Hayy ibn Yaqzan

by

Ibn Tufayl

(d. 1185)

Translated by George N. Atiyeh

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Hayy the Son of Yaqzan

(Summary of the Tale)

After [t]his introduction, Ibn Tufayl proceeds to narrate the experiences of Hayy the son of Yaqzan. Starting with his birth, he offers the reader a choice between two alternative accounts. According to the first, Hayy would have been born on a desert island south of the equator, not from a father and a mother, but from clay in fermentation. The author expounds the importance of the island's perfect geographic position and temperature climate in order to indicate the possibility of spontaneous human generation without the need for mother and father. According to the second story, Hayy would be the illegitimate son of a princess and daughter of the tyrant of a large inhabited island next to the desert island. In order to save him from certain death if she were discovered, she puts him in a box and entrusts him to the waves. Overnight the tides toss it on the desert island. The author then gives a detailed description of the successive phases in the spontaneous generation of the human embryo, following the account of those who hold the first version. First the clay ferments, then sticky and aerated bubbles appear, a heart is formed from the bubbles, and finally a soul descends from heaven and enters the heart. There follows a comparison between the soul and the continually emanating light of the sun. The soul sheds its light on the human body, whereas the sun sheds its light on the different classes of substance that constitute this world. The two stories coincide from here on.

Then the author begins his description of Hayy's self-education. A gazelle who had lost her doe hastens to the sound of a crying baby. She adopts, feeds, and raises him until he is over seven years old. As a boy, endowed with keen intelligence, grows up, he begins to observe nature and the animal world around him. To provide for his needs, he learns how to dress himself, how to shelter himself, and also how to domesticate animals. One day, however, the gazelle dies. Frightened, but wanting to save her, he reasons that the gazelle's inertness must be due to an invisible impediment. He decides to open her up and look for the seat of the impediment. He finds it in the left ventricle of the heart. He discovers that the obstacle is nothing but the permanent departure of a vital principle located in the ventricle. And that leads him to think of the body as a mere instrument of a life-sustaining principle, without which the body is nothing. After burying his "mother", he wonders what that principle is, what unites it to the body, and where it goes. For a time he roams around the island until one day he sees a fire break out in a bush. Taking a firebrand to the cave in which he now lives, he keeps it alive night and day. He studies the properties of the flame and observes that it tends to go upward and to radiate warmth. This convinces him that it belongs by nature to the celestial bodies and that it may somehow be related to the life-sustaining principle. In order to find out whether that principle possesses things like fire, light, and heat, he opens the heart of a living animal. In the left ventricle, which he had found empty in the heart of the gazelle, he senses with his finger a whitish vapor of such warmth that his finger is almost burned. The immediate death of the animal convinces him that the hot vapor is the principle of motion in all living beings, and that its absence spells death. Devoured with curiosity, he now wants to know how this vapor holds together and how it imparts life to all the bodily organs. Hayy dissects live and dead animals until his scientific knowledge equals that of the greatest naturalists. He recognizes that what gives unity to the body, in spite of the multiplicity of its parts and the variety of its sensations and movements, is the animal spirit radiating from a central abode and using the bodily organs as instruments to perform specific functions.

When Hayy reaches his twenty-first birthday, he has already learned how to stew meat, dress, use a knife made from the spines of fish, build himself a refuge, and domesticate animals. But then his mind begins to move from the consideration of the physical order of things to the metaphysical. He starts with the world of generation and corruption. After examining all kinds of objects such as animals, plants, and minerals, he notices that they possess a great variety of attributes and perform a number of varied functions; moreover, their movements are either concordant or discordant. Looking at them carefully he notices that they coincide in
certain attributes but differ in others. They form a unity if one looks at them from the angle of their congruencies, and form a multiplicity of its parts. Also, all classes of animals coincide in sensation, in the need for food, and in voluntary motion, all of which are functions of the animal spirit. This must be, he thinks, one in essence in spite of the small differences that exist between the species. He then mentally reduces the animal and vegetable kingdoms to their smallest units; and in the inanimate kingdom he observes a tighter unity in all corporeal bodies. From the attributes common to corporeal bodies, he infers the general notion of a body as a three-dimensional extension. He begins then to look for that quality which makes a body, that is, the essence of a body. He had observed that bodies are either light or heavy. Nonetheless, these two attributes, lightness and heaviness, do not belong to the body as body, they are added to corporeality, which is common to all bodies. This is how Hayy arrives at the notion of form and thus comes nearer to the spiritual world. He comes to realize that a body, aside from being an extension, is also a form, and that a substance is made up of matter, extension, and form. He discovers along with this duality in substance the notion of a first matter that is apt to receive all forms through change. Now, if bodies change, that is, if the same matter receives different forms, this implies a giver of forms. He looks for a giver of forms among the bodies that surround him, but he realizes that they are all produced, which implies the existence of a producer.

When Hayy reaches his twenty-eighth year, he looks into the sky and among the stars, but comes to the conclusion that the sky and what is in it are all corporeal since they all have length, width, and depth. He proves to himself that an infinite body is impossible. He later demonstrates to himself that the celestial body is finite, and tries to find out what form the sky could have. He arrives at the conclusion that it is spherical in shape, but composed of a series of concentric spheres, the outermost of which causes the movement of the rest. He also infers that the world is a huge animal. Asking himself whether the world is eternal or produced in time, he finds that there are two plausible answers to this question, which he leaves unanswered. But in each case he is led to the conclusion that there exists a necessary being who is the creator of all other being and who is exempt from all corporeal qualities and inaccessible to the senses or the imagination. He maintains the world and is superior to it in the order of His being as well as by His eternity. Hayy then determines the degree of His power on all created things, also His eternity and omnipotency. He finds Him, furthermore, endowed with complete perfection and exempt from all imperfection.

