

The Risālah of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī

THE RISĀLAH

Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī

Translated by Aisha Bewley

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Risalah Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani

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TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ خَلْقَ سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَصَلَّى عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ سَلَامًا

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, ALL-MERCIFUL, MOST MERCIFUL.
MAY ALLAH BLESS OUR MASTER MUḤAMMAD AND HIS FAMILY AND
COMPANIONS AND GIVE HIM PEACE.

IBN ABĪ ZAYD'S PROLOGUE

Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdullāh ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, may Allah be pleased with him and make him pleased, says:

Praise be to Allah Who begins the creation of man as a blessing from Him and fashions him in the womb by His wisdom and brings him out into His tender care and to the provision to which He eases him, and teaches him what he did not know – Allah’s favour to him is indeed immense.

Allah makes him aware of Himself through the effects of what He has made and has left no excuse for him by virtue of what has come on the tongues of His Messengers, the best of His creation. He guides, by His favour, those to whom He has granted success and He leads astray, by His justice, those whom He has debased. He eases the believers to ease and opens their hearts to the Reminder. So they believe in Allah, articulating that belief with their tongues, being sincere about it in their hearts and acting according to what has come down to them through His Messengers and His Books. They learn what He teaches them and stop at the limits He has prescribed for them. They are satisfied with what He has made *ḥalāl* for them

and avoid what He has made *ḥarām* for them. May Allah assist both us and you in taking care of what He has entrusted us with and in holding to His *sharī‘ah*.

You have asked me to write a short treatise for you about what is obligatory in the *dīn* – those things which should be pronounced by the tongue and believed by the heart and acted upon by the limbs; about those *sunnaḥs* which are associated with these obligatory actions – the confirmed (*mu‘akkadah*), the supererogatory (*nāfilah*) and the desirable (*raḡhibah*); something about the courtesies (*adab*) associated with them; along with certain of the key principles and derived rulings in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) according to the *madhhab* and way of Imam Mālik ibn Anas, may Allah have mercy on him; and in addition to mention what the great men of knowledge and *fiqh* have said about unclear matters in the *madhhab* in order to make them easier to understand.

You have made this request because of your desire to teach these things to children in the same way that you teach them how to read the Qur’an, so that they may first of all gain an understanding of the *dīn* of Allah and His *sharī‘ah* in their hearts, which will hopefully bring them blessing and a praiseworthy end. I have responded to this out of the same hope of gaining for both myself and you something of the reward of those who teach the *dīn* of Allah or call to it.

Know that the best of hearts is the one which contains the most good, and those hearts which are most likely to gain good are the ones that no evil has been able to enter. That which the people of sincere advice are most concerned about and which those who desire its reward most want, is to put good into the hearts of the children of the believers so that it becomes firmly established in them; and to make them aware of the fundamentals of the *dīn* and the limits of the *sharī‘ah* so that they may be satisfied with that, and to make their

hearts believe those things in the *dīn* that they have to accept and that their limbs are required to do. It is related that teaching the Book of Allah to young children extinguishes the anger of Allah and also that teaching something to someone in their childhood is like engraving it on stone. I have made these things clear, and if Allah wills, they will get benefit from learning them, nobility from knowing them and happiness from believing them and acting according to them.

It has come down to us that children should be ordered to do the prayer at seven years old, be chastised for not doing it at ten years old and also at that time be separated in their beds. Similarly, they should be taught before they reach puberty those words and actions which Allah has made obligatory for people so that when they reach puberty these things are fixed in their hearts and they are at ease with them and their limbs are used to doing them. Allah has made certain beliefs obligatory for the heart and certain acts of obedience obligatory for the limbs.

I will arrange what I have undertaken to talk about in chapters so that it will be easier, if Allah wills, for those who are studying it to understand. It is Him we ask for guidance and Him we ask for help. And there is no power nor strength except by Allah, the High, the Mighty. May Allah bless our Master Muḥammad, His Prophet, and his family and Companions and grant them much peace.

1. CREEDS

THE OBLIGATORY MATTERS OF THE *DĪN* THAT THE TONGUE SHOULD
GIVE EXPRESSION TO AND THE HEART SHOULD BELIEVE

These obligatory tenets include believing in the heart and expressing with the tongue that Allah is One God and there is no god other than Him, nor is there any like Him nor any equal to Him. He has had no child. He had no father. He has no wife. He has no partner. There is no beginning to His firstness nor any end to His lastness.

Those who try to describe Him can never adequately do so nor can thinkers encompass Him in their thought. Thinkers may derive lessons from His signs but should not try to think about the nature of His Essence.

وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ ۚ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

“But they cannot grasp any of His knowledge save what He wills. His Footstool encompasses the heavens and the earth, and their preservation does not tire Him. He is the Most High, the Magnificent.” (2:255)

He is the All-Knowing and the All-Aware, the Arranger and the All-Powerful, the All-Hearing and the All-Seeing, the High and the Great. He is above His Throne, Glorious in His Essence.

He is everywhere through His knowledge. He created man and He knows what his self whispers to him and He is nearer to him than his jugular vein. (50:16)

وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٍ
وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

*“No leaf falls without Him knowing of it nor is there any seed in the
darkness of the earth, nor any fresh thing nor any dry thing,
that is not in a Clear Book.” (6:59)*

He is settled on His throne and has absolute control over His kingdom.

He has the most Beautiful Names and the most sublime Attributes and He has always had all these Names and Attributes. He is exalted above any of His Attributes ever having been created or any of His Names having been brought into temporal existence.

He spoke to Musa with His speech which is an attribute of His Essence and not something created. He manifested Himself to the mountain and it disintegrated through exposure to His majesty.

