Dadisho‘ Qatraya’s *Letter to Abkosh*: the text according to MS Baghdad Archbishopric of the East n° 210 with critical notes and a translation

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Dadisho‘ Qatraya’s *Letter to Abkosh* was first edited by A. Guillaumont and M. Albert in 1984\(^2\). Although their edition gives the impression that it is based on three witnesses, in point of fact there is only one: the Notre-Dame des Semences (or Alqosh) n° 237, called S by the editors. The other two manuscripts used are merely 20\(^{th}\) century copies made for J. Vosté and A. Mingana from the previous exemplar and thus have

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\(^1\) The text of the *Letter* was one of the subjects of the Intermediate/Advanced Syriac course we gave during the 2012 edition of the Académie des langues anciennes at Digne-Les-Bains and we extend our thanks to our two students, Jean-Marie Mouesca and Bosko Eric who participated in the analysis of the textual variants.

no independent value, they are referred to as V and M respectively.

We have already had the opportunity of drawing attention to the fact that another witness, Baghdad Archbishopric of the East n° 210 (which we have called G) has, in addition to Dadisho’s Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers (DQC), the complete text of his Letter, on ff° 169v°-173v°, and that having been unknown to Guillaumont and Albert, it has not yet been used to provide a critical edition of the letter.

G’s importance for Dadisho’s works is paramount since it constitutes the oldest East Syriac witness to his writings. Although the exemplar is acephalous and its colophon is lacking, A. Kaplan has been able to date it, on palaeographical grounds, to the first half of the 9th century.

Compared with the previously edited text (E), G provides more than seventy true textual variants for the Letter. Although, by and large, their nature is not earth-shaking, there are several interesting divergences. Given that a simple list of variants without having the text immediately available would be frustrating for the reader, it has seemed preferable to reproduce the whole text as it appears in G. All the divergences from E have been noted here in an apparatus provided for G’s text. Purely orthographic variants have also been included for the sake of completeness, though their importance is marginal. Where it has been deemed useful, a brief analysis of the variants has also been provided and constitute a kind of critical commentary.

We can say that G is a witness to the same text form as E which is stable. G allows us to fill in a certain number of lacunae where text has fallen out through homoeoteleuton and is therefore useful for completing the text.

However it is far from having the best text. Of the 84 true variants, we have preferred only 30 of G’s. These variants have been marked with an asterisk (*) in the apparatus.

Comparing E and G, we can notice that while both have a tendency to make stylistic improvements there are perhaps a few more in E. As to the mind-set behind G, one element for further investigation could be the question as to whether the “heart” can

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3 For a description of the manuscripts, see GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre”, p. 236.

4 D. PHILLIPS, “The Syriac Commentary of Dadisho’ Qatraya on the Paradise of the Fathers: Towards a Critical Edition”, BABELAO 1 (2012), p. 12. I take the opportunity of correcting my remark there saying that G is a “fourth” witness to the text – it is in fact only the second.

be the seat of “thoughts”. Two of the variants might indicate that G had a problem with this (see notes 64 and 118), but it would require more evidence to be confirmed⁶.

To facilitate reference to the text, we have kept the numbering of the sections established by the first editors of the text. We have added an English translation since it seemed a useful way of complementing the French rendering of thirty years ago.

What can we say about the context of the Letter? In all likelihood, it would seem that we are dealing with a real letter rather than a simple literary convention. The recipient, Abkosh (or Bakosh) was a friend of Dadisho’’s on whose insistence he composed at least two of his writings⁷.

Abisho’’s Catalogue tells us that Dadisho’ composed ܬܐ ̈ܐܓܖܠܐ ̈ܘܫܐܘ”7F8, though the recipients are not mentioned. In this case, it means that the Letter to Abkosh is the only known surviving item of his correspondence and thus particularly valuable as being the sole witness to the epistolary genre among his writings.

The historical context is made clear by the letter itself. Abkosh had wanted to visit Dadisho’, the latter not only refused him entrance to his cell, but also declined to even speak with him from the window. This greatly saddened his fellow monk and so Dadisho’ decided to send him a letter to make up for his apparent lack of hospitality and justify his behaviour (Section 1). The justification is the need to preserve the monk’s quietude⁸. Dadisho’ then develops on this at length by explaining the interdependence of the three basic virtues which are quietude, meditation and self-coercion (Sections 2 to 4) and the other virtues which come into being through them (Sections 5 to 7).

