

on the practical and religious knowledge of Abu Bakr, which stood the community in good stead in the immediate aftermath of the Prophet's death. In the eleventh century, al-Mawardi referred to two early competing schools of thought, one of which believed that reason decreed that there be a ruler of the polity after the death of the Prophet while the other believed that this was so decreed through revelation. Both schools concurred that in either case social harmony and the public good were served by appointing a ruler who could contain chaos and adjudicate disputes. By Ibn Taymiyya's time we see *maslahah* specifically cited as one of the main reasons, if not *the* main reason, for considering the rule of the Rightly-Guided caliphs as paradigmatic for later Muslims. In his usage, *maslahah* is both "public good/interest" and "political expediency," judicious recourse to which enhanced the well-being of the early polity as was the case with the Rightly-Guided caliphs and their successors. In the early modern period, Rashid Rida regarded a wide range of people who possess expertise in traditional fields (such as jurisprudence) to modern sciences (such as horticulture) to share in a broadly defined notion of socio-political-intellectual authority. He maintained that to fail to consult the proper expert at the proper time is to fail in proper administration of the polity. Since the late twentieth century and continuing into the present one, modernist and reformist Muslim scholars, as we saw, have been emphasizing the concept of *maslahah* and, in conjunction with traditional concepts such as *shura* and *ijtihād*, are establishing a theoretical basis for the legitimization of representative and democratic governments.

Interpretations of what exactly constituted the public good/interest and how it was to be achieved remained diverse through time, but that the public good must be served has remained a central and stable concern of Islamic discourses on legitimate leadership and political ethics since the formative period.

3

On Sa'di's *Treatise on Advice to the Kings*

ALIREZA SHOMALI
AND MEHRZAD BOROUJERDI

Cherish the poor, and seek not thine own comfort. The shepherd should not sleep while the wolf is among the sheep. Protect the needy, for a king wears his crown for the sake of his subjects. The people are as the root and the king is as the tree; and the tree, O son, gains strength from the root. He who has fear of injury to his kingdom should not oppress the people. Seek not plenteousness in that land where the people are afflicted by the king.

—King Anushirvan's deathbed counsel to his son Hormuz (Sa'di's opening remark in *Bustan*, chapter 1)

THE NINTH to the thirteenth centuries AD represent the "golden age" of Iranian culture and Islamic philosophy. Emblematic of an awakening self-consciousness in the Islamic world, which some have referred to as "medieval Enlightenment,"¹ rationalism emerged within this period as a

We wish to thank Ebrahim Khalifeh-Soltani for his valuable comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

1. See Strauss 1991, 205–6; and Strauss 1995, 152–53. From the ninth through the eleventh centuries, western Iran under the Persian Buyids and eastern Iran—i.e., Khurasan and Transoxiana—under the Samanids witnessed what scholars identify as the "new Persian Renaissance" or the "Renaissance of Islam." See Fry 1965 and Kraemer 1986.

powerful discourse that could capably rival the dominant jurisprudential discourse. Accordingly, a whole range of important philosophers, scientists, historians, poets, and statesmen plunged themselves into new endeavors and contemplated different and novel questions.²

Muslih al-Din Sa'di's (1209–1291) opening passage from the first chapter of *Bustan*, where he approvingly quotes counsel from the pre-Islamic King Anushirvan,³ cleverly embodies elements of the type of rationalism that emerged during this era.⁴ Despite Sa'di's extensive training in Islamic theology and jurisprudence, there is a curious absence of jurisprudential language in his deliberations on statecraft. Why, one might ask? In this chapter we will address this question by (a) highlighting Sa'di's predominantly pragmatic and secular beliefs about statecraft, and (b) situating him within a broad conception of social contract. The Sa'di that emerges is one who adopts a language of social contract in which the king does not own the people and is not God's representative

2. To name but a few, Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari (ca. 841–922), Muhammad ibn Zakariya Razi (865–925/932), Rudaki Samarqandi (858–941), Abu Nasr Farabi (874–950), Firdawsi (940–1020), Avicenna (980–1037), Farrukhi Sistani (960–1037), Abu Rayhan Biruni (973–1048), Nasir Khusrau Qubadiyani (1004–1088), Nizam al-Mulk (1017–1092), Khayyam (1048–1131), Anwari Abiwardi (1126–1190), Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi (1154–1191), Averroes (1126–1198), Nizami Ganjawi (1141–1209), Fakhr al-Din Razi (1149–1209), Attar Nishaburi (1145–1230), Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273), Sadr ad-Din Qunawi (d. 1273/5), and Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201–1274).

3. Anushirvan (surnamed “the Just”) (ca. 501–579) was the twenty-second Sassanid emperor of Persia, who ruled from 531 to 579.

4. According to medieval Enlightenment, reason incorporates both theoretical and practical wisdom (*hikmat-i nazari* and *hikmat-i amali*). Politics, ethics, and economics are the three constitutive elements of practical wisdom. Political philosophy in its original meaning, which embodies Socrates's philosophic life, probes into the nature of good and evil and applies this knowledge in order to make noble life possible in the just polis. Political philosophy, therefore, is based on practical wisdom (for more on this see Bruell 1988). A second meaning of rationalism suggests something that promotes a means to an end. This is also the definition of pragmatic rationality. In this chapter rationalism connotes both practical wisdom and pragmatic rationality, and the expression “secular reasoning” is used interchangeably with it. Secular or practical reasoning should not be confused with *philosophical secularism*, which is a type of metaphysics that belongs to *theoretical* wisdom.

on earth. Rather, he is an employee hired by the people to protect their welfare and security.⁵

Far from claiming that Sa'di has articulated a systematically consistent political theory, we offer a series of observations concerning his seminal work on a manual for the prince, *Nasihah al-muluk*, and suggest a (re)reading of Sa'di as part of the responsibility of intellectuals to revive and refurbish possibilities that are latent in the Islamic tradition. The tradition is pregnant with a whole host of potentialities that might help future generations of Muslims contemplate a nontheocratic statecraft.

On Secular Reasoning and Justice

Sa'di overtly differentiates between the realm of politics and practical wisdom on the one hand and the domain of individual life on the other. He believes that while the individuals must follow the *shari'a* in their daily prayers and interactions, the supplications of the king are qualitatively different from those of clerics and ordinary subjects. For Sa'di, a just king who serves his subjects by protecting them from harm and secures a just society is simultaneously praying to God (see #94).⁶ Sa'di's background in Islamic mysticism leads him to differentiate between two types of religiosity corresponding to two distinct modes of a man-God relationship: the *shari'a* and the *tariqah* [path to God]. While the universal rules of jurisprudence dominate the former, singularity and virtue uphold the realm of the latter. Underscoring this distinction, Sa'di elevates the king's proper fulfillment of his mandate as the king's admission into the realm of *tariqah*, thereby guaranteeing his ultimate salvation. In contradistinction to mainstream mysticism,⁷ Sa'di maintains that the king's application of

5. In the canons of Islamic law and jurisprudence, the concept of *ijarah* also includes the meaning “to hire” or “to employ.” This age-old concept plays an important role in shedding light on the idea of social contract.

6. The numbers refer to the 151 articles of Sa'di's *Treatise on Advice to the Kings*, whose English translation constitutes the second part of this chapter.

7. According to different schools within mainstream mysticism, following *tariqah* can be realized through (a) solitude and abnegation of worldly affairs advocated by

secular-practical reasoning in serving the people inducts the king into the realm of *tariqah*.⁸

One place in which Sa'di makes this point explicit is in the story of Atabeg Tuklah,⁹ as narrated in *Bustan*:

It is recounted in the history of preceding kings
That when Tuklah ascended to the throne of the Zangi dynasty,
Under his rule no one harmed a fellow creature,
And his good repute outshined that of other kings.
The king once confided to a sage
That, alas, fruitless have been my years,
May I now sit in the corner of devotion?
To usefully employ the few short days that yet remain to me?
[Since] the throne and positions of power are all but transient
It is only the ascetic Sufi who takes happiness to the [narrow] grave
Upon hearing Tuklah, the sagacious sage burst into rage
And, rebuking Tuklah, cried: Enough!
Tariqah consists solely in serving the people
And finds no place in the prayer beads, or prayer-rug, or tattered
garment.
Be a king in sovereignty and simultaneously
A devotee of purity of morals

Bayazid Bastami (804–874), (b) self-control and inward monitoring advocated by Junayd Nahavandi (830–910), and (c) love and compassion championed by Jalal al-Din Rumi (for more information see Furuzanfar 1972).

