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Cover

Mašhad, Kitābḫāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Radawī 300, f. 1v
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v
Saʿīd ibn Dādhurmuz’s Epistle on Soul and Spirit

Veysel Kaya

Abstract
This article briefly addresses the content of Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz’s Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, an epistle which was written as a complementary section to the author’s Risāla fī Fadl al-āḫira ‘alā l-dunyā (Epistle on the Superiority of the Hereafter over This World). In these epistles, the author aims to posit the superiority and substantiality of the Hereafter as opposed to the inferiority and imperfection of the worldly life. The author regards an investigation about the essence of soul/spirit (nafs/rūḥ) as a necessary task, because one cannot truly understand the issue of the Hereafter without knowing what the human soul is. Typically, Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz attempts here an amalgamation of philosophical and religious discourses while quoting from several philosophical works available to him. Hence, after close examination, the Arabic Aristotle, Arabic Plato, al-Kindī, Miskawayh and especially the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity appear to be among his sources. Besides, a part of the Epistle on Soul and spirit which addresses certain sayings of the past prophets before Muḥammad about spirit attracts special attention.

Aim
The idea that philosophy has its roots in the teachings of the prophets, which is aptly called by Henry Corbin “philosophie prophétique” (al-ḥikma al-nabawiyya), was familiar to the Muslim community since the time Greek philosophy was transferred into the Muslim lands. Philosophers such as al-Kindī and Abū Zayd al-Baḫī were seen as proponents of this amalgamation of ḥikma and šarī’a. This attitude, of course, found its avid proponents in the fourth century H., in the hands of the Brethren of Purity. In a famous passage quoted by his disciple Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Sulaymān al-Siǧistānī finds the effort of combination to be vain, particularly addressing to the Brethren.1 However, contrary to the expectations of al-Siǧistānī, the subsequent (5th/11th) century was to witness several figures who attempted to combine the fields that had been positioned against each other in the earlier centuries of Islam. In jurisprudence, al-Māwardī is mentioned for his integrating the philosophical elements into his juridical writings.2 In theology, Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī received criticisms from his fellow adherents of the Muʿtazilite school for his philosophical approach to the Kalām.3 Among such names, al-Gazālī is obviously the towering figure, who has frequently been mentioned for his applying the logical structures into the field of jurisprudence and theology, and who was deeply inspired by the philosophy of Avicenna, although he had declared the latter an

unbeliever in his Incoherence of the Philosophers. In this century, such an eclectic attempt arose from a mysterious Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, a name which is completely unknown. His project was to merge rational disciplines into a single unity, those including the philosophical tradition of al-Kindī and the Muʿtazilite theology. During my ongoing studies on the writings of Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, I have recently discovered that he was significantly influenced by the Epistles of the Sincere Brethren (Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ), so much so that the spirit of his writings can essentially be labeled as “Iḫwānian”. Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz’s project was to enhance and update the syncretic philosophy of the Brethren of Purity. It must be kept in mind that Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz did this in a century in which both iʿtizāl and falsafa were received with categorical denial in the eyes of religious authorities.

The subject of this short paper is the Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ (ff. 37v - 52r), one of the two extant works by Saʿīd. Early in this epistle, the author announces his intention to discuss the issue of soul at length in this separate risāla. As it will appear under the heading “Structure” below, the epistle actually exhibits a mosaic which touches upon several aspects of the issue of soul, rather than a systematical examination of the subject matter. However, the epistle does not lack philosophical depth, for it carefully emphasises the key notions to establish the rationale for the entire body of Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz’s writings, that is, soul and its achievements must absolutely be kept apart from body, hence its salvation ought to be searched for in spiritual virtues.