He concludes his analysis (Section 8) by making a correlation between the virtues and the passions to which they constitute a remedy. It is this part of the letter that is the most developed, from a literary and technical point of view. A triple correlation is established between each of the passions and, for each of them, three virtues that can cure them. Given the literary density of the section and its concluding position, we would like to suggest that it constitutes the real object of the Letter.

⁶ A cursory examination of the variants in G related to the word ܠܒܐ in DQC appears neutral in this respect, at least at first sight.
⁷ See note 11.
⁹ On the choice of this translation, see note 172.
Although, of course, Dadisho is also speaking within the general context of ܫܠܝܐ, what he wants to explain in detail to his friend is the system of the three-fold remedy to each of the generic passions.

The editorial title ܥܠ ܫܠܝܐ could have come into being by the assimilation of the letter to Dadisho’s other works on the same subject. In S, and its copies, the letter is interpolated between four ܡܗܪē and a text of admonitions (ܐܙܘܗܖ) grouped together under the general title ܥܐܢܐ ܕܥܠ ܫܠܝܐ ܕܫܒܘܡܐܡܐ “Profitable discourses on the quietude of weeks”10 and thus associated with them.

Be that as it may, the Letter had its own independent life, as we can gather from G where it is associated not with the ܨܡܪē but with Dadisho’s Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers. This association could have taken place because, in Section 3, the Letter refers to two passages of the Book of Paradise.

The text of the Letter to Abkosh according to G

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Dadisho’ Qatraya’s Letter to Abkosh


16 The diacritical point is not visible in G and has been supplied from E.

17 E. legi nequit G


21 ܕܘܒܨܐ ܠܡܘܬܐ ܒܣܝܪܬܐ ܕܡܡܣܪܐ ܠܗ. ܐܢ ܓܕܫ

22 ܕܥܩܪܒܐ ܬܐܼ ܙܒܢܐ ܣܓܝܐ܃ ܐܢ. ܐܢ ܘܝܐ ܠܗ ܥܠܬܐ ܠܦܗܝܐ ܕܡܚܫܒ.

23 ܕܓܡܝܪ ܒܚܝܪܗ ܕܠܐ ܫܠܝܛ ܥܠ.

24 ܕܗܐ ܠܐ ܫܠܝܛ ܥܠ.

25 ܕܗܐ ܠܼ ܝܬܝܪ ܡܢ ܕܒܨܐ.

26 ܕܥܩܪܒܐ ܬܐܼ ܙܒܢܐ ܣܓܝܐ܃.
27 add מ. E. Omitted by haplography.

28 מ. E. The participle is more coherent with the end of the introduction, section [1], where the same form is found. The omission of yudh by assimilation to following nun is easily explained.

29 מ. E. The form של can be construed either as a superlative “the greatest of the gnostics” or as a title “the master” or “teacher”. Both epithets are applied to Evagrius, though only once, in another of Dadisho’s writings, the Commentary on the Book of Abba Isaiah, X, 2 (מ. 5, מ.); see R. Dragueut, Commentaire du Livre d’abba Isai (logoi I-XV) par Dadilo Qairaya (VIIe s.) (CSCO 326-327), Louvain, 1972, p. 140, 142 (translation p. 108, 110); Dragueut opts for the superlative meaning for של. Neither of the epithets appear in Dadisho’s Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers, though Evagrius is regularly referred to as the “gnostic” there (to cite only a few: DQC II, 112, 194, 268; edition under preparation, see Phillips, “The Syriac Commentary”). The choice between the two variants is thus open.

30 מ. E.

31 מ. E. The introduction of the conjunction is probably secondary.

32 מ. E(SV)M. מ. E. The previous editors have corrected the text on the basis of Frankenberg’s edition of Evagrius against the text of S and its two copies (Guillaume and Albert, “Lettre”, p. 237, n. 24). G supports S and thus allows us to invalidate the editors’ correction which seems gratuitous anyway. The text makes perfect sense (see the translation here); correcting a quotation solely on the textual history of its source text is a perilous undertaking subject to caution anyway.

33 add מ. E. The addition of the conjunctive particle could well be secondary.

34 מ. E(SV)G tr M.

35 מ. E.

36 מ. E. As S.P. Brock has shown (“A Criterion for Dating Undated Syriac Texts: The Evidence from Adjectival Forms in –a(ya),” Parole de l’Orient 35 (2010), p. 111-124 and in particular on the form מ, p. 115), the use of adjectives as opposed to a genitive formation with a substantive betrays a later stage of the language. The older form is to be preferred here.