8. Similar to Sa'di, the Persian mystics Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr (967–1049) and Abu Hafs Umar Suhrawardi (1144–1234) also equate the *tariqah* with serving the public. See Munawwar 1998. Sa'di's novelty, however, resides in the fact that he ties *tariqah* with *political* service to the people. Badi' al-Zaman Furuzanfar (1904–1970), the renowned scholar of Islamic mysticism, confirms the point that Sa'di moves beyond the above-mentioned interpretations and offers yet a fourth alternative that links *tariqah* with political service (79–80).

9. Muzaffar al-Din Tuklah ibn Zangi (d. 1195) was one of the sultans of the Salghurid dynasty who ruled from 1175 to 1195. He had a reputation for justice and mystical devotion. See Musawi Bojnurdi 1994, 492.

Act sincerely and in good will
And never rave about piety and creed.
Action, not words, is demanded by *tariqah*
For words without action are void of substance.
The wise who have the wealth of purity
Wear this tattered garment underneath their pristine mantle.¹⁰

The above poem demonstrates how in the poet's eyes, a wise king who acts justly is striding toward God. Furthermore, following a causal logic, Sa'di believes that the king's justice guarantees the city's well-being and in turn secures the prosperity of his state. In other words, the king's primary self-interest (that is, power and sovereignty) becomes conditional upon meeting the primary interest of the subjects (that is, security and prosperity) (see #95). Sa'di invokes this language of causal relationship when he maintains that a city's reputation for justice and security lures traders to its shores to invest (see #1, 43, 44). And, on the contrary, the king's injustice is tantamount to self-destruction, like a lumber thief who saws a tree's branch while sitting on it. Observing this thief, the "owner of the garden," who is a metaphor for the people, concludes that, more than harming me, this thief is wounding himself (Sa'di 1997, 239–41; also see #103). Furthermore, Sa'di's idea of justice does not derive from any specific religion. Instead, it is imbued with secular/pragmatic (or utilitarian) implications (see #79). The pagan King Anushirvan secures a place in glorious Paradise by choosing justice (Sa'di 1906, 35, 40), that is, by not being kind to criminals or tormenting the innocent (see #29).

In the spirit of the Golden Rule of ethics, Sa'di counsels the king, "Hold sway over others such that if you were one of them, you could tolerate such reign" (#121). And, "rule in such manner that if dethroned you would neither feel ashamed of your track record nor be treated unkindly by people" (#142). In other words, practical reason, including ethics, alone discerns what justice is. Moreover, Sa'di (1997, 228) adds that just kings are

10. Sa'di 1997, 233–34. Parts of this translation were transcribed from *The Bustan of Sa'di* prepared by the Iran Chamber Society (2010).

simultaneously "cultivators of religion," that is, if justice with its metareligious definition is promoted, religion will be shielded. Using this subtle meaning or distinction, Sa'di's king becomes a servant of religion. Such a king serves faith not by establishing theocracy but by addressing the demands of universal and metareligious justice, which human reason discloses. Borrowing Isaiah Berlin's terminology, we may state that Sa'di's king is akin to a "night-watchman"¹¹ with a clearly defined duty of securing the neighborhood/city and protecting its inhabitants from the wicked inside and outside its boundaries.

In Sa'di's eyes, the otherworldly good is the dependent variable whereas the worldly good (read security and justice in society) is the independent variable. The happiness in the afterlife for the king and his lieutenants follows the worldly happiness of the people;¹² that is, their consent, security, and prosperity—the very secular measures of affluence in the city—are the sign of the otherworldly redemption. Accordingly, God's consent—that is, the warranty of the king and his subjects' salvation in the hereafter—naturally follows the execution of justice.

Sa'di on Social Contract

The king's service to the people entitles him to receive a wage for his service. The compensation he receives is indeed what empowers the king to perform his duty in the first place. Sa'di calls this reward *authority*, which demands the subjects' actual obedience (see #89). Let us lay out the logic of protection/obedience in Sa'di's treatment of authority at greater length (see #93). This logic is the rationale that underwrites the tacit contract between the king and his subjects. The king guards (see #12) the latter against harm, provided that he receives obedience from

11. See Berlin 2000, 75 and 199.

12. Article #96 reads, "The king's emissary must consider God's consent over the king's command so as to truly benefit from his vicinity to him/Him." Obeying God's commands, as stated in the preamble of *Nasihah al-muluk*, and obtaining God's consent are conditional upon acting justly and not obeying the king blindly.

them, and in their turn people offer obedience to the king on condition that they receive security. For Thomas Hobbes, such rationality of exchange results in a covenant among the people (and not between the people and the king). According to this covenant, the people relinquish all of their rights before the state and unreservedly obey the Leviathan, which, consequently, emerges as the Absolutist State (Hobbes 1966, 157). In contradistinction to Hobbes, Sa'di's works harbor an implicit contract-based concept of governance that does not result in the absolute authority of the king. Perhaps the difference can be attributed to, among other things, the presence of a third factor in Sa'di's worldview (and its absence in Hobbes's), that is, God.

There is a philosophy hidden behind Sa'di's application of the famous metaphor of king as shepherd. This age-old metaphor can be understood in at least two different ways. First, the king is the shepherd and the subjects are *his* sheep, akin to a master who *owns* his slaves. The shepherd unilaterally decides what is best for the sheep while the latter have no say regarding their own well-being. The shepherd-king thus is a master who has the right to command, establish the law, and demand obedience while the subjects have no right but the duty of compliance.¹³

Sa'di presents the shepherd-king metaphor in a second way, one in which the king is a shepherd who is *hired* by the people to protect their life and belongings. As he emphatically states in *Golestan* (Sa'di 1997, 52), "the sole purpose for having kings is protection of people":

The sheep is not for the shepherd

It is the shepherd that is for serving the sheep.

And on another occasion, he continues (Sa'di 1949, 27), "the king is more needful of having subjects than the subjects are in need of a king. The subjects can live with or without a king while kingship is not imaginable

13. This viewpoint is discernible in the medieval theory of the divine rights of king as well as in modern secular dictatorships where the ruler sits on the throne vacated by God.

without subjects." To further assert his position, Sa'di immediately adds, "An apt analogy for the king and the subjects is that of the shepherd whose wage would be *haram* should he fail to take proper care of the herd" (Sa'di 1949, 27).¹⁴ In this more humane and rational interpretation of the king-shepherd allegory, the central point of analogy is not ownership but employment; the shepherd does not own the sheep; rather, he is merely a hired agent. In the presence of someone of the stature of Sultan Abaqa Khan, the representative and son of the Mughal emperor Hulagu Khan, Sa'di recites the following lines:

A righteous monarch who protects his subjects from harm
 Receives tax that is *halal* for his shepherding wage
 And if he is not a true shepherd of the people, may that wage change
 into poison
 Since what he receives is poll tax illegitimately achieved.¹⁵

What emerges as a recurring theme in Sa'di's conception of statecraft is a contract whereby the king is the employee¹⁶ and the people are the employers. In other words, Sa'di's expression "the shepherd of the people" denotes a servant of the people who is hired to protect the latter's security/property (that is, the herd).¹⁷ The shepherd's income (authority) is considered *haram* (illegitimate) if he is (a) unable to perform his job in protecting the flock, (b) capable of protecting the sheep but refuses to do so, or (c) the wolf in the cloak of the shepherd (see #33). In all of the above scenarios, the king has violated his obligations toward the people

14. In general, the term *haram* implies what is sanctioned as illegitimate by God. In the lexicon of Islamic jurisprudence, it is the opposite of *halal*.

