

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The “Exhortation” of Imam al-Haddad or *al-Ba’iyya*

As the title suggests, the “Exhortation” of Imam al-Haddad is a poem containing advice for the spiritual wayfarer seeking to reach Allah. It is one of a number of similar poems of advice which Imam al-Haddad wrote and is also called *al-Ba’iyya*, as each verse ends with the Arabic letter ba’. Al-Habib Ahmad ibn Zayn al-Habashi, student of Imam al-Haddad and author of a commentary on the poem, described it as being amongst the best, most beneficial and most comprehensive of the Imam’s exhortations.

The Author

Imam al-Habib Abdullah ibn `Alawi al-Haddad “the Pillar of Guidance” was born in Subayr near the city of Tarim in the Hadramawt Valley in the year 1044 Hijri. He went blind when he was still young but Allah blessed him with the light of inner sight. He sought knowledge from an early age from amongst others teachers al-Habib `Umar ibn `Adburrahman al-`Attas and by the time he was about thirty years of age he was widely regarded as being the foremost scholar and spiritual guide of his time, and subsequently as the renewer of the 12th Islamic Century. His *da’wa*, his teachings in the form of poetry and prose, and his invocations spread far and wide during his lifetime and continue to spread to this day. He died in 1132 and was buried in the Zanbal Graveyard in Tarim.

The following is a rough translation of the poem. The emphasis has been placed more on conveying the meaning than on linguistic accuracy:

1. My exhortation to you, o possessor of merit and etiquette,
If you wish to attain high stations
2. And if you wish to surpass others and reach the highest levels
With ease and attain your goal and desire
3. Then have *taqwa* of Allah whose mercy is hoped for,
The One, the Unique, the constant Reliever of difficulties
4. Adhere to His obligations and avoid His prohibitions
And cut through your nights and days with righteous works
5. Bring to your heart a fear which does not part from it,
A fear of its Lord and with it an equal measure of hope
6. And strive to adorn the heart with sincerity

And know that ostentation¹ will lead to your destruction

7. And purify your heart from all vices and do not
Go down the paths of corrupt and dubious people
8. And guard your tongue against wounding any one
Of (Allah's) servants and against tale-bearing and lying
9. Be dignified and humbled (in front of Allah) and be not absorbed
In distractions, joking, merriment and play
10. And free your heart from deceit and envy
And avoid arrogance, O poor soul, and vanity
11. And be content with humility because truly it is the character-trait
Of the righteous so emulate them and you will be saved from the heart's sicknesses
12. And beware! Indeed beware of the ignorant one's saying "I"²
And "You are beneath me in merit and degree"
13. For people have fallen behind and did not seek to attain
Noble character and (instead) were content with saying "my father was so-and-so"
14. Go against your lower self and recognise it as an enemy
Disobey its whims and what it chooses and you will succeed
15. And if it calls you to what it aspires to through its desire
Then clarify to it that hardship will be the outcome
16. Renounce with your heart an abode which has seduced
Many people, who saw it as the ultimate goal
17. They competed over it and gave it their bodies
And hearts – O Allah! What a strange thing!
18. Since it is worthless and does not weigh
In the sight of Allah the wing (of a gnat),³ so foolish is the one who covets it!
19. Take only what you need from this material world and use it
While earnestly striving to reach your Lord and seek His reward
20. Know that the one who buys his earthly life
For the price of an afterlife of everlasting bliss will be deprived

¹ *Riya'*, or showing off in good works

² ie "I am such and such, I am so and so"

³ As in the hadith related by al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah on the authority of Sahl ibn Sa'd that the Messenger of Allah said ﷺ: "If the Dunya was equal in Allah's sight to the wing of a gnat He would not have given a single disbeliever a drink of water from it."

21. If you have more than enough then give to the needy
And your Lord will pour His provision upon you, so answer (His) call
22. And if you are tested with poverty be content and find your sufficiency
With Allah your Lord, hope for His bounty and wait patiently
23. And if you are removed from worldly means then act with certainty
And (act) with knowledge if your state is involvement with these means
24. Recite the Qur'an with a present and fearful heart
Continuously and do not become distracted or allow your mind to wander
25. Because in it are both guidance and knowledge
And light and openings, by which I mean the lifting of veils
26. Constantly remember your Lord and never leave His remembrance
Because truly remembrance is the *Sultan* of righteous works
27. And rise when the heedless are sleeping and strive
And eat moderately and do not neglect correct etiquette
28. Your parents have rights which are (only) fulfilled by
Those who fear Allah, and likewise your relatives
29. And your neighbours and companions - do not forget their rights
And choose only the company of the righteous
30. Interact with people with noble character and do not
Rebuke anyone and do not find fault with them
31. Fulfill their rights, do not demand your rights from them and give them sincere advice⁴
And resolutely call them to fulfill the rights of Allah
32. Beware of the company of evil and foolish people
And the envious and those who cause trouble
33. In all situations be patient⁵ and know that at first
It is bitter but later it becomes sweet like honey
34. O my Lord! You are my utmost desire and my reliance,
You are my hope in this life and the next
35. So forgive and pardon a small servant who has no deeds
That are righteous and has only accumulated sins

⁴ *Nasiha*

⁵ Have *sabr*

36. He is, however, repentant of what he has done
And has come to You acknowledging (his sins), fearing Your wrath.
37. If You forgive him it is from Your grace O Eternally Besought⁶
So be generous to me my Lord and remove my fear!
38. And then send blessings on the Guide Muhammad and his descendants
As long as rain falls from the clouds
39. And as long as the dove coos on its branch
And as long as the branches sway on the dunes.

⁶ *Samad*, the Eternally Besought, the One to whom people turn for the fulfillment of their needs