

vol. { 8 }

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعر اراون

فواطر

المجلد { 8 }



*In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.*

vol. [8]

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The Chapter of

al-A'raf

Continued

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآيَاتِهِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ يَنَالُهُمْ نَصِيبُهُم مِّنَ
الْكِتَابِ ۗ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُتَوَفَّوْنَهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ نَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ
اللَّهِ قَالُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْنَا وَشَهِدُوا عَلَيَّ أَنفُسِهِم أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا كَافِرِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Who is more wrong than the person who invents lies against God or rejects His revelations? Such people will have their preordained share [in this world], but then, when Our angels arrive to take them back, saying, ‘Where are those you used to call on beside God?’ they will say, ‘They have deserted us.’ They will confess that they were disbelievers [37] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 37)

The words, ‘And who could be more wicked,’ (*al-A'raf*: 37) are in the form of a question which can have no answer except an acknowledgement of the truth. No one could be wickeder than him who attributes his own lying inventions to Allah *Glorified is He*. Such a person has truly wronged himself and his own people. The principle way to wrong one’s self is to be pleased with an ephemeral life and leave aside an eternal life. As for wronging his people, he will have to bear the burden of the evil they commit because of his lies about Allah *Glorified is He*.

‘Or disbelieved His messages’ (*al-A'raf*: 37) That is, they ascribe to Allah *Glorified is He* what He did not say. They also disbelieved in what He actually said. Each of these two is equal to the other. The Arabic word *ayatihi* (His messages) refers to the amazing miracles revealed by Allah. The word *ayat* is used in the Quran to mean several different things. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘A divine Book, the messages (*ayat*) whereof have been clearly spelled out ...’ (*Fussilat*: 3). It is also used to mean the miracles which Allah *Glorified is He* sent to aid His messengers, ‘And nothing has prevented us from sending [this message, like the earlier ones] with miraculous signs (*ayatih*) [in its wake], except [Our knowledge] that the people of olden times [often] disbelieved in them.’ (*al-Isra*: 59) Here, the word *ayat* means miracles, i.e. amazing signs. The Quran also tells us about the cosmological signs of the universe. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Now among His signs (*ayatihi*) are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon.’ (*Fussilat*: 37)

Thus, an *aya* is an amazing sign. This word is also applied to the verses of the Quran because when you look at the arrangement of the Quranic verses, how they incorporate facts of existence and cover matters of the universe, you

say to yourself, 'This is amazing because the one whose lips uttered these verses was an unlettered prophet. He was known to have never been educated, was not heard to utter any poetry or prose, and had not been trained in oratory. In addition, he had never ruled a nation, nor had he studied the history of the past nations to develop laws which the modern civilisations have not been able to surpass.'

When the Muslim Bedouins took their religion to Persia, it was the basis of the entire eastern civilisation. Despite that, the Persians adopted their laws from this Bedouin nation. Before the message was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the legal system of the Bedouins was based on a tribal system, with each tribe having its own chief. Prophet Muhammad's message brought a system which encompassed all the nations of the earth and succeeded in managing the whole world. This is an amazing phenomenon, and every *aya* of these was a miracle and a wonder. In addition, the cosmological signs have absolute precision: the sun and the moon run in their appointed courses, with each of them floating in a distinct orbit. This is an amazing system.

So, these amazing signs included the verses of the Quran as well as the cosmological miracles and signs. How could they deny these signs? Did they not look at the universe with its clear-cut creation, perfectly engineered and flawless formation? Such signs express the precision of the Creator. He is the All Knowing, All-Powerful, All-Wise and the All-Accounting Lord. Likewise, how could they deny Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who came bearing these miracles? They called him a sorcerer, and when he recited the verses of the Quran, they denied them as well.

Thus, they did not look at the cosmological signs to deduce the greatness and the wisdom of the Maker. Likewise, they denied the signs and miracles which the Messengers brought, the greatest of which being the verses of the Quran.

When Allah *Glorified is He* presented this matter, He asked them, 'How can you say that your Prophet bewitched the other people to believe in him. Why then, did he not bewitch you, too?'

Allah narrates another aspect of their disbelief in the following verse, 'It is but a human being that imparts [all] this to him!' (*an-Nahl*: 103) Allah replied to their false accusations, 'The tongue they refer to in disbelief is not Arabic, whereas this (Quran) is in a clear Arabic tongue speaking the truth.' (*an-Nahl*: 103)

‘And they (the disbelievers) say, “Fables of ancient times which he has caused to be written down, so that they might be read out to him at morning and evening!”’ (*al-Furqan*: 5) So, Allah *Glorified is He* taught Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say, ‘Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you before this [revelation came unto me]. Will you not, then, use your (mind for) reason?’ (*Yunus*: 16) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remind them that he had lived among them for forty years. Was he known ever to have said or uttered anything like this Quran?

Will Allah leave those who disbelieved in His signs without sustenance? They are His creatures and He will assure for them the essential necessities of life. He also commanded the material means of existence to serve those who disbelieved in Him, just as they should serve those who obeyed and believed in His messengers. The disbelievers who utilise the worldly means properly will reap their benefits. On the other hand, if the believers are negligent in utilising the universal laws, they will not reap their benefits. Allah’s bounties are a provision of His Lordship, and therefore, he will provide the sustenance to those He created. Also, the natural laws of the universe serve the obedient and the disobedient alike because this is the way of Allah *Glorified is He* and His universal laws do not change.

So, their disbelief will not cause Allah *Glorified is He* to decrease their worldly provision that were ordained for them by Divine predestination. Whatever is written in their decree of fate will come to them, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Whatever has been decreed to be their lot [in life] will be theirs.’ (*al-A'raf*: 37)

This would also mean that they will be afflicted by their share of torment in life. This is made clear in the Book that was sent to clarify that the obedient will be rewarded and the disobedient will be punished in the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* says here, ‘Until there shall come unto them our messengers to take their souls (causing them to die), [and the angels] shall say, “Where, now, are those beings whom you were invoking beside Allah’s name?” [Those sinners] will reply, “They have forsaken us!”, and [thus] they will bear witness against themselves that they had been denying the truth.’ (*al-A'raf*: 37)

When you hear the words, 'causing them to die', you will understand that this life will surely end and the spirit will be separated from the body. This is the meaning of 'causing them to die'. Sometimes this action is ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He*; in other verses, it is ascribed to the Angel of Death and, on other occasions, it is ascribed to the followers of the Angel of Death. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Until, when death approaches any of you, Our messengers cause you to die, and they do not overlook [anyone].' (*al-An'am*: 61) These three different forms of expression are all equivalent because the Angel of Death does not cause death by his own choice, but takes directions from Allah *Glorified is He*. The Angel of Death follows the orders and commands the angelic messengers to carry it out.

The most basic meaning of the Arabic word *tawaffi* (to die) refers to the moment when the appointed duration of life has reached its end. Every man has two appointed ends. It could be the end of this life, where it means the event of death; it could also mean the end of *barzakh* (the period of life after death, in the grave) until the Day of Reckoning and punishment in the Hellfire. This is their second appointed end.

We can also say that the time of reckoning of every man is at the moment of his death since the period of Resurrection is composed of stages that begin at the grave and end in the eternity spent in Paradise or Hell.

When the angels ask them, 'Where, now, are those beings whom you were invoking beside Allah's name?' [Those sinners] will reply, "They have forsaken us!", and [thus] they will bear witness against themselves that they had been denying the truth.' (*al-A'raf*: 37)

At this point, they will admit that those idols which they had called upon instead of Allah *Glorified is He* have disappeared and vanished without a trace. 'And they say, "What! After we have been [dead and] lost in the earth, shall we indeed be [restored to life] in a new act of creation?"' (*as-Sajda*: 10)

In that final reckoning, they will testify against themselves about their disbelief. However, this testimony will not benefit them after the time of moral responsibility had ended; they will be in an abode where they will be compelled to do whatever Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to do with them. In this world, they were free to act as they pleased, but in the Hereafter, their testimonies will be useless. The purpose of this testimony will be to show the

fairness of the requital to which they will be subjected. Thus, they will not object to this requital; which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ ادْخُلُوا فِي أُمَمٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مِنَ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسِ فِي النَّارِ كَلَّمَا دَخَلَتْ أُمَّةٌ لَعَنَتْ أُخْتَهَا حَتَّى إِذَا آذَرَكُوا فِيهَا جَمِيعًا قَالَتْ أُخْرَبْتُمْ وَأُؤْتَبْتُمْ رَبَّنَا هَلْ نَوْلَا أَضَلُّونَا فَتَاتِهِمْ عَذَابًا ضِعْفًا مِنَ النَّارِ قَالَ لِكُلِّ ضِعْفٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

God will say, 'Join the crowds of jinn and humans who have gone before you into the Fire.' Every crowd curses its fellow crowd as it enters, then, when they are all gathered inside, the last of them will say of the first, 'Our Lord, it was they who led us astray: give them double punishment in the Fire'— God says, 'Every one of you will have double punishment, though you do not know it'[38] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 38)

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us that by His command 'Be', they will enter the fire just as other disbelieving nations have entered it before them. They will not be the first, but they will join them in the same fate to which the others went. Those nations will be intermixed because all of the disbelievers will receive the same requital.

It was following the example of the nations which went before them that led them to the hellfire. The former nations were models of misguidance who were followed by those nations who came later. Therefore, when the final nations enter hellfire, they will curse those who led them in to that abode.

Suppose that a person went to jail for a crime he had committed. What if a subordinate wrongdoer imitated that former criminal and entered prison with him? By Allah *Glorified is He* when they meet in jail, will the latter not curse the former? 'Every crowd curses its fellow crowd as it enters (the fire), then, when they are all gathered inside, the last of them will say of the first, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray. Give them double punishment in the fire."— Allah says, 'Every one of you will have double punishment, though you do not know it.'" (*al-A'raf*: 38) After one group of them follows the other into the fire and they meet, this curious conversation will be exchanged between them: '... the last of them will say of the first, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray. Give them double punishment in the Fire"...' (*al-A'raf*: 38).

'The last of them' denotes the ones who entered hell last, and 'the first of them' denotes those who were the leaders of error and misguidance and thus they entered hell before them. That is, the first crowd will consist of the generals and leaders of error and mischief, while the last crowd will consist of their followers who copied their bad example. The direction of speech in '...the last of them will say of the first, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray ...' indicates that the last crowd will be addressing it to our Lord.

But why would it happen this way? It might have been expected that the Quran would say, 'The last of them will speak to the first of them, "You led us astray.'" However, it is worded in this way because it will be no use, then, to speak to those who led them astray. Everything at this point will be solely in Allah's Hands. They shall say to Allah *the Almighty* what they wish to say to everyone: '... it was they who led us astray ...' (*al-A'raf*: 38) -with 'they' referring to those who led them astray. It is as though these words which they will be addressing to Allah *the Exalted* are a testimony from them against those who have been the causes of leading them astray. They say this to our Lord in attempt to increase the punishment of their leaders in the fire, as the Quran states: 'give them double punishment in the Fire' (*al-A'raf*: 38) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* will say to them all: 'Every one of you will have double punishment, though you do not know it'" (*al-A'raf*: 38).

Based on this, each wrongdoing group of humanity, throughout time, shall receive a double punishment for both going astray and causing others to go astray. We understand that 'double' means something that is equal to twice the amount or size of something else. Accordingly, O, you who followed the bad example of others, you too led other people astray by the bad example you set for them. By following them, you increased their numbers and influence and induced people into following the same example. You too deserve a double portion of suffering since you led others astray as well. You should be aware that the One Who is judging you administer justice perfectly. He gives every human just what he deserves.

Now, what will be the answer of the first crowd to the last crowd? The True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَالَتْ أُولَئِهِمْ لِأَخْرَجْتَهُمْ فَأَمَّا كَاتُ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلٍ
 فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

And the first of them will say to the last, ‘You were no better than us: taste the punishment you have earned’ [39] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 39)

This means that since you too shall receive double punishment, the same as us, then we are equal: 'taste the punishment you have earned' (*al-A'raf*: 39). It is as though the criminal himself, when he meets another criminal like him, will say to him, 'Experience the same punishment!' This is not cruelty on Allah's part or an exercise of irresistible power on His servants; rather, it is the justice of His Decree, for this is the result of what you have done.

It is obvious that tasting is connected to food. Does this mean they will eat the suffering? No, the True Lord *the Exalted* will make every part of their bodies experience the suffering. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants the suffering to cover the entire body, He extends the sense of taste, perceived by the tongue, to every other part of the body. Therefore, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'Allah presents the example of a town that was secure and at ease, with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places. Then, it became ungrateful for Allah's Blessings, so Allah made it taste the garment of famine and fear, for what its people had done.' (*an-Nahl*: 112) The significance of 'made it taste' is that the tasting experience becomes comprehensive and enveloping, like a garment covering the whole body. Taste is the strongest physical sense, and a garment extends over the entire body: 'taste the punishment you have earned' (*al-A'raf*: 39).

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* uses the word *taksibun* (gain, earn or win) which is translated in the verse as earn - and not *taktasibun* (acquire) since incurring evil deeds no longer involved the use of any artifice. Rather, it became for them a natural action even though the natural state of being is the spontaneous doing of good without any affectation or artifice. During the commission of an evil deed, the human soul undergoes an inner struggle since a wrongful act is alien to the original nature of human beings. However, due to the deep addiction to evil deeds, these people lost their original state of

being; it became corrupted, and their faculties no longer came into conflict when committing evil deeds. Rather, they committed sins easily, as though they were natural. This is the danger that threatens those who excessively commit sins; rather than being irritated, they feel happy with sin.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْهَا لَا تُفْتَحُ لَهُمْ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ وَلَا يَدْخُلُونَ
الْجَنَّةَ حَتَّى يَلِجَ الْجَمَلُ فِي سَمِّ الْخِيَاطِ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

The gates of Heaven will not be open to those who rejected Our revelations and arrogantly spurned them; even if a thick rope were to pass through the eye of a needle they would not enter the Garden. This is how We punish the guilty [40] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 40)

The True Lord *the Most High* in this verse declares a new verdict and specifies who will be subject to this verdict in order to make known the type of crime involved. This crime is independent, unlinked to any previously stated crime, so that every human knows that such an act constitutes a crime liable and subject to judgment and punishment. 'Those who rejected Our *Ayat* and arrogantly spurned them' (*al-A'raf*: 40).

We have already elaborated on the meaning of the word *ayat*, saying that it can refer either to the inimitable Quranic verses or to heavenly signs. Any human being who holds himself above being a follower of a law brought by a prophet who was well known among his people for his honesty, deserves severe punishment. It is true that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* did not have the prestige and authority with which to compete with the leaders and aristocrats of the Quraysh, which is why we find some Qurayshi people quoted as saying: 'Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities (Mecca or Ta'if, the two main cities of the region)?'" (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) Although the Qurayshi people acknowledged the sublimity of the Quran, still they wished it had been sent down to someone else who would meet their own materialistic criteria for greatness.

Consequently, the gates of paradise will not be opened to anyone who denies Allah's signs and hates to follow Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* as stated in the Quran: 'The gates of Paradise will not be open to those who rejected Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations) and arrogantly spurned them; even if a (camel or a thick, twisted rope) were to pass through the eye of a needle, they would not enter Paradise. This is how we punish the criminals' (*al-A'raf*: 40).

Thus, we know the people in the face of whom the gates of paradise will be shut. Naturally, we also know, by contrasts, who are the people for whom the gates of paradise will be opened: they are the believers. When their souls ascend to *the Exalted Assembly of Angels*, they will find their good deeds lifting them higher. As for the deniers, they will not ascend, rather they will descend. They will not enter paradise. Allah *the Exalted* has linked their entry to paradise with something which is rationally, normally and intrinsically impossible: '... even if a (camel or a thick, twisted rope) were to pass through the eye of a needle, they would not enter Paradise' (*al-A'raf*: 40). 'The eye of a needle' means the hole in the needle through which a thread is passed. The tip of the thread cannot enter the eye of the needle unless the width of the thread is less than the width of the eye. Also, a thread should be firm enough to pass through, and its ends not frayed; since if it has been cut and its end is frayed, it will not pass through the eye of the needle. This is why the tailor makes the tip of the thread pointed so that it will pass through the eye of the needle. Therefore, if we bring a camel, or *jamal*, which also means a thick, twisted rope and tell it to pass through the eye of a needle, would it be able to do this? Of course, it would not. Thus, we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has linked the entry of these people into paradise with an impossible event.

Some people may say, 'What does a camel have to do with the eye of a needle?' We answer them by saying that the word *jamal* also means a thick rope made of smaller ropes twisted together, like the ropes of ships, which are thick and plaited together.

Poets have utilised this issue in their poetry. A poet describing how his devotion and longing for his beloved has reached such a level that he has become emaciated and weak said:

If the passion and love I felt were felt by a camel,
No disbeliever would ever enter hell.

The poet is claiming that if the love and passion from which he is suffering were to afflict a camel, it would grow progressively thinner and thinner, and eventually emaciated until it could pass through the eye of a needle. In this verse, our Lord clarifies that only when a thick, twisted rope (or a camel) passes through the eye of a needle, will He let such transgressors into paradise: 'even if a (camel or a thick, twisted rope) were to pass through the eye of a needle, they would not enter Paradise. This is how we punish the criminals' (*al-A'raf*: 40). They deserve this punishment for the evil which they have committed. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* then says:

لَهُمْ مِنْ جَهَنَّمَ مِهَادٌ وَمِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ غَوَاشٍ ۚ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

Hell will be their resting place and their covering, layer upon layer – this is how We punish those who do evil [41]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 41)

The word *mihad* means a bed, from which is derived the word *mahd* which means a baby's cradle, and the word *ghashiya* means a covering. This means that the coverings and bedding components of that flat surface will be of hellfire. In another glorious verse, the True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'They shall have coverings of Fire above them and coverings (of fire) beneath them...' (*az-Zumar*: 16).

These covering layers will overwhelm two sides of the dimensional formation of the human body. The six directions of the human body are front, back, right, left, above and below. The word *mihad* (bed) refers to something that lies as a cover from below, while the word *ghashiya* (covering) refers to something that lies as a cover from above. The same applies to the word *zhulla* –multiple layers or canopies –of hellfire. Yet, the True Lord also decreed that Hell should surround the disbelievers on all six sides, by saying: '... We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides ...' (*al-Kahf*: 29). This indicates that the torment will encompass the wrongdoers from all sides.

The word *jahannam* (hell) is derived from the word *juhuma* which denotes something terrifying with a hideous, frowning appearance. Allah *the Exalted* then mentions the contrasting state in order to reinforce the soul's aversion to such a situation and induce it to love the opposite condition; therefore, He *the Most High* says:

وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا وِإِلَّا
 وَسْعَهَا أَوْ لَتِيكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

**But those who believe and do good deeds – and
 We do not burden any soul with more than it can
 bear – are the people of the Garden and there
 they will remain [42] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 42)**

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that those who believe and do righteous deeds will dwell eternally in paradise. The True Lord then places between the beginning and end of the verse the following clarifying alert, '...and We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear...' (*al-A'raf*: 42), to make us understand that those who transgress against themselves by disbelieving in Allah *the Almighty* and denying His signs have not grasped the reality of faith. Abstention from many desires lies within, and not beyond, the capacity of the human soul. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* clarifies for us that He has placed upon every accountable person (i.e. adult Muslim of sound mind) the obligations contained in 'Do's and Dont's' which are within the scope of human ability.

By viewing a total picture encapsulating the contrast and comparison between the dwellers of Hell and the dwellers of Paradise, we find that the True Lord *the Exalted* says about the people of Hell: 'The gates of Paradise will not be open to those who rejected Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations) and arrogantly spurned them; even if a (camel or a thick, twisted rope) were to pass through the eye of a needle, they would not enter paradise. This is how we punish the criminals.' (*al-A'raf*: 40)

They shall not enter paradise, which indicates that they will be deprived of something beneficial. Not only this, but they will also enter hell. So, there

are two afflictions here: one is the loss of a beneficial blessing, namely entrance into paradise, of which Allah *the Almighty* deprives them and withholds from them this delight as requital for their sins. Beyond this is the second which is that they are also sent to Hell, another punishment, as the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'Theirs will be a bed of Hell (Fire), and over them coverings (of Hellfire). This is how We punish the wrongdoers.' (*al-A'raf*: 41)

In the first glorious verse, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'This is how we punish the criminals' (*al-A'raf*: 40), and in the second verse, He says: 'This is how we punish the wrongdoers.' (*al-A'raf*: 41)

It is as though their criminality is the cause for not entering paradise, while their injustice is the cause for being enveloped by fire from above and below along with being enclosed from all sides by an encirclement of hell.

After this reminder which rouses our abhorrence for the dwellers of hell, firstly, due to their non-performance of the responsibilities that have been assigned to them, and secondly for the horribleness of the punishment they have brought upon themselves, it is appropriate for us to be eager for the contrary end. Therefore, Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'However, those who believe and do good deeds—and We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear—such are the companions of Paradise. They will abide therein eternally.' (*al-A'raf*: 42) The True Lord's Words '—and we do not burden any soul with more than it can bear—' (*al-A'raf*: 42) come between the subject of the sentence and its predicate as a parenthetical clause. This is because the style of discourse in this verse is concerned with informing us that believers and doers of good works will spend eternity in paradise. The parenthetical clause '—and we do not burden any soul with more than it can bear—' (*al-A'raf*: 42) comes between the two key parts of the sentence, the subject and the predicate. Therefore, when we hear 'those who believe', we realise that this is an action of the heart; then we hear after it 'and do good deeds', which is an action of the body, and the harmonious combination of the emotional and physical actions leads to a conduct in line with the Islamic beliefs. Belief is what always facilitates faithful conduct and renders the difficulties encountered while fulfilling moral responsibility and righteous works acceptable and easy. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* gives this clarification:

Beware of thinking that I have assigned to you more than what you can bear. No, for I place on humans only that which they can well bear. Also, beware of understanding that My words: '...but those who believe and do good deeds...' (*al-A'raf*: 42) are meant to exhaust you, rather, they are well within your ability to do good. This is because I am the Lawgiver, and the Lawgiver makes people solely responsible for what lies within their power.

We do the same thing in our working lives. We find that the engineer who manufactures a machine tells us about the extent of its capabilities. He warns us that the equipment should not be overloaded, otherwise, it will be damaged. If a human manufacturer cannot charge a lifeless machine with doing more than it can, would the One Who created mankind charge them to do more than what they can? This is impossible.

We must close the door on those who wish to excuse themselves from the obligations which have been placed on them. Do not base your judgment on your listless, unjust assessment of your ability; rather base your judgment of your ability on what Allah *the Almighty* holds you responsible. If He charges you with a responsibility, you should regard this responsibility as within the scope of your ability. Clear evidence of the falsehood of those who wish to evade Allah's Rulings is their attempt to subject the rulings to their view of their own ability, although others do what they are avoiding. For example, when the True Lord forbids drinking alcohol, you find that there are people who abstain from drinking alcohol in obedience to Allah's Command. Likewise, you find that there are people who abstain from illegal sexual intercourse or taking usury. Since a human being who is equal to you and is a member of your own species is able to do the command, then whoever does not abstain from these forbidden things is a sinner and cannot blame it on the difficulty of the duty. The responsibilities that are entrusted to us by the All-Wise Lawgiver consist of the 'Do's and 'Dont's' commands. Allah *the Exalted* does not assign obligations that are beyond the ability of the one who is obligated. Allah *the Almighty* assigns responsibilities in proportion to human capacities. Also, the functioning of human powers and capacities require sustenance, such as food, drink, clothing, and the rest of survival needs. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear that He provides mankind with all basic material life's needs. Never

think that Allah *the Exalted* tasks humans with unachievable responsibilities; rather, humans are the ones who put themselves into situations of excessive responsibilities. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: '...but let him whose provision is restricted...' (*at-Talaq: 7*) which is a phrase referring to the person whose means are somewhat straitened calling him to '... spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah does not burden any soul with more than He has given it' (*at-Talaq: 7*)

Therefore, do not make unreal estimations when calculating your livelihood expenses, and then try to subject your income to this reckoning; rather, you should consider your income and live within its limits. If your income is one hundred pounds, organise your life so that your expenses are equal to your income. Allah *Glorified is He* puts no obligation on you beyond what He has given you.

Let us look at what Allah has given us. Do not bring into your provision that which He has not made lawful. Do not steal, plunder, pilfer or take bribes and then say, 'This is what Allah has given me.' No, you must only take and benefit from what Allah *the Almighty* has made lawful for you. If you live within what Allah has made lawful, He will help you with all the details of your life and supply all your needs since you are living according to His Way. The True Lord *the Exalted* will spare you the needs of life which might require you to take in excess of what He has given you, so that they will not cross your mind or the minds of your children. For example, you might enter the market with the limited amount of money that Allah has given you, and see many good things, but the True Lord makes it so that you only look at those things which are within your budget. In this way, Allah makes what is within your budget look good to you and keeps what is beyond your budget away from you. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him, and He does not stir the cravings of the soul for anything beyond this.

This is the reason why the True Lord says: 'However, those who believe and do good deeds—and We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear— such are the companions of Paradise. They will abide therein eternally.' (*al-A'raf: 42*)

The companions' of paradise are those who will never be parted from it, just as a friend, or *sahib*, loves the companionship of his friend. Paradise wants them, and they want paradise. Life there is eternal. Any joys which you did not obtain during this worldly life, they could never have been eternal. In this world, you fear that you may die and lose the joys of life. Even if you do not die, you fear that these joys will sooner or later leave you since we are living in a world of fluctuations. Such is Allah's Constant Law in His creation. You find that the healthy person becomes ill, and the rich person becomes poor, for nothing intrinsically belongs to human beings. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* maintains the balance of humanity. He divides the economic condition amongst mankind. Thus, we find that a person who does not despise his portion of sustenance and work, as allotted to him by Allah, He will grant him ease after every hardship. Likewise, in paradise, Allah *the Exalted* will remove all types of vicissitudes which humans should confront in worldly life. Therefore, The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِّنْ غَلٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ
الَّذِي هَدانا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَن هَدانا اللَّهُ لَقَدْ جَاءتْ رَسُولَ رَبِّنا
بِالْحَقِّ وَنُودُوا أَن تِلْكَمُ الْجَنَّةُ أَوْرِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

We shall have removed all ill feeling from their hearts; streams will flow at their feet. They will say, 'Praise be to God, who guided us to this: had God not guided us, We would never have found the way. The messengers of our Lord brought the Truth.' A voice will call out to them, 'This is the Garden you have been given as your own on account of your deeds' [43] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 43)

Allah's Words 'We shall have removed all ill feelings from their hearts...' (*al-A'raf*: 43) also apply to those who exerted their best efforts to reach expert opinions about certain matters in this world and came to different conclusions. On the Day of Resurrection, they will be brought forth without any rancour or ill feeling in their hearts. Therefore, we find that `Ali Allah be pleased with him would say on reciting this noble verse, 'O, Allah, make me, `Uthman, Talha and Az-Zubayr among these people!' This is due to the fact that these were the

very men who differed about the caliphate, and each of them was a Companion who had been given glad tidings of paradise. Therefore, if souls have been affected by fluctuations of feelings, do not think that they will accompany them to the abode of reward in the Hereafter since Allah *the Exalted* says: 'We shall have removed all ill feelings from their hearts....' (*al-A'raf*: 43)

In other words, it was the difference in formulating well-reasoned opinions amongst believers who all worked righteous deeds and who each wanted to exercise their judgment to the best of their ability. However, due to the fluctuations of life experiences, certain feelings ensued. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified that this will not continue with them in the Hereafter; although each of them differed, they were exerting their utmost effort to reach the most well-founded and informed opinions for Allah's sake. In the Hereafter, this exertion will not exist. The True Lord wants to make this issue a universal principle. For example, you might find that a man marries a woman based on different criteria from those that Allah *the Almighty* has established for marriage. He might have married her, for example because she was beautiful or because her father was influential or wealthy. Then, after the marriage, her wealthy father did not give him anything of his wealth, so he said, 'He tricked me by marrying his daughter to me!' Or she was beautiful, but then he found many bad characteristics in her, so he grew to hate her. Our advice to this man is that since you did not choose her according to Allah's Criteria, you must accept the consequences of your choice.

On the other hand, when someone marries a woman for her religious commitment and righteousness and then finds a blameworthy trait in her, this blameworthy trait will not continue into her afterlife. This is why we find that the True Lord mentioned this exact matter and described it specifically in terms of the husband and wife rather than in terms of sons and daughters since the husband and wife are the main pillars of a family. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear to spouses: Never think that any bad traits in your spouses which might have annoyed, upset, or troubled you would remain with them in the Hereafter. For this reason, He *the Glorious and Exalted* says: '...purified spouses ...' (*Al-'Imran*: 15).

This means that spouses will be purified from the things which used to anger you. They will be made pure by Allah's purification of them: 'We shall

have removed all ill feelings from their hearts; rivers flowing from under them ...' (*al-A'raf*: 43).

We find that the True Lord says in one verse '*tajri tahtiha*' which can be translated as '...Gardens under which rivers flow...' (*at-Tawba*: 100), and says in another verse '*tajri min tahtihim*' which can be translated as '...rivers flowing from under them...' (*al-A'raf*: 43). We notice that the difference in Arabic is the word *min*, or 'from'. People living in palaces may have water flowing around and beneath them, which is a delightful sight. The water of the Hereafter is unalterable; it does not change in taste or smell along with being free from the impurities which contaminate the water of this world. Just as we feel pleased by the sight of water in this world, we shall be pleased by it many times over in the Hereafter. Water may flow beneath a palace, yet it springs from a distant source, which causes the owner of the palace to fear that someone else may cut it off from him. In this verse, the True Lord assures His righteous servants the following: Rivers shall flow from under your gardens. All water shall be self-generating, springing at the place where you are stationed, so your spring shall be neither be controlled nor cut off by anyone. You shall see the rivers of paradise without any shores, for everything shall be governed, not by material means as is the case in this world, but by the command word 'Be!' – That is Allah Himself. This shall make Allah's servants in paradise of the Hereafter say: 'Praise be to Allah Who guided us to this. Had Allah not guided us, We would never have found the way'" (*al-A'raf*: 43)

They shall thankfully say, 'Praise be to Allah' since He *the Most High* has gathered, directed and guided them to a permanent reward and bliss, which nothing can ruffle. 'Praise be to Allah' is an expression of worship which believers shall utter in the Hereafter for having successfully fulfilled the responsibilities that Allah *the Exalted* had placed on them during worldly life. Allah *the Almighty* consequently will grant them in the Hereafter more than they have expected. The delights of the Hereafter are without limits. No matter how great a person's ingenuity, he cannot arrive to that which paradise contains since wishes there will be realised as soon as thought of: '...They will say, "Praise be to Allah"' (*al-A'raf*: 43)

Thanking and praising Allah is, in the worldly life, an obligatory act of worship, but in the Hereafter, it becomes a reaction of joy and satisfaction.

'...They will say, "Praise be to Allah, Who guided us to this: had Allah not guided us, we would never have found the way."*(al-A'raf: 43)*

The believers will say this gratefully since if it were not for Allah sending a Divine Law that defined the correct way of life and warned and inspired fear in them against sins, they would not have reached paradise. Guidance, as we have said, is direction to the way that leads to a specific goal. Therefore, you must first know what the goal is, and then plan the way that leads to it which must neither be crooked nor obstructive to your moving forward, thus elongating the distance for you. Allah's Words '... had Allah not guided us, We would never have found the way ...' *(al-A'raf: 43)* signify that it is not possible for human beings to lay down laws for themselves that guide them to the goal, since they themselves do not know what the goal is. Therefore, their Creator clarifies it for them by sending down His Law and Way to His Messengers.

Guidance is solely from Allah, yet He would not speak to every person individually. Rather, He sends Messengers who convey to us the signs and revelations of Allah and explain to us His Way. For this reason, the True Lord wisely says in this same verse: "'The Messengers of our Lord brought the Truth.' A voice will call out to them, 'This is the Paradise you have been given as your inheritance on account of your deeds.'" *(al-A'raf: 43)*

In this worldly life, you may meet someone who says to you: 'If you wish to relax, I advise you to go to such-and-such a place by such-and-such road and you will find yourself happy and relaxed there.' You believe him and follow his advice, and you find that he is telling the truth. Does this not make you feel happy? Similarly, the True Lord sent messengers with clear proofs, signs and right guidance which, when the believers follow and attain paradise and bliss, they must surely give thanks to Allah, saying: 'The Messengers of our Lord brought the Truth' *(al-A'raf: 43)* This is because the Messengers have not lied to them, rather, they brought them goodness: 'A voice will call out to them, "This is the Paradise you have been given as your inheritance on account of your deeds.'" *(al-A'raf: 43)*

It is as though the True Lord is clarifying for us, while of the responsibility of adhering to Allah's Laws is still incumbent upon us, that we must receive Allah's Doctrine on this basis. Everyone will claim their place in

paradise in proportion to how close or far they are from Allah's Way, for entrance into paradise is the reward for acting in compliance with His Way. The scholars—may Allah *the Almighty* reward them with the best of rewards—have raised a point here by saying, 'How can we reconcile between the part of the noble verse saying: "A voice will call out to them, "This is the Paradise you have been given as your inheritance on account of your deeds"' (*al-A'raf*: 43) with the following Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, "No one will enter Paradise because of his deeds alone." The Companions asked, "Not even you, O, Messenger of Allah?" He said, "No, not even me, unless Allah showers me with His Mercy."⁽¹⁾

Our answer to this is that there is no contradiction between Allah's statement and that of our reliably truthful and honest Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who brought to us the truth from Allah *the Exalted*. Rather, the two statements support one another; when the True Lord laid down the rules of our life, He made it clear that those who would act righteously would enter paradise. This Decree of Allah, which is forced by nothing, rather bestows grace and favours upon us. No one has a right over Allah since there is no action that benefits Him. Following Allah's Way and Laws only benefits and brings goodness to a servant. Accordingly, our entering paradise because of our good actions is also by Allah's Grace and Favour. The Quran elucidates to us the coherence in the meanings of these verses and the non-contradiction between a text of Hadith and a Quranic passage. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Say, "In Allah's Grace and Mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate."' (*Yunus*: 58)

The reward of every action belongs to the human; he takes the recompense for his actions. When the reward is greater than the exact recompense deserved for the action, this is an act of grace and favour from Allah. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '... Each person is in pledge for his own deeds.' (*at-Tur*: 21) Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* also says: 'That man will only have what he has worked towards.' (*an-Najm*: 39)

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the books of *Ar-Riqaq* (*Heart Softeners*) and *Al-Marḍa* (*The Sick*), Muslim in *Sifat Al Munafiqin* (*Description of the Hypocrites*), At-Tirmidhi in *Al-Jana'iz* (*Funerals*), Abu Dawud in *Al-Jana'iz*, An-Nisa'i in *Al-Jana'iz*, Ibn Majah in *Az-Zuhd* (*Renunciation of Worldly Pleasures*), and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (vi. 125)

Regarding the previous verse—*'wa-an laysa lil'insani illa ma sa`a'* (*an-Najm*: 39), if you understand Arabic language and you have a good aptitude for it, you will recognise that the Arabic letter *Lam*, which expresses ownership, signifies here that you have no right over Allah *the Exalted* unless your work and effort are consistent with and obedient to His Law. This previously mentioned glorious verse specifies just repayment, not the bountiful recompense: 'Say, "In Allah's Grace and Mercy let them rejoice. These are better than all they accumulate."' (*Yunus*: 58)

As an illustrative example, we as Muslims offer the funeral prayer over a deceased Muslim in compliance with the Islamic teachings. During it, we ask Allah to forgive the deceased person's sins. However, does this prayer add any extra deeds to the deceased person? If the prayer added nothing, the Islamic Law would not have commanded it. It is a prayer for a deceased person who is a Muslim; his acceptance and adherence to Islam is indeed part of his deeds. Therefore, we find that the True Lord says in another verse 'We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith ...' (*at-Tur*: 21) which means that the parents and their offspring share together the faith and the actions consequent upon such faith: 'We unite the believers with their offspring.' (*at-Tur*: 21)

This reunion indicates that the rank of the offspring is less than that of the parents, but the True Lord will raise their ranks as an honourable favour extended to their parents. This reunion may be a reward for the offspring or a reward for the parents. Their children will be united with them as long as they all share in faith, and the parents have provided for their offspring through lawful means and raised them according to the teachings of Allah *the Exalted*. A father may see his neighbour's children wearing expensive clothes and eating fine foods, but his children remain patient and live within the moderate means of their father who adheres to righteous deeds and a lawful income. Therefore, the children will attain Paradise alongside their father since they patiently bore with him the challenges of adhering to what is lawful.

In this way, we find that every believing person receives the reward for his deeds and then: 'A voice will call out to them, "This is the Paradise you have been given as your inheritance on account of your deeds.'" (*al-A'raf*: 43)

The word *irth* (inheritance) signifies that some property has been passed on from one person to another. We know that Allah *the Exalted* knows from

predestination how every human will behave and whether he will show belief or disbelief, obedience or violation of His Laws. Yet despite this, Allah *the Most High* prepared for every human a place in paradise which will be his own, on the basis of deeming him a believer and another place in hell on the basis of deeming him a disbeliever.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* has prepared paradise to accommodate His created beings, and He has equally prepared enough places in hell to accommodate everyone as well; there is no shortage of space for the Powerful and Able God. If we all believed, the vastness of paradise would amply contain every one of us. On the other hand – Allah forbid – if all mankind were to disbelieve, hell would not be cramped for them. This raises a question: 'When a group of mankind enters Paradise by their good deeds, to whom will the places allotted for the people of Hell go?' The True Lord, by His Grace, will grant them to the believers. They will inherit them from those undeserving of Paradise due to their disbelief.

Concerning paradise, the reward for the righteous, giving praise out of bliss and joy during life in paradise, it is appropriate for the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* to speak about the attitude of the dwellers of it towards the people of Hell; so He *the Most High* says:

وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ أَنْ قَدْ وَجَدْنَا مَا وَعَدَنَا رَبُّنَا حَقًّا فَهَلْ وَجَدْتُمْ مَا
وَعَدَ رَبُّكُمْ حَقًّا قَالُوا نَعَمْ فَأَذَّنَ مُؤَذِّنٌ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

The people of the Garden will cry out to the people of the Fire, 'We have found what our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found what your Lord promised you to be true?' and they will answer, 'Yes'. A voice will proclaim from their midst, 'God's rejection [hangs] over the evildoers [44] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 44)

In this verse, we witness the reproach. The glorious verse depicts for us the time when the dwellers of Paradise shall see the dwellers of Hell. Their mutual seeing of one another is part of the bliss and pains each experience on the one side and the other. When believers in Allah's Way see those who have antagonised, oppressed and persecuted them being punished in hell, this

will complete their joy. As for the other group, when they see their opponents in paradise, this will climax their suffering. Thus, they must see each other, which is why this dialogue shall take place. Then, the dwellers of paradise will call out to the dwellers of Hell, declaring that they have found that which Allah *the Exalted* has promised them real—the True Lord has granted them this paradise. Have you found, O, people of hell, what your Lord has promised to be true as well?

We notice the following difference between the two styles, even though the contextual structure is the same: the people of paradise will say, '...We have found what our Lord promised us to be true' (*al-A'raf*: 44), while in the second occurrence of 'promised' the pronoun 'you' is omitted, and the verb is made impersonal, 'Have you found what your Lord promised to be true?' (*al-A'raf*: 44)

Allah *the Exalted* says, 'what your Lord promised' without using the personal pronoun 'you' since the statement is intended to convey to them the promise in general, not given specifically to them alone, but also to others. In this way, the Absolute Promise of Allah comes to be fulfilled. The people of paradise, through their faith and righteous deeds, shall dwell in paradise by Allah's Grace, and the people of hell, through their disbelief and rebellion, shall dwell in hell as a punishment from Allah *the Almighty*.

At this point, the dwellers of hell will respond in the affirmative: 'Yes!' This is a confession from them of the real situation which they are experiencing; when before this, it has only been a warning. They will not react with arrogant denial. Arrogant denial can only occur between opponents over something that is not yet a matter of fact and reality. In this world, they used to deny Allah's Message and Warnings before their occurrence in real life. Now, they have transitioned into the Hereafter phase, and their entrance into Hell has become a reality.

'A voice will proclaim from their midst, "Allah's rejection [hangs] over the evildoers.'" (*al-A'raf*: 44) This means that a caller from among the angels will cry out, within the hearing of both the people of Paradise and Hell, to proclaim that expulsion from Allah's Mercy is a deserved retribution against the evildoers who have wronged themselves by not having faith and by denying the Last Day.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

those who turned others away from God's path and tried to make it crooked, those who denied the Hereafter' [45] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 45)

Those who turn people away from Allah's Path are those who refuse to follow His Path, along with hindering people from reaching it. In short, they go astray themselves and then lead others astray. These people attempt to make Allah's Path appear crooked, criticising it and not believing in it; they also object to the application of Islamic legal punishments and just retaliation. They try to make people averse to Allah's Way, to completely turn them off religion. Therefore, they turn other people away from Allah's Path and seek to make Allah's Laws seem deviant, aiming to stir up aversion to what He has ordained. They do not stop at this point, but they also disbelieve in the Hereafter. Had any of them believed in the Hereafter and recognised that he would certainly return to Allah and would not have done such things.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَبَيْنَهُمَا حِجَابٌ وَعَلَى الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلًّا بِسِيمَتِهِمْ وَنَادَوُا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ سَلِّمُوا عَلَيْنَا لَمْ يَدْخُلُوهَا وَهُمْ يَطْمَعُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

A barrier divides the two groups with men on its heights recognizing each group by their marks: they will call out to the people of the Garden, 'Peace be with you!'— they will not have entered, but they will be hoping [46] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 46)

A barrier will stand between the people of Paradise and the people of Hell. They will see one another through it. The True Lord *the Most High* explains this by saying (in another verse): 'On the same Day, the hypocrites, both men and women, will say to the believers, "Wait for us! Let us have some of your light!" They will be told, "Go back and look for a light." A wall with a door will be erected between them: inside it lies mercy, outside lies torment.' (*al-Hadid*: 13)

The inner side of this barrier facing towards the people of Paradise will contain mercy, and the outer side, facing towards the people of Hell, will contain suffering. The True Lord is Able to do all things; therefore, the dwellers of Paradise will not feel any of the misery that afflicts the dwellers of Hell. Similarly, the people of Hell will not receive any of the joy bestowed on the dwellers of Paradise. The people of Hell will hear the response to their desire of getting some light from the dwellers of Paradise, 'You are seeking guidance in the wrong place. The time of fulfilling obligations has ended.' Anyone who wanted light in the Hereafter should have worked for it while living in this world. Light in the Hereafter cannot be given by one created being to another, but it is offered as a gift by the Creator to the created beings who have believed in Him. You say, 'Wait for us! Let us have some of your light.' However, the dwellers of Paradise cannot give away any of their light. Giving is in the power of Allah alone. 'A barrier divides the two groups with men on its heights, recognising each group by their marks' (*al-A'raf*: 46) 'Each group' denotes both the dwellers of Paradise and people of Hell. We have seen already two groups, the dwellers of Paradise, and those of Hell. There is a third group; those are who dwell on the Heights. The word *a'raf* (heights or high places) is the plural of '*uruf*' that derives from the word meaning 'crest' or 'comb' like the one on top of a rooster's head or a horse's mane. It is as though between Paradise and Hell there is a high place like a crest, upon which stand another category of people who will recognise the dwellers of Paradise or the people of Hell, each by their distinctive marks. This implies that there are certain signs and marks that will distinguish the dwellers of Paradise from those of Hell.

How do these marks occur? It is said that when a person believes, he becomes worthy to acquire the marks of faith. The more the person proceeds in the Way of Allah by showing higher obedience and deference, the more He adds gracious marks to him which become indelible and inseparable from his identity. While on the contrary side, such marks of graciousness will be far removed from the people of hell. Instead, marks of hideousness, vileness and foulness will appear on them.

On seeing the dwellers of paradise, the people of the Heights will say to them, 'Peace be upon you!' because the ones of lower rank—the people of

the Heights—will say to those of higher rank—the people of paradise—'Peace be upon you!'

The people of the Heights are the ones whose good and bad deeds, when weighed in the scales of divine justice, which do not do even an atom's weight of injustice, will be found equal. The Quran says: 'The one whose good deeds are heavy on the scales will have a pleasant life, but the one whose good deeds are light will have the Bottomless Pit for his home.' (*al-Qari`a*: 6-9)

O, Lord, you told us about the scales of justice and only specified two groups with respect to weighed deeds: a group whose scales shall be heavy and a second group whose scales shall be light. The logic of weighing dictates that there should be a third group whose good and bad deeds have equal weight. This means that their scales are neither heavy enough to neither send them to Paradise nor light enough to send them to Hell. Such people shall be waiting at the heights, while their deeds are presented to Allah's merciful consideration. It is amazing how, on seeing the dwellers of paradise, they shall say to them, 'Peace be upon you!' even though they themselves have not entered paradise; but they long to enter. Allah's Mercy precedes His Wrath.

'They will call out to the people of paradise, 'Peace be upon you!'— they will not have entered, but they will be hoping.' (*al-A'raf*: 46) In this place, there will be no cheating or deception.

What will the people of the Heights say when they look at the people of hell?

وَإِذَا صُرِفَتْ أَبْصَارُهُمْ تِلْقَاءَ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

And when their glance falls upon the people of the Fire, they will say, 'Our Lord, do not let us join the evildoers!' [47] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 47)

By considering the Quranic phrase 'their glance falls upon' (*al-A'raf*: 47), we can determine that they will not turn their eyes of their own free will; being cursed, the sight of the dwellers of hell will be repugnant to them. Also, the expression 'their glance falls upon' carries a kind of reproof to the people of hell.

The saying of the True Lord: 'When their glance falls upon the people of the Fire ...' (*al-A'raf*: 47) means in the direction of the dwellers of hell. At this sight, the people of the Heights will say, 'Our Lord, do not let us join the evildoers!' (*al-A'raf*: 47) The people of the Heights will thus supplicate to Allah *the Exalted* 'O, Lord, keep us far from being with them!' The horror of the punishment, when witnessed, shall make them beseech Allah and seek refuge in Him against entering Hell with them.

The True Lord *the Exalted* then says:

وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالًا يَعْرِفُونَهُمْ بِسِيمَانِهِمْ قَالُوا مَا
 أَغْنَىٰ عَنْكُمْ جَمْعُكُمْ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

And the people of the heights will call out to certain men they recognize by their marks, 'What use were your great numbers and your false pride? [48] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 48)

It seems that when the eyes of the people of the Heights shall be turned towards the people of hell. They will see certain categories of sinners being punished, 'Look! There is Abu Jahl and Al-Walid, and along with them is Umayya ibn Khalaf and other chiefs who thought that their leadership of their societies and their authority above other people gave them absolute power and superiority. They used to mock those who first entered Islam such as `Ammar, Bilal, Suhayb, Khabbab *Allah be pleased with them* and other believers who lived with and for the truth. The people of the Heights will say to these people, 'What use were your great numbers and your false pride?' (*al-A'raf*: 48)

It is as though they are saying to them, 'Your misguided alliance during your worldly lives have availed you nothing. Your devils, idols, statues, and influence did not benefit you, nor did your haughty rejection of the call to faith. What use were they? Did they bring you any benefit? No, you benefited nothing from them.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

أَهْتُولَاءِ الَّذِينَ أَقْسَمْتُمْ لَا يَنَالُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ أَدْخُلُوا
 الْجَنَّةَ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ تَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

**And are these the people you swore God would never bless?
 [Now these people are being told], “Enter the Garden! No
 fear for you, nor shall you grieve” [49] (*al-A'raf*: 49)**

The people of the Heights will then point to the true believers such as Bilal and Khabbab, and say to the people of hell, such as Abu Jahl and Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, 'Are these righteous inhabitants of paradise, the ones about whom you used to say that they would never attain Allah's Mercy?' In this manner, the people of the Heights will engage in a comparison between the people of Paradise and the people of Hell during which it seems that they will be distracted from their own state of waiting for relief. They rejoice in the success of the dwellers of Paradise and reproach the people of Hell. Their preoccupation with their own position will not prevent them from taking this decisive stand. At this juncture, the True Lord *the Exalted* will allow the people of the Heights to enter His Paradise because of their feeling joy for the dwellers of Paradise and their reproach to the people of Hell. So He will say to them: 'Enter Paradise! No fear for you, nor shall you grieve.' (*al-A'raf*: 49) As we have said, these are the people whose bad deeds are equal to their good deeds. They are the ones who will be waiting at the Heights. Their good deeds are not heavy enough to make them deserve Paradise, nor are their bad deeds heavy enough to make them deserve Hell.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ أَفِيضُوا عَلَيْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ أَوْ
 مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ حَرَّمَهَا عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾

**The people of the Fire will call to the people of Paradise,
 ‘Give us some water, or any of the sustenance God has
 granted you!’ and they will reply, ‘God has forbidden both
 to the disbelievers [50] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 50)**

The people of Hell will then call out to the dwellers of Paradise pleading them to give and pour on them some water or any of the provisions that Allah

the Almighty has bestowed on them in Paradise. However, the dwellers of Paradise will say, 'We are now linked with Allah's Word "Be!" We no longer have choice (to give or refrain from giving). Allah has forbidden you anything from Paradise and prevented their reaching you. You are denied this, O, people of Hell, or such bounties are barred from you.' What the people of Hell are asking for is quite basic—water—while they dwell in 'a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides. If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces' (*al-Kahf*: 29).

The True Lord further says about the disbelievers who will be deprived of the bounties of paradise:

الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَهُمْ لَهْوًا وَلَعِبًا وَغَرَّتْهُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا فَالْيَوْمَ
نَنْسَهُمْ كَمَا نَسُوا لِقَاءَ يَوْمِهِمْ هَذَا وَمَا كَانُوا بِتَابِعِينَا يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

Those who took their religion for distraction, a mere game, and were deluded by worldly life.' Today We shall ignore them, just as they have ignored their meeting with this Day and denied Our Revelations [51] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 51)

Through this noble verse, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* explains to us who are the disbelievers who will be denied paradise. They are those who did not take their religion seriously, but merely as play and pastime. The first stage which a person passes through is *la`ib* (play), and then he moves on to the stage of *lahu* (futile pastime and amusement). We know that every action has behind it an active energy that is directed to perform it. Before this active energy is directed towards it, this action passes through the mind to specify the purpose of the effort. This purpose has specifications; either it will achieve some benefit or ward off some harm. Every purpose or intention that neither brings benefit nor wards off harm is considered play.

Therefore, the definition of *la`ib* is an act where the performer does not intend by doing such an act to achieve a proper objective that may ward off harm or bring about benefit, just as children play with their toys. When the child grasps his toy gun or toy car, does he have a proper intention towards which to direct his energy? No, because if he had a proper intention, a child

would not break any of his toys. Children usually break their toys after a while which shows that they are directing their energy towards an improper intention, neither bringing themselves benefit and nor warding harm from themselves. When energy is directed to something useless, this is futile pastime such as when you should do a certain task, but instead you divert your energy to something else.

What incurs Allah's punishment is indulgence in useless amusement, not playing. Therefore, we find that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exhorted parents to train their children to engage in useful sport that can benefit their community such as swimming, archery and horseback riding. However, the problem in our time is that people have made playing games a goal in itself. It is amazing how games now have serious laws, which no one can break without being punished. The referee watches the players during the game carefully. If he overlooks a rule or makes a mistake, the spectators become outraged. I ask you that you have adopted serious laws and transferred them to sport, so why have you left truly serious matters without laws?

We find that the adverse effects of indulging in trivial delights are enormous. A person who indulges in trivial pastime puts aside important work in favour of unimportant activities. Therefore, he sits playing backgammon and neglects the work that provides his livelihood. Trivial amusement not only harms the one who indulges in it, but it also attracts the attention of other people to it and it wastes their time, too. Instead, their time should have been used to perform a beneficial action. Corruption of all societies is caused by some of their members misusing their energy in ways that bring no good for themselves and nor for their community. Thus, useless pastime is an abuse along with being a waste of one's energy. 'Those who took their religion for distraction, a mere game, and were deluded by worldly life' (*al-A'raf*: 51).

Their beguilement by the attractiveness of worldly life has originated from their misuse of the means that Allah *the Almighty* has placed at their disposal, so that each of them has believed himself to be the supreme master. When the life of this world deceived them, they forgot the diligent work that was required to lead them to the eternal beneficial goal. Their requital for this shall be as Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Today We shall ignore them, just as they

have ignored their meeting with this Day and denied Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations).' (*al-A'raf*: 51) When Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Today We shall ignore them', does this mean that He shall leave them to do as they please? No, rather, hell will devour them and burn them. Disregarding them here signifies that Allah *the Exalted* will not include them in His Care, Kindness, and Mercy. Instead, He will abandon them to hellfire which will blacken their faces and scorch their skin.

Once again it is affirmed that this world is the arena through which a person constructs his place in the Hereafter. If he wants a place in the Highest paradise, he must fulfil the duties that will earn him a place there. If he wants a lesser degree, he will perform less work. It is as though the human, by his deeds, can assign himself his own place in the Hereafter. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not reward people arbitrarily, falsely or unjustly; rather, He repays each person according to his deeds. This is the reason why there are dwellers of Paradise, people of Hell and people of the Heights. The knowledge which the True Lord has sent down to us in the form of Quranic revelations, giving us warnings and glad tidings, is a guide for every Muslim. It should urge us to compete with one another for the attainment of honourable positions in the Hereafter.

'Those who took their religion for distraction, a mere game, and were deluded by worldly life, today We shall ignore them, just as they have ignored their meeting with this Day and denied Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations).' (*al-A'raf*: 51) The word *ayat* is from the saying of the True Lord '... and denied Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations)...' (*al-A'raf*: 51) can either denote cosmic signs, as in the verse stating, 'The night, the day, the sun, the moon, are only a few of His *Ayat* (signs)...' (*Fussilat*: 37), or it can denote the divine revelations, as in the verse stating, 'a Scripture whose *Ayat* (verses) are made distinct as a Quran...' (*Fussilat*: 3). It can also mean the miracles that prove and support the position of a prophet, as in the verse saying: 'Nothing prevents Us from sending miraculous signs, except the fact that previous peoples denied them.' (*al-Isra'*: 59)

The people of past generations denied all forms of *ayat*, whether cosmic signs or revelations. They first denied the cosmic signs which they saw and lived through, even before they were entrusted with duties from Allah *the Exalted*. They

experienced day and night, breathed air, enjoyed the warmth of the sun, and benefitted from the rain that watered their lands. They saw how the universe was orderly and uniform providing humans with their needs even before their perceptions and powers became active. These signs should have pointed them to the fact that they must have a Creator—the Sole, True, Supreme Lord. Then, when the successive Messengers came to them with miraculous signs and wonders proving their veracity as Messengers of Allah, they also denied them. Finally, when the Quran came as a miracle in its own right, they denied its elucidating verses that conveyed to them Allah's Way. This left them without excuse. In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ جِئْتَهُمْ بِكِتَابٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

We have brought people a Scripture – We have explained it on the basis of true knowledge – as guidance and mercy for those who believe[52] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 52)

What this means is that they have no excuse for this denial since the Scripture was clearly spelled out. They might say, 'The Scripture came to us suddenly out of nowhere, as did the Messenger who brought it.' Therefore, what do they have to say about the firm signs of the universe for they denied these, too? We have brought people a Scripture—We have explained it on the basis of true knowledge—as guidance and mercy for those who believe (*al-A'raf*: 52).

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not send down discourse which was abstract or vague, rather, the Scriptures contain spelled-out details from the All-Knowing and All-Wise Who clarified His rulings, meanings, counsels and stories so that the Scriptures were straight and not crooked; and He *Glorified is He* has the power to reveal a way which is appropriate for the standards and circumstances of every person.

When a person comes to us to ask us about anything, trying to twist his words so that we give him a legal opinion which justifies for him what he is already doing, we say to him, 'We do not have case-by-case legal opinions since there are ones we have already prepared, and you can apply your question to any legal one of them.' 'We have brought people a Scripture—We

have explained it on the basis of true knowledge—as guidance and mercy for those who believe.' (*al-A'raf*: 52)

There are people who heard the Quran, saw the signs, and were therefore guided. So, why were these ones guided whilst others went astray? The ones who believed were those who had faith in the existence of the Higher Power, as we said when we looked at the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'That is the Book; there is no suspicion about it; a guidance to the pious.' (*al-Baqara*: 2)

Therefore, those who were guided to the truth believed in the Quran, and some of them the True Lord *Glorified is He* described by saying that when they hear it, their eyes flow with tears. Also, there are also people whose hearts are not touched by faith when they listen to the Quran: 'Now among those [hapless sinners] are such as [pretend to] listen to thee, [O Muhammad,] and then, as soon as they leave thy presence, speak [with scorn] unto those who have understood [thy message], "What is it that he has said just now?..."' (*Muhammad*: 16) These are the ones whose hearts have become hard so that the light of the Quran cannot enter or become mixed with them, which is why we find that the True Lord *the Exalted* answers them by saying: '... It is such as these whose hearts Allah has sealed because they [always] followed but their own lusts.' (*Muhammad*: 16)

Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* says, 'Say: "Unto all who have attained to faith, this [Book] is a guidance and a source of health, but as for those who will not believe, in their ears is deafness, and so it remains obscure to them..."' (*Fussilat*: 44). We gave the example of how the exact same action can be done in different situations, but those who receive the action differ from one another, so the end result is different. For example, if you go outside in winter and find the weather cold, you feel as if your fingertips will freeze due to the coldness. You may cup your hands together and blow into them, doing this spontaneously to warm your hands up. Likewise, when you are given a very hot cup of tea and you want to drink from it, you blow unto it to cool it down. The breath which is blown from your mouth is the same, but it brings warmth to your hands and coolness to the cup of tea; so the action is one, but the results are different. The same is the case of the Quran: those who are

prepared for faith are guided by it, whilst those who are not prepared have hearts develop ones hardened to faith.

The attitude of those who are unable to receive Allah's Mercy is unnatural. What are they waiting for after this disbelief, and this oppression, and this arrogance, and this refusal, and after taking their religion lightly? What are they waiting for? The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells them what the result of their actions will be:

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُ يَوْمَ يَأْتِي تَأْوِيلَهُ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ نَسُوهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ
جَاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِالْحَقِّ فَهَلْ لَنَا مِنْ شُفَعَاءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا لَنَا أَوْ نُرَدُّ فَنَعْمَلَ غَيْرَ
الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ قَدْ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

What are they waiting for but the fulfilment of its [final prophecy]? On the Day it is fulfilled, those who had ignored it will say, 'Our Lord's messenger spoke the truth. Is there anyone to intercede for us now? Or can we be sent back to behave differently from the way we behaved before?' They will really have squandered their souls, and all [the idols] they invented will have deserted them [53] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 53)

What does *ta'wil* (final meaning) mean? *Ta'wil* means 'that to which a thing returns'; it is the final result after which the truth comes. Thus, mercy and Paradise will be for those who had faith, and Hell will be for those who disbelieved. Furthermore, the True Lord *the Almighty* is the One Who speaks here and has the power to make His Words come to pass, for the whole universe is in His hand.

In this verse, He *Glorified is He* says, 'Are [the disbelievers] but waiting for the final meaning of that [Day of Judgment] to unfold? ...' (*al-A'raf*: 53) Does this mean that are they waiting for anything but the final return which will be the day when their deeds return to them? Their final return will lead to suffering after the Reckoning on the Day in which will come the final end, destination, and consequences of their actions. When the Day of Resurrection comes and the truth comes out, and the veracity of the promises and warnings which the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought comes to light,

what will they say? They will say what He *Glorified is He* tells us they will say: '... those who previously had been oblivious thereof will say, "Our Lord's Messengers have indeed told us the truth! ..."' (*al-A'raf: 53*)

Basically, they will announce their belief now that this belief cannot avail them in aught since they will no longer be in the realm of moral responsibility; they will agree to have faith that now can no longer benefit them. '... Those who previously had been oblivious thereof will say, "Our Lord's Messengers have indeed told us the truth! Have we, then, any intercessors who could intercede in our behalf? ..."' (*al-A'raf: 53*) Therefore, they will acknowledge that the Messengers indeed conveyed the true Way of Allah, and they will ask if they have any intercessors. We know that an intercessor must be loved by the one to whom he intercedes, and in this world, we find people searching for someone who can intercede for them with a person of high standing who is influential with, and dear to; this person of high standing, or who has always listened to him or has done him favours so that he will not refuse to listen to him now. Thus, who will come on the Day of Resurrection and intercede for these people? No one will, and we will find them trying to take as intercessors those whom they had set up as rivals to Allah, yet these beings will also announce their hatred of them. Even if Allah gave them the right to intercede, they would not give their intercession to disbelievers and idolaters. In this world, such people exploited mankind and misled them, whilst on the Day of Resurrection no one will be subject to anyone else's will, and even the body parts will not obey their owner's will, rather, they will obey the True Lord *the Most High*. In the Hereafter, there will be no free will for anyone.

We gave an example before by supposing that there is a platoon of an army under a junior commander with the rank of officer, and the soldiers of the platoon are expected to do as he says, and then they take their position and the junior officer gives them flawed commands. Since they are subject to his will, they do what he commands them to do. When they return and the high commander accounts them for their actions, they will say, 'We did as we were told by the officer entrusted with our command.' Likewise, on the Day of Resurrection, the body parts will come forward, and the hands, feet, tongues, and skin will testify against their owners. So, the body parts will

raise their complaints with Allah on the Day when no one will have ownership over anyone else, and on that Day, the deniers will announce belief which will not benefit them: '...Our Lord's Messengers have indeed told us the truth! ...'" (*al-A'raf*: 53). Likewise, they will look for intercession, but they will not find it; rather, the first people to scorn those who worshipped beings other than Allah will be the very ones which they worshipped.

This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '[Then they will be told:] "Verily, you and all that you [were wont to] worship instead of Allah are but the fuel of hell: that is what you are destined for."' (*al-Anbiya'*: 98) What is the sin of those who were worshipped? The idols are blameless; indeed, each of them wishes to save itself by being the instrument of torment for those who ascribed something to it which did not rightfully belong to it. This is why we find that the stones which were worshipped will say, 'They worshipped us, yet we worshipped Allah even more than those who stand in prayer in the watches of the night. Thus, the one who prays in the watches of the night is subject to fluctuations and might choose to do other than this, yet we were compelled to obey Allah, and they took our silence as consent.'

The stones will announce that they did not have the power to refuse anyone worshipping them nor to ward him off; therefore, they will inform him of his foolishness.

A poet said:

They blamed us ignorantly, just as they blamed

The Son of Mary and the Apostles;

The deluded will be requited; as for the object

Of their delusion: the mercy of the All-Forgiving will save them.

Thus, the truth will be plainly shown to them on the Day of Resurrection. They will ask to be sent back to this world, and this will be a failure, for this kind of admission is not faith since faith applies to the unseen, not the seen. Furthermore, even if they went back, they would not have faith, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...and if they were brought back [to life], they would return to the very thing which was forbidden to them ...' (*al-An'am*: 28). It is

as though they will forget, when they make their admission, that they are subject to fluctuations, and Allah's final judgment will be rendered upon them: '... Indeed, they will have squandered their own selves, and all their false imagery will have forsaken them.' (*al-A'raf*: 53)

They squandered themselves after having been forsaken by all that they had falsely ascribed to Allah in their worldly lives. They refused to worship Him *Glorified is He* and instead worshipped idols which will become the fuel of the fire into which they will be cast.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says,

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ
عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُغْشَى اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُ حَثِيثًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ وَالنُّجُومَ
مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ ۗ أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ ۗ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and earth in six Days, then established Himself on the throne; He makes the night cover the day in swift pursuit; He created the sun, moon, and stars to be subservient to His command; all creation and command belong to Him. Exalted be God, Lord of all the worlds! [54] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 54)

There is Lordship (*rububiyya*) and Divinity (*uluhiyya*): 'your Lord is Allah'. No one differs about the matter of Lordship since the True Lord *Glorified is He* says of the disbelievers and idolaters: 'And thus it is [with most people]: if thou ask them, "Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?" They will surely answer, "Allah"...' (*az-Zumar*: 38). Likewise if you ask them who created them, they will say, 'Allah', and no one ever claimed the matter of Lordship for himself since it was Lordship that benefitted them. As for Divinity, it brought them the way of 'Do's and 'Dont's' since moral responsibility comes from The Lord, Allah, and responsibility is a blessing from Him for your own good, and no part of responsibility benefits Allah. Your good or bad deeds do not give Allah *the Exalted* an attribute He did not already have since His Attributes of Perfection are what brought you into being. If you are in doubt of this Lordship, then your Lord is Allah. Allah *the Almighty* is

beyond compare and is absolved above resembling anything. For example, it is like when a mother says to her son, 'Your father told you not to stay out late at night,' and the son refuses. Thus, the mother warns him, 'Your father is the one who brings you food, drink, and clothing, along with giving you pocket money', and so on.

I gave this example to explain that the One Who assigns moral responsibilities is the Provider, and no one besides Him provides. Due to this, you should accept the responsibilities He assigned you since He already extended His Grace to you by providing for you and subduing the world for your service.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* previously gave us details of the creation of man, and also He gave us details of the creation of the sky and the earth; also, the space in which man lives is composed of the sky and the earth, and all good things come to him from them. If Allah *the Exalted* told us how He created us before, in this verse, He tells us how He created the sky and the earth, and the creation of man and the creation of the sky and the earth are two matters which modern science concerns itself about. There are scientists who say that the earth detached from the sun, and there are those who propagate the theory that man originated from apes. To these people, we say the following: 'This verdict of yours is unacceptable since you did not witness the act of creation. Therefore, you should listen to the One Who created all things when He tells you how He created them.' Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, your Lord is Allah Who has created the heavens and the earth in six days, and He is established on the throne of His almightiness. He covers the day with the night in swift pursuit, with the sun and the moon and the stars subservient to His command. Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command. Blessed is Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!' (*al-A'raf*: 54)

The verse is concerned with the first creation, namely that of the heavens and the earth, which as I made clear is the existential background for man, the vicegerent of Allah. Furthermore, man was placed into this universe with all of the power and natural laws which it contained. It is as though Allah *the Exalted* prepared the universe for His vicegerent before he was created, so that he would come and find the universe subdued for his service and that nothing within it could evade the Will of Allah for it. 'Verily, your Lord is Allah Who has created ...' (*al-A'raf*: 54).

The meaning of 'create' is to bring into being something which did not previously exist or to form something without any prior example on which to base it. Our Lord *Glorified is He* measured everything out with a precise arrangement with no precedent; this is the meaning of 'creation'. The subject of the Arabic word *khalq* (creation) is *khaliq* 'creator', and Allah *Glorified is He* uses this word in the plural form even though there is really only One Creator, saying: '...Blessed, therefore, is Allah, the best of *khaliqin* (creators)!' (*al-Mu'minun*: 14) Thus, there is the Highest Creator, Allah, but He included creators other than Himself *the Exalted* in these words, saying, '... Blessed, therefore, is Allah, the best of creators!' (*al-Mu'minun*: 14) How could this be? It is due to the fact that 'creation' means to bring something into being which did not exist before. For example, the one who made the microphone is said to have 'created' it, the one who made the cup is said to have 'created' it and the one who made the lamp is said to have 'created' it; this is so because it did not itself exist until he brought it into being. However, the difference is that a human creator makes something which did not exist by using existing materials; he does not create new material. The one who takes pre-existing materials and makes a lamp from them, by melting sand and blowing air into the glass, is said to have 'created' the lamp and brought something non-existent into existence by using pre-existing things.

