

Abu'l-Fath al-Busti

Ali bin Muhammad al-Busti, known as Abu'l-Fath, was born around 330 Hijri (942 CE) in the city of Bust in Sijistan in modern day Afghanistan. Bust was famous for its fertile lands and beautiful gardens, but was also a centre of knowledge and literature. It produced the great scholar, Abu Hatim Muhammad bin Hayyan (not to be confused with other scholars also known as Ibn Hayyan), famous for his knowledge of hadith, fiqh, medical science and astronomy. Abu'l-Fath studied hadith, literature and law, particularly the Shafi'i school, at the hands of Ibn Hayyan. He held a number of official positions with the various rulers of the region. He became renowned for the beauty and wisdom of his poetry and prose.

He said, for example:

إذا بقي ما قاتك فلا تأس على ما فاتك

“If some food is left, then do not be sad about what has passed you by”

And also:

عادات السادات سادات العادات

“The customs of the noble masters are the most noble of all customs”

His most celebrated poem is known as the *Epitome of Wisdom*. Its verses are often quoted and a number of scholars wrote commentaries on it. It is full of admonition for the spiritual traveller and contains many insights into human nature. A millennium has passed and its words continue to have their effect.

Abu'l-Fath al-Busti died around 400 Hijri (1010 CE). May Allah have mercy upon him and benefit us by him.