37 מ. E.
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ܘܚܝܐ ܕܒܪܝܢܝ ܠܡܚܐ ܐܪܣܢܝܐܢܘܐܡܐ ܠܗ ܥܪܘܩ ܡܢ ܢܫܐ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܬ ܠܐܣܩܛܝܣ ܠܘܬ ܐܒܐ ܡܩܪܝܣܕܝܢ ܐܼܙܠ ܒܟܢܘܫܝܐ ܘܗܘܐ ܬܕܐܬܕܪܫ ܣܦܩܐܝܬ ܐܝܟ ܕܙ ܒܩܢܘܒܝܢ ܘܐܫܬܘܝ ܠܥܘܡܪܐ ܒܡܗܝܪܘܬ ܝܕܥܬܗܟܕ ܚܙܼܐ ܕܒܩܠܝܬܐ ܦܪܘܫܘܬܐ ܢܛܘܪܬܗ ܕܡܕܥܗ ܕܟܠܗ ܕܒܩܠܝܬܗ ܕܟܠܗ ܒܕܐܫܒܬܐ ܡܢܗ ܬܐ ܠܓܘܐ ܒܥܠܬ ܫܓܘܫܝܐ ܟܕ ܐ ܠܠܒܗ ܘܐ ܠܠܒܗ ܕܗ ܘܐ ܗܘܼܐ ܡܢ ܚܙܬܐ ܘܫܡܥܐ ܡܚܣܪܢܐ ܕܗ ܢܝܢ ܦܝܐ ܕܟܡܐ ܙܒ ܐ ܖ ܠܘܬܗ ܡܢ ܐܚ ܐ ܡ ܫܬܟܚܝܢ ܒܥܘܡ ܐܝܟ ܡܠܬܗ ܕܐܘܓܪܝܣ ܠܝܠܝܢ ܠܡ ܕܒܟܢܘܫܝܐ ܕܓܘܐ ܥܘܡܩܐ ܕܠܒܗ

E. E's text seems incomplete; one would expect a qualifying word such as ܠܒܗ, which the previous editors appear to supply ad sensum when they translate “de tout son cœur” (GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre”, p. 242). The text of Apophthegm Arsenius 1 as quoted by Dadisho' in DQC II, 4 is ܚܐܓ ܒܚܫܐ ܕܠܒܐ ܠܘܬ ܐܠܗܐ; Budge's text of the apophthegm itself does not contain the phrase (E.A. WALLIS BUDGE, The Book of Paradise being the Histories and Sayings … (Lady Meux Manuscript 6), London, 1904, vol. 2, p. 432). It would seem that in the Letter, Dadisho' has slightly embellished the basic text of the apophthegm and in E ܥܘܡܩܐ was left out due to a scribal error.

E. At first sight, it does not seem obvious to choose between the two variants. Why would a copyist have changed one term for another? The parallel text in DQC II, 4 mentioned in the preceding note goes with G. I make a tentative suggestion: if one looks at the use of ܒܘܝܐ in DQC, one finds 18 occurrences of the term. Of these, the vast majority, 14 in all, appear in the composite phrase ܐܠܗܐ ܒܘܝܐ, usually with a possessive suffix on the second term. It thus seems tempting to suggest that the original text of the Letter could have been ܠܘܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܒܘܝܗ which has been differently abbréviated in E and G.

E/SV/G om waw M.

om E. While G has the support of both the parallel text in DQC II, 4 and the apophthegm itself (see note 38), it is easier to imagine the name being added rather than its being left out. We opt for E's reading.

ܪܡܐ ܐ.

ܪܓܢ ܐ.

Ē/SV/G cum sesame M.

ܪܠܗܐ ܐ. E's reading gives a better meaning, having more the sense of “the fact of dwelling”; G's reading could have been induced by the fact that ܥܡܘܪܐ is one of the recurrent words for designating a monastery.

ܪܠܗܐ ܐ. The repetition of the preposition has been induced by parallelism to ܒܡܗܝܪܘܬ and can be considered secondary.

ܪܠܗܐ ܐ. The addition of the suffix as a determiner to the substantive is secondary.

ܪܠܗܐ ܐ. The function of the ܫܬܟܚܝܢ is not clear; it could introduce a loose apposition to the indirect object of ܡܥܝܪ ܥܠܝܗܘܢ. G has left it out to make the text easier. We follow the lectio difficilior.
E. G has the longer form of the 1st person suffix attached to the 2nd person singular imperfect, on the model of the imperative which is attested by NOLDEKE §188 but without any indication of whether there is an older or a more recent form (TH. NÖLDEKE, Compendious Syriac Grammar, London, 1904, p. 139. His suggestion, to be found also in R. DUVAL, Traité de grammaire syriaque, reprint Amsterdam, 1969, p. 200, that the longer form is linked to a negative imperative or a prohibition is not borne out here).

