

THE POEM OF
AL-ILBĪRĪ

On Leading a Purposeful Life

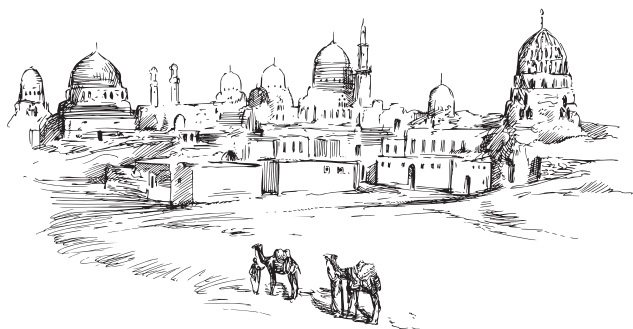
THE POEM OF
AL-ILBĪRĪ

On Leading a Purposeful Life

تَائِيَّةُ
أَبِي إِسْحَاقَ الْإِلْبِيرِيِّ

ARABIC – ENGLISH

Translated by
Moustafa Elqabbany



ض

Fluent Arabic Publications

Fluent Arabic Publications is an independent publisher which focuses on the translation of unique and often overlooked Arabic titles.

Typeset by Mohammad Khalid Hussain.

© Fluent Arabic Publications AH 1441 / 2020 CE.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For permission requests, write to abdulaleem@fluentarabic.net.

First Edition.

Transliteration Table

ء	’		د	d		ط	ṭ		م	m
ا	ā		ذ	ḏ		ظ	ẓ		ن	n
ب	b		ر	r		ع	‘		ه	h
ت	t		ز	z		غ	ġ		و	w/u/ū
ث	ṭ		س	s		ف	f		ي	y/i/ī
ج	j		ش	š		ق	q			
ح	ḥ		ص	ṣ		ك	k			
خ	ḳ		ض	ḏ		ل	l			

- Transliteration is based on Hans Wehr’s. Transliterated phrases do not have mid-sentence capitalisation as there are no capital letters in Arabic. Proper names such as al-Ilbīrī and Abū Bakr, however, are exempted; these are not italicised either.
- *Hamza* (ء) is represented as ’ in the middle and at the end of a word. It is not represented at the beginning of a word. *Alif maqṣūra* (ﺀ) is represented as ā.
- The *tā’ marbūṭa* (ة) is normally not represented, and words ending in it simply have a final -a. It is, however, represented with a *t* when it is the ending of the first noun of an *iḏāfa* and with an *h* when it appears after a long ā.
- *Wāw* and *yā’* are represented as *u* and *i* after *fatha*: ‘*ain* “eye”, *yaum* “day”.
- Definite article: The Arabic definite article (ال) is represented as *al-* except where assimilation occurs: *al-* + *šams* is transliterated *aš-šams*. The *a* in *al-* is omitted after a final *a* (as in *lamma šamla l-qatī*: “to round up the herd”) or changed to *i* after a feminine third person singular perfect verb form (as in *kašafat il-ḥarbu ‘an sāqin* “war flared up”).
- The transliteration table and associated rules were sourced from Wikipedia (CC-BY-SA 3.0, *Hans Wehr transliteration*) and the Hans Wehr dictionary with slight modifications.

Foreword

It is fascinating how some works remain unaffected by the passage of time. They do not lose their charm, beauty and most importantly, relevance. The *tāʾīya* of al-Ilbīrī is one such work. It contains advice for the student of knowledge that is of the highest value. A reminder that should be written in letters of gold.

Fluent Arabic Publications is delighted to present this work in English, along with the original Arabic text which is intended to provide Arabic learners deeper insight into the poem. Short explanations are also provided in the footnotes where required.

Irrespective of what stage of life you are in, this is a poem worth reading, understanding, and reflecting on. I hope this book will provide you with gems that will remain for a lifetime.

Abdul Aleem

Founder, Fluent Arabic Publications

Kerala, India

10 Jumādā l-ūlā 1441 / 4 January 2020

Translator's Introduction

Abū Ishāq al-Ilbīrī al-Tujībī (d. AH 459 / 1067 CE) was a poet and scholar of Islam from Granada, Andalusia. His lineage traces back to the Yemeni tribe of Banī Tujīb.

While most of his poetry is didactic—concerning itself with aphorisms related to asceticism and seeking sacred knowledge—al-Ilbīrī was not blind to the political problems of Andalusia at the time. He wrote a poem addressed to the Sanhaja Berbers of Granada that led to the execution of the city's Jewish vizier after the poet's exile to Elviria (*Ilbīra*), a Mediterranean coastal town whose name he bears.

Among his most famous poems is his *tā'īya* (a poem rhyming with the Arabic letter *tā'* [ت]) in which he addresses a young man by the name of Abū Bakr on the paltriness of this world and the lofty rank of sacred knowledge in this world and the next. Al-Ilbīrī's poem is not a haughty, judgmental work: in it, he admits that he is worse off than Abū Bakr and more in need of counsel, but he reminds Abū Bakr that he is still young and unstained by a life of heedlessness and sin.