The Epitome of Wisdom

By Shaykh Ali b. Muhammad al-Busti

زيادة المرء في دُنياه نُقصانُ * وربُّه غيرَ مُحضِ الخيرِ خُسرانُ

1. Increase in worldly possessions is in fact decrease,
Any profit void of pure goodness is a loss

وكل وجدانٍ حَظٌّ لا ثباتَ له * فإنَّ معناه في التحقيقِ فِقدانُ

2. All findings of pleasure that do not last,
Are in reality only deprivation

يا عامراً لخرابِ الدَّارِ مجتهداً * بالله هل لخرابِ العمرِ عمرانُ؟

3. O one striving to build an abode prone to ruin,
By Allah, can a ruined life be built again?

ويا حريصاً على الأموالِ تجمُعُها * أنُسيَت أنَّ سرورَ المالِ أحزانُ؟

4. O one greedy for wealth and its accumulation,
Have you forgotten that the happiness of wealth is in fact grief

زِعِ الفؤادِ عن الدنيا وزينتها * فَصَفُوهَا كدراً والوصلُ هِجرانُ

5. Remove your heart from the *dunya* and its embellishments,
Its purity is pollution, and its union abandonment

وأرِعِ سَمْعَكَ أمثالاً أفصَّلُها * كما يُفصِّلُ ياقوتٌ ومرجانُ

6. Lend your ears to the wisdoms here delineated,
Just as sapphires and pearls are refined

أحسِنِ إلى الناسِ تَسْتَعِيدُ قلوبَهُمُ * فطالما استَعَبَدَ الإنسانَ إحسانُ

7. Be kind to people and you will win their hearts,
How well does kindness win people over

يا خادمَ الجسمِ كم تشقى بِخدمتهِ * أتَطلُبُ الرِّبْحَ فيما فيه خُسرانُ؟

8. O servant of the body, wretched in its service,
Do you seek profit from that in which lies loss?

أقبل على النفس واستكمل فضائلها * فأنت بالنفس لا بالجسم إنسان

9. Take care of your soul and perfect its virtues,
By virtue of your soul are you human, not your body

وإن أساء مسيءٌ فليكنْ لك في * عُروض زلّته صفحٌ وغفرانٌ

10. If an evil person mistreats you, rather than,
Exposing their faults, forgive and overlook

وكن على الدهرٍ معواناً لذي أمل * يرجو نداءك فإنّ الحرّ معوانٌ

11. Be forever helpful to those hopeful,
Of your generosity, for indeed the free person is a benefactor

واشدّدْ يديك بجبلِ الله مُعتصماً * فإنه الرُّكنُ إن خانتك أركانُ

12. Hold fast to the rope of Allah,
For indeed, He is your pillar when all others betray you

من يتق الله يُحمّد في عواقبه * ويكفّ شراً من عزوا ومن هانوا

13. Whoever fears Allah will be praised in the end,
And He will suffice them the evil of all honoured and disgraced

من استعانَ بغيرِ الله في طلبٍ * فإنّ ناصره عجزٌ وخذلانٌ

14. Whoever seeks assistance from other than Allah,
Will find only incapacity and disgrace as their helper

من كان للخيرِ مَناعاً فليس له * على الحقيقة إخوانٌ وأخدانٌ

15. Whoever is stingy with their favours will have not,
Any brethren or companions, in reality

من جادَ بالمالِ مالَ الناسِ قاطبةً * إليه والمالُ للإنسانِ فتانٌ

16. Whoever is generous with wealth will win all people over,
While wealth for a person is indeed a temptation

من سالمَ الناسَ يسلمَ من غوائلهم * وعاش وهو قرير العين جَدْلَانُ

17. Whoever treats people amicably will be safe from their dangers,
And will live pleasantly in high spirits

من كان للعقلِ سلطانٌ عليه غداً * وما على نفسه للحرصِ سلطانُ

18. Whoever gives reign to their intellect will live such,
That greed will not have sway over them

من مدَّ ظرْفاً لفرطِ الجهلِ نحو هوى * أغضى على الحقِّ يوماً وهو خزيانُ

19. Whoever lends their gaze ignorantly to caprice,
Will soon be disgraced, finding it difficult to stand for truth

من عاشَرَ الناسَ لاقى منهم نصباً * لأن سوسهمُ بغيٌ وعدوانُ

20. Whoever mixes with people will soon face difficulties from them,
The nature of people is injustice and aggression

ومن يُفتش عن الإخوانِ يقلهمُ * فجلُّ إخوانِ هذا العصرِ خوانُ

21. Whoever searches for brethren will soon despise them,
Most brethren of this age are traitors

من استشارَ صروفَ الدهرِ قامَ له * على حقيقةِ طبعِ الدهرِ برهانُ

22. Whoever seeks counsel from the vicissitudes of time will receive,
A clear sign about the true nature of life

من يزرعَ الشرَّ يحصدُ في عواقبه * ندامةً، ولحصدِ الزرعِ إبانُ

23. Whoever plants evil will in the end reap regret,
The harvesting of crops has an appointed term

من استنمَ إلى الأشرارِ نامَ وفي * قميصه منهمُ صلٌّ وتعبانُ

24. Whoever seeks comfort with evil ones will,
Soon go to sleep with snakes from them in their clothes

كن رَيِّقَ الْبِشْرِ إِنَّ الْحَرَ هَمَّتُهُ * صحيفةٌ وعليها البِشْرُ عُنوانُ

25. Be of beautiful disposition, for a free person's aim,
Is to always display a cheerful face

ورافِقِ الرَّفِيقَ فِي كُلِّ الْأُمُورِ فَلَمْ * يندَمَ رَفِيقٌ وَلَمْ يَذُمَّهُ إِنْسَانٌ

26. Be gentle in all your affairs
Never has a gentle one ever regretted, nor were they ever rebuked

وَلَا يَغْرَتُّكَ حَظُّ جَرَّةٍ خَرَقٌ * فَالْخُرْقُ هَدْمٌ وَرِفْقُ الْمَرْءِ بُنْيَانٌ

27. Do not be deceived by fortune attained through harshness
Harshness is destruction while gentleness is construction

أَحْسِنُ إِذَا كَانَ إِمْكَانٌ وَمَقْدِرَةٌ * فَلَنْ يَدُومَ عَلَى الْإِحْسَانِ إِمْكَانٌ

28. Be generous in times of ability and capability
A person's ability never remains

فَالرُّوضُ يَزْدَانُ بِالْأَنْوَارِ فَاعْمَةٌ * وَالْحَرُّ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ يَزْدَانُ

29. Gardens increase in their blossoming with light,
Likewise, an intelligent person increases with justice and kindness

صُنْ حُرَّ وَجْهِكَ لَا تَهْتِكْ غِيَالَتَهُ * فَكُلُّ حَرٍّ لِحَرِّ الْوَجْهِ صَوَانٌ

30. Protect your honour and do not expose yourself,
The intelligent one is well protecting of their honour

فَإِنْ لَقِيتَ عَدُوًّا فَالْقُهُ أَبَدًا * وَالْوَجْهُ بِالْبِشْرِ وَالْإِشْرَاقِ غَضَّانٌ

31. If you meet an enemy, meet them always,
With a happy and cheerful disposition

دَعِ التَّكاسُلَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ تَطْلُبُهَا * فَلَيْسَ يَسْعُدُ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ كَسَلَانٌ

32. Abandon laziness in all acts of goodness you seek,
A lazy person never attains any goodness

لا ظِلَّ لِلْمَرْءِ يَعْرِى مِنْ تَقْوَىٰ وَنُهَىٰ * وَإِنْ أَظْلَمَتْهُ أَوْرَاقٌ وَأَفْنَانُ