15. Sa'di 1997, 1182. Abaqa Khan (also spelled Abaga) (1234–1282) reigned over the Tabriz principality from 1265 to 1282.

16. In other words, he is the "shepherd of the people."

17. Compare Sa'di's to Nietzsche's lines: "On the sovereign types.—The 'shepherd' as opposed to the 'master' (—the former a means of preserving the herd; the latter the end for which the herd exists)" (Nietzsche 1968, 479).

by depriving them of their right to be protected. Such conduct is not only illegitimate but also unvirtuous (see #97).

Sa'di's Realism

As a man of the world, Sa'di is not a utopian thinker necessarily intent on changing it. Having probed into the *nature* of man and society, he is aware that human nature, unlike molding clay, cannot be radically altered. Sa'di acknowledges that man is motivated by self-interest and that politics cannot be understood without taking this fact into consideration. Almost two centuries before Machiavelli (1469–1527) and three hundred years before Hobbes (1588–1679), he acknowledges that kings are first and foremost interested in their own well-being and self-preservation. In *Nasihah al-muluk*, he devotes the lion's share of his advice to the reason of the state and the type of conduct that the sovereign should undertake to preserve his throne. Consider the following:

On statecraft, see #7, 21, 40, 48, 54, 70, 135.

On staffing the state, see #8, 10, 14, 24, 25, 59, 104, 106, 150.

On dealing with enemies, see #38, 39, 55, 72, 83, 87, 102, 105, 132, 133, 134, 149.¹⁸

On political economy, see #15, 17, 37, 43, 44, 88, 103, 110, 120.

On judicial affairs, see #14, 16, 26, 27, 35, 41, 46, 58, 65, 67, 74, 75, 81, 107.

As a further sign of realism, Sa'di's state administers the city and regulates peoples' lives based on secular human intellect; not by religious provisions. His city flourishes and collapses from material, not meta-physical, causes (see #1). Article #30 indicates human experience and

18. Furthermore, in Sa'di's advice to Sultan Ankiyanu (1949, 27), it reads, "Make strong allies to weaken your strong enemies." This same statement can also be interpreted as follows: "Strengthen your allies in order to weaken your strong enemies."

rational consultation should steer the machinery of the state.¹⁹ Furthermore, as stated in the advice treaty to Sultan Ankiyanu, once the king has articulated the state interest in such a fashion it is incumbent upon all to follow it. Sa'di immediately adds that, on issues pertaining to the interest of religion, however, the verdicts of [clerical]-judges take precedence. "Otherwise both will ruin." This last sentence can be interpreted in two radically different manners. One interpretation implies that, if the citizens were not to follow the commands of kings and [clerical]-judges in their respective domains of authority, chaos would ensue. A second interpretation warns that mixing the mandates of religion and state will result in ruin to both.²⁰

Within the universe of Sa'di's realism, self-interest is not given free rein. He articulates at least three arguments that admonish the king against turning self-interest into a destructive force. Sa'di's method of taming the sovereign is to warn him about worldly and otherworldly losses. He reminds his king of the following points:

The Mutual Self-interest of the King and the Public. "Under a king totally preoccupied with securing his self-interest, the public interest is not realized. Accordingly, the interest of all parties including the king will perish" (#95). In other words, Sa'di reminds the sovereign that the durability of office is contingent upon mass consent more than the state's coercion. In *Golestan* he writes,

A true king never adopts injustice as his vocation
 Since a wolf is not fit for shepherding
 A king who inaugurates failure of justice
 Strikes at the foundations of his own sovereignty. (Sa'di 1997, 32)

19. Similar to Sa'di, Iran's national poet Firdawsi (940–1020) considers secular practical reasoning as the crux of statecraft. See Parham 1998, 88–125.

20. The exact text reads, "The king's decree on what constitutes State interest must necessarily be followed. And, the [clerical]-judges' decree on what constitutes the interest of religion must necessarily be followed. Otherwise, both will [end in] ruin" (Sa'di 1949, 27).

The Requisite of Good Repute. Appealing to the human desire to master death by immortalizing one's reputation, Sa'di writes to the king, "Among your possessions it is only your good repute that lasts with you after your departure; poor is he who does not leave a good repute behind" (#111; see also 113, 114, 119, 129). Invoking Prophet Abraham's prayer narrated in the Qur'an,²¹ Sa'di reminds the statesman, "Life may leave you with but two achievements: good repute and spiritual reward. Beyond these two, everything else shall perish" (Sa'di 1997, 930). In other words, injustice is the corrosion of a good reputation while justice is the adornment of loyalty.

The Weight of the Day of Judgment. Perhaps more than any other Persian thinker, Sa'di conjures up the theme of Judgment Day for a blatantly political purpose. His works are filled with references to death, afterlife, and perdition in order to plant fear into the heart of the sovereign lest he commit injustice (see #80, 82, 124, 125, 130). He intermittently counsels the king to read the chronicles of earlier kings and to commit to memory those passages about the transitory nature of power (and how everything scatters to the winds) (see #21, 116, 131).²²

But what happens if the king is not tamed by the above three provisions? Can the people then rise up against him? The Hobbesian theory of social contract leaves no room for legitimate rebellion and overthrow of the Leviathan because the people have relinquished a priori all their citizenry rights. However, one can deduce a notion of legitimate rebellion within the confines of a non-Hobbesian contract such as Sa'di's. If one side of the contract, that is, the king, fails to meet his obligation of protection, the subjects have the right to withhold his payment, that is, their obedience. Moreover, because the contract is sanctioned by God, a

21. "Grant me honorable mention on the tongue of truth among the latest [generations]." Qur'an 26:84.

22. For examples of Sa'di's emotive depiction of death while counseling the king, see the odes and exhortations section, especially the ode addressed to Sultan Ankiyanu (Sa'di 1997, 912–14).

king who breaks his covenant with the people simultaneously garners the wrath of God.²³

Sa'di's nonutopianism, however, prevents him from enthusiastically embracing a theory and practice of rebellion. If confronted with the above questions, Sa'di would probably have maintained that the three aforementioned provisions are the only choices left to the public and that prudence does not permit more. There is no guarantee that through revolution people will not make their condition even worse.²⁴ Moreover, God may vanquish an unjust king through the might of an adversary or exact his justice in the afterlife.

As mentioned above, the presence of God is one of the ways in which one can distinguish Sa'di's contract from that of Hobbes. According to the theistic worldview that dominates Sa'di's era, God has created the cosmos and has entrusted human beings with a social nature. The God-created nature of humans calls for collective life, security, and governance. If in response to this call the people enter into a contract that helps them fulfill the above requirements, God will bestow his sanction on them because the contract is rational and accordingly in harmony with the state of nature. Moreover, the omnipotence of God precludes entrusting the king with as much absolute power as Hobbes's Leviathan enjoys (see #2, 3, 35, 151). Within the universe of Sa'di's theistic weltanschauung, the king and the subjects must all be God-fearing creatures (see #101).

While *Nasihah al-muluk* contains numerous articles about the king-public relationship, only a few articles address the king-clergyman liaison. Sa'di states that the king must act and speak respectfully in the presence

23. This same logic is also applicable to people whenever they fail to fulfill their part of the contract in obeying a just king. Such conduct disappoints God, the guarantor of the contract. A contract-based interpretation, therefore, sheds new light on the traditional divine dicta about following the king: people should obey the king and please God not because the king is His representative on earth but because they have signed a contract.

24. In *The Revival of Religious Sciences (Ihya' ulum al-din)*, Sa'di's intellectual mentor, Abu Hamed Ghazali (1058-1111), states in a jurisprudential decree that the people may at best softly admonish the unjust king and shall never draw swords against him to cause bloodshed (see Ghazali 1982, 2nd quarter, bk. 19).

of religious leaders (#20), exalt and dignify them (#136), and recognize the sovereignty of the jurist's jail as a parallel judicial organ (#41).²⁵ While the above three articles are still compatible with a secular reading of Sa'di's notion of statecraft, the article that seems most pertinent is article #4: "The ruler must treat religious leaders and clergymen with reverence and offer them a prominent seat, and rule as they deem it advisable so that kingship is in compliance with the shari'a and not vice versa."