E(SV)G. M.

E. The addition of such joining words is likely to be secondary, since, as such, there is no reason to suppress them while their addition can be considered an embellishment of style.

E. G has added the word to provide an explicit context for the frequentations to be avoided and is secondary.
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The addition of such joining words is likely to be secondary.

pr. E.

This and the proceeding variant go together. E has an explicit hypothetical clause introduced by whereas G has a circumstantial clause, the hypothetical sense of which is implicit, but clear. E has “improved” the text and is secondary.

E. G has preferred using a word to designate the intellect which it felt better suited to whereas G has allowed us to recover.

E. The same remark on the repetition of the preposition in note 46 applies here as well.

E. has omitted this sizeable phrase by homoeoteleuton on which G has allowed us to recover.

E. The pe'el and ethpe'el/ethpa'al all have the same meaning here. Perhaps it is easier to imagine the contraction of the longer form to the shorter, rather than the other way round.

E. The addition of the suffix is secondary.

E. 

E. 

E.
The addition of the title is certainly secondary.

The addition of the indirect object changes the meaning of the phrase. Instead of the original “If you seek out consolation from my words … it will be a teacher …” with בושא as the subject of חלה, the latter becomes with ל in an impersonal “there will be for you” i.e. “you shall have”. G has the preferred reading.

G’s single syntactic unit is probably original, because of the following singular הניה rather than a plural which one would expect with E’s two substantives.

The previous editors’ hypothetical correction has been vindicated by G.
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94 He has added an anticipatory objective suffix which is good literary style; it is easier to think that it was added rather than omitted.

95 E’s vocabulary is more consistent with the introduction of the section which speaks of the need to “acquire” (ܕܢܩܢܐ) virtue.

96 *om E. G has added the enclitic as a parallel to ܐܡܢܘܬܐ ܬܠܬ ܡܝܬܖ. ܐܟܙܢܐ.

97 E has preferred to introduce a plural to give an idea of generality which however the singular can convey perfectly well.

98 add ܐܡܢܘܬܐ ܬܠܬ ܡܝܬܖ ܐܟܙܢܐ E. G has added the enclitic as a parallel to ܩܠܝܐ ܗܼܘ.
E. E has preferred to simplify the text.

108 אֱלֹהִים וְאֵלֹהִים | אֱלֹהִים E. The demonstrative has been added by G by parallelism to the preceding אֱלֹהִים.

109 Add אֶל E. A secondary addition.

110ומ E. The same observation as in note 100 can be made here.

111ומ E. E had added a by parallelism to the preceding וה phố.

112לָלךְ E. E has omitted this part of the sentence through homoeoteleuton onלָלךְ. The third word, only partly legible, is probably to be readלָלךְ.

113לָלךְ E. Two variant forms of the same preposition.

114ומ E. The slightly more complex phrasology of E is likely to be original.

115 실제로 E. Both the participle and the perfect can express a hypothetical instance ( BölDEKE, Compendious Syriac Grammar §259, p. 204-205) but the use of the participle in the rest of the sentence makes the perfect slightly unexpected and thus probably original.

116ומאים E. The context is: “to purify his soul and his heart from thoughts”. As pointed out in note 64, G might possibly seem allergic to usingלָלךְ is association withלָלךְ. This could be an interesting anthropological quirk of this witness.

117ומאים E. G has reduced the less habitual “evil ones” to designate the devils to the usual “Evil One” for Satan.
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 aspiring to the justice that is in the name of His Lord, so that their names may be secured for the sake of justice and security in the name of the Creator, 123 for this is the duty of all the faithful. 124

212

The conjunction is not necessary since ܝܬܐ has one already.

E. Both the masculine and the feminine 3rd person can be used as impersonals.

124 ܐܬܦܫܩܬ E. The expansion with “all” to generalize is likely to be a secondary expansion; in a very similar text in DQC I, 52 ܕܐܢܫ is present (see note 192).

125 ܘܟܠ ܪܘܡܐ E. The impersonal form has been replaced by a feminine plural under the influence of ܬܐ that has become the subject of the verb.

126 ܡܨܝܐ E. The impersonal form has been replaced by a feminine plural under the influence of ܬܐ that has become the subject of the verb.