When Hayy reaches his thirty-fifth year, he is completely absorbed in thinking about this producer. Sure of the existence of a Perfect Being, Hayy wants to find out how he came to know Him. He realizes that he could not have known Him through the senses. These, being divisible, are not capable of knowing what is indivisible, spiritual, and not subject to corruption. He must have come to know Him through something to which corporeality cannot be attributed, and that must be the very essence of his own being, that is, his soul. This, consequently, is indivisible, spiritual, and not subject to corruption. After he reaches the knowledge that his soul is not subject to corruption, he wants to know what happens to it after it departs from the body. Examining all the faculties of perception, he finds out that they perceive sometimes in actuality and at other times in potentiality. Whenever the perception is in a state of potentiality, it desires to pass into actuality, this being a state more perfect than potentiality. In fact, the more perfect a being is, the greater is the craving for actuality and the sadness at being deprived of it. He thus comes to know that the Necessary Being is perfect and exempt from all privation, and that He is known by something whose nature is unlike the corporeal bodies. This leads him to see that the perfection of the soul consists in the constant use of reason in this life. If, on the other hand, one does not use reason, his soul becomes a nothingness after death. Also, if he has known the Necessary Being, but turned away from Him in order to follow his passions, he will be deprived of the intuitive vision and will suffer infinitely, whereas if one turns wholly toward God and dies while enjoying the intuitive vision, he will enjoy eternal bliss. These considerations lead Hayy to seek divine ecstasy by concentrating his thoughts on the Necessary Being. However, the senses, sensible images, plus the physical needs of the body, would obstruct him. He is afraid death would overtake him while he is still being distracted from the Necessary Being. Hoping
to find a remedy for his plight, he examines the actions and goals of all animals to find out whether they seek
after God so that he could learn from them how to save himself. To his dismay, he discovers that they do not
seek after God. He next examines the celestial bodies and finds out that they possess an intelligent substance,
like his, and that they eternally behold the Necessary Being. Among all the animals, he thinks of himself as the
only one who could know the Necessary Being. The reason lies in his possession of a perfectly balanced
substance that abides in the heart and presents unmistakable similarities to the celestial bodies. Moreover, he
realizes that he resembles, on the one hand, the Necessary Being through that noble part of himself— the
immaterial intelligent substance, his soul— and, on the other, the animals through that vile part of himself that is
his body. From this he concludes that his action should be carried out on three levels: (1) the actions emulating
those of the animals, (2) those emulating the celestial bodies, and (3) those emulating the Necessary Being.>

(Hayy's Three Emulations)

He was obliged to undertake the first emulation by virtue of having a murky body with separable members,
different faculties, and a variety of passions. He was obliged to undertake the second emulation by virtue of his
animal spirit, which has its seat in the heart and which is a principle for the whole body and the faculties
existing in it. He was obliged to undertake the third emulation by virtue of his being what he is, that is, by virtue
of being the essence through which he came to know the Necessary Being. He had come to know before that his
happiness and his triumph over misery consisted in a continuous intuitive vision of this Necessary Being and not
parting from it for so much as the twinkling of an eye. Then he considered the means by which this continuity
might be secured, and his considerations led him to conclude the necessary of continuous practice in the three
levels of emulation. The first emulation, he realized, could not contribute to his acquiring any portion of this
vision, but on the contrary it was a deterrent and a hindrance to it because it concerned sensible things, and all
sensible things are curtains that interfere with that vision. The reason for practicing such an emulation,
therefore, was to preserve the animal spirit that makes possible the second emulation, namely, emulating the
celestial bodies. Sheer necessity demands that one take this road, although it is not exempt from the harm
indicated. Through the second emulation, he realized, he might obtain a great portion of this continuous vision.
However, it is an adulterated vision since whosoever beholds after this manner of vision, remains, while
experiencing the vision, conscious of his own essence and turns toward it, as will be shown afterwards. Finally,
through the third emulation one might obtain pure vision and absolute absorption, without being diverted from it
in any direction except in the direction of the Necessary Being. The very essence of the one who experiences
this vision disappears from his consciousness, it melts and fades away, and so do all the other essences,
irrespective of their number, except the essence of the One, the True, the Necessary Being (may His name be
exalted).