The above article is open to a number of different interpretations. One can view it as yet another manipulation by Sa'di to curtail the emergence of absolutist kings. A second interpretation suggests that "compliance with the shari'a" does not necessarily rule out the practicality and desirability of a wide range of secular undertakings, which do not fall under the jurisprudential label of *haram*.²⁶ In this sense, kingship is not theocratic but still in compliance with the shari'a. Yet a third interpretation is one that calls for the establishment of a theocracy.²⁷

The reading of Sa'di presented in this chapter does not present him as a modern thinker with a well-developed political philosophy or a champion of revolutionary politics. Sa'di, living in the thirteenth century, did not develop a systematic political theory of statecraft akin to the yet-to-emerge school of social contract represented by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Indeed, the intellectual paradigm of his time could not have found the modern theory of social contract relevant simply because the latter is "modern" in its *philosophically* secular and nonreligious worldview. In other words, Sa'di is not the forefather of the modern school of social contract. And this is entirely appropriate for the time.

Nevertheless, what makes Sa'di's deliberations so intriguing is a sketchy conceptualization of a humane type of politics incorporating

25. The jurist's jail was used to hold civil law offenders while the king's penitentiary incarcerated those guilty of penal offenses. See al-Mawardi 1996.

26. Islamic jurisprudence has a notion of the discretionary sphere of the law (*mint-aqah al-firaq*), which can host the secular and practical reasoning of the State.

27. The same ambiguity is also present in article #77. In light of our interpretation of all the other articles of *Nasihah al-muluk*, we prefer the first and second interpretations when addressing articles #4 and 77.

elements of pragmatism, secular statecraft, and public interest. He views governance as a rational contract between the sovereign and the people without having to reject Deity or embrace theocracy.



Sa'di's *Treatise on Advice to the Kings*

Translated by Alireza Shomali and Mehrzad Boroujerdi

Introduction

Sa'di, a celebrated Persian poet and writer, was born in Shiraz. His poetical nom de plume, Sa'di, was derived from Atabeg Sa'd ibn Abu Bakr ibn Sa'd ibn Zangi.²⁸ As a young man Sa'di studied Islamic theology and jurisprudence in the prestigious Nizzamiya school in Baghdad. He reportedly traveled extensively through such regions as Anatolia, Arabia, Caucasus, the Fertile Crescent, North Africa, and South Asia. In addition to his worldly excursions (*sayr-i afaq*), Sa'di also undertook inward sojourns (*sayr-i anfus*) into the realm of the human mind and mysticism. These travels endowed him with a wealth of practical wisdom and deliberation on the economic, political, and social experiences of those with whom he rubbed shoulders. *Bustan* and *Golestan*,²⁹ which exhibit Sa'di's intellectual maturity in his most eloquent manner, provide the reader with a treasure trove of practical advice concerning morality, politics, and humane living.

Sa'di's *Nasihah al-muluk* (Treatise on advice to the kings) encapsulates his lifetime deliberations on the above themes succinctly and lucidly. Although it is not clear exactly when this treatise was penned, its content demonstrates the maturity of thought that is evident in Sa'di's *Bustan* and

28. Atabeg Sa'd bin Abu Bakr ibn Sa'd ibn Zangi (1223–1260) was one of the sultans of the Salghurid dynasty, who officially ruled for only eighteen days before succumbing to illness. See Musawi Bojnurdi 1994, 495.

29. Sa'di started writing these two books respectively in 1257 and 1258.

Golestan. Rather than directed at any particular ruler, the treatise provides a set of broad moral-political insights and instructions for present and future rulers. These instructions are also consistent with his other shorter advice treatises dedicated to Sultan Ankiyanu (Sa'di 1949, 27–28)³⁰ and to Sultan Abaqa Khan (Sa'di 1997, 1181–82).

Convinced of the canonical role of *Nasihah al-muluk* in illuminating Sa'di's political philosophy, we have undertaken a full translation of this treatise from Persian into English. In translating this text we relied upon Sa'di's primary text (1997, 1117–37) as our main source. This version is meticulously edited by the erudite scholar and politician Muhammad Ali Furughi (1878–1942), who based it upon more than twelve of the earliest editions dating back to the fourteenth century (see Sa'di 1997, viii–ix).³¹ In addition to Furughi's version, we examined four other editions of this treatise and took note of the minor differences between them inasmuch as they could alter the meaning of some of the statements.³² These differences are highlighted in the footnotes.



Treatise on Advice to the Kings

May all praises be to God who alone and self-sufficiently watches over His creatures. May all thanks be to Him for His grace. I beg for more of His grace and declare that there is no God but He who is known as the absolute and eternal and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger who traversed the heaven.

After paying tribute to the lord of existence and commending the best among Adam's progeny—God's blessing and peace be upon him—we begin

30. The Mughal-era governor of Fars province from 1268 to 1272.

31. Furughi confirms both the authenticity of *Nasihah al-muluk* and its conformity with the scroll of wisdom that unfolds in *Golestan* and especially in *Bustan* (Sa'di 1997, 876).

32. See citations under Sa'di in the Works Cited section of this book. In addition, we also consulted Sa'di 1906 to find equivalent terms for a few Persian expressions.

to offer advice to statesmen, responding to a dear friend who requested a lucid treatise on this subject. I wrote to this friend—may the noble moments of his life be sustained by God's grace and sanctioned by serving the Almighty Lord—that God in the Holy Book states, "[God orders you] when ruling over and judging among the people, to do it justly," and on another occasion, "God orders you [the people] to act toward others based on justice and grace." God Almighty phrased it succinctly, and yet the elaboration of God's words exceeds books. However, within the capacity of our intellect, we shall offer a few words on justice and grace, and we trust God in this task because our success is in His hands.

- 1- Kings who attend to their subjects are, in fact, guardians of their own state and status because the kings' justice, grace, and fairness result in security and harmony among his subjects, breed civil prosperity, and boost productivity. Consequently, the excellent repute of the king and of his subjects' comfort—together with news about the security and affordability of major staples within the territory—travels around the world. The travelers and traders, therefore, will be encouraged to trade fabrics, grains, and other goods. The State and the country will subsequently thrive. The State coffers will be filled; soldiers and State servants will prosper; worldly goods will abound, and [hence] otherworldly salvation will be obtained. The king who follows the path of injustice forfeits all these achievements at once.

The unjust departed and left their wicked customs behind
The just departed and left their good name as a memorial.³³

- 2- One of the chief qualities of the kings should be that, in their nightly solitude, they beg at the Almighty's doorsill, while during the day,

33. In Sa'di 1876, 27, the poem reads instead,

Look at the mistake [or the mischief] of the unjust
The world [that he conquered] survives, yet he departed carrying but the
burden of his ill-repute.

they resume their statesmanship. It is said that Sultan Mahmud-i Sabuktakin³⁴—may God's blessing be upon him—removed his attire every sunset and assumed the garb of the dervish and humbly prostrated to God, crying, "O Almighty Lord! authority and State are truly yours, and I am your servant. Authority has not come to me by my might and sword; you blessed me with this kingdom, and I pray that you empower me and assist me since you are the compassionate." Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz³⁵—may God's blessing be upon him—also prayed to God each dawn, while praising God's grace and requesting from Him his subjects' security and harmony. He would say, "O Almighty Lord! you have entrusted this weak servant with an arduous task that exceeds his capacity. Pray, assist me to be just, gracious, and fair; and save me from treating people unjustly; pray, relieve me from the vice of people and relieve people from my vice. Pray, do not let my behavior injure a heart or let an indignant heart curse me."

- 3- The king must continuously contemplate God's omnipotence and permanence [as opposed to man's ephemeral power]; be cautious about the sport of fortune; and, finally, ponder the frequent transition of power from one group to another, lest [the king] deceive himself by the fleeting moments of his worldly sojourn or take solace in his short-lived status.