May Allāh accept the author's work and this translation and make them a means to draw close unto Him. Amen.

Moustafa Mounir Elqabbany

Amman, Jordan

26 Dū l-ḥijja 1440 / 27 August 2019

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

1 نَقُتْ فُؤَادَكَ الْيَوْمَ فَتًا وَتَنْجِتْ جِسْمَكَ السَّاعَاتُ نَحْتًا

The passing of days¹ crushes your heart into crumbs,
And hours carve away at your body.

2 وَتَدْعُوكَ الْمُنُونُ دُعَاءَ صِدْقٍ أَلَا يَا صَاحِبَ أَنْتَ أُرِيدُ أَنْتَا

Death calls out to you in earnest,
“O friend! It is you I desire! You!”

3 أَرَأَاكَ تُحِبُّ عَرَسًا ذَاتَ عَدْرِ أَبَتَّ طَلَّاقَهَا الْأَكْيَاسُ بَتَا

I see that you care for a treacherous bride
Whom astute men have divorced irrevocably.

4 تَتَأَمُّ الدَّهْرَ وَيَحَلْكَ فِي غَطِيطٍ بِهَا حَتَّى إِذَا مِتَّ انْتَبَهْتَا

Woe unto you! You sleep through life snoring,
[Thinking] of her until such time as you die and awaken!

5 فَكَمْ ذَا أَنْتَ مَخْدُوعٌ وَحَتَّى مَتَى لَا تَرْتَعَوِي عَنْهَا وَحَتَّى

O how deceived you are! Until when
Will you not hold back from her? Until [when]?!

6 (أَبَا بَكْرٍ) دَعَوْتُكَ لَوْ أَجَبْتَا إِلَى مَا فِيهِ حِطُّكَ لَوْ عَقَلْتَا

Abū Bakr!² I've invited you—if only you'd take heed—
To your own best interest if only you understood—

1 Literally, “Days crush your heart...”

2 There are two opinions regarding Abū Bakr. He is either the author's son, or, more likely, he is a young man who mocked the author in a poem. The genre of Arabic poetry used to mock others is known as *hijā'* (هجاء).

7 إِلَىٰ عِلْمٍ تَكُونُ بِهِ إِمَامًا مُطَاعًا إِن نَهَيْتَ وَإِن أَمَرْتَ

To knowledge that would make you an *imām*,
Obeyed whenever you command or prohibit—

8 وَيَجْلُو مَا بَعَيْنِكَ مِنْ غَشَاهَا وَيَهْدِيكَ السَّبِيلَ إِذَا ضَلَلْتَ

That clears up the film over your eyes
And shows you the way when you're lost—

9 وَتَحْمِلُ مِنْهُ فِي نَادِيكَ تَاجًا وَيَكْسُوكَ الْجَمَالَ إِذَا اغْتَرَبْتَ

By virtue of which you will bear a crown in your own circle,
That clothes you in beauty when you're a stranger.

10 يَنَالُكَ نَفْعُهُ مَا دُمْتَ حَيًّا وَيَبْقَى ذُخْرُهُ لَكَ إِن ذَهَبْتَ

You will reap its benefits for as long as you are alive,
And its stores will remain after you've departed.

11 هُوَ الْعَضْبُ الْمُهَنْدُ لَيْسَ يَنْبُو تُصِيبُ بِهِ مَقَاتِلَ مَنْ أَرَدْتَ

It is a sharp sword of Indian steel³ that doesn't miss
And strikes the Achilles' heels⁴ of those you desire—

12 وَكَتْرٌ لَا تَخَافُ عَلَيْهِ لِصًّا خَفِيفُ الْحَمْلِ يُوجَدُ حَيْثُ كُنْتَا

It is a treasure for which you fear no thieves,
A light burden that is found wherever you may be.

3 Swords made of Indian steel were coveted for their strength.

4 The Arabic word *maqātil* (مَقَاتِل) means the fatal spots which, when struck, kill the victim.

13 يَزِيدُ بِكَثْرَةِ الْإِنْفَاقِ مِنْهُ وَيَنْقُصُ إِنْ بِهِ كَفًا شَدَدَتْ

It increases the more you spend of it
And decreases if you hold on to it [stingily].

14 فَلَوْ قَدْ ذُوقْتَ مِنْ حَلْوَاهُ طَعْمًا لَا تَرْتِكَ التَّعَلَّمَ وَاجْتَهَدْتَ

Had you just tasted of its sweetness,
You would have preferred learning and applied yourself,

15 وَلَمْ يَشْغَلْكَ عَنْهُ هَوَى مُطَاعٌ وَلَا دُنْيَا بِزُخْرُفِهَا فِتْنَتَا

And your heeded obsession wouldn't have preoccupied you,
Nor would you have been tempted by this world's ornaments,

16 وَلَا الْهَالِكُ عَنْهُ أَنْبِقُ رَوْضٍ وَلَا خَدْرٌ بِرَبْرَبِهِ كَلِمَتَا

Nor would elegant meadows have distracted you from it,
Nor would you have fallen for a herd of antelope⁵ in a virgin's
quarters.