33. No honour is there for a person who has no *taqwa* and intellect,
Even if they live in luxury and splendour

والنَّاسُ أَعْوَانُ مِنْ وَالْتَهُ دَوْلَتُهُ * وَهُمْ عَلَيْهِ إِذَا عَادَتْهُ أَعْوَانُ

34. People are your friends when the *dunya* is your friend,
And are your enemy when it turns against you

(سَحْبَانُ) مِنْ غَيْرِ مَالٍ (بِاقِلِّ) حَصْرُ * وَ(بِاقِلِّ) فِي ثَرَاءِ الْمَالِ (سَحْبَانُ)

35. One eloquent without wealth is deemed an ignoramus,
While a wealthy ignoramus is deemed eloquent

لا تُوَدِّعِ السَّرَّ وَشَاءَ يَبُوحُ بِهِ * فَمَا رَعَىٰ غَنَمًا فِي الدَّوِّ سِرْحَانُ

36. Place not your secrets with a traitor who will expose them,
Wolves cannot be made shepherds of sheep in the wilderness

لا تَحْسِبِ النَّاسَ طَبْعًا وَاحِدًا فَلَهُمْ * غَرَائِزُ لَسْتَ تُحْصِيهِنَّ أَلْوَانُ

37. Do not deem people to all be of the same temperament,
They have differing dispositions whose colours cannot be encompassed

وما كُلُّ مَاءٍ كَصَدَائِهِ لُوَارِدِهِ * نَعَمٌ، وَلَا كُلُّ نَبْتٍ فَهُوَ سَعْدَانُ

38. No water is [as pure and sweet] as Sadda'
And not all pastures are [as nourishing] as Sa'dan

لا تُخْدِشَنَّ بِمَظِلِّ وَجْهَ عَارِفَةٍ * فَالْبِرُّ يُخْدِشُهُ مَظَلٌّ وَلَيَانُ

39. Do not injure your generosity through procrastination,
Goodness is injured by putting off and procrastination

لا تَسْتَشِرْ غَيْرَ نَدْبٍ حَازِمٍ يَقِظُ * قَدْ اسْتَوَىٰ فِيهِ إِسْرَارٌ وَإِعْلَانُ

40. Seek not counsel except from the honourable, trustworthy and vigilant,
One whose inner and outer states are equal

فللتدابير فرسان إذا ركضوا * فيها أبروا، كما للحرب فرسان

41. Plans have their knights, when they take to the task,
They outperform others, just as knights do in war

وللأمر موقيتٌ مقدرٌ * وكل أمر له حد وميزان

42. All affairs have their appointed term
And all affairs have their due limits and measures

فلا تكن عَجلاً بالأمر تطلبه * فليس يُحمدُ قبل التُّضجِ بُحْرانُ

43. Do not be hasty in what you seek,
An illness changing before its cure is not praised

كفى من العيش ما قد سدَّ من عَوَزٍ * ففيه للحرِّ إن حَقَّقتْ غُنْيَانُ

44. Sufficient provisions are that which satisfy one's basic needs,
In it lies enrichment for the intelligent one

وذو القناعة راضٍ من معيشته * وصاحبُ الحرِّصِ إن أثرى فغضبانُ

45. The content one is pleased with his provisions,
While the covetous one, even if wealthy, is always angry

حَسْبُ الفتى عقله خِلاً يُعاشِرُهُ * إذا تحاماه إخوانٌ وخُلانُ

46. A person's intellect as a companion is sufficient,
When all brethren and confidants have dispersed

هما رَضِيعا لِبَانٍ: حِكْمَةٌ وَتَقَى، * وساكناً وطنٍ: مالٌ وطغيانُ

47. Wisdom and *taqwa* are suckling twins,
Wealth and oppression are always neighbours

إذا نَبَا بِكَرِيمٍ مَوْطِنٌ فَلَهُ * وراءَهُ في بَسِيطِ الأَرْضِ أوطانُ

48. If an honourable person is constricted in their homeland,
They find in the vastness of the earth another abode

يا ظالماً فرحاً بالعزِّ ساعدهُ * إن كنت في سنّةٍ فالدهرُ يقظانُ

49. O oppressor, blissful on account of power given to you,
Even if you are asleep, time is awake

ما استمرّاً الظلمَ لو أنصفتَ آكلهُ * وهل يلدُّ مذاقَ المرءِ خُطبانُ

50. In fair mindedness you would agree that no oppressor ever found oppression sweet,
Does a person tasting a colocynth ever find it sweet?