127 E. G has added the numeral by attraction to the first occurrence of ܡܠܫܡܐ.

128 ܒܗ܃ ܠܐ ܡܬܥܒܕܬܙܕܩ E. G has preserved the use of a singular verb agreeing only with the principal subject, a perfectly acceptable Syriac style, whereas E has preferred a plural to agree with the fact that there is a concatenation of several substantives.

129 ܠܡ ܠܐܝܠܝܢ E. The conjunction is not necessary since ܝܬܐ has one already.

130 ܠܒܣܡܗܒܘܢ E. There is no real difference in meaning here between the abh‘el and the pa‘el. We suggest that the second beth has fallen out through haplography.

131 E.

132 E.

133 E.

134 E. [   ] G.
E. The addition of the suffix as a determiner to the substantive is secondary.

E. The form as an adjective is not attested as such in the dictionaries, unlike , but free –ya forms to create adjectives are frequent in Syriac (Nöldeke, Compendious Syriac Grammar §135, p. 80-83) Perhaps G has normalized the form.

E. A secondary addition to match .

E. E is referring to at the beginning of the sentence, while G has had its attention drawn to the nearer feminine substantives and .

E. Probably omitted through the close visual resemblance to .

E. There is a curious inversion of the synonyms in the witnesses, see note 147.

E. G has regularized the vocabulary to fit in with the three parts of the soul announced in the preceding lines: desire, anger, thought.

E. There is a curious inversion of the synonyms in the witnesses, see note 145.

The punctuation is that of E, G has none here.
E. G has removed the relative, which is not strictly necessary and added a suffix to the verb to replace it. This can be considered to be a stylistic improvement.

E. G would seem to have misconstrued the Evagrian term “natural desire” which has the sense of what is the original, true nature created by God with the idea of nature as what is of this world (See, for example, the Praktikos (A. GUILLAUMONT and C. GUILLAUMONT, Évagre le Pontique. Traité pratique ou le moine, vol. 2 (Sources chrétiennes 171), Paris, 1971, p. 556-557). In consequence, G thought it necessary to replace “natural” by “pure”.

E.’s text means literally “restriction of the throat” with the idea of reducing food. G doubtless found the metaphorical use of the part of the body difficult and has replaced it with a literal psychological one.

The use of double diacritical points is quite common in G.

The text is talking about the irascible part of the soul, G has preferred to make this explicit by replacing “part” with “anger”.

E. The same remark can be made as in note 46, but here it is E that has the better reading.

add E, probably a stylistic embellishment.

The relative distinction made by E between reading and prayer that G puts on the same level is a secondary development.

E. E has hierarchized body and soul, going from the “baser” to the “nobler” element.

E. One wonders if the shift is just a question of two synonyms or if we are dealing with a shift from a Semitic word to a Greek one (νόμος).
Translation of the text

The letter that Mar Dadisho' sent to Bakosh on the subject of quietude

[1] Before anything else, I greet you in the fear of God and the love of our Lord and I beg your Charity to pray for the sinner I am. Next, I ask your Modesty to be neither sad nor despondent because I did not let you enter my cell, nor did I speak with you from the window. I was hindered from this for two reasons: firstly, because you have no need of one as lowly as myself, for you have acquired many great teachers and helpers and, secondly, if I did this for you in particular, others would request and require the same thing. Now I am incapable of doing this for a great number, because it would be unprofitable for me.

As for me, my dear friend, I have found no profit whatever in being a recluse in my cell and holding conversation with brothers from the window. What profit would I acquire if I shut my body...
in a cell, but I let my mind wander everywhere? Indeed how could the mind not wander when the senses of the body roam free and wander? Moreover, how could the senses not wander when the three of them that are most in need of being kept under control are allowed to be free? By those, I mean the tongue, sight and hearing. How much harm does a brother who is a recluse suffer from lack of watchfulness over his senses and in particular that of hearing! We can learn this from the writings of the fathers and from the experience of things.

[2] From experience, it is as follows. When a brother who is a recluse speaks of profitable matters with another brother from the window, he can be watchful over his sense of sight in order not to look in an unrestrained fashion and he can also keep his tongue in order to stop any despicable and harmful word from escaping him. This is possible if he is very valiant and perfect. As to his sense of hearing however, how can he keep watch over it, since he has no power over the tongue of the person who is speaking with him? If it happens that he hears a word that is harmful to his observance, it will make him suffer more than a scorpion’s sting and will be a cause for his thoughts to wander for a long time. Now if one word from one brother can hurt a recluse, how much more so many words from many brothers.