Now it became clear to him that his ultimate end consists in the third emulation, that this is not obtained
without long exercise and practice in the second, and that the continuation of the second depends on his first
emulation. And he also realized that the first emulation, although necessary, is as such a hindrance and a help
only accidentally. Consequently, he forced himself to reduce the first emulation to bare necessity, that is, the
strictly required amount below which the animal spirit would not subsist. He found two things necessary for the
subsistence of the animal spirit. One, what maintains it internally by restoring what is wasted of it, namely food.
The other, what preserves it externally and guards it against all kinds of possible damage coming from cold,
heat, rain, sunburn, harmful animals, and the like. And he perceived that if he were to take his necessities from
these elements haphazardly, he would fall into excess and take more than the strictly required amount. He might
thus injure himself unawares. Whereupon he thought it prudent to set for himself certain limits that he would
not pass and measures that he would not exceed; and it became clear to him that this prescription should apply
to the kind, content, and quantity of his nourishment as well as its frequency.
Examining first the types of his food, he discovered that they are three in number: (1) Either plants that have not yet finished, or reached the limit of, their growth— that is, the different kinds of green vegetables proper for nourishment. (2) Fruit of the plants that have reached their full growth and developed seeds for the reproduction of the same species— that is, the different kinds of fruit, fresh or dry. (3) Or some kind of edible animal, either terrestrial or marine. Hayy had ascertained that all these types of food are made by the Necessary Being; and it had become evident to him that his happiness consists in the nearness to, and the desire to imitate Him. Doubtless, he thought, to eat these different foods must prevent them from reaching their perfection and obstruct the realization of the end for which they are destined. This would be like an objection against the work of the Maker, an objection that is contrary to what he was seeking— the nearness to, and emulation of, Him. He perceived that the correct thing for him to do, if possible, would be to abstain from eating altogether. But this was impossible. He found that by completely abstaining from eating, his body tended to dissolve, a thing that constituted a much greater objection against his Maker than the former; since he is nobler (by nature) than the other things whose very destruction is the cause of his preservation. He chose the lesser of the two evils and indulged in the milder of the two objections. Now, it seemed proper to him that, whenever some of these classes of food are not available, he should partake of whatever can be obtained, and in quantities that he will decide about later. But if all the classes of food are available, then he should make sure to choose those foods whose consumption will not constitute a major objection against the work of the Maker, such as the flesh of fully ripe fruit whose seeds have so matured as to produce others of the same class. But always with the condition that he preserve the seeds by not eating them or spoiling them or throwing them in places not fit for plants to grow in, such as rocks, briny soil, and the like. And whenever such fruit with nourishing flesh— such as apples, plums, and the like— are not accessible, he should then eat of those fruits that had nothing edible in them but their seeds— such as walnuts and chestnuts or the vegetables that had not yet reached the limit of their perfect growth— but on condition in both cases that he should prefer the vegetables that are more abundant and endowed with greater force of reproduction. He was never to extract any of their roots or destroy their seeds. And if none of these (edible plants) was to be had, then he could take some animals or their eggs, on condition— inasmuch as the animals were concerned— that he take the more numerous and not exterminate any one species. This was what he considered prudent in regard to the kind of his nourishment. Regarding the quantity, he perceived that it should be in accordance with what satisfies a man's hunger and no more. As to the lapse of time between meals be ruled that once he had satisfied his needs, he was to remain content with that and not touch anything until he suffered a weakness that would hinder him from the performance of some of the actions to which he was committed in the second emulation and that will be mentioned afterwards. Regarding the necessities required for the subsistence of the animal spirit, protecting it from external harm, he had very little to worry about, for he clothed himself with skins and he had a dwelling that protected him against external harm. This satisfied him, and hence he did not see any further need to worry about it. And as far as his diet was concerned, he observed the rules he had set for himself, which we have already explained.

Then he applied himself to the second exercise— that is, to emulate the celestial bodies, imitate them, acquire their attributes, and look for their qualities, which he found to be of three kinds. First, the qualities the celestial bodies possess by virtue of the relations they maintain with what is below them in the world of generation and corruption: imparting heat, by essence, and cold, by accident, illumination, rarefaction, condensation, and the other actions by means of which they dispose the things of this world to receive the overflow of the spiritual forms from the Agent, the Necessary Being. The second kind of qualities are qualities that belong to their very essence— such as that they are translucent, luminous, pure, free from turbidness and any kind of vileness, and that they move circularly, some of them moving around their own center and some around the center of another. The third kind of qualities are the ones they possess by virtue of their relation to the Necessary Being, such as that they possess continuous vision of Him without any deviation, and that they yearn for Him and act according to His command, constrain themselves in order to do His will, and do not move save
in accordance with His wish and within His control. So he proceeded to emulate them (the celestial bodies) in
every one of these three kinds of qualities to the utmost of his power.

In the first case, his emulation of the celestial bodies consisted in obliging himself, whenever he could,
to remove (the cause of the plight) of every animal or plant he sees to be in need, diseased, injured, or facing an
impediment. Thus whenever he saw a plant that was deprived of sunlight by the interference of another object,
or that was entwined with another harmful plant, or that was suffering from extreme dryness, he would remove
the object if it was something that could be removed, and he would separate the harmful plant from the other
without inflicting the harmful one, and he would take care to water it whenever that was possible. Whenever he
happened to see any animal endangered by a wild beast, or trapped in a snare, or picked with thorns, or that had
something harmful fallen into its eyes or ears, or was hungry or thirsty, he would take infinite care to relieve it
and give it food and drink. Or whenever he happened to see any water course, flowing to irrigate a plant or to
quench the thirst of an animal, stopped by a stone that has fallen in it or by a fallen cliff, he took care to remove
all that. He persisted in this kind of emulation until he attained its highest end.

In the second case, his emulation consisted in obliging himself to remain pure, to remove all dirt and
filth from his body, washing himself often and keeping his nails, teeth, and the hidden parts of his body clean,
and perfuming himself with every kind of fragrant herb and all sorts of aromatic pomades that he could find. He
took care to maintain his clothes clean and fragrant until he was resplendent with beauty, cleanliness, and
fragrance. In addition, he took upon himself to perform all sorts of circular movements. One time he would walk
around the island compassing its shores and journeying to its remotest areas. Sometimes he would walk or run
around his house or a rock for a number of times. At other times he would spin himself until he lost
consciousness.

