

Detachment from the World

An Annotated Translation of
Kitāb al-Zuhd

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By: Al-Ḥusayn ibn Saʿīd al-Kūfī al-Ahwāzī
(d. after 254 AH)

Translated by: Tahir Ridha Jaffer

الزهد. انگلیسی.

حسین بن سعید اهوازی، - ۳۰۰ ق.

Detachment from the world: an annotated translation of Kitāb al-Zuhd[Book]/ by Al-Ḥusayn ibn Sa'īd al-Kūfī al-Ahwāzī ; translated by Tahir Ridha Jaffer. Qum: Ansarian, 2022-1401. (P 208)
ISBN: 978-964-219-779-8

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الف. جعفر، طاهررضا، مترجم/ Jaffer, Tahir Ridha

BP141/5

۲۹۷/۲

شماره کتابشناسی ملی: ۹۰۲۸۲۳۲

کتاب الزهد ترجمه انگلیسی

Detachment from the World

Author: Ḥusayn ibn Sa'īd al-Ahwāzī

Translator: Tahir Ridha Jaffer

Publisher: Ansariyan Publications

First Print: 2022 - 1444 - 1402

Quds Press

Pages: 208

Quantity: 1000

Size: 148 x 210 mm

ISBN: 978-964-219-779-8

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ANSARIYAN PUBLICATIONS

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www.ansariyan.ir

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Translator's Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

*All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the worlds,
and blessings and salutations upon the Noble Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ)
and his pure progeny, the Ahl al-Bayt (a).*

Good character and etiquette is the foundation upon which the life of a pious Muslim is established. Perfection of morals is said to have been the goal of the Prophet's message, as reflected in his own words. As such, it has always been part and parcel of the teachings of divinely appointed guides. Indeed, without good character, a believer has little worth and can end up doing more harm to the cause of the faith than anything else.

Human perfection has many levels. The greater the amount of self-discipline and effort on the part of an individual, the higher the level of perfection that he would attain. In reality, a human being stands between two extremes, the lowest of which is below the level of beasts and the highest of which surpasses even the lofty station of angels. It is through ethics that progress is made towards higher stations. The goal of ethics is to raise and guide people from the lowest animal state to the most exalted position that is superior to that of all other creatures.

Having realized this, throughout the ages scholars have focused their attention on the subject of ethics and have penned numerous treatises on the subject. As Muslims and followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (a), we have the added advantage of access to a wellspring of ethical teachings that have reached us from the Infallible guides. This saves us from the need to refer to fallible scholars and philosophers who refer to their own intuition and understanding to decipher ethical dilemmas.

The present work comprises two hundred and ninety narrations on ethical subjects, compiled by a trustworthy individual who was himself a companion of the Imams (a). That on its own makes it a highly valuable text. Most, if not all, of the teachings found herein transcend time in terms of their relevance and importance, and offer practical advice to believers that would go a long way in improving their lives in both this world and the next.

On the question of the authenticity and soundness of the traditions, it is noteworthy that while the chains of transmission of most of the traditions in this work have been adduced, not all are complete or sound. However, this is not the only gauge of soundness, especially with traditions about etiquette and ethics. Rather, other corroborating evidence from the Qur'ān and established traditions would be sufficient to verify the soundness of the narrations. For this, each tradition needs to be examined individually, and that is something for experts of ḥadīth to embark upon. Suffice it to say that most of the traditions found in this work are indeed generally accepted by scholars and have been related in other later ḥadīth compilations as well.

About the Author of *Kitāb al-Zuhd*

Al-Ḥusayn ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥammād ibn Sa'īd ibn Mihrān, whose great grandfather was from the clients (*mawālī*) of Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a), was born in Kūfah, though the precise year of his birth is not known. Later, he migrated to Ahwāz, hence he is known by the title al-Ahwāzī. He was a companion of the Infallible Imams (a) and has narrated traditions from Imam al-Riḍā, Imam al-Jawād and Imam al-Hādī (a). According to the scholars of *rijāl*, he was a reliable transmitter of ḥadīth.¹

In the introduction of his book *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh*, al-Shaykh

¹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist Kutub al-Shīʿah wa Uṣūlihim* (1420 AH), p. 149.

al-Ṣadūq speaks highly of a number of texts. Among these are the works of al-Ḥusayn ibn Saʿīd al-Ahwāzī, including his *Kitāb al-Zuhd*.² These works were well-known during his time and scholars would regularly refer to them. Al-Ḥusayn ibn Saʿīd has been considered a reliable and praiseworthy individual by the early biographers such as al-Ṭūsī and al-Najāshī, as evinced in their respective works.