Structure

The introductory passage of the epistle emphasises the fundamental notion of Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz’s overall project: there is no way to achieve knowledge of the hereafter other than knowing first the true nature (ḥaqīqa) of the soul, thus reaching the conclusion that soul survives its separation from body. This primordial notion is supported by two main realms of authority. Firstly, in terms of the realm of rational argumentation, the sages (ḥukamāʾ) have demonstrated that the hereafter is a second resurrection for human beings after their death, and this means that their soul will endure after its separation from body. Secondly, as for the realm of religious proofs, the notion is firmly established by the statements of religious authorities. The Quranic verse, “O you the soul satisfied! Come back to your Lord well-pleased and well-pleasing” (89: 27-28) is a clear evidence to the human soul’s coming back to where it belongs, that is, the vicinity of God. Moreover, the saying of the Prophet “the soul of the believer shines to the dwellers of the heavens, as the stars shine to the dwellers of the earth” stresses this belonging. After giving these proofs from the Quran and the ḥadīṯ, Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz appeals to another authority, this time more indicative of the background of his writings: the fourth caliph ʿAlī. Simply introduced by a salutation word “peace be upon him” and without mentioning the name of the caliph, the author briefly quotes from his famous saying: “all people are asleep; when they die, they wake up”.

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4 V. Kaya, “Kalām and Falsafa Integrated for Divine Unity: Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz’s (5th/11th century) Risāla fī l-Tawḥīd”, Studia graeco arabica 4 (2014), pp. 65-123. In the present article I will refer to the manuscript which is described therein.


6 The Arabic text of this epistle, with two other epistles of Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, will hopefully be available in my future monograph, which will be published by Klasik Yayınları, Istanbul 2017.

7 This is clearly stated in the Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ, 5 vols, ed. Ā. Tāmir, Éditions Oueidat, Beirut-Paris 1995, III, p. 237.

8 Elsewhere, the author similarly quotes a poem, which is attributed to ʿAlī, without mentioning the caliph’s name (qāla baʿḍ ḥukamāʾ al-ʿarab). The fact that ʿAlī’s name is intentionally disregarded is meaningful, if we are to place the
This brief introduction is followed with a long quotation from the Arabic version of the Buddhist tale *Barlaam and Josaphat*, which is known in early Islamic literature as *Bilawhar and Būḍāsif*. Our author quotes a part of the tale in several pages to strengthen his position that the life in the Hereafter is of the utmost superiority when compared to the worldly life, since the latter brings only obstacles for human beings' salvation. As an example, in the author's words “[one must] find the purity of the world as turbid, its joy as distress, its rich as poverty, its power as weakness, its glory as shame, its benefit as grief and sorrow, its happiness as delusion. No one comes into any bit of richness without facing afterwards several kinds of poverty; and no one fulfils any wish without falling into other wishes” (f. 38r). As is typical of the writing style of Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, the whole quotation is masterfully adapted to the flow of the text, without mentioning neither the names of the main characters, i.e., Bilawhar and Būḍāsif, nor the actual source the author depends on in his narrative.

We know that the tale was widespread from the 8th century onwards up to the 11th century, notably in Ismaili circles. Besides, it is intriguing that the very part which is quoted in Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz’s epistle can be partially found in al-Ġazālī’s *Iḥyāʾʾulūm al-dīn*. All in all, this narration is used and contextualised by the author in terms of religious argumentations for the superiority and permanence of soul, hence implicitly regarding Bilawhar as a link of the prophetic chain that formed the entire body of religious truth. No doubt, this is in complete accordance with the Brethren’s reference to Bilawhar himself, that is, with their representation of the latter as a prophet.

In parallel with the same context, Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz’s epistle *On Soul and spirit* continues to provide prophetic material in order to shed more light on the nature of spirit, a topic which is frequently addressed by the author as one of the most difficult issues to be dealt with. Our author's determination to clarify the matter in this way makes us come across a very rare collection of the prophetic sayings in this genre, all of which are dedicated to the description of the nature of spirit. These prophets belong, all of them, to the Abrahamic-Islamic tradition; their list includes Abraham, Hūd, Ismael, and David, and their sayings are specifically dedicated to defining different aspects of the human spirit (*rūḥ*):

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“Reflect upon the spirit, which was made by God a sign in the offspring of Adam. Don’t you see that man is still hearing, seeing, knowing, and speaking (nāṭiq) as long as the spirit stays in him? If man looses his spirit, he becomes dumb, blind, and deaf. Don’t you know that the share of spirit is knowledge, remembrance of God the Most High, His obedience, and His knowledge, just as the share of body is eating and drinking? If body continues to eat and drink, it grows and has the strength for its action. Similarly, if the spirit receives its nourishment, which is knowledge and wisdom, it perceives its substance at once, knows its own self, and has the strength for the knowledge of its Creator. Then, God gives him the water of eternal life to drink”.