The Creator, on the other hand, is the best of creators since He creates out of nothing; He also does not prevent His creatures, if they bring something non-existent into existence, from being called 'creators', though when He *Glorified is He* creates, He creates out of nothing. Also, when you create any product, it remains frozen in the form in which it was made. For example, if someone makes a glass from smelted sand, the glass remains as it is; as I said long ago, we cannot make a 'male' glass and a 'female' glass, and put them together, and then ask them to procreate little glasses for us. However, our Lord gives the spirit which is the secret of life to the things He creates and makes it so they can procreate, develop, and grow according to natural laws. Therefore, He is the best of creators.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us information about His creation of the heavens and the earth. Thus, He *Glorified is He* clarified to us that there are seven

heavens which are stated in the plural form, while the earth is stated in the singular form. Yet, He *the Exalted* said in another verse: 'Allah is He Who has created seven heavens, and, like them, [the many aspects] of the earth...' (*at-Talaq*: 12). Therefore, just as He created seven heavens, He created seven earths. So, why does He state the word 'heavens' in the plural form in this verse while leaving the word 'earth' in the singular form? Why did He not say 'and seven earths'? It is due to the fact that the word *aradin* (earths) is difficult to say, so He left it because of its heaviness and gave 'heavens' in the plural because of its lightness and easy pronunciation.

A 'sky' or 'heaven' (*sama'*) is everything which is above, covering you; this is the lexical meaning of *sama'*, but is the sky to which Allah *the Exalted* refers to in this verse meant to mean everything above you? Stars are also above, and it could be said that the sun and the moon are likewise above. We shall make the point of saying to those who like to include the celestial bodies in the meaning of 'sky' that they are not always above us, since the sun is sometimes above and other times below as is the moon. Therefore, this attribute applies to the sun or the moon only some of the time, but neither of them can be thought of as being part of the sky all the time. Another point is that when they said, of the seven planets which were known to them, that they constituted the sky, by doing this they fell into error. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has since made it known to us that the sun has other bodies orbiting around it; scientists at one point believed there to be eight planets, and at another point, they believed there to be nine, while at another point, they believed there to be ten. In this way, the notion that the planets represented the seven heavens was refuted; thus, the sky remains that which is above all of this. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, We have adorned the skies nearest to the earth with the beauty of stars.' (*as-Saffat*: 6)

This, therefore, is an adornment of the sky nearest the earth, and the sky which our Lord intends is not the same one which they are speaking of. Rather, the sky is another creation which no one can ever reach. The jinns used to dwell there to listen: '... and anyone who now [or ever] tries to listen will [likewise] find a flame lying in wait for him.' (*al-Jinn*: 9) This happened after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, and it was the True

Lord *the Almighty* who told us of this. The True Lord *the Exalted* did not tell us of the true reality of this sky and its order which means that our Lord did not want our minds to understand anything more than this. He *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the sky above us, and He *the Exalted* is also the Creator of the earths. Where are these earths? Are they scattered here and there?

Science has confirmed that every galaxy contains millions of solar systems, and every solar system contains an 'earth'; so, there are many earths. Also, we can observe that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about the earth, everyone is addressed according to the earth which they are upon; for this reason, some of the scholars have said that in the greater universe there are many earths, and to every earth, the True Lord *the Almighty* sent a messenger. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And among His signs is the [very] creation of the heavens and the earth, and of all the living creatures which He has caused to multiply throughout them, and [since He has created them,] He has [also] the power to gather them [unto Himself] whenever He wills.' (*ash-Shura: 29*)

Every day science brings us more discoveries. Therefore, the sky is everything which is above you, and the earth is everything which is below you. Likewise, as long as there are seven heavens, the first heaven is a huge void and space, and after it comes the second heaven which covers the first one, and every heaven contains an earth and another heaven. Also, we are not responsible for knowing this; we are only responsible for knowing that the earth upon which we live was created by Allah *the Almighty*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says that He '... created the heavens and the earth in six days ...' (*al-A'raf: 54*). When He says 'six days', this was the time which the act of creation took. We know that the word *yawm* (day) means the period of time which lasts from sunrise to sunset and then to sunrise again, lasting twenty-four hours. However, we must examine some of the True Lord's Quranic uses of language.

He *the Exalted* says, '... Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day.' (*Saba': 18*) Therefore, there is night and day, so a day for the True Lord *Glorified is He* is not the same as a day for us since we use this word to mean the time between sunrise and sunset, and then sunrise again. Therefore, according to the convention of astronomy, a 'day' is from sunrise to sunrise,

or from sunset to sunset. Allah's Words '... Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day' (*Saba'*: 18) mean that He *Glorified is He* has made night time one division and daytime another. Likewise, did anyone know of days until the sun existed? If the sun is what defines day, how could day have been known before it, especially since at the time the heavens and earth were created, there was no sun nor were any celestial bodies? We must be aware that this is His measure, and He spoke of it to us after we had come to know the length of a day. Have you read that Allah *Glorified is He* says, '... and there will they have their sustenance by day and by night' (*Maryam*: 62), even though there will be no day or night in the Hereafter? Therefore He *the Almighty* measured out both day and night; and the same is with the case of 'six days'. The decisive verses of the Quran which deal with the matter of the time of creation state that it was six days; yet in the verse which gives the details of the act of creation, it appears at first glance that there were eight days. Read with me:

'Say: "Would you indeed deny Him Who has created the earth in two days? Also, do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?" For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it [and all this He created] in four days. Also, He [it is who] applied His design to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke, and He [it is who] said to them and to the earth, "Come [into being], both of you, willingly or unwillingly!" – to which both responded, "We do come in obedience." He [it is Who] decreed that they become seven heavens in two days ...' (*Fussilat*: 9-12).

The apparent implication of these detailed verses is that eight days were involved, while the verses which mention the matter generally say that it was six days. The orientalists have used this point to falsely claim that the Quran contains an inconsistency trying to make this into a big point of contention. We say that Allah *Glorified is He* created the earth and all within it in exactly four days, no more and no less, which means that this happened and was completed in a total of four days. Then, Allah added two days for the creation of the heavens, so the total number of days in which the heavens and earth were created was six. Or, we can explain the detailed verse by using the general

verse; when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, your Lord is Allah Who has created the heavens and the earth in six days ...' (*al-A'raf*: 54), does His creation require extra effort so much so that an extended amount of time would be needed? Our Lord creates with the word 'Be', whilst we humans must expend effort, according to our powers, to create something, and everything we do takes time. However, for the One Who creates with 'Be', the matter is quite easy for Him *Glorified is He*, but then why does He state that it took six days to complete the act of creation?

We know that there is a difference between the birth of something and the preparations for its birth. We gave the example before – and Allah is beyond compare – of the yogurt manufacturer who takes cups of warm milk and puts special yeast in them and then leaves the cups in the appropriate temperature. Does this man have to work on each cup for twelve hours, which is the time required for the milk to turn? Of course he does not; it is enough that each cup contains the right ingredients to ferment which react with one another until they are done.

Consider the creation of the embryo from the meeting of the egg and the sperm, and this creation takes nine months. Allah *the Exalted* does not need nine months of work to create the embryo; rather, He leaves it to go through the stages of development.

Therefore, Allah's creation of the heavens and earth in six days does not mean that during these six days He was continuously busy with the act of creation; rather, He said 'Be!' and then left the constituent parts of the heavens and earth to go through their development and their stages since their 'birth' would take place after six days. There is a verse in the Quran which alludes to this theory when He *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have indeed created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, and [that] no weariness could ever touch Us.' (*Qaf*: 38) This means that He *the Exalted* created the heavens and the earth without becoming tired since He did not need to put forth any effort into the act of creation since all it took was His word 'Be!', and the heavens and the earth came into existence. Likewise, the verse which comes directly after this one says: 'bear with patience whatever they may say ...' (*Qaf*: 39). It is as though His Words in this verse were meant

to console the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and to clarify to him, 'They call you a liar, and you might desire that We seize them with all Our might and power. However, the True Lord *the Almighty* has ordained a record for everything, and He created the heavens and the earth in six days.' Thus, we too, in our daily lives, say to those who are impatient, 'Sir, even our Lord created the heavens and the earth in six days, so do not rush things!'

Therefore, our Lord was quite able to complete the creation of the heavens and the earth in a single moment, but He gave the command 'Be!' and then left the components to react with one another for six days. Why should we not say that He did all this to teach us to be methodical, and not to rush things? Although He was able to bring forth the heavens and the earth in a single moment, He created them in six days. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'bear with patience whatever they may say ...' (*Qaf*: 39). This means that do not overburden yourself since He *the Exalted* created the heavens and the earth in six days, and to these deniers shall come the Day when they shall be taken to task for their evil deeds; it will certainly come.

There are those who ask, 'How did Allah *the Almighty* create the universe with all the mountains and beings within it?' We reply, 'It was with the creative, single act of which He has informed us, and then the beings reacted to His Power a single time, after which numerous chains of reactions took place in everything addressed by His Power, in every aspect of the action. Also, this took place over six days, after which things settled and became stable.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '... and is established on the throne of His almightiness ...' (*al-A'raf*: 54). We must be aware of what a 'throne' is. He *the Almighty* says of the Queen of Sheba: '... and hers is a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml*: 23). A throne, then, is the seat of a monarch since he only sits on his throne after his affairs are settled. It is as though His Words '... and is established on the throne of His Almighty...' (*al-A'raf*: 54) are allusions to the fact that everything was completed and that He created them, and that was that. However, when the scholars came to the word 'established' (*istawa'*), they differed as to how to understand it; if the throne were a chair upon which Allah *the Almighty* sat, this would imply that He was contained and that He was placed and enclosed in some kind of body. The truth is that He is absolved

above all such things, for He cannot be contained. This is why the scholars started to look for appropriate meanings for the word 'established'. Some of them said that it means that He fixed His intent upon it by creating it and forming it; others say that it means His affair is lofty and high; others said that it means His commandment was raised to the heavens, using His following Words as evidence: 'And He [it is who] applied His design (in Arabic this is also *istawa* ') to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke' (*Fussilat*: 11)

All of these meanings are close to one another. Other scholars wanted to avoid making any comparisons with Allah *the Exalted* so they said that 'established' means that He took control of all existence, therefore asserting that the concept of the throne and one's sitting on it are symbols of the stability of a monarch. In order that we avoid entering both the labyrinth of making comparisons with Allah and the labyrinth of corrupting the text, we must understand everything which is ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He* in the light of His words: '... There is nothing like unto Him ...' (*ash-Shura*: 11).

Therefore, when He *Glorified is He* says, '... The hand of Allah is over their hands ...' (*al-Fath*: 10), we understand that the word 'hand' has a recognised meaning, and Allah *Glorified is He* addresses us in the Quran in the Arabic language; therefore, this statement that Allah has a hand means that He has Power, and Allah's use of the word 'hand' here is a symbol of His Power. One must take everything which Allah *the Almighty* ascribes to Himself, but which is also possessed by man in the light of 'there is nothing like unto Him', so we say that He *the Exalted* has a hand, but it is not like a man's hand; He has being, but it is not like a man's being; He has an eye, but it is not like a man's eye; He has a face, but it is not like a man's face. This is why when our master Imam Malik *Allah be pleased with him* was asked about this matter, he said, '[Allah's] establishment is known, but the mode of it is unknown. To ask about it is heresy, and I see that you are an ill-intentioned man!' Indeed, it is heresy to ask about it since it takes us into the labyrinths of either making comparisons with Allah or else corrupting His Words. Did any of the Companions ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about this 'establishment'? No, they did not since they understood the meaning, and no part of its meaning was unclear in their minds so that they would find it necessary to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about it. They understood it

by the natural disposition upon which Allah *the Exalted* had placed them, in the light of that which befits His Majesty and Perfection.

If someone says, 'Did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* know what it meant, or not?' Had he known it, he would have told us of it; yet, if he did not tell us, he might have wanted to conceal it from us. Also, if he did not know it, do you seek to know yourself that which the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not know? Or, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* left everyone to understand what they wanted, but in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura: 11*).

Those who seek to forbid any interpretation say, 'Beware of interpreting the "hand" to mean "power", for if He said that He has a hand, say that it is not like our hands in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura: 11*). Allah *Glorified is He* has life, and you have life, but is His life like yours? No, it is not; so why should you make His hand like your hand? We must approach every attribute of Allah's by refraining from explaining it away and also refraining from comparing Allah to His creation. We also say to all those who seek to forbid interpretation: You will be forced to interpret in the end since the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...Everything is bound to perish, except His face...' (*al-Qasas: 88*).

As long as '...Everything is bound to perish except His face...' (*al-Qasas: 88*), this means that all which can be called a 'thing' will perish and only His face will remain. If you were to say that 'face' here means 'face' in its usual sense, this would mean that His hand will perish, His foot will perish and His breast will perish – and far be it for this to happen to Allah! Doing as such, you enter a labyrinth which has no exit. For this reason we say, 'Let us take the text and place it in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura: 11*). Verses about this 'establishment on the throne' occur in several chapters, and specifically in seven places: the verse in the chapter *al-A'raf* which we are currently examining and in the chapters of *Yunus*, *ar-Ra'd*, *Ta Ha*, *al-Furqan*, *as-Sajda* and *al-Hadid*.

In the verse being discussed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after speaking about His establishment on the throne: 'He covers the day with the night.' (*al-A'raf: 54*)

Allah *Glorified is He* created the heavens and the earth for His vicegerent on earth and prepared for him therein the essential needs of life; He showed him how to get what he needs; thus, what would this vicegerent do then? He would inevitably seek out all the essential constituents of life, and when he worked, he would expend his utmost effort; however, effort necessitates rest. He who works for an hour must rest for an hour, and if he works for two hours and does not rest for an hour, he will be overwhelmed. We see that a machine that works three shifts a day, that is, for twenty-four hours without stopping wears out before the machine that works only two shifts. However, the machine that works only one shift, that is eight hours, lasts the longest. Everyone needs rest, so the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to explain to us that night and day follow one another for this very purpose: 'For it is out of His Grace that He has made for you the night and the day, so that you might rest therein as well as seek to obtain [what you need] of His bounty ...' (*al-Qasas*: 73). What this means is that you can rest by night and seek Allah's bounty by day, but if you were not to rest at night, you will not be able to do any activity. One of the necessary actions of Allah's vicegerent on the earth is to make time for rest and time for work; thus, He *Glorified is He* clarifies for us, 'I created night and day, and made night a time of repose', i.e. a time of rest and inactivity. In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...He covers the day with the night...' (*al-A'raf*: 54). What this means is that day also covers night, and we spoke before about how the fact that night and day follow one another is a proof that the earth is a sphere. 'And He it is who causes the night and the day to succeed one another, [revealing Himself in His works] unto him who has the will to take thought – that is, has the will to be grateful.' (*al-Furqan*: 62)

Night follows day and day follows night. For example, it might be day in Egypt, whilst it is night in another land at the same time. If you were to follow the chain back to the very first day and the very first night to find out which one came first, you will never figure it out since they are each a successor of the other. If the earth was created to be flat and the sun was created to face the flat surface of the earth, this would mean that day was created first and then night followed it. On the other hand, if the sun had been created so that it did not face the flat surface of the earth, this would mean that night would have been first, and then the sun would have risen above the surface to make

day. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted night and day to each follow the other, and this could only be the case if Allah created night and day at the same time. Therefore, the earth had to be a sphere, in order that day would cover the part facing the sun, and night would cover the part facing away from the sun. Likewise, as the earth turns, night follows day and day follows night: 'And He it is who causes the night and the day to succeed one another, [revealing Himself in His works] unto him who has the will to take thought – that is, has the will to be grateful.' (*al-Furqan*: 62) Further, He says 'He covers the day with the night', and He also covers the night with the day; this is left unsaid because of other verses, including that in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '... nor can the night usurp the time of day...' (*Ya Sin*: 40). Basically, night cannot overtake day nor can day overtake night; this shows that they were created at the same time.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '... with the sun and the moon and the stars subservient to His command. Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command ...' (*al-A'raf*: 54). Therefore, none of these creations has the freedom to choose whether to act or not to act, rather, they are all subservient. Thus, you find that the cosmological laws in which man plays no part, and on which the choices he makes have no effect, run according to a precise order. At a certain time, the earth comes between the sun and the moon, and at another given time, the moon comes between the earth and the sun, so that there is an eclipse; all of these phenomena have a precise measure.

'... He covers the day with the night in swift pursuit, with the sun and the moon and the stars subservient to His command. Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command ...' (*al-A'raf*: 54). Creation means to bring something into existence out of nothing, and after Allah created the universe, He did not leave its affairs to anyone else; rather, He *the Almighty* retained the command and sustenance of it after that. He did not merely assume control over His dominion at the time of creation, and then leave the natural laws to work. Rather, He sometimes commands these laws to cease applying, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed that the miracles of the Prophets would break the natural laws, in order that we would understand that the universe does not run merely by nature or by causality. Therefore, He said: '...Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command ...' (*al-A'raf*: 54).

If you consider the word *amr* (command), you will find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...Say: "Verily, all power of decision (*amr*) does rest with Allah...' (*Al-Imran*: 154). This verse means that there is a cosmological command; as for matters of free will, Allah's Commandment regarding them is embodied in His Way of Guidance, and you are faced therein with a commandment which you can either obey or disobey: you are free.

'... Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command. Blessed is Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!' (*al-A'raf*: 54). When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Blessed is Allah', along with saying, 'the best of creators' (*al-Mu'minun*: 14), every word has a meaning, and within His human creations are certain gifts of creative ability, but only creation from the pre-existent, as we clarified. Elsewhere in the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes Himself by saying, '... and He is the swiftest of all reckoners!' (*al-An'am*: 62)

People know how to calculate, and they have created mechanical calculators, machines which are programmed and prepared to add, subtract, multiply and divide. Yet, every act of calculation requires time. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will reckon all of mankind in a single instant, and He is the swiftest of all reckoners. Furthermore, there is not only one reckoning, and you will be reckoned by Allah, and another person will be reckoned by Him, and His Reckoning is as numerous as the people who will be reckoned. Also, the True Lord's Reckoning of His creation will not require any effort; rather, it will be akin to His provision of sustenance. When 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked, 'Will Allah reckon all His creation at the same time?' He replied, 'Why should this be strange. Does He not provide for them all at the same time?'

Look at the Quran, and you will find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is 'the swiftest of all reckoners', 'the best of all creators', 'the most merciful of the merciful' and 'the best of inheritors'. These are the expressions which have been related to us, and in them, Allah shares His attribute with His creation, but His attributes are always in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him'. (*ash-Shura*: 11)

'Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!' (*al-A'raf*: 54) The Words 'Blessed is Allah' mean that He is transcendent, for there is a difference between omnipotent power—the Power of Allah—and reaction to this omnipotent

power by will and by 'Be!', which is a reaction and a conformity to the Divine Will and Commandment.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says,

أَدْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

Call on your Lord humbly and privately – He does not like those who transgress His bounds [55] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 55)

Du'a (supplication) only comes from an incapable being that calls upon a capable one to do and achieve what he is incapable of doing, or to aid him in doing it. When you feel that you are incapable, you rely on Him Who has omnipotent Power since your own power is limited. Therefore, if you act with transgression or arrogance, recognise well your position and rank and stop this since you are only a temporary accident. To supplicate is to be humble, contrite, and submissive, along with confessing your own incapability, and asking your Lord for aid and support. To call to mind your incapability and your Lord's Power constitutes for you continuous certainty and faith, and our Lord only gave people needs for this reason. If a person sees things reacting in response to him, and he invents and creates, he may be seized by delusion; so He sends him a need which he cannot meet by recourse to material means. Thus, he stands and calls upon Allah *the Almighty*. He who is arrogant, proud and boastful goes to a saintly ascetic who has detached himself from pride and temporal power along with devoting himself to the worship of Allah, and says to him, 'I ask you in the name of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call upon Allah for me, for I am in a crisis.' This person who asks the saintly ascetic is an important man amongst his people, but he thinks that the saintly ascetic is closer to Allah *the Almighty* than he is.

Therefore, to supplicate and call on Allah is to entreat to Him, along with showing Him humility and submission, in order to make one's certainty and faith constant: 'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts' (*al-A'raf*: 55). Be careful not to call upon Allah, whilst your mind is set on the fulfilment of your need: instead call upon Him with the intention of showing

Him your humility, submission, and subservience since even if you do not call upon Him, your affairs will continue on the course for which they were destined. To supplicate is to display your humility, so be careful not to understand that you call upon Him merely in order to gain that which you seek, for He is far absolved above being an 'employee' for you, and there is an order which Allah *Glorified is He* has established for the realisation of His servants' requests. There are people who seek harmful things when they supplicate: 'As it is man [often] prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good, for he is prone to be hasty.' (*al-Isra'*: 11)

A man's heart might become attached to harmful fancies, which is why we say, not be hasty with your supplication, seeking fancies which might be bad for you. The All-Knowing True Lord organises our affairs for us. Likewise, be careful not to despair when a supplication you have in mind is not answered since Allah decrees what is best for His servants. Furthermore, if Allah were to give you some of the things for which you supplicate, they might be bad for you, and He allows certain things to happen to you in order to show you this, so that you might say, 'The thing I had been hoping for actually happened, but it ended up being bad for me.' For example, you might buy a ticket for a plane but then not manage to catch it. However, it sets off before you arrive, so you are sad since you have lost out on some of your interests and failed to realise them. Then, you are astonished to find out that this plane crashes into the sea.

Make your purpose and intent behind supplication that you submit and humble yourself to Him, and not that your request be granted. You call upon Him to ask for what is best, so leave the True Lord *Glorified is He* with His sustenance and knowledge, to bring what is best for you. Listen to Allah's, Words: 'As it is man [often] prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good, for he is prone to be hasty.' (*al-Isra'*: 11)

Therefore, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says 'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts ...' (*al-A'raf*: 55), He asks us to call upon Him since we shall encounter many occasions when we are incapable of doing things; instead of remaining defeated by the attribute of incapacity, remember that you have a Mighty, All-Powerful Lord, and when you

remember this, material means will not draw you away from your faith. We said before that whoever has a father does not have any concerns in the world, and if the one who has a father does not have any concerns for the demands of life, then he who has a Lord must be humble and know that his Lord will bring goodness to him. This is why He *the Almighty* clarifies by saying that if you are incapable of utilising the means, remember that you have a Lord Who has asked you to call upon Him. Do not think that your purpose of calling on Allah is to get what you are asking for; rather, your purpose of calling on Him should be to show your humility and subservience to Him; what has happened to you might be the result of your own self-delusion. Qarun (Korah) was delusional before you, and what happened to him? The True Lord *Glorified is He* destroyed him and sent upon him the worst of punishments. The True Lord *the Exalted* might make the failure of material means and their refusal to help you a way to draw your attention to Allah. However, the attention you show to Allah must not be based on your intention of getting what you need, rather you should base the attention you show to Him by displaying your incapability before Him in humility and subservience, and then He will give you that which was not even on your mind when you called upon Him.

'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts...' (*al-A'raf*: 55). The meaning of 'in the secrecy of your hearts' (*khufiatan*) is that the supplication be secret and hidden, and it also means that it be based on *khawf* (fear); this means call upon your Lord in fear of the manifestations of His Attributes of Majesty such as the All-Compeller and the All-Dominant, or call upon Him in fear that He might reject your supplication and not accept it.

Call upon your Lord humbly with lowliness, meekness, and subservience, in the secrecy of your hearts between yourselves and your Lord. Do not raise your voice when supplicating and make this your only way of doing it since the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us⁽¹⁾ When he was in one of his battles and his Companions went into a valley and began to shout loudly, saying 'There is no deity but Allah' and 'Allah is the Greatest', he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O, people, calm yourselves. You are not calling

(1) The story of the Companions entering a valley and worshiping their Allah in a loud voice

upon one who is deaf or absent, rather you are calling One Who is All-Hearing and Near, and He is with you.⁽¹⁾

To call upon Allah in the secrecy of your heart keeps you far away from ostentation, and it is the best way to conceal what you ask of your Lord from others. When He clarifies for you, 'Call upon Me secretly, for I am All-Hearing and All Knowing: I know all that you reveal and all that you conceal', then supplicate with humbleness, subservience and devoutness in order to break the desire for egotism within you, along with the tendency for haughtiness and pride.

If you consider this matter, you will find that many of the scholars say, 'We know people who recite the Quran in our presence, and we cannot even see their lips move. Likewise, we know people who can derive rulings from Allah's Words, and we have never seen them act in a way which distracted them from us.' Therefore, this is an expression of an inner activity.

The True Lord *the Exalted* wants to keep us far from ostentation and to keep our requests concealed from others since a person might ask Allah *Glorified is He* for something which he would be ashamed for other people to hear.

'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts...' (*al-A'raf*: 55). If you examine this verse, you will find that many people breach it in a public way. For example, at night you find people who climb the minaret or who shout into microphones which free them of the need of climbing the minaret; one of these people might sleep all day since calling to prayer is his only job. After this, he continues to shout and entreat Allah by saying, 'These are supplications', although there are people sleeping in order to get the rest they need to work the next day. Likewise, there is nothing required of these sleeping people except that they wake at dawn to pray, so why are you bothering people like this? We must let these who imagine that they are reminding others of Allah's religion know that they are not doing the right thing by doing this since we cannot remind others of Allah whilst disobeying Him or harming anyone. He says: 'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts ...' (*al-A'raf*: 55).

(1) *Narrated by Muslim with this wording, and also narrated by Al-Bukhari; the meaning of 'still yourselves' is 'be quiet and lower your voices'*

Humbleness and secrecy dictate that I do not disturb people nor make public the things which I want for myself personally with a loud voice, such as the one who comes after the communal prayer is finished and makes his supplication loudly, along with raising his hands. To people who do this, I say that Allah *Glorified is He* gave us the *qunut* (the supplication read aloud by the imam in certain canonical prayers such as the dawn prayer and the special night prayers in *Ramadan*) in which we call upon Him, and He left it for every Muslim to call upon Him personally with their needs. When you call upon Allah loudly at the end of the prayer, there might be people who came to the prayer late and missed one or two *rak'as* (units of prayer) with the imam and who now wish to complete their prayers. Thus, when you raise your voice and supplicate at the end of your prayer, you spoil the completion of their own prayers for them. Also, you distract them with your own personal words and speech from the obligatory deed they are performing. Those who do this have a good intention in doing so, but they inadvertently spoil the worship of others.

Therefore, we must be aware of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has His requirements, and one might breach these requirements for the sake of something he sees to be good. However, he must take this in the light of the following: 'Say: "Shall we tell you who the greatest losers in whatever they may do are? [It is] they whose labour has gone astray in [the pursuit of no more than] this world's life, and who none the less think that they are doing good works.'" (*al-Kahf*: 103-104)

Therefore, we must be aware of these things, and allow those who sleep to fully rest so that they can wake and offer the dawn prayer and then go to work; so, there is no need for anyone to turn on the microphone and supplicate with a raised voice. Those who do this think that they are diligently performing a desirable act when in fact they are disturbing those who are sleeping, and indeed, they are even disturbing those who are praying by night. They could be confusing those who are reciting the Quran or revising their studies. Those who do this should instead leave everyone to their own personal expressions and allow them to have control over their own selves and their own choices. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an image of this when He says: 'When he called out to his Lord in the secrecy of his heart, he prayed, "O my Lord!

Feeble have become my bones, and my head shines with grey hair...' (*Maryam: 3-4*). Therefore, the word 'in secrecy' occurs in the Quran, so we must acknowledge supplicating secretly.

'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts. Verily, He loves not those who transgress the bounds of what is right.' (*al-A'raf: 55*) If it is not humble and secret, it thereby transgresses the bounds of supplication, for you are held responsible, and Allah is the One Who holds you responsible; if He says to you, 'Call upon me humbly, and in the secrecy of your heart.' and you do anything other than this, you thereby transgress the bounds of what is right. Likewise, all of these people must understand that they are transgressors, either transgressing in the form of the entreaty or else transgressing in the thing which is requested.

This is due to the fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has specified the form of entreaty, by clarifying: 'Call upon secretly,' so if you call in a way which is not secret, you are transgressing against Allah's Way. Likewise, the transgression might be in something which is requested, as it is not right. For example, if you were to say, 'I call upon you, O, Lord, to make me a prophet' this is not right. Furthermore, our Lord *Glorified is He* taught us when He told us the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* by saying, 'And Nuh (Noah) called out to his Lord, and said, "O, my Lord! Verily, my son was of my family; and, verily, Your promise always comes true, and You are the most just of all judges!" [Allah] answered, "O, Nuh (Noah), behold, he was not of your family, for, verily, he was unrighteous in his conduct. And you shall not ask of me anything whereof you cannot have any knowledge. Thus, behold, do I admonish you lest you become one of those who are unaware [of what is right]?"' (*Hud: 45-46*) In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* alerted Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to the possibility of transgression in what one requests by saying, '... And you shall not ask of me anything whereof you cannot have any knowledge...' (*Hud: 46*). This is why we find that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* sought forgiveness for asking and calling upon Allah with this supplication without having any knowledge. When he realised his mistake, he sought His forgiveness by saying, '...O, Lord, the Sustainer! Verily, I seek refuge with you from [ever again] asking of You anything whereof I cannot

have any knowledge! ...' (*Hud*: 47) Also, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to him: 'Disembark in peace from Us, and with [Our] blessings upon you as well as upon the people [who are with you and the righteous ones who will spring from you and] from those who are with you ...' (*Hud*: 48).

So those who do not pay heed to, or implement, the Way of Allah in supplication are thereby transgressing against the True Lord *the Almighty* and He does not love those who transgress. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا إِنَّ
رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

Do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right call on Him fearing and hoping. The mercy of God is close to those who do good [56] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 56)

The earth is the place of mankind whom Allah has created as vicegerents to those who lived before. In it are all the means essential for the preservation of life. The sky, earth, sun, and air are all subjugated to us by the Will and Grace of Allah, and we do not interfere with their functioning, nor do we need to do anything to maintain them. We do not need to command the sun to rise or the wind to blow! Since they are thus out of our control, it is out of our scope to corrupt the higher laws of the universe: we cannot alter the path of the sun or the moon nor control the direction of the wind. Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* commands us: 'Do not corrupt the earth ...' (*al-A'raf*: 56), this refers to things within our scope of influence. Corruption can only result from employing our faculties by our free will, but Allah *the Almighty* has not left us the mission of deciding how to employ them, but He has sent down His Guidance for us to know the right way and follow it in all aspects of life. As long as He has revealed to us the Quran containing His ordinances, it means He has given us the means and tools of reform and prosperity, and this is why He commands us: 'Do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right—call on Him fearing and hoping ...' (*al-A'raf*: 56).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* again mentions the issue of supplication (*du'a*). In the previous verse, Allah orders us to pray to Him '...humbly and privately...'

(*al-A'raf*: 55), and in this verse, He tells us: '...call on Him fearing and hoping...' (*al-A'raf*: 56). Implore Allah, fearing His Might and hoping for His Forgiveness and Mercy. Allah has Attributes of Power and Majesty and Attributes of Beauty, so call upon Him in fear of the manifestations of the former and yearning for the manifestations of the latter. The verse may also be interpreted in another way: supplicate to Him in fear of being rejected and ask Him for what you hope.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '...The Mercy of Allah is close to those who do good.' (*al-A'raf*: 56) It is you who chooses to have Allah's Mercy close to you or otherwise: if you do the good, He will turn to you with Mercy. Allah *the Exalted* is never unjust to anyone. The key is to do the good. It is narrated in a Hadith: '... Allah never gets bored⁽¹⁾ of rewarding you unless you get bored of doing the good.'

You may go to the mosque at any time to observe *salat* (prayer). Allah *the Almighty* has specified five particular times for observing mandatory *salat*, but you may perform voluntary *salat* at other times. It is in your hand to choose to stand before your Lord at any moment. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'If anyone comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed ...'.

Our effort cannot be enough, so Allah *the Exalted* reassures us that we just need to show keenness to win His Good Pleasure, and He will cause us to become closer to Him. He will come to you! If you get tired at times, He never gets tired. Just show Him that you are mindful of Him and wish to meet Him. He also says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'If anyone remembers Me inwardly, I remember him inwardly, and if anyone remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in a better assembly (i.e. in the assembly of angels).' Thus, it is in your hand whether to seek Allah's Mercy or not; He grants it to those who seek it: '... The Mercy of Allah is close to those who do good.' (*al-A'raf*: 56) We know that Allah *the Almighty* has an Essence and Attributes and has eternally existed without a beginning and an end. He possesses all the Attributes of Perfection and every Attribute has manifestations: 'Mercy' has manifestations

(1) When a word is used to describe Allah, it has a completely different meaning and denotes a completely different quality and degree. Here, "bored" is not meant to ascribe to Allah the imperfection of getting tired of anything or anyone. Exalted is He above this. Rather, it means Allah does not ever stop rewarding His servants for their good deeds unless they are tired of doing them.

and so does 'Resurrection' since one of His Names is 'The Resurrector'. Glorify Him always by His Most Beautiful Names and call on Him by them too. Remember, however, that you may ask Allah for a particular thing which He does not grant you. This should not make you stop glorifying Him; He does not begrudge you anything, and He has Power over all things, but when He prevents you something, it is actually for your own benefit and good.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... The *Rahmah* (Mercy) of Allah is *qarib* (close) to those who do the good.' (*al-A'raf*: 56) Scholars have taken time to consider the word *qarib* (close). It is a masculine form even though the word it modifies, *rahmah* (mercy), is a feminine word. We know that the Quran was revealed in the Arabic language that has words indicating gender, feminine or masculine. Still, some adjectives indicate both masculine and feminine so that they are used in the same way whether they refer to a male or a female. For example, we use this form of the word *sabur* (patient) whether it refers to a man or a woman. Other examples are *mi'tar*, which means someone (male or female) who always wears perfume and *qatil* (murdered). The latter is used with men or women, and the feminine suffix is only added (*qatilah*) when there is no other word to indicate that the murdered person is female.

These are correct lexical usages, and this has come about in the language for sound reasons: the word *sabur* denotes 'patience' which requires strength, determination, struggle, etc., which are all meanings associated with masculinity, so the word is never used with the feminine suffix, *saburah*; rather, we use the masculine form which best embodies strength and firmness. Likewise, the word *mi'tar* means someone who always wears cologne/perfume. A man who is *mi'tar* is one famous for the fine scent of his cologne. Since it does not befit a woman to exhibit her charms or wear anything that may be inviting, wearing perfume, while out is allowed only for men. Therefore, if a woman wears perfume, she thus imitates men, and this is why she is described by the masculine form, *mi'tar*. The word *qarib* mentioned in the verse belongs to the lexical set of *fa'il*, like the word *zhahir* (supporter/helper). The latter can be used as a masculine and a feminine word for the same reason that it denotes help which requires strength that is more associated with masculinity, so it is always in the masculine form.

From this argument, we deduce that the word *qarib* (close), even though it modifies a feminine word, *rahmah* (mercy), is in the masculine form for any of the following reasons: it belongs to the lexical set of *fa'il*, and in this lexical set, where the word functions as an object, the same form is used for males and females. It is worthy of mention that the word *qarib* in the original Arabic text of the verse functions as an object complement; it modifies the object, *rahmah* (mercy) which is brought closer to those who do good. Thus, the subject or doer of the action is Allah and *rahmah* (mercy) is the thing made close or *qarib*, so this is an object and an adjective modifying it and functioning as an object complement. Another reason why *qarib* comes in the masculine form is that the word it modifies, *rahmah*, may be meant to refer to *rahem* (ties of kinship) or *tarahhum* (showing mercy), which are both masculine words. *Qarib* may also be in the masculine form since it modifies an omitted noun: '... The *Rahmah* (Mercy) of Allah is a *qarib* (close) [thing] to those who do good' (*al-A'raf*: 56). The Arabic for 'thing' is a masculine word, so this is why the word *qarib* is masculine since it modifies an omitted masculine noun, 'a *qarib* thing'. Finally, the reason why *qarib* (close) comes in the masculine form is that the word *rahmah* (mercy) it modifies is an inanimate thing, so it does not actually refer to a 'female' even though the word itself is feminine, or perhaps because the word is a root noun and root nouns are treated as masculine words in Arabic.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ ۗ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا
 أَقْلَّتْ سَحَابًا ثِقَالًا سُقْنَهُ لِبَلَدٍ مَّيِّتٍ فَأَنْزَلْنَا بِهِ الْمَاءَ فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ
 مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نُخْرِجُ الْمَوْتَىٰ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

It is God who sends the winds, bearing good news of His coming grace, and when they have gathered up the heavy clouds, We drive them to a dead land where We cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops, just as We shall bring out the dead. Will you not reflect? [57] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 57)

Sending the winds means stirring up the air in the world to freshen and renew it. Otherwise, the world would be like a stuffy room full of exhalations

of countless people and with barely enough oxygen. Therefore, sending forth of the winds is essential so the air would not remain motionless. In an airtight place, air would be filled with carbon dioxide resulting from breathing, and if this persists, suffocation of all living beings in that place would most probably ensue. For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* has made the motions of the wind a continual and general mercy for everything. These motions are also connected to nourishment and to maintaining the basic constituents of life, which are air, food, and water. Why is this? The winds are sent forth to renew the air we breathe, and they also cause rains to fall, for Allah *Glorified is He* says about the winds: ‘... and when they have gathered up the heavy clouds, We drive them to a dead land ...’ (*al-A'raf*: 57)

Rains then fall on the earth and water the soil which we plough to produce crops. In this way, the winds indeed bear 'good news'- as the verse says- in three ways: their motions freshen the air we breathe; they cause to bring water by carrying clouds and causing rain to fall; and they, therefore, contribute to producing food that grows from the earth by means of this water.

The Arabic word used for 'good news' in the original text of the verse is *bushr*, which is different from *bushrah* even though both denote 'good news', so do not confuse them. The latter is a singular word meaning 'a piece of good news', as in this verse: ‘To Ibrahim (Abraham) Our Messengers brought *bushrah* (good news)...’ (*Hud*: 69) As for the word *bushr*, it is the plural of *bashir* which means 'a bearer of good news'. The plural form is originally pronounced as *bushur*, but it has been changed to *bushr* as an easier way of pronouncing it.

An example of the singular form, *bashir*, can be found in the verse: ‘...Then, when the *bashir* (bearer of good news) came....’ (*Yusuf*: 96) The plural of *bashir* is *bushur*, just as the plural of *nadhir* (a warner) is *nudhur*, but the word *bushur* has been lightened to *bushr* so it can be pronounced easier, and both pronunciations are correct. Thus, the winds are bearers of good news: ‘...bearing good news of His coming grace....’ (*al-A'raf*: 57) They indeed bear news of His Coming Grace since they bring us water which is a grace in itself that we and all living things drink, and by means of which the land is irrigated to yield crops. It is worthy of notice that when the word *riyah* (winds) comes in the Quran in the plural, it indicates a useful thing, whereas

when it comes in the singular form *rih* (wind), it indicates a harmful thing, as in His words: 'Ad was destroyed by a furious *rih* (wind).' (*al-Haqqa*: 6)

Allah *the Exalted* sends punishment or torment in the form of a single wind, a single soldier of His that He sends on a particular mission. On the other hand, the general motion of winds in the world is a source of benefit and good, whether by causing rains to fall and producing food from the earth or by freshening the air so it can be always fit for breathing.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* sends the winds as heralds of His Coming Grace since they carry heavy clouds and cause rain to fall. The original text of the verse uses the verb *aqalla*, an Arabic equivalent of 'carry' or 'pick up'. It is derived from *aqall* which means 'less than' since one can only carry a thing or lift it from the ground when it is *aqall* (less) than one's strength. Allah *the Exalted* has made power of the winds great enough to carry and move the heavy clouds, or else the latter would inevitably fall down. We know that clouds are made of the water which evaporates and rises from the earth then gathers in the high stratum of the atmosphere. The winds carry them to a cold medium where the clouds are condensed and rain falls. This is the way distilled water is prepared in laboratories: water is made to boil and the rising steam travels inside pipes through a current of cold air where it is condensed and becomes water.

The Arabic text of the verse uses a singular form of the adjective for 'heavy' even though the word it modifies is in the plural form (translated here as 'clouds'). As long as all the clouds are driven together, they are treated as one unit, and this kind of plural in the Arabic language comes with singular verbs and adjectives.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...When they have gathered up the heavy clouds, We drive them to a dead land....' (*al-A'raf*: 57) Clouds do not all head for the same place, but they are carried in different directions, but Allah, in this verse, mentions the dead land in particular. A thing is dead when it loses the ability to demonstrate life. The earth is like this. Allah *the Exalted* sends rain to the earth when it is lifeless through the winds that carry clouds. Then, life comes back to it, and it becomes rich in its produce. '... We drive them to a dead land where we cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops' (*al-A'raf*: 57)

Allah *the Almighty* means to draw our attention to this natural process which we always see in numerous forms. Rain would fall on a mountain, and a little while later, the mountain starts to get verdant without anyone sowing seeds in it. This means every place on the earth contains the constituents of life, the requirements for it to exist. Plants only wait for water, so as soon as rain falls, they sprout up without anyone having to interfere. ‘... We cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops, just as we shall bring out the dead. Will you not reflect?’ (*al-A'raf*: 57)

Allah *the Exalted* brings life to a dead land; He makes it green and rich after it had been arid. Is not this proof He can bring the dead to life once again? Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to a manifestation of His Might that we can clearly see every day, so when He tells us about another manifestation of His Might that is in the realm of the Unseen, it befits people of understanding to reflect and believe. Allah thus makes His signs clear and visible for everyone so no one can stubbornly deny and dispute them. By reflecting on these signs, we can see the Truth with our hearts and minds and believe in our Lord.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَالْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ يَخْرُجُ نَبَاتُهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَالَّذِي خَبثَ لَا يَخْرُجُ
إِلَّا نَكِدًا كَذَلِكَ نُصَرِّفُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

Vegetation comes out of good land in abundance, by the will of its Lord, but out of bad land only scantily: We explain Our Revelations in various ways to those who give thanks [58] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 58)

Therefore, the previous verse deals with the issue of Resurrection by giving a parable based on a tangible sign: the winds carry the clouds and drive them to a dead land where rain falls and crops are thus brought forth. The earth can be dead, without any sign of life, and Allah *the Almighty* would bring it back to life. The same will be the case when He brings us from the dead. Just as that verse explains a matter relevant to faith through a parable from life, also Allah in it brings up a religious concept through a similar parable:

‘the vegetation of a good land comes forth (easily) by the permission of its Lord, and that which is bad, brings forth nothing but (a little) with difficulty....’ (*al-A'raf*: 58)

A good land is a fertile one which needs only water for its crops to come forth. In the case of bad land, however, no matter how much rain falls on it, its crops will only come forth with difficulty, and even then they will be scant and useless. Here is an illustration of a religious concept, just as the concept of Resurrection is illustrated in the verse before.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The similitude of the guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me is as that of rain which falls upon a land, part of which is good, so it accepts the water, and many plants and crops grow. Then, there is part of which is dry but is fit to hold the water by which a stream is created for people to benefit from it by drinking from its water and watering their animals and crops. Others who receive this guidance are like a barren land, neither holding the water, thus creating streams for the benefit of others, nor giving forth crops. Such is the similitude of those who seek understanding of the religion of Allah *the Almighty* and benefit from that with which I have been sent, so they learn it and teach it, and those who do not take heed and reject the Guidance of Allah with which I have been sent.’⁽¹⁾

Allah *the Almighty* has sent down His Guidance to us, and people divide into three groups based on their attitudes: a group, who accepts the ordinance of Allah, seek to understand it, benefit from what they learn and convey it to others so they may benefit too. They are like a fertile land which takes in the water and gives forth plants, so it is rich in itself and others get benefited from it as well. Another group embrace faith and convey it to people, but they do not practice what they preach. To this group, the following words of Allah *the Exalted* apply: ‘you who believe, why do you say things and then do not do them?’ (*as-Saff*: 2)

They teach others the Straight Path of Allah, but do not abide by it themselves. This reminds me of verses a poet once said:

(1) Cited by *Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Take my knowledge and do not rely on my action:

Pick the fruit and leave the wood for the fire!

This is a different story, yet it is worth underlining that those who teach people about faith are no infallible, so we should not try to find fault with them. They too are mortals and are, therefore, subject to error, so we should overlook their slips and not expose them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whoever protects a Muslim from being exposed [by overlooking his slips] will be protected by Allah from being exposed in this life and the Afterlife.’⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾

It is the duty of a believer to forgive a slip of his brother and let it go unnoticed, particularly if that brother is a scholar from whom people receive knowledge. He is not infallible after all, and making his slips go viral will make people needlessly refrain from learning from him, which is a big loss. The third group is that of people who neither makes use of the water nor gives it to others. Those are the people who reject the Guidance of Allah. Allah’s Guidance is like rain: it brings good to a good land, and it only increases a bad land in its aridity.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘the vegetation of a good land comes forth (easily) by the Permission of its Lord; and that which is bad, brings forth nothing but (a little) with difficulty. Thus, do we explain variously the *ayat* (proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) for a people who give thanks?’ (*al-A'raf*: 58) We have said before that the word *ayat* has three meanings: the signs of creation we see in the universe, about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Now among His *ayat* (signs) are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon ...’ (*Fussilat*: 37). Verses of the Quran are also called *ayat*, and the third meaning of the word is that of the miracles given to prophets to support their cause and prove the truth for what they call.

In this reference, *ayat* refers to signs of the universe such as rain which is a parable of Allah’s Guidance: those who take it succeed and gain triumph,

(1) *Al-Hakim* classified it as “authentic” according to the criteria of *Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim*.

(2) Cited by *Muslim*, *Abu Dawud*, *At-Tirmidhi*, *An-Nasa'i*, *Ibn Majah*, *Ibn Hibban* in his *Sahih*, and *Al-Hakim*

and those who leave it go astray. Therefore, we should be grateful to Allah *the Almighty* for sending His Messages down to us.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَقَالَ يَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ
إِلَٰهِ غَيْرُهُ ۖ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٥٩﴾

We sent Noah to his people. He said, ‘My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him. I fear for you the punishment of a fearsome Day!’ [59] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 59)

After speaking about the obedient and the disobedient in this worldly life, recompense of each in the Hereafter, the dwellers of Paradise and Hellfire and the Heights, Allah *the Exalted* clarifies to His Prophet Muhammad that every one of His Messengers inevitably encountered difficulties and opposition and was subject to much harm. He thus means to strengthen His Messenger by explaining to him that what he experienced was not something new compared to the other Messengers of Allah. All of them were met with rejection and were subject to harm. Every Messenger of Allah had to endure hardships as much as the limited time and place of his mission required. However, the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is for all mankind at all times and places, so it is inevitable that he too had to face difficulties commensurate with the magnitude of his mission and message. Allah *the Almighty* meant to tell Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that since he was the final and noblest of Messengers, the harms and afflictions he would face will be the most severe. All the previous Messengers of Allah had to sacrifice and persevere much to fulfil their missions, so Allah told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to prepare himself for the same. He too would face harm and rejection, so he must be steadfast and struggle with patience for the cause of Allah. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* tells the stories of the previous Messengers in the Quran, and He expressed the purpose for telling these stories: ‘So [Muhammad], We have told you the stories of the prophets to make your heart firm ...’ (*Hud*: 120). Every time he was met with denial or opposition, Allah told him the story of a messenger who was met

with the same denial and opposition, so that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers Allah *be pleased with them* would remain steadfast and prepare themselves for the difficulties that still awaited them. They were not expected to fulfil the mission with ease and smoothness; rather, they were to combat the evil of Satan on the earth. These stories contain guidance in several forms to make firm the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and show him that what he faced in his call for Allah's religion was not something new compared to the other Messengers. They were also meant to strengthen the souls of his followers, for when they saw that the people of truth who believed with the Messengers were victorious in the end, and the disbelievers were defeated, this firmed up faith of the believers. On the other hand, that also weakened spirits of the disbelievers. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* said about one of the leaders of Quraysh: 'We shall brand him on the snout.' (*al-Qalam*: 16) This verse was revealed at the time when Muslims were unable to defend or protect themselves so much that they immigrated to Abyssinia to save themselves from the scourge of Qurayshite leaders. At such a critical time, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed that verse about Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira: 'We shall brand him on the snout.' (*al-Qalam*: 16) Al-Walid was one from Quraysh's nobility, and he was seen in the Battle of Badr with a wound that marked his nose! Thus, did the Words of Allah come true to reassure the believers that they were in the right and the religion they embraced was the truth from the Lord of the worlds? Who could ever foretell that the sword of one of the warriors would wound that man's nose? It is the One Whose Knowledge encompasses all things.

Besides making firm the hearts of the Prophet and the believers, stories of the previous Messengers came to confirm that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* truly received the Quran from Allah *the Exalted*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was an unlettered man who never studied with a teacher or read a book; from where, then, did the news of previous Messengers come to him? Allah *Glorified is He* says about this matter: 'You [Muhammad] were not present on the western side of the mountain when we gave our command to Musa (Moses)...' (*al-Qasas*: 44) He also says: 'You never recited any Scripture before We revealed this one to you;

you never wrote one down with your hand. If you had done so, those who follow falsehood might have had cause to doubt.’ (*al-'Ankabut*: 48) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘... You were not present among them when they [the priests] cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Maryam (Mary)...’ (*Al-'Imran*: 44)

So, how did this information get to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, whereas he never studied with a teacher or read a book? It all came from the True Lord *Glorified is He* and this is another proof of the truth of his message.

The story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is one of the stories told several times in more than one chapter of the Noble Quran, like the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. It is remarkable that the chapter of the Quran named *Nuh* (Noah), after this prophet, does not contain certain details and important events, which are considered the essence of the story. The reason is that the chapter of *Nuh* (Noah) deals particularly with his perseverance in calling his people to embrace faith and that he did not relent or falter in his mission; he called them day and night, secretly and openly, yet every time he called them, they strayed further. It is worthy to note that the Ark and the Flood are not mentioned in the chapter of *Nuh* even though they are primary events in the story. Likewise, the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) is not mentioned in the chapter named after him, yet we find it in the chapter of *Hud*.

Every part of the story is intentionally related in a specific chapter of the Noble Quran. However, the chapter of *Nuh* leaves out some important elements of the story; these elements are highlighted in the chapter of *Hud* and the chapter of *al-A'raf*, the latter which we are currently examining.

Every chapter of the Quran is meant to deal with a particular concept, so Allah *the Almighty* mentions in each chapter the events of each story that particularly serve the purpose of the chapter. We find, on the other hand, that the entire story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is related in one piece in the chapter of *Yusuf*; this story is not mentioned in any other chapter of the Quran except for this single verse: ‘Yusuf (Joseph) came to you before with clear signs, but you never ceased to doubt the message he brought you. When he died, you said, “God will not send another messenger.”...’ (*Ghafir*: 34)

The chapter of *Yusuf* tells the story of the life of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* from his childhood until he became the governor of Egypt. This way, we see that when Allah *the Exalted* wants to give a story as a historical account, He relates it all at once. When He wants to alert us to matters pertinent to certain situations and lessons, He mentions particular parts of the story in several chapters of the Quran in order to emphasise and serve a certain purpose and meaning.

Thus, in the verse we are dealing with, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Certainly, We sent Nuh (Noah) to his people, so he said, “O, my people”’ (*al-A'raf*: 59) the *lam* and *qad* are particles of emphasis (which are translated in the verse as 'certainly'). When they are both mentioned in a sentence, they denote very strong emphasis or an oath, as if Allah were saying: ‘By My Magnificence and My Majesty, I sent Nuh (Noah) to his people’

The original Arabic text of the verse uses the word *qawm* (people) which is used to refer exclusively to the men of a community. Usually they are men who are primarily addressed by Messengers not because women are not addressed by the Divine Ordinance, but modesty of old has necessitated that women stay at their homes, so they would receive the revelations of Allah *the Exalted* from their fathers, brothers or husbands after they heard them from the Messenger of Allah. This is why Muslim women said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Men dissuade you from us!’ That is, men always went to Prophet Muhammad to learn Islam from him, so there was no way for women to have a chance to ask the Prophet about religious matters. Therefore, they asked the Prophet to specify a day for them when they might have a chance to talk to him and ask him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appointed a day for them. From this, we understand that the usual state of affairs is that women are not allowed to interact freely with men. Rather, it befits the dignity and modesty of a woman to stay at her home, so even when it came to Allah’s revelations, their husbands, fathers, or brothers passed on the ordinance of Allah to the women in their families after learning them from the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, men were mainly addressed by the call of Allah’s Messengers and then communicated their teachings to women in their families. The word

qawm is derived from the same root of *qa'em* or *qayyem*, which both mean to be responsible for something or attend to something, hence using *qawm* to refer to men. An Arab poet said:

I do not know, and I am not even close to knowing,
if the people of Hesn were *qawm* (men) or women!

He uses the word *qawm* to mean 'men'. Also, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: 'Believers, no *qawm* (one group of men) should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them ...' (*al-Hujurat*: 11) The verse makes a distinction between *qawm* and women; the latter is not included in the former word. Those who confronted the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* were mainly the men of their communities; from them came rejection, obstinacy and war.

The call of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* revolved around three elements: worshipping Allah alone [“...serve Allah...” (*al-A'raf*: 59)], never associating any partners with Him [“...you have no god other than Him...” (*al-A'raf*: 59)] and he showed them his concern and worry for them if they were to disobey Allah [“Surely, I fear for you the chastisement of a grievous day.” (*al-A'raf*: 59)]

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* called his people to monotheism; he called them to worship Allah, the One God, by obeying His commands and avoiding His prohibitions. Seeing they did not do this, Prophet Nuh (Noah) feared for them that suffering would befall them on the Day of Judgement when Allah *the Almighty* will resurrect them to call them to account. Another interpretation of 'grievous day' is the day of the Flood. Such a call would normally weigh heavily on the thoughts of some who were likely to be disturbed by it. Who were they? The ones who were disturbed by this call were the tyrants who oppressed people and made them their slaves. Normally, they were troubled by that Messenger who called for submitting to only One God to Whom the right to command and forbid belongs and Who is the One worthy of being worshipped. Such a call threatened their temporal power, so they opposed the Messenger, as Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in the following verse:

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ إِنَّا لَنَرُّكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٦٠﴾

But the prominent leaders of his people said, ‘We believe you are far astray’ [60] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 60)

The word *mala'* is derived from the same root of the verb *mala'a*, which means 'to fill'. It refers to prominent people who perhaps 'fill' their eyes with their statures, fill their hearts with awe or fill assemblies with their importance. They are the people of consequence and authority.

They were unwilling to believe that the call of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was a call to the Straight Path and that his words were true guidance. Consumed by rejection, they indulged themselves in the vain hope that his call was actually nothing but error and misguidance, so they said: ‘...“We believe you are far astray”’ (*al-A'raf*: 60). They resorted to the safeguard of accusing Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* of being so far from the truth, almost doomed to blindness beyond cure.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* responded, as Allah *Glorified is He* quotes him in the following verse:

قَالَ يَقَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي ضَلَالَةٌ وَلَكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦١﴾

He replied, ‘My people, there is nothing astray about me! On the contrary, I am a messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds [61] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 61)

Thus, they accused him of being far astray. He could have responded to them by saying, ‘I am not far astray’, but he said: ‘... there is nothing astray about me’ which includes emphasis that he is very far from being in error. The original Arabic text of the verse uses the singular noun *dalalah* which literally translates to the following: ‘There is not a single error in me!’ In this sentence there is strong emphasis. It is like saying, ‘I do not have a penny’ compared to ‘I have no money.’ The former is more precise in emphasising the idea meant by the expression. Prophet Nuh (Noah) knew he had no whims or any personal interest, but he was delivering the Message Allah has sent down to him, so he underlined that fact and further explained to his people: “... I am a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds.” (*al-A'raf*: 61) He

meant to tell them, 'Do not say that I am lost in error, for there is not even a single error in me, rather, I am a Messenger sent to convey Allah's message, and Allah gives me nothing but guidance.'

"... I am a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds" (*al-A'raf*: 61); that is, he was sent to them by the One who has created the worlds and who undertakes to provide all creation with sustenance. He has created us and provides for us, so He would not send down to us a message which would lead us to stray or slide into error, rather, He has sent down to His servants a way of guidance that best rectifies them. Allah *the Almighty* has created the whole universe and made the earth subservient to mankind. He has created us and cares for us. He provides for all even those who do not believe in Him. It does not befit His Majesty to send down an ordinance that would mislead His creation. Elevated is He above that.

Having answered their accusation, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* continued to convey his message to his people saying:

أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَأَنْصَحُ لَكُمْ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

I am delivering my Lord's messages to you and giving you sincere advice. I know things from God that you do not [62]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 62)

The Arabic text of the verse uses the word *yuballigh* for 'deliver'; the stem *b-l-gh* means reaching the utmost level of something or reaching an end or destination. For example, the word *balaghah* (eloquence) conveys the following meaning: the utmost level of beautiful expression. In the verse we are dealing with the word *yuballigh*, which means letting the communications of Allah reach those they are meant to reach. It denotes fulfilment of the mission of delivering the Message of Allah assigned to His Messenger.

It would have been enough for Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to say, 'my Lord's message', but he said 'my Lord's messages'. In this is an indication that all the messages of Allah *the Exalted* are one as they share the same essence, so Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* delivered the 'messages' of his Lord in the sense that he came with a message that confirmed and conformed with those

sent down to the previous Messengers. He only says that which any other messenger before him said—and we know that Prophet Idris (Enoch) and Prophet Seth had scriptures before them— so he proclaimed that he was delivering a message which incorporated the previous messages, whether the messages of Idris (Enoch), Seth or any other Messenger of Allah *peace be upon them*.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* delivered to his people everything Allah *the Almighty* has sent down to him for His servants as guidance that contains wisdom and mercy. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: ‘In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Nuh (Noah), which We have revealed to you [Muhammad]....’ (*ash-Shura*: 13)

Therefore, by 'messages', perhaps he was referring to the fact that all the messages of Allah share the same essence and fundamentals. Another possible interpretation of using the plural 'messages' instead of the singular is that he was referring to the several communications he received from Allah *the Exalted* from time to time. Using the singular 'message' would have meant the entire message had been revealed to him from Allah *the Almighty* already before thus addressing his people, which was not the case. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* delivered every message which was revealed to him immediately when he received it, hence the use of the plural 'messages'. The word may also be meant to refer to the various teachings that constituted the content of his call. The message dealt with all that was needed to rectify life. It consisted of obligations, prohibitions, counsels, reprimands, good news, warnings, stories, etc. Thus, they were several messages, not just one.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* then said: ‘...and giving you sincere advice....’ (*al-A'raf*: 62) He called his people to follow the Way of Allah by appealing to their hearts and addressing them in a gentle way. This advice was something additional to the content of the message itself.

There is something particularly worth underlining in the Arabic expression of the verse. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said: ‘...and giving you sincere advice....’ (*al-A'raf*: 62) The word *nush* means to give advice. If your own interest is involved in the matter, sincerity of the advice may be doubted. However, Prophet Nuh (Noah) said *ansahu lakum* which literally translates to the following: 'I give advice for you.' By adding *lakum* (for you), instead of

only saying *ansahukum* (literally “I give you advice”), he thus emphasised his disinterestedness and that he gave them that advice only for their own benefit.

Then, he said: ‘... I know things from Allah that you do not.’ (*al-A'raf*: 62) It is as though Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* meant to tell his people, ‘What I say to you now is not all the knowledge which has come to me from Allah or all that Allah knows or has taught me; rather, I know other things which I will tell you if you accept the call and show mindfulness of Allah.’ Another possible interpretation is that he was alluding to the fact that, unlike people of the previous Messengers, those who denied his message would be punished by Allah *the Exalted* in this life for their sin. This experience had not occurred to the people of Prophet Seth or Prophet Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon them*. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: ‘And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned...’ (*al-'Ankabut*: 40) This kind of punishment had not occurred before the time of Nuh (Noah), so he meant to explain to them that he knew Allah *the Exalted* planned for them a punishment if they rejected His message.

The words of Prophet Nuh (Noah), ‘... I know things from Allah that you do not’ (*al-A'raf*: 62) may also mean that he wanted to let his people know that the Guidance Allah sent down to him contains much more than what he told them, but he would reveal everything at the time which was destined for it.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* then says as Allah *Glorified is He* quotes him in the Quran:

أَوْعَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جَاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ
 مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ
 لِيُنذِرَكُمْ وَلِتَتَّقُوا وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord – through a man in your midst – to warn you and make you aware of God so that you may be given mercy?’ [63] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 63)

I would love to point to something respecting the structure of the verse. The original Arabic text of the verse uses the conjunction *wa* which means

'and/also'. Thus, rendered literally, the verse would translate as follows: 'Do you *also* find it so strange...', or 'So you do, *and* you find it so strange...' (*al-A'raf*: 63) This structure in Arabic means they have done something else besides deeming it strange that a message should come from their Lord. However, this something is not explicitly mentioned in the verse, but is implicitly referred to through using the conjunction *wa*. This omitted or implied clause can be rendered as such: 'So you *deny the truth of what I say* and you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord...' (*al-A'raf*: 63).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* quotes Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as saying: 'Do you find it so strange that a *dhikr* (message) should come from your Lord...' (*al-A'raf*: 63) The Arabic word *dhikr* has multiple connotations, generally denoting 'remembrance, which is the opposite of 'forgetting'; it refers to a thing one bears in mind and sometimes expressed by the tongue.

The word *dhikr* is used in the Quran to convey several meanings, and the first and foremost of these meanings is when it is used to mean the Quran itself: 'we relate to you [Muhammad] this *dhikr* (revelation; the Quran), a decisive statement' (*Al-Imran*: 58). Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'We have sent down *dhikr* (the Quran) Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it.' (*al-Hijr*: 9)

The word *dhikr* may be also used to mean 'eminence' or 'high repute'. As Allah says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'and, verily, this [revelation] shall indeed become [a source of] *dhikr* (eminence) for you and your people...' (*az-Zukhruf*: 44) The Quran is a great honour for whoever follows it until the Day of Resurrection. Wonders of the Quran never end, and seekers of the truth never tire of researching into it and discovering its miraculousness. Having been revealed in the Arabic tongue, it will forever be an honour to this language, its people and whoever attempts to learn or speak it. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Certainly we have revealed to you a Book in which is your *dhikr* (good remembrance)...' (*al-Anbiya*: 10). This means that this Book, the Noble Quran, contains the message that gives you honour and renown and makes your history; through this message, Islam has come to eliminate differences of race, colour, etc. so that all people are as equal as the teeth of a comb. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should

recognize one another. In Allah's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him...’ (*al-Hujurat*: 13) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, ‘No Arab is superior to any non-Arab, and no non-Arab is superior to any Arab except based on mindfulness of Allah.’

The Quran is the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent down in the Arabic language, so forever will this language exist and forever will honour be associated with it. The Quran is indeed an honour to whoever follows it. Allah *the Almighty* has conferred on it renown and grandeur that will mark it until the end of time. He *the Exalted* says: ‘Sad: By the Quran, full of *dhikr* (grandeur/ honour)...’ (*Sad*: 1). Prestige associated with the Quran is eternal. It has been and will be a focus of researchers and scholars. Scientists have always taken interest in exploring its verses that have scientific allusions. Even those who do not believe in it give it considerable attention. Countless copies of it are published all over the world using the best materials. This is the Quran, full of *dhikr*! Even though many Muslims stray from the Straight Path, where the Quran is concerned, they all show reverence for it. We would find a woman who is walking with her face unveiled, yet wears a large Quran pendant on her chest. A man who perhaps does not observe *salat* (prayer) constantly may well keep a copy of the Quran in his car! All these are various manifestations of the *dhikr* (renown/grandeur) Allah *the Exalted* has conferred on His Noble Book. Furthermore, reciters of the Quran compete to recite it in the most beautiful manner, learn its different modes of recitation, and record it with their voices. Quran recording may well be produced with high quality by people who do not even believe in it. Such is the eminence and prestige Allah *the Almighty* has made for the Noble Quran.

The word *dhikr* is also used to mean that which was revealed to all the Messengers; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Ever closer to people draws their reckoning, while they turn away, heedless. Whenever any fresh *dhikr* (revelation) comes to them from their Lord, they listen to it playfully.’ (*al-Anbiya*’: 1-2) So, *dhikr* refers to everything that has been revealed to the Messengers of Allah. Also, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘We gave Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) [the Scripture] that distinguishes right from wrong, a light and a *dhikr* (reminder) for those who are mindful of Allah.’ (*al-Anbiya*’: 48)

Elsewhere in the Quran, the word *dhikr* is used to mean 'reflection' or 'remembrance'. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices and [divining with] arrows are repugnant acts – Satan's doing – shun them so that you may prosper. With intoxicants and gambling, Satan seeks only to incite enmity and hatred among you, and to stop you from *dhikr* (remembering) Allah and prayer.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 90-91) The meaning of *dhikr* in this verse is to reflect, to remember the ordinance of your Creator by living as a Muslim following His Guidance. The word *dhikr* also means 'glorification and praise of Allah', as in His words: '... shining out in houses of worship. Allah has ordained that they be raised high and that His name be remembered in them, with men in them celebrating His Glory morning and evening: men who are not distracted, either by commerce or profit, from *dhikr* (remembering and glorifying) Allah, keeping up the prayer, and paying the prescribed alms, fearing a day when hearts and eyes will turn over.' (*an-Nur*: 36-37)

The word *dhikr* can also be used to mean the goodness which Allah *the Exalted* bestows on His servants by sending guidance to them and also their worship of Him by obeying this guidance. This goodness is a manifestation of Allah's remembrance of His servants, and their remembrance of Him manifests itself through their devotion to Him. For example, contemplate these words of Allah *the Exalted*: 'Allah commands justice, doing the good, and generosity towards relatives, and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and oppressive. He teaches you, so that you may *tadhakkarun* (take heed and obey Him; from the root *dhikr*).' (*an-Nahl*: 90) Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Recite that which has been revealed to you of the Book and keep up prayer. Surely, prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil, and certainly the *dhikr* (remembrance) of Allah is the greatest, and Allah knows what you do.' (*al-'Ankabut*: 45) Indeed, Allah's remembrance of them by giving them guidance is the greatest. His remembrance is a grace and a favour, and how should we show gratitude for this favour? It is by observing remembrance of Him through constant worship.

Now back to the verse we are dealing with; Allah quotes Prophet Nuh (Noah) as saying: 'Do you find it so strange that a message should come from

your Lord— through a man in your midst— to warn you and make you aware of Allah so that you may be given mercy?’ (*al-A'raf*: 63). Why did Nuh’s (Noah's) people find it strange that he was sent to them? Incredulity occurs when something which goes against the usual run of things, takes place. Thus, where did their incredulity originate? Allah *the Exalted* says in another chapter of the Quran: '*Qaf-By the Glorious Quran! But the disbelievers are amazed that a warner has come from among them....*' (*Qaf*: 1-2) The source of their amazement and incredulity is that a Messenger came to them from their own kind, but what kind of being did they want the Messenger to be? They were so foolish that they imagined that a Messenger of Allah had to be an angel: ‘But the disbelievers are amazed that a warner has come from among them and they say, “How strange!”’ (*Qaf*: 1-2)

They were also incredulous about the resurrection. They wondered, after they disappeared into the earth and became dust after their deaths, would they be brought back life? It is logical to show incredulity respecting something that goes against the normal course of things, something unexpected given the facts and implications involved in the matter.

The verse we are examining tells that the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) were amazed that he wanted them to attain to faith in the existence of Allah *the Almighty*. Had they applied to logic, they would have pondered this vast universe that Allah has designed with His Might and Wisdom and brought mankind into it. Had they pondered, they would have realised that they were sent to this earth to find it was already shaped, made perfect to receive them and was for their service. Logic dictates then that they search for the Creator of this miraculous universe and seek to know Him. Not only did they neglect that natural duty, but even when a Messenger from Allah told them about the Creator, they deemed that strange! They should have eagerly received the one who informed them about their Lord. Look around you: the universe and its species of plants and animals, its mineral, natural resources and all that is in are made subservient to you. It was not by your own power that this universe or these created beings were brought to existence, but you were brought into existence to find this universe and all that is in it waiting for you. Should it not occur to you to wonder who has made all this for you?

So the people of Nuh (Noah) should have employed their minds to attain to faith. Imagine that a person's plane crashed somewhere that lacked the essential means of life, and exhaustion overcame him that he fell asleep. Upon waking up, he was surprised to find before him a table laid with the finest foods and drinks. Before eating, should he not ask himself who spread that table there for him?