In the third case, his emulation of the celestial bodies consisted in concentrating his thoughts on the
Necessary Being and suppressing all connection with the sensible world. He would close his eyes, stop his ears,
and restrain himself from following his imagination. He would wish, to the utmost of his power, to think of
nothing else but Him, and to associate nobody with Him. To accomplish this, he would have recourse to
spinning himself more rapidly. As his spinning increased, sensible objects would vanish out of his sight, his
imagination would grow weaker and so would all the faculties that make use of bodily organs. Meanwhile, the
work of his essence, which is independent of the body, grew stronger; so that at times his thoughts freed
themselves from all confusion, and he beheld the Necessary Being. But the corporeal faculties would return
upon him and spoil this state for him, bringing him back to the lowest of levels; thus he would go back to his
former condition. Whenever he felt any weakness that interrupted him from pursuing his purpose, he partook of
some food, but always according to the established conditions. Henceforth he moved to the performance of his
emulation of the celestial bodies in the three mentioned respects. He applied himself assiduously to this for
some time, struggling against his corporeal faculties—just as they were resisting him. Whenever he got the better
of them and his thoughts were free from confusion, he briefly experienced something of the state of those who
have attained the third emulation.

Then he started to seek after the third emulation and tried hard to attain it by pondering over the
attributes of the Necessary Being. He had come to know, during the period of his scientific speculation on the
subject before he had entered upon any action that these attributes were of two kinds: positive, such as
knowledge, power, and wisdom; and negative, such as His complete freedom from corporeality and from the
bodily attributes, and from whatever adheres to these attributes or is related to them even remotely. The negative
attributes are a condition that renders the positive attributes absolutely exempt from the attributes of the bodies,
one of which is multiplicity, so that His essence would not be multiplied by these positive attributes, and so that
all of them would be reduced to a single notion which is that of His real essence. He started thereupon to seek a
way by which to emulate Him in both kinds (of attributes). As for the positive attributes, when he came to know that they are all to be reduced to His real essence and that they are free from multiplicity in every respect—since multiplicity is one of the attributes of bodies—and that His knowledge of His essence is not a notion superimposed on His essence, but that His essence is His knowledge of His essence and His knowledge of His essence is His essence, it became evident to him that if he could know his own essence, the knowledge with which he would come to know it could not be something superimposed on his essence, but identical with it. Therefore he perceived that to emulate Him in His positive attributes would be to know Him alone without association with any of the corporeal attributes. He took it upon himself to do exactly that. As for the negative attributes, they are all reduced to exemption from the corporeal.

He began therefore to strip himself of all corporeal attributes. He had cast off a great deal of them during his former exercises in which he sought to emulate the celestial bodies. However, a great many relics had been left, such as spinning around—and movement is one of the most characteristic attributes of bodies—and his care for animals and plants, the feeling of pity toward them, and the preoccupation he had to remove whatever inconvenienced them. The latter, too, are corporeal attributes. For, to begin with, they can be seen only with the help of a corporeal faculty. Furthermore, the hard labor they require is performed with a corporeal faculty too. Therefore he began to rid himself of all this, for it is in no way befitting the state to which he now aspired. Henceforth he confined his activities to repose in the bottom of his cave with his head tilted down, his eyes closed, disregarding all sensible things and all corporeal faculties, concentrating all his effort and thoughts on the Necessary Being alone, without associating Him with anything whatsoever. Whenever a thought that was not of God crossed his imagination, he tried to drive it away and put it off with his force. He exercised himself in this, persisting for a long time, so much so that several days would pass without his having anything to eat and without ever stirring. At those moments when he would reach a high pitch in his exercise, all things might vanish from his memory and thought except his own essence, which would continue to be present when he was deeply immersed in the vision of the True Being, the Necessary Being.

This used to cause him great concern, for he knew that it was a mixture perturbing the sure vision and an intrusion in the observation (of Him). Nevertheless, he kept seeking the dis-appearance of his soul and the utmost sincerity in his vision of the Truth, until finally he achieved what he was after. Thereupon, the sky, the earth, and everything that is between (xv, 85; lxxviii, 37), vanished from his memory and thought. And so did all the spiritual forms and corporeal faculties and all the powers separate from the elements, namely the essences that know the True Being. Also, his own essence disappeared like the other essences. The universe vanished and dwindled away, a scattered dust (Ivan 6). There remained only the One, the True Being, the Permanent Being, and he recited His speech (which is not a notion superimposed on His essence): "Whose is the Kingdom today?" "God's the One, the Omnipotent" (x1, 16). He understood His words and heard His call, and not even his ignorance of words and his inability to speak could hinder the understanding of Him. He immersed himself in this state, and beheld "that which no eye has ever seen nor ear ever listened to, neither has it ever presented itself to the heart of a man."

Do not let your heart be chained to the description of something that has never presented itself to the heart of a man. Many are the things that present themselves to the heart of a man but are hard to describe. How much harder, therefore, would be the description of something that has no chance of ever presenting itself to the heart, and that is not of the same world nor of the same category. And I do not mean by "heart" the body out of which the heart is constituted or the spirit contained in its ventricle, but rather the form of the spirit whose powers extend throughout the body. Now, each one of these three things might be called "heart", but it is impossible for this thing (ecstasy) to occur to any of these three. And yet there is no way of expressing anything beyond what occurs to these three. Therefore, he who seeks to express this state is seeking the impossible. He is like someone who wants to taste the dyed colors inasmuch as they are colors, and at the same time requests that
black should taste, for example, sweet or sour. However, in spite of all this, we will not let you go without some allusions by which we shall hint at the wonderful things Hayy saw when he was in that station. We will do this in the form of an allegory without knocking upon the door of the truth; for there is no other way to ascertain what is in that station without actually reaching it. So listen now with the ear of your heart to what I shall indicate to you and gaze at it with your mind's eye; perhaps you will find in it some form of guidance that may bring you to the highway. I demand that you not ask me at present for any oral explanation in addition to what I have entrusted to these pages. For my hands are tied, and it is dangerous to express arbitrarily something that cannot be expressed.