17 فَقُوْتُ الرُّوحِ أَرْوَاحِ الْمَعَانِي وَلَيْسَ بِأَنْ طَعِمْتَ وَأَنْ شَرِبْتَ

For the soul's nourishment is the souls of meanings,
And not that you've eaten and drunk.

18 فَوَاطِبُهُ وَخُدُّ بِالْجِدِّ فِيهِ فَإِنْ أَعْطَاكَ اللَّهُ انْتَفَعْتَ

So persist in it⁶ and pursue it diligently,
And when Allāh grants it to you, you will benefit.

5 Women are often compared to antelopes. The Arabic term for antelope is *baqaru l-wahš* (بَقَرُ الْوَحْشِ) which is often mistranslated as “wild cows.”

6 i.e. in seeking knowledge.

19 وَإِنْ أُوتِيَتْ فِيهِ طَوِيلَ بَاعٍ وَقَالَ النَّاسُ إِنَّكَ قَدْ عَلِمْتَ

If you are given a generous portion of it,
And people say, "You have certainly acquired knowledge,"

20 فَلَا تَأْمَسْ سُؤَالَ اللَّهِ عَنْهُ بِتَوْبِيخٍ عَلِمْتَ فَهَلْ عَمِلْتَ

Then do not feel safe from Allāh asking you about it
Rebukingly, "You knew, but did you act?"

21 فَرَأْسُ الْعِلْمِ تَقْوَى اللَّهِ حَقًّا وَلَيْسَ بِأَنْ يُقَالَ لَقَدْ رَأَسْتَ

For the peak of knowledge is truly fear of Allāh,
And not that it be said, "You've certainly gained standing."

22 وَصَافِي تَوْبِكَ الْإِحْسَانَ لِكْرٍ تَرَى تَوْبَ الْإِسَاءَةِ قَدْ لَبَسْتَ

The fullest of your attire is the performance of good deeds, not
that
You be seen having worn the raiment of misdeeds.

23 إِذَا مَا لَمْ يُفِدْكَ الْعِلْمُ خَيْرًا فَخَيْرٌ مِنْهُ أَنْ لَوْ قَدْ جَهَلْتَ

If knowledge doesn't provide you with goodness,
It would have been better had you not known.

24 وَإِنَّ الْقَالَكَ فَهَمُّكَ فِي مَهَاوٍ فَلَيْتَكَ لَيْتَكَ مَا عَلِمْتَ

If your understanding casts you into abysses,
Would it be, O would it be, that you hadn't understood.

25 سَتَجِي مِنْ ثَمَارِ الْعَجْزِ جَهْلًا وَتَصْعُرُ فِي الْعُيُونِ إِذَا كَبُرْتَ

You will reap ignorance from the fruits of failure
And shrink in [people's] eyes when you grow old,

26 وَتُفْقِدُ إِنْ جَهَلْتَ وَأَنْتَ بَاقٍ وَتُوجَدُ إِنْ عَلِمْتَ وَقَدْ فُقِدْتَ

And you'll be absent—if ignorant—though you remain,
And you'll be present—if knowledgeable—though you're
absent.

27 وَتَذَكُرُ قَوْلِي لَكَ بَعْدَ حِينٍ إِذَا حَقَّابَهَا يَوْمًا عَمِلْتَ

You will remember my pronouncement after some time
If you truly apply it one day.

28 وَإِنْ أَهْمَلْتَهَا وَنَبَذْتَ نَصْحًا وَمِلْتَ إِلَى حُطَامٍ قَدْ جَمَعْتَ

If [instead] you neglect it and cast advice aside
And incline towards fragments that you've gathered,

29 لَسَوْفَ تَعَضُّ مِنْ نَدَمٍ عَلَيْهَا وَمَا تُغْنِي النَّدَامَةُ إِنْ نَدِمْتَ

Then you will bite on them regretfully,
Though regret cannot benefit you even if you regret.

30 إِذَا أَبْصَرْتَ صَحْبَكَ فِي سَمَاءٍ قَدِ ارْتَفَعُوا عَلَيْكَ وَقَدْ سَفَلْتَ

When you see your companions in a lofty place,⁷
Having risen above you while you have sunk,

7 Literally, "in a sky."

31 فَرَاغَهَا وَدَعَّ عَنْكَ الْهُوَيْنَىٰ
فَمَا بِالْبُطْءِ تُدْرِكُ مَا طَلَبْتَا

Then examine it⁸ and abandon leisureliness,
For what you seek is not achieved by being slow.

32 وَلَا تَحْفَلْ بِمَالِكَ وَالْهُ عَنْهُ
فَلَيْسَ الْمَالُ إِلَّا مَا عَلِمْتَا

Don't celebrate your wealth; rather, distract yourself from it,
For your wealth is nothing but what you've learned.

