāmate here and for the remainder of the paragraph, even though the word *imāma* has not been mentioned for some time.

³⁵ The editor identifies this as an allusion to a cluster of *ḥadīth* found in al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* and elsewhere, in which an unspecified group of the Prophet’s contemporaries will be prevented from approaching the Basin (*al-ḥawḍ*) on Resurrection Day because of what they innovated (*aḥdathū*) after the Prophet’s death; see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-riqāq: Bāb fi’l-ḥawḍ* (53).

God wishes for agreement over religious matters, and that [people] hold fast to the firm rope of God and the secure handle, which is God-consciousness (*taqwā*), preventing the soul from inclining toward passions, following the [scriptural] indicators, and abandoning unquestioning adherence to earlier masters (*taqlīd*) in theological matters, unless a clear proof is brought forth.

Friendship toward all believers is obligatory, and animosity toward all iniquitous people is necessary. It is not permissible for a believer to stay³⁶ where God is flagrantly disobeyed until it changes; rather he should emigrate elsewhere: *Whoever emigrates for the cause of God will find* [p. 31] *much refuge and abundance in the earth* (Q. 4:100).

It is not permissible for those who possess a scripture³⁷ to conceal what is in it. A clear proof is not referred back to a school or opinion of (a group of) scholars. Instead, the referral of disagreements back to the sound Sunna and unambiguous [Qur'ānic verses] is obligatory (*farḍ lāzim*) and absolutely required of all who possess intelligence.

May God shower Muḥammad and his family with blessings and greetings of peace. There is no power nor might save by God, the Lofty, the Tremendous. All praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds.

[Conclusion of *The Sound Creed*]

³⁶ Literally, “to close his eyes (*fa-yuṭrif*).”

³⁷ In other words, Jews, Christians, and Muslims.