(Summary of the Tale Continued)

Hayy, in spite of his superior intelligence and philosophic preparation, falls into the error of identifying himself with God. But with the help of divine mercy, he corrects his error. Furthermore, he comes to understand that the separate essences cannot be said to be one or multiple, since they are beyond the reach of any human logical classification and since the divine world can only be known through vision. Reason only observes the particulars and abstracts universal notions from them. Then the author describes in an allegorical form the descending hierarchy of the separate essences that Hayy perceives during his ecstasy, namely, the intelligences of the spheres, the fixed stars, and those of all the other spheres until one reaches the sublunary world. They are compared to a series of mirrors of diminishing perfection that reflect from the first to the last the image of the divine essence in a descending order of clarity. The mirror of the sublunary world is the last and least perfect of them all. The image of the divine essence seems to be reflected in it as in troubled waters and divided into a multitude of indefinite individual essences each of which is united to a body (this refers to human souls), some virtuous and happy, the others perverse and miserable. However, one should not think that these souls disappear when the body to which they are united disappears, as happens to the image reflected in a mirror once the mirror is destroyed. The comparison should not be taken literally since it is not the body that sustains the soul, but the soul the body. Likewise, since the sensible world is sustained by the divine, it necessarily follows the divine world just as the shadow necessarily follows the body.

(Conclusion)

This is as much as I could indicate to you now concerning what Hayy the son of Yaqzan intuitively beheld in that noble station. Do not expect any more than this through mere words. For this is almost impossible. As for the rest of his story, that I will tell you.

After he had come back to the sensible world from the excursions he had undertaken, he became weary of the concerns of this life and he strongly yearned for the ultimate life. He sought to return to that station through the same means by which he had sought it at first, till he was able to attain it with less effort than before and also to stay there longer than he had stayed before. Then he returned to the sensible world, and attempted later to attain his station once more and attained it with less effort than in both the first and the second preceding attempts, and his stay there was longer too. And so it grew easier and easier for him to attain that noble station and to continue in it longer and longer until he could attain it whenever he pleased and stay in it for as long as he pleased. He used to keep himself in that station and not turn away from it except when the necessities of his body, which he had cut down to the bare minimum, demanded it. In all this, he used to wish that it would please God, the Mighty and Majestic, to deliver him altogether from his body, which caused his separation from that station, so as to give himself up perpetually to his (supreme) pleasure and so as to be relieved from the pain he suffered every time he had to retire from his station to attend to the necessities of the body. He continued in this state of affairs until he was past the seventh septenary of his birth, that is, he was fifty years old. Then he
happened to come together with Asal; the story of what took place between them will be narrated—God willing—in what follows.

It is told that on an island close to the one on which Hayy the son of Yaqzan was born—according to one of the two different accounts of the circumstances of his birth—there arrived one of the true religions received from one of the old prophets—upon whom be the blessings of God. It was a religion that imitated all the true beings through parables that present images of those things and establish their descriptions in the souls, as is customary in addressing the multitude. This religion continued to spread on the island and kept growing and gaining in power until the king adopted it himself and made the people embrace it.

Now there had grown in that island two young men of virtue and good will, called respectively Asal and Salaman, who embraced that religion and accepted it eagerly. They took it upon themselves to observe all its Laws and to follow regularly its practices; this formed the basis of their friendship. Sometimes they used to study the wording of that religious Law concerning the attributes of God, the Mighty and Majestic, and His angels, and also the character of resurrection, rewards, and punishments. Of the two, Asal delved deeper into the esoteric meaning; he was more apt to find spiritual notions, and was a more ambitious interpreter. As for Salaman, he was more apt to keep to the apparent meaning, to avoid interpretation, and to abstain from examination and reflection. However, both assiduously performed the external practices (of the religious Law), disciplined themselves, and controlled their passions.

Now there were in this religious Law certain arguments that favored seclusion and solitude, indicating that these led to salvation and (ultimate) success; and there were other arguments that favored sociability and adherence to the whole body of the community (Jama'ah). Asal devoted himself to the search for seclusion and favored the argument for it, because he was naturally inclined to continued meditation, to heeding the warnings (of the religious Law), and to penetrating deeply into the meanings (of the things mentioned in it); and it was through solitude that he most frequently accomplished these objectives. Salaman, on the other hand, devoted himself to adhering to the whole body of the community and favored the argument for this position, because he was naturally timid as regards thought and examination. Following the majority, he thought, would lead to the suppression of evil thoughts and the removal of the promptings of the devil. Their differences on this issue caused them to separate.

Asal had heard about the island on which it was said that Hayy the son of Yaqzan was formed. He knew also of its fertility, conveniences, and temperate climate, and that the one who seeks solitude can achieve it there. Resolved to move there and to retire from the company of men for the rest of his life, he gathered together what money he possessed; with a part of it he hired a ship to carry him to that island, and the rest he distributed among the poor. He bade farewell to his friend (Salaman) and went aboard. The mariners transported him to the island, set him ashore, and withdrew. Asal remained there worshipping God, the Mighty and Majestic, magnifying Him, sanctifying Him, and meditating upon His most beautiful names and exalted attributes without any interruption in the presence of his mind or disturbance in his thoughts. Whenever he felt the need for food, he took from the fruits or game of the island enough to satisfy his hunger. He remained in this state a while, enjoying the most complete felicity and the greatest delight through an intimate intercourse with his Lord, experiencing every day His kindness, the excellence of His gifts, and the ease with which He enabled him to satisfy his necessary needs and nourishment— all of which confirmed his belief in Him and consoled Asal's heart.