33 وَكَيْسَ لِحَاهِلٍ فِي النَّاسِ مُعْنَىٰ
وَلَوْ مُلْكُ الْعِرَاقِ لَهُ تَأْتَىٰ

No person can help a fool,
Even if ruling over Iraq presents itself to him.⁹

34 سَيَنْطِقُ عَنْكَ عَائِمُكَ فِي مَلَأِ
وَيُكْتَبُ عَنْكَ يَوْمًا إِنْ كَتَمْتَا

Your knowledge will speak on your behalf before a group,
And will be recorded against you one day if you conceal it.

35 وَمَا يُعْنِيكَ تَشْيِيدُ الْمَبَانِي
إِذَا بِالْجَهْلِ نَفْسَكَ قَدْ هَدَمْتَا

Erecting buildings will not avail you
If you destroy yourself through ignorance.

8 i.e. your ego; that is, do some soul searching.

9 At the time the poem was written, the Abbasid Caliphate was the world's superpower. Thus, Baghdad was the world's most powerful city. The author is indicating that nothing can help a fool even if ruling over the world's most powerful region presents itself to him subserviently.

36 جَعَلْتَ الْمَالَ فَوْقَ الْعِلْمِ جَهْلًا لَعَمْرُكَ فِي الْقَضِيَّةِ مَا عَدَلْتَ

You've ignorantly put wealth before knowledge.
On your life, you haven't been just in this matter.

37 وَبَيْنَهُمَا بَيِّنٌ الْوَحْيِ بَيِّنٌ سَتَعْلَمُهُ إِذَا ﴿طه﴾ قَرَأْتَ

Even though, according to the text of Revelation, there is a gulf between the two¹⁰
Which you will know when you read Ṭā-Hā.¹¹

38 لَنْ رَفَعَ الْغَنَى لِيَاءَ مَالٍ لَأَنْتَ لِيَاءَ عِلْمِكَ قَدْ رَفَعْتَ

If a rich man raises the banner of wealth,
It is you who has raised the banner of knowledge.

39 وَإِنْ جَلَسَ الْغَنِيُّ عَلَى الْحَشَايَا لَأَنْتَ عَلَى الْكُوَاكِبِ قَدْ جَلَسْتَ

If a rich man sits on cushions,
It is you who has sat on the stars.

40 وَإِنْ رَكِبَ الْجَيَادَ مُسَوَّمَاتٍ لَأَنْتَ مَنَاهِجَ التَّقْوَى رَكِبْتَ

If he rides branded steeds,
It is you who has ridden the paths to piety.

41 وَمَهْمَا افْتَضَّ أَبْكَارَ الْعَوَايِي فَكَمْ بِكُمْ بِكْرٍ مِنَ الْحِكْمِ افْتَضَّصْتَ

However many beautiful virgins he's deflowered,
How many virgin aphorisms have you deflowered?¹²

10 i.e. wealth and knowledge.

11 A reference to Quran (20:14), "...My Lord! Increase me in knowledge."

12 i.e. How many gems of wisdom have you been the first to discover?

42 وَلَيْسَ يَضُرُّكَ الْإِفْتَارُ شَيْئًا إِذَا مَا أَنْتَ رَبِّكَ قَدْ عَرَفْتَ

Poverty cannot harm you in the least
If you have come to know your Lord.

43 فَمَاذَا عِنْدَهُ لَكَ مِنْ جَمِيلٍ إِذَا بِفِئَاءِ طَاعَتِهِ أَنْخَتَا

[If only you knew] what delight is in store for you with Him,
When you reside in the courtyard of His obedience.

44 فَاقْبَلْ بِالْقَبُولِ لِنُصْحِ قَوْلِي فَإِنْ أَعْرَضْتَ عَنْهُ فَقَدْ خَسِرْتَ

So reciprocate my correct advice with acceptance,
For if you avoid it, you will have lost.

45 وَإِنْ رَاعَيْتَهُ قَوْلًا وَفِعْلًا وَتَاجَرْتَ إِلَيْهِ بِهِ رِبْحًا

But if you act upon it in word and deed
And do business with God on its basis, you will profit.

46 فَلَيْسَتْ هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا بِشَيْءٍ تَسْوُوكَ حِقْبَةً وَسُرُوقًا

For this world is nothing—
It abuses you for a long time and pleases you for a time.

47 وَغَايَتُهَا إِذَا فَكَّرْتَ فِيهَا كَفَيْتَكَ أَوْ كَحُلْمِكَ إِنْ حُلِمْتَ

Ultimately, if you think about it,
It is like your afternoon shadow or like a dream you've seen.

48 سَجُنْتَ بِهَا وَأَنْتَ لَهَا مُحِبٌّ فَكَيْفَ تُحِبُّ مَا فِيهِ سُجِنْتَ

You're imprisoned in it, yet you love it,
But how can you love that in which you're imprisoned?