[3] So this is what we learn from experience. Listen now to the writings of the fathers. The blessed Evagrius, the greatest of the gnostics, that very grammarian of the passions and examiner of the thoughts, says this: “Because it is through the five senses that the intellect receives thoughts, let (the monk) look to see through which (sense) warfare waxes the strongest against him. It is clear that it is through hearing.” This he demonstrates (by quoting) from the First-Born of the wise, saying: “According to the word of Solomon: ‘A word of sadness troubles a man’s heart.’” We also learn the same thing from what happened to the glorious and blessed Arsenius following an order from God. When he was still in the royal palace, he desired the way of life of the angels, but was hindered from so doing because of the distractions of the world. He cried out in pain from the depths of his heart to God and said, “Lord, lead me to life.” The Lord replied

174 **Γνωστικός** is the usually rendering of γνωστικός in the Evagrian sense of the word: one who, after practical experience, has moved on to the truly spiritual matter of contemplation (see A. GUILLAUMONT and C. GUILLAUMONT, Évagre le Pontique. Le Gnostique ou À celui qui est devenu digne de la science (Sources chrétiennes 356), Paris, 1989, p. 24-40 and ibidem, Évagre le Pontique. Traité pratique, (Sources chrétiennes 170), vol. 1, p. 38-63).

175 Prov 12:25.

176 Before becoming a monk, he was preceptor to the emperors Arcadius and Honorius (L. REGNAULT, Les sentences des Pères du Désert. Collection alphabétique, Sablé-sur-Sarthe, 1981, p. 23).

177 i.e. the monastic life.
to him from his holy height\textsuperscript{178}, saying: “Arsenius, flee from men and you shall live.” So he went to Scete to be with abba Macarius and lived in a coenobium of many monks.

Once he had received sufficient instruction befitting a coenobium, he was deemed worthy of dwelling in a cell\textsuperscript{179}. Thanks to the ability of his knowledge and the discernment of his mind, he perceived that all his observance in the cell during the week was lost to him whenever he went to the community. This happened because of the commotion which occurred in his heart due to what he saw and the harmful things he heard, caused by dissolute brothers who are often to be found in monasteries. On this subject, Evagrius says, “As to those who wish to accomplish the disciplines\textsuperscript{180} of virtue in a community, Satan arouses the dissolute brothers against them\textsuperscript{181}.”

So what did the blessed man do? He cried out again to God in the suffering of his heart and said, “Lord, lead me to life.” It is as if he was saying in the presence of God, “I had prayed before your Greatness and implored your Grace to save me from the tumult of the world, so to speak from the waves of the sea. You caused me to dwell in a haven of peace in order for me to be agreeable to you and for my soul to live in remembrance of your love. Yet now, among the brothers, I suffer even greater confusion and disturbance through what I see and hear.” Then he heard the divine voice again that said to him, “Arsenius, flee, be silent and remain in quietude.” These are the roots, that is to say the remedies, for a man not to sin. It is as if God said to him, “When you were in the world, I did not order you to be in quietude and silence in a solitary dwelling, because you lacked instruction and perseverance. Now however that you have been instructed and sufficiently trained, depart henceforth from the monastery of many brothers and remain in quietude and silence.”

By “flee”, God commanded him to go far from the company of the brothers and to shut up his body in a cell. By “be silent”, he instructs him not to speak from the door or the window with those who come to him. Finally, by “remain in quietude”, he warns him not to hold conversations with people in his mind all

\textsuperscript{178} The translation in Guillaumont and Albert, “Lettre”, p. 242 “du haut de sa sainteté” misses the point that the genitive with a substantive has an adjectival force, just as \textit{ܡܲܪܲܚܲܐ ܕܲܩܘܕܫܐ} means “holy Spirit” and not “spirit of holiness”.

\textsuperscript{179} Life in a community is a simple preparation for the solitary life in a cell.


the time, because there is absolutely no profit to be derived from confining one’s body in a hermitage while letting the senses go free through talking from the window. Neither does it serve any good to confine the body and the senses while allowing the thoughts of the intellect to wander and reflect about the brothers and exterior things. Apart from the set times of prayer when one reflects on one’s fathers and brothers spiritually, as befits the law of spiritual love, a recluse should in no way remember anybody or reflect on anything, except on God and on himself.