In the meantime, Hayy the son of Yaqzan was wholly immersed in his sublime stations. He never left his cave but once a week to take whatever nourishment was at hand. This is the reason why Asal did not discover his presence at first; he used to walk around the island and go over all its parts without seeing a human being or
observing the traces of any footsteps. This swelled his joy and gladdened his heart as he was firmly resolved to lead the most retired and solitary life that was possible, until Hayy the son of Yaqzan happened to go out one day to seek his provisions at a place where Asal happened to be. They both spied one another. Asal did not entertain any doubt but that Hayy was a retired worshiper who must have come to that island in search of solitude as he himself had done, and feared that should he come up and make his acquaintance, this might disturb Hayy's state and disrupt the pursuit he was engaged in. Hayy the son of Yaqzan, on the other hand, did not know what Asal was; for of all the animals he had seen, he had never seen anything with such a form. Now Asal had on a black coat made out of hair and wool, which Hayy the son of Yaqzan thought was a natural part of him and at which he stood wondering for quite a while. Asal turned and fled from fear that he might distract Hayy. But Hayy the son of Yaqzan ran after him out of his natural curiosity to look for the truth of things. When he saw that Asal began to run faster, he slowed down and hid himself from him, so that Asal thought he had left him and gone off far from the place where he was. Asal then proceeded with his prayer, recitation, invocation, supplication, and lamentation, until this made him forget everything else. Then Hayy the son of Yaqzan started to draw closer and closer, with Asal unaware of his presence, until he came so close as to hear his recitation and praise (of God), observing in him a sense of humility and that he was weeping. Hayy heard a pleasant voice and harmonious sounds such as he had never heard before in any kind of animal. Then he considered Asal's shape and lineaments and saw that he was of the same form as himself. He also found that the coat he had on was not a natural skin but an artificial attire like his own. Upon watching the sincere humility of Asal, his supplication and weeping, he did not doubt but that he was one of those essences who know the True One. He felt himself seized by an affection toward him and a desire to know what was the matter with him, and what caused his weeping. He drew closer to him till Asal felt his presence and took to flight. Hayy the son of Yaqzan chased him energetically until he caught up with him— as the result of the vigor and the capacity, intellectual as well as physical, that God had bestowed upon him—seized him, held him fast, and would not let go of him. When Asal looked at him and saw that he was clothed with animal furs, his hair grown so long as to cover a great part of his body, and perceived his alertness and great strength, he trembled from fear and began to implore and entreat him with words that Hayy the son of Yaqzan could not understand and did not know what they were meant to convey. He could, however, see the signs of alarm on Asal's face; whereupon he endeavored to allay his fear with such voices as he had learned from some of his animals. He stroked his head and both sides of his neck, and caressed him, showing him a great joy and gladness, until Asal's agitation calmed and he understood that he meant him no harm.

Asal had formerly studied most languages as a result of his love for the science of interpretation and had become an expert in them. So he began to speak to Hayy the son of Yaqzan in every language he knew, asking him about himself and trying to make himself understood, but without success. Hayy the son of Yaqzan wondered all the while at what he heard, not knowing what it was. Nevertheless, he showed gladness and good disposition; and they mutually wondered at each other. Asal had conserved some of the provisions he had brought along from the inhabited island. He offered it to Hayy the son of Yaqzan, who, having never seen such food before, did not know what it was. Asal ate a little of it and signaled Hayy to eat too. Hayy the son of Yaqzan, nonetheless, kept asking him and urging him beseechingly. As Hayy the son of Yaqzan had become fond of Asal and was afraid lest he might be vexed if he should continue to refuse, he went ahead and ate some of the food. As soon as he had tasted it and liked it, Hayy realized that he had done wrong by violating the covenant he made with himself as regards diet. He repented what he did and wanted to separate from Asal and go back to his former condition, seeking to return to his sublime station. But he could not attain the vision quickly. Thereupon he decided to stay with Asal in the sensible world until he discovered what he really was and until he felt no more desire to be with him, after which he might apply himself to his station without any interruption. Thus he remained in the company of Asal. Now as Asal perceived Hayy's inability to speak, he felt secure since no harm
could threaten his faith from his company. He hoped to instruct him in speaking, in science, and in the faith, so that he (Asal) might obtain a great reward and be favored by God. Asal began to teach him how to speak, first, by pointing at particular beings and pronouncing their names, repeating them several times, and then making Hayy pronounce them. Hayy pronounced them at the same time as he in turn pointed to each being, until Asal taught him all the names. He helped him to improve gradually, until, in a very short time, Hayy could speak.

Then Asal began to ask him about his condition, and whence he came to that island. Hayy the son of Yaqzan told him he knew nothing of his origin, nor of a father or a mother beyond the gazelle that reared him. Then Hayy described his experiences from beginning to end, and how he ascended in knowledge until he attained a degree of union (with God). Asal heard him describe those truths and the essences separate from the sensible world, which know the essence of the Truth, the Mighty and Majestic. Then Hayy described the essence of the Truth, the Exalted and Majestic, with His beautiful qualities. And finally Hayy described, as far as he could, what he beheld when he attained union (with God), the joys of those who unite (with God), and the pains of those who are veiled from Him. After hearing all this, Asal had no doubt that all the things given in his own religious Law concerning God, the Mighty and Majestic, His angels, His books, His messengers, the last day, and His paradise and hell, are the similitudes of these things that Hayy the son of Yaqzan had beheld. The eye of his heart was thereby opened, the fire of his mind kindled. He found that reason and tradition agree, and he found a better access to the ways of interpretation. There remained not one difficulty in the religious Law that he did not now see clearly, nor anything locked up that was not opened, nor anything obscure that did not become plain. Thereupon he passed into the ranks of the men of understanding (xii, .111). From that moment, Asal looked upon Hayy the son of Yaqzan with veneration and respect, and he was convinced that Hayy was one of the saints of God who need have no fear; neither shall they suffer (ii, 38, 262, 274). He took it upon himself to wait upon him, to follow in his steps, and to accept his directions in regard to the fulfillment of the religious-legal practices that his religion had taught him, but <that> seemed to be contradictory.