Prophet Hūd: “Verily, God created the spirits of the knowers (ārifīn) from His light, and the spirits draw their possessors to their mines. Whoever is bestowed with one of the lights of God and one of the spirits of God, obtains a great outcome”.

Prophet Ismael: “Know that God is with you in every place because he has put in you some of His spirit which does not perish, and of His light which does not die out. Don’t be afraid of death, if you know the unity of God! This is because the spirit which is truly supported by the knowledge of God, and knowledge of His unity, does not die”.

Prophet David: “The spirit of lust is for animals and unbelievers (kuffār); the spirit of anger is for predatory animals and wicked people; and the spirit of knowledge is for pure and pious believers”.

Thus, after strengthening his position on a religious basis, the author is now ready to put forward some rational argumentations in order to establish the spirit’s distinctive nature, that is, its being free from any material qualities. The definition presented by the author is evidently taken from the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity, a collection of texts which seems to have heavy influence on the writings of Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz. Thus, the spirit is defined as “a spiritual substance, living by virtue of itself (bi-l-ḏāt), knowing in potency, active with divine guidance”, not a body, accident or bodily mixture (mizāĝ), as was claimed by naturalist philosophers and other heterodox groups (ahl al-biʿda). Furthermore, the spirit’s distinctive nature is evinced in its capability of receiving countless immaterial qualities. To put it more simply, while the bodily substance has a limited capacity to receive bodily substances, such as heat, cold, shape and form, the spiritual substance is ready to receive numerous kinds of spiritual accidents, such as knowledge, wisdom, virtue, and justice. In the author’s words, “when the bodily substance receives a form, it cannot receive another form from the same genus unless it leaves the first form. For instance, if a board’s surface takes a form of writing, it will not possibly take another writing unless the first form is removed. But when it comes to the spiritual substance, it is simple; it does not include any combination; it does not have any measure; and its power for receiving knowledge and virtue is not limited. Rather, it receives numerous forms without loosing any one of them. On the contrary, the more the forms of knowledge in it multiply,

13 Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, Rāsāʾil fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, f. 41 r. For the same definition, see Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ, V, 145 (using nasf instead of rūḥ). Here, the Brethren further explain that, by this definition, any claim that soul is dead, ignorant and passive will be left out. In the philosophy of the Brethren of Purity, all the existent beings (mawǧūdāt) fall into two categories: material (ǧismānī) and spiritual (rūḥānī). The material beings are perceived by the senses, while the spiritual beings are perceived by thinking. The spiritual beings are also divided into three: (1) The primal būle is a simple substance which is passive (munfaʿil), (2) the soul is a simple substance, but it is active (fāʿāl) and knowing, and (3) the intellect is passive with respect to God, but it is also the agent and cause of the things. God cannot be categorised, neither as material nor spiritual. See Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ, V, pp. 207-8. Al-ʿĀmirī similarly states that the rational soul is “knowing” (ʿallāma) and “active” (fāʿāla) at the same time: Kitāb al-Amadʿalāl l-Abad, in E.K. Rowson, A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and Its Fate: al-ʿĀmirī’s Kitāb al-Amadʿalāl l-Abad, American Oriental Society, New Haven (CT) 1988, p. 90.
the more its power to receive other forms increases in limitless number”.¹⁴ We are familiar with this line of reasoning in other Arabic texts which were produced in the same milieu.¹⁵

Making the most of the diversity of the philosophical culture in his age, Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz does not miss any opportunity to bring forward his major source of inspiration, the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. In such a case, he quotes from the epistle Fi l-ʾAql wa l-maʿqūl, where the Brethren discuss the cogitative faculty (al-quwwa al-mufakkira) and its functions. Therein, the Brethren distinguish the cogitative faculty from the rational/speech faculty (al-quwwa al-nāṭiqa), comparing the relation between them to the relation between the king and his translator. Just as the king consults his translator and depends on him to answer the questions of other people, the cogitative faculty gets help from the rational/speech faculty to construct discourse and speech.¹⁶ The rational faculty gives to the words their meanings, which are present as forms in the cogitative faculty. Then, these words are delivered to the expressive faculty (al-quwwa al-muʿabbira) in order to construct different kinds of speech forms in different languages. Afterwards, in an intriguing passage, the Brethren attribute many actions to the cogitative faculty, including discernment (rawiyya), perception (tasawwur), syllogism (qiyyās), physiognomy (firāsa), interpretation of dreams, and revelation and inspiration (waḥy wa-ilhām). Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz incorporates this passage into his writing, although he connects these actions to the cogitative spirit (al-rūḥ al-ʿilmī), applying his own vocabulary.