One of the caliphs requested advice from Bohlul.³⁶ The latter replied, "Thou canst bear nothing with thee from this world to the next, save a recompense or a punishment, and the choice rests with thee."³⁷

34. Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi (971–1030) was the most prominent ruler of the Ghaznavid dynasty, who ruled from 998 to 1030 and died in Ghazni, in today's Afghanistan.

35. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (ca. 682–720) was an Umayyad caliph who ruled from 717 to 720 and died in Halab, in today's Syria.

36. Abu Wahib Bohlul ibn Amr al-Seyrafi al-Kufi (died ca. 806), also known as Bohlul the Majnun, was a wise man pretending to be mad. He is famous for his clever remarks.

37. Translation taken from Sa'di 1906, 19–20.

- 4- The ruler must treat religious leaders and clergymen with reverence, offer them a prominent seat, and rule as they deem it advisable so that kingship is in compliance with the shari'a and not vice versa.
- 5- Among the most important tasks of the State is the construction of mosques, houses of dervishes, bridges, water reservoirs, and roadside wells.
- 6- Cater to the needs of God-fearing people and consider your service as an opportunity, for the prayers of the pious assist government and nourish the State. The sages have advised that durability of the State and the augmentation of its power depend on the king's attendance to the destitute and assistance to the desolate.
- 7- An astute king should keenly probe the disposition and temperament of his companions and subsequently win them over in proportion to their merit, and not as to what the greedy expect. Otherwise, the State's reserves dwindle before the thirst of those fallen into greed's snare is quenched. Self-respecting souls would never engage in self-promotion or send an advocate to negotiate on their behalf. Therefore, those who truly deserve the king's esteem will receive it without having to demean themselves by uttering their needs. Consequently, the dignified will not solicit, and the greedy will not submit to avarice.

If a man possesses a worthy art,
It is that worthy art, and not his utterance, which reveals itself.

- 8- The king should provide for the aged servants of the State and not expect further service from them since their dawn prayer exceeds their daytime service in value.
- 9- To ensure that his own achievements live on posthumously, a newly minted ruler should not demolish the worthy relics of past kings.
- 10- The associate of the court must be wise, handsome, pious, of noble birth and good name, propitious, experienced, and competent so that his conduct is nothing but praiseworthy.
- 11- A minister worthy of the designation is concerned first and foremost with the king's salvation and not with his property. He should consider

the king's maltreatment of his subjects as a more severe problem than the king's being wronged by his subjects.

- 12- The king should incessantly attend to the weak and aged, to widows, orphans, the needy, and strangers. As advised by the sages, the king who does not care for his subjects is not worthy of the name of master, and his mastery will not last.
- 13- The king is the father of the orphan. He should care for the orphan better than his own biological parents so that one can clearly see the difference between having a poor father and having the king for a father.

It is reported that someone left behind a child and a bag of gold. The ruler sent an envoy to the guardian to confiscate the gold. The guardian placed the gold next to the child and took them to the ruler's court. "This gold is not mine," said the guardian, "as it belongs to this orphan. If you are taking it away, take it from him so that you know to whom it should be returned on the Day of Judgment." The ruler was in tears, and kissing the eyes of the orphan, said, "How can I defend myself against the charges of this orphan on the Day of Judgment?" The ruler handed over the bag of gold to the guardian and provided for the livelihood of the orphan until he reached adolescence.

- 14- The openly corrupt must not be embraced or appeased by the ruler because the companion of the criminal is a criminal too and deserves punishment.
- 15- Generosity when your expenses exceed revenue is blameworthy; squandering and stinginess are equally culpable. Find the path in between.
- 16- Benevolence and noblesse oblige have limits; too much clemency may empower the wicked and kindle their avarice. Earning a reputation for magnanimity does not imply tolerating the transgressors' injustice. The wise do not find such tolerance virtuous, only fatuous.
- 17- Generosity is praiseworthy as long as it does not weaken state power or cause it harm. Reducing state expenditures is prudent as long as the soldiers and state servants do not suffer financially.

- 18- The king's manifest wrath and obduracy are effective as long as they do not plant the seeds of hatred in people's hearts. His jubilation and jesting are permissible as long as they do not suggest that the king's behavior is frivolous.
- 19- Piety and abstinence are commendable so long as they do not hamper life for the sovereign and his associates. Relaxation and joy are acceptable so long as such practices do not distract the king from attending to his religious obligations or upholding the interests of the citizenry.
- 20- The king should observe prayer times and, out of respect, refrain from drinking or other indecent acts during such times. [Similarly], in the presence of the pious and religious leaders, he should speak and act in accord with their view.
- 21- The king must immerse himself in the history of former kings so that he may imitate their noble practices, ponder the vicissitudes of their times, and not be deceived by status, prestige, and power.
- 22- The king should not always preoccupy himself with entertainers, chess and backgammon players, performers, poets, storytellers, magicians, and the like. Although entertainment is occasionally permissible to lift the king's spirits, excessive leisure can have its toll on the king's judgment. It is reported that Shibli—may God's blessing be upon him—entered the court and saw the king and his vizier playing chess.³⁸ "Bravo," Shibli remarked sarcastically, "you are placed here to act [seriously] and righteously. Instead you are playing chess?"
- 23- The administration of the State is a tremendous responsibility. It requires vigilance and prudence and, also, continuous prayer to God so that what happens by the king's will, tongue, hands, and pen will be productive to the dominion and to religion and [thus] accord with God's consent.

38. Abu Bakr Shibli (861–946) was a renowned pious and Sufi master. Of Persian background, he was born in Samarra (present-day Iraq), became a governor of the Dama-vand region in Persia, and later left office to follow the path of asceticism.

- 24- Do not entrust the novice and the untested with crucial tasks if you do not wish to regret your decision later.
- 25- Do not enlist those branded as impious among your companions because their vicious temper can spoil your soul. Even if it doesn't, such companionship encourages people to reproach you, and it takes away your justification to penalize those who choose to have wicked companions.
- 26- Do not listen to the accusation of treason from a claimant whose piety you have not ascertained. Nor issue a verdict unless you have carefully established the nature and magnitude of the alleged treason.
- 27- Do not allow your friends to intercede in matters pertaining to the execution of murderers and the dismemberment of thieves.
- 28- There are two types of thieves: those with bows and arrows in deserts and those with scale and standard in bazaars. It is imperative to vanquish them both.
- 29- King Anushirvan the Just,³⁹ who was reputed to be irreligious, is said to have been seen in a dream residing happily in a paradise-like garden. "How and on what basis have you received this status?" the dreamer asked Anushirvan. The king responded that he was never kind to the criminal or a tormentor of the innocent.
- 30- When an idea that sounds beneficial to the country percolates in the king's mind, he should not rush to action. Rather, the king must first ponder it and then consult about it, and only then, if his intellect deems it reasonable, should he enact it with trust in God and in His name. [As the Qur'anic verse goes], "when you resolve to do it, then trust God [and enact your will]."
- 31- The king should expect contemplation and foresight from the sagacious elder as he would expect nothing but ill-considered demands for war from the imprudent youngster.
- 32- Respond positively to a wronged subject's plea for justice so that transgressors are not encouraged. As the saying goes, the sultan who does not vanquish the thieves is, in reality, the thief of the caravan.

39. See footnote 3.

33- The king's joy [of power] and ambition [for authority] are halal only if he manages to protect his people against the wicked, like a shepherd who effectively shields the sheep against wolves. If the shepherd was unable to guard the flock and, consequently, did not save the sheep from harm, the wage he had received would be haram. Now consider how much more illegitimate his wages would become had the shepherd been indeed capable of protecting the flock but did not rescue them from harm!

The sage Zunnun al-Misri complained to a king that an agent he had dispatched to a certain province acts unjustly toward the subjects and illegally appropriates their property.⁴⁰ The king said that he would punish the agent someday. "Yes," the sage replied, "you will punish your agent when he has already appropriated all of the subjects' possessions, and then through torture and confiscation, you will expropriate these possessions and add them to your own treasury. Tell me, what benefit would the poor subjects receive from such an act?" The king was embarrassed and put an end to the abuses of the agent at once.