49 وَتُطْعِمُكَ الطَّعَامَ وَعَنْ قَرِيبٍ سَتَطْعَمُ مِنْكَ مَا مِنْهَا طَعِمْتَ

It gives you food, and soon
Whatever you ate while with it, it will now take from you and eat.

50 وَتَعْرَىٰ إِنْ لَبِسْتَ لَهَا ثِيَابًا وَتُكْسَىٰ إِنْ مَلَأْسَهَا خَلَعْتَ

If you dress up for it, you'll be naked.
If you remove its garments, you'll be dressed.

51 وَتَشْهَدُ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ دَفْنٍ خَلٍ كَأَنَّكَ لَا تَرَادُ بِمَا شَهِدْتَ

Every day, you witness the burial of a friend.
It's as though you aren't intended by what you've seen.¹³

52 وَأَمْ تُخَلِّقُ لِتَعْمُرَهَا وَلَكِنْ لَتَعْبُرَهَا فَبَدَّ لِمَا خُلِقْتَ

You weren't created to tend it, but rather
To pass through it, so take seriously what you were created for!

53 وَإِنْ هُدِمَتْ فَرِذْهَا أَنْتَ هَدِمًا وَحَصِّنْ أَمْرَ دِينِكَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتَ

If it's demolished, increase its demolition
And fortify your religion to the best of your ability.

13 i.e. You do not take heed upon seeing your friends buried, as if there is no message in it for you to remind you of your impending death.

54 وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَى مَا فَاتَ مِنْهَا إِذَا مَا أَنْتَ فِي أُخْرَاكَ فُرْتَا

Don't worry about what you've missed of it
As long as you've succeeded in your hereafter.

55 فَلَيْسَ بِنَافِعٍ مَا نَلْتُ فِيهَا مِنْ الْفَائِي إِذَا الْبَاقِي حُرِمْتَا

So whatever you've acquired in it of transient things
Is of no benefit if you are denied what is permanent.

56 وَلَا تَضْحَكْ مَعَ السُّفَهَاءِ لَهَوًا فَإِنَّكَ سَوْفَ تَبْكِي إِنْ ضَحِكْتَا

And don't entertain yourself by laughing with fools,
For you will surely weep if you laugh.

57 وَكَيْفَ لَكَ السُّرُورُ وَأَنْتَ رَهْنٌ وَلَا تَدْرِي أَتَقْدَى أَمْ غُلِّتَا

How can joy be yours when you're a hostage
And don't know if you'll be redeemed or shackled?

58 وَسَلْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ التَّوْفِيقَ فِيهَا وَأَخْلِصْ فِي السُّؤَالِ إِذَا سَأَلْتَا

Ask for success from your Lord in it [all],
And be sincere in asking when you ask.

59 وَتَادِ إِذَا سَجَدْتَ لَهُ اعْتِرَافًا بِمَا نَادَاهُ ذُو النُّونِ بِنُ مَمَّى

Call out to Him in confession when you prostrate
With that which *Dū l-nūn bin mattā*¹⁴ called out.

14 *Dū l-nūn* (ذُو النُّونِ) is the Prophet Yūnus (Jonah) (عليه السلام). In other words, call upon Allāh with the words *لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ* "...There is no God but You. Glory be to You! Lo! I have been a wrong-doer." (Quran, 21:87)

60 وَلَا زِمَ بَابَهُ قَرَعًا عَسَاهُ سَيَفْتَحُ بَابَهُ لَكَ إِنْ قَرَعْتَا

And keep knocking on His door, that perhaps
He might open His door for you if you knock.

61 وَأَكْثِرْ ذِكْرَهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ دَأْبًا لَتُذَكَّرَ فِي السَّمَاءِ إِذَا ذَكَرْتَا

And tirelessly make much mention of Him on earth
That you might be mentioned in Heaven when you make
mention [of Him].

62 وَلَا تَقُلِ الصِّبَا فِيهِ إِمْتِهَالٌ وَفَكَرِّكُمْ صَغِيرٌ قَدْ دَفَنْتَا

Don't say, "Youth provides respite,"
But think of how many children you've buried.

63 وَقُلْ لِي يَا نَصِيحٌ لَأَنْتَ أَوْلَى بِنُصْحِكَ لَوْ بَعَقَلِكَ قَدْ نَظَرْتَا

And tell me,¹⁵ "O you who advises me, you are more in need
"Of your advice if you'd just use your mind to reflect.

64 تُقَطِّعْنِي عَلَى التَّفْرِيطِ لَوْ مَا وَبِالتَّفْرِيطِ دَهْرُكَ قَدْ قَطَّعْتَا

"You rebukingly rip me apart for being neglectful,
"While you've spent your life in neglect.

65 وَفِي صَغَرِي تُخَوِّفُنِي الْمَنَايَا وَمَا تَجْرِي بِبَالِكَ حِينَ شِخْتَا

"You're making me scared of fate in my youth,
"And of what goes through your mind in old age.