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<th>Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, f. 43 r</th>
<th>Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ, III, p. 202</th>
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Plato’s tripartite division of the human soul, i.e., the rational, concupiscent and irascible faculties, was a commonplace among the Arab philosophers, starting from early figures such as al-Kindī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī.¹⁷ The Brethren of Purity have recourse to this division in numerous places of their works.

¹⁴ Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, f. 42 r.
¹⁶ The analogy of “translator” is occasionally repeated in Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ, III, pp. 199-201.
¹⁷ Al-Kindī sees the soul (nafs) as a divine and spiritual substance, and the concupiscent and irascible faculties as those powers (quwwa) which distract the soul from its noble character. See al-Kindī, Fi l-Qawl fī l-Nafs, in Rasāʾil al-Kindī falsafyya, ed. M.ʿA. Abū Rida, Dār al-Fikr al-ʿarabī, I-II, Cairo 1950-53, I, p. 273. According to Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Plato,
their epistles. In a typical passage, the embodied-particular soul (al-nafs al-ğuziya al-muğassada) was parted into three types: the vegetative concupiscent soul, whose desire is for eating, drinking, and sex, the animal irascible soul, whose desire is for dominance and leadership, and the rational soul (al-nafs al-nāṭiqā), whose desire is for the attainment of sciences and virtues.\textsuperscript{18} The Iḥwānian sketch appears to be strikingly similar to Sa’īd b. Dādhurmuz’s treatment of the human spirit in his epistle. Hence, it is not surprising to see that the tripartite division is applied throughout his epistles.\textsuperscript{19} However, contrary to his predecessors, our author prefers to go with his own vocabulary choice, that is, the cogitative spirit (al-rūḥ al-‘ilmī) the concupiscent spirit (al-rūḥ al-šahawī), and the irascible spirit (al-rūḥ al-ġadabi). This preference can be best explained by his effort to see the religious and philosophical discourse at the same level. In fact, Sa’īd b. Dādhurmuz explicitly points to the fact that the saying of the Prophet David about the rūḥ, which has been quoted above, portrays the very same idea of the philosophers about the tripartite definition of soul.\textsuperscript{20}

The Platonic themes in the epistle strengthens with a subsequent section which exhibits another well-known element of Plato’s philosophy: the four cardinal virtues of prudence (iţfā), courage (şaqī’a/naqda), wisdom (ḥikma) and justice (‘adāla).\textsuperscript{21} When the spirit is purified, refined, and perfected by knowledge, and by acquiring these four virtues, it reaches the real pleasure (al-laţţa al-ḥaqqīyya), which is far greater than every mundane pleasure.\textsuperscript{22} The well-being of human beings both in this world and in the hereafter is achieved only through these virtues.\textsuperscript{23} However, one might need to be aided by his bodily features to complete the acquisition of these virtues, since the only qualities whose attainment is accomplished by the pure powers of the spirit is theoretical wisdom and gnosis (ma’rif).\textsuperscript{24}

The human spirit’s necessary engagement with its body results in worldly ties that distract human beings from their path towards salvation. In fact, men’s love of the world is firmly grounded in their natural disposition from their birth. For human beings were created out from earth; and, in this sense, it is their “mother”. Human beings are the children of the earth, and one should not be blamed for loving his mother. It follows that their inclination towards the Hereafter, and their preference for it instead of this world are only accomplished with an additional effort, which comes after their natural disposition.\textsuperscript{25} The spirits that fall short of the path of perfection are stuck in the false pleasures of the worldly life: a serious obstacle for one who attempts to reach the real happiness (al-