The shepherd shall behead the wolf at the outset
Not when the beast has already torn apart the people's sheep.

34- The king's punishment of the debauched and the corrupt is praiseworthy only if he inwardly resists the impulse to commit the same mischief.

It is reported that a king ordered the destruction of a wine cellar and the same night ordered his servants to crush the grapes in one of his gardens. The news reached a connoisseur who observed, "O you! who forbid the vice, follow your own bid."

35- It is unbecoming a king to express unjustified wrath. When rightfully angry, the king should exact fair revenge because, should he exceed

40. Zunnun al-Misri (796–859) was an Egyptian Sufi sage and a follower of Gnosticism.

what is prudent, the king would become the offender—and the punished person the claimant.

- 36- Follow the path of beneficence in treating your friends and foes alike. Favors bestowed on friends augment sympathy and when transferred to enemies will diminish hatred and hostility.
- 37- The State coffer should be kept filled at all times. Refrain from [a torrent of] improper expenditures, and keep in mind that unforeseen incidents do occur and that enemies are always ready to take advantage of your vulnerabilities.
- 38- Never feel impervious to conspiracy and disloyalty. Meditate upon your affairs in order to undercut the sinister plots of the envious.
- 39- The king should investigate his lieutenants' servants and associates. He must know their names and scrutinize their lineage so as to acquire meticulous and reliable information about them all, lest the enemy manage to infiltrate spies and assassins into the court.
- 40- The king shall appoint undercover informants to every high-ranking State official so that he may discover each official's vice and virtue and detect potential conspiracies.
- 41- The king should command the chief of police to review the prisoners' files every other month or so, release the innocent, and pardon those guilty of petty crimes who have served a few days of incarceration. The chief of police will also ensure that the same procedure is followed in the jurists' prison.
- 42- If the borrower is incapable of repayment and the lender's livelihood does not depend on timely repayment, command them both to be patient and work out an installment plan. If both sides are desperate and the state coffers are full, consider paying the loan out of the State's funds. On the surface, it appears that soldiers and financial wealth protect the State while, in reality, it is the prayers of the disenfranchised.
- 43- One of the most crucial obligations of the ruler is to provide for those [merchants] whose caravan has been raided, whose ship has sunk, and whose wealth has suffered, no matter how large or small their loss may be.
- 44- The contractors who work on court properties [such as farmers and gardeners] and whose income does not rise to the level of profit

promised to the court should not be pressured for payment. Rather, the king may compromise in closing the case and indeed offer them a more lucrative contract the next time around.

- 45- The king should pay tribute to the erudite and the artisan so that those deficient in such qualities feel inspired and will patronize art and science. Consequently, learning will spread and boost the glory of the country.
- 46- The king may reappoint an employee with a positive record of service who has been dismissed due to some shortcoming and who has already been punished by eviction from the court. Providing occupation for the unemployed is as worthy as releasing innocent prisoners.
- 47- The king may call to service those who have suffered hardship. Such people will sincerely and tirelessly serve the State, lest their destitution recur.
- 48- Attend to the welfare of the soldiers and win over their hearts through your affability expressed in different ways. Since all your enemies are united in their enmity toward you, your friends should not be divided in their friendship.
- 49- The soldier who runs away from the enemy in the battlefield should be executed since he has already received his blood money from the king in advance. The bread [livelihood] that the king gives the soldier is the latter's blood money; hence, if the soldier absconds with it, the king has the right to demand his blood.
- 50- Remove the unjust official from office and entrust him with no more responsibility, for the complaints and curses of those who have been wronged do not extend to such an official alone. And you know what I mean by being accursed!
- 51- One of the responsibilities of a newly crowned heir is to value his predecessor's friends and companions and provide for them.
- 52- The kings owe their throne to their subjects. Sovereigns become enemy of their own throne once they ill-treat people.
- 53- Kings are to subjects as heads are to bodies. Only a truly stupid head would tear apart its body with its teeth.
- 54- A secret that should not reach the public should not be communicated to even your closest associates. For, close associates have close associates ad infinitum.

- 55- Do not reveal everything about yourself to your friends because friends can turn into enemies.
- 56- Do not ignore the agonizing accounts and distressing appeals from the poverty-stricken. Address them tenderly and listen to them sympathetically.
- 57- A ruler should carry the burden of his subjects so that their interests are preserved. Inquire about their aspirations and needs and gratify the desires of your subjects as you deem it conducive to their interest. A quick-tempered and morose ruler does not deserve a leadership position.

A ruler endowed with authority, wisdom, and glory
Should not be made impatient by the crowd's clamor.

Once a plaintiff petitioned Hajjaj ibn Yusuf and was ignored by him.⁴¹ The frustrated man walked out muttering that Hajjaj is more arrogant than the Almighty. Hajjaj heard the grumbling and asked the plaintiff to explain why. "Because," the man replied, "the Almighty conversed with Moses and you cannot make yourself talk to one of God's creatures." Hajjaj accepted the comment and treated the man fairly.

- 58- If someone accuses another without proof, the ruler should hand over the claimant to the accused so that the latter may take full vengeance on the former. Let the accuser's ill-fate be a lesson to others.
- 59- Relocate or assign a state clerk periodically to a new office so that if he has embezzled, his fraud will be discovered.
- 60- The sultan should reward those who bring him gifts, offerings, and young servants, and he should reciprocate with gifts in kind—and do so promptly.
- 61- Before strangers, the king must appear majestic and display severity. Yet, in private and in the midst of intimate companions, the same king is advised to appear cheerful, amicable, and blithesome.

41. Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi (661–714) was reportedly a cruel governor of Iraq during the Umayyad dynasty.

- 62- Appoint two agents who are not friendly toward each other as partners in the same office so that they will not conspire.

While the wolves attack one another
The sheep stays safe and secure.

- 63- A wise king⁴² shall not torment his subjects because he will forfeit their support vis-à-vis his domestic rivals in the midst of an attack by his foreign enemies.
- 64- Command the border guards not to plunder the residents of the adjacent territory so that the country is safe within and without.
- 65- If, because of gross misconduct, the tenure of a State servant must be terminated, [the king] should not further abolish the servant's entitlements that are warranted by his previous services.
- 66- Considering the lineage and dignity of a [public] servant's ancestors, the king is justified in pardoning the servant's multiple transgressions and flaws.
- 67- When issuing a death warrant for a felonious public servant, the king must provide for the criminal's wife and children so that they will not be left without livelihood.
- 68- The king should unreservedly provide for the spouse and children of his soldiers who died on the battlefield.
- 69- As much as possible be modest and friendly toward foreigners and acquaintances, strangers and citizens alike, so that you may endear yourself to them. Friendship will not harm your rule [and helps you apprehend how the subjects really think].
- 70- When the king decides to forgive a wrongdoer, he should delicately reveal hints of grace so that the astute nobleman comprehends the king's true wish and intercedes. Having considered the mediator's pledge, the subject's penitence, and the overall merit of the case, the king may pardon the subject.

42. In Sa'di 1876, 28, the word used is *farehmand* [charismatic] rather than *khirad-mand* [wise], which better indicates Sa'di's emphasis on mass consent as a pillar of the king's charisma.

- 71- When a man of high status is imprisoned, the king should hold the detainee in esteem and provide him with the clothing, food, drink, spouse, servants, and other necessities of life commensurate with his status. Such is expected from the principle of magnanimity.⁴³ And remember your life is but two days; one auspicious and the other ominous [lest you experience misery in your second day].
- 72- A wise king does not provoke a mighty foe, nor will he perpetrate injustice toward a weak enemy. It is not prudent to clash with a greater power, nor is it virtuous to harass the weak.
- 73- Breaking the heart of your friends is tantamount to fulfilling the wishes of your enemy.
- 74- Blatant injustice is when the king refuses to punish a courtier for his transgressions yet beheads a layman for the very same offense.⁴⁴
- 75- A just ruler/judge is like a fortified wall; if it leans toward one side [of a quarrel], know that the wall is failing.
- 76- Exhort your close associates to be virtuous before reprimanding others. Your most intimate associate is your own self. Your words do not have an effect on others if your deeds belie your words.