15 In verses 63–87, the author is telling Abū Bakr how to respond to his advice and turn it against the author.

66 وَكُنْتَ مَعَ الصَّبَا أَهْدَى سَبِيلًا فَمَا لَكَ بَعْدَ شَيْبِكَ قَدْ نَكثْتَ

“You were better guided in youth;
“Why have you become undone after going grey?”

67 وَهَذَا أَنَا لَمْ أَخْضُ بِحَرِّ الْخَطَايَا كَمَا قَدْ خُضْتَهُ حَتَّى عَرَفْتَا

“And here I am not having plunged into the sea of sins
“As you had plunged in it until you drowned.

68 وَلَمْ أَشْرَبْ حُمِيًّا أَمْ دَفْرٍ وَأَنْتَ شَرِبْتَهَا حَتَّى سَكِرْتَا

“Nor have I drunk of the inebriation of the putrid wench,¹⁶
“While you drank from it until you became intoxicated.

69 وَلَمْ أَحْلُلْ بِوَادٍ فِيهِ ظُلْمٌ وَأَنْتَ حَلَلْتَ فِيهِ وَأَنْهَمَلْتَا

“Nor have I set up in a valley where there is wrongdoing,
“While you set up there and were neglected.

70 وَلَمْ أَنْشَأْ بِعَصْرِ فِيهِ نَفْعٌ وَأَنْتَ نَشَأْتَ فِيهِ وَمَا انْتَفَعْتَا

“Nor did I grow up in an era where there was benefit,
“While you grew up in it but didn’t benefit.

71 وَقَدْ صَاحَبْتَ أَعْلَامًا كِبَارًا وَلَمْ أَرَكَ اقْتَدَيْتَ بِمَنْ صَحِبْتَا

“And you kept the company of major authorities,
“But I don’t see that you’ve emulated those whose company
you kept.

16 An epithet for the world, i.e. I have not been stupefied and intoxicated by the world’s pleasures.

72 وَنَادَاكَ الْكِتَابُ فَلَمْ تُجِبْهُ
وَنَبَّهَكَ الْمَشَيْبُ فَمَا انْتَبَهْتَا

“The Book¹⁷ called out to you, but you didn’t respond,
“And grey hair alerted you, but you took no heed.

73 وَيَقْبُحُ بِالْفَتَى فِعْلُ التَّصَايِبِ
وَأَقْبَحُ مِنْهُ شَيْخٌ قَدْ تَقَيَّ

“It is repulsive when a young man behaves like a boy,
“And even more repulsive when an old man pretends he’s
young.

74 وَأَنْتَ أَحَقُّ بِالتَّفْنِيدِ مِنِّي
وَلَوْ سَكَتَ الْمُسِيءُ لَمَا نَطَقْتَا

“You are worthier of practicing [your advice] than I,
“But if wrongdoers were silent, you wouldn’t have spoken.

75 وَنَفْسَكَ ذَمَّرَ لَا تَذُمَّمُ سِوَاهَا
بِعَيْبِ فَهَيْبِ أَجْدَرُ مَنْ ذَمَّمْتَا

“So criticize yourself—and don’t criticize anything else
“Due to a fault—for it is the most fitting thing you’ve criticized.

76 فَلَوْ بَكَتِ الدِّمَا عَيْنَاكَ خَوْفًا
لِدَنْبِكَ لَمْ أَقُلْ لَكَ قَدْ أَمِنْتَا

“For if your eyes cried blood out of fear
“Of your sins, I wouldn’t tell you that you’re now safe.

77 وَمَنْ لَكَ بِالْأَمَانِ وَأَنْتَ عَبْدٌ
أُمِرْتَ فَمَا انْتَمَرْتَ وَلَا أَطَعْتَا

“And who can offer you security when you’re a slave
“Who’s been commanded but hasn’t executed or obeyed?

17 i.e. the Quran.

78 تَقَلَّتْ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ وَلَسْتَ تَخْشَى لَجْهَلِكَ أَنْ تَخْفَ إِذَا وُزِنْتَ

“Sins weigh you down, but you don’t fear—
“Due to your ignorance—that you’ll come out light when weighed.

79 وَتَشْفِقُ لِلْمُصْرِ عَلَى الْمَعَاصِي وَتَرْحَمُهُ وَنَفْسِكَ مَا رَجِمْتَ

“You feel sorry for determined sinners,
“And show them mercy while you show yourself no mercy.

80 رَجَعْتَ الْقَهْقَرَى وَخَطَبْتَ عَشَا لَعَمْرُكَ لَوْ وَصَلْتَ لَمَا رَجَعْتَ

“You’ve returned backwards and blundered about.
“On your life, had you arrived, you wouldn’t have returned.

81 وَلَوْ وَايَيْتَ رَبِّكَ دُونَ ذَنْبٍ وَنَاقَشَكَ الْحِسَابَ إِذَا هَلَكْتَ

“Even if you appear sinless before your Lord,
“But He interrogates you while holding you accountable, you’ll have perished.