يا أيها العالمُ المرَضِيُّ سيرتهُ * أبشِرْ فأنتَ بغيرِ الماءِ ريانُ

51. O scholar possessed of a pleasing character,
Glad tidings, for you quench thirst without water

وياأخا الجهلِ لو أصبحتَ في لججٍ * فأنتَ ما بينهما لا شكَّ ظمانُ

52. And O ignorant one, had you lived in oceans of water,
You would no doubt live therein in thirst

لا تحسبنَّ سُروراً دائماً أبداً * من سرّه زمنٌ ساءتّه أزمانُ

53. Deem not happiness everlasting,
Whoever time pleases once, will soon grieve them many times over

إذا جفّاك خليلٌ كنتَ تألفهُ * فاطلبْ سواهُ فكلُّ الناسِ إخوانُ

54. If an intimate friend deserts you,
Seek another, for all people in reality are brothers

وإن نبتَ بك أوطانُ نشأتَ بها * فارحلْ فكلُّ بلادِ اللهِ أوطانُ

55. If your homeland becomes estranged to you
Then travel, for indeed, all lands belong to Allah

يا رافلاً في الشبابِ الرّحِبِ مُنتشياً * من كأسِهِ، هل أصاب الرشدَ نشوانُ؟

56. O conceited one, drunk from the cup of blossoming youth,
Did a drunkard ever attain righteous conduct?

لا تَغْتَرِرْ بِشَبَابٍ رَائِقٍ نَضِرِ * فكم تقدم قبل الشَّيبِ شُبَّانُ

57. Be not deceived by handsome, flourishing youth
How many in old-age were not previously youth?

وياأخا الشَّيبِ لو ناصحتَ نفسَكَ لم * يكن لمثلِكَ في اللذَّاتِ إمعانُ

58. O elderly one, were you to offer yourself sincere advise,
You would not pay attention to frivolous pleasures

هَبِ الشَّيْبَةَ تُبْدي عُذَرَ صاحِبِها * ما عُذْرُ أَشْيَبَ يَسْتَهْوِيهِ شَيْطانُ؟

59. Leave youth to offer excuses to its ilk,
There is no excuse that Satan seeks to tempt through more than old-age

كُلُّ الذنوبِ فإن الله يغفرها * إن شَيَّعَ المرءَ إِخلاصُ وإيمانُ

60. All sins, Allah will forgive them,
If one is possessed of sincerity and faith

وكُلُّ كسرٍ فإن الدِّينَ يَجْبُرُهُ * وما لكسرِ قناةِ الدِّينِ جُبرانُ

61. All wounds, religion will mend,
However, there is no mending the spear of religion if that is broken

خُذها سوائِرَ أمثالٍ مَهذَبَةٌ * فيها لمن يَبْتَغِي التَّبَيانَ تَبَيانُ

62. Take these wisdoms that have been refined,
They are an exposition for one seeking exposition

ما ضَرَّ حَسانَها – والطبعُ صائِعُها – * إن لم يَصْنَعْها قَرِيعُ الشَّعْرِ حَسانُ

63. Its beauty is not harmed by the fact that its author,
Is not the master of poetry, Hassan [ibn Thabit]

The Aphorisms
Of Imam Ahmad Ibn 'Ata'illah al-Iskandari

Aphorisms 74-120

74

When He provides you with obedience,
and sufficiency from it with Him,
then know that He has showered you liberally with His graces both inwardly and outwardly

75

The best that you can seek from Him is that which He seeks from you.

76

One of the signs of delusion is sadness over the loss of obedience,
whilst not rising to revive it.

77

The gnostic is not one who, when making a symbolic allusion, finds God nearer to himself than his symbolic allusion.

Rather, the gnostic is the one who, because of his self-extinction in His Being, and self-absorption in witnessing Him, has no symbolic allusion.

78

Hope goes hand in hand with deeds; otherwise, it is just wishful thinking.

79

That which the gnostics seek from God is genuineness in servanthood and performance of the rights of Lordship.

80

He expanded you so as not to keep you in contraction;
He contracted you so as not to keep you in expansion;
and He took you out of both so that you do not belong to anything apart from Him.

81

It is more dreadful for gnostics to be expanded than to be contracted,
for only a few can stay within the limits of proper conduct in expansion.

82

Through the existence of joy the soul gets its share in expansion,
but there is no share for the soul in contraction

83

Sometimes He gives by depriving you,
and sometimes He deprives you by giving.

84

When he opens up your understanding of deprivation,
deprivation becomes the same as giving.

85

Outwardly, creatures are an illusion;
but, inwardly, they are an admonition.
Thus, the soul looks at the illusory exterior
while the heart looks at the admonitory interior.

86

If you want a glory that does not vanish,
then do not glory in a glory that vanishes.