So the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* were incredulous about something that natural disposition requires that they should have sought knowledge of and should have believed in. Allah *the Exalted* does not benefit from your obedience or worship; rather, He gives you reward for it. It is true that worship comprises difficulties since it involves controlling one's desires and forbids him from indulging in unlawful pleasures, but the struggle and devotion are amply rewarded in the Hereafter.

Some may say, 'Why does Allah not simply give us the reward without the hardships of moral responsibility, so long as He does not benefit from our worship?' They see that human intellect is enough, without any religious ordinance, to guide people to do what is right and avoid what is wrong, and for those things which we cannot determine to be good or bad; we may resort to them if we have to and avoid them when we have no need for them.

The answer to this is simple, 'Who told you that human intellect is sufficient to guide us to what is best? That which is good for you might be bad for someone else.' Suppose there were a single property and two people desiring to have it. Each would see that taking it for himself is the best thing to do, whereas the other would see just the reverse. Someone must judge between them, someone who has no prejudices or whims of his own and to whom neither of the two is closer than the other. So Divine Ordinance is essential to protect us from our whims; Allah *the Almighty* has sent down to us guidance to make clear for us what is good and what is bad, for if human logic is left to decide what is good, our whims will clash.

Here is another example. A man would feel good about seeing a woman who is not akin to him by looking at her and talking to her, but how would the woman's family, father, or husband feel about it?

The people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) found it strange that a man from amongst themselves told them about Allah *the Exalted* and faith. However, they should have themselves sought to know about their Creator and employ their minds to understand the truth about Him since everything point to His existence.

Allah says in another verse of the Quran: 'Our Lord! Bestow upon us all that You have promised us through Your messengers....' (*Al-Imran: 194*) Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell them that it is by the virtue of this Divine Promise to them that He sent down upon them His Way of Guidance through Messengers and Prophets. In this respect, we should take into account the fact that Messengers' and Prophets' missions were exceedingly difficult, for these missions were not only restricted to conveying the Divine Messages to people, but they caused them appalling hardships and difficulties. In addition, we should know quite well that He *the Almighty* out of His All-Great Wisdom, perfectly and freely chose Messengers and Prophets to carry out these difficult missions; that is to say that their lives were not luxurious in any way. For example, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left the world without eating his fill of barely bread. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* instructed that him and his family members are not allowed to receive almsgiving. Furthermore, Allah's Messengers' properties are not inherited by their relatives; rather, whatever they leave is to be spent in charity. It is thus clear that all the hardships caused by conveying the Divine Messages fall on Messengers and Prophets. This is the reason why He *the Almighty* did not say, 'on the tongue of a Messenger' since if the matter had to do only with the function of the tongue, Messengers' and Prophets' missions would only be restricted to conveying Divine Messages. Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'through a man in your midst' indicates that the Messengers and Prophets were fully responsible for the delivery of Divine Messages. He *the Exalted* says: 'Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord—through a man in your midst...?'

However, what is truly strange in this regard? What is truly strange is their rejection to Divinity and Prophethood. Some of them did not yet reject Divinity but denied the fact that a man could be a Messenger or Prophet, to the extent that they asked for a messenger from among the angels to come

down to them; they made this request since angels do not disobey, are striking in appearance and never lie. This raises a question: 'How could an angel become a prophet, especially if we were to take into account the fact that we are unable to see them?' It goes without saying that delivering Allah's Message requires direct contact with those to whom the Message would be conveyed; a matter that necessitates that people must see the Messenger and speak with him face to face, yet angels cannot be seen. Therefore, even if He *the Almighty* sent down an angelic Messenger for you, he would have to take the form of a man, just as Jibril (Gabriel) Allah *be pleased with him* did. Thus, deeming sending Messengers from amongst mankind to be strange is actually logical and necessary.

In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us plainly that people, strangely enough, did not follow Divine Guidance when it came to them unprompted, but they wondered how He sent a mere mortal man as His Messenger: 'And nothing prevents people from believing when the guidance comes to them save that they say, "Has Allah sent a man like us as a Messenger?"' (*al-Isra*': 94) As a matter of fact, their statement indicates exceeding foolishness on their part, for if they were sensible, they would hasten to attain faith since a Messenger was sent from amongst themselves; they were quite familiar with his past and dealt directly with him. Had he experienced any past deviations before becoming a Messenger, he would have been ashamed and hesitant to tell them to be upright. As long Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been sent from amongst themselves and they knew him quite well, they should have firmly believed that he would have never fabricated anything against Allah, for he never had lied to anyone. In the same respect, due to the fact that he had been sent from amongst you, he must be a human being. This is why Allah *the Almighty* reproached them in the Quran for asking for an angel to come from Heaven to them by saying: 'And if We had appointed as Messenger an angel, We would have made him appear as a man; and thus We would have caused to be confused to them that which they are now confusing themselves.' (*al-An'am*: 9)

As for this verse under discussion, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord- through a man

in your midst- to warn you and make you aware of Allah so that you may be given mercy?', it indicates obviously that the mission of this Messenger is to warn his people so that they may attain piety which causes Allah, in turn, to give and show them mercy. In this way, we find this verse dividing the mission of the Prophet into several stages, namely giving a warning along with glad tidings. Giving a warning means to inform someone that something bad or evil will afflict him so that he can prepare for it and avoid it; *al-Bisharah*, or 'giving glad tidings', on the other hand, conveys a meaning contradictory to that of 'warning' since it means to tell someone that he will experience something good. As a result, one fully prepares himself to receive this forthcoming good and, thus, staying away from all that is evil and bad.

The main reason for giving warnings and glad tidings is for people to avoid what is bad and gain what is good, and thus, man will be really experiencing consciousness of Allah- which causes Him, in turn, to show them mercy.

Therefore, the reasons for their not believing about the coming of their Messenger are unacceptable since the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) should have naturally believed in him, for the message came to them in a way which was consistent with predecessors. 'In the same respect, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was not an angel. Rather, he was a mere human from among you so that he would serve as a model example for you.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* did not choose His Messengers from amongst the people of authority and power, lest they would spread Divine Messages by force, especially if taken into account the fact that, followers under the authority and power of the leaders used to willingly follow falsehood fabricated by such leaders. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* does not want people to think that Divine Laws have been forced by men of falsehood, and thus, He allowed religion to be spread by the hands of the weak. The polytheists of Mecca wished that the revelation of the Quran could have been revealed to a rich person and someone other than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was poor. In the chapter of *az-Zukuruf*, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that they wished if the Quran had been revealed down from above on a great man of the two cities: 'And they say, "Why has not the Quran been sent to some great man of the two towns?"' (*az-Zukhruf*: 31)

This indicates that the polytheists of Mecca wished that the Quran had been revealed to a great man from the two cities, yet they viewed this greatness from their own unsound perspective. In addition, it clearly indicates that they themselves believed that the Quran itself is a Divine Message and a miracle. In the same respect, why did not they wonder, 'Is the Quran ennobled by Prophet Muhammad, or vice versa?' It goes without saying that Prophet Muhammad himself *peace and blessings be upon him* was ennobled by the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* stresses in the Quran that the followers of Messengers and Prophets were obviously the most abject amongst their people: 'The chiefs of his people, who disbelieved, replied, "We see thee nothing but a mortal like ourselves, and we see that none have followed thee but those who, to all outward appearance, are the meanest of us. And we do not see in you any superiority over us; nay, we believe you to be liars.'" (*Hud: 27*)

Yet, this is viewed as a sign of greatness of religion. If we offer the case of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as an example, we will find that his followers were not from among those of authority or power, and thus, they were completely unable to compel others to accept religion; they were tortured and severely hurt, to the extent that they left their homes and migrated to another place. Therefore, it is clear that the primary goal of sending Messengers and Prophets was to warn people, who will, by virtue of this warning, attain piety which will cause Allah, in turn, to show them mercy.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ فِي الْفُلْكِ وَأَغْرَقْنَا
الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا عَمِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

**But they called him a liar. We saved him, and those who were with him, on the Ark and We drowned those who rejected Our revelations – they were wilfully blind [64]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 64)**

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* speaks about the story of the salvation of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and the believers with him. We know quite well how Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was prepared for receiving the Divine Mission; Allah *the Exalted* wanted him to learn carpentry in order to make the ark.

In the Quran, He *Glorified is He* says that the people of Prophet Nuh used to mock at him whenever they passed by him: 'And he started making the ark; and every time the chiefs of his people passed by him, they mocked at him. He said, "If now you mock us, the time is coming when we shall mock you even just as you mock now."' (*Hud: 38*) He *the Almighty* did not refer to the story of the Flood in this context. Yet, in another position in the Quran, He says: 'Thereupon we opened the gates of heaven with water which fell in torrents.' (*al-Qamar: 11*)

In this chapter of *al-'Araf*, He *the Almighty* tells us of the outcome of rejecting the Message of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* by his people. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But they called him a liar. We saved him and those who were with him, on the ark and we drowned those who rejected Our revelations....' (*al-A'raf: 64*)

As a matter of fact, this was the first instance of punishment in the history of religion since the Message of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was the first one to face denial and stubbornness. All of the Messengers who came before Nuh (Noah) were only charged with conveying the Message; they were not charged with entering into wars or conflicts. This is why the matter of their punishment was left up to the Heaven due to the fact that the mission of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entailed that humanity would reach its full maturity; his followers became worthy of inflicting punishments directly upon disbelievers.

In aforementioned verse, He *the Almighty* tells us about the final outcome of rejecting the Message of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. He *the Almighty* says: 'We saved him and those who were with him...' Yet, Allah did not say how He saved him, nor did He tell us anything about the story of the ark; rather, He told us about the final end of those who called him a liar. In fact, the punishment inflicted upon them was the Flood. He *the Almighty* says: '...and we drowned those who rejected Our revelations. They were wilfully blind.' (*al-A'raf: 64*) The Arabic word '*Ama* (blind) means someone who has lost the sight of both eyes. Arabs also use the following two words in the same respect, namely, '*amih* and '*amah*. As a matter of fact, there is no difference whatsoever between the two meanings indicated by the blindness of sight and

that of the heart, for both of them refers to that person who deviated from the Way of Guidance.

Allah *the Exalted* then moves to tell us about another Messenger, in order to give Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* an excellent example in him, too. Having shed light on the story of Nuh (Noah), He mentions the story of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon them*. Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَإِلَىٰ عَادٍ أَخَاهُمْ هُودًا ۖ قَالَ يَنْقُومِ أَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنِّ إِلَهِ غَيْرِهِ ۗ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

**To the people of 'Ad We sent their brother, Hud. He said,
'My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him.
Will you not take heed?' [65] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 65)**

This verse clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who sent Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* to his people, exactly as He sent Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* before him. The words 'their brother' evoke many things: first of all that he was from their own race and spoke their own language and second that they knew quite well everything about him and his past. All of these points are undoubtedly signs which were supposed to make them place trust in Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* did not send them a foreign Messenger about whom they knew nothing so that they would not say, 'He has come to make himself our master.' Rather, He sent them one from their own race, namely their brother, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*.

Therefore, it is clear that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was from the people of 'Ad. Yet, another group of scholars holds a different opinion; they believe that he was not from that tribe. They claim that brotherhood is of two kinds; one pertains to the close father and another pertains to the origin of man, namely, Adam. According to the second opinion, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was their brother in humanity and not from among themselves. Therefore, we have two possible explanations for this part of the aforementioned verse. At this point, let us discuss the following story about Mu'awiah *Allah be pleased with him*. He was sitting once when a guard came in and said, 'O, Commander of the Believers! There is a man at the door who says he is your brother,' Whereupon Mu'awiah raised his eyebrows, confused, as though saying

to his guard, 'Do you not know the brothers of the Commander of the Believers?!' He further said, 'Show him in.' When the man came in, Mu'awiah said, 'which brother of mine are you?!' 'Your brother from Adam,' the man replied. 'A family tie which has been cut,' Mu'awiah Allah *be pleased with him* replied, meaning that people no longer pay any attention to this kind of brotherhood. He then continued, 'I swear by Allah that I shall be the first to restore it!'

If we draw a direct comparison between the saying of Allah *the Almighty* on what Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to his people and that on what Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* said to his people, we notice that He adds the letter *Fa'* which translates in this verse as 'and' to the statement of Nuh (Noah) without doing the same with Hud's (Eber's). This actually indicates the absolute accuracy of the Quranic style, which proves definitively that the Quran has been sent down by Allah *the Almighty*. As a matter of fact, these two verses are identical to each other: the context and the meaning are the same. Also, Nuh (Noah) and Hud (Eber) *peace be upon them* were both Messengers, yet we find the letter *Fa'* in one verse, while the other does not have it. Grammatically, we know that the word 'and', the letter *Fa'* indicate chronological succession, and thus, it lends to the idea that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* repeatedly asked them to accept his Message; this is a fact which is mentioned clearly in chapter of *Nuh* in which Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the story of Nuh (Noah) with his people by saying that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* complained to Allah that he had been calling his people night and day, but his call has only caused them to flee further and further away from Him *the Almighty*. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* then added that whenever he called them to Allah so that He would grant them forgiveness, they would put their fingers into their ears, wrapped themselves up in their garments of sin, grew obstinate and became yet more arrogant in their false pride. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* further added that he openly called them by preaching to them in public, and he spoke to them secretly, or in private, by saying: 'Ask your Sustainer to forgive your sins for you – for, verily, He is All-Forgiving!' (*Nuh*: 5-10)

Thus, it is clear that the use of the letter *Fa'* (and) is quite appropriate in the context of speaking about the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and his people,

but as for Prophet Hud (Eber), we find that he called his people to Allah once, or twice or even three times, and thus, there was no consistent and frequent repetition as in the case of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon them*. This, indeed, clarifies for us why Allah *the Almighty* adds the letter *Fa'* to the statement of Nuh (Noah) and not to that of Hud (Eber). A person might yet find this point strange, especially if we take into account the fact that the time period spent by Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* with his people was not equivalent to the that spent by Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* with his people. The Quran tells us clearly that Nuh (Noah) remained among his people for a thousand years minus fifty years: 'And We, certainly, sent Nuh (Noah) to his people, and he remained among them a thousand years, short of fifty years. Then the deluge overtook them while they were wrongdoers.' (*al- 'Ankabut*: 14)

This indicates that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* spent almost a thousand years calling his people by night and day, both secretly and openly, yet they always fled from faith. This is why when speaking of the mission of Nuh (Noah), Allah *the Almighty* used the Arabic particle *Fa'*, or 'and', which indicates chronological succession, whilst in the case of the people of 'Ad, He did not use it.

Similarly, by close reflection on the statement of Nuh (Noah), we find that he gave warning to his people that they might be afflicted with a great punishment. As for Hud (Eber), we find him asking his people to offer acts of worship to Allah *the Exalted* and to fear Him at all times. Therefore, the question is 'Why did Hud (Eber) not warn his people in the same way Nuh (Noah) did, especially if we take into account the fact that the context and the meanings are the same?'

The answer to this question may be quite evident from the fact that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was previously told by Allah that his people would be afflicted with a punishment. As for Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* he had no previous knowledge that his people would be tortured. This means that the punishment of drowning that afflicted the people of Nuh (Noah) was the first of its kind, and Allah had previously told him about it. This is why Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* relying on the possibility, his people should take into account, that they might be afflicted with the same punishment, just drew their

attention that such a punishment might afflict them as well. Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Will you not take heed?' (*al-A'raf*: 65). This part of the verse implies a warning to the people of 'Ad that punishment might afflict them in the same way it afflicted the people of Nuh (Noah).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ إِنَّا لَنَرْنَكَ فِي
سَفَاهَةٍ وَإِنَّا لَنَظُنُّكَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

**But the disbelieving leaders of his people said,
'We believe you are a fool,' and 'We think you
are a liar' [66] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 66)**

We notice that Allah *the Almighty* adds the act of disbelief to the leaders of the people of Prophet Hud (Eber), yet He does not do that while speaking about the people of Nuh (Noah). Why is that? The reason is that there was no one amongst the people of Nuh (Noah) who had attained faith, even secretly. As for the people of 'Ad, there was a man named Marthad ibn Sa'd who had attained faith secretly. Thus, the Divine statement concerning the people of 'Ad is quite on the mark given their status since amongst them was a believer who did not follow their falsehood in accusing Prophet Hud (Eber) of foolishness. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us what the people of Hud (Eber) said about him by saying: 'But the disbelieving leaders of his people said, "We believe you are a fool, and we think you are a liar."' (*al-A'raf*: 66) As for the people of Nuh (Noah), they accused him of being lost in manifest error, saying: '...We believe you are far astray.' (*al-A'raf*: 60) Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* replied to them: 'My people, there is nothing astray about me!' (*al-A'raf*: 61)

At this point, we must provide an answer to a very important question: 'What is the difference between error (*Dalal*) and foolishness (*Safaha*)?' Error means to be averse to the truth, whilst foolishness means behaving in an insensible and silly manner, without thinking. The people of 'Ad fabricated another lie against Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* and accused him of being a liar. Allah says: '... and we think you are a liar.' (*al-A'raf*: 66) The word *Azh-Zhann*, in this verse translates as 'think', which means to presume

that something is true without actually being certain of it. Truthfully speaking, there are things which are more likely to happen than others. Other scholars yet believe that this particular word *Azh-Zhann* conveys the meaning of certainty, a point which is believed to be correct in the light of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in chapter of *al-Baqara* wherein the word *Azh-Zhann* indicates certainty (*al-Baqara*: 46).

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us how Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* answered his people by saying:

قَالَ يَنْقُورِ لَيْسَ بِي سَفَاهَةٌ وَلَكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

**He said, 'My people, there is nothing foolish about me!
On the contrary, I am a messenger from the Lord of all
the Worlds [67] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 67)**

As a matter of fact, this statement of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* completely negates their accusation against him of weak-mindedness and foolishness. In addition, it clearly indicates that he is just a bearer of the Divine Message, a point which is confirmed by the following verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says:

أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَأَنَا لَكُمْ نَاصِحٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿٦٨﴾

**I am delivering my Lord's messages to you.
I am your sincere and honest adviser [68]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 68)**

Telling us about what Prophet Noah said to his people, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'I am delivering my Lord's messages to you and giving you sincere advice.' (*al-A'raf*: 62)

This raises a very important question: 'Why are the two Quranic styles of giving advice different from each other in these two verses?' In other words, Allah *the Exalted* when speaking about Nuh (Noah), uses the verb to indicate the giving of advice by saying 'I am... giving you sincere advice...' However, when He speaks about Prophet Hud (Eber), He uses the noun by saying: 'I am your sincere and honest adviser.'

Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the verb in the statement of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to indicate frequent repetition, a point which clearly explains how Nuh (Noah) used to call his people to Allah; he called them day and night, both openly and secretly. As for Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* Allah *the Exalted* uses the noun. Grammarians believe that the use of nouns indicates that there is no motion or movement which plainly elucidates the condition of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* with his people, for he did not frequently repeat his call to them.

Telling us about what Prophet Hud (Eber) told his people, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَوْعَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جَاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ
وَأَذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِن بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَزَادَكُمْ فِي الْخَلْقِ
بَضْطَةً فَادْكُرُوا ءَالَآءَ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord, through a man in your midst, to warn you? Remember how He made you heirs after Noah's people, and increased your stature: remember God's bounties, so that you may prosper' [69] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 69)

Close reflection upon this verse indicates that Allah *the Almighty* states that a 'warning' was the ultimate goal behind the mission of Prophet Hud (Eber) showing that this statement of Hud (Eber) is different from that of Prophet Nuh (Noah) who showed that his ultimate goal was to make his people attain piety and fear Allah. Furthermore, the meanings of the two statements are identical to each other; Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* mentioned 'warning' so that his people would fear and be conscious of Allah so that they might attain mercy. Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* mentioned the first link in this chain, namely warning, we can adduce the rest, that is being conscious of Allah which leads us to attain His Mercy.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... Do you but remember how He made you heirs to Nuh's (Noah's) people...' indicates a new statement by Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* since the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) were the

first people ever to be punished for not believing. Thus, when Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was sent to his people, he told them about the punishment that afflicted the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) so that they would take admonition from them.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Do you but remember how He made you heirs to Nuh's (Noah's) people and endowed you abundantly with power. Remember, then, Allah's Blessings, so that you might attain to a happy state!' (*al-A'raf*: 69)

The verse explains that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* reminded them of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* has endowed them powerful bodies, to the extent that it was said that the tallest of them measured one hundred cubits in height, while the shortest measured only sixty. Furthermore, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* ordered them to remember Allah's Blessings upon them—the greatest of blessings was sending them a Messenger to lead them to goodness.

However, what was their response? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us, by saying:

قَالُوا أَجِئْنَا لِنُعْبَدَ اللَّهَ وَحْدَهُ، وَنَذَرَ مَا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا
فَأَنَّا بِمَا تَعُدُّنَا إِن كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾

They said, 'Have you really come to tell us to serve God alone and to forsake what our forefathers served? If what you say is true, bring us the punishment you threaten' [70] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 70)

Logic dictates that they were supposed to worship solely Allah and not to ascribe other partners with Him in worship. We know for certain that these false gods brought them neither benefit nor harm, nor did they even hear them. It is historically recorded that the polytheists used to take their broken idols to the blacksmiths to fix them. So, how could such idols be worshipped?! As for the people of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* they told him they were following the footsteps of their forefathers and that they could not leave what their forefathers worshipped. Likewise, they transgressed and challenged him by saying, 'If your Lord warns us of an eminent torment, then bring it upon us if you are truthful.' Consequently, it became clear that there was no hope of convincing them to accept the call to faith.

Thus, how did Allah *the Almighty* respond to them? The answer is clear in the following verse in which Allah says:

قَالَ قَدْ وَقَعَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ رِجْسٌ وَغَضَبٌ أَتُجَادِلُونَنِي فِي
 أَسْمَاءِ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَءَابَاؤُكُمْ مَا نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ
 فَانظُرُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

**He said, 'You are already set to receive your Lord's loathing and anger. Are you arguing with me about mere names you and your forefathers invented, names for which God has given no sanction? Just wait; I too am waiting' [71]
 (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 71)**

This verse indicates that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* used to enter in lengthy conversations with them; so, when they asked him to bring them the torment he promised them with, Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* told them immediately that they had been already set to receive Allah's Loathing and Anger. However, this raises an important question: 'Hud (Eber) was already speaking to his people when he told them that they had already been afflicted with Allah's Anger and Loathing. So, why did he use the past tense, even though the action had not yet happened?' He used the past tense which indicates that the action had already been decreed in spite of the fact that it had not yet happened since he had conveyed Allah's Message to them which means that this Divine Punishment would inevitably afflict them, and they would be unable to escape it by any means. In addition, we should take into account the undeniable fact that time is meaningless as to the Orders of Allah *the Almighty* for He is fully capable of carrying out His Will whenever He wishes. Furthermore, none can prevent them from being afflicted with this Divine Punishment. This verse points out that Allah *Glorified is He* afflicted them with *Ar-Rijs* which is impurity and uncleanness. Consequently, this verse does not clearly explain about how Allah's Anger will afflict them, yet it must have had a particular form in which it occurred.

The verse then tells that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* asked them scornfully, 'Are you arguing with me about mere names you and your

forefathers invented...?' People used to name things after their indications, and thus, they are the ones who gave these false gods their names; yet are these gods true gods so that they can worship them? The answer is a definitive 'No'. Rather, they have ascribed Divinity to that which is not truly divine; therefore, these names they gave to these idols are absolutely meaningless. Likewise, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* tells them that they were only imitating their forefathers and that what they worshipped were only names for which Allah *the Almighty* gave no sanction. He *the Exalted* says: 'Are you arguing with me about mere names you and your forefathers invented names for which Allah has given no sanction?' (*al-A'raf*: 71)

This means that these names could in no way prove their claims, which are proven by the fact that during the pre-Islamic time period, they named an idol after al-'Uzza, or 'Dignity', yet when they smashed it, they found no dignity whatsoever. Since this so-called 'god' did not defend itself in any way, how could it be one along with a Sustainer for others?! Likewise, they had a goddess named *al-Lat*, yet when they smashed it, they found that it had no power, might, or wrath.

Confirming that they would be certainly afflicted by Allah's punishment, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* said to them, 'Just wait. I too am waiting.' Furthermore, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* ordered them to 'wait' which enables us to properly understand the true meaning of His Saying, 'Just wait. I too am waiting.' What this means is that this loathsome evil and condemnation would undoubtedly afflict them. In this respect, it is of great importance to reiterate that time is of no meaning as to Divine Orders. To illustrate this point, let us examine the Quranic verse in the chapter of *an-Nahl* in which Allah *the Almighty* says: that His command has come, therefore, do not seek to hasten it: 'In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful, the decree of Allah is at hand, so seek not to hasten it. Holy is He and exalted far above all that which they associate with Him.' (*an-Nahl*: 1) Even though Allah *the Exalted* put the verb in the past tense indicating that His command has already come which seems to be in apparent contradiction with His Order, they were told not to seek to hasten it, namely the command. Yet, we affirm that there is no contradiction whatsoever since Allah *the Almighty* is the One

Who told us about this matter. In addition, there is no force that can prevent, or even alter, the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَقَطَعْنَا دَابِرَ الَّذِينَ
كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَمَا كَانُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

We saved him, and those who were with him, through Our mercy; We destroyed those who denied Our revelations and would not believe [72] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 72)

Drawing a comparison between the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and that of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon them* clearly indicates that He told us about the means through which Nuh (Noah) and those with him were saved; yet He did not tell us anything about that means through which He saved Prophet Hud (Eber) and the believers with him. The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'We saved him' indicates that a general torment had afflicted them. In this respect, it is important to note that Allah *the Almighty* revealed to Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* to go far away along with his companions before afflicting his people with this torment. In the ancient past, Arabs used to go to the Sacred House when they were afflicted by any disaster they could not ward off; they used to do so to supplicate to Allah *Glorified is He* to save them from this particular disaster and calamity. That was actually the case with the people of Prophet Hud (Eber) who denied and rejected his Message; Allah *the Exalted* afflicted them with a famine which lasted for three years. This is why they went to the *Ka'ba* to call upon their Lord to lighten their suffering. A group of them headed by Qayl ibn 'Anaz and Marthad ibn Sa'ad, a Muslim who concealed his faith, went to Mecca. They became guests of their maternal uncle named Al-'Amaliq whose lineage went back to 'Amliq, son of Levi, son of Sam, son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. It was 'Amaliq who ruled Mecca during that particular period of time. The group of the people of Hud (Eber) were guests of Mu'awyah ibn Abu Bakr who comfortably accommodated them under Arab customs and traditions for three days; they were so comfortably accommodated to the extent that they forgot about the prime goal of their journey, enjoying the hospitality of Mu'awyah for an entire month. It was at this point that Mu'awyah wondered, 'they came

to save their people from the famine striking them, yet they did not even think to go to the *Ka'ba*, or to call upon our Lord. However, I fear to say such to them lest they say that I have treated them inhospitably, and it becomes a black mark on my name.' He began to think how to settle the matter, thus, he decided to make use of his two songstresses known as 'The Two Locusts' who said to him, 'Compose poetry on the matter and we shall sing it for them.' Mu'awyah approved the idea and proceeded to say:

O Qayl, woe to you, stand and pray!

Perhaps Allah might send abundant rain

And water the lands of 'Ad, for the people of 'Ad

Have become so feeble they can barely speak!

Singing has a strong effect on people, especially when it is intended to target a particular person. So, when the songstresses sang and mentioned the name of Qayl, saying: 'O Qayl, woe to you, stand and pray, which really means: 'Why did you not go to the Sacred House to call upon Allah *the Almighty* to remove the punishment from your people, those of 'Ad, who were so utterly exhausted that they can barely speak?' Qayl regained his senses at these words and do did Marthad ibn Sa'd. At that point, Qayl knew that Marthad ibn Sa'd had already believed in Prophet Hud (Eber) and his Message, so he, therefore, refused to accompany him to the *Ka'ba*. Qayl already went to the Sacred House and supplicated to Allah *the Almighty*. Consequently, He sent three clouds of different colours: black, red and white. Qayl heard a voice asking him, 'Choose for his people.' The voice told him that whatever of these three clouds he would chose would go to his people. Thinking that black clouds contain huge amounts of water, Qayl chose the black one. They returned home and found the black cloud there, so he said to them, 'I chose the black cloud since it gives the most abundant rain.' Yet, this cloud actually contained the Divine Punishment that afflicted them for rejecting the Message of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*. Therefore, the people of Prophet Hud (Eber) mistakenly thought that the black cloud was nothing but a heavy cloud which will bring them much needed rain!: 'Then, when they saw the punishment coming towards their valleys in the form of a cloud, they said, "This is a cloud which will give us rain." We said, "Nay, but it is that which you sought to

hasten - a wind wherein is a grievous punishment.'" (*al-Ahqaf*: 24) This is the cloud which Qayl told about. At that point, Allah *the Almighty* told them that they were wrong, for this cloud was the very thing which they so contemptuously sought to hasten; it brought forth a wind bearing grievous suffering, a wind which was bound to destroy everything at its Sustainer's behest, to the extent that they, the disbelievers of the people of 'Ad, were so utterly wiped out that nothing could be seen save their empty dwellings (*al-Ahqaf*: 24-25). Therefore, it was by this punishment of wind and rain mentioned in the chapter of *al-Ahqaf* that Allah *the Almighty* tortured the disbelievers from among the people of 'Ad. Furthermore, no one escaped this Divine torment except those who had attained faith, which is confirmed by the saying of Allah *the Exalted*: 'We saved him and those who were with him, through Our Mercy; we destroyed those who denied Our Revelations and would not believe.' (*al-A'raf*: 72)

It is quite clear that Allah *the Exalted* made it easy for Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* and his believing followers to escape and leave the area the moment the cloud appeared. Prophet Hud (Eber) heard a voice confirming that this cloud bore within it grievous torment, so he took the believers with him and fled to Mecca. As for those who wronged themselves by denying their Messenger and refusing to believe in their Lord, they were utterly destroyed.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وإِلَى ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا قَالَ يَنْقَوْمِرِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ إِلَهِ
غَيْرِهِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ هَذِهِ نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ
فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَمْسُوهَا بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذْكُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

To the people of Thamud We sent their brother, Saleh. He said, 'My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you now from your Lord: this is God's she-camel – a sign for you – so let her graze in God's land and do not harm her in any way, or you will be struck by a painful torment [73] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 73)

Following the same pattern as Prophet Hud (Eber) did, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* gave his people a warning so that they would be

conscious of Allah, making them eligible to attain His Mercy. The Quran mentions Saleh's (Shelah's) statement for his people saying, " ... "My people serve Allah. You have no god other than Him." Thus, it is clear that the main purpose of 'giving a warning to the people of Saleh (Shelah)' is to make them fear Allah *the Almighty* in order to make them eligible for attaining His Mercy and prosperity. In this respect, I always say that the Quran may sometimes mention no details about a particular topic, yet the context reveals the intended meaning. In fact, the Quran does this in order to make us forever attentive all the time to acquire the true meanings of the verses. Let us offer a striking example to illustrate this point. Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* with the hoopoe. The Quran tells us that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) took count of his birds, but he did not see the hoopoe. Thus, he threatened that he would punish him severely or he would even slaughter it. However, the hoopoe came back and told Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* that it comprehended that which Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) did not comprehend and that it has brought to him clear information from Sheba. Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* then sent the hoopoe to the people of Sheba with a letter from him, ordering the hoopoe to turn away from them and see what answer they would return. The Queen of Sheba immediately told her people that she has received an honourable letter (*an-Naml: 20-29*). It is as though the hoopoe took the letter, threw it down to the Queen of Sheba, and she then made her response directly. This tells us clearly that the Quran does not repeat the events which may be understood from the context.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says in this verse under discussion: 'To the people of Thamud, We sent their brother, Saleh (Shelah).' The saying of Allah *the Exalted* 'their brother' confirms that the people of Thamud were well acquainted with Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* and that they were equally acquainted with his past and moral conduct. The word Thamud in the verse has been ascribed to Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* since he was from among themselves. It is important here to note that the Message of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) was quite similar to that of Prophets (Nuh) Noah and Hud (Eber) *peace be upon them*. The Quran tells us that Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* tells his people, 'To the people of Thamud, We sent their

brother, Saleh (Shelah). He said, "My people serve Allah. You have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you now from your Lord. This is Allah's she-camel-a sign for you-so let her graze in Allah's Land and do not harm her in any way, or you will be struck a painful torment." (*al-A'raf: 73*)

The word *Bayyinah*, which translates as a 'clear sign' means the proof that Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* was indeed sent to deliver Allah's Message to the people of Thamud, and this sign was the miraculous she-camel. What is the story of that she-camel? Did Prophet Saleh (Shelah) bring them a she-camel and then ascribe its ownership to Allah? Of course he did not; the creation of this she-camel must have been miraculous so that they would realise that it did not belong to any human being. Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* called his people to have faith in Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, the leaders of his people challenged him and agreed that each of the two parties, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) and his followers, on one hand, and the disbelievers of his people, on the other, would supplicate to their own lords. The disbelievers even told Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* that they would follow him if His Lord defeated theirs. They called upon their false gods, but they received no answer whatsoever, whereupon they said to Prophet Saleh (Shelah), 'If you are truthful in what you say, let your Lord bring forth from this solitary rock, known as al-Kathiba, in front of you in the mountain a she-camel and let it be pregnant with a calf.' They even asked him that this she-camel must be a Bactrian – the finest kind of camels. Therefore, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* called upon Allah *the Exalted* to give him this miracle, and the rock opened and the she-camel came out. The coming of the she-camel out of the rock left no room for doubt since it was a sign from Allah, for this miracle had happened right before them. This is actually the true meaning of Allah's saying 'a clear sign', which is the rock splitting before them and revealing the she-camel which was pregnant and very hairy. The throes of birth then came to this she-camel, and it proceeded to give birth to its calf. This, undoubtedly, confirms that this she-camel was a true Divine Miracle. The people of Thamud were supposed to believe in Prophet Saleh (Shelah) and his Message and not to oppose him in any way. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He revealed to Prophet Saleh (Shelah) to tell the people of Thamud to share the water with it, so that it would drink one day, and they would drink the next:

'He said, "Here is a she-camel. She has her turn of drinking, and you have your turn of drinking on an appointed day.'" (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 155) So, we should take into account that the people of Thamud had scarce resources of water.

Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* told them that they must designate a particular day for this she-camel to drink. In addition, he told them that they themselves and their animals must not approach the water during that day. Amazingly enough, this she-camel would drink the whole amount of water in the spring until there was no water left; it drank as much water as would suffice all the other animals of Thamud. All the water which it drank would, by the Permission of Allah, become milk in its udders and Thamud used to drink it.

It is true that the she-camel prevented them from the water for defined days, but they meanwhile got benefit from the milk they took from it. Due to the fact that this she-camel was a Divine Miracle, it was necessary that its body must be big in such a way which enables it to eat massive quantities of food and to drink large amounts of water which will consequently turn into huge amounts of milk. This indicates that this she-camel possessed miraculous qualities. Its calf used to accompany her all the time. When the temperature was high in summer, the she-camel and its calf used to dwell high in the mountain, whilst the other camels would descend to the lower areas of the land. However, when winter came, it would go down to the low-lying areas. It is known that Mada'in Saleh (the dwelling-place of Thamud) was in a very hot place; those who visit Medina or Tabuk can pass by it.

The she-camel was thus free to choose wherever it wanted to stay in summer or winter, and no one could ever harm it. There were two women who owned she-camels, and the she-camel of Allah used always to graze and drink more than theirs. So, these two women brought a man nicknamed 'the ruddy-faced man of Thamud', whose name was Qudar ibn Salif, to slay the she-camel. When he slew the she-camel, its calf climbed up a mountain known as Qara and gave three cries. At that point, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* called out, 'O, people! Find this young calf, for perhaps if you find it, Allah will hold back His Torment from you.' So, they went looking for it but could not find anything. Allah *the Almighty* thus informed Prophet Saleh (Shelah) that the torment would inevitably afflict his people.

Allah *Glorified is He* told him that the punishment would afflict them, as follows: on the first day their faces would become yellow; on the second they would become red, while on the third they would witness their faces turning black. The people of Thamud had actually committed an awful crime, for they knew for certain that the she-camel had belonged to Allah *the Almighty*; they had actually witnessed its creation by eye, and thus, they must have taken a warning from it. Furthermore, they must have understood that Allah *the Almighty* would afflict them with a painful torment in case they harmed it. Yet, their foolishness made them forget that it was Allah's she-camel.

He *the Almighty* says: 'A clear sign has come to you now from your Lord. This is Allah's she-camel-a sign for you-so let her graze in Allah's Land and do not harm her in any way, or you will be struck a painful torment.' Indeed, a grievous chastisement did befall them once the 'little, ugly man of Thamud' slew the she-camel. Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَأَذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَادٍ وَبَوَّأَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَنْجِدُونَ مِنْ سُهُولِهَا
 قُصُورًا وَتَنْجُونَ الْجِبَالَ بِيُوتًا فَأَذْكُرُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

Remember how He made you heirs after 'Ad and settled you in the land to build yourselves castles on its plains and carve houses out of the mountains: remember God's blessings and do not spread corruption in the land' [74] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 74)

Before, Allah *the Almighty* spoke about the people of 'Ad, He told us that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* asked them to remember how He *the Almighty* made them heirs to Noah's people: 'Do you remember how He made you heirs to Nuh's (Noah's) people.' (*al-A'raf*: 69)

Concerning the verse under discussion, He tells us that Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* asked his people to remember how He made them heirs to the tribe of 'Ad.

This is naturally so due to the story of the people 'Ad was nearer to them than that of the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah). Furthermore, their story was quite well known and its lessons were clear. As for the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* it was certainly somewhat less recent than that of the people of 'Ad.

In this particular verse, Allah *the Almighty* reminds the people of Thamud that He made them settle in the land in which they lived, enabling them to make castles from its plains; a 'plain' is a flat area of land in which there are no hills, rocks, or mountains. Allah *the Exalted* made it possible for them to carve houses out of the mountains; the life span of one of the people of 'Ad was so long that a house would crumble twice during the single lifetime of a man. It is actually for this reason that they decided to make houses out of the mountains so they would remain secure. Today, when one sees how Mad'in Saleh (the dwellings of Thamud in Arabia) were wonderfully carved out of the mountains, he will undoubtedly have the opportunity to fully realise the Greatness of Allah *the Almighty* since He directed man to that which benefits them. Allah finally concludes the verse with His saying, 'remember Allah's Blessings and do not spread corruption in the land'

We previously explained that the term '*Alaa*' Allah' means His countless Blessing and favours. Allah *the Exalted* then warns them that they must not spread corruption on the earth.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعِفُوا لِمَنْ ءَامَنَ مِنْهُمْ
 أَنْتَعْلَمُونَ أَنْ صَدَقْنَا مِنْ رَبِّهِ قَالُوا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلَ بِهِ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

But the arrogant leaders among his people said to the believers they thought to be of no account, 'Do you honestly think that *Saleh* is a messenger from his Lord?' They said, 'Yes. We believe in the message sent through him' [75]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 75)

The Quran tells us that people are divided into leaders and followers. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in the chapter of *al-Baqara* that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers: 'Could they but see when those who were followed shall disown their followers and shall see the punishment and all their ties shall be cut asunder.' (*al-Baqara*: 166)

In this particular verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* tells us that a dialogue took place between the leaders and the oppressed ones who have neither

prestige nor power, and the oppressed were the ones who truly believed that the call to faith would be of great benefit to them and so they accepted it. As for the arrogant leaders of the people of Thamud; they were of higher ranks in their community. Thus, the arrogant leaders asked the oppressed ones who had faith in Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* whether they honestly believed that he was a true Prophet sent from Allah or not. It should also be mentioned that there were other oppressed people who remained in their allegiance to disbelief.

When the arrogant ones heard the answer of the faithful from amongst the oppressed, they replied to them in the following verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا بِالَّذِي ءَامَنْتُمْ بِهِءِ كَفِرُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

But the arrogant leaders said, ‘We reject what you believe in’ [76] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 76)

As a consequence, they proclaimed their disbelief verbally and affirmed it by slaying the she-camel. Telling about what they did, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَعَقَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَعَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ وَقَالُوا يُصَلِّحُ
أَقْتِنَا يَمَا تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

And then they hamstrung the camel. They defied their Lord’s commandment and said, ‘Saleh, bring down the punishment you threaten, if you really are a messenger!’ [77] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 77)

The word *al-‘Aqru* means 'to slaughter a camel'. Following the same pattern of disbelievers before them, they challenged Prophet Saleh (Shelah) to bring them down the punishment he promised them proving if he was really a Messenger sent from Allah. Allah’s Messengers and Prophets are all truthful. Yet, they people of Thamud accused Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* of telling a lie even though they witnessed the miracle of the she-camel be performed before their very eyes. Accordingly, they deserved Allah’s punishment mentioned in the following verse in which He *the Almighty* says:

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَثِيمِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾

An earthquake seized them: by the next morning they were lying dead in their homes [78] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 78)

An earthquake or *Ar-Rajfa* means a violent movement which causes something to convulse. In another verse, the Quran refers to this *Rajfa* as *At-Taghya*, or 'overpowering blast.' (*al-Haqqa*: 5)

After they had been overtaken with this severe punishment, they became, as the Quran describes them, *Jathimin*, or 'motionless bodies in their abodes'. This clearly indicates that when this punishment befell them, they died at once; for example, if one of them had been standing, he remained in his standing position, and if he had been sitting, he remained in his seated position, and if he had been reclining, he would remain in his reclined position; or, as they say, they were 'frozen on the spot'. The word *al-Jathim* in Arabic means someone who remains in his place without moving or one who sticks to the ground.

After the earthquake overtook them, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* turned away from them; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رَسُولَ رَبِّي
وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُحِبُّونَ النَّصِيحِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

So he turned away from them, saying, 'My people, I delivered my Lord's messages to you and gave you sincere advice, but you did not like those who gave sincere advice' [79] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 79)

Another important question is raised: 'was Prophet Saleh (Shelah) truly speaking to them after they were dead?!' Yes, he spoke to them as a vindication of himself along with showing that he was free from blame. For example, this is exactly like when someone gets into trouble and his friend says to him, 'I cannot do anything for you now, for I advised you before.' Another example is when an evil man is slain; you say to him, 'I told you so!' As a matter of fact, you speak in order to prove your innocence and vindication. In the same respect, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did so with the

idolaters who were slain in the battle of Badr by calling on them one by one after their bodies had been thrown into the pit of Badr. He said: 'O, men of the pit, (calling them by their names), have you found what your Lord promised you to be true? Indeed I have found what my Lord promised me to be true!'⁽¹⁾

The Companions Allah *be pleased with them* said, 'Do you speak to them, O, Messenger of Allah, when they are corpses?' He replied, 'By Allah, you do not hear what I say any better than they do. However, they cannot answer me.'⁽²⁾

It is as though Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* said this so that they would remember how he had conveyed to them Allah's Messages and His Way of Guidance, along with how he advised them sincerely and dearly hoped for them that they would adhere to Allah's Way. However, they did not listen to his advice, for they did not love those who give sound advice. Truthfully speaking, the one who gives sound advice wants to take the person, whom he advises, away from the evil to which the advised has grown accustomed, yet the advised becomes angry when anyone advises him.

After finishing with the story of Thamud with their Prophet, Allah tells us about the story of another Prophet:

وَلُوطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَتَأْتُونَ الْفَحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ
بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّنَ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

We sent Lot and he said to his people, 'How can you practise this outrage? No one in the world has outdone you in this [80] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 80)

Just as the Quran tells us that Prophet Nuh (Noah), Prophet Hud (Eber) and Prophet Saleh, (Shelah) *peace be upon them* had been sent by Allah *the Almighty*, it also makes it clear that Lut (Lot) was a true Messenger sent by Allah to his own people. In this particular verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* puts the name of Lut (Lot) in the Arabic accusative case which stresses that he, like the Messengers and Prophets before him, was sent by Allah to his people.

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari

(2) Narrated by Al-Bukhari

However, when was the time in which he was sent? The verse indicates plainly that the time in which he spoke, was exactly the same time in which he was sent. This means that whenever a Messenger or Prophet is sent and held responsible for delivering Allah's Message to his people, he would not waste a single instant in vain; rather, he seized all the opportunities to fulfil his mission. It was as though the deliverance of the Message began immediately at that instant he said, 'O, my people!' Consequently, the Quranic style assures that whenever a Messenger or Prophet receives the Order from Allah *the Exalted* to deliver the Divine Message to his people, he immediately began to carry out the order, without delaying.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'we sent Lot and he said to his people' (*al-A'raf*: 80). The saying of Allah, 'his people', implies that Prophet Lut (Lot) was one of them. So, why did He not say 'their brother Lot'? This obviously means that Prophet Nuh (Noah), Prophet Hud (Eber) and Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon them* were sent from amongst their own people, but as for Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* he was not originally from amongst the people to whom he was sent. As a matter of fact, both Prophets Lut (Lot) and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them* had come to this place after fleeing the oppression to which they both had been subjected. This shows clearly us that Prophet Lut (Lot) was not from amongst the natives of his tribe. Nevertheless, they were 'his people' since he had lived with them for a long period of time, which was enough that they knew each other quite well. In fact, his people knew his moral conduct and everything about him.

I say this in order to direct people's attention to the precision and accuracy of the rhetorical style of the Quran; despite the fact that the all the stories revolve mainly around one prime goal, He *the Almighty* clearly and precisely distinguishes them from one another. Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* did not say to them, 'My Lord has forbidden you from indulging in this vile action, namely, lustfully approaching men', rather, he delivered the Divine Prohibition of this vile act to them in the form of interrogation so that they would refrain from committing it.

Prophet Lut's (Lot's) addressing an interrogative question to them was meant to chastise and rebuke them for committing this awful crime. He did not

say to them, 'My Lord commands you to refrain from this deed', rather, he censured the deed as something which is contrary to man's natural disposition.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'How can you practise this outrage? No one in the world has outdone you in this.' (*al-A'raf*: 80) This indicates that he wanted to ask them a critical question to make them feel ashamed since, naturally, sound intellect rejects such an evil act. This means that this action has never taken place before; therefore, it is a filthy one since a man can only approach another man in a filthy place. Yet, the people of Lot (Lut) did dare do it. Truthfully speaking, the crime of sodomy cannot be done except by someone whose soul is perverted.

The word *al-Fahisha*, or 'outrage' means something excessively ugly, for this crime is hideously and incredibly ugly. This is due to the fact that it is an abomination even for a man to approach a woman who was made for this action, if he has not made a marriage contract with her. However, as for a man to approach another man in this way, it is even more abominable. If this matter is ultimately forbidden to be committed with a woman who is not man's wife, it is even more abominable in that particular case under discussion, for man was not created for this kind of act, and thus, it can never become lawful. Therefore, it is clear that this crime is even a greater abomination.

We previously explained that the Arabic particle *min* is sometimes meaningless when it occurs in human speech, but it would be wrong to say this about the speech of our Lord *the Almighty*. As for this particle *min* mentioned in this Quranic verse under discussion, it is used in this context to clarify that no one had ever done such a thing before the people of Prophet Lut (Lot). We said long ago that if you were to say to someone, 'I do not have any money', you have denied that you have any money, which is of any value, but you might have a small or minute sum which could be called 'money'. Thus, when Allah *the Exalted* says: 'No one in the world has outdone you in this', this means that not even a single person has ever done this before the people of Prophet Lut (Lot). By this, Allah *the Almighty* wants to stress its prohibition. Thus, the particle *min* mentioned in this verse means plainly that no one from any part of the world had ever committed this crime before the people of Lut (Lot). So, why is this crime so heinous? Allah *the Exalted* called this abomination an 'outrage' which means something extremely ugly, a point which is

confirmed by the fact that no one in any part of the world had ever done it before the people of Lut (Lot).

When we carefully examine this matter intellectually, we find that man was created to be Allah's Vicegerent on the earth, and thus, mankind had to preserve its existence since everyone has a limited life span and people follow one another in this worldly life. Allah *the Exalted* has provided man with the means of nourishment by means of which he can maintain his survival. In the same respect, He *the Almighty* made marriage lawful to him in order for him to be able to preserve his race.

Allah *Glorified is He* made mankind into males and females. It is through the process of copulation between the male and the female that reproduction takes place. A man is first carried in his father's loins as a droplet; then his mother carries him as a foetus; she then gives birth to him and looks after him along with his father. Then, the mother and father raise him until he reaches adulthood. These are five difficult stages; the mother carries her child within her for nine months which is a difficult matter for if one of us were to carry something for even one full day, he would be tired out by doing so. However, the mother carries her child for nine consecutive months. Due to Allah's Great Wisdom, the size of the foetus in the very beginning of its creation is very little, and it increases gradually; this means that at its first stage of development the embryo weighs the smallest amount, and then it grows slowly and gradually for nine months until its creation is perfected.

Since the beginning of its creation, an embryo develops gradually until its weight reaches about three kilograms by the day of its birth. This indicates that there is a particular period of time between the very beginnings of its creation to the time of its birth. Miraculously, the embryo develops continuously every millionth of a second. This means that it develops incrementally during the passage of time.

A case in point is the sport of weight-lifting; unprofessional athletes will not start with lifting one hundred kilograms from the very beginning, rather they will train to lift twenty kilograms; the load will gradually increase so that the weightlifters' muscles are not overstretched. This process of training is thus described as being gradual. This is due to one needing to become accustomed

to lifting such weights, so he cannot be trained to lift these weights all at once from the very beginning, rather, he is supposed to do this gradually. The same applies to the development of the embryo. Let us suppose that one will continuously watch the development of his baby since the moment the mother bore it. He will barely realise its development since it grows in an imperceptible way. However, if one were to go away for a month and then come back, he would be able to easily realise how big it became. Consequently, the child had actually grown during that particular period of one's absence, the duration between the last time one saw it and the time being.

Therefore, it is clear that the embryo, out of Allah's Mercy, develops incrementally during pregnancy, which is why the womb continuously increases in size every day from the beginning of pregnancy until its end. Even though women suffer quite a bit during pregnancy and during the time of delivery, they, along with their husbands, greatly and passionately care about their babies. Children take a long time -several years- to attain the age of adulthood. It is well known that man's infancy is the longest among all created beings, which is why we find fathers bearing, alongside mothers, the difficulties of bringing up their children. Furthermore, it is out of Allah's Infinite Wisdom that the process of reproduction is naturally dependant on the sexual desire -man's strongest desire. Having given birth to her child, a woman may say, 'I made up my mind not to have any more children', yet, she ends up having more all the same. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* paves the way for the process of reproduction through sexual desire, and He made (lawful) sex the means to reproduction so that the existence of the human race is permanently preserved. Once men copulate with their wives and the latter get pregnant and give birth to children, fathers and mothers shoulder the responsibility of bringing them up together. If any man practises coitus interruptus in one way or another, he undoubtedly violates and breaches Allah's Law meant with achieving man's vicegerency on the earth. This is so in such a case, since during coitus interruptus, one will only experience the pleasure of the sexual intercourse, yet he will prevent his wife from becoming pregnant; thus, man's vicegerency on the earth, at a particular point in time, will no longer be fulfilled. Another important point is that man, in sexual intercourse, is the main player, a matter that is turned upside down in homosexuality.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We sent Lut (Lot) and he said to his people, 'How can you practise this outrage? No one in the world has outdone you in this.'" (*al-A'raf*: 80) The word *al-Fahisha* which translates as 'outrage' means homosexuality. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* did not mention explicitly the name of this unlawful act from the outset as an indication of the fact that its prohibition is naturally well known to all people. Thus, the saying of Allah, 'How can you practise this outrage? No one in the world has outdone you in this', indicates that the people of Lut (Lot) knew quite well that this act was against man's natural disposition. As for those who pretended to be foolish and refused to understand, Allah *the Exalted* then precisely defines this crime for them in the following clear verse in which He *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِّنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ
 بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

You lust after men rather than women! You transgress all bounds!' [81] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 81)

The Arabic word *al-Israf* means 'transgressing the bounds'. For example, Allah *the Almighty* instructed us how to lawfully satisfy our sexual desire by instructing us to marry women, who will thus bear our children. Yet, if one deviates from this Divine Law, he will be judged as 'transgressing the bounds'. It is undoubtedly through marriage that a couple will be able to naturally and lawfully satisfy their sexual desires. In addition, the wife will give birth to one's children, after which they both the wife and the husband will shoulder the responsibility of bringing them up. It is quite clear that any other act that goes against this prime goal of reproduction will be motivated solely by sexual desire. We should yet take into account the fact that satisfying one's desires as well as reproduction are the major goals behind sex. This is why when the people of Lut (Lot) deviated away from this Divine Law, He *the Almighty* described them as 'transgressors of the bounds'.

Allah then tells us about their response to Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*. He *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا كَانَتْ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَخْرِجُوهُمْ
 مِّنْ قَرْيَتِكُمْ إِنَّهُمْ أَنَاسٌ يَنْظَهُرُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

The only response his people gave was to say [to one another], ‘Drive them out of your town! These men want to keep themselves chaste!’ [82] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 82)

This verse indicates clearly that these people stubbornly refused to acknowledge that homosexuality is a vile act, to the extent that they told one another to 'drive Prophet Lut (Lot) and the believers with him out of their town'.

This raises yet an important question: 'What was the argument they offered to justify their decision of expelling Prophet Lut (Lot) and his faithful followers from the town?' It goes without saying that chastity and purification are good moral qualities, yet these people of Lut (Lot) had lived so long in filth to the extent that they had become accustomed to it, and even refusing to abandon it. This is actually the main reason why they hate chastity and purification. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; a young man wants to join a group of friends who are of the same age as he, but he finds that they drink alcohol and chase after women, so he advises them to stay away from these immoral acts. As a result, these friends reject him by not including him in their group on the grounds that he is a pious, chaste, and purified person who is not accustomed to corruption and who would not participate with them in doing these unlawful acts. Therefore, it is clear that good moral qualities are viewed by people with deviant thoughts as something vile and immoral, exactly like animals that permanently live in filth, so that if they were to change to a clean environment, they would die.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا أُمَّرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

We saved him and his kinsfolk – apart from his wife who stayed behind [83] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 83)

Consequently, their decision to drive Prophet Lut (Lot) and his believing followers out of the town put them at a grave and serious risk. By doing this,

the disbelievers from amongst the people of Lut (Lot) only hastened Allah *the Almighty* to inflict His punishment on them. Due to His Infinite Wisdom and Mercy, Allah *the Exalted* saved Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and his kinsfolk from this punishment. If someone were to ask, 'What does the word "kinsfolk" mentioned in the verse refer to? Does it refer to Lut's (Lot's) family members? Or does it refer to the believers who believed in him?' The answer is that it refers to both Lut's (Lot's) family members along with the group of believers from amongst his people. However, Allah *the Almighty* included the wife of Lut (Lot) in this punishment imposed on her people. This clearly indicates that the rest of his family had attained faith in his Message, and so did a group of his followers.

Thus, it is apparent that Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* was accompanied by some of his family members along with his followers; they were all from *al-Mutattahirin*, or 'the ones who purified themselves' It should be mentioned that 'purification' means that one keeps himself away from vileness and evil. In the same respect, when Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) advised his people to give full measure and weight in all their dealings along with not depriving people of what is rightfully theirs, they were utterly amazed by his saying, to the extent that they wondered if his prayer compels him to ask them to give up all that their forefathers were wont to worship. (*Hud*: 85-87)

The people of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) deemed it strange that prayer could forbid such a thing; their misguidance led them astray, to the extent that they did not understand that prayer forbids all evil things. Actually, some of the disbelievers of Mecca did the very same thing when they accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of madness even though they admitted that the Quran had been revealed to him: 'And they said, "O, you, to whom this exhortation (reminder) has been sent down, you are surely a madman."' (*al-Hijr*: 6)

Indeed, this statement of theirs indicates plainly that they were exceedingly foolish, for as long as they believed that the Quran has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, they should have asked themselves about the one who sent down this reminder upon him. Furthermore, the word 'exhortation (reminder)' refers to the Quran and the One Who sent it down is

Allah *the Almighty*. So, how could they acknowledge the Quran as a reminder and then accuse Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a madman. It goes without saying that they believed in the Quran as a reminder and that it was sent down to him, so how could he be mad?! The disbelievers of Mecca were undoubtedly deniers of the truth. In addition, their own statement clearly points out that their thinking was completely incorrect.

Concerning the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We saved him and his kinsfolk except his wife who stayed behind.' (*al-A'raf*: 83). The verse plainly affirms that the wife of Prophet Lut (Lot) was not included amongst those who were saved since she was one of those who stayed behind, or *al-Ghabirin*. The verb *Ghabara* conveys many meanings: it may convey the meaning of staying and remaining in a particular place; it can also be used to refer to anything which took place in the past. Arabs used to say, '*Hadha Ash-Shay' Ghabarat Ayyamuh*' or 'This thing has become obsolete.' This may cause someone to ask the following, 'How can one single word indicate one particular meaning and its opposite at the same time?' This question is actually based on the fact that the word *Ghabara* means 'to stay' and also 'to pass' or 'to end'. We reply that both of these opposite meanings given by this word *Ghabara* are understood from the verse, as follows: as long as Allah *the Almighty* saved Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* from the torment that He inflicted upon his people and as long as his wife did not exit from this land with him, this apparently means that she remained in the town where she was afflicted, like her people, with Divine Punishment. Furthermore, when these disbelievers from amongst the people of Lut (Lot) were destructed by Allah's Punishment, this means that they would be completely forgotten. Therefore, it is clear that the verse gives these two different meanings correctly indicated by this particular word *Ghabara*.

Thus, we shall not go into the details of why the wife of Prophet Lut (Lot) stayed behind. In this respect, I would like to draw your attention to an important fact, namely that some scholars have wrongly accused this woman of committing vile acts. They are completely wrong since if she had committed something like this, Allah *the Almighty* would have told us in the Quran. Therefore, we must suffice with these pieces of information delivered to us through the Quran

concerning this point which is that she acted contrary to the Message of Allah revealed to Lut (Lot) and that she did not have faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the chapter of *at-Tahrim* about the disbelief of the two wives of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and Prophet Lut (Lot), respectively. He *the Exalted* says that these two women had betrayed their husbands by disbelieving in the Divine Messages Allah *the Almighty* revealed to them: 'They were under two righteous servants of Ours, but they acted treacherously to them. So, they availed them naught against Allah, and it was said to them, "Enter the Fire, you two, along with those who enter it.'" (*at-Tahrim: 10*)

Some scholars yet mistakenly interpret the phrase, in the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *at-Tahrim*, '*Fa Khanatahuma*', which translates as 'they betrayed them'- to mean that these two wives of these two Prophets, Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) had committed adultery. Once again, I strongly stress that this opinion is completely wrong since if they had committed something like this, Allah *the Almighty* would have told us within the Quran. As for the matter of belief, it is entirely dependent upon one's free will. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* wants to tell us that even Messengers and Prophets were unable to cause their family members to attain faith which is, once again, a matter of free will. In addition, if we examine the verse more closely, we will certainly know that none of these two wives were arrogant with her husband, a matter confirmed by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* that both of these two women were under these two Prophets. This clearly means that Prophets Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* were in charge of their wives in spite of these two women's disbelief. As for faith, it is completely a matter of choice and free will; everyone has the free will to choose whatever religion he wants to adopt, and Allah *the Almighty* will judge all human beings on the Day of Resurrection. Confirming the fact that faith is a matter of choice and free will and that even Messengers and Prophets may be unable to guide even their own family members, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran about the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) about whom He *Glorified is He* states that he was not from his family: 'Allah said, "O, Nuh (Noah), he is surely not of your family. He is indeed a man of unrighteous conduct. So do not ask of Me that, of which you have no knowledge, I admonish you lest you be one of the ignorant.'" (*Hud: 46*)

Therefore, it is quite apparent at this point that man's free will to choose whatever religion he wants to adopt and follow was the main reason that led the two wives of these two Prophets to be disbelievers. In addition, even though Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* were two Prophets of Allah, they could not guide their own wives to attain faith, a matter that plainly indicates that belief is entirely dependent on man's free will to choose whatever he wants. This point is yet affirmed by another example of the wife of Pharaoh. Allah *the Almighty* tells us that this woman prayed to Him to build her a mansion in the Paradise and to save her from Pharaoh and his doings along with saving her from all evildoing people: 'And Allah puts forth as an example, for those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh when she said, "My Lord, build for me a house with You in the Garden and deliver me from Pharaoh and his work and deliver me from the wrongdoing people.'" (*at-Tahrim: 11*)

This aforementioned verse talks about the wife of Pharaoh who attained faith in Allah *the Almighty* even though her husband, Pharaoh, was a tyrant, who laid claim to divinity. However, Pharaoh could not prevent his wife from having belief in Allah. Thus, we find that Prophets themselves might be unable to guide their own wives to attain faith; the same applies to that tyrant who laid claim to divinity: he was unable to prevent his wife from attaining faith in Allah. This clearly shows us that belief is entirely a matter of free will and choice, which is completely protected so that everyone will be able to freely choose his religion on the basis of conviction.

Allah *Glorified is He* also gives us another example of Maryam (Mary), daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity: 'And sets forth as an example Maryam (Mary), the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity. So, We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and she fulfilled the prophecy conveyed to her in the words of her Lord contained in His Books, and she was one of the obedient.' (*at-Tahrim: 12*) We notice that Allah *the Almighty* did not give the names of the two wives of Prophets Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot), nor did He *Glorified is He* mention the name of the wife of Pharaoh, yet He did tell us the name of Maryam (Mary) and the name of her father. So, why were the first names left vague? The answer is that Allah *the Almighty* wants us to realise that it is quite possible for a woman to be married to a tyrant, yet she is a believer; and she may be married to a Prophet, yet she does not attain faith.

Back to the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*; He *the Almighty* says: 'We saved him and his kinsfolk except his wife who stayed behind.' (*al-A'raf*: 83) The saying of Allah *Anjayna* which translates as 'We saved him' indicates that the torment was yet to afflict the town in which Prophet Lut's (Lot's) people resided. Due to the fact that Allah *the Exalted* wanted to punish a particular group of people, namely the disbelievers from among the people of Lut (Lot) but not another, He caused those who were destined to be saved namely Prophet Lut (Lot) and the believers with him, to leave the town. Amazingly enough, the disbelievers from amongst the people of Lut (Lot) had previously made up their minds to expel Lut (Lot) and his followers from their town. So, Allah *the Almighty* ordered them to leave the town, not by way of fulfilling the wish of the disbelievers, but rather to save them from the Divine Punishment.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us about the kind of torment He afflicted the disbelievers from among the people of Lut (Lot) by saying:

وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مَطَرًا فَأَنْظَرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ

**And We showered upon [the rest of] them a rain [of destruction]. See the fate of the evildoers [84]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 84)**

Let us reflect on: What is the essence of that rain mentioned in this particular verse of *al-'Araf*? Was it the like the natural rain which usually falls down from the sky?' No, it was of another kind. Allah *the Exalted* in the chapter of *adh-Dharaiyat* tells us about it saying that He punished the disbelievers from among the people of Lut (Lot) by sending down upon them stones of clay: 'That we may send down upon them stones of clay, Marked with thy Lord, for those guilty of excesses.' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 33-34) So, it is clear that this particular rain mentioned in this verse of *al-'Araf* was none but the Divine punishment of the stones of clay that afflicted the extravagant from the people of Lut (Lot).

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the verse under discussion, the word *Fanzhur* which translates as 'see', is a term that means to strongly encourage people to reflect carefully on this story of the destruction of the

people of Lut (Lot) so that they would take admonition. It tells us, likewise, that Allah never leaves evildoers to transgress against His Messages delivered to people by His Messengers and Prophets, without meting out any punishment upon them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then proceeds to tell us about the story of another Prophet, Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* by saying:

وَإِلَىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِن إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ
 قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَالْمِيزَانَ وَلَا
 تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا
 ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

To the people of Madyan We sent their brother, Shu 'aib.

He said, 'My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you from your Lord.

Give full measure and weight and do not undervalue people's goods; do not cause corruption in the land after it has been set in order: this is better for you, if you are believers [85] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 85)

Midyan is one of the sons of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who came and settled in this place. Thus, this particular word Midyan is a name of that particular son of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). Later, this name was used to refer to that particular place-the area from Mount Sinai to the Euphrates- wherein he resided. When the descendants of Midyan grew numerous and became a tribe, it was named after him, namely the people of Midyan or the tribe of Midyan.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* again uses the word 'brother' to make it clear that if Midyan treated them sternly on one occasion, he *peace be upon him* would treat them compassionately on another since they were his brothers, and he felt affection towards them. He lived amongst them and they knew everything about him. Midyan was married to Prophet Lut's (Lot's) daughter. They reproduced and gave birth to many children, to the extent that they formed a tribe. Allah *the Almighty* sent Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* to the people of Midyan to deliver them, like the way all previous Prophets

did with their own people, Allah's Message. As stated in the Quran, Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* ordered them to worship Allah *the Almighty* solely, for there is no other god beside Him: 'My people, serve Allah: you have no god other than He.' (*al-A'raf*: 85)

Worship generally means to obey commandments and to keep away from prohibitions. As a matter of fact, one does not obey any commandment or even shun away from any prohibition of anyone unless he, who makes either the commandment or the prohibition, is of higher rank than him. If he were one's equal, he may ask, 'Why do you order me to do such and such? Or why do you order me to keep away from such and such?' Another example to illustrate this point is when a father orders his child not to do something, the child does not discuss it with him since he knows that his father is the one who provides him with food, drink and clothing. Yet, when the child grows up, he indeed will discuss the reasons behind commands and prohibitions with his father since his identity will be completely formed, and thus, he will want to know the wisdom behind commands and prohibitions.

He *the Almighty* tells us that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* said to them: 'My people, serve Allah. You have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you from your Lord.' The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'serve Allah: you have no god other than Him' clearly indicates that Shu'aib (Jethro) was a Messenger sent from Allah; therefore, he must have had a miracle to prove this. However, the Quran tells us that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) came with a clear sign and not a miracle.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'A clear sign has come to you from your Lord. Give full measure and weight.' Truthfully speaking, all acts of disobedience and disbelief lead to deceit in measuring and weighing. As long as Shu'aib (Jethro) ordered his people to give full measure and weight, this apparently indicates that the contrary, i.e. not giving full measure and weight, was a common act of disobedience at that particular period of time, and thus, he *peace be upon him* was sent to tackle this problems of undervaluing people's good and of not giving full measures and weight.

Some people mistakenly believe that this act of disobedience in the verse under discussion is of lesser evil. In other words, they think that undervaluing

other's goods and not giving them full measures and weight will help them acquire great wealth. When one deliberately weighs and measures deficiently, he commits this act of disobedience against those who buy from him. Then, the seller himself will go to buy from other people who will do the same things to him, making this act of disobedience spread on a large and wide scale. This is why if one gives full measure and weight to other people, he is undoubtedly doing what serves his interest since he will, by means of that, spread fairness amongst all people, for one's own interest will first and foremost be protected and, at the same time, so will be the interests of others.

Likewise, when one sells any commodity, even dates, and deliberately lessens the weight, he thereby makes a profit, which is not rightfully his; the same ruling applies to one who does not give the full weight of wheat to buyers. Wheat and dates are some of the major constituents of life. What is absolutely true is that most of people's essential commodities are weighed and measured. Thus, if one reduces the weight or the measure, people, in turn, will do the same with him. By doing as such, all the members of the society will suffer loss. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Give full measure and weight and do not undervalue people's goods.' (*al-A'raf*: 85)

In reality, if a loss incurred by reducing measures and weight is slight and bearable and yet forbidden by Allah, undervaluing people's goods and depriving them of what is rightfully theirs by unlawfully taking their wealth and usurping their rights are thus more sinful and evil. This is actually the main reason behind the prohibition of theft, for the thief unlawfully takes something which belongs to someone else and keeps it. In the same respect, we are prohibited, under Islamic Law, to extort, or pilfer or take bribes. This is the true understanding of this part of the verse under discussion. Basically, even though the loss incurred by not giving full measures and weight is slight, Allah *the Almighty* still forbids it. Therefore, it is consequently all the more certain that it is also forbidden to deprive people of what is rightfully theirs. Allah *Glorified is He* then continues: '... do not cause corruption in the land after it has been set in order.' (*al-A'raf*: 85)

Thus, it is quite clear that the Message of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) implied a number of orders and prohibitions. He *peace be upon him* ordered them to

worship Allah alone, for there is no other god but He *the Almighty*. As a result, this worship would have cultivated their manners and made them carry out Divine Orders. In addition, it would have made them more awestruck at the Might of Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* then ordered them to give full weight and measure. After that, he forbade them from depriving people of what is rightfully theirs and undervaluing their goods. Finally, he forbade them from causing corruption in the land after it has been set in order. Even though Allah *the Almighty* orders us to permanently carry out reform in the land, we should take into account that this reform is only achieved in light of the existence of the essential components of life.

