



## ḤELYAT AL-MOTTAQIN

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**ḤELYAT AL-MOTTAQIN** (“The Adornment of the Godfearing”), a compendious work that has remained highly popular, by the Shi‘ite traditionist Mollā Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi (d.1110/1699), on recommended customs, norms, and modes of behavior. It consists chiefly of traditions attributed to the Prophet and the Imams, grouped according to topic. The great majority of the Hadith that Majlesi cites are to be found either in his own massive compilation, the *Beḥār al-anwār*, or in the *Wasā’el al-šī’a* of Moḥammad b. Ḥasan Ḥorr-e ‘Āmeli (d. 1104/1692), one of his instructors in Hadith. The sense of the title is that the Godfearing, already adhering to the requirements of Islamic Law (*šari’a*), may “adorn” themselves in the course of their everyday lives by performing actions that are considered meritorious without being obligatory. The first word in the title is sometimes vocalized as *Holyat* (see the title page of the Tehran edition of 1968).

Majlesi explains at the outset that he has written the book in response to a request that he prepare a concise collection of “desirable customs” (*maḥāsen-e ādāb*) recommended by the Imams and that he “clothe the content [of the relevant Hadith] in the garb of an easily comprehensible Persian” (p. 2). *Ḥelyat al-mottaqin* is, therefore, a work of popularization, akin to the other books Majlesi wrote in Persian in order to facilitate the assimilation of Shi‘ite customs and beliefs by a non-specialized readership. Beyond this general purpose, no particular concern reflecting the circumstances of the time can be seen in the book. Completed on 26 Du‘l-ḥejja 1081/6 May 1671, *Ḥelyat al-mottaqin* was the second book written in Persian by Majlesi for a popular



audience, having been preceded by his *ʿAyn al-ḥayāt*, a work on ethics completed in 1073/1662.

*Ḥelyat al-mottaqin* is divided into 14 chapters, each containing 12 sections, these divisions obviously alluding to the “Fourteen Immaculate Ones” (Čahārdah Maṣūm, q.v.) and the Twelve Imams respectively. The chapters deal with the following matters: 1) the donning of clothes and footwear; 2) the use of jewelry, rings, kohl, and dyes, and the propriety of looking in the mirror; 3) customs relating to food and drink; 4) the merits of marriage and customs pertaining to it, together with guidelines for dealing with women and children; 5) cleaning the teeth, combing the hair, and clipping the hair, moustache, and fingernails; 6) the use of perfume, rosewater and aromatic oils; 7) customs connected with the bathhouse and cleansing the body and the head; 8) customs connected with waking and going to sleep and the use of the toilet; 9) cupping and the cure of certain diseases by way of medicine, amulets, or prayer; 10) general rules for social intercourse; 11) how to give and receive greetings, and embrace or shake hands; 12) entering and leaving the home; 13) walking or riding, going to the market, customs connected with trade and agriculture, and the rights of animals; and 14) customs connected with traveling.

It is evident from this breadth and variety of subject matter that the interest of the book transcends the strictly religious and is, in some cases, folkloric in nature, despite the attribution—sometimes dubious—of each recommendation to either the Prophet or one of the Twelve Imams. This is the case particularly with chapter nine; there, for example, the cure recommended for epileptic fits induced in children by the demon known as “*omm al-ṣebyān*” is that the *surat al-fāteḥa* be written 7 times with saffron and musk and then dissolved in water, with the resulting potion being given to the afflicted infant to drink for a month (*Ḥelyat al-mottaqin*, pp. 165-66; Arabic translation, p. 401). In a similar pseudo-medical vein, chapter four warns against the perils of marital intercourse at certain times: if it should take place on the first, middle, or last night of the month, any consequent pregnancy may result in spontaneous abortion or, at best, the birth of a mentally defective child (*Ḥelyat al-mottaqin*, p. 70; Arabic translation, p. 175). The same chapter contains a strong recommendation of clitorodectomy (*Ḥelyat al-mottaqin*, p. 89; Arabic translation, pp. 216-17), which is curious because the practice has been virtually unknown in Persia outside of areas populated by ethnic, and mostly Sunni, minorities (see [CIRCUMCISION](#)).



Despite the popularity of the work, no critical edition of the *Ḥelyat al-mottaqin* has ever been prepared. The Arabic translation made by Ḳalil Rezq al-‘Āmeli (Beirut, 1414/1994) not only restores the traditions cited by Majlesi to their original language, but also identifies their sources in the collections he used. An Urdu translation made by Maqbul-Aḥmad Dehlavi, with the title *Tahḍib al-eslām*, is also said to exist (*al-Dari’a* IV, p. 508).

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