87

The real journey is when the world's dimensions are rolled away from you
so that you see the Hereafter closer to you than yourself.

88

A gift from creation is deprivation;
but deprivation from God is beneficence.

89

Our Lord is far above the servant dealing with Him in cash, and His repaying him in credit.

90

It is reward enough for worship that He has accepted you as worthy of it

91

Reward enough for workers is what He discloses unto their hearts in His worship, and that
which He shows them of His kindliness.

92

Whoever worships Him for something they hope from Him,
or obeys Him to keep chastisement from coming to themselves,
has not given His attributes their due.

93

When He gives to you, He shows you His kindness
and when He denies you, He shows you His irresistible power.
So in both He is disclosing Himself to you and drawing nigh with His loving kindness unto you.

94

Deprivation hurts you only because of your incomprehension of God in it.

95

Sometimes He opens the door of obedience for you, but not the door of acceptance;
or sometimes He condemns you to sin, and it turns out to be a cause for union with God.

96

A disobedience that bequeaths lowliness and extreme need is better than an obedience that
bequeaths self-infatuation and arrogance.

97

There are two graces that no extant being can do without and that are necessary for every
creature:
the grace of existence, and the grace of sustenance.

98

He bestowed His grace upon you,

first, through giving you existence,
and, second, through uninterrupted sustenance.

99

Your indigence belongs to you essentially,
for contingencies do not abolish essential indigence:
The trials that arrive in this world
are but reminders to you of what you know not of your indigence.

100

Your best moment is the one wherein you witness your actual indigence
and, through it, reach the reality of your lowliness.

101

Whenever He alienates you from His creatures, realise that He wants to open for you
the door of intimacy with Him.

102

Whenever He releases your tongue to ask, know that He wants to give to you.

103

The duress of the gnostic never departs, and he finds no rest in anything but God.

104

He has illumined outward appearances with the lights of His created vestiges;
And illumined inmost souls with the lights of His attributes.
This is why the lights of created vestiges set at night, but the lights of hearts and inmost souls
never set;
and why it has been said: "The daytime sun goes down at night, But the sun of gnostic hearts
never goes down."

105

Let the pain of tribulation be lightened for you by knowing that it is He Most Glorious who is
making trial of you;
For Him from whom you are faced with the blows of fate
is He who has accustomed you to His choosing well.

106

Whoever thinks His subtle gentleness is ever separated from His ordaining fate,
does so out of short-sightedness.

107

It is not to be feared that the paths will confuse you, but only that whims will defeat you.

108

Glorious is He who has veiled the secret of electhood in the appearance of humanness,
and who is manifest through the mightiness of Lordship in the very showing of one's slavehood.

109

Take not your Lord to task that what you seek is slow in coming;
but take yourself to task that your manners are slow in coming.

110

Whenever He makes you obedient outwardly to His command and bestows you surrender inwardly to His irresistible power, He has shown you largesse beyond thanking.

111

Not everyone truly of the elect has yet been freed of shortcomings.

112

Only the ignorant man scorns the recitation of litany.

Inspiration is to be found in the Hereafter, while the litany vanishes with the vanishing of this world;

but it is more fitting to be occupied with something for which there is no substitute.

The litany is what He seeks from you; the inspiration is what you seek from Him.

What comparison is there between what He seeks from you and what you seek from Him?

113

The arrival of spiritual sustenance is in accordance with receptivity,

while the raying-out of lights is in accordance with the purity of the innermost secret.

114

When the forgetful man gets up in the morning, he reflects on what he is going to do, whereas the intelligent man sees what God is doing with him.

115

The devotees and ascetics are alienated from everything only because of their absence from God in everything.

Had they contemplated Him in everything, they would not have been alienated from anything.

116

He commanded you in this world to reflect upon His creations;

but in the Hereafter, He will reveal to you the perfection of His Essence.

117

When He knew that you would not renounce Him,

He made you witness that which issues from Him.

118

Since God knows the occurrence of weariness on your part, He has varied the acts of obedience for you;

and since He knows of the occurrence of impulsiveness in you, He has limited them to specific times,

so that your concern be with the performance of ritual prayer, not with the existence of the ritual prayer.

Not everyone who prays performs well.

119

Ritual prayer is a purification for hearts from the dirt of sins,

and an opening-up of the door of the unseen realms.

120

Ritual prayer is the place of intimate conversations and a mine of reciprocal acts of purity,

wherein the regions of the innermost secrets are expanded and the rising gleams of light shine forth.

He knew of the existence of weakness in you, so He made the number of ritual prayers small; and He knew of your need of His grace, so He multiplied their fruitful results.