He who does not divest himself of all things cannot put on the Lord of All. The remembrance of God cannot dwell with the remembrance of men in the heart. As it is written in the Book of Paradise, “A certain brother asked an elder and said, ‘How should a monk dwell in his cell?’ The elder replied by saying, ‘He should in no way have any remembrance of men when he dwells in his cell’182.”

[4] Contrary to my habit, I have obliged myself to write these few things to you183, that they may serve as the apology I owe you. God knows how I love you in the person of our Lord and how I have profited from your aims and your zeal in the fear of God. That I owe you honour and satisfaction, this I know. However, I live among many people and it is does not befit your Charity that you should be for me a pretext for complaint or gainsaying because I speak with you alone among this large community or that I give a pretext to others to be scandalized about me.

Now, if you keep the commandments of our Lord Christ, in spiritual love, and keep the gaze of your mind stretched towards him184 at all times, with the insatiable185 and ceaseless desire and zeal to do his will, it is he himself who will be for you a teacher, guide and helper for accomplishing his will and for the joy of your soul. Now, it is written, “The commandments of the Lord are upright and gladden the heart186” – here is joy for your delection; “the commandment of the Lord is choice and enlightens the eyes187” – here is light for your soul to journey in his path without stumbling; “the testimony of the Lord is faithful and brings wisdom to children188” – here is divine understanding and

183 According to the French translation (GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre” p. 243), it is the “things” which are not habitual, not the fact of writing. It is however clear that it is the latter which is intended, whichever Syriac text is followed (see note 74).
184 Perhaps compare Heb 12:2.
185 Not “sans lassitude” (GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre” p. 243).
186 Ps 19:8.
187 ibidem.
188 Ps 19:7.
spiritual wisdom in order to be enlightened with spiritual considerations and to resist the enemies’ attacks. As it is written, “Make me wiser than my enemies because I have kept your commandments.” If you seek out consolation from my words in replacement of my conversation with you, (this consolation) will be a teacher and a consoler. I even dare to say that the narrowness of the seclusion in which I am, the poverty of the place in which I dwell and the confined hermitage which I inhabit will serve you in place of a teacher, if it is that you do indeed desire to draw some profit from my littleness and my simplicity.

[5] But if words are also necessary, listen then. You must learn and know, my dear friend, that before anything else a monk has to acquire these three virtues which will be for him like the tools of craftsmanship used by craftsmen. Just as every craft necessarily needs three things, by which I mean to say: an iron anvil, a hammer and pincers so all the different disciplines among monks have need of these three things. They are: quietude, meditation and coercion (of self). Without them, no virtue can be properly accomplished with the upright intention which behoves it. These (virtues) engender one another: quietude engenders meditation and meditation coercion. From these are thence engendered and established all the precious and glorious virtues.

Therefore, a monk must leave the world in order that his soul become used to living in quietude according to his strength and his stature, be it as a kelliot or a coenobite. Accustom yourself, my brother, even if you are in a coenobium, when you have the opportunity, to sit and meditate. Reflect, saying to yourself, “For what reason did I leave the world and what do I run after in order to acquire it?” Meditate on the passions and ponder on the virtues: what and how many are the virtues and what and how many are the passions? Then because of quietude and suchlike meditations, you will perceive how this monastic way of life is hard and that without constantly compelling yourself, you will be unable to accomplish it, for you have a combat against nature, old habits and will.

[6] So, when you will have received instruction concerning these three things and will have understood that without quietude there is no meditation, and that without meditation there is so coercion (of the self), you will then acquire the discovery of the knowledge of three other virtues which are even greater than the others. They are prayer without ceasing, the overthrow of thoughts and asceticism.

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189 Ps 119:98.

190 is derived from κέλλα and refers to a monk living a solitary life in a cell.

191 Perhaps compare Phil 3:12 (so GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre”, p. 244), but the vocabulary of the Peshitta is somewhat differ (instead of 𓊡).
Listen then to how they become known to someone and how they are engendered one from another. When someone is in quietude with his soul, this very quietude and silence awaken his mind to meditate on himself. Once he has meditated on himself and has correctly understood what sin is and what righteousness is, he knows that it is impossible to depart from evil and do good, except by compelling himself every day and at every instant. When he realizes that, however much he compels himself night and day, he is too weak for improvement, he then understands that, without divine help, he is unable by himself to free himself from the passions and accomplish the virtues.