Have you contemplated how to preserve the State?

By you controlling your Self and following God's commands.

- 77- He whose inner self does not abide by the commands of shari'a is not worthy of leadership and his State will not endure.
- 78- Forbearance and not acting hastily are commendable at all times except on those occasions when delay can cause irreversible damage, such as rescuing people from fire or drowning.
- 79- Religion without knowledge and governance without moderation will fade away.

43. This sentence is added in Sa'di 1876, 29.

44. Sa'di 1876, 29, reads, "Blatant injustice in the eyes of a layman occurs when the king beheads a subject arbitrarily whereas in the eyes of the courtiers the king's ignorance of them constitutes blatant ignorance."

- 80- Avoid sin as much as possible and if—God forbid!—you succumb to iniquity, pay alms to the destitute so that God may forgive you.
- 81- Pardon a condemned person whose release will be met with grateful prayers by all rather than the sole prayer of the offender.
- 82- Tomorrow, on the Day of Judgment, all will be fearful except those who fear God today and haven't caused harm to people.

It is reported that the Caliph Harun al-Rashid⁴⁵—may God bless his soul—used to invoke this prayer: “O Lord! don't let any day that I have committed a sin come to an end without me asking for forgiveness from you and sending alms to the needy.” His wife, Zubaydah,⁴⁶ would constantly pray to God and ask him to forgive and conceal her flaws.

A righteous official of Alexander the Great engaged in an argument with the latter. Alexander asked him, “Are you not afraid of me?”

“Why should I be afraid?” responded the official. “One who does right won't fear God because you fear either your own mischief or your Lord's injustice, and my mind is at ease about both.”

A king confided to a pious man his deep angst about his destiny on the Day of Judgment. The man advised, “Be fearful of God Almighty today, and don't fear tomorrow.”

It is reported that a caliph dismissed an official because of embezzling only one dinar. After a few days some noblemen pleaded with the caliph not to deprive the official of service because of such a meager misappropriation. The caliph responded that what is at stake is not the amount but the fact that an officer who dares to steal money dares to shed the subjects' blood with no remorse.

- 83- Do not feel secure before the one whose mind is not at peace with you; the snake attacks when fearing for his life. It is unwise to excavate the

45. Harun al-Rashid (763–809) was the fifth Abbasid caliph, who ruled from 786 to 809.

46. Zubaydah bint Ja'far (d. 832) was a descendent of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur and married Harun al-Rashid in 781.

base of a wall and still sit in its shadow, or to kill the baby snake and leave its parents alive.

- 84- Avoid the one who gives accounts of others' misdeeds in their absence. Such a person will flatter you in your presence and reveal your defects behind your back.⁴⁷
- 85- The saying “the statements of kings are the king of statements” should not be trusted. Speak judiciously, reflectively, and meaningfully so that if your statement is recited in your absence, the taunter cannot scoff at it. Make utterances that, if voiced by others, you too would find appropriate.
- 86- A dervish of inward repose looks down at the king's wealth and power. However, a king of meager soul covets his subjects' property.

It is not virtuous to torment the weak
The wicked bird robs the ant of its grain.

It is reported that a merchant had a chest full of jewelry for sale. The sultan dispatched an envoy and asked the merchant to bring his merchandise to the court whereupon he demanded the goods at a cheap price. The merchant responded, “I have been away from my abode for more than a year and upon my departure my spouse pleaded that I transact only with one who is fearful of God, faithful, and trustworthy.” The sultan was receptive to his point and told the merchant to leave. “I will buy these jewels only when I see myself in possession of these three virtues,” the sultan vowed.

- 87- It is considered a weakness for the king if he downplays the potential danger of his weak enemy or grants his friends so much latitude that, if tempted to harm the king, they prove capable.⁴⁸

47. Sa'di 1876, 30, reads, “Do not feel safe from, do not socialize, and do not consult with whoever speaks ill of others in their absence. Whoever mentions others' fault to you will no doubt reveal your fault to others.”

48. Sa'di 1876, 30, reads, “It is wise for the king not to unnecessarily preoccupy himself with his weak enemy or to grant his friends so much latitude that if tempted to harm the king, they prove capable.”

- 88- Prudence demands that you reap profits tomorrow by planting seeds today and not postpone today's tasks to tomorrow.⁴⁹
- 89- A master has the right to demand obedience and service from his servants. However, a virtuous master is appreciative of his subjects' obedience and service and does not hold them in servitude.⁵⁰

An unjust king asked a pious man what is the fate of kings on the Day of Judgment. The pious man responded, "A just sultan who is fair, who does not mistreat his subjects, and who does not desire the riches of his wealthy subjects is king of both realms."

The just king is the king of both realms
Otherwise, he is but a beggar in both worlds.

- 90- So long as the enemy's harm can be forestalled by gold, war is not recommended because blood is nobler than gold. As the Arabic proverb goes, "Sword is the last resort," that is, war is justified only when all other options are exhausted. Turning one's back [in flight] on the enemy is better than fighting the enemy without a sword.
- 91- A true aficionado of the king discloses the king's defects to his face—so that rectification may follow his master's dismay—and conceals the king's defects in his absence so as to preserve the sovereign's reputation.
- 92- The dignity of the wealthy and those of rank emanates from the fact that they may use their affluence to serve the people. Acting to the contrary divests them of their dignity.
- 93- The king and the army exist for the protection of the public so that the strong may not wrong the weak. Hence, if the king failed to prevent

49. Sa'di 1876, 30, reads, "Prudence demands that you neither spend tomorrow's income today nor postpone today's tasks to tomorrow."

50. Another possible translation of this advice reads, "A master has the right to demand obedience and service from his underlings. However, a virtuous master is one who appreciates the opportunity of serving his subjects and does not hold them in servitude."

- such a transgression or he himself transgressed, such a king would then be useless. Consequently, his reign would necessarily decline.
- 94- Each and every blessing calls for its corresponding type of appreciation. The gratitude for wealth is benefaction; for kingship, it is service to the people; for being an elite, it is advocating the public's interest; for bliss, it is compassion for the wretched; and for power, it is assisting the powerless.
- 95- Under a king totally preoccupied with securing his self-interest, the public interest is not realized. Accordingly, the interest of all parties including the king will perish.
- 96- The king's emissary must consider God's consent over the king's command so as to truly benefit from his vicinity to him/Him.
- 97- Virtue demands that, when receiving a favor, the recipient acknowledge the right of the benefactor to be praised and also recognize his duty-bound obligation to reciprocate the favor. Kings owe their State and status to their subjects because without a people there would be no governance. Therefore, it is utterly unvirtuous if a king does not acknowledge the rights of his subjects and his resulting obligation to provide for their well-being.
- 98- Whoever sets a bad precedent inadvertently brings about his own destruction.
- 99- The [smiting] swords of the enemy battalion are less perilous to the king than the anguished sighs of children and the cries of the aged.
- 100- The king should not belittle the moans of the destitute when a single blaze may burst the whole city into flames.
- 101- Considering that a State official can always betray the king's trust without the king realizing the treachery, the State official's heartfelt fear of the almighty God is a necessity [for the well-being of the State and society].
- 102- To chastise the wicked briefly and then to set him free is tantamount to capturing a wolf and releasing it upon the beast's oath!
- 103- The king who makes trouble for the merchants closes the door of prosperity and prominence on his own city and territory.
- 104- As a general principle, do not trust the neophyte.