Hayy the son of Yaqzan, in his turn, began to inquire from him about himself and his present condition. Whereupon Asal proceeded to describe the island from which he came, the people who inhabit it, and their way of life before and after religion reached them. He described to him all the content of the religious Law concerning the divine world, paradise, hell, the quickening of the dead, the resurrection, the assembly for a final judgment, the balance, and the bridge. Hayy the son of Yaqzan understood all this, not finding in it anything that disagreed with what he had intuitively seen in his sublime station. He recognized that the one who described these things and brought them forth was truthful in his description, veridical in his words, and a messenger from his Lord. He believed in him, accepted his truthfulness, and bore witness to his mission.

Then he began to find out from Asal what were the acts of worship that he (the messenger) ordained as duties. Asal described prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage, and similar external practices. Hayy accepted them, and he took it upon himself to carry them out in compliance with the command of whose author's veracity he had become convinced. There only remained two points that kept him wondering and whose wisdom he could not understand. One point was why this messenger, in the greater part of his description of the divine world, used parables? Why he avoided the clear disclosure (of the truth) and thus led men to fall into the great error of attributing corporeality to Him and believe certain things about the essence of the Truth from which He is completely exempt? And why he did the same concerning rewards and punishments? The other point was why he confined himself to those duties and acts of worship and permitted acquisition of wealth and excessive consumption of food so that people gave themselves up to vain occupations and turned away from the Truth. Hayy's own opinion was that nobody ought to eat anything more than necessary to keep body and soul together. As for riches, they meant nothing to him. He saw no point to the rules of the religious Law in regard to wealth, such as alms-giving in its various forms, trading, and usury, and in regard to penalties and punishments. All this he found strange and considered it superfluous. He said that if people understood the truth of the matter they
would avoid these vanities, turn toward the Truth, and dispense with all this. Nobody will then own private property for which alms would have to be paid, hands cut off for stealing it, or people die for robbing it. What misled Hayy was his belief that all men were endowed with excellent natures, clear-sighted sagacity, and resolute souls. He was not aware how stupid, deficient, ill-opinioned, and weak in resolution they were, as the cattle, nay, they are further astray from the way (xxv, 44).

As his pity toward men increased and he entertained the ambition of becoming the instrument of their salvation, he made up his mind to reach them, and to lay bare the truth before them and make it clear for them. He discussed his intention with Asal and asked him if a way could possibly be contrived to reach them. Asal informed him of their deficient nature and how they turn from God. But Hayy could not comprehend that and still hoped to be able to pursue his intention. Asal, too, entertained the ambition that God might, through Hayy, lead into the right path some of his acquaintances, who were initiates and closer to salvation than the others: so he helped him to carry out his design. They resolved to keep close to the seashore without leaving it night or day, till God should please to offer them the opportunity to cross the sea. So they stayed by the shore supplicating and praying to God, the Mighty and Majestic, that He may guide them to the right path in their design (cf. xviii, 10).

It happened, by God's command, that a ship that had lost its course was driven by the winds and the tumultuous waves upon the shore of that island. As the ship drew closer to the land, the people on board saw the two men on shore and made toward them. Asal spoke to them and asked that the two of them be taken along. The mariners responded favorably and took them abroad. God sent a fair wind, which in a short time brought the ship to the island they were seeking. There they landed and went into the city. Asal's friends met with him, and he told them the story of Hayy the son of Yaqzan. They flocked around Hayy, showed him great admiration, met with him, and esteemed and venerated him. Asal let Hayy know that this group was superior to all other men in understanding and sagacity; should he prove unable to instruct them, his chances of instructing the multitude were slim. Now the ruler and chief of that island was Salaman, Asal's friend who believed in adhering to the whole body of the community and argued for prohibiting seclusion. Hayy the son of Yaqzan began to teach and to disclose the secrets of wisdom. But no sooner had he gone a little beyond the apparent, and started to describe what they had previously learned to be otherwise, than they began to feel ill at ease in his presence, to feel in their souls an abhorrence for what he told them; and they resented it in their hearts, although in his face they showed that they were pleased, out of respect for his being a stranger as well as for the sake of their friend Asal. Hayy the son of Yaqzan kept entreating them night and day, and kept explaining to them the truth both in private and in public. But this did not produce any effect except to increase their disdain and aversion, despite their love of goodness and their desire for the truth. Nonetheless, because of their deficient natures, they did not pursue the truth in the proper way, nor did they receive it in the proper manner nor call for it at its own doors. On the contrary, they wanted to learn the truth on the authority of other men. So Hayy despaired of reforming them and lost hope in their ability to receive the truth.