About thirty of his works have been mentioned in early bibliographical texts, not all of which have reached us. *Kitāb al-Zuhd* and *Kitāb al-Muʾmin* are perhaps two of the better-known works that are available as independently published monographs. Some of the other works attributed to him include titles such as: *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīyah*, *Kitāb al-Muruwwah*, *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*, *Kitāb al-Duʿāʾ* among others. It is also noteworthy that his name appears in the chains of over five thousand traditions.³

His brother al-Ḥasan ibn Saʿīd was also a reputable scholar, and in some bibliographical works, the two brothers are mentioned together. Due to the similarity of their names, it has been suggested that some of the works attributed to al-Ḥusayn ibn Saʿīd may actually have been penned or compiled by his brother al-Ḥasan. This does not impugn the authority or value of the works, however, since al-Ḥasan ibn Saʿīd was also a reliable scholar and authority in his own right.

Al-Ḥusayn ibn Saʿīd moved from Kūfah to Ahwāz, and later to Qum, where he resided until he passed away. The exact year of his demise is not known, but there is some evidence to indicate that he was alive in 254 AH.⁴ It is reported that before his death, he gave all his books to Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Abān, the son of his host in Qum, who then

² His general praise for the works of al-Ḥusayn ibn Saʿīd is found in vol. 1, p. 3 of the *Jāmiʿat al-Mudarrisīn* edition.

³ Al-Khūʾī, *Muʿjam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth* (1413 AH), vol. 5, pp. 333-340.

⁴ Subḥānī, *Mawsūʿah Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahāʾ*, vol. 3, p. 220.

transmitted all of his books.⁵

A Word on the Text and Translation

Since this is one of the older extant ḥadīth texts, there are bound to be some discrepancies among the available manuscripts of this work. The source we have chosen for this translation is the edition that has been meticulously put together, after comparing a number of available manuscripts and also referring to secondary sources, by the esteemed scholar and researcher Mirzā Ghulām Riḍā ‘Irfāniyān, and published in the year 1361 AH Solar.

Many of the traditions compiled in this work are also found in other sources such as Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*, or al-Ṣadūq’s *al-Amālī* among others. At times, these latter works seem to have more complete and accurate versions of the traditions. It is perhaps for this reason that in more recent times *Kitāb al-Zuhd* has not gotten the same attention as some of the other ḥadīth texts, despite being of an earlier provenance. To date, there is only one Farsi translation of the work and no other complete English translation.⁶

Since the Arabic text of this work has a number of instances where the editor has included a second form of a word or phrase in square brackets, which at times is quite different from the first one, we opted to translate only the word which seems more accurate given the context, and in cases where it is not clear which of the two is more correct, we translated the second form and included that in brackets as well. We have, however, left the Arabic text as is for those who would like to refer to the possible alternative form when it is present.

We have also included some annotations in the footnotes to clarify

⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* (1407 AH), al-Mashikhah, p. 66.

⁶ An effort was made by one group to translate this text into English but their translation omits a number of traditions and is not accurate in certain instances.



the meaning of certain traditions, and have also included the sūrah and āyah numbers of Qur'ānic references within the traditions. Given that this is one of the earliest source texts, there is no bibliography. However, in the Arabic text of this work that we used, the editor did include footnotes wherein he mentioned the later works that referred to each of the traditions.

Though the title of this work might lead one to believe that this text is all about *al-zuhd* or abstemiousness, it contains within it a variety of ethical teachings categorized into twenty different topics. For this reason, we have included an appendix to explain the meaning of the term *al-zuhd* itself, and how it is possible that the term was understood, during certain periods, to encompass all positive ethical traits. In conclusion, we acknowledge that all mistakes in the translation are ours alone. We pray that the Almighty accept this humble effort and hope that this work will be beneficial for those who read it. And all praise belongs solely to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

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