- 105- If wickedness is discovered in a man, the king should execute, and not exile, him; it is unwise to capture a snake or scorpion and toss it into the neighbor's house.
- 106- Entrust with a mission those who are equipped with power, wealth, and the wherewithal. Otherwise, you will not see any real progress, only empty promises.
- 107- Graciousness demands that the sovereign pardon a misdemeanor done unintentionally. However, if the transgressor committed the offense intentionally, the ruler should frighten the criminal over his first transgression and execute him if he dares to repeat it. The rotten root does not fruit.
- 108- Do not hasten to make judgments while angry. It is always possible to put the living to death; however, it is not possible to revive the dead. You are able to smash a precious stone but incapable of restoring it.
- 109- Virility is not aggressiveness. It is about the ability to hold yourself in check at times of wrath and not violate the parameters of fairness.
- 110- Leave to the orphans what they have inherited. It is unbecoming of a king to take possession of such assets. It is inauspicious too.
- 111- Among your possessions it is only your good repute that lasts with you after your departure; poor is he who does not leave a good reputation behind.
- 112- Wealth, if spent, can turn foes into friends. Yet, if kept, it can turn friends into enemies. Even one's son, if deprived of the father's wealth, may wish his death.
- 113- A ruler who is unjust and expects his name to be remembered for his goodness is like he who plants barley and expects wheat.
- 114- Oh, you who desire wealth for the sake of glory adopt the path of magnanimity and modesty because there is no glory higher than being loved and praised by the people.
- 115- Hunger is nobler than enriching yourself by feasting on the desolate.

If 'Anqa is on the verge of dying from lack of food
She will not feast on sparrows.⁵¹

51. 'Anqa was a fabled bird.

- 116- You occupy the throne of those who came before you and of those who are yet to come. Such short-lived existence between two nonexistents is not worth much.
- 117- Virility is not conquering new lands but properly administrating your own territory. The wise take over the world and administrate it, and the unwise ruin the world.⁵²
- 118- The king should position himself such that he can directly hear the pleas of his subjects because courtiers and officers do not always transfer the public's concerns and pleas to him.

It is reported that Anushirvan the Just extended a cord between his bed and the city square so that people could ring the chamber bells and demand the king's attention when they had a concern.

It is reported that an Arab monarch would patrol his city incognito so that he could correct wrongs, and he would also dispatch agents to various villages and neighborhoods for the same purpose.

- 119- Those from whom people do not receive benefits are all but dead, even if they still breathe. On the other hand, those who do good works may die, but their good name remains.
- 120- The requisite gratitude for opulence is to support the populace and to refrain from stealing from the poor.
- 121- Hold sway over others such that if you were one of them, you could tolerate such a reign.
- 122- The accumulated grievances of the helpless wound more severely than the elbow of champions.
- 123- The elapse of time makes remorse for missed opportunities futile. Seize every chance to attend to the wronged and pull out the teeth of the unjust.
- 124- O you who are enjoying your slumber should think of those who are homeless; O you who can move should accommodate the handicapped; O you who are prosperous should assist the needy. Did you

52. The last sentence is taken from Sa'di 1876, 33, and Sa'di 1917, 23.

see what the ancients accomplished and what they took with them? They departed and their injustice against the innocent is now over, but the burden of injustice is on their shoulders. It is better to be a dervish with a clear conscious than a sovereign chastised for injustice.⁵³

- 125- If you are enlightened, you will hear dead bones speak to you: "I was once a human being like you; yet I did not realize the value of my days and threw my life away."

We spend our life negligently
Unlike us, avail yourself of your moments.

- 126- One who does not torment others fears no soul. The scorpion flees and fears everyone because of its own wicked conduct; the cat is safe within the confines of the house because it is harmless; the wolf is not safe in the desert owing to its bad behavior; the minds of city beggars are at ease because of their decency; and the thieves hide in mountains and deserts because of their roguery.
- 127- Be cautious against a frail foe who, fearing his life, will resort to the most extreme measures against you. Although weak, the feeble cat wrestling a lion will not shy away from injuring the lion's eyes.
- 128- The king's confidant should befriend the nobleman and the commoner alike. He should not assume that, being under the king's patronage, no one will defy him. If a wicked person killed the reckless confidant and the vengeful king set the country on fire, this action would not bring the confidant back to life.
- 129- Behave in such manner that people praise you in absentia, because in your presence they will eulogize you out of fear or avarice.
- 130- While alive, take every effort to precede others in good deeds, prudence, and generosity; in death, kings and paupers are the same. Open the graves of a king and a dirt farmer, and witness that one cannot differentiate between the two bodies [enveloped in the earth].

53. In translating this sentence we followed Sa'di 1917, 27, which uses the term *mala-mat* [chastising] instead of *alamat* [sign] in Sa'di 1997, 1134.

- 131- Happy are those sages who, upon realizing that in death one has to leave the world to others, did so while still alive.
- 132- The king cannot divide his united enemies without making friends with some among them.
- 133- Instigate one enemy against another so that, following either one's conquest, you emerge as the true winner.
- 134- Do not let the enemy grow and emerge out of childhood, and don't let the feeble *piyadeh* [pawn] of chess reach the other side to become *farzin* [queen].
- 135- Win over hearts during easy times so that they are useful to you in times of hardship.
- 136- Exalt and dignify the great figures and leaders of all different religions.
- 137- A king will soon witness the downfall of his country if he spends all in lust and license, neglects the interest of the State, and delegates the important matters of statecraft to various secretaries who in turn privilege their own personal interests over the public's.
- 138- Do not blame those who highlight your vices because you are the guilty one. Why don't you change your ways so that your virtues are highlighted?

One who commits injustice can't expect
People to honor his name.

- 139- Celebrate your enemy's death on condition that your own death is surely postponed forever!
- 140- Eat only when the appetite is fully ripe, speak only when necessary, go to bed only when sleepy, and engage in feasting and drinking only when utterly craving.
- 141- Take seriously the pain that is inflicted upon people's hearts during your watch. United, a community of tiny ants can frustrate the lion, and a swarm of mosquitoes can kill the elephant.
- 142- Rule in such manner that if dethroned you would neither feel ashamed of your record nor be treated unkindly by the people. Remember that the bee is trampled upon once it is seen as frail and fallen.

- 143- Be as vigilant against the inner pain and sighs of the wounded and broken-hearted and the curses of the maltreated as you are against poison, conspiracy, betrayal, assassins, and night assaults. The Sultan of Ghazni used to say, "I don't fear the spear of men as much as I fear the spindle of women," that is, the desolation in their hearts.
- 144- Do not be troubled so much by the [mythical] demons under the earth as by the real demons on earth, that is, vicious men.
- 145- If you dislike being reprimanded by others, scrutinize and contemplate your actions before undertaking them.
- 146- Do not inquire about your defects from your friends because they may refuse to point them out. Discover what your enemies say about you instead.
- 147- In circumstances where tenderness is called for, do not invoke harsh language, because the noose is appropriate for taming only the wild. And where roughness is required, do not resort to using a delicate tone because sweet sugar is no substitute for bitter scammony when only the latter helps the patient.
- 148- If you are fearful of God, who is your true commander, be nice to whomever you command.⁵⁴
- 149- Always be seated on your throne as though the enemy is at your doorstep [that is, an attack is imminent] so that if they entered [your domain], you won't be caught off guard.⁵⁵
- 150- Do not trust anyone unless you have subjected them to multiple tests.
- 151- If there is a threat that is causing you anxiety, ask God for assistance and victory at night when the people have fallen asleep. Then pay a visit to the pious to seek their prayers and attend to their requests from you. Then visit the holy shrines and request absolution. Show special mercy toward orphans, the weak, the disenfranchised, and

54. The original text can also be interpreted in the following manner: "If you are concerned about your commander's loyalty, try to win over the hearts of his inferiors directly."

55. Sa'di 1949, 24, reads, "Always be seated on your throne as though the enemy is at your doorstep [i.e., an attack is imminent] so that if they entered, you are already standing on guard!"

the needy. Release some prisoners, vow and distribute charity, further oblige the soldiers and promise them more perks. Then take measures to handle the threat through deliberation and consultation with wise and loyal friends. Once you have attained your aim, thank God for his mercy, and do not attribute your success to your own efficiency and power. Finally, fulfill your vows and give thanks so that, when faced with the next threat, the people are desirous and hopeful for your victory.

The king should apply Sa'di's advice truthfully and cordially so that, with the help of God Almighty, his State and faith remain safe, his soul and offspring stay healthy, and his wishes for this world and the next come true. And God knows what is best, and to Him returns everything.