Let us discuss a number of blessings conferred by Allah *the Almighty* upon mankind. For example, air is one of the most essential elements of life; He *the Almighty* keeps it in motion so that it does not corrupt. The second most essential blessing in life is drink; He *Glorified is He* sends down water from the sky. Allah *the Almighty* then causes the land to produce its grains, and as a result, people and animals eat. A fourth divine blessing conferred by Allah upon mankind is the livestock from which milk, hair, wool, and leather are taken. In fact, He *the Almighty* subdued all of this for us, which is the result of an order set by Him *the Almighty* in the land. However, are these all the essential constituents and components of life? The answer is 'No' since if all of these constituents are provided for us in the light of the spread of extortion, stealing, bribery and pilfering, everything will be corrupted. Truthfully speaking, there is nothing at all that can put things on the right track again except religion since it is the Way of Guidance prevents the spread of corruption on the earth.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'My people, serve Allah. You have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you from your Lord. Give full measure and weight and do not undervalue people's goods. Do not cause corruption in the land after it has been set in order.' (*al-A'raf*: 85) It goes without saying that the orders and prohibitions mentioned in this particular verse falls under the legal obligations of 'Do's and 'Dont's. These orders and prohibitions may yet be viewed as restricting the freedom of man; this is incorrect, and we will prove right now. It is of great importance while one is considering his own interests to also pay attention to public interests of the entire society.

Consequently, one only represents a single unit of the building of the entire society. Thus, all what the individual wants is to fulfil his interest, which represents only one part of the entire society's other vast interests. So, if one gives full measure and weight to other people, this is good for him, for the rest of the society, under the same prohibition, will surely deal with him in the same way, and thus, justice will prevail for the entire society.

Careful reflection on the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'and do not undervalue people's goods', indicates that all the members of the society are included under this prohibition, namely, you are commanded not to deprive other people of what is rightfully theirs, and so other people are commanded not to deprive you of anything which is rightfully yours. In the same respect, just as you are commanded not to spread corruption on the earth after it has been so well ordered, other people are also commanded not to do this; thus, the entire society experiences maximum benefit. This is why we should consider all the legal obligations and prohibitions, irrespective of all the burdens they impose, in the light of the interest that will be attained by the entire society. For example, when you are ordered not to look at what is unlawful for you, this entails that others are also prohibited from doing the same. This prohibition of not looking at what is forbidden to you undoubtedly protects and guards your honour. The same goes when you are ordered not to steal from others, for all other people are ordered not to steal from you. As such, the entire society will live in security.

By the same token, when you are ordered by virtue of legal obligation to pay almsgiving from your money, you must not disobey this order on grounds that you are the one who earns the money through your hard work, since all wealth belongs to Allah *the Almighty*. Likewise, you, a human being, have nothing to do in earning this money but exerting your efforts in accordance with the plans made by your mind. It is taken for granted that your efforts, mind, actions, etc. are created by Allah *the Almighty*. Considering all of this, He *the Exalted* obligates you to pay out a certain amount of your wealth to the poor. By doing so, He protects you from the calamities that may afflict man by the continuous change of time; the strong may turn weak, and vice versa, and the rich may turn poor, and vice versa, and so on. Therefore, it is clear

that you, under this obligation of giving obligatory charity, will permanently enjoy social solidarity, for in case you -a rich man- become poor, you will find others who will sustain and support you in the same way you did before.

In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran that if we want to feel secure about our young children after our death, we should then look after orphans in our society, and even be fathers to them. Furthermore, when all the members of the society perform the role of father to orphans, they will feel no sadness, for if they had already lost their fathers, the entire society of believers perform the same role. Thus, we will not fear for our own children if they become orphans since we have previously done the same with other orphans. However, we will surely grieve if we live in a society that does not care for orphans since it is at that time that we will be certain that our children will live under no protection or care.

In this way, it is quite clear that Divine obligations and ordinances are concerned with securing people's life. Another example to illustrate this point is when you say to a woman, 'Wear the headscarf, and do not show your beauty to any men other than your near relatives.' The woman might believe that her freedom is thus restricted under this obligation, yet, meanwhile, she does not take into account the fact that it is this particular obligation that protects her dignity at the given time when she becomes unattractive due to old age. A woman may marry whilst still young and beautiful. Then, when she reaches the age of forty, her beauty gradually fades due to the hardships of bearing and raising children, and thus, her husband, upon seeing a young woman showing her adornment, may feel no desire whatsoever to his wife whom he views unappealing. He may fall in love with this young one. Therefore, it is quite apparent that the *Shari'a*, Islamic Law, commands a woman to wear the headscarf when she is young in order to keep her husband for her when she gets older and less attractive. If the *Shari'a* restricted her when she was young, it restricts others in her interest when she gets older. Therefore, all of these obligations and prohibitions are meant to protect people's life.

At this point, it is quite evident that giving full measure and weight to people and the avoidance of depriving them of what is rightfully theirs, as well as the avoidance of spreading corruption on the earth after it has been so

well ordered are meant with achieving good for the entire society, both in this worldly life and the Hereafter. For this reason, He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying, '...This is better for you, if you are believers.'

The saying of Allah *the Almighty Dhalikum* which translates as 'This' refers to Divine commands and prohibitions that has just been mentioned in the verse under discussion. What this means is that we must worship Allah without ascribing any other partner in divinity to Him, to give full measure and weight in all dealings, not to deprive people of what is rightfully theirs and finally not to spread corruption on the earth after it has been so well ordered. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* encourages us to do so if we are believers. This brings up a very important point, which is when we carry out all these Divine commands, goodness will prevail the entire society including believers and disbelievers; yet we must take into account that believers will benefit from this goodness in both this world and the Hereafter. As for disbelievers, they will benefit the good of this world alone and will find nothing for them in the Hereafter. Therefore, if you (O, people of Midyan!) would but believe, the goodness resulting from carrying out these commands would be doubled for you so that it would be everlasting in this worldly life and the life to come.

Allah says:

وَلَا تَقْعُدُوا بِكُلِّ صِرَاطٍ تُوعِدُونَ وَتَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مَنْ
ءَامَنَ بِهِ، وَتَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَأَذْكَرُوا إِذْ كُنْتُمْ قَلِيلًا
فَكَثَّرَكُمُ وَأَنْظَرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

Do not sit in every pathway, threatening and barring those who believe in God from His way, trying to make it crooked.

Remember how you used to be few and He made you multiply. Think about the fate of those who used to spread corruption [86] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 86)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty Wa la Taq'udu Bikulli Sirat*, which means 'Do not set in every pathway' is an order to them not to sit on the roads, lest that they might bar the way of those who are attempting to get to the Messenger or Prophet. In this respect, we should take into account the fact

that Satan had previously said to Allah *the Almighty* that he shall most certainly lie in ambush for the children of Adam all along His *Glorified is He* Straight Way: 'He said, "Now, since You have adjudge me to be erring, I will assuredly lie in wait for them on Your straight path.'" (*al-A'raf*: 16)

Therefore, when you sit on every road to prevent people from reaching the Messenger, each one of you thereby becomes a demon, exactly like Satan. This is why He *the Almighty* prohibits the act of sitting in every path. Thus, we should take into account a very important point, namely that Allah *the Exalted* has only One Straight Path which we all must follow and firmly adhere to. The ways of Satan, on the other hand, are numerous, and this is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-An'am* in which He *Glorified is He* orders us to follow His Way and not to follow other ways, lest they cause us to deviate from His Way: 'And say, "This is My straight path. So follow it and follow not other ways, lest they lead you away from His Way. That is what He enjoins upon you, that you may be able to guard against evils.'" (*al-An'am*: 153) It is thus clear that the ways of misguidance of Satan are numerous including temptation with money, women, authority, etc., whilst the way of righteousness is one.

This particular part of the verse may also indicate that the guidance to which every Messenger called his people was so common that it affected everything around him; yet when anyone comes towards any way of guidance, he will find those who try to turn him away, to the extent that he who seeks the guidance of the Messenger, will be met with threats and obstacles to prevent them from reaching the way of the truth. So, why do they do this? Allah *the Almighty* answers this question to us when He says: '... trying to make it crooked.' (*al-A'raf*: 86) This means that they try their utmost effort and avidly seek to make the *Shari'a* of Allah (Islamic Law) crooked and deviant from the way of righteousness. Another possible explanation for this particular part of the verse is that disbelievers from amongst the people of Shu'aib (Jethro) used to describe the *Shari'a* of Allah as being unrighteous in order to prevent people from embracing it along with making them averse to it. People who are addicted to drinking of alcohol, for example, bitterly criticise the prohibition of it, for they mistakenly believe that it brings one happiness and well-being. Yet, they are only doing so out of their desire to make the *Shari'a* of Allah

crooked or to prevent people from embracing it. In the same respect, we find people who declare usury to be lawful since they mistakenly believe that its prohibition prevents people from considerable benefit. Therefore, such people do so in order to achieve their personal goals or to make people averse to it.

Allah *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying: 'Remember how you used to be few and He made you multiply. Think about the fate of those who used to spread corruption.' (*al-A'raf*: 86) We know for certain that all proscriptions and prescriptions are meant with achieving two main goals, namely encouraging people to do good and deterring them from committing evil. For example, a teacher might say to his pupils, 'I will give a prize to the hardest worker.' This is actually an act of encouragement, yet, he then adds, 'However, if anyone is neglectful with his studies, I will expel him from the school.' This is viewed as an act of intimidation. As long as people are able, by virtue of the free will implanted in them out of Allah's Infinite Wisdom, to choose either to do good deeds or to do evil ones, they must be addressed by these two things: encouragement to do good and intimidation from doing evil.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Remember how you used to be few and He made you multiply.' It is as though He *Glorified is He* is asking them to reflect upon the Blessings He conferred upon them, so that they would give up their stubbornness. We know quite well that Midyan married the daughter of Prophet Lut (Lot), and they had many children, to the extent that they became a tribe. Furthermore, the members of this tribe of Midyan were weak, but He *Glorified is He* strengthened them. They were also poor, but He *the Almighty* enriched them. So, as long as He *the Almighty* is the One Who did all this to you and for you, why should you not then obey His Commandments?! Indeed, you should have done so. Also, this particular part of the verse implies some kind of encouragement to them to refrain from the evil they used to do.

Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* was preceded by four Prophets, namely Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* all... Therefore, he was the fifth one to be sent after these previous four. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* in this particular verse being explored, reminded disbelievers from among the people of Midyan of the Divine

punishments that befell disbelievers who denied and rejected the Messages of the Prophets before Shu'aib (Jethro). This is to say that even though the people of Nuh (Noah) might have been excused since they were the first ever to experience this Divine Punishment, Allah *the Exalted* did not pardon them but afflicted them with this great torment, so that all people would know with certainty that whoever denies the Messages of Prophets and Messengers, will be afflicted with such severe Divine punishments. This point is affirmed in the Quran by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-'Ankabut* in which He *Glorified is He* says that He seized each of the wrongdoers and the evildoers with their sins: 'So each one of them We seized for his sin; of them were those against whom We sent a violent sandstorm, and of them were those whom a roaring blast overtook, and of them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow up, and of them were those whom We drowned. And Allah did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves.' (*al-'Ankabut*: 40)

Thus, Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* warned them of the bad consequences of denying his Message asking them to think about the fate of those who used to spread corruption from amongst the previous nations. He *peace be upon him* gave them warnings of the punishment that afflicted disbelievers from amongst the people of Nuh (Noah) who were tortured by drowning, of the punishment that afflicted those disbelievers from among the people of Hud (Eber) who were taken by the wind storm, of the punishment that afflicted the deniers of the truth from amongst the people of Saleh (Shelah) whose houses were overturned and destroyed and of the punishment that afflicted disbelievers from amongst the people of Lut (Lot) upon whom stones of clay were poured down from the sky. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wants to deter the people of Midyan by asking them to think about the bad consequences of those who spread corruption before them. Of course, He *the Exalted* proceeded to threatening them after they failed to seize the opportunity of encouragement granted to them by Him. Allah *the Almighty* encouraged them to refrain from their evil acts by asking them to reflect upon His countless Blessings upon them, yet they failed.

Allah says:

وَإِنْ كَانَ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنكُمْ ءَامَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ، وَطَائِفَةٌ لَّمْ
 يُؤْمِنُوا فَاصْبِرُوا حَتَّىٰ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ بَيْنَنَا وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

If some of you believe the message I bring and others do not, then be patient till God judges between us. He is the best of all judges'[87] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 87)

This verse clearly indicates that there were some people who believed in the Message of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro), while some others did not. Allah *the Almighty* then orders, as indicated by the verse, the two groups (believers and disbelievers) to be patient until He judges amongst them. Yet, this touches upon a very important point of showing the absolute accuracy of the Quranic style, namely that even though the Order issued by Allah to the two groups is the same, the meaning inferred from it is different in the case of believers from the case of disbelievers. As for believers, the order to be patient implies they will be admitted into paradise, and as for disbelievers, it ironically tells them about the bad consequence that awaits them in the Hereafter, namely the severe punishment that will afflict them. In the same respect, the verse tells that Allah, the best of all judges, is the One Who will judge all of mankind. We know with absolute certainty that people are all equal in the sight of Allah, the All-Just, and thus He never commits any injustice against anyone.

Allah says:

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِن قَوْمِهِ لِنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يَشُعَيْبُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا
 مَعَكَ مِن قَرْيَتِنَا أَوْ لَتَعُودَنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَا قَالَ أُولَٰئِكَ كَفَرِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

His people's arrogant leaders said, 'Shu'aib, we will expel you and your fellow believers from our town unless you return to our religion.' He said, 'What! Even if we detest it? [88] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 88)

We previously explained that the Arabic word *al-Mala'* refers to these arrogant leaders who were of high social rank, a ranking so high that people feared them. This verse indicates that the arrogant leaders from the people of

Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) denied and rejected his Message and even threatened to expel him and the believers with him from their land, exactly as the disbelievers from among the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) did before: 'However, the only answer of his people was that they said, "Drive out Lut's (Lot's) family from your city. They are a people who would keep pure."' (*an-Naml*: 56)

The word *Qarya*, usually referred to as 'village' in English, is mistakenly used nowadays to give a meaning which is different from the original meaning it must convey; we now use it to refer to a particular area which is smaller than a town, yet it was used in the past to refer to such a place wherein all the essential components of life were found. This is why Mecca was called '*Umm al-Qura*' or 'The Mother of Lands'. Back to Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*; the arrogant leaders from amongst his people asked him and his followers to choose between two options, which were to leave their land so that they would not misguide, as the arrogant leaders said, or to return to their previous religion.

A very wonderful subtle observation can be made, which I would like to draw attention to, namely the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...unless you return to our religion' which indicates that they would return to something they had already been accustomed to previously. However, the question to ask is 'Did Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers previously follow the ways of their people, and then they came to have faith, and now they were being asked to return again to their original religion?!'

We must fully recognise the fact that even though this statement addresses both Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers, it is inconceivable to think that Shu'aib (Jethro) is included in the order of these arrogant leaders of his people to return to their religion since he was a Messenger sent by Allah. Yet, the believers with Shu'aib (Jethro) might be included in this order since they actually followed the religion of their people before the advent of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro).

Therefore, the arrogant leaders from amongst the people of Shu'aib (Jethro) asked him to choose either to return to their religion or to leave the town, yet they did not take into account a very important point which is that the Will of Allah *the Almighty* might have decreed something else other than

these two options offered by them, something that would go against the will of those arrogant leaders. For example, what if they were afflicted with an awful disaster that would completely prevent them from fulfilling their will!

It is ever so apparent that these arrogant leaders from amongst the people of Shu'aib (Jethro) did not take into account the fact that the Divine Will might have already decreed something else other than these two options. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* might have decreed to make them suffer weakness and thus be unable to expel Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his followers of faith, or even afflict them with an awful and big disaster that would completely and utterly destroy them. So, how could it be for such arrogant leaders of Midyan to decide a matter which goes against the Supreme Will of Allah *the Almighty*?! How could they ask Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his followers of faith to choose between two particular options even though the Will of Allah might have decreed something else?! However, how did Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his fellow believers answered them? The Quran tells us about their response, confirming that they rejected this call issued by those arrogant disbelievers: 'What! Even if we detest it?' (*al-A'raf*: 88) This means that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers wondered if it was possible to force someone to abandon faith for disbelief! Consequently, this statement of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his followers indicates that disbelievers had forgotten that moral responsibility is subject to one's free will and man is thus able to choose between the way of faith and the way of disbelief.

Allah *the Almighty* continues narrating what Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) later told them by saying:

قَدْ أَفْرَيْنَا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا إِنَّ عُدْنَا فِي مِلَّتِكُمْ بَعْدَ إِذْ بَخَّسْنَا اللَّهَ مِنْهَا وَمَا
يَكُونُ لَنَا أَنْ نَعُودَ فِيهَا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَسِعَ رَبُّنَا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا عَلَى
اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا رَبَّنَا افْتَحْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ قَوْمِنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْفَاتِحِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

If we were to return to your religion after God has saved us from it, we would be inventing lies about Him: there is no way we could return to it – unless by the will of God our Lord: in His knowledge He comprehends everything. We put

**our trust in God. Our Lord, expose the truth [and judge]
between us and our people, for You are the best judge' [89]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 89)**

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'If we were to return to your religion after Allah has saved us from it, we would be inventing lies about Him', means that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his followers knew quite well that returning to their people's religion would be, in a way, telling a deliberate lie against Allah. Furthermore, 'to lie' means to say something which is not true and to affirm something which is not real. If one, however, says something while knowing that it is not real or true, this is considered as a lie; yet, if one knows perfectly well the truth but says something different, this is judged as an act of lying and deliberately spreading falsehood. As for the believers with Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro), they certainly knew that their old religion was false. In addition, they, having believed in the Message of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro), had experienced the sweetness of faith and thus refused to tell a deliberate lie against Allah *the Almighty*. They said as mentioned in the Quran: 'If we were to return to your religion after Allah has saved us from it, we would be inviting lies about Him.'

This part of the verse clearly elucidates that the believers with Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) knew that moral responsibility is completely a matter of choice and that they had chosen faith. Yet, they meanwhile affirmed the undeniable fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who has Absolute Omnipotent Power; a point which is quite clear in their saying: '...unless by the Will of Allah, our Lord...' It is taken for granted that His Will cannot be challenged by any other will. In this respect, a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* may be stated: 'Indeed, the hearts of the children of Adam are between two Fingers of Allah's Fingers, He changes them as He wills.'⁽¹⁾

In the same respect, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked Allah *the Almighty* to preserve him and his children from ever worshipping idols: 'And call to mind when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord, make this a city of peace and preserve me and my children from worshipping idols."' (*Ibrahim*: 35)

(1) Narrated by Muslim

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was fully aware of the Absolute Omnipotent Power of Allah, so he did not ask Him to preserve the entire humanity from worshipping idols; rather, he restricted his supplication to himself and his own children. Likewise, the believers who followed Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) made a similar request by saying, '... there is no way we could return to it-unless by the Will of Allah our Lord.'

However, it goes without saying that Messengers and Prophets, infallible human beings, are protected, by the Will of Allah, from falling into the trap of misguidance. Furthermore, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who guides people to the way of righteousness and He is also the One Who supports people to keep on the Straight Path.

Allah *the Exalted* continues telling us about how those who believed in Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) responded to their arrogant leaders by saying: '... In His Knowledge He comprehends everything. We put our trust in Allah. Our Lord, expose the truth [and judge] between us and our people, for You are the best judge.' (*al-A'raf*: 89) The believers declared that they had placed their trust in Allah since the arrogant leaders of their people asked them to choose between leaving their town or returning to their previous religion. In other words, these arrogant leaders of the people of Midyan, in this verse, wanted to force the believers to abandon their faith and that is why the latter placed trust and confidence in Allah *the Almighty* so that He would protect them from the arrogance of these disbelievers.

When we read the word 'open', 'he opened' or 'opening', words that are composed of the root *f-t-h*, we understand that there is something which is closed or vague. Yet, if we are talking about a physical object, *fath* will mean opening something which is closed by removing locks. Furthermore, if we are speaking about the 'opening' of a non-physical thing, then it means to remove its vagueness. Consequently, examples for these two cases have been mentioned clearly in the Quran. Regarding the first case, which is 'opening' of closed, physical objects, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *Yusuf* that when the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) opened their packs, they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them. (*Yusuf*: 65)

In reality, their saying that 'when they opened their packs' means that the packs were closed and needed to be physically opened. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* telling us about the people of paradise says in the chapter of *az-Zumar*: 'And those, who feared their Lord, will be conducted to Heaven in groups until when they arrive there, its gates will be opened and its Keepers will say to them, "Peace be upon you! Be happy, and enter it, abiding therein."' (*az-Zumar*: 73) Therefore, as long as the doors will be opened, this means that this act of opening applies to a physical object.

On the other hand, *al-Fath* may be used in connection with matters of belief and knowledge wherein it will indicate the meaning of 'disclose or unveil, etc.' Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran orders believers not to inform disbelievers of what He has disclosed, or *fataha* to them so that disbelievers might use it in arguments against them: 'And when they meet those who believe, they say 'We believe.' And when they meet one another in private, they say, 'Do you inform them (the believers) of what Allah has unfolded to you, that they may thereby argue with you before your Lord. Will you not then understand?' (*al-Baqara*: 76)

This particular word *al-Fath* may be used to refer to the bringing of goodness and assistance. This is proven by the saying of Allah in the chapter of *Fatir* in which Allah *the Almighty* says that whatever grace or mercy He opens up to man, none can withhold it: 'Whatever sources of mercy Allah lays open for mankind - there is none to withhold them.' (*Fatir*: 2)

The same meaning of bringing of goodness and assistance is also evident in His Saying in the chapter of *al-'Araf*: 'And if the people of those towns had believed and been righteous, We would have surely opened for them blessings from heaven and earth, but they disbelieved, so We seized them because of that which they earned.' (*al-A'raf*: 96)

Furthermore, rain, which is the most important reason behind the goodness that comes forth from the land, is undoubtedly one of these blessings that came from heaven.

Yet, this particular word *al-Fath* can also be used to convey the meaning of 'settling a conflict or a dispute' between two rivals or enemies. Even until

recently, Yemenites call a judge who rules over people's affairs 'the Opener' or *al-Fatih* since he settles conflicts between parties. *al-Fath* can also mean 'victory'; it is used in this respect in the saying of Allah in which He states that the Jews used to pray for victory (*yastaftihun*) over those who were bent on denying the truth: 'And when there came to them a book from Allah, fulfilling that which is with them - and before that they have prayed for victory over the disbelievers - yet when there came to them that which they knew to be the truth, they rejected it. The curse of Allah be on the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara*: 89). The Jews waited for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to come and lead them to victory over those who disbelieved.

Concerning the true and exact meaning of *al-Fath* in the verse under discussion, it is to finally and wisely decide on matters.

This statement of the believers from among the people of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) is, in essence, a supplication to Allah in order to make His Religion victorious over disbelief. Allah says:

وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَئِنِ اتَّبَعْتُمْ شُعَيْبًا إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا لَخَسِرُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

**The disbelieving leaders among his people said,
'You will certainly be losers if you follow Shu'aib [90]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 90)**

This verse indicates that the arrogant leaders from the people of Midyan warned those who already believed in Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and those who were ready to believe in him against following him; the arrogant leaders claimed that they would not be the only ones who remain in misguidance.

When we read the word *la* (certainly) followed by *in* (if), we should recognise that it implies an oath. In this verse, there is also the particle *in* (if) which implies a condition; both the two Arabic styles of oath and condition require a clause of result. Yet, when the first clause contains an oath and condition structure, we provide the result of the one that proceeds in order. For example, we say, 'By Allah, if you do this, such-and-such will occur.' The same applies to Allah *the Almighty* with the verse under discussion: 'The disbelieving leaders among his people said, "You will certainly be losers if you

follow Shu'aib.'" (*al-A'raf*: 90) However, what would those who believed in Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) lose? In the opinion of the arrogant leaders of the people of Midyan, the believers had lost the extra amount they were to (unlawfully) take when they gave less than due. Therefore, the strong committed injustice against the weak. So, when these believers adhered to and followed the Way of Allah, they lost out what they were to take by systematically reducing the measures and weight, which is a great loss in the opinion of those who are deviant. Allah tells us about the punishment that afflicted them by saying:

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جِثْمًا ﴿٩١﴾

**An earthquake seized them: by the next morning
they were lying dead in their homes [91]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 91)**

The saying of Allah *the Almighty Ar-Rrajfa* which translates as 'an earthquake' in this verse means a violent movement that causes man to tremble involuntarily. When the disbelievers of Midyan were afflicted with this punishment, they lay dead in their homes; they were in a state of abasement. This indicates that when every one of them was afflicted with the punishment, he remembered all their previous acts of disbelief and disobedience and thus wanted to show remorse for each one of them. They even blamed and reproached themselves for the injustice they had committed. At the point when the punishment befell them, they displayed no arrogance at all. Consequently, at times of disasters and calamities, people, even the arrogant, will not deceive themselves. This is why we find that those who wrong and oppress others and usurp their rights want to give these rights back to their rightful owners when they are in the agony of death, but they do not find those whom they wronged. Due to this, they say that it during that particular moment that a wicked man attains faith, but faith at that moment will not benefit one in any way. Allah *Glorified is He* continues to describe what happened to them after the earthquake seized them by saying:

الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْبًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْبًا كَانُوا هُمُ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

It was as if those who had rejected Shu'aib had never lived there; it was those who had rejected Shu'aib who were the losers [92] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 92)

The Arabic term *Ghana Bi al-Makan* means that someone had already resided in it. Therefore, when the disbelievers of Midyan became lifeless and their homes were destroyed, it was as if they had never dwelled there for they were utterly annihilated and wiped out. Ironically, although these deniers had said to the followers of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) that they would be losers if they followed him, they themselves, the ones who denied the Message of Shu'aib (Jethro) were the losers.

Continuing His Speech about Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَنَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يٰ قَوْمِ لَقَدْ اَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ فَكَيْفَ ءَاَسَىٰ عَلٰى قَوْمٍ كٰفِرِيْنَ ﴿٩٣﴾

So he turned away from them, saying, 'My people, I delivered my Lord's messages to you and gave you sincere advice, so why should I grieve for people who refused to believe?' [93] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 93)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'So he turned away from them...' means that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* left and went far away from them, and then, he spoke to them symbolically by saying to them, 'My people, I delivered my Lord's Messages to you and gave you sincere advice.' It is as if Prophet Shu'aib's (Jethro's) *peace be upon him* natural human feelings and emotions were roused when he saw their awful and dreadful fate; he even felt sympathy for them and mourned, but then he overcame this emotion by asking rhetorically, 'So why should I grieve for people who refused to believe?' In fact, ordinary believers, let alone prophets and messengers, do not grieve for these people. This is why he reflected, 'I was not remiss in undertaking my mission, rather, I delivered to you the Messages which I received from Allah.'

The word *Ar-Risalat* which translates as 'Messages', may refer to the Message of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and the Messages of the previous Messengers before him *peace be upon them* concerning the laws in which no abrogation or change was made; it may also refer to all the different messages he conveyed to them since every time a ruling was sent down to him, he would convey it to them. Or, it means that for every good thing there is a message, and for every evil thing there is a message. Indeed, he conveyed to them everything he received from Allah; he did not confine himself only to conveying the Message to them, rather, he also gave them good and sincere advice. It should be stated that there is a big difference between *An-Nushr* and *al-Balagh*. *An-Nushr* is 'conveying what you have received or known and that is all', whilst *al-Balagh* is imploring people to follow the Way of Allah. Allah says:

﴿٩٤﴾ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا أَخَذْنَا أَهْلَهَا بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَضَّرِعُونَ

**Whenever We sent a prophet to a town, We afflicted its
[disbelieving] people with suffering and hardships, so
that they might humble themselves [before God] [94]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 94)**

We previously explained that the word *al-Qarya* which translates as a 'town' in this verse means a place which provides all of the life's components for its inhabitants.

What is meant by the word *al-Qarya* in this verse is that town to which He *the Almighty* sends a Messenger, yet its people denied and rejected his Message. As a result, Allah *the Exalted* would afflict its inhabitants with misfortune and hardship. 'Misfortune' or *al-Ba'sa'* means a calamity which afflicts one in something other than himself such as the loss of money, the ruin of a business, the destruction of a house, etc. As for 'hardship' or *Ad-Darra'*, it means a calamity which afflicts man himself, such as illness. In fact, He *the Almighty* afflicts them with misfortune and hardship since they forgot Him in times of ease, so He sends them misfortune and hardship that perhaps they might return to their Lord and seek Him out so that He will be with them in both times of ease and times of hardship. Telling us about man's nature when he is afflicted with any kind of harm, Allah *the Exalted* says that when affliction

befalls man, he cries out to Him, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing, but as soon as He has freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked Him to save him from the affliction that befell him!: 'And when trouble befalls a man, he calls on Us, lying on his side, or sitting or standing, but when We have removed his trouble from him, he goes his way as though he had never called on Us for the removal of the trouble that befell him. Thus, it is that the doings of the extravagant are made to seem fair in their eyes.' (*Yunus*: 12)

Man should turn to his Creator when misfortune befalls him. He *the Almighty* made misfortune a means of alerting and reminding man that he has a Lord; it is at this point that Allah *the Exalted* answers the call of the straitened person and comes to his aid. Allah says in the Quran that it is He Who responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him and Who removes the ill that caused the distress. In addition, He *the Almighty* has made us inherit the earth. He concludes the verse with stating that most people seldom bear these facts in mind: 'Or, Who answers the cry of the distressed person when he calls upon Him, and removes the evil, and makes you successors in the earth? Is there a god with Allah? Little is that you reflect.' (*an-Naml*: 62)

If Allah does this with the distressed person, he might be fully aware of the fact that he must not forget Allah *the Almighty* the One Who answered his call at times of distress. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* reminds us of His Omnipotent Power when He says that yet when the misfortune decreed by Him befell them, they did not humble themselves: 'Why, then, when Our punishment came upon them, did they not humble themselves? But their hearts were hardened all the more and Satan made all that they did seem fair to them.' (*al-An'am*: 43)

Therefore, when misfortune afflicts us Allah *the Almighty* wants us to seek refuge in Him; He does not want us to feel that we are left in this world alone, rather, He wants us to firmly believe that the course of our lives is running smoothly by virtue of the means created and subdued to us by Him *the Almighty*. Yet, whoever finds no way to make use of these created means let him resort to Allah *the Almighty* and the Creator of these means. This is why Allah *the Exalted* out of His Mercy, afflicts any town that denies the Messages

of their Messengers with misfortune and hardships so that its people might humble themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* in the Quran tells us: 'That the hearts of those deniers of the truth had already grown hard.' (*al-An'am*: 43) Thus, do we think that Allah *the Almighty* will leave them all the time in this happiness or in this affliction? The answer is definitive 'No', for He afflicts them with hardships and misfortune so that their hearts might incline towards Him *the Almighty*. Yet, in case they do not go back to Him, He changes the hardship into prosperity in accordance with His saying,

ثُمَّ بَدَّلْنَا مَكَانَ السَّيِّئَةِ الْحَسَنَةَ حَتَّىٰ عَفَوْا وَقَالُوا قَدْ مَسَّ
 ءِآبَاءَنَا الضَّرَّاءُ وَالسَّرَّاءُ فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

And then We changed their hardship into prosperity, until they multiplied. But then they said, 'Hardship and affluence also befell our forefathers,' and so We took them suddenly, unawares [95] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 95)

This verse actually tells us about one of Allah's most important Laws in the universe, that is, if He wants to utterly destroy a tyrant, He supplies him with abundance in wealth and health. Then, He gives respite to him and even allows him to be of extreme cruelty until He *the Almighty* will suddenly overtake him by the Mighty, Powerful One. Pharaoh is a case in point. Allah *the Almighty* allowed him to transgress to an extent that he falsely claimed to be the 'Most Exalted Lord', and thus, Allah seized him in exemplary punishment for the last and the first transgression.

As a matter of fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'until they multiplied' means that these people who rejected to the Messages of their Messengers increased in number, wealth, and power. Thus, the meaning will be that He *the Almighty* only afflicted them with hardships and misfortune in order to make them turn to Him. Yet, when they did not consider this trial, He provided them with wealth and all that pleased them, and then He overtook them without any warning.

Having shed light on the fact that Allah *the Exalted* created man to perform the role of vicegerency upon earth, He provided them with everything by

means of which their lives are preserved: how He, through the Messages of His Messengers, provided them with moral values; how He *the Almighty* sent down His Way of Guidance to make clear what He had made lawful to them and what He had forbidden upon them. Therefore, we notice that some of the adversaries of Islam, out of their desire to turn people away from the Straight Path, ask the following question, 'As long as Allah had judged something as being unlawful, why did He create it?' To those people, we reply that everything in this life has been created out of Allah's Infinite Wisdom, which means that there is a wise reason behind the creation and existence of everything in this life, but this reason might yet have nothing to do with food, drink, and clothing. For example, a number of things had been created in this life to achieve a particular purpose which might not concern man directly. Petroleum, for example, is created to fulfil a particular purpose, namely the producing of energy and that is why we do not drink it. In the same respect, there is a Great Divine Wisdom behind the creation of pigs, yet it is only known to Allah *the Almighty*. We may assume that the wisdom behind the creation of pigs is that they serve as means to gather the microbes which emerge from decomposition of things used by people. Therefore, it is clear that everything in this world is created for a wise purpose, so you (O, mankind!) should not, based on your whims, believe that the wisdom behind the creation of a particular thing is such and such, which may be totally against the Great and Profound Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty*. It is taken for granted that Allah, the Creator is the One Who is only entitled to exactly define and set the course and the way for His Creation. We know, for example, that there are many forms of fuel: there is the very clean petrol known as 'number 1 fuel, which is specially used for planes, whilst the petrol used for cars is labelled 'number 2'. Thus, if we use the fuel specially designated to a particular machine in place of another, the machine will get out of order or not function properly. In the same respect, Allah *the Almighty* having created mankind and subdued all other created beings for them, clarified, 'These things are eligible for your direct use, whilst these others are created to serve you in an indirect way. So leave them alone.'

Having told us about the positions of the people of paradise, the dwellers of the hellfire and the denizens of the Heights- those whose good deeds are

equal to their evil deeds- along with clarifying and explaining to us His Divine Way of Guidance, He wanted to show us quite clearly that all of the aforementioned things are not merely theoretical, rather, they are facts that actually took place. In fact, we should take into account that there is a difference between theory and practice. So, He *the Almighty* told us about the stories of the Prophets when He sent them to their people, confirming that those who denied these Divine Messages were overtaken in a manner of a Mighty, Powerful One, a thing which all people during that particular period of time witnessed. Allah *Glorified is He* told us the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* with his people, the story of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* with his people (‘Ad) the story of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* with his people (Thamud), the story of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* with his people of Midyan and the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* with his people. In all of these stories, Allah *the Exalted* told us quite clearly that the believers were saved from the different severe punishments that afflicted the disbelievers and the deniers of the truth. In the same respect, He *the Almighty* explains that He afflicts people with misfortune and hardships so that they might humble themselves before Him. Man is a creature to whom Allah gives many of His Attributes of Majesty and His Attributes of Beauty; Allah is the All-Powerful, and thus, He gave man some of His Power; He *the Almighty* is the All-Rich, and thus, He gave man some of His riches; He *the Almighty* is All-Wise, and thus, He gave man part of His Wisdom, and He *Glorified is He* is All Knowing, and thus, He gave man part of His Knowledge.

In fact, if one wants to have a clear view about the Perfect Knowledge of Allah *the Almighty* let him then consider today’s scientific advancement and progress in the light of the undeniable fact that this knowledge is still incomplete and imperfect. In addition, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who enabled them to achieve all of this progress and all of mankind’s knowledge is thus attributed to Him. Yet, man might be deluded by the material means when the latter obey them, to the extent that he might falsely believe that they had complete control over things; man ordered them, and the material means carried out the order! In actuality, this causes him to incorrectly believe that he had held absolute power over things. This is why Allah *the Almighty* warns us against this point, saying in the Quran that man becomes incredibly arrogant whenever

he believes himself to be self-sufficient: 'Nay! Man, indeed, transgresses because he thinks himself to be independent.' (*al-'Alaq: 6-7*)

When man finds all of the material means at his disposal, he should remember that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who provides them with all of this. It goes without saying that man's body parts are subject to his will; when one wants to stand up, his body parts perform the action of standing, and when he wants to hit someone, his body parts responds positively to him and perform the action of hitting. So if this happens within man who is created by Allah *the Almighty* the universe which is also created by Him, must have, in turn, become entirely subject to His Will. Thus, if man, relying on the material means in the universe, believes that he became self-sufficient, He *the Almighty* would afflict him with a trial so that he would return to Him. For example, a person with good health might be afflicted with a particular disease and thus become weak to the extent that he seeks the help of others to move or to do a particular act. Therefore, it is of great importance to note that Allah *the Almighty* destructs tyrants and oppressors with the very same things they used to show arrogance thereby. Thus, it is clear that Allah *the Exalted* wants us not to forget about Him, the Creator of all means.

In this respect, it is of great importance to know that Allah *Glorified is He* fills the universe with different wonders and secrets. Today, science has achieved great advances and progress in the field of astrophysics to the extent that man unveiled a number of Allah's Secrets in the universe, yet scientists are still unable to reveal the secrets of particular phenomena, a matter that shows man's incapability. Having finished the manufacturing of a particular advanced machine, they discover the existence of one single defect by means of which the entire work will be in vain. In the same respect, we should take into account that when a storm or hurricane blows and destroys everything or when there is a big fire that eagerly devours everything before it, this actually does not mean that He *the Almighty* wants to spread corruption in the earth; rather, He wants to alert us so that we do not become deluded by the means which we have been given. As a matter of fact, even though radars have been manufactured to enable us to predict events before their occurrence, Allah *the Exalted* may sometimes cause these

radars to be inoperative so that people may fully respect and acknowledge the fact that their knowledge is still imperfect.

Therefore, it becomes quite clear that affliction with misfortune and hardship is one of Allah's Laws by means of which the affairs of the universe run smoothly. It is primarily meant with allowing man to be fully aware of the fact that he had come into existence to perform the role of vicegerency on the earth. This is why the corruption of man stems first and foremost from the fact he mistakenly believe that the entire universe will not dispense with him. Basically, the falsehood of this conviction is proven by the fact that people die and still the affairs of the universe run smoothly in their absence. It thus goes without saying that man will never be able to make all what is in the universe subject to his will since there are some natural laws in the universe which refuse to obey him, and thus, he can never control them.

Nowadays we see a number of nuclear reactors that exploded after having been set in order. This raises the question: 'Why?' In fact, the explosion and the destruction of these reactors clearly indicate the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty* which is unchallengeable and cannot be defeated. Once again, afflicting people with misfortune, hardships and things which we might view as 'evil' and 'bad' is primarily meant with returning man to the essence of his role as Allah's vicegerent on the earth. That is to say that if he is deluded by the created material means, Allah will afflict him with such trials to make him return to Him *the Almighty* the Creator of means. Furthermore, when Allah *the Exalted* tries people with misfortunes which are calamities that do not, in essence, afflict man himself, rather, something or someone else such as loss of wealth or loss of children or the destruction of one's home. Or when Allah *the Almighty* tries them with hardships which are calamities that befall man's person, this means that He wants to remove their ostentation of pride, and thus, they should find no recourse other than to surrender themselves before the Lord of heavens and earths and to humble themselves before Him *the Almighty*.

We previously explained that the Arabic word *At-Tadaru'* means 'to show humility and be humble before Allah *the Almighty*'. Yet, if the disbelievers and the deniers of the truth took no admonition whatsoever from these afflictions to the effect that they believed that these were nothing but natural disasters

that might befall people at any time, Allah *the Almighty* will, amazingly, change these afflictions and hardships into prosperity in accordance with His saying in the chapter of *al-An 'am* in which He says: 'When they forgot that with which they had been admonished, and We opened unto them the gates of all things, till, even as they were rejoicing in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, and lo! they were in utter despair.' (*al-An 'am*: 44)

When people stray far from the Divine way of guidance, Allah *the Almighty* will give them requite in a way which fits their crime. Likewise, if He *the Exalted* were to take them to task whilst being in a wretched condition, the impact of the punishment would not be so powerful; therefore, He opens the gates of all good things for them so that when He overtakes them suddenly and unexpectedly, the punishment will be severer and more painful, and thus, they will be in utter despair.

We previously mentioned that proverb used by the laymen, which says: 'If you want to push someone over, you do not push him from a reed mat; rather, you should push him from a high place.' In the same respect, Our Lord *Glorified is He* gives the deniers of the truth all that they want in this worldly life and even makes them behave more cruelly so that when He overtakes them, He will do so in a manner of a Mighty, Powerful One. The true events of life have served to prove this fact. We have already known quite well about many oppressive tyrants who were overtaken by the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty* after He had thrown open the gates of all that is good for them.

He *the Almighty* says: 'And then We changed their hardship into prosperity, until they multiplied. But then they said, "Hardship and affluence also befell our forefathers,' and so We took them suddenly, unaware.'" (*al-A'raf*: 95) Thus, man might invent things that alert him to bad events which may afflict him in the coming future such as the radar which reveals the approach of any kind of possible danger. Yet, when He *the Almighty* says that the disbelievers would be overtaken while being unaware, this means that the disbelievers did not have any calculations or measurements by means of which they could recognise the approach of the punishment about to be imposed upon them.

In fact, if we carefully reflect on this topic, we will find that people may use their intelligences and their thoughts in a way which is contrary to that of Allah *the Almighty* yet they are afflicted with Divine punishments while being unaware of them; this means that their minds and thoughts benefited them nothing. Amazingly enough, people find animals, that are not legally responsible or charged created beings, running away when the punishment is about to afflict people. So, this raises a question: 'Why do these animal run away?' At this point, man becomes of a lower rank than animals since it is a fact of nature that in lands where earthquakes occur, the animals are the first to flee a site where an earthquake will strike. This is why we stress that Allah *the Almighty* has removed this knowledge from people so that a Divine punishment would afflict them severely. When an earthquake is about to hit a particular area, we find that donkeys run to escape that particular site, whilst people remain in their places until the danger overcomes them which raises another important question: 'What is this particular sense that enabled animals to escape the danger of an earthquake?' It is undoubtedly an instinctive sense which our Lord *Glorified is He* created within them. Thus, if Allah *the Exalted* did not grant them the ability to reason things, He granted them instincts by means of which they could sense the approach of danger. Therefore, as long as those disbelievers did not heed the warning by the misfortune and hardships that afflicted them, He *the Almighty* threw open all the gates to what is good for them, and thus, He drew them near to destruction from whence they did not know.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us that the case of the people of faith is totally different from that of disbelievers; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ ءَامَنُوا وَأَتَقُوا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ
وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

If the people of those towns had believed and been mindful of God, We would have showered them with blessings from the heavens and earth, but they rejected the truth and so We punished them for their misdeeds [96] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 96)

This verse clearly indicates that if the people of the towns, namely the disbelievers from amongst them, had attained faith in Allah *the Almighty* and

had firmly adhered to His commands and kept away from His prohibitions, they would have been saved from Divine punishment and torture. When man makes a machine, he writes the helpful guide wherein he defines and specifies the main purpose behind the creation of this machine, how it could be used and how it could be maintained. Therefore, it is clear that if people had closely followed the Divine Way of Guidance, they would have enjoyed all kinds of good. This is why Allah *the Almighty* tells disbelievers that if they were mindful of Him, He would have showered them with blessings from the heaven and the earth including the rain that falls from the sky, the plants that come out of the earth and the other essential elements from which the most important things in life are obtained.

However, what does the word *al-Baraka* or 'blessing' mean? It means for something to give more than what is naturally expected from it. For example, if someone's income is only fifty pounds and yet we find him and his children living in happiness and comfort without any worries, we ask, 'How can he live in such a happiness with such a small sum of money?' He answers you, 'It is a blessing!' Furthermore, 'blessing' may be explained in the light of our daily life. We previously explained that people are quite keen on increasing the amounts of their money and properties, believing that by doing so they will be safe from the changes of time. Yet, they pay no attention at all to the fact that even though a person's income is low, it is blessed, and thus, it meets all the family's different needs and requirements. Let us offer the following striking example to make this point ever so clear. Your income may be thousands of pounds, but it does not meet the needs of your family, and thus, you might need even more. On the other hand, the income of another person may be only one hundred pounds, but their income meets all the needs and requirement of his family, and thus he needs no more.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'If the people of the towns had believed and been mindful of Allah, We would have showered them with blessings from the heaven and the earth...' means that He blesses the small amount of money obtained through lawful means and wipes out the large amount obtained through unlawful means, such as usury. This is why He *the Almighty* calls the act of giving out a particular amount of money to the poor *zakat* which literally means 'increase', even though this act of almsgiving might apparently

be viewed as reducing the amount of money a person has. When you have a hundred pounds, for example, and you pay two-and-a-half pounds from it, then it appears on the surface that your wealth has decreased. On the other hand, if you lend someone a hundred pounds and take it back from him one hundred and ten, this is apparently viewed as increasing your wealth. Yet, we find Him *the Almighty* judging the decrease resulting from the paying of *zakat* as 'purification and increase' while judging the increase resulting from the second case as 'loss and an abomination'.

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'If the people of the towns had believed and been mindful of Allah, We would have showered them with blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they rejected the truth and so We punished them for their misdeeds' thus means that if people had firmly adhered to all the instructions and directions set to them by the Creator *Glorified is He*, all of their affairs would have been set in order, and they would not have suffered any disturbances in this life. Yet, some people might not adhere to the Divine way of guidance, a fact which is definitively proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '... but they rejected the truth and so We punished them for their misdeeds....' (*al-A'raf*: 96)

This part of the verse plainly means that Divine punishments that afflicted disbelievers are not acts of tyranny on part of Allah, the Creator; rather, it is His Justice that decrees the affliction of punishments upon these people. If He *the Almighty* did not take corrupters to task, those who are pious may consequently deviate from the Right Path since it is at this point that they would say, 'As long as we are equal to corrupters whose worldly affairs are fine, why do we not practise corruption like them?' Undoubtedly, if this were to be the case, then those who are pious may be allured to practise corruption to the extent they might allow themselves to commit any form of evil. However, when He *the Almighty* takes corrupters to task for their misdeeds, the pious will realise the bad fate of those who spread corruption, and thus, they will keep themselves from falling prey to misguidance and disobedience.

Concerning the conclusion of this particular verse under discussion, it was expected that He *the Almighty* would use the Arabic verb form *yaktasibun* instead of *yaksibun*; it goes without saying that committing evil causes a number

of man's faculties to be in opposition to each other. We previously gave a striking example to illustrate this point; a man feels no worry whatsoever when he sits with his wife and stares at her beauty, but if he sits with a foreign woman and wants to woo her to enjoy her beauty, his faculties will clash with one another. Therefore, there is a big difference between a particular person whose faculties are in harmony with each other and another whose faculties are in conflict with each other. However, as for these corrupters, they used to practise it day and night until it became almost second nature to them, which is why He *the Almighty* used the verb *yaksibun*, which clearly means that they used to practise corruption while feeling no any shame at all.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أَفَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا بَيِّنًا وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

أَوَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا ضُحًى وَهُمْ يَلْعَبُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾

Do the people of these towns feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them by night, while they are asleep? [97] Do the people of these towns feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them by day, while they are at play? [98] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 97-98)

In these two verses under discussion, we notice the existence of 'do', which implies a question, and then the word 'then' which implies succession. This naturally implies the existence of two consecutive clauses which are introduced by interrogation; this means that having suddenly overtaken those who committed acts of disbelief and disobedience, how could the people of towns feel secure that Our Punishment and Torment will not come to them by night or by day, just as was done with the previous nations who came before them? If this is actually the case, this means that they have failed to heed the warning or lesson of the torment and destruction that afflicted the nations that came before them.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that those who denied and rejected the truth from amongst the people of the towns would also be unable to protect themselves from Divine punishment if it afflicted them, exactly as disbelievers from among the people of Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber),

Saleh (Shelah), Lut (Lot) and Shu'aib (Jethro), who were unable to ward off the punishment that afflicted them. As for the Arabic word *al-Ba's* that translates as punishment, it means the chastisement with which Allah *the Almighty* meted out to the people of towns when they disregarded His way of guidance. So, how could they be so certain that they were all safe from being afflicted with such severe punishments that fell upon the nations who came before them?!

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* talks about events, this means that He will shed light also on the particular time and place in which these events took place. It is taken for granted that every event must have a particular time and a particular place. In this respect, the place mentioned in these Quranic verses refers to the 'lands in which these communities lived', while the time refers to 'that particular period of time' in which Allah's Punishment would come upon them. Consequently, this Divine punishment might come to them by night while they are asleep or by the brightness of mid morning, while they are at play. When the sun rises over a particular place, then it is the day, while the other part to which the light of the sun does not reach will be in dark, and thus, it is nighttime. The Divine punishment might yet come to the people of towns by day or even by night, at any moment of the course of time. Today's science reached the conclusion that when the sun rises over a particular area on the earth, this means that there is another area which witnesses sunset at that same time. This is to say that day and night follow each other consecutively. So, whether it is day or night where you are, you cannot be sure that you are safe from Divine punishment, which may come to you by day or by night.

As for the people of the towns, they are those who rejected the truth, and thus Allah punished them for their misdeeds (*al-A'raf*: 96). Truthfully speaking, as long as they denied and rejected the truth, this means that they did not believe in the Messengers sent to them to deliver Allah's Message to them, a matter that clearly indicates that they did not believe in the Divine way of guidance by means of which the affairs of the life are run perfectly: in the light of the Divine Laws of 'Do's and 'Dont's'.

Therefore, the deniers of the truth spent their days in vain; they performed actions which were neither honourable nor beneficial. As for their nights, they used to spend them either asleep or committing acts of disobedience including

frivolity, shamelessness, and licentiousness. In fact, everyone who lives in conflict with Allah's way of guidance spends his nights in either sleep or disobedient frivolity, whilst his days are spent in worldly play since however great his work might be, it will go unrewarded in the Hereafter. Allah says:

أَفَأَمِنُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

Do they feel secure against God's plan? Only the losers feel secure against God's plan [99] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 99)

'Security' means to be able to avoid being harmed by any risk, danger, or threat. Arabs say 'This person is secure' which means that there is nothing that makes his life hard and unhappy. The Saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Do they feel secure against Allah's Plan?' obviously means that He *Glorified is He* has ascribed the act of planning, or *Makr* to Himself. This raises a very important question, namely: 'Does Allah *the Almighty* really make plans (or *Yamkuru*, an Arabic word that conveys the meaning of cunning)?' This question is actually based on the fact that the act of cunning is impossible to take place on part of Allah *the Almighty*. Yet, we must take into account the fact that the Quran actually tells us about another kind of planning which is a good one. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says that the evil plans shall not beset any save the authors of it: 'For, they sought exaltation in the earth and devised evil schemes. But the evil schemes encompass none but the authors thereof. Do they, then, look for anything other than Allah's way of dealing with the people of old? But you will never find any change in the way of Allah, nor will you ever find any alteration in the way of Allah.' (*Fatir*: 43) In another chapter in the Quran, He *the Almighty* says that He is the best of planners: 'And 'Isa's (Jesus's) enemies planned and Allah also planned, and Allah is the Best of Planners.' (*Al-Imran*: 54)

The Arabic word *al-Makr* conveys, in essence, the meaning of 'intertwining'. When we go to a garden or a forest, we find that the branches of the trees are intertwined as though they are braided to the extent that one cannot tell to which tree this particular leaf belongs. Likewise, we see this act of intertwining in climbing plants that have shoots that are plaited like a rope. Therefore, it is clear that the original meaning of *al-Makr* is to deceive others by making

things unclear to them. In fact, if one wants to gain the upper hand over his foe, he plots something against him of which he is unaware. Thus, if this is actually the case of man when he wants to plot and scheme against his fellow man, how about the plans made by Allah *the Almighty*, the One Whose Knowledge is Complete and All-Comprehensive? It goes without saying that His Plans against the wrongdoers are good since He protects the entire humanity from evil by destructing such oppressors.

Once again, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do they feel secure against Allah's Plan? Only the losers feel secure against Allah's Plan.' This raises another important question, namely: 'Did Messengers and Prophets feel secure from the Plans of Allah?' The answer is 'Yes'. They were secure from the Plans of Allah since they were elected to serve as Allah's Messengers. Yet, another important question is raised: 'How could it be, then, that none feels secure from Allah's Plans except those who are lost?!' We reply that it was an intrinsic part of the Message of every Messenger that none feels secure from Allah's Plans except those who are lost. Allah *the Almighty* is All-Omnipotent. He *Glorified is He* sent down His way of guidance so that man, if he firmly adhered to it, will be prosperous and successful in this worldly life and the Hereafter. Yet, if he does not act upon it, he loses the security of faith both in this world, even if he gains wealth, prestige, or knowledge therein, and in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أَوَلَمْ يَهْدِ لِلَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ الْأَرْضَ مِنْ بَعْدِ أَهْلِهَا أَنْ لَوْ نَشَاءُ
 أَصَبْنَاهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَنَطْبَعُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

Is it not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations that We can punish them too for their sins if We will? And seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear? [100]
 (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 100)

The Arabic word *Yahde* which translates as 'it is clear' means that the way of goodness has become clear to those who have inherited the earth. Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '... those who inherit the land from former generations...' means that the earth was owned by others than them,

and those who currently inherited it came after them. When one carefully reflects on the world's different civilisations, he finds that every civilisation was built on the rubble of a previous civilisation and that which is in one's hand and one's possession was once in the possession of someone else. This is actually what is meant by the word 'legacy'. So, as long as one is aware that he has inherited what is in his hands from others, he must also bear in mind that one day others will inherit from him.

Therefore, it is clear that man's affairs in this worldly life are subject to continuous alteration and change. This is why we reiterate all the time that one should not be deluded by his position or rank. In our daily life, we see someone holding an important and influential position, and then later he is dismissed and removed from this position or is even forced to retirement. This is why it is said, 'If it had lasted for anyone else, it would never have come to him.' So, if one a person of high status and prestige and senior position, he must take into account that he will one day have to leave all of this; thus, it is better to prepare himself for the inevitable coming of this day so that the matter will not be too difficult for him.

In the same respect, one must take into account how to simply abandon his senior position even before he makes arrangements for taking it.

At this point, the following poetic verses may be quoted:

The true commander is the one who becomes
A commander the day he is deposed:
If the power of his command has ended,
The power of his virtue remains.

When we read the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'It is not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations...', we notice that He did not make the people a direct object; He does not say, 'Have, then, not those who have inherited the earth been guided...', rather, He says: 'It is not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations...', so what is the deep wisdom behind this? We know with certainty that guidance (*al-Hidaya*) means directing others to the way which leads to the final destination; this act of guiding others will surely benefit you which means you might guide someone

else for your own benefit. Yet, guidance might also mean directing and guiding another to a righteous deed which brings benefit to both the one who guides and the one who is guided. However, if the act of guidance solely benefits you, and not the one who guides you, would you doubt the guidance he gives you? The answer is 'No'. In fact, one may seriously doubt the guidance of the one who will get benefit from his guidance, since this particular case implies a suspicion that one does so in order to gain a personal interest; however, if the guidance will not benefit the one who gives it but will solely benefit the one who receives it, then there is not the slightest doubt about it.

This point is further explained in the following Qudsi Hadith in which Allah *the Almighty* is related to have said: 'O, My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you and even the whole of human race of yours, and that of jinn even, become (equal in) Allah-consciousness like the heart of a single person amongst you, nothing would add to My Power. O, My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you and the whole human race of yours and that of the jinn too in unison become the most wicked (all beating) like the heart of a single person, it would cause no loss to My Power. O, My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you and the whole human race of yours and that of jinn also all stand in one plain ground and you were to ask Me and I confer upon every person what he asks for, it would not, in any way, cause any loss to Me (even less) than that which is caused to the ocean by dipping the needle in it.'⁽¹⁾

Therefore, when He *the Almighty* guides you to the Straight Path, what Attribute of Perfection does He gain from this? He already possessed all Attributes of Perfection before He created you, and thus, your creation did not add any new Attribute of Perfection to Him *Glorified is He*. Consequently, it becomes quite clear that the essence of the act of guidance depends ultimately on the one who does it.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations that We can punish them too for their sins if We will. And seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear.' (*al-A'raf*: 100) This raises a very

(1) Narrated by Muslim

important point which is when Allah *Glorified is He* sheds light on His Will, He uses the expression 'if We will' In this verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* defines the real causes behind this particular Divine Will mentioned in the verse, saying, '...that We can punish them too for their sins if We will...'. Therefore, it becomes clear that man has free will which is totally different from that of Allah *the Exalted*.

In another verse of the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that if He pleased, He would certainly guide everyone: 'Have not the believers yet come to know that if Allah had enforced His Will He could have surely guided all mankind?' (*ar-Ra'd*: 31). This raises yet a very important question: 'Why does not He *the Almighty* will to guide all mankind?' It is taken for granted that no one can hinder the Will of Allah *the Exalted* from being fulfilled. Yet, He created the angels in such a way that prevents them from sinning which means that they are guided and infallible by their very nature. On the other hand, Allah *Glorified is He* created all the other created beings on the earth in such a way that makes them subdued to His Will so that they constantly exalt His Praise and Glory. Thus, as long as none of the earthly creatures can evade the Will of Allah, this definitively proves the Omnipotence of His Power. However, we must take into account that the nature of creation of angels would not affirm the attribute of love to Allah *the Most High* and the Lawgiver. This is why He *Glorified is He* created another created being with free will to choose whether to obey or disobey Him.

It thus goes without saying that when this particular created being, i.e. mankind out of his free will, implanted in him by Allah, chooses to obey and believe in Him *the Almighty* his faith would undoubtedly be viewed as conclusive proof of the affirmation of the attribute of love for Him *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, it is clear that those who are compelled not to disobey the Divine commands, namely the angels, affirm the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty*, whilst the act of obedience on part of those who have free will either to obey or even disobey affirms the attribute of love for Allah *the Most High*. He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '...We can punish them too for their sins if We will. And seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear.' (*al-A'raf*: 100)

This raises a vital point, which clearly indicates the Infinite Mercy of Allah *the Almighty* since He did not say: 'If We so willed, We could smite them for their sins'; rather, He made the punishment dependant on the sins they committed by virtue of their free will. Likewise, He sealed their hearts as a result of their own free choice to disbelieve and disobey. We previously explained the meaning of *At-Tabu* 'or the 'sealing the hearts' while speaking about the interpretation of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, in which He *the Almighty* says that He has sealed thee hearts of disbelievers: 'Allah has set a seal on their hearts and their ears, and over their eyes is a covering, and for them is a grievous chastisement.' (*al-Baqara*: 7)

The heart is the main part of man's body that receives the Message of faith, so if it is completely full of disbelief, this clearly means that disbelief becomes an intrinsic part of it, to the extent that the heart becomes no longer dispensed with faith. This is why Allah *the Almighty* helps him fulfil his will. It is as though He *Glorified is He* tells them that He will help them do what they want; therefore, He will seal their hearts so that the disbelief within them shall not exit. In addition, the natural faith which Allah *Glorified is He* implanted in everyone's hearts, which left them before, shall not enter them once again. This is due to the fact that you (O, disbelievers!) have already given precedence to disbelief over belief. Furthermore, one is naturally supposed to make his heart completely empty from any conviction, and then receive belief and give it precedence over disbelief.

It is taken for granted that Allah *the Almighty* has not made for any man two hearts within him. This is to say that man does not have two hearts, one for belief, and another for disbelief, rather, He *the Exalted* created only one heart in every human being. This one heart has a limited capacity, and this, it accepts just one thing, that is, either belief or disbelief. Let us offer the following example to illustrate this point. When we take an empty glass and say that it is 'empty', this is shown to be untrue when we pour water into it and see bubbles of air being released from it. Furthermore, it is this releasing of bubbles of air that allows water to enter into the glass. Therefore, it becomes clear that the glass was not really empty; it just appeared to us that it was since we could not see the air in it. If the glass were emptied of air without

having been specially designed for this purpose, it would have certainly broken. The same applies to the heart; it has a limited capacity, so if faith enters into, there will be no room for disbelief, and vice versa. A person with sound mind will carefully and fully examine both of the two cases to objectively decide which one of them is entirely beneficial to him both in this world and in the Hereafter. Yet, if he discusses this issue while firmly believing that he will not believe, this is a fruitless task.

He *the Almighty* says: 'It is not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations that We can punish them too for their sins if We will. And seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear.' (*al-A'raf*: 100) In other words, it is like He is saying, 'Has it not become clear to those who took over the earth after their predecessors were destroyed because of their disbelief and sin, but then those who followed the same path as their predecessors, did the same misdeeds like them and disobeyed their Lord like them, that if We so willed, We could impose upon them the same torment We imposed upon their predecessors.' As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'so that they cannot hear', it refers to the kind of hearing which leads to reflection and admonition; so, it is as though they did not hear the divine Messages sent to them. Allah says:

تِلْكَ الْقُرَى نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِهَا ۗ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا كَانُوا
لِيُؤْمِنُوا بِمَا كَذَّبُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ كَذَلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٠١﴾

**We have told you [Prophet] the stories of those towns:
messengers came to them, and clear signs, but they would not
believe in what they had already rejected – in this way God
seals the hearts of disbelievers [101] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 101)**

This verse highlights the main purpose of relating these stories to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is actually the same purpose clearly mentioned in chapter of *Hud* in which Allah *Glorified is He* says that all He relates to you of the accounts of the Messengers is to strengthen your heart therewith: 'And We relate unto you all the important tidings of the Messengers, whereby We strengthen your heart. And herein has come to you the truth and an exhortation and a reminder for the believers.' (*Hud*: 120)

So, if you (O, Prophet Muhammad!) experience any obstinacy, rejection and arrogance from the people of your *ummah* (followers of Islam), you should take into your consideration that you are not experiencing anything new which other Messengers did not face before you for each of them was faced by this wave of denial from disbelievers from amongst his people. Thus, if every Messenger had already experienced difficulties and challenges according to the importance of his Message, then you (O, Prophet Muhammad!) must certainly undergo trials and tribulations equal to those of all the other Messengers before you.

We previously explained that what is meant by *At-Tabu'*, mentioned in the verse under discussion, is that He *the Almighty* has sealed their hearts. The hearts of these disbelievers were filled with misguidance, and so they denied and rejected the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Another important point is raised which is that He *Glorified is He* has sealed their hearts, not out of compulsion but due to the fact that they concealed disbelief within their hearts.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَمَا وَجَدْنَا لِأَكْثَرِهِمْ مِّنْ عَهْدٍ وَإِن وَجَدْنَا أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَفَاسِقِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

We found that most of them did not honour their commitments; We found that most of them were defiant [102]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 102)

The verse indicates plainly that those who denied and rejected the Divine Messages sent to them through their Messengers and Prophets did not honour their many commitments. The covenant in which Allah *the Almighty* took from the loins of Adam, namely his descendants, and made them testify that He is their Lord is a case in point: 'And remember when your Lord brought forth from Adam's children - out of their loins - their offspring and made them to bear witness against their ownelves saying, "Yes, we do bear witness." This He did lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were surely unaware of this."' (*al-A'raf*: 172)

The mind might yet find it difficult to understand how this covenant could have been taken from all of the progeny which existed within the loins of

Adam *peace be upon him* so we say, 'If Allah said it, He spoke the truth whether we understand it or not.' Furthermore, if you consider the creation of man, you will find that all human beings must have had forefathers. This definitively proves that man came into existence as a result of the process of fertilisation that takes place in the womb of woman. In this process, a living sperm cell from a father fertilises a living egg from a mother and thus begins the creation of man. Had either the sperm or the egg died, the procreation would have been prevented.

Therefore, this makes it clear that all human beings are the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him*. Adam gave birth to his children, who, in turn, gave birth to their children, who, in turn, gave birth to their own children, and so on. This clearly indicates that all human beings are the sons and daughters of Adam *peace be upon him*. This means that all human beings had already made this covenant to Allah *the Almighty*.

We previously gave an example to illustrate this point, saying that atoms, which are spread throughout something, are also spread through its big quantities. We said that if we were to take a cubic centimetre of red colorant, for example, and dilute it in a bottle of water, every part of the bottle would contain a part of the colorant. If we were to take the bottle and pour it into a large vat, then every drop of the liquid in the vat would contain a part of the red colorant. The same actually happens if we were to take the vat and pour it into the sea, for then every atom in it would eventually contain a part of this colorant. In this way, it becomes clearer to each of us how every human being contains a tiny particle of Adam *peace be upon him*. It is actually this tiny particle that witnessed the first covenant made to Allah *the Almighty* by the progeny of Adam. Someone might yet ask, 'How did Allah speak to the progeny which existed in the loins of Adam?' The answer is that He *the Exalted* did so, just as He previously spoke to the earth and the sky. In the Quran, Allah tells us that He applied His Design to the skies: 'Then He turned to the heaven, while it was something like smoke, and said to it and to the earth; "Come both of you in obedience, willingly or unwillingly." They said, "We come willingly."' (*Fussilat*: 11) Therefore, our lack of understanding of how the Lord *Glorified is He* speaks to His creation does not in any way affect the essence and truth of this matter.

This is the case of the first covenant. Then comes the second covenant which He *the Almighty* took from His Messengers, a covenant which is clearly shown in the chapter of *Al-Imran* in which Allah tells us that He took the covenant of the Prophets: 'And remember the time when Allah took a covenant from the people through the Prophets, saying, "Whatever I give you of the Book and Wisdom and then there comes to you a Messenger, fulfilling that which is with you, you shall believe in him and help him." And He said, "Do you agree, and do you accept the responsibility which I lay upon you in this matter?" They said "We agree." He said "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."' (*Al-Imran*: 81)

Then, there were specific covenants occasioned by specific events such as that one described by Him *the Almighty* in the chapter of *Yunus* in which He says that He is the One Who enables people to travel on land and sea until when they are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein then, there comes a storm wind and the waves come upon them from everywhere, and they assume that they are surrounded, supplicating sincerely to Allah, 'If You should save us from this, we will surely be among the thankful.' (*Yunus*: 22) The people experiencing times of distress did not surrender themselves to ruin, nor were they at that particular time deluded by their prestige or by the means at their disposal since they had all been exhausted; so they did not cheat themselves, rather, they humbly retreated to Allah's Refuge, supplicating sincerely to Him that if He should save them from this hardship, they will surely be among the thankful.

Basically, we see that they, while experiencing considerable difficulties and hardships, made a covenant to Allah that if He should save them, they will surely be from among the thankful. However, once Allah saved them, they broke the covenant. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about this: 'And when trouble befalls a man, he calls on Us, lying on his side, or sitting or standing, but when We have removed his trouble from him, he goes his way as though he had never called on Us for the removal of the trouble that befell him. Thus, it is that the doings of the extravagant are made to seem fair in their eyes.' (*Yunus*: 12) Therefore, it is clear that a covenant may be either general or specific.