82 وَلَمْ يَظْلِمَكَ فِي عَمَلٍ وَلَكِنْ عَسِيرٌ أَنْ تَقُومَ بِمَا حَمَلْتَ

“He did not oppress you regarding [your] actions, but
“It is difficult to live up to what you have borne.

83 وَأَبْصَرْتَ الْمَنَازِلَ فِيهِ شَيْءٌ وَأَلَوْ قَدْ جِئْتَ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ فَرْدًا

“If you arrive on the Day of Assembly alone
“And therein witness the varying stations,

84 لَأَعْظَمْتَ النَّدَامَةَ فِيهِ لَهْفًا عَلَى مَا فِي حَيَاتِكَ قَدْ أَضَعْتَ

“You’ll certainly be filled with remorse due to grief
“Over the opportunities you wasted in your life.

85 تَفِرُّ مِنَ الْهَجِيرِ وَتَتَّقِيهِ فَهَلَا مِنْ جَهَنَّمَ قَدْ فَرَرْتَ

“You flee from the midday heat of summer and protect yourself
from it.
“Won’t you then flee from Hell?

86 وَلَسْتَ تُطِيقُ أَهْوَنَهَا عَذَابًا وَلَوْ كُنْتَ الْحَدِيدَ بِهَا لَذُبْتَ

“You cannot bear the least of its torment.
“Were you iron in it, you would have melted.

87 وَلَا تُكْذِبُ فَإِنَّ الْأَمْرَ جِدٌّ وَلَيْسَ كَمَا حَسِبْتَ وَلَا ظَنَنْتَا

“And don’t deny it, for the matter is truly serious,
“And it’s not as you’ve calculated or presumed.”

88 (أَبَا بَكْرٍ) كَشَفْتَ أَقْلَ عَيْبِي وَأَكْثَرَهُ وَمُعْظَمَهُ سَتَرْتَا

Abū Bakr, you’ve exposed the least of my faults,
And you’ve concealed the majority and bulk of them.

89 فَقُلْ مَا شِئْتَ فِيَّ مِنَ الْمَحَازِي وَضَاعِفْهَا فَإِنَّكَ قَدْ صَدَقْتَ

So say whatever you want about me in terms of infamies,
And multiply them, for truly, you will have spoken truthfully.

90 وَمَهْمَا عِبْتَنِي فَلِغَرَطِ عِلْمِي بِبَاطِنَتِي كَأَنَّكَ قَدَّمَدَحْتَ

Whatever fault you find in me, then due to my deep
knowledge
Of my internal state, it's as though you've praised [me].

91 فَلَا تَرْضَ الْمَعَايِبَ فَهِيَ عَارٌ عَظِيمٌ يُورِثُ الْإِنْسَانَ مَقْتًا

Do not be pleased with faults, for they are a great
Shame that bring a person abomination.

92 وَتَهْوِي بِالْوَجِيهِ مِنَ الثَّرِيَّا وَتُبَدِّلُهُ مَكَانَ الْفَوْقِ تَحْتَ

They bring down a man of distinction from the Pleiades¹⁸
And replace his lofty place with lowliness—

93 كَمَا الطَّاعَاتُ تُبَدِّلُكَ الدَّرَارِي وَتَجْعَلُكَ الْقَرِيبَ وَإِنْ بَعُدْتَ

Just as good deeds give you bright stars in exchange
And cause you to be close even though you are far,

94 وَتَنْشُرُ عَنْكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا جَمِيلًا فَتَلْقَى الْبَرِّ فِيهَا حَيْثُ كُنْتَ

And diffuse beauty about you in this world
Such that you find goodness in it wherever you are.

95 وَتَمْشِي فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا كَرِيمًا وَتَجْنِي الْحَمْدَ مِمَّا قَدَّغَرَسْتَ

You will walk in its tracts honorably,
And reap praise from that which you've planted.

18 The Pleiades is an open star cluster in the constellation of Taurus, known as *turayyā* in Arabic.

96 وَأَنْتَ الْآنَ لَمْ تُعْرَفْ بِعَيْبٍ وَلَا ذَنْسٌ تَوْبِكَ مُدْنَشَاتَا

And at present, you are not known to have any faults,
Nor have you putrefied your garment since you've come into
existence.

97 وَلَا سَابَقْتِ فِي مَيْدَانِ زُورٍ وَلَا أَوْضَعْتَ فِيهِ وَلَا خَبَبْتَا

Nor have you raced in a track of falsehood
Whether quickly or merely trotting.

98 فَإِنَّ لَمْ تَتَأَنَّ عَنْهُ نَشِبْتَ فِيهِ وَمَنْ لَكَ بِالْحُلَاصِ إِذَا نَشِبْتَ

If you don't distance yourself from it, you'll get stuck in it,
And who can liberate you once you've gotten stuck?

99 وَدَلَّسَ مَا تَطَهَّرَ مِنْكَ حَتَّىٰ كَأَنَّكَ قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ مَا طَهَّرْتَ

And it will soil whatever of you has been cleaned until
It will be as though you've never been pure previously.