\textsuperscript{18} Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-Ṣafā, V, p. 348. For other places, see for example, II, p. 266; p. 298; III, pp. 56-7.
\textsuperscript{20} Sa’īd b. Dādhurmuz, Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, f. 49 r. al-rūḥ al-‘ilmī wa-l-rūḥ al-šahawī wa-l-rūḥ al-ġadabi wa-biyya allatī waṣafahā Dāwūd ‘alayhi l- salām.
\textsuperscript{21} The four virtues are strongly emphasized in Miskawayh, Tahdīb al-ablaq, p. 15 ff. Zurayk.
\textsuperscript{22} Sa’īd b. Dādhurmuz, Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, f. 44 r.
\textsuperscript{23} Id., Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, f. 44 r.
\textsuperscript{24} Id., Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, f. 45 v.
\textsuperscript{25} Id., Risāla fī Faḍl al-‘āḫira ʿalā l-dunyā, f. 6 v.
saʿīda al-haqqīyya). Accordingly, the author concludes the epistle with a section on bodily pleasures (al-laḍḍāt al-ǧismāniyya). It initially appears that the dichotomy between pleasure and pain (alam) is taken as a precept. Hence, pleasure is defined as the relief from pain, a notion that was stated by several authors before. In this respect, the true pleasures reached only by are the rational abilities of the soul, that is, understanding, gnosis, the vision of God, and the perception of good. All these virtues cannot be attained through bodily/material attachments.

As a Conclusion

Does the text of Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz’s Epistle on Soul and Spirit clearly differentiate between the terms spirit (rūḥ) and soul (nafs)? In comparison with the philosophical writings that deal with the difference between these terms, our text does not seem to apply a strict criterion to separate from one another. On the contrary, we come across passages where both terms are used interchangeably. Hence, just before the author engages in narrating the saying of the past prophets, Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz contends,

وقد قلنا غير مرة إن جميع ما يناله النفس من الخيرات إنما يناله عند معرفة الله تعالى، ولا وصول إلى هذه المعرفة العالية إلا بعد معرفة الروح وبقائه بعد مفارقة البدن. فمن الواجب إذن على الإنسان أن يصرف همه ووكده إلى طلب معرفة النفس، فإنها هي السبيل إلى معرفة أمر الآخرة.

This passage adequately shows that our author has the same meaning in mind when he speaks of “knowledge of the spirit” and “knowledge of the soul”, since either is taken as the preliminary requirement for anyone’s path to knowledge of God, the highest and noblest science for mankind. Be that as it may, Saʿīd’s insistent attitude to use the term “spirit” rather than “soul” as he refers to the three faculties of the spirit (rational, concupiscent and irascible) deserves careful attention. This choice makes him closer to those authors who hold that spirit (rūḥ) is specific to individual souls, hence, personal and material. In this sense, the human spirit is also responsible for the rational faculties such as thinking (fikr), distinguishing (tamyīz), and discerning (rawiyya). Moreover, the prophets Abraham, Hūd, Ismael and David had specifically mentioned this rūḥ when they described the human spirit and its relation to God. Our author is very much aware that, clinging to the word rūḥ, he holds his philosophy as close as possible to the prophetic wisdom, the origin of human awareness of metaphysical realities.

26 Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ, III, pp. 49-50; 256; Miskawayh, Tahqīb al-ablāq, p. 37 Zurayk.
28 Qustā b. Lūqā (d. before 311/923) posits rūḥ as a thin matter which permeates throughout the body, and nafs as an immaterial substance which is the cause of movement in body. It is the rūḥ that is responsible for the rational faculties such as fikr, rawiyya, and tamyiz. The rūḥ is the proximate cause of the human life, while nafs is the remote cause of it. See Qustā b. Lūqā, Kitāb al-farg hayna l-rūḥ wa-l-nafs wa quwā al-nafs wa-māhiyyat al-nafs, in H. Ziya Ülken, Rasāʾil Ibn Sīnā, Istanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, Istanbul 1953, pp. 83-94. See also Rowson, A Muslim Philosopher, p. 267.
29 Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ, f. 41 r.
30 Cf. Qustā b. Lūqā, mentioned above.
31 Very close to the Ismaili interpretation, Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz elsewhere writes: “the prophets are the teachers of people; the angels are the teachers of the prophets; the sacred spirits and active intellects are the teachers of the angels; and the Creator the Exalted is the teacher of all. Accordingly, God said: “He taught by the pen, and taught man that which he did not know” (96:4-5)”: Saʿīd b. Dādhurmuz, Risāla fī Fadl al-āḥiraʿalā l-dunyā, ff. 19v - 20r.