Back to our verse under discussion, we find Allah *the Almighty* concluding it with His saying, 'We found that most of them were defiant.' (*al-A'raf*: 102) This part of the verse clearly signifies that most of these people remained in iniquity. In addition, they did not honour their covenants. In fact, a covenant is something by means of which the actions of a free person are restricted in the light of the pledges and promises he makes. We know for certain that man is totally free to do an act or not to do it. Yet, once he pledges to do something, he becomes bound to it and must fulfil the covenant by his own free choice since once he binds himself to the covenant this means that he must govern his actions within the confines of it. Yet, if his actions take him outside the confines of this covenant, this is judged as *al-Fisq* (iniquity), which is an Arabic word used originally to describe that particular state that a ripe date breaks out of its shell, giving protection to the fruit so that nothing bad can enter it from outside. It is as though our Lord *Glorified is He* has made legal obligations a covering to protect man from misguidance. Thus, if one breaks the rules of religion just as the fruit breaks out of the shell, he becomes liable to pollution and harmful microbes. This is why He *the Almighty* calls the one who abandons His Way of Guidance *al-fasiq* or 'iniquitous' since he thereby deviates from the confines which He *the Almighty* set to protect him from corrupting elements and from the destruction and punishment which might otherwise afflict him.

He *the Almighty* then says:

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ فَظَلَمُوا
بِهَا فَأَنْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَتْ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

After these, We sent Moses to Pharaoh and his leading supporters with Our signs, but they rejected them. See the fate of those who used to spread corruption [103] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 103)

Having elaborated on the stories of Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Lut (Lot) and Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them* with their people showing how Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed the deniers and saved the believers, He

the Almighty wanted to relate to us the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who is one of those Messengers with great determination (*Ulu al-'Azm*) an expression used to refer to Messengers who possessed strong will and perseverance in fulfilling the duties commanded by Allah. I think you are quite aware that the story of Musa (Moses) with the Jews is covered thoroughly in the Quran to the extent that it is the longest story ever in it since their deviations, displays of impetuosity and rebellions against their Prophets were so numerous. Many Prophets were sent to them, and the Jews are proud of that and say, 'Of all nations, the most Prophets were sent to us!' We replied to them, 'Yes, this is true, but the many Prophets that were sent to you shows how severe your sickness is since a large number of doctors are only required when it becomes extremely difficult to treat a patient. So, this clearly indicates that one single Messenger was not enough for you, rather, you required many to treat your many diseases.'

The word *ba'ath* (sent) means both 'to send' and 'to seek out'. As we understand it, the term indicates and suggests that He *the Almighty* sent Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as a Messenger to Pharaoh. As a matter of fact, this particular word, *ba'ath*, is always used with Divine Messages since the concept of it implies that something was present, and then was covered up until Allah *the Almighty* brought it forth again.

Faith was actually found in the first era of Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* created Adam with His Hands and then directly issued His commands and prohibitions to him. Adam, in turn, passed these Divine orders and prohibitions on to his progeny. This original form is what includes the realities of faith which Adam possessed. Likewise, sending many Messengers and Prophets does not mean that each of them had had a new creed; rather, they all revived that which had been present before. The Will of Allah decrees that He sends a Messenger when corruption becomes widespread. Therefore, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* charged Adam with passing the first legal obligation issued to him to his progeny. Had man seriously taken religious responsibilities from those who came before him just as he took the essential constituents of life from them, faith would have remained of constant presence in our life.

We learn from our forefathers things which benefit us in our worldly life, so why did we not take religion from them, too? It is due to the reason that religion curbs one's freedom of action and puts it on the right track, a matter which is against the will of man, who wants to flee from that which restricts his freedom of action. In this respect, it is of great importance to know that using the following two verbs, *arsala* (sent forth) and *ba'atha* (sent), with Messengers indicate clearly that He *the Almighty* did not bring anything new, rather, He brought back that which man should have retained with him just as he retained other things which he inherited from his forefather and which bring him benefit. For example, we benefit from loaves of bread and tailoring, so why did we benefit from these material things and forget the ethical ones? It is because these material things can assist man in his passions, whilst the values of religion fight against these passions.

The word *Ayat*, which translates as 'signs', is the plural of *aya* which means an amazing thing that causes the mind to feel surprise. Furthermore, this particular word, *Ayat* has three different meanings which are as follows: Firstly, it can be used to refer to the verses of the Quran with its rhetorical style that will remain miraculous until the end of time; for everyone benefits from them according to the capacity of his mind and the capacity of his understanding. Secondly, it may also be used to refer to natural signs which are spread everywhere in the heaven and the earth. Lastly, it may furthermore be used to refer to the miracles given to Messengers and Prophets by way of proving their truthfulness and credibility. The act of 'sending' itself requires a courier, which in this case is Musa (Moses); in this case, Allah is the sender, while the recipient is the people of Pharaoh. Furthermore, in this case, the thing with which the Messenger is sent is the Divine Way of Guidance.

The signs with which Allah *the Almighty* sent Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were the proofs of the veracity of his prophethood. In addition, they represented the Divine Way of Guidance sent to Pharaoh and his leading supporters. We previously explained the meaning of the word *al-Mala'* and said that it refers to people who are of high social rank and position to the extent that people fear them. Thus, ordinary people, to whom no one pays attention, cannot be called 'leading supporters'. This raises an important question: 'Why did Allah

the Almighty in this verse, restrict the Mission of Musa (Moses) just to Pharaoh and his great ones?' The answer is that it is because it would have been easy to guide their followers if the leaders were guided. Naturally; those who resist goodness are the ones who benefit from evil, namely arrogant leaders and their entourage. Truthfully speaking, arrogant leaders do not desire the way of goodness to be established since it goes against their interests and their passions, and so they fight against it. As for ordinary people, they are in a state of subjugation; when they see that someone has stood in the way of those who afflicted them with their injustice and oppression, their hearts will attach to this liberator.

He *the Almighty* says: 'After these, We sent Musa (Moses) to Pharaoh and his leading supporters with Our signs...' If what is meant by 'signs' in this verse is these words which set out the Divine way of guidance present in the Torah, or even if it means the miracles which proved the veracity of Musa (Moses), this should have led the Jews to believe. We know that the Quran mentions that Allah *the Almighty* supported Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with a number of miracles to prove the veracity of his prophethood. Allah *Glorified is He* says that He gave Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* nine clear signs: 'And certainly We gave Musa (Moses) nine manifest signs. So, ask then the children of Israel. When he came to them, Pharaoh said to him, "I do think you, O, Musa (Moses), to be a victim of deception."' (*al-Isra'*: 101)

The list of the miracles given to Musa (Moses) includes the staff, the hand which he placed in his pocket or under his armpit and then came out shining white without any injury or blemish and seizing the people of Pharaoh with years of famine. The Arabic word *As-Sinin*, which literally translates as 'years', means an extremely severe drought which lasts for a period of time so that people remember the event and use it as a reference of time thereafter, by saying, 'It happened in the year of the terrible famine', for the year contained many grievous events which destroyed the comforts of life, and then destroyed the essential constituents of life, primarily food and drink. When this happens, they are thus afflicted with a poor harvest causing hunger and famine. So, a famine of this severity is called *Sana* which literally means 'year', and its plural is *Sinin* since it is something which thereafter will be used as a reference to a particular event that took place during a particular period of time.

However, how did Pharaoh and his great ones respond to the signs which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* brought them? Allah *the Almighty* tells us that they wilfully rejected them: 'After these, We sent Musa (Moses) to Pharaoh and his leading supporters with Our signs, but they rejected them.' (*al-A'raf*: 103) Were these signs the cause of their rejection and oppression? Or were they wilful due to their rejection to them as a way of life?

They wilfully rejected them since they refused to follow the way of truth; they even remained in their corruption. We know that corrupters are those who deliberately spoil and destroy that which is intrinsically sound. Corrupters do so although man is required to take into account that there are certain things that are above his choice and his will, and there are also other things which are subject to his choice and his will. The essential constituents of life are not subject to man's free will, and thus, he finds that they are as sound as could be.

Man has, in fact, no control over the motion of the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind, or the rain; these entire created beings act in the right way designed and set to them by Allah *the Almighty*. Corruption only comes in those things in which man has some influence. People do not complain of an 'air crisis', for example, because no one has any influence over the motion of the air. Meanwhile, they do complain of food crises since man plays a part in this. Yet, we find that their complaints about water crises are less frequent, since man has only a small influence over water.

Allah *the Almighty* gives you only partial control over the mechanism which regulates your nourishment. For example, He makes within your body a store of fats to provide you with the energy at times of hunger. Amazing enough, these fats are made of a single substance. Yet, when you need to be nourished by it, this single substance transforms into the other substances that you require.

You need protein, for example, so the fat turns into protein; or you need carbon, so the fat gives you carbon; or you need phosphorus, so it gives you phosphorus; or you need magnesium, so it gives you magnesium, and so on. Although we are able to go without food according to how much we have stored in our bodies, and we can also go without water according to the amount we have stored in our bodies, we cannot go without air since breathing is a simple matter of inhalation and exhalation. This is why if there were a person

who owned air and only gave it to you when he pleased, along with withholding it from you when he was angry, you would die before he became pleased with you again. The same does not apply to water, since if he withheld water from you for a while, your enemy's heart might soften towards you, someone else might bring you water or you might come up with a plan to get it on your own.

So, we find that the things over which man has no influence are as sound as can be, and corruption only comes to the things over which man has influence.

He *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying, 'See the fate of those who used to spread corruption' to tell that those who used to spread corruption will be eventually punished by Him *the Almighty*.

In this context, He *the Almighty* chose to mention the successive events of the story, not from the beginning, rather, from its very end. He is not teaching us history, instead He gives us admonition. Therefore, He did not speak, in this chapter, about the birth of Musa (Moses), how He inspired to his mother to cast him into the sea, how he *peace be upon him* went to Midyan and how he met with Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them*. Rather, He *the Almighty* speaks here about the story of Musa (Moses) with Pharaoh.

Allah says:

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ يٰفِرْعَوْنُ اِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

Moses said, 'Pharaoh, I am a messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds [104] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 104)

The Quran elucidates for us how Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* conveyed the Message to Pharaoh and his people, how he confirmed for them that Allah is One and Unique and that Allah is the Lord of all the worlds. Pharaoh's people believed that there existed one god for the heavens and another for the earth, so Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* told them that there is only One God. In the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara'*, Allah tells us that Musa (Moses) said to Pharaoh, upon asking him about the Lord of the worlds, that Allah is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them if you (O, Pharaoh!) would allow yourselves to believe!: "Musa (Moses) said, "The Lord of the heavens and the earth and of all that is between the two, if you would believe." (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 24)

We notice that Musa (Moses) repeats the word *Rabb* (Sustainer or Lord) in several other verses, in order to address the matter of Lordship that had been falsely ascribed to Pharaoh. The people of Pharaoh believed that there was one god in the heaven and another on the earth, so Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* told them that there is only One God Who is Lord of both the heaven and the earth. They used to believe that there was one god for the east and another for the west, so Musa (Moses) conveyed to them that there is only One God. They, in addition, believed that there is one god and lord for the living, and another god and lord for the dead, so Musa (Moses) said to them that Allah is their Sustainer and the Sustainer of their forefathers of old!: 'Musa (Moses) said, "Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of yore.'" (*ash-Shu'ara*: 26)

In this particular verse under discussion, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* says to them: 'I am a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds.' (*al-A'raf*: 104) Thus, as long as Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds, he spoke nothing but the truth, which is why Allah *the Almighty* tells us about what he said next to Pharaoh:

حَقِيقٌ عَلَىٰ أَنْ لَا أَقُولَ عَلَىٰ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ
بِبَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعِيَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ

Duty-bound to say nothing about God but the truth, and I have brought you a clear sign from your Lord. Let the Children of Israel go with me' [105] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 105)

This raises a good question, that is: 'Which one of these matters required clear evidence; was it that he was a Messenger sent by the Lord of all the Worlds?' This saying of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* shows clearly that he differed with Pharaoh over three points, namely first, Pharaoh did not believe that Musa (Moses) was a Messenger; second, Pharaoh did not believe that the worlds have but one single Lord; and that he did not believe that Musa (Moses) conveyed only the truth. Yet, there is a very important point in this regard which is that even though these are three points of difference between Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh, the latter asked Musa (Moses) for clear evidence of the veracity of his Message; Pharaoh asked him to offer a proof that he was

a Messenger from the Lord of all the worlds, which shows that Pharaoh certainly knew that the world has a Supreme Lord.

This is actually why Pharaoh did not argue with Musa (Moses) concerning the fact that the worlds have a Lord Whose way of guidance may not be understood by every person, which is a reason why He *the Almighty* sent Messengers and Prophets to tell people about Him. Pharaoh did not argue with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* concerning this point; rather, he asked him to prove whether Musa (Moses) was a Messenger sent by Allah or not. Musa (Moses) therefore said, 'Bound by duty to say nothing about Allah but the truth, and I have brought you a clear sign from your Lord. Let the children of Israel go with me.'

This aforementioned verse indicates that the mission of Musa (Moses) to Pharaoh was primarily concerned with securing the freedom of the children of Israel. We are well acquainted that the story of the children of Israel began in the days of Prophets Ya'qub (Jacob) and his son Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon them*. The brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) plotted against him and discussed whether to kill him to expel him from the land or to cast him into a deep well. Apparently, Allah *the Almighty* did not tell us about the story of the children of Israel at one time so that our emotions will appropriately react to the different events within it. The psychological and emotional stages which you pass through with someone you hate takes two different forms: one form indicates the gradual growth of mercy in your heart, whilst the other indicates the gradual growth of evil in the heart. For example, suppose you have an enemy and he wrongs you in some way, so you tell your friends the story of what this enemy did to you and how you would like to extract vengeance from him, so you say, 'I want to avenge what he did to me by punching him twice', and then the evil grows within some of the hearts of the involved', and thus, they say, 'I would like to shoot him dead!' This is the case for the evil person; as for the good person, he says, 'I do not want to kill, punch, abuse, or even insult him', which is a gradual growth of goodness. Therefore, the gradual growth of vengeance or forgiveness differs according to the power of the evil or good implanted in the soul. In the same way, the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* plotted against him. The Quran tells us about that story saying

that the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) said: 'Verily, Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother (Benjamin) are dearer to our father than we are, although we are a strong party. Surely, our father is in manifest error.' (*Yusuf*: 8)

The brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) explicitly acknowledged that they had power and that they were many in number. In spite of all of this, they envied Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother (Benjamin) for their father's greater love for them, and they thus objected to this situation. In order not to mistakenly think that Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) did not deal justly and equally with all of his children, the Quran tells us about the main reason why his children erroneously had this bad thought. Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother were still young and weak, and this is why the heart of their father, Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), inclined to them more than the rest of his children who were strong and fully mature. It is taken for granted that Allah *the Almighty* fills the hearts of fathers and mothers with mercy for their children; furthermore, the younger the child is, the more mercy his parents show him. What this means is that the youngest child is the one who needs to be taken care of and protected more than the rest of his brothers and sisters. In the same respect, we know quite well that the heart of a mother and father inclines to their ill or absent children more than to the rest of them. This is why when a wise woman was asked which of her children she loved the most, she replied, 'The youngest one until he grows up, the absent one until he returns and the sick one until he recovers.'

Therefore, it is clear that the saying of Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers that they were so many is against them. Truthfully speaking, if Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers carefully reflected on the matter, they would have recognised that as long as they were so many in numbers, their father would naturally be attached to Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother who were both young and in need of greater care more than them. In this respect, I would like to direct your attention to a very important point, namely Ya'qub's (Jacob's) sons, being the progeny and descendants of Prophets, gradually moved from evil to goodness, as follows: at first they announced their strong desire to kill Yusuf (Joseph), yet they did not do it, for instead they considered driving him away to a far distant land so that their father's regard may be exclusively for them; yet they

did not do this also, rather, they considered casting him into the depths of a well. That is to say that they started with the idea of killing when they were still in their bitter and fierce anger. Then, they rejected the idea of killing and replaced it with driving him away or leaving him in a place where he was likely to get lost; they, however, rejected the second idea also and finally decided to cast him into the depths of the well where some caravan would doubtless pick him up. Thus, it is clear that they did not want to hurt him, for they had already thought of how he could be saved. This was actually a gradual growth in goodness.

The Quran tells us about the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* with the children of Israel and states that they eventually settled with Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) in Egypt and became many in number. When we carefully reflect on history, we find that Allah *the Almighty* speaking about the rulers of Egypt, singles out some of them with the title 'Pharaoh' while calling some others under the title of 'King'; so there was a pharaoh, and there was a king. If we consider the ancient past, we will realise that Allah called the ruler of ancient Egypt as Pharaoh: 'And with Pharaoh, lord of vast hosts.' (*al-Fajr*: 10)

The same applies to the time of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in which Allah *the Exalted* also called the ruler of Egypt 'Pharaoh'. However, during the time of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* He called him 'King'. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says that as soon as Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph's) interpretation was conveyed to the king, the king said: 'Bring him before me!' (*Yusuf*: 50)

After the French scientist Champollion discovered and studied the Rosetta Stone, we knew that pharaohs were not the rulers of Egypt during the time of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), rather, it was the Hyksos who governed the country during that particular period of time. The Quran alluded to this historical fact when it called the rulers of Egypt before Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) 'pharaohs', yet when it came to describe the rulers of Egypt during that particular period of time, it called them 'kings'. Historically, it has been recorded that the Hyksos conquered Egypt and ruled it and that they were aided and served by the children of Israel. Yet, when the Egyptians expelled the Hyksos out of the country, the pharaohs remembered what they had suffered at the hands of the

Hyksos and thus began to abuse and humiliate the children of Israel due to their assistance to the Hyksos in retaining the rule of Egypt. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to liberate and save them from this torment by means of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which is clearly mentioned in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Musa (Moses) said, "Pharaoh, I am a Messenger from the Lord of the all Worlds, bound by duty to say nothing about Allah but the truth, and I have brought you a clear sign from your Lord. Let the Children of Israel go with me."' (*al-A'raf*: 104-105)

It is as though the ultimate objective behind the mission of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was to liberate and free the children of Israel; as for the matter of Pharaoh's claim to divinity and lordship, it was related to this, as shown from these verses under discussion.

Allah then tells us about how Pharaoh replied to Musa (Moses):

قَالَ إِنْ كُنْتَ جِئْتَ بِآيَةٍ فَأْتِ بِهَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصّٰدِقِیْنَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

He said, 'Produce this sign you have brought, if you are telling the truth' [106] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 106)

This verse indicates that Pharaoh challenged Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to show the sign he had brought, if he was indeed truthful; this is a point which undoubtedly indicates that Pharaoh firmly believed that Allah *the Almighty* supported His Messengers with signs and miracles to prove their truthfulness. This is yet proved by the fact that Pharaoh asked Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to produce the sign he had brought if he was speaking the truth.

Responding to this challenge, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* revealed the sign, as stated by Allah *Glorified is He*:

فَأَلْقَىٰ عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٠٧﴾

So Moses threw his staff and – lo and behold! – it was a snake, clear to all [107] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 107)

Furthermore, Prophet Musa (Moses) had previously experienced this particular miracle of throwing the staff and its transformation into a snake when he went

out from Midyan with his family and saw a fire. Allah *Glorified is He* says: "When he saw a fire, and he said to his family, "Wait. I perceive a fire. Perhaps, I may bring you a brand therefrom or find guidance at the fire.'" (*Ta Ha*: 10)

Upon reaching the position of the fire, he heard a voice addressing him and asking about what he has in his right hand, whereupon he answers that it is his staff on which he leans and with which he beats down leaves for his sheep. He further adds that he uses it, i.e. this staff in other many purposes. Allah *Glorified is He* says: "And what is that in thy right hand, O, Musa (Moses)?" Musa (Moses) said, "This is my staff. I lean on it and beat down therewith leaves for my sheep and other uses also I find in it." (*Ta Ha*: 17-18)

Upon being asked about what was in his hand, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could have said, 'My staff', yet we found him adding more details including leaning on it and using it for many other purposes. Allah *the Almighty* as shown in these Quranic verses in the chapter of *Ta Ha* did not ask Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* about what he did with his staff. Therefore, it is clear that the answer provided by Musa (Moses) for this divine question was fully detailed to the extent that some scholars are under the opinion that he should have given a brief answer, but those who say this forget that there is no one who would wish to abstain from the comfort and sweetness of speaking with Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* gave this answer to Allah, he was fully aware of the Majesty and Omnipotence of Him Who he addressed; therefore, he gave a fully detailed answer, yet when he felt that he might have digressed, he immediately put an end to his answer showing that he uses his staff for many other purposes. He could have named the other purposes for which he used the staff. Thus, it is clear that the staff was thrown down more than once; it was previously thrown down for the purpose of training and preparing Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for the meeting with Pharaoh. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that He ordered Musa (Moses) to throw down the staff. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* responded to the Divine Order by throwing it, and thus, it turned into a snake moving rapidly: 'Allah said, "Cast it down, O, Moses." So he cast it down, and behold it was a serpent running.' (*Ta Ha*: 19-20)

However, what happened next? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He ordered Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to take hold of it and not to

fear, for He shall restore it to its former state: 'Allah said, "Take hold of it and fear not. We shall restore it to its former state.'" (*Ta Ha*: 21)

The fear of Musa (Moses) indicates plainly that what happened to the staff was not a kind of sorcery since when a sorcerer throws his staff or his rope he sees it in original state, i.e. a staff or a rope, whilst others see it as a snake. This is why Allah *the Almighty* while speaking about the sorcerers, says that they cast a spell upon the people's eyes: 'And when they threw, they bewitched the eyes of the people and struck them with awe and produced a mighty magic.' (*al-A'raf*: 116)

This shows clearly that in the case of sorcery, the object remains in its original state in the eyes of the sorcerer; yet the matter was completely different in the case of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for he conceived in his mind a fear which clearly means that the staff had already changed from its original wooden state into a snake, moving rapidly.

At this point, we must take into account that it was possible that the staff could have sprouted leaves and become verdant even though it was a branch that was entirely dry. Had this happened instead, it would also have been viewed as a miracle. However, Allah *the Exalted* changed it from a lifeless state into a living animal and thus transformed its previously original case as a plant.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He, the All-Knowing* responded to those who seek to object to the matter of the throwing of the staff. Some ignorant people mistakenly think that the Quran repeats itself as to this particular topic of throwing the staff. Yet, they do not take into account that the three contexts in which the Quran sheds light on the staff were completely different from each other, as follows: first, when Allah *the Almighty* informed Musa (Moses) on Mount Sinai that He chose him as a Messenger, He ordered him to throw the staff down by way of preparing him for the meeting with Pharaoh; it was in this first meeting that Allah *the Almighty* told Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that He is the Only God Who deserved to be worshipped: 'Verily, I am Allah. There is no god but I, so worship Me alone and observe prayer for my remembrance.' (*Ta Ha*: 14)

Furthermore, this first throwing-down of the staff, a preparation process, was primarily concerned with assuring Musa (Moses) that the staff would

undoubtedly respond to him and turn into a snake when he was to throw it down before Pharaoh. Had Allah only said to him, 'When you go to Pharaoh, just throw down your staff, and it will become a snake', his heart might have been worried and concerned about this. This is why Allah *the Exalted* wanted to give him practical experience of this so that he would know with absolute certainty that the staff would respond to him when he threw it down and become a snake. This was the first occasion on which the staff was thrown down. As for the second occasion, it was when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* went to Pharaoh to inform him of his Divine Message and that he was a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds. It was actually on this occasion that Musa (Moses) would show the clear signs he had brought to Pharaoh. When Musa (Moses) met with Pharaoh, the latter asked him produce a clear sign and thus Musa (Moses) threw the staff down, and it turned into a living snake; this is actually the second throwing-down of the staff that is mentioned clearly in our verse under discussion.

As for the third occasion, it was when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* challenged the sorcerers. Therefore, it is quite clear at this point that each occasion on which the staff was thrown down had its own context; and thus, it is completely incorrect to claim that the Quran repeats itself. We now fully realise that each occasion has its own context and that not one of the three could replace the other.

Back to the chapter of *al-'Araf*; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So, Musa (Moses) threw his staff and- lo and behold- it was a snake, clear to all.' (*al-A'raf*: 107)

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* describes the staff as if it were a serpent: '"Throw down thy rod." And when he saw it move as though it were a serpent.' (*an-Naml*: 10) In this aforementioned verse, He uses the Arabic word *Jann* for 'serpent'.

Thus, it is of great importance to know that orientalist, who seek to cast doubts about the Quran, claim that the Quran, while speaking about the miracle of the staff of Musa (Moses), has given it three different descriptions, as follows: it first says that 'it was a snake (*Thu'ban*), clear to all'; in another verse, it says that 'it was a snake (*Hayyah*), moving rapidly', while in a third verse, it describes it 'as if it were a serpent (*Jann*)'. So, how could it be like

this? We say to orientalists who make such a claim that we must recognise the fact that there is a big difference between these different items which contradict one another and the (different) ones which complement one another. These three different descriptions mentioned, *Ath-Thu'ban*, *al-Hayyah* and *al-Jann* fall under the second category which is 'different items complementing one another'. This means that the staff has turned into a snake, which is long and moves lightly; it may also be that it has turned into *al-Hayyah* which is fearsome in its size when it is coiled; it may even be that it has turned into a serpent (*Jann*) which is of terrifying appearance. Therefore, it is as though every time it took a form which terrified those who saw it, and thus, it had different appearances or shapes, namely *Ath-Thu'ban*, *al-Hayyah* and *al-Jann*. In this respect, we find that the ambiguity actually adds more clarity to that which at first seemed ambiguous.

Let us offer another example to illustrate this principle. We certainly know that Allah *the Almighty* has concealed the timing of death from people, so it is ambiguous; it afflicts people in the exact time predestined by Allah *the Almighty* therefore, it is not subject to a particular age, a particular cause, or a particular time. Yet, this ambiguity of its time and cause make it completely plain and well known to the extent that one expects at any time and at any place. Thus, the ambiguity gives us a powerful and vivid image.

Some orientalists are not satisfied by this; rather, this rouses another misconception, causing them to say, Muslims receive and read the verses of the Quran with great awe and surprise to the extent that they do not carefully reflect upon it to discover the contradictions within it. However, when a non-Muslim reads it, many contradictions are clear to him.' Let me quote their misconceptions in full, 'According to the Arabic rhetoric, simile is used to compare something unknown to something known. For example, if someone says to you, "Do you know so-and-so?" You might say, "By Allah, I do not know him.' Whereupon he says to you, "He looks like so-and-so. His height is like him and so are his body and appearance." Therefore, he compares something unknown to something known in order to clarify it. However, the Quran does violate this rule and compares something unknown to something also unknown, and thus, the meaning is still unclear.' 'In the Quran,' they continue, 'Allah describes the tree of *Az-Zaqqum* saying that it grows in the

very heart of the blazing fire and that its fruit looks like devils' heads: "It is a tree that springs forth in the bottom of Hell. The fruit thereof is as though it were the heads of serpents." (*as-Saffat*: 64-65)

So, how could there be a tree growing in a blazing fire when they are contradictory to each other?! We certainly know that trees are verdant and require irrigation with water, which all are contradictory to the essence of fire, which blazes and is dry; in other words, it contains no water. Moreover, men do not know what demons look like, and the tree of *Az-Zaqqum* is also unknown to them because it only exists in the Hereafter.

So, how could Allah *the Almighty* compare something unknown to something else that is unknown?' This is the misconception roused by orientalist who mistakenly believe that Muslims do not reflect carefully upon the verses of the Quran, and as a result, they are unable to discover what is contradictory in it. Yet, we reply to orientalist that they are unable to understand the true meanings of the verses of the Quran, since Arabic is not their native language, rather, they learnt it as a particular field of study. Furthermore, the Arabic language uses certain words to symbolise things which it saw ugly and horrible. For example, Arabs say, 'Blue teeth like the fangs of ghouls.' A ghoul is an imaginary creature, but they imagined that there was such a creature which had fangs, etc.


Therefore, it is plainly clear that a simile might be drawn from an imaginary thing which is pictured in people's minds. In addition, it goes without saying that the basic rule of a simile is that 'something which is unknown is compared to another which is known, so that it can be known'; yet, we do not know the essence of the tree of *Az-Zaqqum*, and we have also never seen the heads of demons, and so it seems that Allah *the Almighty* had compared something unknown to something else unknown, so how could this happen? It is due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make this particular statement universal and known to everyone. Furthermore, He wants to make the benefit more considerable. It is taken for granted that fear is not struck into the hearts of people unless there is something fearsome to do so, yet we must take into account the fact that people's experience of fear is not exactly the same, which means that there might be something which scares you but

does not scare someone else. In the same respect, you might find something vile, while someone else does not. This is why we gave a striking example before, saying, 'If we bring a group of the most highly skilled caricaturists in the world and ask them to draw us a picture of Satan, do you truly think that they all will draw exactly the same thing?' The answer is a definitive 'No' since each of them will draw Satan in a way which is particularly frightening for him. This is why Allah *the Exalted* draws a simile between the tree of *Az-Zaqqum* and the heads of devils in order that everyone who hears this will imagine the image of Satan which frightens and scares him and so fear will be struck into their hearts from the tree of *Az-Zaqqum*. Had Allah *Glorified is He* given it a particular and defined form, it would have frightened and scared some people but not others. The same applies to the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which is given three different descriptions, namely *Thu'ban*, *Hayyah* and finally *Jann*. As for the verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* states clearly that the staff turned into a snake, clearly visible to all: 'So, Musa (Moses) threw his staff and- lo and behold!- it was a snake, clear to all.' (*al-A'raf*: 107)

As for the saying of Allah *the Exalted* 'lo and behold', it clarifies how Pharaoh was startled by this, for the staff had actually turned into a huge serpent in the blink of an eye. Therefore, it is quite clear that one of the benefits of preparing Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for the throwing of the staff on Mount Sinai was that he would not be taken by surprise when he threw it down before Pharaoh; rather, Pharaoh would be the one to be surprised and startled. It is as though the first preparation was to convince and assure Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that he would not be frightened when the time came to carry out the miracle. It is important to note that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was filled with fear when he saw the staff had turned into a real serpent, moving rapidly. Had it been a kind of sorcery, he would not have been frightened, since the staff would not have been changed in his eyes. So, his fear of it at the time of preparation definitively proves that it truly did change into a snake; it was not a matter of illusion at all. This is actually the difference between the miracle and an act of sorcery: a miracle really happens, whilst sorcery is simply a matter of illusion. This is

actually what made the sorcerers fall down in prostration when they saw this Divine Miracle; they were dumbfounded at what happened.

The Arabic word *Mubin*, which translates as 'clear to all' means that the frightening appearance of that miraculous snake was clear and plain to all of those who saw it. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then presented the second sign; Allah *Glorified is He* says:


 وَنَزَعَ يَدَهُ فَادَاهَا بَيْضًا لِلنَّظِيرِينَ

And then he pulled out his hand and – lo and behold! – it was white for all to see [108] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 108)

This verse tells us about another miraculous sign. The saying of Allah *the Almighty Wa Naza'*, which translates as 'pulled out', means that he pulled his hand out with some difficulty, as though there were something preventing him from taking it out, for had it been easy for him to take his hand out, Allah *the Exalted* would not have used the word *Naza'*, since this word implies that there is something resisting the action. The meaning of this particular word is also quite clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *Al-Imran* in which He says that He is the Owner of Sovereignty; He gives sovereignty to whom He wills and takes it away from whom He wills. (*Al-Imran*: 26)

It goes without saying that wresting dominion from someone is seldom easy since usually the one who owns the dominion attempts to hold onto it, but Allah, the Omnipotent, wrests this dominion from him. The same is the case when He says that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had pulled out his hand. What this clearly indicates is that when he drew his hand forth and took it out with difficulty, it moved to another position, as though it had been in a secure place. At this point, we should note that he was ordered to do to particular acts to his hand; first of all, he was ordered to place it into the opening of his garment: 'And put your hand onto your bosom. It will come forth white without evil. This is among the nine signs unto Pharaoh and his people, for they are a rebellious people.' (*an-Naml*: 12) Then, he was then commanded to press it to his side, so that it shall come out white without the presence of disease: 'And draw your hand closer under your armpit. It shall come forth white, without any disease - another sign.' (*Ta Ha*: 22)

As for the Arabic word *al-Jayb*, it means the opening of the garment through which one inserts his head when putting it on; although in our time, we use *Jayb* to refer to 'pocket'. Long ago, when people wanted to look after things, they would put them in front of themselves and before their hands; so, when people began to make pockets in their clothes, they called them *Jayb* for this reason.

Therefore, it is clear that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was commanded to do two particular acts to his hand; first, he was ordered to place it on his bosom and then to pull it out. Therefore, it is important to note that every verse on this point puts forth a particular idea, as follows: one affirms that he placed his hand in the opening in his robe, while another tells that he pressed it to his armpit. Yet, a third verse indicates that he drew his hand out of his bosom. These are all various images which give us a general view about this particular miracle. Thus, we understand that the Quran does not repeat itself, rather, every verse puts forth a particular idea which, in turn, gives a new piece of information. Therefore, when we examine them all together, we have a really vivid story.

We previously explained that the conflict between Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh could only have arisen from the enmity between them. It is taken for granted that in order for the conflict to be bitter and serious, there must have been mutual enmity between the two foes, for if one of them felt enmity, but the other did not, he would not have had the vehemence of hostility, and he might have excused his rival, seeing the difference as trivial, and thus forgiving him and thereby settling the conflict. Thus, the main reason which makes enmity flare up and becomes vehement is of the case of it being mutual. The Quran thus tells us that enmity did indeed exist on the part of Pharaoh towards Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Musa (Moses) likewise felt enmity towards Pharaoh. Concerning Pharaoh's enmity to Musa (Moses), Allah says that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* will be adopted by an enemy to Him *the Almighty* and an enemy to Musa (Moses): 'there one who is an enemy to Me and also an enemy to him will take him up.' (*Ta Ha: 39*)

Concerning Prophet Musa's (Moses's) enmity to Pharaoh, Allah *Glorified is He* in another verse in the Quran tells that some of Pharaoh's household found and spared Prophet Musa (Moses), for He had willed that he would become

an enemy and a source of grief to them: 'She did accordingly and one of the family of Pharaoh picked him up so that he became for them an enemy and a source of sorrow. Verily, Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts were wrongdoers' (*al-Qasas*: 8). These two separate pieces of information complement each other to give us the complete picture.

Back to the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And then he pulled out his hand and – lo and behold! - it was white for all to see' (*al-A'raf*: 108). We know that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was dark-skinned, so the whiteness of his hand was distinctly different from the colour of the rest of his skin. His hand, under this Divine Miracle, became white so that when people saw it, its light colour would catch their eyes and attract their attention. It was not the whiteness which afflicts dark-skinned people as a result of leprosy, since Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse that the hand of Musa (Moses) will come forth shining white, without blemish: 'And draw your hand closer under your armpit. It shall come forth white, without any disease - another sign.' (*Ta Ha*: 22)

Once again, I stress that each individual verse conveys a new piece of information by means of which the image is complete. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* describes the hand as 'shining white', this indicates that its light was bright and shining so that the eyes of all were attracted to it and this could not be the case unless it was bright, glowing, and radiant. Yet, when He describes it as '[Shining] white, without any disease...' this means that whiteness was not a result of illness or disease.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّكَ هَذَا لَسِحْرٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٠٩﴾

The leaders among Pharaoh's people said, 'This man is a learned sorcerer! [109] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 109)

We previously explained the meaning of the word *al-Mala'* and said that it refers to people who are of high social rank and position, to the extent that others fear them. In this context, it refers basically to those who were in Pharaoh's inner circle who seemed to have been acquainted with sorcery. Yet,

in the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara'*, Allah *the Almighty* says that Pharaoh said to the great ones around him that Musa (Moses) was indeed a sorcerer of great knowledge: 'Pharaoh said to the chiefs around him, "This is surely a skilful sorcerer."' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 34)

This obviously indicates that Pharaoh is the one who told the leaders from amongst his people this idea. Concerning this point, we have two positions which are as follows: one verse tells that the leading supporters were the ones who said that Musa (Moses) was a sorcerer, while another says that it was Pharaoh who said this himself, yet there is no contradiction whatsoever between them since it is possible that Pharaoh might have said it and so might have the leaders. We certainly know that different people may come up with one idea. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. When verses were revealed about the creation of man and his development from a clot to a morsel of flesh and so on (*al-Mu'minun*: 14), the scribe who was writing down the Revelation said loudly, 'So blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.'

In the same respect, Anas Allah *be pleased with him* narrated that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah *be pleased with him* said, 'I totally concurred with my Lord in four things. When the saying of Allah, 'And certainly We created man of an extract of clay' (*al-Mu'minun*: 12) was revealed, I said, "So blessed be Allah, the best of the creators," and then it was revealed.'⁽¹⁾

Moreover, Zayd ibn Thabit Al-Ansari Allah *be pleased with him* is narrated to have said, 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dictated to me this particular verse "And certainly We created man of an extract of clay. Then, We made him a small seed in a firm resting-place. Then We made the seed a clot. Then, We made the clot a lump of flesh. Then, We made (in) the lump of flesh bones. Then, We clothed the bones with flesh. Then, We caused it to grow into another creation" (*al-Mu'minun*: 14), whereupon Mu'adh Allah *be pleased with him* said, "So blessed be Allah, the best of the creators." Prophet Muhammad smiled, and so Mu'adh asked him, "Why do you smile, O, Prophet Muhammad?" He replied, "It is already concluded with these very words."⁽²⁾

(1) Narrated by Ibn Abi Hatim

(2) Narrated by Ibn Abi Hatim, Weak

Thus, it is clear that these ideas came to the minds of the Companions at this particular moment when the Revelation concerning this point about the development of man's creation was revealed.

Therefore, what would prevent the thoughts from coming simultaneously to Pharaoh and the great leaders from among his people so that both spoke the same words?! Another possible interpretation is that it may be Pharaoh said it first, and then the followers and cronies repeated it, exactly as it always is with the case of subordinates and their masters.

The verse under discussion clearly states that Pharaoh's supporting leaders did not only describe the action of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as the work of a sorcerer, but went even further and said that he was a sorcerer of great knowledge. They then added as stated by Allah, in the Quran:

﴿١١٠﴾ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يُخْرِجَكُمْ مِّنْ أَرْضِكُمْ فَأَمَّا مَا تَأْمُرُونَ

**‘He means to drive you out of your land!’ Pharaoh said,
‘What do you suggest?’ [110] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 110)**

Musa's (Moses') Message to Pharaoh was actually a catastrophe to Pharaoh, the so-called god, and to the supporting leaders around him. So, how could he head this catastrophe off so that he would remain in his position and authority? He accused Musa (Moses) of being a sorcerer, believing that this accusation would prevent those who had witnessed the miracles of Musa (Moses) from believing in him as a Messenger of the Lord of all the worlds. Not only did Pharaoh use this accusation, he also tried to stir up his people's patriotism by provoking their zeal and targeting their feelings of national identity, and thus, he told them the Musa (Moses) wants to drive them out of their land: 'He means to drive you out of your land!' (*al-A'raf*: 110)

Therefore, it is clear that Pharaoh and his people accused Musa (Moses) of seeking to drive the people out of their land with his sorcery. Truly, the main purpose for this accusation was to stir up the people and make them angry since Pharaoh had convinced them that he was a god, and this 'so-called divinity' was about to collapse at any given moment. So, he called Musa (Moses) a sorcerer in front of a people who were accustomed to sorcery. This

brings up a very important point, namely the fact that Pharaoh asked his leading supporters for advice which indicates that Pharaoh was of a lower rank than those who were addressed; this should not have been the case since Pharaoh was the one who gave orders to everyone. Yet, this statement on his part indicates that Pharaoh realised that his position had slipped along with his pride on the verge of being destroyed. Another possible interpretation is that Pharaoh may have said this as a way of pleasing the hearts of those around him, implying that he would not issue an order without first seeking their advice. However this raises an important question: 'How could you seek people's counsel, Pharaoh, when you have led them to believe that you are a god? Does a god seek the counsel of his slaves?' These words of yours show up your own total failure since you claimed to be a god, and then sought the advice of your worshippers!

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُوا أَرْجِهْ وَأَخَاهُ وَأَرْسِلْ فِي الْمَدَائِنِ حَاشِرِينَ ﴿١١١﴾

They said, 'Delay him and his brother for a while, and send messengers to all the cities[111] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 111)

The Arabic word *Arjih* means 'let him wait'; this meaning is also understood from the saying of Allah *the Almighty* that there are yet others – people whose cases are deferred (*murjawn*): 'And there are others whose case has been deferred pending the decree of Allah. He may punish them, or He may turn to them with compassion. And Allah is All Knowing, Wise.' (*at-Tawba*: 106) This means that they have been given time before a verdict shall be rendered on them; this refers to the three men who abstained from the battle of *Tabuk* by staying behind. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* postponed judging them until Allah's Pardon was revealed down.

Therefore, the saying of Allah, 'Delay him and his brother...' indicates that they recommended this delay since the situation was quite dire to be acted upon hastily, rather, the decision had to be delayed until the great ones had counselled with each other to arrive at a solution on how to deal with it; actually, it was not a simple matter. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threatened the so-called divine status of Pharaoh, which could bring an end to

the rule of pharaohs and also the benefit which the great ones obtained from this rule. When Pharaoh asked them about their advice, it was as though he wanted their opinion immediately, but they said that the matter needs careful consideration, in which they decided as a first step to send for those who had knowledge of sorcery, by saying, 'As long as we say that Musa (Moses) is a sorcerer, let us combat him with the sorcery which we ourselves possess.' For Pharaoh to accept this counsel would mean the destruction of his divinity since he claimed to be a god and then sought the aid of his worshippers, the sorcerers, who were supposed to be his followers.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'and send messengers to all the cities' indicates that sorcery was widespread and prevalent throughout the cities of Egypt during this particular period of time. Allah *the Almighty* then tells us about what Pharaoh's supporting leaders said:

يَا تُوْكَ يَكْلُ سَنَحِرِ عَلِيْمِ ﴿١١٢﴾

**To summon every learned sorcerer to you' [112]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 112)**

This brings up another misconception roused by orientalist who seek to cast doubts on the Quran. They say, 'In the chapter of *ash-Sh'uaara*', Allah uses the Arabic word *Sahhar* instead of *Sahir*, so how could it be like this?!' It is apparent that these orientalist want to make a difference between the two words, *Sahhar* and *Sahir*. Yet, since they do not have a full and deep understanding of the Arabic language, they do not know that the word *Sahhar* gives emphasis in two ways, as follows: as for the word *Sahir*, it means a person who practises sorcery, while *Sahhar* means that he is very skilled in sorcery. In Arabic, emphatic substantives are used either to indicate that the action is immense or that it is repeated. Thus, the word *Sahhar* means a person whose sorcery is very strong or who engages in sorcery all the time, making him highly adept at it. In the same respect, as long as there were several speakers making this announcement, there is a possibility that one might say *Sahir*, whilst another might say *Sahhar*, and so on. The Quran thus gives us all the different elements of the story.

As for the Arabic word *Hashirin*, it means those who will gather the sorcerers for Pharaoh and bring them before him, not out of their own choice, but by the power of Pharaoh and the strength of his forces.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَجَاءَ السَّحَرَةُ فِرْعَوْنَ قَالُوا إِنَّ لَنَا لَأَجْرًا إِن كُنَّا نَحْنُ الْغَالِبِينَ ﴿١١٣﴾

The sorcerers came to Pharaoh and said, 'Shall we be rewarded if we win?' [113] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 113)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'The sorcerers came to Pharaoh...' clearly shows how a powerful commander Pharaoh was! As soon as he gave the word, his forces rushed quickly to gather the sorcerers. Once again, some orientalist have also objected to this by saying, 'Why is this verse under discussion stated differently from that mentioned in the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara*' in which the saying of the sorcerers takes the form of interrogation, while this verse from *al-'Araf* takes the form of a statement?'

These orientalist did not yet take into account the fact that every one of Pharaoh's sorcerers reacted in the way which got him what he wanted: those who interrogated the matter from Pharaoh were weak, whilst the bolder ones put their saying in the form of a statement. In addition, the question did not make the reward certain since Pharaoh could have responded by saying, 'There shall be no reward for you', but as for the statement in *al-'Araf*, it indicates that some of the sorcerers declared that there had to be a reward. The Quran thus informed us of both the question and the statement.

Then comes Pharaoh's answer to the sorcerer's demand for a reward; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ نَعَمْ وَإِنَّكُمْ لِمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾

And he replied, 'Yes, and you will join my inner court' [114] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 114)

The Arabic particle 'Yes' indicates response. In this context, it substitutes for the sentence 'You shall have a reward'; Pharaoh further added that they would indeed join his inner court.

This statement on his part indicates clearly that he was fawning to them or exaggerating in his praise of them. He did this since he needed them so badly; thus, we see that the so-called divinity of Pharaoh had crumbled before his worshippers, the sorcerers. In addition, his words to them that they would indeed join his inner court indicate the corruption of his rule, for as long as he was the ruler, all of his subjects should have been equal before him. However, if there were some who were nearer to him, then the first tier would plunder according to their nearness, and so would the second and the third, and so on. What this means is that each group would indulge in their corruption as long as the people were categorised by this ruler.

This is why when the Companions would sit and listen to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they were pleased that it means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* equally esteemed and respected all his Companions; the word 'regard' here means 'esteem, respect, etc.'; yet in spite of that, major companions used to get closer to him when he was teaching them anything. This is something which is quite clear in his biography.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

قَالُوا يَمْوَسِيَّ اِمَّا اَنْ تُلْقِيَ وَاِمَّا اَنْ نَّكُونَ نَحْنُ الْمُلْقِيْنَ ﴿١١٥﴾

So they said, 'Moses, will you throw first or shall we?' [115] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 115)

This verse tells that they did not really want Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to be the first to throw his staff, rather, they affirmed their desire that they should be the first to do so. This point is inferred from their use to the additional pronoun 'we', which indicates emphasis.

We know with certainty that people judge latter actions and not the first ones. The same applies to Musa's (Moses's) case with the sorcerers; they really wanted to go second after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*, but their pride made them go first, which is why they came up with an expression which incorporated both possibilities by saying 'Musa (Moses), will you throw first or shall we?' (*al-A'raf*: 115) So, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* knew that they were eager to throw first, since they used the word 'we'; he thought it would be

better for him if they threw first since his staff would then eat and swallow up what they had thrown.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us about the response of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to them by saying:

قَالَ الْقَوْمُ فَلَمَّا أَلْقَوْا سَحَرُوا أَعْيُنَ النَّاسِ
وَأَسْتَرَهُمْ بِوَهُمْ وَجَاءُوا بِسِحْرِ عَظِيمٍ

He said, ‘You throw,’ and they did, casting a spell on people’s eyes, striking fear into them, and bringing about great sorcery [116] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 116)

Therefore, they cast a spell that affected the people’s eyes. It is well known that sorcery is subtle trickery which produces a startling thing resembling a miracle; it seems as though it is breaking natural laws. It is not the same as the trickery which conjurers perform, for they use quick movements and sleight of hand to make people blind to what is actually happening. Sorcery, however, is something else. We know that Allah *the Almighty* created man, jinn and the angels and defined particular laws for each of them. Yet, what is eligible for man is not like that for jinn and angels, and so on. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells that none can comprehend His Forces (of angels) but He: 'And none knows the host of your Lord but He.' (*al-Muddaththir*: 31)

Each created being is governed by laws that have their own characteristics and distinctive features which suit the substance from which it was created. Man, for example, is created from clay, and thus cannot pass through walls; if there is an apple behind the wall against which he is sitting, neither its scent nor its taste will reach his mouth since the wall comes between him and it. The case is completely different if there were to be a fire on the other side of the wall against which he leans. This is due to the fact that it is possible that it could affect you since fire has rays which pass through solid objects. Due to this fact that the jinns “Demons” are created from fire, we find that they enjoy this characteristic (of the ability to penetration). In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the Satan and his tribe see us although we do not see them: 'Truly, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you see them not.' (*al-A’raf*: 27)

It is clear that jinns have their own laws and so does man, but that raises a good question: 'Does this truly mean that these laws are in charge with all the affairs of life?' The answer is definitely 'No', rather, it is the Lord of the law who is in charge for everything in life since He is the Creator of this law. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* enables a particular man to learn some of the secrets of His Universe so that he can subjugate the jinns for his service even though jinns are subtle and swift. He *the Exalted* thus clarifies the matter for us by saying: 'Do not think, O jinns, that because you have taken your special characteristics from the substance from which you were created, you became superior to man. Allah *the Most High* is the One Who created you and everything else; this is a fact which is proven by how man – who is made of a different substance – is able to control you after Allah teaches him some of the secrets of His Universe.' We should realise that knowledge of the secrets of how to subjugate *jinns* is but one of the trials which Allah tests mankind with. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that Harut and Marut used to tell people that they were a temptation to evil. They even urged them not to deny the truth (*al-Baqara*: 102).

Therefore, this aforementioned verse tells that Harut and Marut, who taught people how to perform sorcery, first advised any person who desired to learn sorcery by clarifying for him that that they were but a temptation, i.e. a trial and a test, and even said to him not to deny the truth. This indicates that those who learn sorcery are evildoers, even if they claim that they are doing so for good purposes since they might say this, whilst their souls have pure intentions towards mankind. However, what about the case if someone treats them badly in some way or another and harms them, whilst they know some of the secrets of sorcery? Will they be able to control themselves? It is true that they said to be trustworthy when they made the pledge, but will they prove trustworthy when the time comes to honour it? As a matter of fact, anyone who learns sorcery might use it to take revenge on others, thereby violating the rule of equal opportunities which protects people, makes them safe from one another and even makes everyone stay within his limits.

In the same respect, if a person takes a weapon which no one else has, he might use it against someone who does not possess the same. Thus, the one who exploits his ability to subjugate jinns thereby has a special characteristic

which his fellow man does not possess. Thereby, he claims for himself an opportunity which is more considerable than that of anyone else. In fact, this is viewed as a source of tribulation, for he might succeed in achieving his goals or he might not. As for Harut's and Marut's warning to people not to deny the truth, it shows that the two angels knew well that human nature dictates that when people take a higher opportunity, they might be trusted, whilst their souls are pure, but they cannot be as such when they are disturbed.

It goes without saying that as long as Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who gives them this power, He is able to take it back from them, just as He gives power to a man to create wealth and thus be able to buy a gun and learn how to shoot. Therefore, when this man becomes angry, he might imagine that the way to resolve a dispute with his foe is to shoot him – but had he not possessed a gun, his anger might have been abated by hearing a pleasant and good word. Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* prohibits something, He does it out of His Mercy, which is why He says Harut and Marut never taught sorcery to anyone without first declaring that they are but a temptation to evil. They even warn them against denying the truth (*al-Baqara: 102*). This indicates a warning to those who study sorcery and anything like it; Allah *the Almighty* wants to protect His Creation from the evil and harm of this matter. It is enough to know that He *the Exalted* pledged that they can harm none thereby save by His Leave (*al-Baqara: 102*).

If you were to follow these people, they would subjugate you and consume you, and Allah would leave you to them since you mistakenly believed that they were truthful. However, if you were to seek refuge in Him *the Almighty* and say, 'O, Allah, You have given some of Your creation the ability to do sorcery and evil, but You have kept for Yourself the right to protect from harm's occurrence. Therefore, I seek refuge in that which You have kept for Yourself from the power which You have given to them, by Your words "they can harm none thereby save by God's leave" (*al-Baqara: 102*)'. If you were to say this supplication, Allah *the Almighty* would not let them harm you. It is only if you respond to them and become one of them that they will consume you. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to expose this kind of action, so He conveyed to us the sorcerers' demand to Pharaoh to reward them if they beat Musa (Moses):

'And when the sorcerers came, they said to Pharaoh, "Shall we have a reward if we are the winners?"' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 41)

It is as though they acknowledged their own deficiency: although they claimed to be able to work miracles, they were unable to obtain that which sufficed and met their needs, so they asked Pharaoh for a reward. This actually is the state of those who occupy themselves with sorcery and occultism, for they claim to have power, but meanwhile they suffer from poverty and penury. Allah *the Almighty* has actually ordained that anyone who makes a living from sorcery would be given straightened provisions. In addition, He *the Exalted* always exposes them. In this regard, the intelligent person may rightly say, 'As long as sorcerers claim to bring success to others, let them successfully put their own affairs in order?! In addition, as long as they claim to know where treasures are hidden, why do they not know where treasures are hidden in land which belongs to no one, so that they can claim them for themselves?!' This, of course, is if we first assume that a sorcerer is quite trustworthy that he would not seek to take the treasures of others.

This is why we find that all those who make a living from sorcery and occultism die as paupers in dismal conditions; they also have problems with their children, for each of them utilises an opportunity which does not come to all the members of the human race in order to bring harm to people. In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* tells that certain kinds of humans would seek refuge with certain kinds of such invisible forces, namely jinns, but jinns only increased their confusion: 'And, indeed, some men from among the common folk used to seek the protection of some men from among the jinn, and thus they increased the jinn in arrogance.' (*al-Jinn*: 6)

Thus, Allah *the Exalted* affirms that sorcerers will live in confusion and hardship throughout their lives. In this regard, it is important to know that we do not deny the existence of sorcery, just as we do not deny the existence of the jinn since we have the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said, 'Last night a demon from the jinns came to me (or Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said a similar sentence) to disturb my prayer, but Allah gave me the power to overcome him. I intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the mosque till the morning so that all of you

could see him, but then I remembered the statement of my brother Sulaiman (Solomon): "O, my Lord, grant me forgiveness and bestow upon me a kingdom that may not be inherited by anyone after me. Surely, You are the Great Bestower." (*Sad* :35)⁽¹⁾

Therefore, as long as Allah *the Exalted* said that He created beings which you (O, human beings!) cannot perceive with your senses, we fully accept that. Thus, we should know that there is a difference between the existence of something and being able to perceive it. Every created being has its own law which it acts under it. In the Quran, we were told that powerful chieftain from among the jinns told Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* that he would bring him the throne of the queen of Sheba before he rose up from his place: 'A powerful chieftain from among the jinns said, "I will bring it to you before you rise from your place. Indeed, I possess power, and I am trustworthy.'" (*an-Naml*: 39)

This obviously indicates that the jinn required some time to achieve the act, as Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* might have remained seated in the council with them for an hour, or two or even three. However, the one who had knowledge of scripture told him: 'I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye.' (*an-Naml*: 40)

His eye, of course, blinked in less than a second after he said this, which is why we find that the Quran relates what happened immediately saying that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* saw the throne of the queen of Sheba right before him (*an-Naml*: 40).

All of this shows that Allah *the Exalted* created different kinds of created beings and made particular laws applicable for each of them. Yet, some laws might be stronger than others, but those governed by these laws are created beings, and therefore cannot be certain of them since the One Who created these laws might annul them and even give a lower created being power over a higher one.

Back to the chapter of *al-'Araf*; let us carefully scrutinise the Quranic expression 'they cast a spell upon the people's eyes.' We are faced with two

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari

things here, staffs and ropes, as well as a crowd of people watching the situation. We can understand from the aforementioned part of the verse that sorcery affected the eye of the onlooker, not on the object itself which remained as it was. In our case, the staffs remained in their original case and so did the ropes. Yet, the only thing which was affected was the vision of the onlooker. A point which is proven by another Quranic verse, in which Allah *the Almighty* says that it was imaged to him on account of their magic as if their ropes and staffs were running: 'Moses said, "No, you cast." Then lo! Their ropes and their staffs appeared to him, by their magic, as though they ran about.' (*Ta Ha*: 66)

Therefore, it is quite clear that sorcery does not change reality; rather, reality remains as it is, and the sorcerer sees it as it really is, for it is only the people who see it differently. Hence, the sorcerers of Pharaoh did their task which was to cast a spell upon the people's eyes and strike them with awe: 'they did, casting a spell on people's eyes, striking fear into them and bringing about great sorcery' (*al-A'raf*: 116).

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'striking fear into them' means that they struck fear into the souls of the people by their actions. The sorcerers thought that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would be fearful just as the bewitched people were, forgetting that Musa (Moses) would not be fooled by their sorcery, for he was a Messenger sent by Allah Who had supported him with such a miracle that would defeat their sorcery. They had already produced mighty sorcery which made sense, since the affair was a great contest by which it would be decided whether Pharaoh's divinity would be destroyed or preserved, so they had to come up with the best and mightiest sorcery which they could.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَلْقِ عَصَاكَ فَإِذَا هِيَ تَلْقَفُ مَا يَأْفِكُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

**Then We inspired Moses, 'Throw your staff,' and –
lo and behold! it devoured their fakery [117]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 117)**

This raises a good question: 'Why was a new inspiration needed, especially since Musa (Moses) had been already trained for throwing down the staff?'

We say that there is a difference between training and practice So, when the time came, Allah *the Exalted* gave a new command, for perhaps the human nature of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* might have affected somewhat by this mighty sorcery. We know that the story of Musa (Moses) contains many amazing things. Pharaoh was slaying all the male-born and leaving the women alive, yet our Lord *the Almighty* decreed that Musa (Moses) would not be slain, so He inspired the mother of Musa (Moses) to suckle him for a time, and then to cast him into the river when she was fearful: 'Suckle him, and when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve, for We shall restore him to you and shall make him one of the Messengers.' (*al-Qasas: 7*)

The order of Allah *the Almighty* to the mother of Musa (Moses) to cast him into the river when she feared about him shows that the fearful thing had not yet come, but it would come later. Go to any woman and say to her, 'If you fear for your son for some reason, then throw him into the sea.' Of course, she will not believe you; rather, she will scorn you, leading her to ask, 'How can I save him from an expected death by casting him into certain death?' This is something natural since in this case we are faced with an inspiration from Allah to one of His creation. It is taken for granted that the Inspiration of Allah cannot be doubted, so when an inspiration and a revelation comes from Allah, nothing can appease them. In addition, one does not ask for evidence, for the soul is assured by it – so Musa's (Moses') mother cast her child into the sea without any hesitation.

Allah *the Almighty* taking into consideration the fact that she was a mother, ordered her not to fear and not to grieve, for He shall restore him to her (*al-Qasas: 7*). In addition, not only would He return him to her, but he would be given a mighty status, as well. Allah says to her that her son Musa (Moses) would be one of the Messengers: 'Suckle him, and when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve, for We shall restore him to you and shall make him one of the Messengers.' (*al-Qasas: 7*) It is as though Allah *the Almighty* was clarifying for Musa's (Moses') mother that her son would not only be kept alive for her sake, but he had another mission in life which was to be a Messenger of Allah. Therefore, if Heaven would not protect him for the sake of his mother's concern and emotions, it would protect him because he

had a crucial mission, namely he would be one of the Message-bearers. We notice here that Allah *Glorified is He* does not mention the story of the wooden chest that He mentioned in the chapter of *Ta Ha* in which He reminds Musa (Moses) of His Grace upon him saying that He had inspired his mother to place him in a chest and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore: 'When We revealed to your mother what was an important revelation, to wit. Put him in the ark, and place in into the river, then the river will cast it on to the shore, and there one who is an enemy to Me and also an enemy to him will take him up.' And I wrapped you with love from Me, and this I did that you might be reared before My eye.' (*Ta Ha*: 38-39)

In this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Ta Ha*, He did not order her not to fear and not to grieve since He clarified for her how the river would cast him safely ashore. As for His words in the first verse, namely to cast him into the river when she is fearful, it was a preparation for the event before it came. As for these verses of *Ta Ha*, we find that the quick succession of pieces of information explicitly expresses her actions at the moment of peril, a matter that does not happen in the verse of *al-Qasas*, whose tone is slow, calm and normal since it is speaking of preparations for what would come in the future.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* defines a particular law for every kind of created being. These laws must yet be respected since Allah wants all the members of a given kind to have equal opportunities. When He wanted to inform us of this, He clarified that a believer must consider the advantages that will result from abiding by legal obligations. In the verse of credit transactions, for example, we find that He counsels the debtor, who is the weaker party, to write the record of the credit transaction himself to the creditor, who is the stronger party. Allah *Glorified is He* says not to hate writing down every contractual provision, be it small or great, together with the time at which it falls due (*al-Baqara*: 282).

On the surface, this seems to protect a creditor and his money, but we should also be aware that it protects a debtor from himself since if a debt is not written down, a debtor may not try hard enough to pay it. Furthermore, if a debtor works hard, then everyone is benefitted by his productivity. If we do not write down a debt, however, and a debtor is lazy in working to pay it back,

chaos will spread through the society, and everyone will refuse to lend money to those who need it, and thus, all the economic matters will be corrupted.

Therefore, He *the Almighty* commands that contracts of debt be written down, even though this apparently seems to be a protection for a creditor, but also provides protection for a debtor since there is a difference between the moment when a trust is taken on and the moment when it must be fulfilled.

For example, when someone says to you, 'I have one thousand pounds, but I fear to lose them, so keep them with you as a trust until I need the money' this person is giving you a trust for which there is no document of receipt or witnesses. It all lies in the hands of the trustee who can either deny or acknowledge it. Some people may ask for this trust with the intention of returning it. They are ready for due repayment at the time of taking the trust, but they have no guarantee of what they will do at the time of repayment. Difficult circumstances may befall them at that time, so they contrive excuses to escape or postpone repayment. Therefore, there is a difference between the conditions of the trustee when he takes a trust and when he has to fulfil it. A true believer always bears in mind both moments of when he assumes the trust and of when he returns it. This is why some people refuse to take responsibilities for trusts in order to spare themselves their burdens.

In this context, we say to those who learn things that go against the natural laws of the universe, e.g. sorcery, beware of subjecting yourself to trial and temptation. Stay away from them and save yourself. Do not use them and beware of saying, 'I will use sorcery, for instance, in good causes or if an afflicted person comes to me, I will relieve him by sorcery.' We affirm that you just speak about the time when you take on the trust, but you cannot speak about the time of fulfilment. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Then We inspired Moses, saying, "Throw down your staff." And it immediately swallowed up their false devices.' (*al-A'raf*: 117)

The word *ifk* (to reverse something) is to tell lies (false devices). As stated before, every statement has two aspects: the expression uttered and the relevant reality. If you were to say, for example, 'Mohammad is a hard worker', the predicate is 'is a hard worker', but does reality assert it? If the statement and reality correspond to one another, the speech is truthful, but if they differ, it is a case of lying even if the teller does not know the fact. However, if a person

intentionally tells a lie against the reality, it is a case of deception and fabrication. 'Then We inspired Musa (Moses), saying, "Throw down your staff." And it immediately swallowed up their false devices.' (*al-A'raf*: 117)

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* says: '*fa idha*' which means immediately, to express a quick reaction that occurred when the staff of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* turned into a snake and swallowed up all the sorcerers' lies and false devices whereby they had bewitched the eyes of people.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَوَقَعَ الْحَقُّ وَبَطَلَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١١٨﴾

The truth was confirmed and what they had produced came to nothing [118] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 118)

Allah's Words 'the truth prevailed' (*al-A'raf*: 118) means the mere truth had become a reality. There is a difference between theories and revealing realities. The word *waqa'a*, which conveys 'prevailed' has the literal meaning of 'fell', as things that fall from above everyone can see and recognise them. He *the Most High* then says, 'the truth prevailed' that means that it occurred and became a proven fact after being a mere statement which could be accepted or denied: 'Thus, the truth prevailed and what they had produced came to nothing.' (*al-A'raf*: 118). The sorcery they had wrought had been proven vain. The True Lord *the Most High* made the truth of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* a real event for all to witness, and the sorcerers suffered defeat.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَعُلبُوا هُنَالِكَ وَأَنْقَلَبُوا صَغِيرِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾

They were defeated there and utterly humiliated [119] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 119)

Not only were the sorcerers vanquished, but Pharaoh and his entourage and supporters were vanquished as well. All those who opposed Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* suffered defeat and humiliation; humiliation for those who summoned people and those who were summoned. Therefore,

Allah *the Most High* concludes the Quranic verse by saying: “[they] became utterly humiliated” (*al-A'raf*: 119).

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَأَلْقَى السَّحَرَةَ سَاجِدِينَ ﴿١٢٠﴾

**The sorcerers fell to their knees [120]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 120)**

Allah *the Exalted* did not say, ‘And the sorcerers prostrated.’ Instead, He says: ‘and down fell’ (*al-A'raf*: 120) to indicate that their fall into prostration was not their own choice, but rather, it was a spontaneous expression of awe at what they had seen taking place before them. Seemingly, something else threw them down in prostration. This was the awe they felt upon beholding the truth. Each one thought himself a sorcerer, but they were all shocked at the staff thrown by Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when they saw a real snake, it was the moment they knew that it was not sorcery. They threw down the ropes and staffs they brought from all cities. It is said that they had seventy camels laden with such staffs. They witnessed how Musa's (Moses') staff, turning into a serpent, devoured all their devices. However long it is, a staff is still a staff. The sorcerers became certain that it could not be a work of a sorcerer. In response, they expressed their surprise by saying:

قَالُوا يَا مَنَّا رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٢١﴾

**And said, ‘We believe in the Lord of the
Worlds [121] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 121)**

Did they prostrate before having faith or afterwards? The text suggests they first prostrated in submission before having faith. Normally, no one prostrates himself without having faith first. Yet, we know that faith lies in heart, whereas prostration is a physical, practical action. As such, each one of them had faith in his heart before prostration. Clearly, they first believed, then prostrated and announced their belief: ‘We believe in the Lord of the worlds!’ We do not base faith on prostration’ rather, we base prostration on the testimony and announcement of faith. Truly, the announcement of faith differs from having a firm faith. People around them might have asked, ‘What had happened

to you?' In response, they said, 'We have come to believe in the Lord of the worlds!' (*al-A'raf*: 121)

Consequently, those who criticise the order of the text should be aware that their announcement of faith implies their previous faith. The sorcerers came to believe and then prostrated. When people voiced their amazement at this prostration, the sorcerers replied, 'Do not be amazed or confused, for we have believed in the Lord of the worlds': (They said,) 'We have come to believe in the Lord of the worlds!' (*al-A'raf*: 121)

Some scholars state that Pharaoh said, 'I am the lord of the worlds', but the sorcerers did not pass his claim unchallenged and made it clear that the Lord of the worlds is 'The Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!' Whereupon, Pharaoh said, 'I raised Musa (Moses) in my own household!' In response, they said, 'But you did not raise Harun (Aaron).' This is why Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies here that the Lord of the worlds is,

رَبِّ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

The Lord of Moses and Aaron!' [122]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 122)

After their clear announcement of faith in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron), Pharaoh became enraged. The Quran relates his reply:

قَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ ءَاٰمَنْتُمْ بِهٖۤ ۚ قَبْلَ اَنْۢ ءَاذَنَ لَكُمْۙ اِنَّ هٰذَا لَمَكْرٌ مَّكَّرْتُمْوْهُ فِى الْمَدِيْنَةِ لِتُخْرِجُوْا مِنْهَاۙ اٰهْلَهَاۙ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

But Pharaoh said, 'How dare you believe in Him before I have given you permission? This is a plot you have hatched to drive the people out of this city! Soon you will see [123] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 123)

It seems as if Pharaoh was still trying to affirm his authority. We know that the children of Israel had mingled with the Egyptians, and some Israelites even learnt sorcery. Therefore, Pharaoh accused the sorcerers of having staged the event with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in advance. Pharaoh was backed

to the corner. He had to find a way out since everyone had witnessed what happened. He did not want them to doubt his divinity, lest the castle of lies he had built would come crashing down. He then said to the sorcerers, 'Behold, this is indeed a plot which you have cunningly devised in this [my] city...' (*al-A'raf*: 123). He accused them of staging the event with Prophet Musa (Moses), *peace be upon him*. He went on to accuse Musa (Moses) of sorcery as well, 'Verily, he must be your master who has taught you magic!' (*Ta Ha*: 71)

As a result of the supposed 'plot', Pharaoh threatened them:

لَأَقْطَعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ مِّنْ خَلْفٍ ثُمَّ لَأُسَلِّبَنَّكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

I will cut off your alternate hands and feet and then crucify you all!' [124] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 124)

As seen, this threat was cruel and shocking. Indeed, having one's hands and feet cut off and one's body crucified are all fearsome things. How did those to whom the threat was issued respond, after the radiance of faith had entered their hearts? Allah *Glorified is He* says their response.

قَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا مُنْقَلِبُونَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

They said, 'And so we shall return to our Lord [125] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 125)

Therefore, you are only expediting goodness for us since we will go to meet our Lord. Your recklessness and absurdity only do us a favour and benefit, even if you fail to realise it! They continued to admonish Pharaoh, as the Quran tells us:

وَمَا نَنْفَعُ مَنَا إِلَّا أَنْتَ ءَأَمَنَّا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّنَا لَمَّا جَاءَتْنَا
رَبَّنَا أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَتَوَفَّنَا مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٢٦﴾

Your only grievance against us is that we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord, pour steadfastness upon us and let us die in devotion to You' [126] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 126)

What is wrong with us that you hate? Vengeance is inspired by hatred. In essence, they are saying to Pharaoh, 'Is it not our belief in the Divine

Messages that you hate? Is it a hateful thing to believe in the Divine Messages when they come?’ In linguistics, they call it a case of affirming commendation with introductory sentences seemingly blameworthy but essentially commendatory. For example, when someone says, ‘What do you hate about me? Is it my honesty, my trustworthiness, my generosity, my knowledge?’

It is as though he is enumerating things which everybody knows are not hateful. However, the error lies in the standards of the one who hates non-hated things such as righteousness, something that should not be criticised or hated. They were certain that meeting Allah *the Exalted* in a state of faith was the best thing. They all preferred the company of the Lord to the company of Pharaoh. What Pharaoh saw as punishment and even his execution of the punishments only affirmed his failure. Shall he not threaten them with death; they will die and meet their Lord. It is a certain fact; the fate of every created being is to return to Allah *the Almighty*. It seems as though they nullified the threat of Pharaoh when he said, ‘Most certainly shall I cut off your hands and your feet in great numbers because of [your] perverseness, and then I shall most certainly crucify you in great numbers, all together.’ (*al-A'raf*: 124) Then, they turned to their Lord and Creator by saying, ‘O, our Lord, shower us with patience in adversity and make us die as men who have surrendered themselves unto You!’ (*al-A'raf*: 126)

Ifragh means to pour something unto something else, or in other words, to shower until being fully covered and inundated. Apparently, they said, ‘O, Lord, give us all of the utmost patience.’ Truly, they needed patience since Pharaoh had threatened to cut off their hands and feet. Once a man inspired with Divine Knowledge said, ‘I marvel at the sorcerers of Pharaoh. They started the day as pagan sorcerers and ended the day as righteous martyrs!’

Allah *the Most High* then says:

وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ أَتَدْرُ مُوسَى وَقَوْمَهُ لِيُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَيَذَرَكَ
 وَءَالِهَتَكَ قَالَ سَنُقَذِّلْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَنَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّا فَوْقَهُمْ قَاهِرُونَ ﴿١٢٧﴾

The leaders among Pharaoh's people said to him, 'But are you going to leave Moses and his people to spread corruption in the land and forsake you and your gods?' He replied, 'We shall kill their male children, sparing only the females: We have complete power over them' [127] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 127)

Therefore, we know that the closest ones to Pharaoh were those who feared losing their authority. This statement indicates that Pharaoh did not expose Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to harm since Pharaoh was still in awe of the powerful truth he brought which was undeniably visible, leaving him terrified and afraid of Musa (Moses). Pharaoh was the first to know that his 'divinity' was completely false. He knew quite well that Prophet Musa (Moses) was on the side of truth. However, acknowledgement of defeat in front of the masses is not an easy matter for human souls. The notables of Pharaoh's people, whose authority and stature had been shaken before their eyes, said to Pharaoh, 'Will you leave Musa (Moses) and his people to spread corruption in the land?' It seems that Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* left the scene after the sorcerers were punished. Pharaoh did not detain them, so the entourage of Pharaoh asked, 'Are you going to leave Musa (Moses) and his people to spread corruption in the land and forsake you and your gods?' (*al-A'raf*: 127)

The word *yadharuk* means to forsake, leave or abandon. Pharaoh believed that there existed higher gods and lower gods and that he was the lord of the lower realm in its entirety. That is why they said, 'And [cause your people to] forsake you and your gods' (*al-A'raf*: 127). Another accepted reading of the word *alihatak* or your gods, is *ilahatak*, or your worship. This means that they shall forsake you and forsake your worship. In reply, Pharaoh said, 'We shall kill their male children, sparing only the females. We have complete power over them.' (*al-A'raf*: 127)

Even at this point, Pharaoh did not expose Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to harm. His fears of Musa (Moses) prevented him from approaching him or even speaking a word against him. He was keen not to hurt Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* lest Musa (Moses) would surprise him a

second time. It is said that the serpent which appeared when Musa (Moses) threw down his staff opened its jaws and headed towards Pharaoh's direction, whereupon he said, 'Keep away from me, and I shall believe in that which you have brought!' This is certainly possible since even at this point Pharaoh did not dare approach Prophet Musa (Moses). He announced how boys would be killed and women be enslaved, but he never said anything about what would be done with Musa (Moses): 'We shall kill their male children, sparing only the females. We have complete power over them.' (*al-A'raf*: 127)

When the powerful ones are dominate over the weak, they do not need to clutch them so tightly that they decimate them; they know that their enemies are weak, so they can get them any time they want. However, if the enemy is strong, the powerful ones terrorise them with power so that they yield to them. This is why Pharaoh said, 'We have complete power over them.' (*al-A'raf*: 127) Pharaoh confirmed to his people that he and his entourage were in control and had authority and that the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could not escape from them. Pharaoh emphasised, 'We shall kill their male children, sparing only the females' since male children represent strength, whereas females usually stay home, concealed from the outside world. Keeping females alive whilst slaying their males is degrading for men since it will be the women who will suffer. This is why when Arabs used to go out for war, they would take their women with them to increase their enthusiasm. Therefore, no one would lag or act cowardly whilst his wife, sister or daughter were there behind him. Likewise, Arabs would fear defeat, lest the enemy should seize their women as captives.

In this verse, Pharaoh confirmed that he was bent on degrading the people of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* once again by slaying their sons and sparing their women, for Pharaoh had done it before. The reason for this was that the Children of Israel used to aid the kings of the Hyksos. When pharaohs expelled the Hyksos from Egypt, they turned their wrath on the children of Israel who had been on the side of the Hyksos; the children of Israel who remained were exposed to having their sons slain. However, the True Lord *the Almighty* saved Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from this fate when He inspired his mother to cast him in the river, so that Pharaoh would raise him. Now, once again Pharaoh ordained to kill their sons and spare their women.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ اسْتَغِيثُوا بِاللَّهِ وَأَصْبِرُوا إِنَّا بِالْأَرْضِ لِلَّهِ
يُورِثُهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٢٨﴾

Moses said to his people, ‘Turn to God for help and be steadfast: the earth belongs to God – He gives it as their own to whichever of His servants He chooses – and the happy future belongs to those who are mindful of Him’ [128] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 128)

Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* repeated once more the plain truth—neither did the earth belong to Pharaoh, and nor did the future belong to him, for it belongs the righteous. In this statement, he wanted to bring their attention to the verdict of history that the final outcome is always in the favour of the righteous. If Pharaoh said, 'We have complete power over them' (*al-A’raf*: 127) since they had power, authority, dominance and control, Prophet Musa (Moses) responded, ‘We seek the aid of One Who is more powerful than you.’ Musa (Moses) commanded his people to seek the aid of Allah and to bear patiently the tyranny and injustice that Pharaoh wreaked upon them.

Under suppression did the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* live when Allah promised to rescue and establish them in the land. It is a Divine statement, and Divine statements are true. However, what was the position of Musa's people towards him after their great victory? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us:

قَالُوا أُوذِينَا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَأْتِيَنَا وَمِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جِئْتَنَا قَالَ عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يُهْلِكَ
عَدُوَّكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفَ كُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرَ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٢٩﴾

And they replied, ‘We were being persecuted long before you came to us, and since then too.’ He said, ‘Your Lord may well destroy your enemy and make you successors to the land to see how you behave’ [129] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 129)

They said to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘Before you came to us we suffered when they slew our sons and spared our women. Again, since you have come, we suffer again. In other words, your leadership did nothing

for us.' They only saw the trials that Allah *the Almighty* sent upon His creation, but they failed to see His blessings, gifts and graces of victory when Pharaoh gathered all of the sorcerers, and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* defeated them. This should have been a sign of Divine Graces. However, they remembered the days of trial and ignored the days of ease.

Allah's Words 'Thereupon, He will behold how you act' (*al-A'raf*: 129) indicate how they would break their covenants and do things entirely not in compliance with all that had gone before them. In Islam, we find that 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd went to visit Al-Mansur before he became a Caliph. He had one of two slices of bread, so he said, 'Find some bread for Ibn 'Ubayd!' Yet none could be found. After he had assumed the caliphate and had royal luxury and splendour, Ibn 'Ubayd went to visit him and said, 'The True Lord was true to you, O, Commander of the Believers, when He said: 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe and make you inherit the earth, and thereupon, He will behold how you act' (*al-A'raf*: 129).

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said the same to his people when they criticised his inability to protect them from suffering. In this same manner did the people of Musa (Moses) receive the first defeat of Pharaoh at the hands of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* by saying: 'We have suffered persecution before you came to us and since you have come to us. Our sons were slaughtered and only our women were relieved. You availed us nothing, as we still suffer the same torment. We do not need you since your mission failed to relieve us from the persecution we had in the past!

They did not take into consideration that the persecution they suffered in the past and the present only came from an enemy. The response of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* implied that the causes of suffering would come to an end as Allah *the Exalted* would destroy their enemy who had hurt them in the past and the present. It will not be the only blessing, but He will do even more for them by making them inherit the earth and giving them dominion and land. Two things are to be considered here:

- The first is negative: The destruction of the enemy.
- The second is positive: They will inherit the land.

It was a promise from Allah *the Almighty* that they will have authority and dominion. They had to recognise that the Divine Graces of destroying enemies and making them inherit the earth will not simply be left unquestioned; He will watch over them and see how they act, namely whether they will receive the blessings with gratitude, firm faith and certitude along with developing a closer bond with Allah, or will they prove ungrateful for that Grace. Allah's statement on the tongue of Musa (Moses), 'It may well be...' ordinarily denotes hope; as linguists say, what may come later is hoped to occur. There is a difference between a wish and a hope. The wish manifests itself by seeking impossible, mostly unlikely or difficult matters. You only seek to express your love and desire for it by wishing, e.g. 'If only youth would return!' Really, it cannot possibly happen, but you are expressing your love for younger days. The most that can come from this is that you express your love for such a thing. As for whether it will actually happen or not, this is irrelevant. As for hope, it is something beloved and might well occur. Therefore, we certainly know that hope is stronger than wish. A phrase to express a wish is 'If only', and a phrase to express a hope is 'It might well be'. When the words 'It might well be' are followed by something which is hoped for, there are successive stages in which the strength of the hope of attainment increases.

For example, if I were to say, 'It might well be that I will be generous to you', it depends on me. Simply, treating you generously requires that I remain alive and that my feelings towards you do not change. It is possible that my feelings towards you change before I am generous to you, so that it would never happen. This is the hope of one who is subject to change. As long as I am subject to fluctuations, I might not be able to show you generosity, or I might be able to do it but not as a wish as my soul went against it. This spoils hope and makes it less likely to be attained. If you were to say to someone, 'It may well be that so-and-so will be generous to you', whilst such person is a third party, it is somewhat less likely since a third party is subject to change.

However, if you were to say, 'It may well be that Allah will treat you generously', this is stronger since nothing can prevent the Lord from being generous to a person. Will Allah *the Exalted* respond to your hope? This question requires some consideration. From the perspective of power, He *the Most High* possesses absolute Omnipotence, and nothing can stop, defy or

refuse Him. If the True Lord *the Almighty* says about Himself: 'It may well be that your Lord...' (*al-A'raf*: 129), this is the end of the matter. The promise has been made and kept. This is what is called 'a certain hope.' Therefore, the stages of hope: 'It might well be that I will be generous to you', 'It might well be that Zayd will be generous to you' and 'It might well be that Allah will be generous to you', and the strongest of all hopes is that of Allah *the Most High* Who promises generosity and mercy. 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe...' (*al-A'raf*: 129).

Evidently, it was Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who spoke these words. No one could do that except Allah, so what is the level of expectancy that this would be realised? We know that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was a Messenger aided by a miracle that Allah had commanded to convey unto them, so his hope here was assured: 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe' (*al-A'raf*: 129).

Sometimes, the removal of a harmful thing is a blessing in and of itself. If Allah *the Almighty* destroys my enemy and gives me my enemy's high position, this is a positive blessing coming after a negative one. Something akin to this will occur on the Day of Resurrection. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'He who shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into Paradise will indeed have gained a triumph.' (*Al-Imran*: 185) To be drawn away from hell is a blessing and a grace; what about the one who is drawn away from hell and brought into paradise? He thereby gains two blessings. Here, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe' (*al-A'raf*: 129), which is itself a blessing, and is then followed by another blessing: 'and make you inherit the earth'. In return for this blessing, you are under watch to see how you will act, whether you prove righteous and grateful for the blessings, or you will show ingratitude and thanklessness for them, for man is a wicked ingrate.

If the word 'behold' is used for man, it evidently means that he has eyes to 'see with.' Yet, if the same word is used for Allah, it is different. Clearly, Allah *the Most High* is far beyond having that vision of physical eyes like ours. Furthermore, He is not ignorant of anything; He knows all things before they happen. We know that there is a difference between a verdict rendered upon a man according to the Knowledge of the Creator and a verdict rendered upon a man according to a man's deed.

For example, a teacher of a particular subject knows each level of his students. When the dean of a college says to him, 'What do you think?', he replies, 'So-and-so deserves to pass with high marks! So-and-so will definitely fail.' The teacher bases this judgement on his knowledge about each student. However, if a student fails on account of his estimate without real exams, the student might say to the teacher, 'You misjudged me' or 'Had you let me take the exam, I would have passed!' Finally, when the dean agrees to test that student, the student actually fails. The dean is certain that the teacher already knows the student would fail and eventually the result came as the teacher expected.

When Allah *the Most High* says: 'Thereupon He will behold how you act' (*al-A'raf*: 129). This kind of Divine Beholding is not initiated by a need to know—Allah forbid. Allah already knows all about their acts. However, He does not want to judge them by His Omniscience but through their actions, even if He knows since pre-eternity the guided ones and those who will go astray. This is why He created Paradise and Hell large enough to accommodate all created beings. He did not just create enough places in paradise for those who will enter it. Similarly, he did not just create enough places in hell for those who will enter it. Rather, each one is capable of accommodating all created beings. Allah *the Exalted* does not judge people by His Absolute Knowledge. He left the final judgement to the realities of human life as decided by human free will. Supposing that you were all believers, there would be enough room in paradise for everyone. Yet, if everyone were all disbelieves—Allah forbid, there would be enough room in hell for all as well. Allah *the Most High* will not make anything new; He has already prepared everything, and it is all done.

When the dwellers of Paradise come to enter it and the denizens of Hell come to enter Hell, the dwellers of Paradise will find out that they have equal places reserved for those who went to Hell. It will be announced to the people of Paradise, 'You have inherited them. Take them for yourselves': '[A voice] will call out unto them: "This is the Paradise which you have inherited."' (*al-A'raf*: 43)

They inherited places of paradise originally prepared for the currently losers, who fell short complying with the orders and thus failed to claim their places. Beware of thinking that Allah beholds His creation in order to find out

anything about them. Actually, He is the Omniscient of all things. Indicating this fact, the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘And [all this was given to you] so that Allah might mark out those who would stand up for Him and His Messengers, even though He [Himself] is beyond the reach of human perception.’ (*al-Hadid*: 25).

Allah *the Most High* knows since pre-eternity about all human behaviours, realities and actions. However, it is only realities that stand evidence against criminals. The current Quranic verse highlights three things:

- Allah will destroy their enemy.
- He will make them inherit the earth.
- He will behold how they would act and judge them accordingly.

Giving the interpretation of these promises, He *the Almighty* introduces the effectuation of the first promise: destructing their enemies:

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقَصْنَا مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ﴿١٣٠﴾

**We inflicted years of drought and crop failure on
Pharaoh’s people, so that they might take heed [130]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 130)**

In this verse, we see that the destruction did not occur all at once, rather, it occurred in several stages so that when hardship afflicted them, they might return to Allah. The word *sana* (a year) which means the time between one occurrence of a calendar date to the next occurrence of the same date, is normally used to mean ‘drought’ and ‘famine.’ This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in his supplication against Arab idolaters, ‘O, Allah, afflict them with years of drought (*sineen*) like the years of drought (that took place during the time) of Yusuf (Joseph)!⁽¹⁾ In other words, he asked the Lord to send drought upon them for a while so that they may heed admonition. It is said in Arabic *asnāt al-qawm* means a drought and famine has afflicted the people. Therefore, the word *sana* in this verse means drought and famine.

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *At-Tafseer*; Muslim in *Al-Munafiqun*, and Ahmad (1/ 280, 441)

Why did He call it *sana*? It is due to the fact that the Divine Blessings are manifold and successive, whilst the trials of evil that He sends upon the creation occur infrequently. Allah *the Almighty* gives them blessings for a long period and then subjects them to trials for a moment. When He subjects them to tribulation for a particular time, this time is used as a historical reference point. It is even said, 'The tribulation occurred in such-and-such year.' It becomes known as 'The Year of Locusts' or 'The Year of Cairo Fire'. In this way, we find that people use perilous events as historical marks since happy events are usually much more frequent than bad ones. This is why we said before that the one who counts all the days of misfortune he has lived should compare them to the days of ease. Each one should consider his happy days of the year so that when a disheartening day of tribulation occurs, we say to him, 'How many times did you live and enjoy the blessings of ease?!' We find that their happy days of ease are much more frequent than those of tribulation.

Indeed, We already overwhelmed Pharaoh's people with drought and scarcity of fruits' (*al-A'raf*: 130). The years of drought and famine overwhelmed them along with 'scarcity of fruits'. It indicates that some fruits were present or that the famine and drought were in the countryside, whilst the fruits were grown in the town. It is said that a date-palm of the city would give no more than a single date in a year! Why was this single date given? It is symbolic of the Divine Mercy shown to His creation. Had all the date palms not given even a single date, the lineage of the date palm would have been cut off. Therefore, it is according to Divine Plan to preserve the means of His Mercy for us.

We see in our times that no matter how hard they have tried to grow seedless fruits using the advanced modern science, we still find odd fruits amongst them which have seeds. Why is this? We are told that it is in order to preserve the species, for if all the fruits were to grow without any seeds and then we ate them all, how would we grow a new generation of crops? We said before that it is the Divine Mercy of the True Lord *the Most High* that preserved the blessings and essential constituents of human lives. Furthermore, the fruits are only purely sweet, tasty and healthy when their seeds are mature. If you open a melon when its seeds are still white, you find that it is not tasty, and you throw it away. Once the seeds become black and are ready to be planted,

the fruit of the melon becomes ripe and sweet-tasting. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that fruits are not acceptable and tasty until their seeds are enough mature to be planted once more. It is a sign of Divine Mercy. Similarly, in the case of sinners, we find that Allah *the Exalted* shows His Mercy to them.

'Indeed, We already overwhelmed Pharaoh's people with drought and scarcity of fruits, so that they might take it to heart.' (*al-A'raf*: 130) His Words 'so that they might take it to heart' imply that man must remember his being a Divinely-made vicegerent on the earth. He is not an integral part of the universe, so the world will remain in order. The world becomes corrupt only when the physical universal means and natural laws of life submit to man. Man plants, sows and grows crops, lights fire and brings water from wells, but he forgets that all these are only means. Man rarely bears in mind the Creator of these means unless when they fail him.

A frequent example from our daily lives is when one turns on the tap in the house, but no water comes out; the first thing he does is check the main water valve which controls the flow of water into the house and sees if it is locked or impaired. If he finds that it is fine, he usually examines if the main water pipe is broken. If the main water pipe is fine, he might look for faults in the mechanism which draws up the water, and he continues to examine all these various means for however long.

In the past, water only came from wells. When there was no water in the well, one would say, 'O Lord, give us water!' The means of modern civilisation have distanced us from the Creator of the means. The True Lord overwhelmed the people of Pharaoh with drought and scarcity of fruits in order to separate their hands from the means. When the hand is separated from the means, nothing would remain. They would turn to the Creator of the means in submission and supplications, 'O Lord', for the Quran tells of human nature: 'When affliction befalls man, he cries out unto us, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing.' (*Yunus*: 12) A man remembers the Creator of the means when the means fail him. Since they are essential constituents of life, when they fail man, he cries out, 'O Lord!' In the same respect, the trials that Allah *the Almighty* sent upon the people of Pharaoh, overwhelming them with drought and scarcity of fruits, aimed to remind them of their Creator.

Allah says:

فَإِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوا لَنَا هَذِهِ وَإِنْ تُصِبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَى
وَمَنْ مَعَهُ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّمَا طَّيَّرَهُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣١﴾

**then, when something good came their way, they said, ‘This is our due!’. When something bad came, they ascribed it to the evil omen of Moses and those with him, but their ‘evil omen’ was really from God, though most of them did not realize it [131]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 131)**

The word *hasana* (good fortune) refers to the source from any good thing comes. However, the *hasana* may be for you (in which case it means ‘good fortune’), but at other times you have to do it (in which case it means ‘a good deed’). The good fortune intrinsic in man is first and foremost good health and safety. There are also the good things necessary for human livelihood and life which is found in plants and animals, and fertile ground and natural resources. The good deed, or *hasana*, that a human being shall do is also a favour for humans. Allah *the Most High* requires you to do things, which will bring you salvation and prosperity in the Hereafter. He says: 'Whoever shall come (before Allah) with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof... ' (*al-An'am*: 160).

This form of good deeds gives a human being everlasting good fortune in the future life. As for the good fortune of health and safety among other necessary things for human life such as fruits, animals, crops, herbs and natural resources, they all exist temporarily in a given time in this worldly life, while the second kind of *hasana*, the good deed, is unlimited because it has no time limit. Which of these good things is better and more preferable for man? It is the goodness of the Hereafter.

The True Lord’s Words 'But whenever *hasana* (good fortune) alighted upon them' (*al-A’raf*: 131) means that a certain amount of crops, fruits and other kinds of provision came to them, and they would then say, 'This is [but] our due', which means we deserve it; one of them would say, ‘I deserve it because I prepared, farmed, and harvested it properly.’ Qarun (Korah) said something similar: 'This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge I possess!' (*al-Qasas*: 78). Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* tried him.

Since he claimed that his wealth had come to him due to his own knowledge, let him employ his knowledge to preserve his wealth or even preserve his life. Thus, people said about the good things which Allah gave to them, 'This is but our due', which means 'We deserve it since we have done preparatory tasks that led to these results. The usual occurrence from ancient times was that the Nile would flood its banks every year, and then they would plant the seeds and wait for the fruits. If any affliction befell them, such as drought and scarcity of fruits which Allah sent upon them, they blamed Musa (Moses) for it: 'Whenever affliction befell them, they would blame their evil fortune on Musa (Moses) and those who followed him. Oh, verily, their [evil] fortune had been decreed by Allah, but most of them knew it not.' (*al-A'raf*: 131)

Therefore, when affliction befell them, they blamed they became pessimistic. Pessimism is absolutely the opposite of optimism. Both phenomena occur in our expressions like he has a bad luck or he has a good luck. The Arabic word for pessimist is *tatayyur* which is derived from the root *tayr* or bird. In ancient times, when people wanted to know what course of action to take in something, the one facing that question would take a bird and place on his arm before agitating and releasing it. If it flew to the right, it was a good omen, but if it flew to the left, it was a bad one. The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies in this verse by saying: in essence 'Do not wrong Musa (Moses), for your bad luck is not his fault since he does not possess anything of Allah's Dominion. The sole owner of the universe is the Lord of Musa (Moses).' It is as though Allah *the Exalted* also wanted them not to be deluded if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did something which brought them goodness. In this verse, He told them not to blame their ill fortune on Musa (Moses), for their fortune lies in the Hand of Allah.

The events of life are of two kinds. Some events in which man plays a part, such as the student who does not study and, as a result, fails, or the man who does not drive a car properly and, as a result, has a horrible accident or hits someone with it hazardously. In this case, man is the adversary of his own self. Then, there are those things which befall a person—accidents. Therefore, all events of concern to man is of two kinds: those afflicting man because of his own actions, e.g. negligence, and those afflicting man by fate. We say that these are from Allah *the Almighty* and occur for a wise reason

which is unknown to a person. A person always looks at the superficial things or at their immediate consequences, but he does not look at their ultimate end. Basically, some things happen to him over which he has no influence.

For example, a man might have a fine and intelligent son, who always gets the highest marks at school. Yet, on the day of the exam or the night before, he is afflicted by a headache so severe that he cannot answer the question, and so he fails the exam. This is an affliction over which man has no influence. Usually people grieve over such afflictions, but the believer says, 'The boy was not negligent. It was all decreed by Allah. He is the All-Glorious and far above all vanities, He is All-Wise and, as such, has a wise reason for decreeing such matters. After time passes, the wisdom becomes clear: had the boy passed, he may have suffered evil envious eyes with consequent unpleasant afflictions. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* made for him an amulet to protect him from envy. In the past, they used to protect their children with amulets leaving their children unclean concerning their bodies or clothes. They only aimed to protect them from envious evil eyes. Now, why do you not think that Allah made this sudden accident in order to protect him from the evil eye or to stop people from talking about him? Why do you not suppose that Allah did not allow him to pass this year because he would not have been able to get the result required by the college he wanted, whilst the following year he would study hard and would be easy for him to get that college? We would then tell him, 'Praise your Lord that you did not succeed last year! Allah only wanted the best for you. You can work hard, succeed and enter the college you wanted.'

Such accidental events that happen to people without their interventions are decreed by Allah *the Exalted* for some wise reasons. On such occasions, it is said: 'Your fortune was Divinely Decreed!' As for those instances when a person has influence over what happens to him, it is said that his fortune came from him, and his bad luck was due to his own self and his disobedience: 'But whenever *hasana* (good fortune) alighted upon them, they would say, "This is [but] our due", and whenever affliction befell them, they would blame their evil fortune on Musa (Moses) and those who followed him. Oh, verily, their [evil] fortune had been decreed by Allah, but most of them knew it not'

(*al-A'raf*: 131). The Jews in Medina also blamed their evil fortune on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when they said, 'The rains have become scarce, and prices have become very high due to the ill luck brought by the coming of this man.' They did not seek to understand Divine Wisdom. They were leading figures in Arabia noted for their knowledge of the Scripture and took control of the movement of markets. They practiced usury, sold weapons and possessed garrisons and weapons. Allah *the Most High* wanted to draw their attention by seizing some of their material means and threatening their position to alert them of their misguided course. Simply, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came to bring them back to the Way of Allah.

The True Lord concludes the verse in question by saying: 'But most of them knew it not.' It indicates that there were a minority who indeed did know. So what was the position of this minority? Why did they not decry the position of the majority? They kept silent for fear of oppression. The tyrants forced and coerced them to be silent and abstain from opposing the falsities. In our life, we see many people who know about corruption and tyranny, yet they do not speak out. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُوا مَهْمَا تَأْتِنَا بِهِ مِنْ آيَةٍ لِنَسْحَرَنَّ بِهَا فَمَا نَحْنُ لَكَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

**They said, 'We will not believe in you, no matter what signs you produce to cast a spell on us' [132]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 132)**

The people of Pharaoh said to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'Whatever miracle you bring to us to take us from our current way of life, we will not believe in you.' They called that which Prophet Musa (Moses) brought a 'sign', as a form of mockery mixed with sarcasm. All of these events were precursors, which justified the destruction about which Allah *the Most High* said: 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe' (*al-A'raf*: 129). They announced that what Prophet Musa (Moses) had done was sorcery even though they had witnessed the most excellent and knowledgeable sorcerers fall down in prostration and declare their belief. How could this happen to all the sorcerers who were gathered at an appointed time? All people witnessed the genuine event in which the staff of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*

swallowed up all the devices of the sorcerers, and so they fell prostrate and believed. How could those who had no knowledge of sorcery accuse Musa (Moses) of it? How could they think that the signs which he brought from the Lord were mere sorcery?

In the verse, they used the word 'whatever' to indicate their personal persistence and obstinacy. It is like one saying to another, 'I have made up my mind not to accept what you say!' In reply, the other says, 'Wait to hear my second argument, for it might convince you.' The former replies, 'Whatever argument you come up with, I will not listen to you.' This indicates the persistent obstinacy, rejection and denial. The people of Pharaoh justified their denial by saying: 'Whatever sign you may produce before us in order to cast a spell upon us thereby shall not make us believe it.' (*al-A'raf*: 132). If they thought the Divine signs given to Musa (Moses) *peace and blessings be upon him* was sorcery, does the bewitched person have any free will in the face of the bewitcher? If it were sorcery, they would all have been bewitched and that would have been their end. In response to those who say, 'Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bewitched the people to believe in him': If he had bewitched the people to believe in him, then why did he not bewitch you? The fact that you remain in your obstinacy is proof that he employs no kind of sorcery. When you hear the word 'whatever' (*mahma*), you know that there is a conditional clause and 'result'. The scholars say that the origin of this word is *mah* which means 'stop', or, in other words, 'stop bringing us such signs, for we will never believe you'. They were adamant and obstinate in their refusal to believe. The True Lord *the Most High* then tells us how He requited them for this:

فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الطُّوفَانَ وَالْجَرَادَ وَالْقُمَّلَ وَالضَّفَادِعَ وَالْدَّمَ آيَاتٍ
مُّفَصَّلَاتٍ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَكَانُوا قَوْمًا مُّجْرِمِينَ

And so We let loose on them the flood, locusts, lice, frogs, blood all clear signs. They were arrogant, wicked people [133] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 133)

The word 'floods' refers to the deluges of water. The water as we know is the means of life, which Allah *the Almighty* also employs as a means of

destruction. Do not think that things have intrinsic natures. Rather, things are as they are because of how the All-Powerful directs them. Look at the Flood that drowned the people of Nuh (Noah) from which no one survived except those who boarded the Ark with Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. In this verse, the people of Musa (Moses) had no Ark since Allah *the Exalted* wanted to show them his tribulation against their tyranny. The flood afflicted the people of Pharaoh, whilst the children of Israel were amongst them insomuch that the water would reach a man's collar bone, so that he had to remain standing; if he sat down, he would die. He would have to remain like that. The sky rained down upon them for seven days, in which they could not tell night from day. To their surprise, they could see that the houses of the children of Israel escaped the floods. It was a plain miracle—widespread destructive floods, when the Lord willed to save the children of Israel from destruction without any human intervention. It would not be said that the flood is merely natural. Instead, the flood came to their houses but never afflicted the children of Israel. Old tales relate that the flood reached Pharaoh, and he cried out appealing to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for help. He said, 'Call it off us, and we shall believe in what you have brought!' Therefore, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* supplicated to the Lord, and the flood subsided, but they went back to their disbelief. Allah *the Almighty* introduced His signs one-by-one, beginning with the flood. The Lord made it clear that He punished the people of Nuh (Noah) and the people of Pharaoh with floods as indications to the truth of the case. Heavy rains can fall in any land, destroying houses and drowning crops and livestock. It is a universal natural sign we can observe. Likewise, Allah sends locusts from time to time. They can come at any moment, and we undertake campaigns to combat them. This shows the truth of the afflictions told. If floods and locusts did not exist with regularity, we might be more likely not to believe.

Likewise, Allah *the Exalted* plagued them with *qummal* (lice). It is not necessarily the same lice that afflict human bodies and clothes as a result of contamination. It is said that it was a kind of maggots that afflicted their seeds. It may also refer to 'ticks' or insects which destroy crops and plants. Seeing them, we panic and immediately look for a way to rid the crops of them, either manually or by pesticides. All these things are just ways to alert

mankind. They act as a warning and guidance to the True Lord. Likewise, Allah *the Most High* sent upon them 'frogs' insomuch that when any of them put his hand in something, he would find a frog there. For example, if one were to lift a lid from a vessel of food, he would see a frog therein and even in the water they drank. When one opened his mouth a frog would enter it! It was a miracle as was the 'blood' when everything turned to blood before their eyes. It is even said that a woman of Pharaoh's people wanted to drink, so she went to an Israeli woman and said, 'Take water in your mouth and then pass it into mine' as a means to escape blood. The water left the mouth of the Israeli woman as water, but when it entered her mouth, it turned into blood: 'Thereupon, We let loose upon them floods, [plagues of] locusts, lice, frogs and [water turning into] blood – distinct signs [all].' (*al-A'raf*: 133)

His Word *mufassalaat* means distinct and evident. He *the Most High* did not send all these plagues simultaneously, so they would shock the people all at once and test them as to whether they would announce their faith or not. Rather, He made each sign distinct from the next. No sign occurred at the same time as another. He sent them as clear miracles bearing admonition and caution, indicating the successive warnings that they would take heed and keep restrained. Had they only taken heed and restrained after one single plague, Allah *the Almighty* would have withheld the calamity from them.

In the Quranic verse, He sent five signs: floods, locusts, lice, frogs and blood. The True Lord also says: 'He overwhelmed them with drought and scarcity of fruits' making them seven. There is the staff of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace and blessings be upon him* which swallowed up the works of the sorcerers as the eighth sign. Likewise, there is the 'white hand' that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* showed to Pharaoh and his entourage, which is the ninth sign. Then, the signs are as follows:

- the staff,
- the hand,
- the drought,
- the scarcity of fruits,
- the flood,
- the locusts,

- the lice,
- the frogs and
- the blood.

The distinct signs are wondrous miracles that Allah sends upon those whom He wills to humiliate. He may test some people with them and relieve others. What was their reaction to these wondrous miracles? Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the Quranic verse: 'But they gloried in their arrogance, for they were people lost in sin.' (*al-A'raf*: 133) They did not believe! Instead, they were arrogant, sinned against themselves and cut themselves off from faith. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَلَمَّا وَقَعَ عَلَيْهِمُ الرِّجْزُ قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ بِمَا عَهِدَ عِنْدَكَ لِئِن كَشَفْتَنَا عَنَّا الرِّجْزَ لَنُؤْمِنَنَّ لَكَ وَلَنُرْسِلَنَّ مَعَكَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

They would say, whenever a plague struck them, ‘Moses, pray to your Lord for us by virtue of the promise He has made to you: if you relieve us of the plague, we will believe you and let the Children of Israel go with you’ [134]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 134)

After they gloried in their arrogance as a people lost in sins, the events came to them successively. The 'plague' refers to horrifying things and torments that afflicted them. They went to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asking him to pray for their relief from the punishment sent upon them. Evidently, they believed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was sent by the Lord. They understood that the plagues they experienced could only be removed by that Lord. This contradicted the false 'lordship' of Pharaoh. If they still had faith in Pharaoh's lordship, they would have gone to him rather than going to their enemy Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to ask his Lord for them. We have several conclusions here:

- First, the divinity of Pharaoh was false.
- Second, the supplication of Musa (Moses) was accepted by his Lord.
- Third, had our Lord not removed the plague, it would have continued.

These precursors fill a person with faith in Allah *the Almighty*: 'They would cry: "O, Musa (Moses), pray for us to Your Lord on the strength of the covenant (of prophecy) which He has made with you! If you remove this plague from us, we will truly believe in you and will let the Children of Israel go with you!"' (*al-A'raf*: 134)

That is, 'Call upon your Lord by the promise that Allah gave to you that He will succour you as you are His messenger, supporting you with His miracles, and He would not desert you. Call upon Allah to lift this torment from us; by Allah, if you remove from us the torment which we are now experiencing, we will believe in you and believe in what has been sent down to you, and we will let you go and set the children of Israel free with you, as they were using the children of Israel to do the basest and most contemptible jobs for them'. But every time after the True Lord *Glorified is He* lifted the torment from them, they went back and broke their promise, as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ الرِّجْزَ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ هُمْ بَلَّغُوهُ إِذَا هُمْ يَنْكُثُونَ ﴿١٣٥﴾

But when We relieved them of the plague and gave them a fixed period [in which to fulfil their promise] – lo and behold! – they broke it [135] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 135)

So, it is as if they broke their promise after every sign. Look at the difference between the two expressions: between the True Lord's words *Glorified is He* 'But when We removed the punishment from them until a term which they were to reach, then at once they broke their word.' (*al-A'raf*: 135) and His words before: '...invoke for us your Lord by what He has promised you. If you (can) remove the punishment from us...' (*al-A'raf*: 134). So, who removed the plague? The removal here is ascribed to Allah, and every plague which was lifted had an appointed time which was known to the True Lord *Glorified is He* as He said, '...until a term which they were to reach, then at once they broke their word.' (*al-A'raf*: 135), meaning that they would go back on their promise.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

فَأَنْقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُمْ فِي الْيَمِّ بِآيَاتِهِمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا عَنْهَا غَافِلِينَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

And so, because they rejected Our signs and paid them no heed, We exacted retribution from them: We drowned them in the sea [136] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 136)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that there was nothing left except to destroy them because there was no good in them. They incurred His punishment on themselves, on the constituents of their lives and peace, so the command came for them to be drowned – not by tyrannical might, but by a just order; for they had denied all the signs and remained stubborn in their disbelief. We can notice here that the most important part of the story, namely the drowning, was mentioned very briefly; and the event is mentioned in detail in another chapter, wherein the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We inspired to Musa (Moses), “Travel by night with My servants; indeed, you will be pursued.”’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 52) The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not give the details of the drowning here because every verse in the Quran addresses a specific issue and a specific aspect; for the story is narrated briefly in one place and at full length in another. The part concerning the drowning here is narrated briefly, ‘So We took retribution from them, and We drowned them in the sea.’

The words ‘We caused them to drown’ have a long story which is well-known, and is narrated elsewhere in another chapter. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the children of Israel got out of Egypt, Pharaoh chased them; and when the children of Israel saw this, they said, according to the logic consequence of events, ‘we are to be overtaken’ by Pharaoh and his people because the sea was before them and they had no way of crossing it. But Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* knew that Allah would not abandon him because He wanted to complete the blessing of guidance at his hand. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was filled with certainty and trust; that is why he said confidently, ‘...No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me!’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62)

He said, ‘No!’, that is, ‘they will not overtake you’ – not by his own means, but by the means of the One who sent him, which is shown by the

qualification he then added to this, ‘...No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me!’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62) He spoke with the logic of the believer who resorts to a firm support, in the knowledge that things could not possibly end like this because he had not yet completed his mission. Therefore, he said, in full confidence, ‘No!’, even though all means were exhausted; for the sea was before them, and the enemy was behind them. In addition, he added, ‘...with me is my Lord; He will guide me’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62), with protection and succour. That is, ‘the means which Allah has already sent with me before were beyond the capacity of men: Allah has already succoured me with the staff against the sorcerers’; and it was the very same staff which He inspired him to use at this grave moment, saying to him, ‘...Strike the sea with your staff...’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63).

We know that the sea is a container of water, and the first law of water is the liquidity which makes it flow; were water not liquid but rather solid and hard, it would become an unlevelled mass. The thing which allows it to flow is its liquid state; that is why, when we want to know the delicate balance of any surface, we use a ‘spirit level’ which measures by use of water.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘...Strike with your staff the sea...’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63). When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea with his staff, the water broke its law of liquidity and lost its flowing state, and Allah *Glorified is He* depicted this for us precisely when He said, ‘... and each portion was like a great towering mountain.’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63) We find that mountains are hard, and likewise the water lost its liquidity and each part of it became like a standing mountain. No one could do this except the Creator because liquidity and flowing are natural laws, and the One Who created these natural laws is the One Who is able to annul them. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* walked over the dry land, and they all crossed the path which had been made in the sea, Pharaoh and his hosts followed them; and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* wanted to strike the sea with his staff again to return it to its liquid, flowing state so that Pharaoh and his soldiers could not follow them; and this is also a human way of thinking. But the commandment came to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from Allah, ‘...And leave the sea in

stillness...’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 24). That is, leave the sea alone in the form which it has taken so that Pharaoh and his people will enter it. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the water to return to its liquid and flowing state so that Pharaoh and his people will be tempted to cross the dry path and come and pursue you. When they enter and are surrounded by the dry path, We shall return the water to its liquid and flowing state and they shall be drowned, to affirm that the True Lord *Glorified is He* can deal salvation and destruction with the same thing. The True Lord *Glorified is He* combines all of this here, ‘So We took retribution from them, and We drowned them in the sea.’ The Arabic word *yamm* means a place in which there is deep water, and it can either mean salty or fresh water. For example, in the story of Musa’s (Moses’s) mother *peace be upon him* the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And We inspired to the mother of Musa (Moses), “Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river.”’ (*al-Qasas*: 7) Here the word *yamm* refers to the Nile River, but in this verse, in the chapter of *al-A'raf*, it means the sea. The reason why they were drowned is then given when He says, ‘...because they denied our signs and were heedless of them...’ (*al-A'raf*: 136). How, then, could He punish them and drown them because of their heedlessness, when we know that heedlessness is not accounted, since if the fasting person forgets and eats, his fast is still valid, and it is said that our Lord has gifted this person a meal and accepted his fast because he was heedless? But here the heedlessness was different. The meaning of ‘heedless’ here is that they gave the lie to the signs of Allah and then turned from them in a way which only he who deliberately ignores Allah and His way could. Had they been servants who bore the way of Allah in mind, they could not have been heedless in this way. These words represented the realisation of what Allah *Glorified is He* had said before, ‘...Perhaps your Lord will destroy your enemy...’ (*al-A'raf*: 129), and after this, there comes the realisation of what Allah *Glorified is He* said after this, ‘...and grant you succession in the land and see how you will do.’ (*al-A'raf*: 129)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, in affirmation to this:

وَأَوْرَثْنَا الْقَوْمَ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يُسْتَضْعَفُونَ مَشْرِقَ الْأَرْضِ وَمِغْرِبَهَا
 الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ الْحُسْنَىٰ عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا
 وَدَمَّرْنَا مَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ فِرْعَوْنًا وَقَوْمَهُ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْرِشُونَ ﴿١٣٧﴾

And We made those who had been oppressed succeed to both the east and the west of the land that We had blessed. Your Lord's good promise to the Children of Israel was fulfilled, because of their patience, and We destroyed what Pharaoh and his people were making and what they were building [137] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 137)

That is, Egypt and the Levant came under the control of the children of Israel, the land which Allah blessed with fertility, growth, crops, fruits, animals, and with all of life's essential constituents and its luxuries, '...And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of what they had patiently endured...' (*al-A'raf*: 137). '...And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled...' (*al-A'raf*: 137), that is, the word continued with them and Allah's true promise of stabilization to the children of Israel in the land and succouring them against their foe was fulfilled, and the blessing was completed; for Allah destroyed their foe and made them inherit the land, and His words which were uttered on the tongue of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'and grant you succession in the land and see how you will do...' (*al-A'raf*: 129). And in this way, the promise of Allah was fulfilled by His words, '...We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones...' (*al-A'raf*: 137).

We know that the words 'eastern' and 'western' are relative, since there is no specific place called 'the East' and another called 'the West', but rather, these directions are relative: a place may be called 'eastern' with respect to one place, and be called 'western' with respect to another. And when one moves to another place, he finds a new east and a new west. For example, those people who live in India and Japan consider the Middle East to be west for them, while those who live in Europe consider the Middle East to be east for them. We said before that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives the words 'east' and 'west' in the plural, as is the case here, this merely indicates

that every place has an east, and every place has a west; when the sun sets in one place, it rises in another place. Thus, we find in *Ramadan* that the sun sets in Cairo a few minutes before Alexandria.

The reason for this cycle may be for that the remembrance of Allah, with all of the remembrance of Allah's requirements, remains constant throughout all of Allah's times. For example, when we pray the dawn prayer, we find that at the very same moment, some people pray the midday prayer, and others praying the mid-afternoon prayer, and others praying the sunset prayer, and others praying the night prayer. In this way, the Will of Allah is fulfilled that there be worship always and in every moment. When a Muslim says *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) and gives the call for the dawn prayer, there is another Muslim saying *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) to call for the midday prayer, or the mid-afternoon prayer, or the sunset prayer, or the night prayer. This difference in times of day was intended by Allah *Glorified is He* in order that His Name would be invoked by all tongues, at all times, so that *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) would ring out in all places.

If you count time, even by milliseconds, you would find that Allah's universe never passed without the mention of, 'There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah'. '...And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled...' (*al-A'raf*: 137). We know that the word *husna* (good) is a feminine adjective, as the word *kalima* (promise) is feminine; and the promise here means the True Lord's *Glorified is He* words, 'And We wanted to confer favour upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors.' (*al-Qasas*: 5)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* told the story briefly; and this is what our Lord says, and it was a 'good promise' because Allah *Glorified is He* did not give them a blessing which was contemporary to the blessing that their foe enjoyed, but rather, their blessing was built on the rubble of their foe; so it was a blessing which comprised the ruin of their foe, and then after that He granted them to be leaders and guides, and made them inherit the earth, '...And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled...' (*al-A'raf*: 137).

Indeed, they did bear with patience the harm they were dealt, which Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned before when He says, '...who afflicted you with the worst torment, slaughtering your [new-born] sons and keeping your females

alive...’ (*al-Baqara*: 49). And Allah’s punishment came to Pharaoh’s people, ‘...And We destroyed [all] that Pharaoh and his people were producing and what they had been building.’ (*al-A’raf*: 137) The destruction means that breaking something and ruining it; and what Allah did to Pharaoh’s people has remained in the artefacts which show you the greatness of what they did. We find that every day archaeologists discover many artefacts beneath the earth; and it is amazing that everything they discover is always beneath the earth, and no archaeological discovery is ever made above ground.

The words ‘And We destroyed’ indicate that the objects which were destroyed, were of high stature, and then the process of denudation came and covered them; and Allah left certain examples of them to give us an idea of the civilisation they built, such as the pyramids. And every day new discoveries are made of artefacts found under the soil such as the city of ‘Thebes’ which we discovered in the Valley of the Kings which was covered with dust because of the processes of denudation which transfer sand from place to place. So, if you leave your house for a month, even if you close the doors and the windows before you travel, when you come back, you find dust covering the house and the furniture; and all of this is actually because of the processes of denudation which can pass through the smallest of gaps. That is why if you look at how towns were in the past before the process of paving was developed to make the ground firm, you find that the streets of the town which led to the houses rose gradually over time, so that each house sank into them a little so that people filled up the floors of the houses to make them taller. All of this was because of the processes of denudation which raised the level of the streets. The artefacts of the world can only be found by digging; so the words ‘And We destroyed’ are well supported. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about the buildings of Pharaoh, ‘And [with] Pharaoh, owner of the stakes.’ (*al-Fajr*: 10)

We find the pyramids are an attestation of the strength of their architecture; and until now no one has discovered how the pyramids were built, and how their stones adhere together without any material such as cement; rather, it has been said that the pyramids were built by the process of the evacuation of air. And no one knows how the Egyptians carried the stones which stand at the top of the pyramids. So, they possessed extensive knowledge; and if we look

at this knowledge they had of architecture, artefacts and mummification of the dead – if we look at all of this and see that the ones who did this were priests who belonged to religion, we will be certain that the secrets of these things were all possessed by men of religion; and the origin of this religion was from Allah, even if it had been corrupted later. This confirms for us that the True Lord *Glorified is He* was the One Who guided men, from the onset of creation, to this extensive knowledge. ‘And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones, which We had blessed. And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of what they had patiently endured. And We destroyed [all] that Pharaoh and his people were producing and what they had been building...’ (*al-A'raf*: 137).

The words *ya`rishun* (what they had been building) means that they made hanging gardens (*ma`rushat*); and we said before that some of the plants which grow on the surface of the earth do not have stems, while other plants do have stems, and there is a third kind which has a soft stem, for which they make trellises or espaliers to carry the plants and their fruits.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَجَوْرًا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ فَأَتَوْا عَلَى قَوْمٍ يَعْكُفُونَ عَلَى أَصْنَامٍ لَهُمْ
 قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى اجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

We took the Children of Israel across the sea, but when they came upon a people who worshipped idols, they said, ‘Moses, make a god for us like theirs.’ He said, ‘You really are foolish people [138] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 138)

They said this while they immersed in the blessings Allah had given them in saving them from their foes and making them inherit the earth. Yet, as soon as they came to the shore and saw people worshipping an idol, they asked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to make for them an idol of their own to worship. They envied those who were ignorant of the principles of faith and devoted themselves to worshipping idols; and ‘devoted’ *ya`kifuna* here means that they kept vigil with them. From the same root the word *i`tikaf* (the spiritual

vigil Muslims keep in mosques) is derived which means to cut oneself off from life outside the mosque and to devote oneself to worship in His house.

‘...people intent in devotion to [some] idols of theirs. They said, “O Musa (Moses), make for us a god just as they have gods.”’ (*al-A’raf*: 138) This statement of the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the absolute form of foolishness; as if Allah for them was unknown despite all the blessings He had showered upon them; and this was a grievous failing. They wanted to make Allah, a thing which is ‘set up’, even though Allah, by His Perfection and Omnipotent Power, is the One Who sets up all things. Yet their minds did not take in all the blessings He had given them, and their hearts were closed so that faith had not filled them, and they said, ‘make for us a god’! They wanted him to carve idols for them; and one of them might have said, ‘The god’s head is too big, make it a little smaller; and his nose is not straight; let us straighten it with the chisel. Their words ‘make for us a god’ make us understand that their minds did not comprehend the reality of faith, which is why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to them, ‘...you are a people behaving ignorantly!’ (*al-A’raf*: 138)

He did not say to them ‘you do not know’, but rather, he called them ‘ignorant’; for there is a difference between being uninformed about something and being ignorant about it. To be uninformed means that the mind might be completely empty concerning the matter, while to be ignorant means that you ‘know’ something which is contradictory to the actual truth of the issue. So, the ignorant person believes something which is not actually true; as for the uninformed person, he has no thought on the matter either way, and when the truth of the matter comes to him he will be convinced by it, and this will require only one intellectual process. This is like the illiterate person who does not know because his mind is vacant of the issue; but as for the one who ‘knows’ something contrary to the truth, and this will require two intellectual processes from the messenger: one to remove from his mind the ignorant issue, and another to give him the new issue. The world suffers because of ignorant people, not illiterate people, because when you give the illiterate person the information, he has nothing else in his mind to contradict it, but the ignorant person has something in his mind which contradicts and conflicts with reality.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ مُتَّبَرِّمًا هُمْ فِيهِ وَبَطِلٌ مَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣٩﴾

[the cult] these people practise is doomed to destruction, and what they have been doing is useless [139] (The Quran, al-A'raf: 139)

The word *mutabbar* (destroyed) means ‘destructive’ and ‘ruinous’. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* explains to them that these people who worship idols will be ruined along with their idols, and all what they do is worthless. Because if you want to know the truth of the affairs of the universe, you must have stability; and the truth is stable and never changes because it is a reality which can be witnessed. For example, if an accident happens right before our eyes and then each of us is asked privately to describe what we saw, we will not differ in our narratives because we are describing an actual event. Yet, if the event did not really happen, we will all describe it in a different way. That is why we find that one of the skills of judiciary investigation is that the judge manages dialogues with the witnesses to establish what they agree upon and what they differ in. If the witnesses are all describing a factual event, they will not differ in their narratives; but they will differ if one of them is not sure about the event, or if it is not true.

The Arabic proverb says, ‘If you had to be a liar, then you should have a good memory’! That is, if you had to lie – May Allah keep us away from it – as say something which is not true, you must remember your lie; and you will not remember it because it is imagined, and not a fact. It might be the case that a lie is attractive and enticing, in which case we say, beware of being deluded by this attractiveness because the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘He sends down from the sky rain and valleys flow according to their capacity, and the torrent carries rising foam. And from that [ore] which they heat in the fire, desiring adornments and utensils, is foam like it. Thus, Allah presents [the example of] truth and falsehood. As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth. Thus, does Allah present examples?’ (*ar-Ra'd*: 17)

Allah *Glorified is He* draws similarity between falsehood and foam which is the substance that floats on liquid or water containing the dross and refuse

which sits on top of the water. It vanishes and passes away, while what benefits man remains. We test metals to see if they are adulterated or not, and we put them into fire so that the foreign materials and impurities rise out of it, and the pure metal remains at the bottom. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says on the tongue of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'Indeed, those [worshippers] - destroyed is that in which they are [engaged], and worthless is whatever they were doing!' (*al-A'raf*: 139)

Events may be either speech or action; speech is the work of the tongue, and action is the work of the rest of the body, and together speech and action make 'deeds'. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Why do you say what you do not do?' (*as-Saff*: 2) Their deeds included both their speech and their action. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Worthless is whatever they were doing.' (*al-A'raf*: 139) The idols which they used to make and worship were based on speech and action, such as their saying, 'O Hubal!', 'O Lat!' or 'O 'Uzza!', calling upon these idols and asking them to bring certain actions into fruition; and they would stand before them in humility and lowliness. So, they produced both speech and action, which together made deeds.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ أَبْغَيْكُمْ إِلَهًا وَهُوَ فَضَّلَكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٤٠﴾

**Why should I seek any god other than God for you,
when He has favoured you over all other people?' [140]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 140)**

When they asked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to set up a god for them just as the others had gods, he said to them, 'you are a people behaving ignorantly!', and then he said, 'Indeed, those [worshippers] - destroyed is that in which they are [engaged], and worthless is whatever they were doing!' (*al-A'raf*: 139) After this, he continued to explain why this was an ignorant request, and that those who worshipped gods other than Allah *Glorified is He* did so worthlessly, saying, 'Is it other than Allah I should desire for you as a god while He has preferred you over the worlds?' (*al-A'raf*: 140) His words 'other than Allah' mean that Allah who, as you know from practical experience, has favoured you above all other people; and you saw what He did with your

enemies who debased you and afflicted you with cruel suffering. He destroyed them and utterly vanquished them; could you therefore seek any lord other than Him?

His words, ‘Is it other than Allah I should desire for you as a god...’ (*al-A'raf*: 140). That is, shall I look for another god than Him for you? This question of his implied admonition since he then followed it by mentioning how Allah had favoured them above all men; and then he wanted to remind them of the greatest favour He gave them, so Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَذِّنْكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُقْتُلُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ
وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذَلِكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٤١﴾

Remember how We saved you from Pharaoh’s people, who were subjecting you to the worst of sufferings, killing your male children, sparing only your females – that was a mighty ordeal from your Lord [141] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 141)

When you hear the word ‘when’, know that it is an adverbial particle denoting a time when something happened of which the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to remind us. ‘When!’ means remember well, and do not let it slip your minds how Allah saved you from Pharaoh’s people who afflicted you with cruel, wicked and terrible suffering. He says after this, by way of explaining and elucidating this suffering, ‘...killing your sons and keeping your women alive...’ (*al-A'raf*: 141). We can notice here that He did not use any conjunction. He did not say, ‘Who afflicted you with cruel suffering, and kill your sons in great numbers and spared (only) your women’ which indicates that He was mentioning the very height of the cruel suffering to which they were subjected; for the subjugation and humiliation were also part of the suffering, but the height of it was the slaying of the sons and the sparing of the women.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and [recall] when We saved your forefathers from the people of Pharaoh, who afflicted you with the worst torment, slaughtering your [new-born] sons...’ (*al-Baqara*: 49). This means that they were exposed both to being slain and to being slaughtered. And in a third verse, He says, ‘And [recall, O Children of Israel], when Musa (Moses)

said to His people, “Remember the favour of Allah upon you when He saved you from the people of Pharaoh, who were afflicting you with the worst torment...” (*Ibrahim*: 6). Here, He indeed used the conjunction ‘and’ because the speaker is different. The Speaker here is Allah and Allah *Glorified is He* is reminding them of the height of His blessings to them; but in the case of, ‘And [recall, O Children of Israel], when Musa (Moses) said to His people, “Remember...”’ (*Ibrahim*: 6). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was mentioning all the blessings which Allah sent to the children of Israel, both the great and the tiny blessing.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘And in that was a great trial from your Lord.’ (*al-A'raf*: 141) It was a painful and grievous trial to be separated from those who were killed and slaughtered, and another trial of woe and grief for the women who remained to be humiliated and degraded by servitude.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَوَاعَدْنَا مُوسَى ثَلَاثِينَ لَيْلَةً وَأَتَمَمْنَاهَا بِعَشْرِ فَتَمَّ مِيقَاتُ رَبِّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً وَقَالَ
 مُوسَى لِأَخِيهِ هَارُونَ أَخْلِفْنِي فِي قَوْمِي وَأَصْلِحْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿١٤٢﴾

**We appointed thirty nights for Moses, then added ten more:
 the term set by his Lord was completed in forty nights.
 Moses said to his brother Harun, ‘Take my place among my
 people: act rightly and do not follow the way of those who
 spread corruption’ [142] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 142)**

We saw before that there are two ways of counting, the first comes in the total form, and the second gives the details. Sometimes the total agrees with the detail, in which case there is no doubt or ambiguity. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, ‘And [recall] when We made an appointment with Musa (Moses) for forty nights...’ (*al-Baqara*: 51). There, He gave the total, while here in the chapter of *al-A'raf* He did not want to give it only once as a total, but rather, He explained in detail as being thirty nights to which the True Lord *Glorified is He* then added ten for a purpose which we shall see in due course. This means that the meeting took forty nights in total; and if the

number was given as a simple total in one place and in detail elsewhere, and the two totals are the same, there is no ambiguity. But if the total seems to be different from the detail, the detail is usually explained in such a way as to make it conform to the total as the details might overlap to make the total.

Previously, we gave the example for the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days. Every verse dealing with the creation mentions the six days as a bare total, but Allah *Glorified is He* willed to say in another place in the Quran, 'Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds. And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its creatures' sustenance in four days without distinction - for [the information] of those who ask.' (*Fussilat*: 9-10)

Apparently, it seems that the process was finished and created in six days; but He the Almighty, then goes on to say, 'Then He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, "Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion." They said, "We have come willingly." And He completed them as seven heavens within two days and inspired in each heaven its command. And We adorned the nearest heaven with lamps and as protection. That is the determination of *the Exalted in Might*, the Knowing. (*Fussilat*: 11-12) So, the matter here is of the creation of the world; we find the total and the details, and the details seem of the apparent meaning of the matter to bring the days of creation to eight, while the total is stated to be only six days. So were they six days, or eight? We say they are six days because we can overlap some of the detailed days and combine them. If you say, 'I travelled from Cairo to Tanta in two hours, and to Alexandria in three hours', this means that the two hours are included in the three.

'And We made an appointment with Musa (Moses) for thirty nights and perfected them by [the addition of] ten...' (*al-A'raf*: 142). The purpose of this appointment was that Allah promised Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that after the children of Israel were saved, Allah *Glorified is He* would send down to him a Book in which all the teachings which Allah's creatures were required to follow in their lives will be collected. But as soon as Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* went to meet his Lord, they began to worship the calf during these thirty days;

and Allah did not wish to let Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* go after the thirty days were completed, but rather He added another ten to them so that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would not go back and see what his people had done. And after he went back to them, he took his brother by the neck and was harsh with him, and dragged him by his beard; for how could he have allowed the children of Israel to worship the calf? Concerning this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says on the tongue of Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* ‘O son of my mother, do not seize [me] by my beard or by my head. Indeed, I feared that you would say, “You caused division among the Children of Israel, and you did not observe [or await] my word!”’ (*Ta Ha: 94*)

It is as if the ten days were added to the thirty to give the final picture which is presented in the chapter of *al-Baqara*.

And here in the chapter of *al-A`raf*, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Take my place among my people, do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters.’ (*al-A`raf: 142*) ‘Take my place’ means, ‘be my vicegerent amongst them until I return’, in that matter in which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was specially delegated, namely prophethood. When Musa (Moses) left Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* in his place, this was not a new responsibility for Harun (Aaron) since Allah had sent both Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* as messengers; for when Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* presented themselves to Pharaoh, they used the plural form which referred to them both, ‘Indeed, we are messengers of your Lord...’ (*Ta Ha: 47*). So, they were both messengers. Allah’s words, ‘...And Musa (Moses) said unto his brother Harun (Aaron)...’ (*al-A`raf: 142*), indicate compassion, that is, ‘I had a connection to you before you became my partner in prophethood, for I am a brother to you and you are a brother to me, and it is my right that you should hear my words and take my place. Our brotherhood makes it fit that you should be my partner in prophethood’. We find that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* invoked the background of their brotherhood and their partnership in prophethood; and by using the words ‘my people’, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* emphasised that they were dear to him, and that he wished for them nothing but the same goodness he wished for himself. So, when he issued them a commandment, they should have

known that it was for their own good, and when he issued them a prohibition, they should have known that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* will be the first person to heed it.

It is said that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* prepared for the meeting with his Lord; these preparations must have included purification ablutions and the cleansing of the soul by fasting. He fasted for thirty days, after which he found his breath was unpleasant, so he took a tooth-stick and cleaned his mouth with it to remove this unpleasant smell, whereupon the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarified for him, 'Know you not, O Musa (Moses), that the changed breath of the one who fasts is more fragrant to Me than the smell of musk? Since you have removed this breath, yet I want you to come to Me smelling of musk, so add another ten days so that you shall come thus'. Some of the scholars say that the forty days are divided into thirty and ten because the thirty days were those in which the people worshipped the calf in Musa's (Moses's) absence, so there had to be an extra period in which Allah separated the foul from the fair. 'And Musa (Moses) said to his brother Aaron, "Take my place among my people, do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters..."' (*al-A'raf*: 142).

There is a commandment and a prohibition here; the commandment is 'do right' and the prohibition is 'do not follow'. We know that all the responsibilities which the True Lord *Glorified is He* issues are embodied in 'Do' and 'Do not'; and the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not say to His servants, 'Do this' unless they are able to do it or not to do it; and if He says to them 'Do not', they also must be able to do it or not to do it. That is why we clarified previously that Allah distilled all moral responsibility for Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* in paradise, '...and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will...' (*al-Baqara*: 35), which was the commandment, and He said, '...but do not approach this one tree...' (*al-Baqara*: 35), which was the prohibition. '...do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters...' (*al-A'raf*: 142).

The words 'do right' mean that one must leave what is sound as it is without corrupting it, and if he wished, he can make it even better. And he says that and do not follow the way of the corrupters because this was directed to a prophet, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* so no corruption could come from

him; but Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was telling him that there would be mischief after a short while. It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* revealed that there will be corruption, and so the most he asked of his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was that he not follow the path of those who spread this corruption. That is why Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* would later say, in defence of his decision to leave the children of Israel to worship the calf and having tried his very best to stop them and dissuade them until they overwhelmed him and overpowered him, and almost killed him, ‘Indeed, I feared that you would say, “You caused division among the Children of Israel, and you did not observe [or await] my word.”’ (Ta Ha: 94)

The True Lord says:

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ، قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنظُرْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ نَرَنِي وَلَكِنْ أَنظُرْ
إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنِ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ، فَسَوْفَ نَرُنِي فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا
وَخَرَّ مُوسَى صَعِقًا فَلَمَّا أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ بُنْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٤٣﴾

When Moses came for the appointment, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, ‘My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!’ He said, ‘You will never see Me, but look at that mountain: if it remains standing firm, you will see Me,’ and when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble: Moses fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said, ‘Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance! I am the first to believe!’ [143]
(The Quran, al-A’raf: 143)

The word *miqat* (appointed time) refers to the time which is appointed for a particular action, and usually it refers to the times in which Islamic actions are performed such as the times (*mawaqit*) of the pilgrimage. We know that every action or event requires two things in which it is contained, that is, which give it its context: it must have a place in which it occurs, and likewise a time in which it occurs; and these are called the ‘circumstances of time and place’ (*zharf zaman wa zharf makan*). Yet, the circumstance of time is not constant since the dawn might come and go, after which comes midday, mid-afternoon, evening and night; but the circumstance of place is constant.

Appointed times, then, are either governed by time, place or by both. If we consider those appointed times which are governed by time, the obligation of fasting has a specific time, namely *Ramadan*, and fasting is governed by time, so it can be done in any place. Likewise, the recommended fast on the Day of *'Arafa* is also governed by time, since it takes place on the Day of *'Arafa*, and wherever one is he may fast this day – yet it should not be fasted by the pilgrim. The action of standing at *'Arafa*, however, is governed by both place and time. And the act of *ihram* (consecration) for the greater or lesser pilgrimage is governed by place, which is what we call the ‘appointed place’ (*al-miqat al-makani*, literally ‘the spatial appointed time’); and for those who approach Mecca from each direction there is a special site which they are not supposed to pass without first consecrating themselves. So sometimes ‘time’ governs, and sometimes ‘place’ governs and sometimes both govern. So, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came at the time set by Allah, which would last forty nights.

And did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* come to the appointed time, or at the appointed time? He came at the appointed time, so the Arabic particle *li* means ‘at’, not ‘to’; and the particle *li* takes the meaning ‘at’ many times in the Quran such as ‘Establish prayer at the decline of the sun [from its meridian] until the darkness of the night...’ (*al-Isra'*: 78). That is, establish the prayer at the time when the sun passes its zenith, i.e. just after midday when it passes the centre of the sky until the darkness of night. From the zenith to the darkness of night, we find there occurs the midday prayer, the mid-afternoon prayer, the sunset prayer and the night prayer; this makes four obligatory prayers, leaving only the fifth obligatory prayer, which is offered at dawn, about which the True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, ‘And [also] the Quran of dawn. Indeed, the recitation of dawn is ever witnessed.’ (*al-Isra'*: 78)

Why did He start with the passing of the zenith? Does the day start at midday, or dawn? The Night Ascension took place by night, and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* returned to Mecca the next morning. The prayer had been made obligatory during the Ascension. It means that the first obligatory prayer to be offered was the midday prayer. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying, ‘Take the end, and take the beginning’. The beginning was the midday prayer, then the mid-afternoon prayer, then the

sunset prayer, and then the night prayer, which left the dawn prayer, of which was then said, 'And [also] the Quran of dawn. Indeed, the recitation of dawn is ever witnessed.' (*al-Isra*: 78)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* gave to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the *tahajjud* prayer (the night vigil) which was obligatory for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* alone, while for the rest of his community it is an optional extra act of worship, 'And from [part of] the night, pray with it as additional [worship] for you; it is expected that your Lord will resurrect you to a praised station.' (*al-Isra*: 79)

And those who imitate the example of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* will have generous recompense and great reward, but this is left to the personal choice of the Muslim.

'And when Musa (Moses) arrived at our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him...' (*al-A'raf*: 143) requires some investigation. His words, '...and his Lord spoke to him...' (*al-A'raf*: 143) indicate that speech came directly from Allah to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; yet how could this be, when Allah *Glorified is He* says about His speech to mankind in general, 'And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a partition or that He sends a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He wills. Indeed, He is Most High and Wise...' (*ash-Shura*: 51)?

This negates the notion that Allah speaks directly to man except in three ways: revelation, from behind a veil or by means of a messenger. For prophets, revelation means that the inspiration is cast into the heart of the prophet suddenly, along with certain knowledge that it is from Almighty Allah. *Wahy* (revelation) can also mean the flashes of inspiration given to the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or to the Apostles of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* or also to the angels. *Wahy* can also mean 'subdual', such as the subdual of the earth, or the bee.

After this comes 'from behind a veil', i.e. he hears speech but he does not hear the speaker; and 'by sending a messenger' means Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. The Quran was only sent down in a single way which was by the means of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* descending to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Quran was not revealed by flashes of

inspiration, and nor by a voice from behind a veil, but rather, it was revealed by means of an envoy from Allah, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who had certain distinguishing marks.

And here concerning Allah's speech to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* I say that it was sent from behind a veil, and at this point we should refrain from delving any further because it is a matter of the unseen which has not been shown to us, and we leave it up to Allah.⁽¹⁾

Previously, we said that Allah's attributes are not the same as those of man. Man's existence is not like Allah's Existence, and man's wealth is not like Allah's Wealth; and likewise, your speech could never be akin to the Speech of Allah because you must take everything connected with Allah in the light of, 'There is nothing like unto Him.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made it clear that His speech to Musa (Moses) was a special gift for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which is why He says, 'I have chosen you over the people with My messages and My words [to you] (*al-A'raf*: 144).