100 وَصِرْتَ أَسِيرَ ذَنْبِكَ فِي وَثَاقٍ وَكَيْفَ لَكَ الْفَكَارُ وَقَدْ أُسِرْتَ

And you'll have become the prisoner of your guilt in shackles,
And how can you be released when you've been imprisoned?

101 وَخَفَ أَجْنََاءَ جِنْسِكَ وَاحْشَرْ مِنْهُمْ كَمَا تَخْشَى الضَّرَاعِمَ وَالسَّبَبْتَىٰ

Fear your peers and dread them
Just as you dread lions and leopards.

102 وَخَالِطُهُمْ وَزَايِلُهُمْ حِدَارًا وَكُنْ كَالسَّامِرِيِّ إِذَا لِمَسْتَا

Associate with them and part ways out of cautiousness,
And when touched, be like as-Sāmīrī.¹⁹

103 وَإِنْ جَهَلُوا عَلَيْكَ فَقُلْ سَلَامًا لَعَلَّكَ سَوْفَ تَسْلَمُ إِنْ فَعَلْتَا

If they act foolishly toward you, say [words of] peace,
That perhaps you might be safe and sound if you do.

104 وَمَنْ لَكَ بِالسَّلَامَةِ فِي زَمَانٍ يَتَأَلَّ الْعُصْمَ إِلَّا إِنْ عَصِمْتَا

And who can guarantee you safety in any era,
Preserving you unless you seek preservation?

105 وَلَا تَلْبَثْ بِحَيٍّ فِيهِ صَيِّمٌ يُمِيتُ الْقَلْبَ إِلَّا إِنْ كُبِلْتَا

Do not stay in an area where there is injustice
Which kills the heart, unless you've been chained [in it].

106 وَغَرِّبْ فَالْغَرِيبُ لَهُ نَفَاقٌ وَشَرِّقْ إِنْ بَرِيقَكَ قَدْ شَرِقْتَا

Go west, for strangers are in demand!
Go east if your splendour rises there!²⁰

19 A reference to Quran (20:97), where as-Sāmīrī is ordered to say “Do not touch me.” Some translators have rendered *as-Sāmīrī* as “The Samaritan,” but it’s not clear if such a translation is correct.

20 The Arabic expression *gārib wa šarriq* (غَرِّبْ وَشَرِّقْ), literally “go west and east,” means “travel the world.” However, the author is also making a couple of puns, as the word *gārib* (west) is related to *gharīb* (stranger) and the word *šarq* (east) is related to *šurūq* (sunrise).

107 فَلَيْسَ الزُّهْدُ فِي الدُّنْيَا خُمُولًا لَأَنْتَ بِهَا الْأَمِيرُ إِذَا زَهَدْتَ

Renouncing the world is not lassitude.
You're most certainly its commander when you renounce it.

108 وَلَوْ فَوْقَ الْأَمِيرِ تَكُونُ فِيهَا سُمُوًّا وَافْتِحَارًا كُنْتَ أَنْتَا

If there was anyone in it above the commander
In eminence and pride, it would be you.

109 وَإِنْ فَرَّقْتَهَا وَخَرَجْتَ مِنْهَا إِلَى دَارِ السَّلَامِ فَقَدْ سَلِمْتَ

If you depart from it and leave it
For the Abode of Peace, then you'll have found safety.

110 وَإِنْ كَرَّمْتَهَا وَنَظَرْتَ مِنْهَا بِإِجْلَالٍ فَتَفَسَّكَ قَدْ أَهَنْتَا

But if you honour it and look at it
Reverently, you will have debased yourself.

111 جَمَعْتُ لَكَ النَّصَائِحَ فَاِمْتَثِلْهَا حَيَاتِكَ فَهِيَ أَفْضَلُ مَا امْتَثَلْتَ

I've gathered up words of advice, so adhere to them
Throughout your life—they're the best things to take as a
model!

112 وَطَوَّلْتُ الْعِتَابَ وَزِدْتُ فِيهِ لِأَنَّكَ فِي الْبَطَالَةِ قَدْ أَطَلْتَ

I've rebuked you at length and have overdone it
Because you've been idle for too long.

113 فَلَا تَأْخُذْ بِتَفْصِيرِي وَسَهْوِي وَخُذْ بِوَصِيَّتِي لَكَ إِن رَشِدْتَ

So don't take hold of my shortcomings and forgetfulness,
But take hold of my counsel to you if you are well guided.

114 وَقَدْ أَرَدْتُهَا تِسْعًا حَسَانًا وَكَانَتْ قَبْلَ ذَا مِائَةٍ وَسِتًّا

I've followed it up with nine beautiful [verses],
As it was previously 106 [verses].

115 وَصَلَّى عَلَى تَمَامِ الرُّسُلِ رَبِّي وَعَتَرْتَهُ الْكَرِيمَةَ مَا ذَكَرْتَ

Whelm blessings upon the Perfection of Messengers, my Lord
And upon his noble family as long as You make mention.