Henceforth he applies himself to the labour of prayer and prays without cease in order to find help. When however, he sees that prayer is hindered by the thoughts arising from the passions, he continually takes care to purify his soul from the thoughts that are aroused in him by the Evil One. In this way, his heart is illuminated through prayer and his mind is strengthened against his enemies. Furthermore, when he realizes, thanks to his discernment and the teaching of experience, that he cannot overthrow his thoughts and pray all the time when lying with a full stomach on his bed, he devotes himself to the labours of asceticism. Once his body has become lighter through fasting, it becomes easier for the mind to overthrow the thoughts or pride which arise against the knowledge and love of God; and once the body has been somewhat weakened and emaciated through keeping vigil, the mind is immediately illuminated in prayer.

[7] These three other virtues are born from the first three and without them they cannot be learnt or acquired. Just as the king’s crown, his ring and the cup of gold he drinks cannot be fashioned without pincers, anvil and hammer so, without quietude, meditation and coercion (of self) one cannot acquire prayer without ceasing, the overthrow of thoughts, bodily labour and the other kinds of virtue.

Thus, we must cherish quietude as being the root from which all the virtues sprout. In this quietude, it does not behove us to reflect on anything else apart from our sins and passions and on how we can free ourselves from them, and acquire purity of heart and be deemed worthy of the vision of God and his love. “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” and “He

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192 GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre”, p. 244 translate, we think, ad sum with “obstacle”. No such meaning is attested in the lexica. Although the mention of pride seems unexpected, an almost identical text is found in DQC I, 52 “We overturn their [the demons’] thoughts and any pride which arises in us through them against the knowledge of God and the love of our Lord”.

193 Mt 5:8.
who loves me and keeps my commandments, I shall love him and show myself to him\textsuperscript{194}. This is pledge of perfection to come.

[8] I also add the following for your instruction. At all times, investigate the generic passions and the comprehensive virtues and meditate on them. The generic passions are the following: concupiscence, love of money and vain glory. These were vanquished by our Saviour on our behalf and he gave us victory over them, we\textsuperscript{195} who run after his knowledge seething with love. He showed us in the Gospel the spiritual remedies by which these three passions can be healed, they which are the fathers of all the passions. The remedies are fasting, prayer and mercy. Now, since the rational soul has three parts, I mean, concupiscence, anger and thought – which is the intellect –, and the three of them have fallen sick through sin, our Saviour has offered the healing which is appropriate to our passions. To this end, he says, “When you fast, when you pray and when you give alms, do not do so and so, but do so and so\textsuperscript{196}”. Through fasting, he healed concupiscence, through alms, he cured anger and through prayer he purified the intellect.

The holy fathers, seeing our Lord’s aim given in the Gospel, have expanded on these three generic virtues by way of a more developed explanation which they have made triple for each of them\textsuperscript{197}. Thus the concupiscible part of the soul, which fell sick through being mixed with the concupiscence of the body, is healed and with it the concupiscence of the body also, so that both of them become one pure desire in God. This takes place through fasting, the restriction of desirable things and keeping vigil which engender sobriety. As for the irascible part of the soul which, through sin, was mingled with bodily anger, it is cured and bodily anger with it, so that both of them become one natural anger of the soul which proves itself constantly valiant against the passions and the demons and is strengthened in divine hope. This takes place through gentleness, humility and mercy which engender neighbourly love. As for the intellect, which is the cognitive part of the soul, it is purified and healed through the reading of divine writings\textsuperscript{198}, the recitation\textsuperscript{199} of psalms and constant prayers which engender the love of God.

\textsuperscript{194} A loose adaptation of Jn 14:21.

\textsuperscript{195} ‘The Syriac has switched from a first person plural to a third person plural used generically.

\textsuperscript{196} See Mt 6:15, 6, 2.

\textsuperscript{197} For each of the generic passions, Dadisho’ expands the single remedy “of the Gospel” into three. The correspondence between the passion and the remedy to be applied varies, but the basic idea comes from Evagrius (see GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre”, p. 245, note 6).

\textsuperscript{198} This could be Scripture in the strict sense, but also religious books in general.
In this way, the whole man is healed in his soul and in his body from the sicknesses of sin which is a transgression of the law. He acquires perfect health which is in righteousness, puts off “the old man corrupted through the desires stemming from error” and puts on the new man in holiness and sanctity. “He is renewed in knowledge in the image of his Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ who chose you for his service. He, through his grace, will make you perfect in his love, will fulfil you in his kindness and will make you strong in order to perform his will and will keep you from Satan’s snares. He will teach you his knowledge, affirm you in his hope and make you worthy of his kingdom and of his glory together with all the saints who accomplish his will. Amen.

*End of the letter of saint Mar Dadisho*