We must take every attribute which exists for human beings and is also ascribed to Allah, such as 'to be established', 'to sit', 'face' and 'hand' according to 'There is nothing like unto Him.'

'And when Musa (Moses) arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him...' (*al-A'raf*: 143). When Allah *Glorified is He* singled out Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with the distinction of speaking to him, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was moved by boldness because of his election, as though he said to himself, 'Since He has spoken to me, it may be that I can look upon Him'! This is because when a person is pleased, the soul reaches out in hope that whatever is pleasing him will continue. The same was the case before when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* responded to Allah's question, 'And, what is this in thy right hand, O Musa (Moses)?' (*Ta Ha*: 17) Though it would have been sufficient to answer, 'a staff', he said, 'He said, "It is my staff; I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves for my sheep..."' (*Ta Ha*: 18). He said this even though the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not ask him what he

(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash- Sha'rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

used it for; and by this way, he sought to extend the comfort he felt through the nearness to his Lord; and it is as though he knew that it would be inappropriate merely to respond with a single word to answer the question. Allah is beyond compare – we find when one of us sees a small child, he jokes with him and speaks at length with him to make him feel with comfort. And when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* found that Allah was speaking to him, his soul became bold enough to hope that he might be able to look upon Him, as in the verse, ‘And when Musa (Moses) arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, “My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You...”’ (*al-A’raf*: 143). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not say, ‘Show me Your Essence’, but rather, he said, ‘My Lord, show me [Yourself]...’ (*al-A’raf*: 143). It is as though he knew that by the nature of his composition, he could not possibly see Allah; but if Allah were to show him, this would be by the Will of the True Lord. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* put forward his request such that it was conditioned by the Will of Allah and His Decree because he knew that he was not prepared to see Allah because his composition was not strong enough for this. Even when it comes to revelation and speech, our Lord does not speak to people directly, but rather, He always chooses an envoy from the angels; and then the second stage is that He chooses messengers from amongst mankind, who convey the Word of Allah to the people. This is because the perfect and superior, transcendent attributes of the Creator cannot be perceived by the creature.

Previously, we gave an example before to illustrate this— and Allah is beyond comparison – of human inventions: a person might sleep at night and then wake up for some reason, and if it is dark he might crush the things which are smaller than him, or be crushed by things which are harder than him. If he bumps into something small, he might break it, while if he bumps into a closet or a wall he might be injured. This is why a man leaves a small source of light in the house so that he can benefit from the peace and coolness of the night; so he takes a simple lamp or ‘night light’ which is no more powerful than a few candles; and he cannot plug it directly into the socket in the house because it will burn it out immediately, so he uses a transformer for it which takes the large amount of energy from the socket and feeds only a little of it into the lamp.

So, if there are human inventions which are weak and can only take from powerful sources by means of an intermediary, it is even more certain that it is not possible for Allah's creatures to receive anything from Allah without intermediaries. Human and angelic intermediaries are chosen by Allah for not all of them are suitable for this task; and the chosen angel conveys to the chosen man, and after this, the chosen man conveys to the rest of mankind.

The same is the case where the vision of Allah is concerned; and this will become clear to us when Allah gives the proof that He created you, not in the form which you are able to see now, but rather, when you will be reshaped into the Hereafter and you are formed in a different way so that you can attain the honour of seeing Him: 'Some faces, that Day, will be radiant.' (*al-Qiyama*: 22-23)

And people are not all equal in this regard because the believer will be the one to attain the honour of looking upon Allah, while the disbeliever will be veiled from beholding the True Lord *Glorified is He*. He says about the disbelievers, 'No! Indeed, from their Lord, that Day, they will be partitioned.' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 15) So the believer and the disbeliever will not be equal in this state, as the disbeliever is veiled, so the believer is unveiled and can look upon his Lord. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, '...My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You...' (*al-A'raf*: 143), and the True Lord *Glorified is He* replied, 'You will never see Me.'

In linguistics, we find that the Arabic word *lan* which negates the future, has the meaning of 'never' meaning that the thing in question will never come to pass. Does this mean that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* said, 'You will never see Me', mean that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would never see Allah, not in this world nor the next life? To this, we say: who said that the time of the Hereafter is the same as the time of this world? This world has its time, and that world will have its own time; 'It will be on the Day the earth will be replaced by another earth, and the heavens [as well], and all creatures will come out before Allah, the One, the Prevailing.' (*Ibrahim*: 48) Thus, the time of the Hereafter, and the state upon which men are created therein, will be something completely different. It is enough to show this when we reflect that the inhabitants of paradise will eat but not produce any waste; it will be a

new creation. The word 'never' in His words 'You will never see Me' is relative, referring to this world only; and there was a reason why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was unable to attain this vision, as Allah *Glorified is He* then adds, '...but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me. But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Musa (Moses) fell unconscious....' (*al-A'raf*: 143)

Here Allah *Glorified is He* explained to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* by a practical example, clarifying, 'You can never see Me, but for you to be assured that you are a created being in a form which does not allow you to see Me, look at the mountain' – and mountains are known to be hard, strong, firm, and fixed – 'and if it stays firm in its place, you will be able to see Me'. According to logic, a mountain is stronger than a man, and harder and firmer than him; yet when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, it crumbled. The word *dakka* (rendered it level) means literally to put pressure on something from above until it flattens and becomes level with that which was below it. The True Lord says, 'No! When the earth has been levelled - pounded and crushed.' (*al-Fajr*: 21)

And here, concerning Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his dialogue with Allah, it is confirmed to us that Allah revealed Himself to one of His creatures; but was that to which He revealed Himself capable of withstanding this revealing, or not? If Allah had made it capable of withstanding it, it would have been able to do so; but if Allah did not, it would not. The mountain was hard, but when its Lord revealed Himself to it, it crumbled. So, it is possible for Allah to reveal Himself to some of His creatures; but what is important is whether that to which He reveals Himself is strong enough, or not. The nature of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not strong enough for this revealing, which was proved by the fact that even that which was stronger than him was not strong enough. After this, Allah wanted to impart unto us an additional element of this issue, explaining to us that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* swooned merely by looking at the object to which was revealed – so what if he had seen the One Who revealed? '...but when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Musa (Moses) fell unconscious....' (*al-A'raf*: 143). The word *kharra* (fell) means to come down from a high place to a low place, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse of the Quran, '...And David became certain that We had tried him, and he asked

forgiveness of his Lord and fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to Allah]...’ (*Sad*: 24).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us here that ‘Musa (Moses) fell unconscious’, and the Arabic word *sa’iqā* (unconscious) can also mean ‘death’, but here it means that he fainted and remained unconscious for a long time. As for the use of this word to mean ‘death’, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that whoever is on the earth will fall dead except whom Allah wills. Then it will be blown again, and at once they will be standing, looking on, (*az-Zumar*: 68). So, the first blast of the trumpet will cause everyone to fall and die, and then the second blast will prompt the dead people to their Resurrection. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...And when he awoke he said, “Exalted are You! I have repented to you...”’ (*al-A’raf*: 143); this indicates that the unconsciousness here was not that of death. And then Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* awoke from unconsciousness and realised that it had been inappropriate of him to ask to see Allah directly; as we say, ‘So-and-so came to his senses’. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* awoke from two things: he woke from the unconsciousness which overcame him when he fell unconscious, and it is as though he asked himself, ‘Why did I fall unconscious?’ He fell unconscious because he asked his Lord about something of which he had no knowledge. ‘...when he awoke, he said, "Exalted are You!"’ (*al-A’raf*: 143) When you hear the words ‘Exalted are You’, you should know that it is meant to proclaim how Allah is far above the event which we are concerned with here – the possibility of His being beheld. That is, ‘Far be it for You, O Lord, to be beheld by Your creatures’, for to ‘behold’ means to have enough power of sight to see the thing beheld. To see something means that the human eye is powerful enough to behold it; and if we created beings could see Allah by means of reflected light, this would mean that our eyes were strong enough for our Lord – and this could never be, because the subject of power cannot become its object, and the object of power cannot become its subject.

‘And when he awoke, he said, “Exalted are You! I have repented to You, and I am the first of the believers.”’ (*al-A’raf*: 143). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* repented having asked Allah that of which he had no knowledge; he did not stop at the Divine manifestations which break the natural laws of the universe and because his Lord has given to him without his asking. Allah

spoke directly to him, so why did he take things further and ask to behold Him? Why did he not leave things up to the graces which Allah gave him, enjoying the blessing of pure grace instead of actively seeking them?

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* proclaimed, 'I am the first of the believers.' That is, to believe that His Essence cannot be seen or perceived by any created being. Musa (Moses) felt grave disappointment because he had aspired to that which was beyond his capability, and said, 'Exalted are You! I have repented to You, and I am the first of the believers.', as though he understood what the True Lord was clarifying to him, 'Do not look at what I have denied you, but look at what I have given you'.

قَالَ يَمُوسَىٰ إِنِّي أَصْطَفَيْتُكَ عَلَى النَّاسِ بِرِسَالَتِي
 وَبِكَلِمَىٰ فَحَدِّثْ مَا آتَيْتُكَ وَكُن مِّنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

He said, 'Moses, I have raised you above other people by [giving you] My messages and speaking to you: hold on to what I have given you; be one of those who give thanks' [144] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 144)

'Chosen' means to single out the elite. His statement, 'I have chosen you over the people' is precisely expressed. Had He only said, 'I have chosen you' without the addition of 'over the people,' it would be understood that he was raised above the angels, too; but the selection here was confined to the human realm. Someone might say, 'The True Lord raised other messengers besides him, as well'; for the True Lord says, 'Indeed, Allah chose Adam, and Noah...' (*Al-Imran*: 33).

There is a difference between Allah's choice of someone for a message only, and raising him for a message and something else besides it. Let us give an example to illustrate this – and Allah is beyond compare: If a teacher gives one of his students a pen as a prize, and then gives another student a pen and an ink bottle, by doing this he singled out the first pupil by the gift of the pen, and singled out the other by the combination of the pen and the ink bottle in a single gift. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was chosen by the message, just as Allah *Glorified is He* raised other messengers, and then also by the added honour of the Divine speech.

We said before that ‘messages’, when taken together, constituted a single message; but the message of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* continued to be revealed in piecemeal for twenty-three years, as though every separate revelation was a message in itself. Or, every kind of goodness is a message thereby comprising several messages. Or, his message encompassed the messages of those who came before him.

‘Allah said, “O Musa (Moses), I have chosen you over the people with My messages and My words [to you]. So, take what I have given you and be among the grateful.”’ (*al-A'raf*: 144). That is, ‘Do not look to what I have denied you, but remember that I have raised you and spoken to you; and you must thank Me for this’. That is why when the believer encounters that which Allah has destined for him, he must always consider the blessings which remain for him, not those which may have been taken from him. That is why we find that the optimistic believer looks at the glass which is half filled with water and says, ‘Praised is Allah, the glass is half-full’, whilst the pessimist says, ‘The glass is half-empty’. Even though they are both speaking the truth, the optimistic believer considers the blessings of Allah which remain.

When Ibn Ja`far went to the Umayyad Caliph in Damascus, he injured his leg whilst travelling from Medina to Damascus, and he had no recourse to medical attention so the wound turned gangrenous. When they finally brought him doctors and they announced that his leg would have to be amputated, one of those present said, ‘Get him an anaesthetic’. But he said, ‘No, I do not want to be absent from my Lord for a single moment’. And when they amputated it and took it away to be buried, he said, ‘Bring it forth!’ They brought it to him, and he took hold of it and said, ‘O Allah, although you took one part of my body, you gave health to the rest!’ This is the outlook of the believer, who does not consider what has been taken from him, but rather what remains for him. Such was the direction of the True Lord to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* explaining to him, ‘Do not consider that I denied you the vision of Me, but rather consider how you were raised and given the honour of being spoken to by the Creator, and be grateful for this’.

The True Lord then says:

وَكَتَبْنَا لَهُ فِي الْأَلْوَابِ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مَوْعِظَةً وَتَفْصِيلًا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ
فَخُذْهَا بِقُوَّةٍ وَأْمُرْ قَوْمَكَ يَأْخُذُوا بِأَحْسَنِهَا سَأُرِيكُمْ دَارَ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

We inscribed everything for him in the Tablets which taught and explained everything, saying, ‘Hold on to them firmly and urge your people to hold fast to their excellent teachings. I will show you the end of those who rebel [145] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 145)

‘Wrote’ literally means to write with a pen on a writing surface such as paper, leather, bone or the like. When our Lord says, ‘And We wrote’, Allah did not actually write it down Himself, but rather, His angelic envoys wrote it in obedience to the True Lord’s Commandment. He says, ‘Indeed, it is We who bring the dead to life and record what they have put forth and what they left behind.’ (*Ya Sin*: 12).

The angelic envoys write down our actions by Allah’s command. Sometimes, the commandment is ascribed to the one who issues it, whilst other times it is ascribed to the one who carries it out or acts as the intermediary.

‘On the tablets’: There is a reason for writing on tablets. In the past, they used to write on anything flat, and there are artefacts which show us that books used to be written on animal hides. For example, the ancient Egyptians used to write on stone, such as the Rosetta Stone which decoded for us the secrets of their history. Arabs used to write on the bark of date-palm trees, the bones of slaughtered animals, from which they would take the flat bones such as the shoulder blade and write on them; and this was the most prevalent means of writing they used so that everything they wrote became known as *tablet*. “And We wrote for him on the tablets [something] of all things.”

His word ‘all things’ refers to everything required by man being a vicegerent upon Earth at the appropriate time. The messengers shared one doctrine, but there might have been certain legislations which were appropriate for the time in which a messenger came, but then Allah, *Exalted is he*, added something else to the messenger who came next, until Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with the completed teachings which would last until the end of time.

He clarified that He ordained, in the tablets admonition and clear guidance for the way of life. ‘Admonition’ means that you do not give the one you

address a new instruction, but rather, you advise him to put into practice that which he already knows what he needs do. That is why a preacher is called an 'admonisher' because he does not establish anything new, but presupposes that the one whom he addresses already knows the foundational teachings of the religion, so he advises him to put what he knows into practice.

The True Lord's saying, 'And explanation for all things - saying, "Take them with determination..."' means that His revelations did not come all at once, but rather, they were spelled out gradually in detail. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to hold fast onto the admonition and clear details of the tablets with all his strength. Why? Because when a man is given a commandment, it might contradict that which he has grown accustomed to; and when he is given a prohibition, this prohibition might contradict that which he has grown accustomed to. In this way, the commandment or prohibition seeks to wrest the man from that which he has grown accustomed.

When a man is in this situation, his soul must be strong enough to overcome the desires rooted in him by habit. Because of this, the one who wishes to accept the way of Allah *the Exalted* must be aware that this way will take him away from those things to which he is accustomed, and therefore he must accept the teachings with strength and resolution so that he can combat the habits of the soul; for they say to him, 'Do not do that'. The believer, therefore, must hold fast to his responsibilities with all his strength; for the passions of the soul bring only the passing pleasure of this worldly life, whilst the way of Allah brings long-lasting enjoyment.

Passions might give man pleasure according to his power and his preparations, but moral responsibilities accrue for the believer a benefit which is commensurate with Allah's Omnipotent power to give benefit. So, you must charge your soul with the teachings of the way which Allah shows you; and when you see the way of Allah requires you to make some effort, do not complain; for you are not alone, others are following it alongside you. If it commands not to steal, do not claim that it is restricting your freedom because it protects you from being wronged by others, who, in return, are commanded not to steal, and therefore you are the one who benefits most. The True Lord continues to

tell us what the tablets contained by saying, 'and order your people to take the best of it.' This implies that there is a level below this which is a 'lesser best'; the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded them to leave the lesser best and take the best. We know that man is subject to vicissitudes, and that if something bad afflicts him because of someone else, he considers that person to be his adversary. And if a person has an adversary, the inclinations of his soul are inspired to repay this adversary the hurt which he inflicted upon him. Allah has made this lawful through the channel of legal retribution, but He asks the believer to forgive, if he can. So long as punishments of retribution or otherwise have been legislated by Allah *the Exalted* according to equal retaliation, this is the level of 'lesser best'; but if you ignore the inclinations of your soul and forgive, this is the level of 'the best'. This hierarchy exists because the True Lord *the Exalted* created in man, emotions and instincts, which play a part in man's life. A man cannot control his emotions, which is why Allah does not place restrictions on emotions, but rather on instincts. How is this?

We know that the love for food is an instinct, but love for food must not reach the level of greed. The preservation of the species is also an instinct, or the sexual pleasure which the True Lord *Glorified is He* placed in man for the sake of the preservation of the species; but it should not reach the level of deviation and the violation of people's honour and dignity. Curiosity is also an instinct, and the works of those who made scientific discoveries stemmed from their curiosity about the secrets of existence; yet, it is not right that curiosity should reach the level of devious spying.

Man has certain instincts which the Sacred Law curbs. As for love, it is an emotional matter. The Lawgiver says to you, 'Love whom you will, and hate whom you will, but do not wrong those whom you hate, and do not wrong people for the sake of those whom you love'.

We have a fine example in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said, 'None of you believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self, his children, parents and all other people.'⁽¹⁾

'How?' said 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated what he said. Out of natural disposition,

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, An-Nisa`i and Ibn Majah

Umar realised that this was a commandment of moral responsibility, and he realised that the love meant here is rational love. The believer therefore says to himself, 'Who would I be, were it not for the Prophet Muhammad?' Every believer loves the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a rational way, and this might ascend until it becomes an emotional love. As we said before, one of us might love his medicine with his reason, but not his emotion, since it is bitter. He would be angry if the pharmacy is out of stock, but would be happy if it is not.

So, moral responsibility requires rational love. One of the stories of Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah *be pleased with him* is that when the one who killed his brother Zayd ibn Al-Khattab walked past him, Umar said to him, 'Take yourself from my sight, for I love you not.' So the man replied, with the boldness of faith, 'Does your lack of love for me mean that any of my rights will be denied?' Umar said, 'No.' The man replied, 'Only women weep for lost love!'

Another example is, when a person is murdered, their near kinsman has the right to demand retribution; but the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make the heart of the kinsman feel compassion for the murderer, so He says, 'But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up.' (*al-Baqara*: 178)

When the True Lord *the Exalted* calls the murderer 'brother', he calms the current of emotions and stills the urge for revenge. He also says, 'And whoever is patient and forgives - indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*ash-Shura*: 43).

As Allah stated, tolerance requires 'determination' because it warrants patience and forgiveness. So long as the believer is able to have patience and forgive his adversary, will he not also be patient when a misfortune befalls him without the involvement of any adversary, such as an illness or the loss of a loved one? Who is your adversary in illness? And with whom will you be angry, and at whom will you rage and where will your reaction be directed? For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Bear in patience whatever [ill] may befall you' with no adversary involved. And He affirms to you, 'that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*Luqman*: 17) We can observe here that the context is different, as opposed to the abovementioned instance; this is

because in the first instance, you have an adversary who evokes your rage whenever you see them. In this instance, the True Lord says to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘and order your people to take the best of it.’ (*al-A'raf*: 145)

This means, if they have a way and a means of doing something with a better alternative, then bid them to choose that which is better. Why? Because when a man disciplines himself, making himself accustomed to that which is best, he has understood what Allah *Glorified is He* wants of him. Let us suppose that someone treats you badly and you have an opportunity to treat them badly in return. You must be careful to ensure that your retaliation to their mistreatment is exactly equivalent to it, as the True Lord says, ‘And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed.’ (*an-Nahl*: 126)

But who amongst us can weigh matters of the soul with such precision that they can determine the exact equivalent, by use of their desire? If someone has struck you and you want to strike him in return, how can you measure the pain which his blow caused you? You cannot possibly measure this pain because it is relative according to strength. So why cause yourself to enter such a maze, and why not simply forgive and end the matter?

When the True Lord indicates to you that to forgive is best, He wants to curb the malice of souls and the rancour of hearts. When a man kills someone, there will be retaliation and blood; but if the kinsman of the victim pardons him, the life of the pardoned man will be a gift to him from the kinsman of his victim; and after that, the murderer will be ashamed to do as much as raising a hand to this kinsman or to any of his relatives, and this will bring an end to any grudge or lust for revenge. That is why we find that in those places where cycles of revenge take place and revenge is a widespread thing – such as Upper Egypt – we find that when the murderer takes his burial shroud in his hand and presents himself to his victim’s kinsman and says, ‘I have come to you’, the kinsman pardons him, and the whole family understands that the life which was demanded for revenge has become a gift from the victim’s kinsman, and the cycle of revenge comes to an end. That is why the True Lord commanded them to hold fast to what is best, ‘...and order your people to take the best of it.’ Another example of holding fast to what is best is we might find a debtor who is unable to repay his debt. The True Lord says regarding this type, ‘grant him a delay until a time of ease.’ (*al-Baqara*: 280)

The man took the loan because he was needy. It is obvious people only resort to debt when they have a need to fulfil, as opposed to begging, for which there may be a need or may not. That is why we find that the reward for loaning is greater than the reward for giving charity because the one who asks for a loan only does so out of need. Unlike charity where the giver has given up any attachment for that which he gave out. On the contrary, the soul of the lender is still attached to the money. So, every time the lender has patience despite his soul's attachment to the money, he is rewarded for this. That is why the reward for loaning is more than that of charity.

Once again, there is the best of something, and there is the lesser best. It is lesser of you to claim your lawful rights, but it is the best for you to relinquish them; and those who relinquish them are the ones who have understood best what Allah *Glorified is He* wants of them. We have a fine example in Hasan Al-Bassri, who was good to those who treated him ill, made this his motto, 'Shall we not be good to those who have placed Allah on our side?' I always like to give the following example – and Allah is beyond compare: Suppose that a man has children, and one of them treats the other badly. We find that the father's heart will be on the side of the one who has been ill-treated. It is the same regarding the creation of Allah. If one of Allah's creations mistreats another, we find that the Lord is on the side of the one who was mistreated, and the one who was mistreated should therefore say, 'This man who mistreated me has placed our Lord on my side, so it is fitting that I treat him well in return'. That is why the True Lord says, 'Who listen to speech and follow the best of it.' (*az-Zumar*: 18) And in another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And follow the best of what was revealed to you from your Lord.' (*az-Zumar*: 55)

The True Lord ends the verse which we are currently examining by saying, 'I will show you the home of the defiantly disobedient.' The abode of the disobedient is hell, so it is as though the True Lord were saying, 'I will show you Hell'. We know that every man will pass by it and see it, but the believers will only pass over it and traverse it to enter paradise. Someone might say, 'Why is the path to Hell mentioned here?' I say it is mentioned here to strike fear into the soul, and make it steer clear of everything which leads to hell. This statement was also addressed to the children of Israel, whom

the True Lord *Glorified is He* had succoured against Pharaoh's people, from whom they took treasures and a noble position. It is as though the True Lord were saying to them, 'If you would like your end to be the same as that of Pharaoh's people, then do as they did; and if you would not like this end, then hold fast to the way of the True Lord'. So, the True Lord's words *the Exalted* were meant to prompt them to adhere to the admonition of the tablets, and to hold fast to it with all their strength, and to follow the best laws which Allah sent down to them. Or, 'home of the defiantly disobedient.' This refers to the towns which were destroyed and ruined because of its inhabitants' rebellion, disbelief and disobedience and their iniquity, so that you will take admonition from them and keep from falling into the same iniquity they did lest Allah *the Exalted* do with you as He did with them; for you pass by their dwellings on your travels and journeys.

The True Lord then says:

سَأَصْرِفُ عَنْ آيَاتِيَ الَّذِينَ يَتَكَبَّرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَإِنْ يَرَوْا كُتُبًا
 آيَةً لَا يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَا وَإِنْ يَرَوْا سَبِيلَ الرُّشْدِ لَا يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا وَإِنْ يَرَوْا
 سَبِيلَ الْعِغْيِ يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا عَنْهَا غَافِلِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾

I will keep distracted from My signs those who behave arrogantly on Earth without any right, and who, even if they see every sign, will not believe in them; they will not take the way of right guidance if they see it, but will take the way of error if they see that. This is because they denied Our signs and paid them no heed [146] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 146)

The word 'signs' means an amazing thing, and has three usages. It either means the wondrous signs of the cosmos such as His words, 'Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding.' (*Al-Imran*: 190) Or, it means the signs which prove the veracity of the messenger in all he brings from Allah; or finally it refers to the verses of the Quran bearing Allah's rulings.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that He will cause all those who, without any right, behave arrogantly on earth to turn away from looking with a contemplative

eye at the signs of the cosmos. Or it means that He will nullify the plans of all those who, without any right, behave arrogantly on earth to seek out the truth to destroy it; for when one of such people sees one of Allah's signs, he will deem it to be sorcery or witchcraft, or he will say that it is merely one of the tales of the ancients.

Turning away would be by means of unleashing upon him such arrogance that he is unable to judge these signs properly. The haughty person is the one who thinks that others are lower and lesser than him. The cause of haughtiness might be strength; but has this haughty person never seen a strong person become weak? Or the cause of haughtiness might be wealth; but has the haughty person never seen a wealthy person become poor? Or the haughty person might enjoy a position of eminence; but has he never seen an eminent person become lowly?

So, if anyone wishes to be haughty, he should be haughty about something which is intrinsically his and can never be taken from him. If you apply this to mankind, you will never find anyone who has the right to be haughty because mankind has no quality which is intrinsic; they are all given and subjected to be taken away. They are all from Allah, and they are not intrinsically man's; for if strength is intrinsically yours, then preserve it-but you cannot. And if wealth is intrinsically yours, then preserve your wealth forever-but of course, you cannot. And if might is intrinsically yours, then preserve your might forever-but of course, you cannot. The causes of man's arrogance, therefore, are not intrinsically his.

His words 'who are arrogant upon the earth without right' indicate that there is such a thing as rightful pride, which belongs to the one who intrinsically possesses all the elements of strength, wealth, eminence and might, which is why pride is the right of Allah Alone. Be aware that it is true of every arrogant person on earth that Allah never crosses his mind; for if Allah *Glorified is He* with His Perfection and Majesty, were to cross his mind, he would diminish in his own sight. Allah only enters the minds of those people who are humble, which is why we like to give the following example; we find around us the bosses at the top of the chain, and those who are superior to some and subordinate to others, and those who are only subordinates. The one

who is both superior and subordinate cannot sit with his subordinates and behave haughtily, putting his feet up and issuing orders because he might look around and find that his own superior has come to see him; and if he were to behave in such a way, his subordinates would laugh at him. Likewise, we find that those people who do not keep Allah in mind are objects of scorn, whilst those who keep Allah – He to whom belongs pride in Heaven and Earth – in mind are never haughty.

He turns the haughty away from looking at the signs of the cosmos, so they do not reflect on them; and He turns them away from believing in the signs which prove the prophethood of the prophets. And He turns them away from the ability to believe in the rulings of the Quran, and sets a seal on their hearts so that the disbelief which these hearts contain cannot exit, and the faith which is outside these hearts cannot enter. Despite their motions in life, the True Lord prevents them from being able to see His signs in the cosmos. ‘...and if they should see every sign, they will not believe in it. And if they see the way of righteousness, they will not adopt it as a way, but if they see the way of error, they will adopt it as a way.’

When the people of haughtiness see cosmological signs, miraculous signs or the verses of the Quran, they do not believe in them, and when they see the path of righteousness, they do not choose to follow it. This is because the path of righteousness restricts the passions and desires of the soul, forbidding sins and they are unable to bridle their passions because they have been overwhelmed by them. But the path of error gives free rein to the passions of the soul, and this can only occur if one is heedless of the inspirations of faith which forbid one from doing something to acquire something more valuable. In this way, the viewpoint of the people of arrogance is superficial.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about the haughty people who follow the way of error, ‘That is because they have denied Our signs and they were heedless of them.’ We said before, that heedlessness is not usually something which would be required, since the heedless person only forgets, but these people turned away from the truth deliberately and lucidly to the extent that they do not pay the slightest attention to faith.

The True Lord then says:

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَلِقَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ حَبِطَتْ
 أَعْمَالُهُمْ هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

the deeds of those who denied Our signs and the Meeting of the Hereafter will come to nothing – why should they be repaid for anything other than what they have done?’ [147] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 147)

The words signs or messages have been used here more than once which means that the entire issue here is centred on the signs of the universe which point to the One who created them, and the miraculous signs which point to the truth of the messengers whom He has sent and the verses of the Quran which impart the way of Allah *the Exalted* for the maintenance of the balance and soundness of man’s actions in life.

‘Their deeds have become worthless.’ On the surface, it seems that they have done good deeds, but their deeds are vain and corrupt. There are people who do good deeds which benefit society, however, their intention is not to please Allah, but to seek fame so that their names become well-known and people would praise them; or they seek eminence, social position and influence. That is why when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, ‘Who is the martyr?’ He replied, ‘The one who fights in order that Allah’s Word be ascendant, and thus follows Allah’s cause.’⁽¹⁾ A man might fight out of lust for battle, or in order that he gains a reputation of being brave. There are those who do good deeds so that they take pride in them. For example, it is said, ‘The disbelievers are the ones who discovered the microbe, and flew into space’! We say to this: Indeed, yes, they were well appreciated by the people because the people were on their minds; yet they are not appreciated by Allah because Allah was not on their minds when they acted. A man takes his reward from the one for whom he works; Allah *Glorified is He* does not squander the reward of their good deeds, but rather, He gives them their reward in this world; yet, the harvest of the Hereafter is not

(1) Related by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nisa`i, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah

for them, 'Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter - We increase for him in his harvest. And whoever desires the harvest of this world - We give him thereof.' (*ash-Shura: 20*)

The one who chooses his seeds well, sows them, chooses the soil well and waters it regularly, they will yield fruitful crops because he utilised the means well. This is called the 'bestowal of Lordship', a general bestowal for everyone whom Allah created, whether believer or disbeliever, obedient or sinful. But the bestowal of Divinity is only for those who follow Allah's way, and this is reserved exclusively for the believers. If they utilise the means of life well and according to natural laws, they will take their share of them, and the disbelievers will also take their share if they utilise the means well, after which their reward making their names immortal, the statues will be built for them and they will be given prizes, awards and honorary parties. As for the reward of the Hereafter, it will be given to those who worked for the sake of the Lord of the worlds *the Exalted*. As for those who did not work to prepare for the meeting with Allah, He says regarding them, 'And We will regard what they have done of deeds and make them as dust dispersed.' (*al-Furqan: 23*)

And He says, 'But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water.' (*an-Nur: 39*) The disbeliever is like a thirsty man travelling in the desert who imagines that there is water in front of him, and walks but finds no water. When the thirsty man sees the mirage, he feels hope that water is coming soon, and that he will get it: 'But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing.'

What is important is not whether he finds anything, but rather, he is surprised when 'but finds Allah before Him.' He is shocked to find that Allah *Glorified is He* in whom he did not believe before him on the Day of Resurrection, whereupon He will give him his reckoning and requite him for his evil deeds. So, if a man does a deed, let him wait for the reward from whoever it was he did the deed for; and if he does a deed without having Allah on his mind, he must not expect any reward from Him. Despite this, Allah indeed does give such people reward according to the natural laws of life because those who do a deed well are rewarded for it.

‘Those who denied Our signs and the meeting of the Hereafter - their deeds have become worthless. Are they recompensed except for what they used to do?’ (*al-A'raf*: 147) So, they denied Allah’s messages, the Last Day and did not act in accordance with the way of faith. Therefore, they shall be requited and punished by the True Lord who sent down this way which they turned away from and denied.

Therefore, He says, ‘Say, [O Muhammad], “Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? They are those whose effort is lost in the worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work.”’ (*al-Kahf*: 103-104)

The True Lord then says:

وَأَتَّخَذَ قَوْمُ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ حُلِيِّهِمْ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُورٌ أَلْمَ يَرَوُا
 أَنَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّمُهُمْ وَلَا يَهْدِيهِمْ سَبِيلًا اتَّخَذُوهُ وَكَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿١٤٨﴾

In his absence, Moses’ people took to worshipping a mere shape that made sounds like a cow – a calf made from their jewellery. Could they not see that it did not speak to them or guide them in any way? Yet they took it for worship: they were evildoers [148] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 148)

His words ‘after his departure’ refer to when after he went to meet his Lord having said to Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* ‘Take my place among my people.’ After this, the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* made from their jewellery an effigy of a calf which made a lowing sound. You know that jewellery is the trinkets used for decoration made of gold, gems and other valuable things; and the most valuable among all jewellery is gold. We know that a skilled goldsmith can shape gold however he wishes, and if it breaks, it is easy to repair, and it is also slow to break. That is why it is said, ‘A good man is like gold: slow to break, easy to repair’.

When you hear the word ‘ornaments’, this may include diamonds, emeralds and pearls, but gold is the most valuable among all these ornaments. We know that however much the world advances, there will be no reserves for its currency except gold. That is why He did not say here pearls, or gems or diamonds; for when the word ‘ornaments’ is used by itself, it means gold.

It was from this ornament that the Samaritan, made the effigy of the calf. He used gold ornaments, since diamonds and gems cannot be melted. But from where did Musa's (Moses's) people acquire these ornaments, given they were oppressed and lowly? They deceived the Egyptians and took their ornaments as though it were a loan which they would repay later, but then they set out on their exodus and took the ornaments with them!

Pharaoh's people were then drowned, but the ornaments remained. The Samaritan, made the calf of the gold that remained. A calf is a young male cow; and when you hear Him say 'image of a calf', this means that it was three-dimensional, having a clear bodily form. The exegetes have understood, from the word 'image', that the calf was only a body with no spirit.

The True Lord's words 'an image having a lowing sound' indicates that the effigy of the calf was lifeless because if it had been a body which contained a spirit, He would not have needed to say, 'an image having a lowing sound', and it would have been enough for Him to say that it was a calf. His words 'having a lowing sound' indicate that the calf had a body, but did not mean it had life. He described it by saying, 'having a lowing sound' meaning the sound which cows make. He made it from gold, as though he wanted to make it distinct from the deities which were made of stone. He tried to make it a valuable deity by making it from gold which – as we know – was stolen. He made the calf in such a way that when wind blew into the back of it, a sound would be produced in its hollow inside that sounded like the lowing sound which usually comes from a cow's mouth. We see this same principle with the flute, a tube made of reed with holes bored into it which the player then blows into to produce the tune he wants to play.

When the Samaritan, made the calf with this device, a sound came from it like the lowing of a cow. The story of the calf is told in detail in the chapter of *Ta Ha*, and we will cover it when we come to examine that chapter, Allah willing.

'...a calf - an image having a lowing sound. Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to a way? They took it [for worship], and they were wrongdoers.' Why did the Samaritan choose to make a calf? It was because when they came out of Egypt, and then saw the ancient Egyptians worshipping the calf because of a quality which it possessed, they saw in it a

manifestation of power. Just as others would worship the sun when they saw it as a manifestation of power; and likewise, there were those who worshipped the moon, and the stars. The ancient Egyptians worshipped the calf because the yearly flooding of the Nile would saturate the land with water, and they would use calves when they wanted to plough the land. They were strong and powerful at ploughing the land, and this was a manifestation of power. But how could the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in his absence, have taken a calf to worship besides Allah *the Exalted* after He had bestowed them such a great blessing by saving them and drowning Pharaoh and his people? Allah clarifies for us that the Children of Israel crossed the sea and passed by people who worshipped idols, so they said to Musa (Moses), ‘Set up for us a deity as they have deities!’

The True Lord says, ‘Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to a way?’ This principle refutes the worship of anything but Allah. The worshipper must receive commandments from that which he worships; and that which he worships must have a way which he wants his worshipper to follow. The way must be conveyed by messengers who deliver Allah’s messages and His speech unto mankind. As for those who worship the sun, for example, we say to them why do you worship it? What is the way of guidance which the sun has sent to you? Worship means to obey the commands and refrain from the prohibitions. So, has the sun ever given commands or prohibitions? No, because there is no speaking intermediary which conveys the way of guidance unto you. How, then, could anything be worshipped without its giving a way of guidance to its worshippers? Did the sun say, ‘For those who worship me, I shall rise upon them and give them light and heat; while for those who do not worship me, I shall give them none of this’? Of course, it did not. It gives to both those who believe in it and those who do not, and it has not sent any information to us about the Hereafter and the Resurrection. In this manner, before our eyes the worship of everything besides Allah is shown to be false, since worship requires commandments and prohibitions in the form of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not’; and none of these worshipped beings ever told us in what way we should obey them or disobey them. The essential characteristic of the worshipped being is that it guides its worshippers to the path which leads to goodness in this life and the next. Therefore, the True Lord says, ‘Did they

not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to a way?' They were evildoers because they devoted the right of worship of something undeserving of it. The True Lord deserves His rights more than any other, which is why He said about the practice of associating partners with Him, 'Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice.' (*Luqman*: 13)

The True Lord then says:

وَلَمَّا سَقَطَ فِي أَيْدِيهِمْ وَرَأَوْا أَنَّهُمْ قَد ضَلُّوا قَالُوا لَئِن لَّمْ
 يَرْحَمْنَا رَبُّنَا وَيَغْفِرْ لَنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿١٤٩﴾

When, with much wringing of hands, they perceived that they were doing wrong, they said, 'If our Lord does not have mercy and forgive us, we shall be the losers' [149] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 149)

This indicates that the worship of the calf became prevalent amongst the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* but those who possessed some insight or a remainder of faith said, 'This is a terrible state of affairs, and we should have never done it'. They regretted what had occurred. The phrase 'And when regret overcame them...' indicates a natural state in which no one nation differs from any other, but rather is shared by all races and all languages. It indicates that when a person does something and it turns out badly for him, he bites his fingernails in regret and sorrow. This is one of the natural gestures which still remain with us from those natural forms of communication which are common to all races. A man bites his nails because he has done something which he should not have done; and if the wrong is grave, he does not stop at his fingernails, but rather, he takes hold of his whole hand and bites it. The True Lord says, 'And the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands [in regret].' (*al-Furqan*: 27) 'And when regret overcame them' means they were extremely regretful so much that their teeth would bite their hands, as though their remorse was especially severe. This happened in the case of those people who opened their eyes and saw that what they had done was falsehood and folly. They said, 'If Allah does not grant us His Mercy and His Forgiveness, we will be destroyed!' This was an acknowledgement from them of their sins, and a repentant return to Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord then says:

وَلَمَّا رَجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ غَضْبَانَ أَسِفًا قَالَ بِئْسَمَا خَلَفْتُمُونِي مِن بَعْدِي ۖ أَعْجَلْتُمُ أَمْرَ رَبِّكُمْ
وَأَلْقَى الْأَلْوَاحَ وَأَخَذَ بِرَأْسِ أَخِيهِ يَجُرُّهُ إِلَيْهِ قَالَ ابْنَ أُمَّ إِنَّ الْقَوْمَ اسْتَضَعُّفُونِي وَكَادُوا
يَقْتُلُونِي فَلَا تَشْمِتْ بِالْأَعْدَاءِ وَلَا تَجْعَلْنِي مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

On his return to his people, angry and aggrieved, Moses said, ‘How foul and evil is what you have done in my absence! Were you so keen to bring your Lord’s judgement forward?’ He threw the tablets down and seized his brother by the hair, pulling him towards him. Aaron said, ‘Son of my mother, these people over- powered me! They almost killed me! Do not give my enemies reason to rejoice! Do not include me with these evildoers!’ [150] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 150)

The fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* returned to his people full of wrath and sorrow shows us that he was already informed about the matter of the calf. Wrath and sorrow are feelings involving sadness. These feelings could also be called ‘emotional responses’. Thus, we find that there is a difference between someone who feels sorrow but suppresses it and someone who displays anger. The latter’s veins swell up and his face reddens, his rage deepens, his eyes light up with evil and his hands lash out rashly; and we call such a person ‘wrathful’. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came to be in both states simultaneously; and he gave precedence to his wrath because he was a messenger who came to deliver a way of guidance. In such a situation, sorrow was not enough, but rather, there had to be wrath which transformed into action.

We said before that every emotional process has three stages. First, there is the stage of perception, then the stage of sentiment then the stage of the bodily reaction. We illustrated this with the example of a rose. When one sees a rose, this is perception; when he enjoys it, feels peace and contentment from it, this is sentiment; but if he stretches out his hand to pick it, this is a bodily reaction. The Sacred Law did not ordain laws for perception or sentiment; rather, it ordained laws for action except in the case of the obligation of lowering one’s gaze from those things which Allah has forbidden, as a way of protecting people’s honour.

The sorrow Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* felt was not displayed to those who had contravened Allah's way, but rather, his wrath was displayed; and this was an emotional reaction. Even Allah's description of how Musa (Moses) felt expresses that sorrow was very deep and overwhelming.

'Were you impatient over the matter of your Lord?' This means, 'Do you think I have been slow in coming?' This was because Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* went for thirty nights and then ten more were added. So, Musa (Moses) asked them, 'Did you think that I would not come? Or that I was slow in coming to you? Was your belief and your faith for my sake, or for the sake of the Almighty Allah?' Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* died, 'He who worshipped Muhammad, Muhammad has died; and he who worshipped Allah, Allah is Living, and dies not.'

Here, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was saying, 'Supposing that you sought to hasten the affair, and deemed that I was slow in coming, or feared that I had died: were you worshipping me, or worshipping your Lord?' 'Were you impatient over the matter of your Lord? And he threw down the tablets...' We know that the tablets bore Allah's way of guidance. Musa (Moses) then, 'seized his brother by [the hair of] his head, pulling him toward him.' This wrathful reaction that made him seize his brother's head was not abated by their brotherly connection, so what was his brother Harun's (Aaron's) *peace be upon him* response? 'Harun (Aaron) said, "O son of my mother, indeed the people oppressed me and were about to kill me, so let not the enemies rejoice over me and do not place me among the wrongdoing people.'

Notice here that he did not say 'son of my father', but 'son of my mother'. This is because the story of the father of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* is lost in the history of the prophets, and we have no information about him. We do have some knowledge about Musa's (Moses's) mother, however, because she was the one who underwent hardships for the sake of his life. For this reason, Harun (Aaron) made mention here of the prominent thing which was common to both their lives. The True Lord *Glorified is He* here mentioned the common element in the lives of both Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* as they shared the same

mother, which was a vivid part of their history. As for the father, we know nothing about him. All the verses of the Quran concerning Musa (Moses) make reference to his mother. That is why we find that his brother Harun (Aaron) spoke to him in a way which would awaken his affection.

Since he said, 'and were about to kill me' this proves that he opposed and resisted them to the extent that they thought of killing him. The True Lord continues on the tongue of Harun (Aaron), 'so let not the enemies rejoice over me and do not place me among the wrongdoing people.'

In other words, it is to gloat when an adversary is afflicted by misfortune. The 'enemies' here were the people who had worshiped the calf. He called them 'enemies' to prove that he had stood up to them as though there was enmity between them, and that any conflict between Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* would only delight them.

Musa (Moses) did this to hear Harun's (Aaron's) excuse because he knew that Harun (Aaron) was a messenger just as he was. He wanted the whole world to hear the argument of his brother when he clarified that he had not been negligent. He said, 'The people brought me low, because I was alone, and they almost slew me' which shows that he opposed them with all the strength and effort he could muster, and hence they almost killed him. He did not agree with them in any way, but rather, he opposed them as much as he could. The True Lord *the Exalted* ends the verse by saying, 'and do not place me among the wrongdoing people.'

It is as though he were saying to Musa (Moses), 'If you blame me whilst you are full of wrath, it might be thought of me that I was with them, or that I also worshiped the calf'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to clarify for us what the positions of Musa (Moses) and his brother were. The position of Musa (Moses) became clear when he was wrathful with his brother, and the position of Harun (Aaron), was clearly shown to be such that the people brought him low and almost killed him, and nothing more than this could have been asked of him. When Harun (Aaron) said this, Musa (Moses) became aware of two things:

The first was how could he have thrown down the tablets, when they contained Allah's way of guidance? The second was how could he blame his brother in this way before first hearing the truth of the matter from him?

The True Lord tells us what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then said:

قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِإِخِي وَأَدْخِلْنَا فِي رَحْمَتِكَ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ﴿١٥١﴾

**Moses said, ‘My Lord, forgive me and my brother;
accept us into Your mercy: You are the Most Merciful
of all who show mercy [151] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 151)**

He asked his Lord to forgive him if he did anything which contradicted sound reason and truth. He also asked his Lord to forgive his brother Harun (Aaron) for what he did; for he should have fought those who worshipped the calf until he prevented them or they overcame him, if not by killing him, then at least by injuring him, or scratching him and so on.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sought the grace of mercy for himself and his brother, ‘...and admit us into Your mercy, for You are the most merciful of the merciful.’ When you hear the words ‘most merciful of the merciful’, or ‘the best of providers’, or ‘the best of inheritors’, or ‘the best of creators’, and every instance like this where a plurality is given to one of Allah’s attributes, He is thereby also calling upon mankind to adorn themselves with these attributes. So, you should know that Allah has not denied man the ability to take on these attributes because they have the ability to act in accordance with them, even if only in a limited way which is correspondent with their power and their status as created beings and servants of Allah – to say nothing of the fact that such attributes are a gift and a blessing from Him. As for Allah’s Attributes, they are unlimited and unending in their majesty, perfection and beauty; for, ‘There is nothing like unto Him.’ So, if Allah is ‘...the Most Merciful of the merciful.’ this means that He has not denied His creation the ability to show mercy to one another; so whoever shows mercy to his brother may be called ‘merciful’, but Allah is the Most Merciful of the merciful; for the mercy which one man shows another is merely curbing the anger which he feels against him. If you say, ‘I was merciful with so-and-so’, this means that you spared him your anger and your punishment; and whatever it is you could have inflicted upon him was only commensurate with your power. But when Allah *Glorified is He* wants to take someone to task for his sin, His power is unlimited; and likewise, His mercy is unlimited.

The True Lord then says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا الْعِجْلَ سَيَنَالُهُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ
وَذِلَّةٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُفْتَرِينَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

**Those who took to worshipping the calf will be afflicted
by their Lord's wrath, and by disgrace in this life.'**

**This is the way We repay those who invent such
falsehoods [152] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 152)**

When it is said that they 'took the calf for worship' someone might ask, 'Did they take the calf and slaughter it to eat it? Or did they use it to plough the land, or water the crops and turn the water wheels'? For calves are meant for these purposes; yet they did not take the calf for these purposes, but as a deity and an object of worship. As for taking it for those purposes for which Allah created it, this is blameless. This distinction is left unsaid for the intelligence of the listener to discern. If we take a calf for those purposes for which calves were created, Allah's wrath will not be called upon us. The ones who incurred Allah's wrath, they are those who took the calf for purposes other than those for which it was created. They took it as a deity, and therefore, 'will obtain anger from their Lord and humiliation in the life of this world...' The words 'will overtake them' (*al-A'raf*: 152) indicate that the time for this wrath and disgrace had not yet come, and would happen in the future – and the future with respect to this worldly life of is the Hereafter. Yet, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that the disgrace would occur in the life of this world. How could it be that wrath would overtake them, when they had repented? Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this for us elsewhere when He says, '...so, repent to your Maker and kill yourselves [the guilty among you]. That is the best you can do in the eyes of your Maker. Thereupon He accepted your repentance...' (*al-Baqara*: 54). Since some of them had turned in repentance to their Maker and killed themselves, so why would this wrath overtake them? The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies that the wrath which overcame them caused what was said to them, 'kill yourselves [the guilty among you].' (*al-Baqara*: 54). Thus, we understand that His words '...will be overtaken by their Lord

Glorified is He's wrath... (al-A'raf: 152) means before they repented. Killing one's self is the utmost degree of disgrace and humiliation.

'Those who took to worshipping the calf will be overtaken by their Lord's, wrath, and by disgrace in this life. This is the way We repay those who invent such falsehoods.' (al-A'raf: 152). This principle does not apply solely to them; for, everyone who invents falsehoods and thus goes beyond the boundaries of Allah's Law must surely be overtaken by this requital; for when our Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about what happened in their history, and when He relates these stories unto us, Allah *Glorified is He* intends that the listener takes admonition from the story and applies it to their own life; the listener will not apply the lessons of the story to their own self unless Allah *Glorified is He* says to them as a warning and a caution, 'This is the way We repay those who invent such falsehoods.' (al-A'raf: 152). That is, 'Beware of being like these people lest you be overtaken by that which overtook them'. Thereby, Allah *Glorified is He* cautions each one of us to benefit from this admonition and this story; for, history is told for taking admonition and learning a lesson, that the listener might pay heed.

The True Lord then says:

وَالَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ ثُمَّ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهَا وَءَامَنُوا إِنَّ
رَبَّكَ مِنْ بَعْدِهَا لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٥٣﴾

**But your Lord is most forgiving and most merciful
towards those who do wrong, then repent afterwards
and truly believe [153] (The Quran, al-A'raf: 153)**

This is what happened after they worshipped the calf, and Allah *Glorified is He* said to them, 'kill yourselves as an act of repentance to your Maker', and they repented and returned to Allah *Glorified is He* and believed in what He had sent to them, and Allah *Glorified is He* forgave them. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us stories of the manifestations of His Apparent Omnipotence, He also does not want to leave us amidst this atmosphere of His Omnipotence; rather, He wants to admit us into the comfort of His Mercy, which is why He says, 'But those who commit misdeeds and repent afterwards and truly believe, indeed your Lord, thereafter, is most Forgiving and most Merciful.' (al-A'raf: 153)

The True Lord's words 'and repent afterwards' mean that they regret what they have done, and are resolved and determined not to do it again. We said previously that repentance has three aspects. First, there is the aspect of its legislation. Secondly, there is the action of the one who repents. Thirdly, there is Allah's acceptance of this repentance. The legality of repentance is an act of absolute mercy; and had our Lord *Glorified is He* not legislated repentance, all of mankind would have suffered, and all those who commit evil deeds would have multiplied their evil by continuing to do evil deeds. Our Lord's *Glorified is He* legislation of repentance and His call for His servants to cease committing evil is a mercy for sinners and for the society in which those sinners live. After the servant repents, the True Lord *Glorified is He* accepts this repentance, which is the height of bestowal and mercy from Him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But those who commit misdeeds then repent afterwards and truly believe...' (*al-A'raf*: 153). This statement indicates that bad deeds mar faith, so the Lord *Glorified is He* commands His servant to, 'Renew your faith, and recall your Lord consciously because doing wrong indicates that you have become heedless of the Him as well as His commandments and prohibitions. When you repent, you renew your faith and find that your Lord *Glorified is He* is forgiving and merciful'; '...indeed your Lord, thereafter, is most Forgiving and most Merciful.' (*al-A'raf*: 153)

The servant sins when he contravenes his Lord's way of guidance composed of 'Do' and 'Do not do'. If the servant seeks Allah's forgiveness and repents to Him, He accepts this repentance. The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies, 'If I am forgiving and merciful, then beware, My creatures, of reminding a sinner of his sin after he has repented, for, the Master has forgiven him.' So, beware of saying to a former thief who has repented, 'O thief!', and beware of saying to adulterer who has repented, 'O adulterer!', and beware of saying to a briber who has repented, 'O briber'. So long as the sinner has renewed his faith and repented, and Allah *Glorified is He* has forgiven him, do not be so intrusive as to remind him of his sins anew.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَلَمَّا سَكَتَ عَنْ مُوسَى الْغَضَبُ أَخَذَ الْأَلْوَابِحَ وَفِي
 نُسَخَتِهَا هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِلَّذِينَ هُمْ لِرَبِّهِمْ يَزْهَبُونَ

**When Moses' anger abated, he picked up the
 Tablets, on which were inscribed guidance and
 mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord [154]
 (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 154)**

Can wrath be stilled? Does wrath have feelings so that it might fall still? Yes, indeed; for wrath is the stirring up of the soul so that it reacts against the one who wronged it. It is as though wrath implores and entreats the wrathful: 'Strike! Abuse! Kill!' It is as though wrath takes on the form of a person who has the ability to give orders; so Allah *Glorified is He* likened Musa's (Moses's) wrath *peace be upon him* to a man who implored him to do such-and-such things, and when Allah *Glorified is He*, says, 'When Musa's (Moses's) anger stilled...' (*al-A'raf*: 154), it was as though the anger was silenced in him.

Otherwise, it is as our brethren from amongst the scholars call 'inversion', linguistically speaking, meaning that a phrase is turned around and the intelligence of the hearer is trusted to put things back in their places. For example, we might hear someone say in Arabic '*kharāq al-thawba al-mismaru*' (the nail tore the dress). *Kharāqa* (tore) is a verb. The object *thawba* (dress) came before the subject *al-mismaru* (nail). Yet, we understand that it was the nail which tore the dress because we cannot imagine that dress could tear a nail. This is called 'inversion', that is, the order of a sentence is inverted, yet, the intelligence of the hearer interprets it, otherwise, it could be that the nail was stuck in its place and the cloth dragged along it and was torn, so that the cause of the tearing was the cloth, thus it is as though the cloth was the active participant in the event.

'When Musa's (Moses's) anger stilled...' (*al-A'raf*: 154). It could also be that the word 'stilled' is a way of saying that the wrath abated and ended. 'When Musa's (Moses's) anger stilled, he picked up the Tablets, on which were inscribed guidance and mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord.' (*al-A'raf*: 154) The first thing Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did when he was filled with sorrow and anger was to cast down the tablets, and as soon as

the anger abated and left him, he picked up the tablets. This is logical, for anger made him throw the tablets down and seize his brother's head. Then, he understood what his brother had done, excused him and accepted his excuse. Then, he beseeched Allah *Glorified is He* to forgive him as well as his brother. As his anger abated, he picked the tablets which were cast on the ground.

'...on which were inscribed guidance and mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord.' (*al-A'raf*: 154) The Arabic word *nuskha* (inscription) literally means 'copy' which means to transfer something from one place to another, so it is said, 'I copied such-and-such book from such-and-such book', i.e. there was a manuscript and then it is transferred by print or by writing to a copy or several copies. An image of it is made from the original; this is called *mansukh* (copied). The word '*nuskha*' is in the morphological form *fu'la* which can have the same meaning as a passive participle. So, *nuskha* (a copy) means that it is *mansukha* (copied). This morphological form occurs many times in the Quran. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...Allah will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me; if he scoops up just one handful [he will be excused]...' (*al-Baqara*: 249).

The word for 'handful' here is *ghurfa* which literally means the same as the passive participle *maghrufa* (scooped), meaning a small amount of water scooped up by the hand to merely take the edge off one's thirst. The word *ghurfa* also means 'room', as in the room of a house because it is a place which is cut off from the whole house with walls to bound it, i.e. it is a place of a size 'scooped' off the space. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...on which were inscribed guidance and mercy...' (*al-A'raf*: 154).

The meaning of 'guidance' is the Divine way - represented by 'Do' and 'Do not do' - that leads to the goal, which is the reward of the Hereafter. So, guidance and mercy are one single thing with two different aspects. Guidance is the way that, if followed, will lead you to grace. The True Lord *Glorified is He* therefore says, '...guidance and mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord.' (*al-A'raf*: 154)

Thus, we find that the way of Allah *Glorified is He* is that of guidance and mercy. He who hears Allah's words and follows them, will be guided and

granted mercy by our Lord *Glorified is He* because he keeps Allah in his mind and fears the True Lord's attributes of Omnipotence. Therefore, it is essential for man, or a believer, to call to mind his awe before his Lord and his fear of Him *Glorified is He* so that the Lord's way can be guidance and mercy for him, and that he will be amongst those who stand in awe of their Lord *Glorified is He*.

In the Arabic context of this verse, the words 'of their Lord' come before 'stood in awe'. When the object of the verb is brought forward like this, we understand that this is an example of what is called, according to Arabic linguistics, *'ikhtisaṣ* (special emphasis) and *qasr* (exclusivity) such as is the case when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, 'It is You we worship.' (*al-Fatiha*: 5)

What is the difference between 'It is You we worship' and 'We worship you'? If we say, 'We worship you', this statement could be added to; as in 'We worship you and your associates besides you'. But when we say, 'It is You we worship', this means 'We have chosen you exclusively for our worship and no other besides you – Glory be to you! – and our worship is devoted to none other than you'.

So, when the object of the verb is brought forward, this imparts special emphasis. An example of this from our daily lives is when you say, 'I treated you generously', there is nothing to stop you from then saying, 'and I treated Zayd and 'Umar generously, too'. But if you say, 'It is you I treated generously', this means that I was generous to none but you. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...for those who stood in awe of their Lord.' (*al-A'raf*: 154)

Someone might say, 'Is it not possible for anyone to claim that they feel awe, and that they are following Allah's Commandments, simply out of ostentation or a desire to have people say of him, 'So-and-so is a good Muslim', and praise him? But here we find exclusivity; that the servant must stand in awe of none but Allah *Glorified is He* and that this awe is especially for Him alone, not out of ostentation, affectation or the seeking of praise.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then, says:

وَإِخْتَارَ مُوسَىٰ قَوْمَهُ سَبْعِينَ رَجُلًا لِّمِيقَاتِنَا فَلَمَّا أَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ قَالَ رَبِّ لَوْ شِئْتَ
 أَهْلَكْتَهُم مِّن قَبْلُ وَإِنِّي أَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَّا إِن هِيَ إِلَّا فِتْنَتُكَ تُضِلُّ بِهَا مَن
 تَشَاءُ وَتَهْدِي مَن تَشَاءُ أَنْتَ وَلِيُّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْغَافِرِينَ ﴿١٥٥﴾

Moses chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment, and when they were seized by trembling, he prayed, ‘My Lord, if You had chosen to do so, You could have destroyed them long before this, and me too, so will You now destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is only a trial from You – through it, You cause whoever You will to stray and guide whoever You will – and You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy on us. You are the best of those who forgive[155] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 155)

The word ‘chose’ indicates that in the choosing process the intelligence gives preference to doing something over not doing it, or over doing something else; otherwise it is not a choice because *ikhtara* (to choose) means to seek *khayr* (what is good), whilst you have the ability to take something else. This only applies to those matters of free choice included in legal obligations. For example, the tongue is subject to the will of its owner, and it yields to the believer when he says, ‘There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah’, and yields to the atheist –who is cursed by Allah- when he says, ‘Allah does not exist’. The tongue does not disobey in the former case, or the latter. Giving preference is done by the believer when he gives preference to faith when he says, ‘There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah’, and by the atheist when he gives preference to atheism as he says, ‘Allah does not exist’. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And Musa (Moses) chose from his people seventy men...’ (*al-A'raf*: 158).

Those who studied the language say that there is an action, and there is a doer of the action whom we call *fa'il* (the subject). For example, when we say, ‘Zayd wrote the lesson’, this means that Zayd is the one who performed the writing, whilst we call ‘the lesson’ which was written *maf'ul bihi* (the object of the verb). Sometimes, there is also what we call the *maf'ul le'ajlih* (the object of reason), such as when we say, ‘I stood up out of respect for my

father'. The one who stood was the son, and respect was the reason why the action was undertaken, so we call it the 'object of reason'. If we say, 'I fasted the other day', we call this *maf'ul fihi* (the object of time) meaning that the verb took place during this time. Sometimes, an action affects something directly so that it is its direct object, and sometimes it occurs because of something so that it is its 'object of reason', and sometimes it occurs on such-and-such day or at such-and-such time so that it is its object of time. And sometimes it could be the 'object of accompaniment', such as when we say in Arabic, 'I walked with the Nile' meaning that I walked by the Nile, and as I walked I always found the Nile next to me.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And Musa (Moses) chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment...' (*al-A'raf*: 155). In the Arabic context, the verse says, 'And Musa (Moses) chose his people seventy men...'. So, we understand that the seventy men are from his people. Thus, the actual object 'seventy men' is taken out of the 'people'. 'People', here, is called 'source of the object' (*maf'ul minhu*), since Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not choose all his 'people', but rather chose seventy men from amongst them for the appointment set by Allah *Glorified is He*. Some said that the reason behind choosing seventy, was that the followers of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were divided into several tribes. So, he chose a certain number of men from each tribe. Thus, every tribe was represented at the appointment. The word *miqat* (appointment) is used in another verse when Allah *Glorified is He*, says, 'When Musa (Moses) came for the appointment, and his Lord spoke to him...' (*al-A'raf*: 143). Was this appointment here the same as the first one? No, because the first appointment was just for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to speak with his Lord *Glorified is He*, whilst the second appointment was to seek pardon for the worship of the calf.

'And Musa (Moses) chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment, and when they were seized by trembling, he prayed, "My Lord, if You had chosen to do so, You could have destroyed them long before this..."' (*al-A'raf*: 155). Why did this trembling seize them? It was because they did not resist those who worshipped the calf well enough, and Allah *Glorified is He* wanted them to experience a bit of His punishment. *Rajfa* (trembling) means

strong shaking which shakes whom it is aimed to and causes him to tremble, arouses in him fear and awe of the One Who sent it upon him. When the violent trembling seized them, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: ‘My Lord, if You had chosen to do so, You could have destroyed them long before this, and me too...’ (*al-A'raf*: 155). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* clarified, ‘I brought them from their people, and their families know that these seventy men have come with me; if you destroy them, O Lord, their families might think that I brought them here to die, and that I delivered them to their doom. If Your will is to cause them to die, O Lord, You would have destroyed them before, and destroyed me with them’.

The Quran, then, adds that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the others said together, ‘...so will You now destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is only a trial from You — through it, You cause whoever You will to stray and guide whoever You will— and You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy on us. You are the best of forgivers.’ (*al-A'raf*: 155) ‘You are too Merciful, O Lord, to destroy us for what the foolish among us have done’. This statement indicates that the people had done something, namely, worshiping the calf; and if this had been the first meeting, such a statement would not have been required because the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had not yet worshipped the calf. After the first appointment, they said, ‘Since Musa (Moses) has spoken with Allah, we must see Allah for ourselves’, and they therefore said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘...Make us see Allah face to face...’ (*an-Nisa'*: 153).

Thus, what the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did after the first appointment when they said, ‘...Make us see Allah face to face...’ (*an-Nisa'*: 153), was something that they said not an action they took, whilst, here the verse speaks about an action, ‘...so will You now destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is only a trial from You...’ (*al-A'raf*: 155).

So, we know that the verse speaks about a second appointment set after some of them had worshipped the calf. A ‘trial’ is a test, and a test is not a bad thing in itself, and no test can be called bad; what is bad is the result when one fails the test. Tests and trials are not bad for those who pass them.

So a trial is an ordeal and a test, and this test is directed at the ignorant human who does not know how things will ultimately turn out so that he can choose the road which leads to the goal. This is not the case for Allah *Glorified is He* since He has known from pre-eternity what all His servants will do; but this knowledge is not an argument against His servants. It is a must that the servants take actions to cause this knowledge to stand out, manifest and have factual existence so that it can be an argument against them. To base judgements on facts is the fairest way.

The words of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘This is only a trial from You — through it, You cause whoever You will to stray and guide whoever You will...’ (*al-A’raf*: 155) mean: ‘O Lord, You made this test because you created them with free will so that they are able to obey or to disobey’. Allah *Glorified is He* is The One who sends astray and guides because as long as He has made man free to choose, He has placed within him the power to go astray and the power to be guided. And He shows us clearly those whom He wills to guide, and those whom He wills to send astray, when He says, ‘...And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.’ (*Al-Imran*: 86) The reason He does not guide them is the evil they do. Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...And Allah does not guide the disbelieving people.’ (*al-Baqara*: 264)

Thus, we see that it was their own disbelief that prevented them from being guided. So, Allah *Glorified is He*, allowed His servant to choose guidance or choose aberrance. Whatever a servant chooses to do, he does without any compulsion from Allah *Glorified is He*. Had He not created us all with free ability to choose, no one would be able to do anything against Allah’s will. Allah *Glorified is He* created man with free will. It is His bounty that enables man to choose to be guided or to go astray. He made it clear that the evildoer and the one who acts wickedly, is worthy to be aided by Allah *Glorified is He* in his misguidance, just as He aids the one who chooses to be guided because he is worthy to be aided by Allah *Glorified is He* in his guidance.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says on the tongue of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* at the end of this verse, ‘...You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy on us. You are the best of those who forgive.’ (*al-A’raf*: 155)

The word *wali* literally means someone who is close to you; and no one is close to you unless you have drawn him closer to you by showing your love for them; and you do not allow this closeness unless there is something about them which pleases you, benefits you and aids you when someone wrongs you, or to take from their knowledge because they are knowledgeable.

Musa's (Moses's) words *peace be upon him* 'You are our Protector' mean 'You are our Succour, and the closest One there is to us; so if any of us commits a sin, You are the most entitled to decide his fate, for You are the only One Who can forgive him'; that is why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then said, 'so forgive us.' From this, we can ascertain that prevention of what is harmful comes first because it must be prevented before any benefit can be brought. So, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* first asked for forgiveness for the sin, and then asked and beseeched his Lord *Glorified is He* to have mercy on them which meant the bringing of benefit. About preventing harm, our Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'then whoever is removed far away from the fire' -this is the prevention of harm, namely to be drawn distant from the fire- 'and is made to enter Paradise, he indeed has attained the object.' (*Al-Imran*: 185) This is the bringing of benefit. So, harm must be prevented before the benefit is brought. For example, you see an apple on a tree and you want to stretch out your hand to take it, then, you see a youth who wants to throw a brick at you, what do you do? In such a situation, you automatically protect yourself from the brick first, and then you pick the apple later. This is the prevention of harm which comes before the bringing of benefit. Here, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* says, 'so forgive us and have mercy on us...; forgiveness is the prevention of harm and mercy is the bringing of benefit. Likewise, the Quran says, 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy...' (*al-Isra'*: 82). This is because disease comes first, and when you follow the way of the Quran, it heals you from this disease. 'Mercy' means that the disease never comes to you; so if you take the Quran as your guide, this disease will never befall you.

Forgive '...us and have mercy on us. You are the best of forgivers.' (*al-A'raf*: 155) This resembles the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'the best of providers', 'the best of planners', 'the best of inheritors', and here we have 'the best of forgivers.' It is possible for a man to forgive a man, but we know that forgiveness of The Lord *Glorified is He* is above the forgiveness of

His creation; for the man who forgives might do so out of ostentation, or to get a good reputation or he might forgive because he fears the strength of the other. But Allah *Glorified is He* does not fear anyone, and He is the best of all forgivers without any recompense.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَأَكْتُبُ لَنَا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ إِنَّا هُدْنَا إِلَيْكَ قَالَ
عَذَابِي أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَسَأَكْتُبُهَا
لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾

**Grant us good things in this world and in the life to come.
We turn to You.’ God said, ‘I bring My punishment on
whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. ‘I shall
ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of God and pay
the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations [156]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 156)**

We can observe that this verse includes new requests made by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to his Lord *Glorified is He* after having said, ‘...forgive us and have mercy on us...’ (*al-A’raf*: 155). We see that the words ‘...the best of all forgivers’ (*al-A’raf*: 155) refer back to the words of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘...forgive us and...’ (*al-A’raf*: 155); and as for the goodness mentioned in his words ‘And ordain Thou for us what is good in this world...’ (*al-A’raf*: 156), it refers to his request for mercy. ‘And ordain for us what is good in this world and in the life to come...’ (*al-A’raf*: 156). He asked for goodness in this world and in the Hereafter.

The word *hasana* (good) has a general lexical meaning, and a meaning specific to the Sacred Law. Regarding the lexical meaning, everything that a man feels to be good is called *hasana*; but the meaning of *hasana* or ‘good deed’ in the Sacred Law is everything which the Law declares to be good. The Sacred Law oversees all our deeds and actions, and the good deed is not everything which man deems to be good because a man might deem a sin to be good and this human assessment of what is good is far from Allah’s way. As for the Sacred Law’s assessment of what is good, it is to implement Allah’s way of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do.’