The Qur’an is the speech of Allah, not something created which must therefore die out, nor the attribute of something created which must therefore come to an end.

Also included is belief in the Decree, both the good of it and the evil of it, the sweet of it and the bitter of it. All of this has been decreed by Allah, our Lord. The way things are decided is entirely in His control; and the way they happen is according to His decree. He knows all things before they come into existence and they take place in the way He has already decided.

There is nothing that His servants say or do which He has not decreed and does not have knowledge of.

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

*“Does He Who created not then know?
He is the All-Pervading, the All-Aware?” (67:14)*

He leads astray whomever He wills and in His justice debases them, and He guides whomever He wills and in His generosity grants them success. In that way everyone is eased by Him to what He already has knowledge of and has previously decreed as to whether they are to be one of the fortunate or the wretched.

He is exalted above there being anything He does not desire in His kingdom, or that there should be anything not dependent on Him, or that there should be any creator of anything other than Him. He is the Lord of all people, the Lord of their actions, the One who decrees their movements and decrees the time of their death.

He has sent Messengers to people so that they would have no argument against Him. He sealed this Messengership, warning, and Prophethood with his Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ whom He made the last of the Messengers –

وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا

“A bringer of good news and a warner, and a caller to Allah by His permission and a light-giving lamp.” (33:45-46)

He sent down His Wise Book on him and by means of him He explained His upright *dīn* and guided people to the Straight Path.

Also part of what must be believed is that the Final Hour is coming – there is no doubt about it.

It must be believed that Allah will resurrect all who have died: As He brought them into existence the first time so they will be brought back again. (21:104)

It must be believed that Allah, glory be to Him, multiplies the reward of the good actions of His believing servants. He pardons them for their major wrong actions by virtue of their repentance (*tawbah*) and He forgives them for their minor wrong actions by virtue of their avoidance of the major wrong actions.

Those who do not repent of their major wrong actions become subject to His will.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ

“Allah does not forgive anything being associated with Him, but He forgives whoever He wills for anything other than that.” (4:48)

If He punishes someone with His Fire, He will remove him from it on account of any belief he has and by this He will cause him to enter His Garden.

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ

“Whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it.” (99:7)

Any of the community of the Prophet ﷺ who have committed major wrong actions and for whom he intercedes, will be brought out of the Fire through his intercession.

Allah has created the Garden and has prepared it as an everlasting abode for His friends (*awliyā*). He will honour them in it with the vision of His Noble Face. This is the same Garden from which He sent down Adam, His Prophet and Caliph, to the earth, which was as it had already been decreed in His foreknowledge.

He has created the Fire and has prepared it as an everlasting abode for those who disbelieve in him and deny His Signs and Books and Messengers, and He keeps them veiled from seeing Him.

Allah – blessed and exalted is He – will come on the Day of Rising together with the angels, rank upon rank. All the different peoples will be confronted with their accounts and their punishment or reward.

The balances will be set up to weigh people’s actions –

فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

“Those whose scales are heavy, they are the successful.” (23:102)

People will be given pages on which their actions are recorded:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ ۖ فَسَوْفَ يُحَاسَبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا ... وَأَمَّا مَنْ
أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ وَّرَاءَ ظَهْرِهِ ۖ ... وَيَصْلَى سَعِيرًا

“As for him who is given his Book in his right hand, he will be given an easy reckoning ... But as for whom who is given his book behind his back, ... he will be roasted in a Searing Blaze.” (84:7-13)

The Bridge (*ṣirāt*) is true and people will cross it according to their actions. Those who cross it and achieve safety from the Fire do so at different speeds, while the actions of others cast them to their destruction in the Fire.

Also included is belief in the Basin (*hawḍ*) of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ which his community will come to drink from after which they will never feel thirst again. But those who made any changes or alterations in the *dīn* will be driven away from it.

Belief consists in what you say with the tongue, what you believe sincerely in the heart, and what you do with the limbs. Belief increases when your actions increase, and decreases when they decrease. So it is through actions or the lack of them that increase and decrease in faith occurs.

The statement of belief is not complete without action. Neither the statement nor action are complete without intention. And neither the statement nor intention are complete unless they are in accordance with the *sunnah*.

No Muslim becomes an unbeliever through wrong actions.

Martyrs (*shuhadāʾ*) are alive, receiving their provision in the presence of their Lord.

The spirits of the fortunate remain in bliss until the day they are raised again. The spirits of the wretched are tormented until the Day of Judgement.

The believers are tried and questioned in their graves.

يُثَبِّتُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِالْقَوْلِ الثَّابِتِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ

“Allah makes those who believe firm with the Firm Word in the life of this world and the Next World.” (14:27)

People have recording angels over them who write down their actions. Nothing people do escapes the knowledge of their Lord.

The Angel of Death seizes people’s spirits by the permission of his Lord.

The best generation are those who saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and believed in him, then those who followed them and then those who followed them.

The best of the Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) are the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Firstly, Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthman, then ‘Ali, may Allah be pleased with all of them.

None of the Companions of the Messenger should be mentioned except in the best way and silence should be maintained concerning any disagreements that broke out between them. They are the people who are most worthy of being considered in the best light possible and the people whose opinions should be most respected.

Obedience to the leaders of the Muslims, both their rulers and their men of knowledge, is obligatory.

It is also obligatory to follow the righteous Companions, tread in their footsteps and ask Allah to grant them forgiveness.

It is also obligatory to avoid wrangling and argumentation regarding the *dīn* and to avoid every new thing which people have introduced into it.

May Allah bless and give much peace to our Master Muḥammad, His Prophet, and his family and his wives and his descendants.