Examining afterwards the different categories of men, he found that each party was rejoicing in what it had (xxiii, 53; xxx, 32), taking their caprice to be their god (cf. xxv, 43) and worshipping their desires. They were fighting desperately to collect the crumbs of this world, and they were absorbed in amassing (wealth) until the day they reached their graves (cf. cii, 1-2). All good advice is lost upon them, and kind words have no effect. Discussion only makes them more obstinate; and as for wisdom, there is no way they could acquire it, neither have they any portion of it. They were submerged in ignorance, and what they were earning has rusted upon their hearts (Ixxxiii, 14). God has set a seal on their hearts and their hearing and on their eyes is a covering, and there awaits them a mighty chastisement (ii, 7). When he saw the pavilion of punishment surrounding them and the darkness of the veils covering them— all of them, except a few, do not take seriously anything but the worldly aspects of their religion; they disregard the observance of its practices regardless of
their easiness, and they sold it for a small price (cf. iii, 187); commerce did divert them from the remembrance of God, the Exalted, and they had no fear of a day when hearts and eyes shall be turned about (cf. x, 37)– it became clear to him, indeed he was absolutely sure, that it was impossible to address them by way of unveiling (the pure truth), and that to enjoin upon them any works beyond the measure (laid down by their messenger) was not expedient; and further, that the greatest benefit the multiple could get from the religious Law concerned their mundane life alone, so that they might live forthrightly and no man trespass the private property of the others. Only the exceptional and the rare among them would attain the happiness of the hereafter, namely the one who desires the tillage of the hereafter, and strives after it as he should– being a believer (cf. xvii, 197). As for him who is impious, and prefers the life of this world, then surely hell is his abode (lxix, 37-39). What weariness can be greater, or what misery more overwhelming than that of the one who, if you examined his activities from the moment he wakes up till the time he goes to sleep, you would find does nothing but seek after one or another of the vile sensible things: riches to collect, pleasures to partake of, lusts to satisfy, a rage for which he seeks relief, glory to obtain, or practice commended by the religious Law with which to make a vain-glorious show or defend his own neck. All these things are darkness upon darkness in a deep sea (cf. xxiv, 40), and, there is not one of you, but he shall go down to it, that for thy Lord is a thing decreed, determined (xix, 71).

Upon comprehending that this is the condition of men and that the majority are like irrational animals, he knew that all wisdom, guidance to the right path, and good fortune reside in the utterances of the apostles of God and what is set forth by religious Law: nothing else is possible and nothing more could be added to it. Certain kinds of men are fit for certain kinds of work and each man is more fit to do that for which he is made. Such has been God's way with the ones who had passed away, and you shall find no change in God's way (cf. xlviii, 23). Hence Hayy went back to Salaman and his friends, apologized for what he had said to them, and asked that he be forgiven for it, He informed them that he now shared their opinion and has been guided to the right path that they were following. He also exhorted them to keep firm in their observance of the prescriptions of the religious Law and the performance of the external (religious) practices and not to delve into what does not concern them. They should believe, furthermore, in the ambiguous (statements of the Law) and assent readily to them. They should avoid innovations and private opinions and follow in the footsteps of their pious ancestors, forsaking all unprecedented novelties. He commanded them to avoid the indifference of the vulgar toward the religious Law, and their love of this world, and cautioned them with insistence against it. He and his friend Asal knew now that this is the only way in which this group, which has the desire but not the capacity for salvation, can achieve it. Should one try to raise them to the height of personal vision, this would upset their present order without enabling them to attain the grade of the happy ones. They will waver and suffer a relapse, ending in evil. On the other hand, if this same group should continue in this same condition till death overtook them, they would gain security and belong to the Companions of the Right (1vi, 90,91). As for the Outstrippers, they are the ones brought nigh [(to God's Throne) 1vi, 10-11].

Asal and Hayy took their leave and separated from the group. They sought an opportunity to go back to their island, till it pleased God, the Mighty and Majestic, to help them and facilitate their passage back. Hayy sought his previous sublime station the same way he had sought it before, till he recovered it. Asal followed in Hayy's footsteps till he came close to him or almost did so. They both worshipped God in that island until death overtook them (cf. xv, 99).

This– may God assist you through his inspiration (cf. lviii, 22) is the story of what happened to Hayy the son of Yaqzan, Asal, and Salaman. It contains certain statements that are not to be found in any book, nor heard in a common discourse. It is a part of that well-protected science which only those who know God accept and only those deluded concerning God ignore (cf. xxiii, 33; Ivii, 14; lxxxii, 6). We have taken a road contrary to that of the pious ancestors who grudged its dissemination and parsimoniously guarded it. The reason that the disclosure of this secret and the tearing of its veil were made easy for us was the appearance, in our present time,
of corrupt opinions aired and broached by some contemporaneous pretenders to philosophy, till they spread all over the countries, and the mischief caused by it has now become common. Fearing lest the weak ones who have rejected the authority of the prophets and who would want to imitate the fools, should think that these opinions are the secrets guarded against the ones unworthy of them, and so increase their inclination to, and love of, them, we decided to give them a glimpse of the secret of secrets in order to attract them to the side of selffulfillment and avert them from this road. Nevertheless, we have not left whatever secrets we confided to these pages without a thin veil and a delicate curtain, which is easy to break by those worthy of doing so, but which turns thick for the ones unworthy of going beyond it so that they would be unable to go any further.

I ask my brothers who read this book to accept my apologies for my indulgence in explaining what I explained and for my liberality in writing it down. I did so only because I climbed heights that the eyes fail to see, and wished to simplify my discourse about them in order to attract others and make them desire to take to the way. I ask for God's indulgence and forgiveness, and that He may lead us unto the pure knowledge of Him. He is gracious and generous. Peace be with you, my brother whom it is my duty to help, and the mercy and blessing of God.