Those who are *mukallafeen* (who are obliged not to act in accordance with Allah's orders) should only deem good that which the Sacred Law declares to be good because a man might deem something unlawful to be good because he only considers the immediate benefit of it and not the long-term benefit, and he does not consider the quantity of the benefit it brings. As we know, benefit in this world is commensurate with your own conception of benefit, whilst the value of the benefit of the Hereafter is not known to any save the Knower of the unseen. So, the good in His words 'And ordain for us what is good in this world and in the life to come...' (*al-A'raf*: 156) means that which the Sacred Law deems to be good in this world as deed, and in the Hereafter as reward.

We can observe here that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* intended by the first 'good' that which includes both the Sacred Law's definition of 'good' and the lexical meaning of 'good'; it was a prayer for health and great blessings, and every kind of goodness in the world in the light of Allah's way. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "These are for the believers in the life of this world, exclusively (theirs) on the resurrection day"' (*al-A'raf*: 32).

So, the exclusive goodness is on the Day of Resurrection, but there are people who benefit from goodness in this worldly life. In this worldly life, inanimate objects, plants, animals and the disbelievers benefit from Allah's mercy. This is the case in this worldly life, and this is the mercy which outspreads everything; but in the case of the Hereafter and the reward for good actions, this reward is exclusively for the believers alone.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues to relate the words of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'Indeed, we turn to You' (*al-A'raf*: 156). The verb 'had' means 'to return', and '...we turn to You...' (*al-A'raf*: 156) means 'We have returned to you'. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was speaking here for himself, his brother and the people who worshipped the calf and then repented for doing so. 'As long as we have returned to You, O Lord, You are too generous to turn us away empty-handed'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* responds, 'I bring My punishment on whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of Allah and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations.' (*al-A'raf*: 156)

The words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'I bring My punishment on whoever I will...' (*al-A'raf*: 156), mean, 'There is no one who can compel Me

or direct Me to turn My punishment on anyone; when My servant commits a sin, I may either punish him or forgive him'. So, no one should ever say to a sinner, 'Allah will surely punish you', for He Himself says, '...I bring My punishment on whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things...' (*al-A'raf*: 156) What does 'mercy' mean here? Does it mean mercy in this world, or mercy in the Hereafter? It means the mercy which, in this world, encompasses the obedient and the sinful, the believer and the disbeliever; but on the Last Day, as we said, it will be exclusively and purely for the believers.

His words 'I shall ordain My mercy' indicate that it will be in the Hereafter; that is, Allah's mercy overspreads everything in this worldly life, but for the disbelievers this mercy goes no further than this worldly life, whilst for the believers this mercy will continue as Allah *Glorified is He* conferred it from pre-eternity, and it will be given to the believers as a special gift and bestowal from Him. 'I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of Allah and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations.' (*al-A'raf*: 156)

When some of the Jews were heard to say, 'We are conscious of Allah', it was said to them, 'What way of guidance do you follow in your consciousness? Is it the way of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*? If you were conscious of Allah following the way of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as you claim, then you would have believed in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since one of the teachings of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was to believe in Allah's Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*'. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْنُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ
وَالْإِنْجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ
وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ فَالَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ مَعَهُ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

Who follow the Messenger – the unlettered prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel – who commands them to do right and forbids them to do wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad

**things unlawful, and relieves them of their burdens, and the iron collars that were on them. So it is those who believe him, honour and help him, and who follow the light which has been sent down with him, who will succeed' [157]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 157)**

These are nine attributes of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* namely that Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to him a unique scripture, the Quran, and that he was supported from Allah by miracles. He conveyed and taught the finest and most perfect doctrines, devotions and morals despite that he was unlettered and had never learned to read or write or studied under a teacher so that He remained as he was when he was born. His Lord *Glorified is He* mentions him by his name, and by the attributes and qualities by which he was known to the Jews and Christians in the Torah and the Gospel, which the disbelievers amongst them had concealed or deliberately misinterpreted. His Lord *Glorified is He* also describes him as enjoining upon them the doing of what is right and forbidding them the doing of what is wrong, and commanding them to do all that is consistent with upright human nature and sound natural disposition; for this is the way to success in this worldly life and felicity in the Hereafter. In addition, it is he *peace and blessings be upon him* who deters them and forbids them from all that is bad and improper, and that which appears foul to upright disposition and well-balanced moral sensibility. He makes lawful for them the good things which had been forbidden to them, which Allah *Glorified is He* had made unlawful to them as requital for their tyranny and misguidance; and he forbids them from all that is harmful and bad such as consuming carrion and unlawfully earned wealth such as usury, bribing and cheating. He *peace and blessings be upon him* lightens for them the burden of responsibilities which had existed in the Law of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* such as the amputation of sinful limbs, and the unlawfulness of battle-spoils, which they were obliged to burn. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* lightens and annuls the harsh covenants which were imposed upon them as a punishment for their iniquity and evildoing. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before: for having frequently debarred others from Allah's path, for taking usury when they had been forbidden to do so

and for wrongfully devouring other people's property. For those of them that reject the truth we have prepared an agonizing torment.' (*an-Nisa'*: 160-161)

In this way, Allah *Glorified is He*, instructed those messengers who came before the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell their people about the coming of Muhammad so that all those people who lived to see the coming of His message would believe in him. It is true that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not a contemporary of any of the previous messengers, but the prophets brought glad tidings of him which were recorded in the scriptures revealed to them. Every messenger who came before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was commanded by Allah *Glorified is He* to ask those to whom they were sent to follow Muhammad, believe in him and not to hold on to their temporal power and fear lest it be taken from them. Since Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came supported from Allah by miracles and proofs, they had to believe in him. 'And when Allah took a pledge from the prophets' (*Al-'Imran*: 81). So Allah *Glorified is He* made a leaven of faith so that the followers of different religions would not conflict, and so that the followers of an existent religion would not think that another religion had come to abrogate it and wrest from them their temporal power; for the message of faith continues, and deals with people's affairs which arise as time progresses. All the messengers of Allah *peace be upon them* were eager to ensure that life would be safe and happy, where different talents complemented one another and no opposing powers conflict. The True Lord *Glorified is He* instructed His messengers *peace be upon them* to do this and took from them a pledge, and then affirmed it by saying, '...Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?' (*Al-'Imran*: 81) And He foretold their response that affirmed this way of guidance. That is why no follower of any prophet should oppose a new message if it is supported by a miracle and by a way of guidance which ensures for man security and happiness in life.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not settle for making the belief in the message of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a mere piece of information, but rather, He placed a description that fitted Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alone in the scriptures which came before him.

Allah *Glorified is He* described his physical appearance to them; for, describing physical appearance is clearer than merely informing them about his coming in words. `Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him*⁽¹⁾ said, when `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* asked him about Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘I know him better than I know my own son’. He asked him why, and he replied, ‘I have no doubt that Muhammad is a prophet; as for my son, his mother might have cheated on me’. Upon this, `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* kissed his head. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons...’ (*al-Baqara*: 146).

There is no doubt that a father has thorough knowledge of his own son. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had specific qualities which affirmed His physical appearance. What happened on the Night of Ascension and Journey was not only a matter of speech, but rather, when he was asked about this Journey *he peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I saw Musa (Moses), and he was thin and wavy-haired, like one of the men of Shanu`a.⁽²⁾ And I saw `Isa (Jesus), who was of middling height and reddish complexion, as though he had just come out of a bath. And of all the sons of Ibrahim (Abraham), I resemble him the most.’⁽³⁾

Likewise, in the Torah and Gospel, Allah *Glorified is He* did not only give information about Muhammad, but rather, He gave details about his appearance to provide them with a vivid image of him so that they would not confuse him upon his coming with anyone else. Therefore, the True Lord says, ‘Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons...’ (*al-Baqara*: 146). Yet, some of them concealed the truth to hold on to their temporal power because they thought that when a new religion came it would deprive them of this power and assume authority over nations and peoples. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to make for His messengers *peace be upon them*

(1) The story of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* asking `Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him*

(2) The word *darb* means ‘thin’, and *rajal* means hair which is neither curly nor straight. ‘Like the men of Shanu`a means ‘tall’, as the men of Shanu`a were a Yemeni tribe known for being very tall. As for the description of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*, the word *rub`a* means average-sized, i.e. neither tall nor short.

(3) *Agreed upon by Al- Bukhari and Muslim*

sent to earth by Allah to complement one another and not contradict one another so that each of them would succour the other, as is stated in the chapter of *al-Fath*: ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other. You see them kneeling and prostrating, seeking Allah's bounty and His good pleasure; on their faces, they bear the marks of their prostrations. This is how they are pictured in the Torah and the Gospel: like a seed that puts forth its shoot, becomes strong, grows thick and rises on its stem to the delight of its sowers. So Allah infuriates the disbelievers through them; Allah promises those who believe and do righteous deeds forgiveness and a great reward.’ (*al-Fath*: 29)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* described, in the Torah and Gospel those who would believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because when Islam would be revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, no other religion would come after it. Therefore, He mentioned the life of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his attributes as well as those of his followers, in the Torah and Gospel. This religion would contain that which the Jews were missing because of how they had drifted to pure materialism and had abandoned spirituality, which is why the description of the followers of Muhammad is given in the Torah as, ‘on their faces they bear the marks of their prostrations’

When the Jews became lost in materialism, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to bring forth a messenger who inclined and leaned toward spirituality, namely `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him* to bring about a balance in life with neither negligence nor excess.

So the True Lord *Glorified is He* paved the way for the coming of every messenger by having the messenger who preceded him give glad tidings of him because there is no contradiction between Allah's messages. Since the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the seal of the succession of prophets, Allah had to describe him not only with words, but also as an image so that when they saw him they would recognise him. We find that when Salman Al-Farisi *Allah be pleased with him* saw Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina, and saw many signs upon him, he wanted to see a certain physical sign, and saw the seal of prophethood

between his shoulders. Was this of any benefit? Indeed, it was, for many people believed in him. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* engaged in a debate with the Jews with the intermediation of `Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* who said after he embraced Islam in the presence of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O Messenger of Allah, the Jews are people of deceit. If they know of my Islam before you ask them about me, they will surely calumniate me to you.’ So the Jews came, and `Abdullah entered the house and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘What kind of man is `Abdullah ibn Salam?’ They said, ‘He is the most knowledgeable of us and the son of the most knowledgeable of us, and the best of us and the son of the best of us.’ Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Then what would you say should `Abdullah embrace Islam?’ They said, ‘may Allah save him from that!’ Upon this, `Abdullah came out to them and said, ‘I testify that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah!’ They said, ‘He is the worst of us and the son of the worst of us,’ and went on slandering him. ⁽¹⁾

So, attributes connected with his speech and his physical appearance were given, lest anyone say, ‘The religions of Allah contradict one another’; they are all complementary in that they connect the earth to Heaven according to what the time and place of the message requires. In the past, the different sectors of the world were cut off from one another, and every environment had its own atmosphere and problems, so a messenger would come to heal the specific ailments of a specific place. But Allah *Glorified is He* sent His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at a time when these ailments had become uniform over the world. Our Noble Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to treat these global ailments. He was aided in his coming by his previous descriptions, and aided by his teachings which lifted their burdens and shackles from them. *Ysr* ‘burden’ means a heavy load, and *aghlal* (singular *ghull*) ‘iron collars’ are the iron chains which bind the hands to the neck to restrict one’s movement. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gave these descriptions and paved the way in people’s minds for the coming of the message of Muhammad *peace and*

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih*, in the chapter *Bad` Al-Wahy*, on the authority of *Anas Allah be pleased with him*

blessings be upon him in order that their iron collars be removed by the light which Allah *Glorified is He* sent down to Muhammad; for, the message of Muhammad is protecting and inclusive. Therefore, the True Lord then said:

قُلْ يَأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ فَتَمَنُّوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ
الَّذِي يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ وَأَتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

Say [Muhammad], ‘People, I am the Messenger of God to you all, from Him who has control over the heavens and the earth. There is no God but Him; He gives life and death, so believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered prophet who believes in God and His words, and follow him so that you may find guidance’ [158] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 158)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* orders His Messenger with the following, ‘Say [Muhammad], “O mankind, I am the Messenger of Allah to you all...”’ (*al-A’raf*: 158). He sent him with a message for all times and all places. Regarding this, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I have been given five things which no prophet before me was ever given. I have been given victory by dread over (the lands covered by) a month’s journey, the earth has been made for me a purified place of worship, so that any man of my community to whom comes the time of prayer may pray (where he is), battle-spoils have been made lawful unto me, and a prophet used to be sent to his people alone, whilst I was sent to all mankind and I have been given the right of intercession.’⁽¹⁾

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to affirm that the message is as universal as the utilisation of nature for man’s benefit is; that is why the address is made to all of mankind, ‘Say [Muhammad], “O mankind...”’ (*al-A’raf*: 158). Everyone belongs to mankind, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is sent to them, ‘I am the Messenger of Allah to you all...’ (*al-A’raf*: 158). The True Lord wanted to give us the reasons which made Him send a messenger to both his own people and to all

(1) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

other people to convey to them the way of Allah, in life. So He said, ‘...who has control over the heavens and the earth....’ (*al-A'raf*: 158)

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has dominion over the heavens and the earth, and none of His creatures ever claimed to have dominion over them, and the heavens and earth and all between them contain our life and the constituents of our existence, it is therefore righter and fitting that we worship Him. Were it that the sky belonged to one god, the air to another, the earth to another and what lies between them to another, it might be possible that there be a god here, and a god there, and another god yonder. Regarding this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘...each deity would have taken his creation aside and tried to over- come the others...’ (*al-Mu'minun*: 91).

Since all existence – the earth, heavens and everything else – belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*, it is more fitting that He be worshipped. The primary peak of worship is that you say, ‘There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah’. The first aspect of His divinity is that He has dominion over the heavens and the earth. Since He is a God, He must be obeyed; and He cannot be obeyed unless He has a way of guidance; and there is no way of guidance without ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’. The primary concern of the way of guidance is the peak of all doctrine; the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*; and Allah referred to His Oneness by means of an aspect from our real life, saying: ‘...He gives life and death...’ (*al-A'raf*: 158). This is something which no one has ever claimed for himself because Allah *Glorified is He*, is The One Who has dominion over the heavens and the earth, and because He gives life and death. That is why we find that the one who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* about his Lord is described by the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He says, ‘because God had given him power to rule? When Ibrahim (Abraham) said, “It is my Lord who gives life and death”’ (*al-Baqara*: 258).

This king attempted to begin a misleading sophisticated argument to silence Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and so he said, ‘I too give life and death’ (*al-Baqara*: 258). He illustrated this by his ability to order that a man be killed, and then pardon him; and in doing this, he did not deal him death, but rather ‘granted him life’ according to logic. Yet, is giving order to kill the same as death? Of course not, because there is a difference between death and

killing. A man might kill another man, but he cannot make him die since death comes without the destruction of the body in any way such as by a bullet, a stone or a bomb. No one can deal death to someone simply by desiring him to die because death happens without any cause; but for one person to kill another, this is certainly possible. The True Lord *Glorified is He* therefore says about Himself, 'He gives life and death, so believe in Allah and His Messenger' (*al-A'raf*: 158).

Look at this precise wording, the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded His Messenger to say, '...I am the Messenger of Allah to you all...' (*al-A'raf*: 158), and the essence of faith is to acknowledge and believe in the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*, who has dominion over the heavens and the earth, He besides whom there is no other deity, and He who gives life and death. Therefore, He calls them to faith in *the Most High*, the Creator: '...so believe in Allah and His Messenger...' (*al-A'raf*: 158).

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, 'And believe in me' because it is not something intrinsic in your person, O Muhammad, but rather, it is for the honour of your having been sent as a messenger to mankind. Faith is not in yourself and your character, but rather in the fact that you are the Messenger of Allah. So, the essential aspect is given in the words, '...believe in Allah and His Messenger...' (*al-A'raf*: 158), and the Apostle might be Muhammad, or someone else. After this, He gave a description of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* '...the unlettered prophet who believes in Allah and His words...' (*al-A'raf*: 158). The unlettered status, as we said before, was an ennoblement for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and He believes in Allah's words, which either refer to the Revelations of the Quran which came to us through him, or else it refers to what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* conveyed unto his people from Allah: 'And I shall place My words in his mouth.' (*Deuteronomy* XVIII: 19) 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said of him, 'He shall not speak from himself, but whatever he shall hear (from his Lord), that shall he speak.' (*John* XVI: 13)

And the comprehensive descriptions of the words of Muhammad are those which the True Lord *Glorified is He* elucidates thus, 'And neither does he speak out of his own desire.' (*an-Najm*: 3)

Or, that faith in words means believing that Allah's entire universe was created by a single word from Him, 'When He wills something to be, His way is to say, "Be"— and it is!' (*Ya Sin*: 82)

Someone might say, 'How could Allah *Glorified is He* address something which had not yet existed'? We say: He knew of it from pre-eternity, and its existence was affirmed and certain, but Allah *Glorified is He*, wanted to show this existence to mankind. Everything has existed since pre-eternity in Allah's Knowledge, and it is as though He says to the thing, 'O thing, show your existence so that mankind can see you after you had been concealed in folds of My omnipotence'.

Whether the Word instigated creation of means such as the creation of the sun or the moon, or creation without any means, such as 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* who was 'a word from Him' (*Al-'Imran*: 45), i.e. a word which bypassed the usual means of causality in that he was born to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* without any man which was a bypassing of the usual means of causality, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...a word from Him.' (*Al-'Imran*: 45) We know that everything only exists by a word from Him, but this word either instigates means of causality, or it works without these means.

Allah's words are also the verses which bear His way of Law, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "We believe in Allah and (in) that which had been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac), and Ya`qub (Jacob) and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus), and (in) that which was given to the prophets from their Lord, we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.'" (*al-Baqara*: 136)

It is narrated to us in the *Sunnah* that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to his Lord *Glorified is He* 'I find in the tablets mention of a community who shall believe in the first Book and the last Book, and who shall fight against the forces of misguidance until they fight The One-Eyed Deceiver (the Antichrist); make them my community!' He was answered, 'This is the community of Ahmad.'⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his exegesis of Allah's words 'And when Musa's (Moses's) wrath was stilled...' (7:154)


The words of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'who shall believe in the first Book and the last Book' allude to that which the True Lord *Glorified is He* refers to when He says, 'Say, "We believe in Allah and (in) that which had been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac), and Ya`qub (Jacob) and the tribes..."' (*al-Baqara*: 136).

And the True Lord *Glorified is He* ends the verse which we are currently examining by saying, '...and follow him so that you may find guidance.' (*al-A'raf*: 158) The words 'that you may' are an expression of hope and aspiration, and we know that every aspiration is for one of two things: Either something impossible which you nevertheless aspire to as a way of showing how you love it which is a kind of wishing such as when one says, 'If only youth would return'! He knows that youth will never return, but he says this to show you how much he loves youth. Or someone might say, 'If only the stars would come down to me so I could thread them in a necklace of praise'! This aspiration is impossible, but he wants to show you that this is something he would love to happen.

Then, there is also a kind of aspiration which is possible to realise, and this is called 'hope'. Hope has various stages. When you hope something for someone, you say, 'It might well be that so-and-so will give you this'. Venturing through the door of hope would be for you to say, 'It might well be that I will give you this' because the hope is then from you, yet even so, not anyone else; yet, you might not be able to accomplish it. Stronger still is for you to say, 'It might well be that Allah *Glorified is He* will give you this'; but this is only your own speech, which Allah *Glorified is He* might choose to answer or not answer. Yet, if Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says 'so that you may...' this is the strongest of all hopes, and it will certainly be realised.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* He speaks about them by telling their stories, their scandals and their breaking their covenants after the many blessings with which Allah *Glorified is He* showered them. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us, 'Beware judging them and making this judgment universal; for, were it universal not one single member of Musa's (Moses's) people would have

believed in Muhammad'. That is why we said before that there is something called 'allowing for the possibility'. For example, we find that there were some Jews who believed in the message of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such as Mukhayriq Allah *be pleased with him* of whom the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Mukhayriq is the best of the Jews'. There was also 'Abdullah ibn Salam. Some of the Jews were indeed drawn to the faith, so do not take the matter as though it is universal; for there are, amongst the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* some whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes with the following noble words:


 وَمِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَىٰ أُمَّةٍ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ

**There is a group among the people of Moses who guide
 with truth, and who act justly according to it [159]
 (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 159)**

When the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* heard these words, they would say to themselves, 'He knows what is in our hearts and how we have been thinking about having faith in the message of Muhammad'. Yet, if judging them – as people of scandals and people who broke their covenants etc.– were made universal, those who had been thinking of believing in Muhammad would have said, 'Why would He make a judgement against me when I am thinking about believing'?

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'allowed for the possibility', and clarified for all of those who were thinking about believing in Muhammad that they should openly declare their faith, saying, 'There is a group among the people of Musa (Moses) who guide with truth, and who act justly according to it.' (*al-A'raf*: 159). That is, they direct others towards the truth and call them to the way of goodness, and considering this truth, they act justly when judging between people, and they do not commit injustice.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then, says:

وَقَطَعْنَاهُمْ اثْنَتَيْ عَشْرَةَ أَسْبَاطًا أُمَمًا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ إِذِ اسْتَسْقَاهُ قَوْمُهُ أَنْ
 أَضْرِبَ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ فَانْبَجَسَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ
 مَشْرِبَهُمْ وَظَلَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الْغَمَمَ وَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَنَّاتِ وَالسَّلْوَىٰ كُلُّوا مِنْ
 طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١٦٠﴾

We divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities, and, when his people asked him for water, inspired Moses to strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out. Each tribe knew its own drinking place; We gave them the shade of clouds and sent down to them manna and quails [saying], ‘Eat the good things We have provided for you.’ They did not wrong Us; it was themselves they wronged [160] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 160)

Allah’s saying, ‘We divided them’ (*al-A'raf*: 160) refers to the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. It is well known that the Quran is not like any other book, specifying a chapter to Prophet Musa (Moses), another to Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) and another to Prophet Muhammad. Rather, it presents different issues relevant to the *Da'wah* (call to Allah), moving, for example, from the issue of ‘Isa (Jesus) to that of Musa (Moses) and so on. Then, it returns to the main issue in order to take advantage of the soul’s reaction to any particular story.

So, Allah tackles the topic of the people of Prophet Musa (Moses) again—after Allah has treated them fairly—stating that there are people amongst them who guide with truth and act justly according to it. He says: ‘And We divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] nations...’ (*al-A'raf*: 160). This verse refers to the children of Israel. The Arabic word *qatta'* means ‘dividing an object into parts and sections.’ Allah clarifies that He divided the Children of Israel into *asbat* (tribes). The word *sibt* literally means tribe; and in this context, it refers to the twelve sons of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob). The chapter *Yusuf* states: ‘O my father, I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me.’ (*Yusuf*: 4)

When counting the number stated in this verse, we will find eleven stars, the sun, the moon and Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), so the total number will be

fourteen; if the sun and moon – who symbolise Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) and his wife – are not counted, the total number will be twelve, who were the twelve descendant tribes. Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) had twelve sons from different wives; a fact that caused a conflict of which Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) was aware. It is well known that children from different wives may have conflicts with each other. Therefore, Prophet Ya'qub (Joseph) predicted what would happen and told Prophet Yusuf (Joseph): 'O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers or they will contrive against you a plan...' (*Yusuf*: 5) This is the first sign that they were at odds, and it was one of the reasons why they were divided: 'We have divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities.' (*al-A'raf*: 16)

The following verse is stated in the chapter of *Yusuf*: '...This is the explanation of my vision of long ago. My Lord has made it reality...' (*Yusuf*: 100).

In the following verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Inspired Moses to strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out...' (*al-A'raf*: 160). They did not even want to share the water because of the differences between them; so, Allah gave every tribe a spring to drink from in order to cure them of the jealousy and rancour they felt towards one another. Allah says about them: 'We have divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities.' (*al-A'raf*: 16) There is a purely linguistic point to consider in this context: the tribes that descended from Prophet Ishaq (Isaac) and Prophet *Ya'qub* (Jacob) are paralleled to the tribes formed by Prophet Ismail's (Ishmael) descendants. However, the descendants of Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) – the Arabs – are called *qaba'il* in Arabic, while the descendants of Prophet *Ishaq* (Isaac) and Prophet *Ya'qub* (Jacob) are called *asbat* in Arabic. It is well known that the words *ithnatay 'ashrah* (twelve) refer to the feminine gender since *ithna* is for the masculine gender, whilst *ithnata* is for the feminine gender. The word *ithnata 'ashara* (twelve) is a compound number, and the noun to which it refers is always singular in Arabic. Hence, Allah says: *Ahad 'ashr kawkaban* (eleven stars).

The word *sibt* (tribe) is in the masculine form, but if the word is mentioned in the plural form, it will become a feminine noun because there is an Arabic rule stating that every plural noun is a feminine noun. Moreover,

the word *asbat* in this verse means 'tribes', a meaning which is referred to by the Arabic word '*qaba'il*' (a plural word whose singular is *qabila*), which is also a feminine noun. As Allah divided them, this implies that they had been united previously. In Arabic, it is correct to say *ithnata 'ashrah qabilah* (twelve tribes), but it is not correct to say *ithnata 'ashrah qaba'il*. Therefore, Allah uses the word *asbat* (tribes) instead of *qaba'il*, as every *qabila* includes different *asbat*, so the noun following the numeral is mentioned in the masculine form.

'And We have divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities...' (*al-A'raf*: 160) Allah has made every tribe a community in itself; a reality which has been confirmed, as in the past there was not any national community called 'the Jewish state.' Despite the fact that powerful and tyrannical nations aided them and established a state for them in Palestine, there are Jewish communities in many countries living in a state of isolation from the people in whose lands they live, since they do not want to integrate with the different peoples. In Paris, for example, you find the Jewish district, and the same applies to London. In every city they live in, they maintain their own customs, traditions and ways of life, and are isolated from the people, fulfilling Allah's decree concerning them: 'And We divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities...' (*al-A'raf*: 160). Our Lord has divided and dispersed them on earth, and has not given them a homeland to settle in. Therefore, Allah says in the chapter of *al-Isra'*: 'After his death, We told the Children of Israel, "Dwell in the land"...' (*al-Isra'*: 104). Allah said to them after the time of Prophet Musa (Moses): 'Dwell in the land...' (*al-Isra'*: 104). The Arabic word *iskun* (dwell) indicates specifying a certain place to dwell in. For example, a person may dwell in Alexandria, Cairo, Jordan or Syria, but as Allah says to them to dwell in the land, this means that they would be dispersed on earth and not to be gathered.

Allah says: '... and when the promise of the Hereafter is fulfilled, We shall bring you to the assembly of all people.' (*al-Isra'*: 104) This means that when the promise of the Hereafter is fulfilled, it will be the end of the Jews, as their enemies cannot pursue them in every country and cannot send armies to fight them wherever a group of them live. However, when the promise of the

Hereafter is fulfilled, Allah will bring them together so that they will be attacked and annihilated while they are in one place. Then, Allah states the miracles which occurred: ‘...when his people asked him for water, We inspired Moses to strike the rock ...’ (*al-A'raf*: 160).

The word *istasqa* means asking for water to quench one’s thirst; since they asked for water, they must have been very thirsty. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to show them His grace at a time of need; He let them feel thirsty for them to ask for water and feel the grace of quenching one’s thirst. Allah says: ‘... when his people asked him for water...’ (*al-A'raf*: 160). They asked Prophet Musa (Moses) for water, but he told them that he would not give them water by his own means, but he would ask Allah for water. We know that the essential constituents of life, ordered according to their importance for maintain life, are air, water and food; and when an Arabic verb starts with *hamzah, sin and ta’*, this indicates a request and a desire. For example, when Prophet Musa (Moses) walked with the righteous servant and came to a village, they asked its inhabitants for food, an action that is expressed in the Quran by *istat’ama ahlaha*. Food is considered the third essential constituent of life, while water which is mentioned in this verse, is the second essential constituent of life. It is well known that the first essential constituent of life is air; without it, all the living beings cannot survive. Therefore, Allah has not caused it to be controlled by any person and has granted it to all living beings.

As air is not owned by anyone and is generally prevalent, no one asks another for it. However, food and water can be owned, so Allah has mentioned in the Quran the word *istat’am* (asking for food) and *istasqa* (asking for water), but the word *istahwa* (asking for air) has never occurred with this meaning; it occurs with the meaning (enticing) as in the following verse: ‘...like one whom the devils enticed...’ (*al-An’am*: 71). The verse means that the devils enticed a person to follow their orders and desires and not to follows Allah’s Commands.

The story of the people of Musa (Moses) asking for water has already been mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘And [recall] when Musa (Moses) prayed for water for his people...’ (*al-Baqara*: 60). In the chapter of *al-A'raf* which we are currently discussing, the people of *Musa* (Moses) asked for water – is there any contradiction? Certainly, there is not, because the

people of Musa (Moses) asked him for water, so he asked his Lord for water. This cannot be considered repetition because Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned Musa (Moses) who interceded for the children of Israel, then referred to Himself as the source of water. Therefore, He said in the chapter of *al-A'raf*: '... when his people asked him for water, inspired Moses...' (*al-A'raf*: 160). In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah says: 'And [recall] when Musa (Moses) prayed for water for his people...' (*al-Baqara*: 60). This is a natural sequence. The difference between the two expressions should be illustrated for the reader to be sure that there is neither contradiction nor repetition. The people of Musa (Moses) asked him for water; Musa is the one who prayed for water; Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who was asked for water—this is an ordinary sequence. Allah says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'and [recall] when Moses prayed for water for his people, so We said, "Strike with your staff the stone"...' (*al-Baqara*: 60).

The Revelation came down to Musa (Moses), with Allah's saying: '...so We said, 'Strike...' (*al-Baqara*: 60). In the chapter of *al-A'raf*, Allah says: '...when his people asked him for water, inspired Moses to strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out ...' (*al-A'raf*: 160).

We should be aware that 'We Said' (*al-Baqara*: 60) has the same meaning of 'We inspired' (*al-A'raf*: 160) in this context, since the meaning of 'said' in the first verse does not refer to the direct conversation between Allah and Musa (Moses), which is referred in Allah's saying: '... And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech.' (*an-Nisa'*: 164)

Not every revelation received by Musa (Moses) from Allah was in the form of direct speech; Allah spoke directly to Musa (Moses) only once in order to honour him, then He sent down revelation to him in the same way He sent revelation to the other Messengers. Allah's saying: '... inspired Moses to strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out...' (*al-A'raf*: 160), this indicates an absolute miracle—Allah commanded Musa (Moses) once to strike the water with his staff, '... and it parted, and each portion was like a great towering mountain.' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63) Then, He commanded him to strike the rock so that water gushed out from it. Accordingly, we notice the Omnipotence of Allah, as He gives and withholds with the same object by

means which are controlled only by Allah. Allah's decree is manifested when Musa (Moses) struck the sea with his staff, and each part appeared like a mountain and stopped flowing. When Musa (Moses) and his people reached land after crossing the sea, he wanted to strike the sea again with his staff so that it would return to its previous flowing state, but Allah has inspired to him: '... and leave the sea in stillness...' (*ad-Dukhan*: 24). This means that Allah told him to leave the sea as Allah wanted Pharaoh and his people to be deceived by seeing a dry path through the water, so that they would attempt to cross it after Musa (Moses) and his people. Immediately after Pharaoh and his people have entered the sea behind Moses, the water returned to its flowing state and Pharaoh and his people drowned. Thus, Allah saved Musa (Moses) and his people and caused Pharaoh and his people to drown. The same idea applies to Musa's (Moses) staff; when it struck the water, it parted it so that each portion became like a towering mountain. In the chapter of *al-A'raf*, Musa (Moses) struck the rock, and twelve springs of water gushed out from it. Hence, this indicates Allah's Omnipotence. '... Strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out...' (*al-A'raf*: 160).

The meaning of the word *inbajasat* is different from that of the word *infajarat*; the first word means 'to flow slowly', while the second means 'to gush quickly and in large amounts.' It is well known that water flows slowly first, then it flows in large amounts. When Musa (Moses) struck the rock, a little amount of water came forth at first then it began to flow in large amounts. Accordingly, Allah has reviewed the stages which followed the striking of the rock in detail from the beginning to the end.

When the Prince of Poets, Ahmad Shawqi, handled Allah's bestowal and omnipotence, he said:

Glory is to Allah, the Best of Instructors,
You gave the first generations knowledge,
You sent the Torah as a guide to Musa (Moses),
And the Virgin's son taught the Gospel.
Then, he said about Prophet Muhammad:
You caused Muhammad to flow with eloquence,
He quenched the people with the Hadith and conveyed the Quran.

The poet's choice of the expression 'He quenched the people with the Hadith' is very appropriate and wonderful, as he likened the Prophet's Hadith [tradition] to water which quenches the people's thirst, while the Quran, which was revealed by Allah, was conveyed by the Prophet to His slaves.

Allah says: '... [So that] twelve springs gushed out...' (*al-A'raf*: 160). One blow from one staff has been expected to cause one spring to flow, but Allah willed that the blow of the staff caused twelve springs to flow, and each tribe knew its own drinking place. Therefore, this means that the place where this incident occurred was large. In addition, this blow was a prompt for the land to react. '... [So that] twelve springs gushed out. Each tribe knew its own drinking place...' (*al-A'raf*: 160).

How did each tribe amongst them know the spring that was assigned to them? Allah distributed the water amongst them, and each spring attracted those for whom it was meant, so they did not compete over the springs. This also indicates that all the springs were equal, so no spring flowed with more water than the others, inciting greed; rather, all of the tribes were arranged in the manner Allah wanted: '... Each tribe knew its own drinking place...' (*al-A'raf*: 160).

In this verse, Allah describes the journey of the children of Israel in the desert under the burning sun without any water. They asked Musa (Moses) to pray for water, so he asked Allah to give them water, then twelve springs flowed for them so that they would not be crowded together, and all of them knew their own drinking place. Allah says: '... We gave them the shade of clouds...' (*al-A'raf*: 160). As the sun was burning, Allah graced them with shade from a series of clouds; each tribe had a cloud to cover themselves. For example, a human being is able to divide a large group into small groups and distribute those over twenty camps; therefore, Allah can certainly distribute them among the springs and bring clouds to shade them.

Allah provides people with sustenance, clothes and water so that they do not become hungry, naked or thirsty. He also does not cause the sun to burn them. As for the children of Israel, Allah says about the food He provided for them: '... and sent down to them manna and quails [saying], "Eat the good things We have provided for you"...' (*al-A'raf*: 160). When the words 'sent down' are mentioned, this means that the object under discussion comes from

a sublime position, not necessarily a high place. It also indicates a higher power that exceeds one's own power.

'Manna' is a white sweet-tasting substance similar in appearance to drops of mercury which could be found on trees that still exist in Iraq. When the tree leaves are shaken in the morning, the solid white drops fall, and people collect them on white sheets. The Iraqis also call them *mann*; the taste is sweet like honey, and its consistency is similar to cream.

Quails are a type of fowls which live in Europe and the Mediterranean countries. These birds are called in Arabic *salwa* or *summani*; coastal people call them *samman*. This type of birds migrate from a country to another and are not bred by people, so they can be considered as sustenance that Allah sends down, as they go beyond the people's capabilities. Allah says: '... and sent down to them manna and quails [saying], "Eat the good things We have provided for you."...' (*al-A'raf*: 160)

Some factories produce different types of *mann* along with other types of sweet. Some people who visited Iraq tasted it and brought some for their families. The quails, as previously mentioned, are the *samman* which can be found in cold environments, but Allah causes them to immigrate to warm environments where people can eat them. These birds immigrate to warm environments seeking survival, but Allah provides them to people as a type of food to show that He can give sustenance that transcends their knowledge and ability. He sent down the *manna* and quails to the children of Israel, just as He caused water to flow from the rock and clouds to shade them. Accordingly, their needs were fulfilled by unseen means that they could not control. However, they said that they were not sure that the provision of *manna* and quails would continue and that they could never endure just one kind of food. Therefore, they said to their Prophet Musa (Moses): 'And [recall] when you said, "O Moses, we can never endure one [kind of] food. So, call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions."' (*al-Baqara*: 61) Allah guided them to go to any city or land so that they could find what they wanted: '... Go into [any] settlement and indeed, you will have what you have asked...' (*al-Baqara*: 61) Allah gave them provision without the need for any means, as it was a grace

from Him. Therefore, they should have given thanks to the One Who made sustenance easy for them, but they did not thank Allah and were insubordinate to Him. Hence, Allah ends this verse: ‘... They did not wrong Us; it was themselves they wronged.’ (*al-A'raf*: 160) Certainly, they wronged themselves by neglecting to thank Allah for His grace.

Then, Allah says:

وَإِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمْ اسْكُنُوا هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ وَكُلُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ
 شِئْتُمْ وَقُولُوا حِطَّةٌ وَادْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا نَغْفِرَ لَكُمْ
 خَطِيئَتِكُمْ سَتَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٦١﴾

When they were told, ‘Enter this town and eat freely there as you will, but say, “Relieve us!” and enter its gate humbly: then We shall forgive you your sins, and increase the reward of those who do good’ [161] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 161)

This story is also mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqara*. In this verse, Allah says, ‘When they were told...’ (*al-A'raf*: 161), but He does not mention the one whom were told because Allah divided the children of Israel into *asbat* (tribes) and gave each tribe a spring to drink from, and each tribe had a chief. This shows that they did not get along; not all of them would receive an order from one person, but their orders were given by the Most Sublime Lawgiver who conveyed them to their Messenger Musa (Moses), then the Messenger conveyed them to their chiefs who, in turn, conveyed them to the people.

In another verse, Allah says: ‘And [remember] when We said...’ (*al-Baqara*: 58); it clarifies that the One Who gives orders is Allah. As they were tribes, each having its own place to drink, Allah clarifies that He has revealed His saying to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The Arabic word *idh* mentioned in this verse refers to the time when they were asked to dwell in a town and eat freely. It is said that the town is Jerusalem or Jericho, but the children of Israel said that they would never enter it because it was inhabited by tyrannical people; they added: ‘... so go, you and your Lord, and fight. Indeed, we are remaining right here.’ (*al-Ma'ida*: 24)

Allah has not specified the name of the town in this verse because it is not important; rather, He has mentioned the important matter which is the obedience of the commandment regardless of the place: ‘... Dwell in this town and eat freely...’ (*al-A'raf*: 161).

Allah clarifies that He would provide for them and fulfil their needs in that town just as He did in the desert, as He shaded them with clouds, provided them with water, which sprang from a rock, and also provided them with manna and quails. Therefore, as Allah ordered them to enter the town; this indicates that He would not abandon them. He says, ‘Dwell in this town and eat freely there as you will...’ (*al-A'raf*: 161). In the past, every town had a gate, so Allah says: ‘...but say, “Relieve us of our sins!” and enter its gate humbly...’ (*al-A'raf*: 161).

The word *hitta* which is mentioned in the Arabic verse means supplicating to Allah to remove one’s sins, as they obeyed His commandment and went to the town which He ordered them to enter. They were ordered to enter the gate humbly in a state of prostration because Allah had saved them from the wilderness after giving them blessings and bounties. Had they done so, the reward for them would have been: ‘...We shall forgive you your sins, and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].’ (*al-A'raf*: 161)

Allah *Glorified is He* would have first forgiven them and then recorded a good deed for them. This means that He would have removed harm and brought benefit, but in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, there is a verse that says: ‘And [recall] when We said, "Enter this town and eat from it wherever you will in [ease and] abundance, and enter the gate bowing humbly and say, 'Relieve us of our sins.' We will [then] forgive your sins for you, and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].”...’ (*al-Baqara*: 58)

The general theme is the same, but we find there are differences in the words and phrases in the previous verse and the verse mentioned in the chapter of *al-A'raf*. The first difference is ‘And [recall] when We said...’ (*al-Baqara*: 58) and ‘When they were told...’ (*al-A'raf*: 161) Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to give us a different aspect of the incident, as we have previously mentioned. In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘Enter’, whilst in the chapter *al-A'raf* He says, ‘Dwell.’ We know that the reason for entering the town was to dwell there; a point which is clarified in the chapter

of *al-A'raf*, as the word *iskunu* (dwell) shows that they would not enter merely to pass through, but they would settle there. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the final goal of entering the town: dwelling, as no one can dwell in a town unless he enters it first. Accordingly, this indicates that the words of the Quran are not redundant, but they affirm and give new meanings which clarify and explain the intended point.

Allah says in the chapter of *al-A'raf*: '... eat freely there as you will...' (*al-A'raf*: 161); whilst in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He says: '... eat from it wherever you will in [ease and] abundance ...' (*al-Baqara*: 58). When Allah commanded them to enter the town while they were hungry, He commanded them to eat immediately and in abundance; He used the word *raghada* (in abundance), as they were in dire need of food. But after He commanded them to dwell in the city, He told them to eat because when a person dwells in a place, he feels settled; therefore, he can eat comfortably and leisurely. Allah says in the chapter of *al-A'raf*: '... but say, "Relieve us" and enter its gate humbly...' (*al-A'raf*: 161). This means that He lets their asking for forgiveness precede their entering humbly, while in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He has mentioned their humble entering first, saying: '... and enter the gate bowing humbly and say, "Relieve us of our sins"...' (*al-Baqara*: 58).

Allah has made this difference because He knows that the reactions of the listeners would differ when they entered the town; some of them would react to Allah's saying and ask Him to remove and forgive their sins, while others would respond to the command relevant to action, so they would humble themselves and prostrate as soon as they entered.

Allah also says in the chapter of *al-A'raf*: '... We shall forgive you your sins, and increase the reward of those who do good;' (*al-Baqara*: 58) in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He says: '... We will [then] forgive your sins for you, and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].' (*al-Baqara*: 58)

It is well known that there are forms of plural nouns in Arabic: irregular plural and regular feminine plural. In the first form, the order of the word letters changes; for example, the irregular plural of the Arabic word *qifl* (lock) is *aqfal*. As for the regular feminine plural, the Arabic letters *alif* and *ta'* are added to the end of the root after omitting the feminine ending '*ha*' from the

end of the singular form; for example, the regular feminine plural of the word *Fatimah* is *Fatimat* and *aklah akalat*. Accordingly, the order of the word letters does not change. Another difference between the irregular plural and the regular feminine plural is that the former indicates abundance, and the latter indicates scarcity. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the regular feminine plural and irregular plural to indicate the different amounts of sin because some of the people committed many sins, while others committed few sins.

There is also another difference at the end of both verses: in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, there is the letter *waw* at the end of the verse: *wa sanazid al-muhsinin* which means ‘and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward]’ (*al-Baqara*: 58), while in the chapter of *al-A'raf* there is no letter *waw* at the end of the verse: *sanazid al-muhsinin*, which means ‘We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].’ (*al-A'raf*: 161)

Allah calls the believers to say, *ighfir lana wa'anta khayr al-ghafirin, warhamna wa'anta khayr al-rahimin, waktub lana fi hadhihi al-dunya hasanah* (Forgive us and You are the best of those who forgive, have mercy on us as You are the best of those Who show mercy and give us in this world that which is good). Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that He will not only forgive them and remove their sins, but He will also give them from what is good in this world. This means that He removes harm and brings benefit. Allah uses the word *khatayakum* (your sins) in the irregular plural, as it implies that the sins were numerous, and uses in the other verse the word *khati'atikum* in the regular feminine plural which implies that the sins were few. After forgiving them, Allah will ‘... increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].’ (*al-A'raf*: 161) This means that they will be forgiven and granted rewards. A detailed comparison has been made between a verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* and a verse in the chapter of *al-A'raf* for the reader to know that the verses of the Quran do not conflict with each other, but they complement one another. Accordingly, this proves Allah’s saying: ‘... if it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.’ (*an-Nisa'*: 82)

Then, Allah says:

فَبَدَّلَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ قَوْلًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَرْسَلْنَا
 عَلَيْهِمْ رِجْزًا مِنْ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

**The wrongdoers among them substituted another saying
 for that which had been given them, so We sent them a
 punishment from heaven for their wrongdoing [162]
 (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 162)**

This verse indicates that they were divided into two groups because since Allah says *minhum* (among them), this means that some of them obeyed Allah's Command, while others were wrongdoers and substituted another saying for what had been given to them. Allah commanded them to say, 'Relieve us of our sins,' (*al-A'raf*: 162) and to enter the town humbly in prostration. The change they made was in the words they were supposed to say because a person may speak to himself so that no one else can hear, while his action can be seen by others. This shows that some of them were showing off; some of them mocked the command they were given and mentioned inappropriate words, as they said *hinta* which means (wheat) instead of *hittah* (relieve us of our sins).

Accordingly, they made substitution of the saying, but nothing with regard to the action took place although some people said that some of the children of Israel altered the action as well; instead of entering in humble prostration, they entered crawling on their buttocks in pride. However, Allah has not said anything about that; the action might have been the result of the inability of some of them to move normally. 'The wrongdoers among them substituted another saying for that which had been given them...' (*al-A'raf*: 162).

Allah reminds us of the care he showed to them in the desert, and the clouds which shaded them, the manna and quails that He had sent to them, and the water which Allah granted them when Musa (Moses) prayed to Him. However, their tendency towards insolent rebellion and substitution of Allah's sayings has not changed; accordingly, they deserved Allah's punishment: '...so We sent them a punishment from heaven for their wrongdoing...' (*al-A'raf*: 162).

There is another verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which Allah says: '...so We sent down upon those who wronged a punishment from the sky

because they were defiantly disobeying...’ (*al-Baqara*: 59). The difference between the word *inzal* (sending down) and *irsal* (sending) is that the former means sending something only once, while the latter implies continuous sending. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says about rain: ‘... We send down from the sky pure water.’ (*al-Furqan*: 48) The word *anzalna* (send down) is used in this verse because rain does not fall continuously, but Allah uses the word *arsalna* (send) in the following verse in the context of air, saying: ‘We have sent the fertilizing winds...’ (*al-Hijr*: 22). Allah uses the word *arsal* (send) in the context that implies continuous action, as He mentions this word in the verse which tackles the flood that drowned those who disbelieved Musa (Moses). He says: ‘So We sent upon them the flood...’ (*al-A'raf*: 133).

When Allah aroused the interest of the people of Prophet Hud, ‘Ad, in seeking forgiveness from Allah and repenting of their disbelief and sin, He said to them: ‘And O my people, ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him. He will send [rain from] the sky upon you in showers...’ (*Hud*: 52).

Allah gives us different aspects of the story of the children of Israel, as He uses the word *arsalna* (sent) and *anzalna* (sent down), as the punishment differs according to the sinners; each one’s punishment is commensurate with his sin. Allah sends upon them continuous punishment which is commensurate with their sins. In this verse, Allah says: ‘... so We sent them a punishment from heaven for their wrongdoing.’ (*al-A'raf*: 162)

The word *rijz* means ‘torment,’ and the word *rujz* means sins and acts of disobedience; therefore, *rijz* (torment) results from *rujz* (sins). For example, Allah says: ‘And avoid sins!’ (*al-Muddaththir*: 5) This means: avoid sins in order to be safe from punishment. Allah explains that these people were punished because of their evil-doing, while in the other verse, Allah says: ‘...because they were defiantly disobeying.’ (*al-A'raf*: 59)

Fisq (act of disobedience) happens before wronging because a person cannot wrong himself by contravening the path of Allah unless he first falls into an act of disobedience. Therefore, Allah clarifies both the effect and the cause of punishment. Accordingly, this emphasises that every word in the Quran gives a certain meaning and is not redundant. In addition, there is no

repetition except for the story as a whole; as for the elements of the story, they brought new meanings and aspects.

Then, Allah says:

وَسَأَلَهُمْ عَنِ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ حَاضِرَةَ الْبَحْرِ إِذْ يَعْدُونَ فِي
السَّبْتِ إِذْ تَأْتِيهِمْ حِيتَانُهُمْ يَوْمَ سَبْتِهِمْ شُرْعًا وَيَوْمَ لَا
يَسْبِتُونَ لَا تَأْتِيهِمْ كَذَلِكَ نَبْلُوهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿١٦٣﴾

[Prophet], ask them about the town by the sea; how its people broke the Sabbath when their fish surfaced for them only on that day, never on weekdays – We tested them in this way: because of their disobedience [163] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 163)

There is a question about a town by the sea. We know that the first town they had entered was Jerusalem, but it is not by the sea. The town that is by the sea may be either Ayla, Midyan or Tiberius – what matters here is that it is *hadirat al-bahr* (near or adjacent to the sea). If we say that so-and-so *hadara*, this means that he was far away and then he approached. For example, we could say that Alexandria is *hadirat al-bahr* (near or adjacent to the sea).

Allah's saying, 'And ask them' (*al-A'raf*: 163) is directed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for him to ask the people of the Book to read their scriptures to make sure that what he said was a Revelation from Allah. They knew that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not gain this knowledge from a teacher and did not read it in a book; rather, he gained this knowledge from the One Who sent him as a Messenger. He did not come to them to learn from them previous events and stories, but he wanted to inform them that he had already known these stories. Therefore, the word *ma kunta* (you were not) is mentioned in the Quran in many verses, such as Allah's saying: 'And you, [O Muhammad], were not on the western side [of the mount] when We revealed to Moses the command...' (*al-Qasas*: 44). Another example on this meaning is Allah's saying: 'And you were not a resident among the people of Midyan, reciting to them Our verses...' (*al-Qasas*: 44). The following verse also includes the words *ma kunta* (you were not): 'And you were not with them when they

cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Mary. Nor were you with them when they disputed...’ (*al-Baqara*: 44).

Therefore, Messenger Muhammad was not present when such incidents took place; at that time and age, he was not able to tell the people of the Book what had happened; rather, those incidents were mentioned in their own Books. Therefore, the One who gave him this information is the One Who sent him as a Messenger. Allah confirms this point, saying: ‘And you did not recite before it any Scripture, nor did you inscribe one with your right hand. Otherwise the falsifiers would have had [cause for] doubt.’ (*al-Ankabut*: 48)

The following verse includes a command from Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* to Prophet Muhammad to tell the people of the Book that He informed him of matters they could not deny, so that they would be certain that Allah had taught him and thus believe in him. ‘[Prophet], ask them about the town by the sea...’ (*al-A'raf*: 163). The words ‘ask them’ solve for us many ambiguous matters; one example of that is the event of the Night Journey, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* led the Prophets in performing the prayer of Ibrahim (Abraham).

Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* said, ‘I found myself in Hijr and Quraysh were asking me about my Night Journey. I was asked about things pertaining to Jerusalem, which I could not preserve (in my mind). I was very vexed as I had never been before. Then, Allah raised it (Jerusalem) before my eyes; and I looked towards it, and I gave them the information about whatever they questioned me. I also saw myself among the group of Messengers. I saw Musa (Moses) saying prayer and found him to be a well-built man as if he was a man of the tribe of Shanu'a. I saw ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Mary *peace be upon him* offering prayer; he had the closest resemblance with 'Urwa ibn Masu'd Al-Thaqafi. I saw Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* offering prayer; he had the closest resemblance with your companion (the Prophet himself) amongst people. When the time of prayer came, I led them. When I completed the prayer, someone said, “Here is Malik, the keeper of the Hell. Salutations.” I turned to him, but he preceded me in salutation.’⁽¹⁾

(1) Related by Muslim in his *Sahih*

There is a verse in the Quran that says: ‘And ask those We sent before you of Our messengers...’ (*az-Zukhruf*: 45). A commandment was given to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* to ask the other Messengers who were sent before him, but when could he ask them. There must have been an opportunity for them to meet so that he could ask them. Therefore, when Messenger Muhammad said that he met with the Prophets, spoke to them and led them in prayer, the news is believable because in this way, he had obeyed Allah’s Commandment. ‘[Prophet], ask them about the town by the sea...’ (*al-A’raf*: 163). The question, which Allah ordered Prophet Muhammad to ask the people of the Book was meant to rebuke and reproach them; what was the story of the town by the sea?

This town was close to the sea, and we understand that the question which the verses posed to them indicated that the sea had some significance in the matter because the question was connected with fish and fishing, so it was inevitably a coastal settlement. ‘... How its people broke the Sabbath when their fish surfaced for them only on that day, never on weekdays - We tested them in this way: because of their disobedience.’ (*al-A’raf*: 163)

The Arabic word *hitan* which means a kind of fish is the plural of the word *hut*, just as the word *nun* which also means ‘fish’ is pluralised as *ninan*. Allah forbade them from working on a particular day (Sabbath) so that they would devote it to worship. They still practise some of these customs. I have heard that one of them visited America and refused to ride in a car on Saturday because it is a day off, and refused to work until the next day. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to discipline them when they committed acts contrary to their religion, and He took from them time—during which they could have been working—as He says: ‘For wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We made unlawful for them [certain] good foods which had been lawful to them...’ (*an-Nisa*: 160)

This verse includes admonition and lessons for anyone who strays from the religion, as he should beware of thinking that delusion will bring him benefits which Allah will not know; our Lord is able to punish him with disasters which will cause him to lose what he plundered. As for the bribe, for example, Allah will cause him to have illnesses, ailments and disasters that will eat up all that he has taken.

The children of Israel declared some forbidden things lawful to them, so Allah tried them by forbidding them things which had been lawful for them. Therefore, the punishment which befell them was caused by the wrongdoing they did, as they were preoccupied with the worldly life and material things, so Allah forbade them from working on the Sabbath. As for those who were living close to the sea, Allah afflicted them with a great trial: they could see the fish in the sea with their fins raised above the water like the sails of a ship, while they were in their houses. This was a punishment from their Lord because they were forbidden from catching fish on every Sabbath, but on the other days of the week, when they were allowed to work, no single fish would appear to them. ‘... when their fish surfaced for them only on that day, never on weekdays – We tested them in this way because of their disobedience.’ (*al-A'raf*: 163)

Therefore, they thought that as long as Allah forbade them from fishing on the Sabbath, they had to make a scheme. Accordingly, they made a net from weaved cords like the one that is called *jubiyah* in Egypt, and they were the first people who made this kind of net in this specific way; the fish gets in and cannot get out again. They planned that the fish would come and enter the net on the Sabbath and they would take it out on Sunday, a plan that indicated transgression. Sometimes, they would make a pool with an entrance but with no exit, an act that indicated plotting. Accordingly, Allah made an even cleverer plan for them; He wanted to afflict them because they strayed from His path, disobeyed Him and sought to make lawful what Allah had forbidden; therefore, He made unlawful for them that which He permitted for others. Allah says:

وَإِذْ قَالَتْ أُمَّةٌ مِّنْهُمْ لِمَ تَعِظُونَ قَوْمًا اللَّهُ مُهْلِكُهُمْ أَوْ مُعَدِّمُهُمْ عَذَابًا
شَدِيدًا قَالُوا مَعذِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْقُورُونَ

How, when some of them asked [their preachers], ‘Why do you bother preaching to people God will destroy, or at least punish severely?’ [the preachers] answered, ‘In order to be free from your Lord’s blame, and so that they may perhaps take heed’ [164] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 164)

If a saying is addressed by a certain people, this means that there must be addressees; therefore, such people were divided into three groups: people

who preached to those who were preached and those who criticised the act of preaching.

The people who preached to others, asking them to adhere to Allah's religion were the true believers who did so because they saw those who contravened Allah's religion. Those who criticised the preachers were pious people from among the dwellers of the town who despaired about the rectification of the affairs of those who contravened Allah's religion.

Considering the verse that says: 'How, when some of them asked [their preachers], "Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy or at least punish severely?" ...' (*al-A'raf*: 164) It is well known that the ones who uttered those words mentioned in this verse neither transgressed nor preached; they posed this question to the preachers because they believed that preaching to the people who went astray from Allah's religion was futile. This conforms to what Allah has said to His Messenger Muhammad: 'Then perhaps you would torment yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.' (*ash-Shu'ara*: 3)

Allah tells His Messenger not to torment or kill himself with grief. In the current verse, some of the children of Israel blamed the preachers for preaching to people who were lost in disbelief and did acts which would cause them to be punished. The preachers said: 'In order to be free from your Lord's blame, and so that they may take heed.' (*al-A'raf*: 164)

The words *ma'dhirah ila rabbikum* mean to be free from your Lord's blame. When you commit a misdeed against someone, and you tell him your excuse for doing it, he may free you from blame. For example, you may say to your friend, who has failed to come on time for his appointment with you, 'You are late. You have made me wait for a long time.' Then, he replies to you, 'My car broke down and I could not find a ride.' This is considered an excuse. Therefore, the meaning of the word *ma'dhirah* is the reason why you did something which annoyed another person. Hence, there is a saying, 'He who warns is excused.' Allah says: 'And those with excuses among the Bedouins came...' (*at-Tawba*: 90).

The Arabic word *mu'dhir* means someone who offers a false excuse, while the word *mu'adhdir* means someone who offers a true excuse. The

preachers intended to say to the righteous people—who blamed them for preaching the disbelievers—that they would not lose hope in guiding the disbelievers who chose to be tormented by Allah. Even if the preachers lost hope in guiding the disbelievers, they would continue preaching to them to avoid being blamed by their Lord, as they did what they were able to do.

There is a difference between conveying a ruling and preaching about a ruling, as preaching means to repeat to the listener what he already knows but does not do; for example, preaching to someone about performing the obligatory prayer—he already knows that prayer is obligatory, but he does not perform it.

Accordingly, preaching means reminding the heedless person of a ruling; the word ‘preacher’ is derived from the word ‘preach’ which refers to those who remind people of the rulings they already know, so that they will adhere to them. Therefore, preachers do not bring any new ruling.

Some scholars say that Allah’s words, ‘Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy or at least punish severely’ (*al-A'raf*: 164) were not directed towards the preachers, but they were directed towards those who committed sins and were being preached. This means that those who were preached said that their Lord would chastise and punish them, so there was no need for preaching. However, this is not correct because the ending of the verse contradicts this opinion as Allah says: ‘In order to be free from your Lord’s blame, and so that they may take heed.’ (*al-A'raf*: 164) The Arabic word *la'allahum* (so that they may) affirms that the previously mentioned words were not said by those who were preached. Then Allah says:

فَلَمَّا نَسُوا مَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ أَنجَيْنَا الَّذِينَ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ السُّوءِ وَأَخَذْنَا
 الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا بِعَذَابٍ بَئِيسٍ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿١٦٥﴾


When they ignored [the warning] they were given, We saved those who forbade evil, and punished the wrongdoers severely because of their disobedience[165] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 165)

Allah informs us in this verse that when the sinners forgot about the admonition they received from some of the believers, Allah tormented them

severely for their delusion and abandonment of Allah's religion and saved those who preached to them. As for the third party, who neither joined the preachers, nor the sinners, they said: '... Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy or at least punish severely?...?' (*al-A'raf*: 164). Their words were also a kind of preaching, as the pious people tried to frighten them by saying that Allah would destroy or chastise those who abandoned His path.

Allah's saying, 'When they ignored [the warning] they were given,' (*al-A'raf*: 165) indicates that the disobedient people received preaching and admonition, and Allah punishes severely those who do not follow the instructions of His religion and do not take heed to the preaching and admonition they receive. Therefore, Allah does not treat them unfairly, but they will be punished due to either their disobedience to Allah or their wrongdoing.

Then, Allah says:


 فَلَمَّا عَتَوْا عَنْ مَا نُهُوا عَنْهُ قُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِئِينَ

**When, in their arrogance, they persisted in doing
 what they had been forbidden to do, We said to
 them, 'Be like apes! Be outcasts!'** [166]
 (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 166)

The torment that Allah caused them to suffer indicates that He did not end their lives because tormenting means inflicting pain, and death is not considered torment because it ends any feeling of pain. We can learn something about the difference between death and torment when we read the story of the hoopoe and Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon). Upon noticing that the hoopoe was absent, and its place was empty, Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) said: 'I will surely punish him with a severe punishment or slaughter him...' (*an-Naml*: 20-21)

These verses clarify the difference between torment and death. In the chapter of *al-A'raf*, Allah says: 'When, in their arrogance, they persisted in doing what they had been forbidden to do....' (*al-A'raf*: 166) This means that when they arrogantly rebelled and disobeyed, Allah's torment for them had been confirmed; this is clarified by Allah's saying: 'Be like apes! Be outcasts!' (*al-A'raf*: 166)

Due to their arrogance and rebellion, Allah punished them by making them akin to the basest of creatures, apes; each one of them had his private parts exposed, so the people mocked and laughed at them. Did they really turn into apes? Yes. Before you command someone to do something, you consider whether he is able to fulfil it or not. When Allah says, 'Be like apes,' (*al-A'raf*: 166) was it within their power to turn themselves into apes? This is a command given to subject the creatures to Allah, turning the disobedient from among the children of Israel into apes; those who preached to them saw them in that state. This is a declarative statement which we believe to be true due to our trust in the One Who said it; this statement was an actual fact for those who witnessed it.

Many miracles were performed by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* aside from the Quran which has been revealed as a Book of guidance and will remain until the Day of Resurrection. Water flowed from between the fingers of Messenger Muhammad. In addition, he performed other miracles which his Companions witnessed and narrated, and which were intended to make their belief firm. They reached us through narrations (Hadith); if your mind can accept them, it will be good, but if your mind cannot accept them, do not let them shake your faith because they are not intended for later generations. Every miracle, which was bestowed upon Messenger Muhammad, was intended for those who witnessed it. It has reached you as a narration which you may believe or not, but if you do not believe it, this should not undermine your faith. However, if it has reached you through an authentic chain of transmission, you must believe it.

Allah has informed us by His saying, 'Be like apes Be outcasts!' (*al-A'raf*: 166) that He inflicted a torment upon the disobedient people from among the children of Israel, by turning them into despicable apes, as a punishment for the arrogant insistence on doing what they had been forbidden to do. Those who preached to them or lived during their time witnessed the torment being inflicted on them. Does the one who is transformed into an ape or a pig remain in that state? The ones who were transformed into apes or pigs remained in that state for a while so that those who saw their evildoing and transgression could see the consequences of their evil, and then they died.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكَ لِيُبْعَثَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ يَسُومُهُمْ سُوءَ
الْعَذَابِ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَسَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٦٧﴾

And then your Lord declared that, until the Day of Resurrection, He would send people against them to inflict terrible suffering on them. Your Lord is swift in punishment but He is most forgiving and merciful [167] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 167)

The Arabic verb *ta'adhdhana* and its derivatives mean 'informing.' The ear is the means by which one is informed. Moreover, before a person can read and write, first, he should be taught the alphabet which is recited to him. This is because one cannot read and write unless he first hears and learns the alphabet. So, hearing is the primary means of obtaining information. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'When the sky has split [open], and has responded to its Lord and was obligated [to do so].' (*al-Inshiqaq*: 1-2) Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [mention] when your Lord declared that He would surely [continue to] send upon them until the Day of Resurrection those who would afflict them with the worst torment. Indeed, your Lord is swift in penalty; but indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.' (*al-A'raf*: 167) Allah *Glorified is He* explains that, although they had the freedom to choose how to act, their adherence to faith was always wavering. They were eager to spread corruption and, therefore, Allah sent upon them those who would afflict them with the worst torment. Why? This is because they are seen as followers of religion. Allah does not afflict disbelievers or atheists with worse torment due to their disbelief or atheism; they are not considered role model for religion. Allah has not sent any messenger to them. But if those who follow Allah's Religion, Message, and Book act corruptly, whilst people know them to be the followers of a prophet who is sent with a Scripture, they will be evil role models of corruption for the people. Accordingly, when Allah afflicts them with torment, He *Glorified is He* does not do so merely because of their corruption, but because such corruption is ascribed to people who are seen as role models for religion.

Back to the verse at hand (*al-A'raf*: 167), we know that the linguistic root '*a-dh-n*' means 'informing.' In another verse, Allah says: 'And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful.' (*an-Nahl*: 78) Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the creation, He explains that He brought us out of our mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and He gave us hearing and sight and minds so that we might be thankful.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the Arabs who lived at the time of the Messenger Muhammad as 'unlettered', meaning that they possessed none of the means of knowledge, although He *Glorified is He* created for us, human beings, means of knowledge by giving us hearing, sight, and minds. It is amazing that He listed them in the order they are used, since – as we said before – if any of us has a new-born baby, he can observe that if he waves his finger in front of the baby's eye, he does not react because his eye has still not begun to perform its function. A baby's vision develops within a period of three or ten days from his birth. But if you were to go close to his ear and shout, he would react. This proves that the baby's ear develops hearing from the very moment he is born, whilst his eye only begins functioning after some time. First comes hearing, then comes sight; hearing and sight information is received, so a person begins to develop mental capabilities. For example, parents may say to a child, 'Do not go near this fire because it will burn you', but he does not believe them as fire looks attractive to him, so he touches it, and it burns him once. Having gone through that experience, he becomes no longer in need of anyone to tell him that fire burns because now he has mental information. So, first comes hearing, then sight, and lastly comes the mental capability. Therefore, Allah urges people to be thankful to Him for giving them the means which help them have knowledge and be rid of ignorance.

There is another aspect of the miraculous nature of the Quran here. When Allah speaks about the means of acquiring knowledge, He uses the word *sam'* (hearing) in the singular form; when he mentions *al-absar* (vision), it is in the plural form. Even though they are both faculties of perception; He *Glorified is He* does not use both of them in the singular form, nor does He use them in the plural form. This is because hearing is the faculty we use to perceive sounds,

and it has no natural way of being closed. On the other hand, this does not apply to the eye, since a natural part of it is the lid, which can be closed. If one makes a sound, everyone in the surrounding area can hear it; as for sight, one can open his eyes to see anything he wants to see, whilst if he does not want to see a thing, he can just close his eyes.

Accordingly, with regards to vision, one has more than one option; either to open the eyes and see something or close them, if he has no wish to see anything. Nevertheless, there is no such option for hearing; there is no natural lid to close one ear in case one does not want to hear something. Allah stated this in the Quran even before the development of the science of physiology. He *Glorified is He* mentions ‘hearing’ in the singular and ‘sight’ in the plural—even though they are both faculties of perception—in order to communicate this miraculous aspect. There is, however, one Quranic verse which states both words in the singular form: ‘And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [ones] will be questioned.’ (*al-Isra*: 36)

The singular of both words in this Quranic verse underlines the individual responsibility of everyone; that is, every individual will be called to account for his own hearing, sight and thinking, not for what other people hear, see or think.

Likewise, we see that, in the Quran, hearing always comes before sight except in one single verse: ‘If you could but see when the criminals are hanging their heads before their Lord, [saying], “Our Lord, we have seen and heard, so return us [to the world]; we will work righteousness. Indeed, we are [now] certain.”’ (*as-Sajda*: 12) This verse speaks about the Day of Resurrection; Allah mentions sight before hearing because when the terror of the Day of Resurrection comes, we will see the universe change before we hear anything.

In this verse (*al-A'raf*: 167), Allah *Glorified is He* states that He assured that the children of Israel would always go astray, and therefore Allah should send someone who would inflict a cruel torment on them; either from the side of faith—such as that which the Prophet Muhammad did with the tribes of Banu Al-Nadeer, Banu Qurayzha, Banu Qaynuqa‘ and Khaybar—or He would

send an oppressive, irreligious ruler. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And thus will We make some of the wrongdoers allies of others for what they used to earn.' (*al-An'am*: 129) This was exactly what happened in the cases of Nebuchadnezzar and Hitler. Accordingly, when Allah informs us of anything, He surely has the power to put that thing into practice; on the contrary, when a human being tells that he is going to do something, he may not have the ability or means to put this very thing into practice. However, Allah possesses all the means and power to bring it about, and His announcements are always confirmed; as for others than Allah, the surrounding conditions might not aid them in bringing about what is announced. For example, the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad were weak and unable to defend themselves against the oppression of the idolaters and disbelievers of Mecca, and each one of them searched for a place where he could be safe; some of them went to Abyssinia, others sought the protection of powerful people who could protect them. In such hard times and unbearable conditions, Allah revealed a Quranic verse in the chapter of *al-Qamar* to Prophet Muhammad, telling him that those disbelieving people would be defeated. Allah has said: '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat].' (*al-Qamar*: 45)

Some people wondered, 'How could they be defeated, while we are not even able to defend ourselves?' When this verse was revealed, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab said, 'Which assembly will be defeated?' Later on, he said: 'on the day of the battle of Badr, when I saw Prophet Muhammad, striding in his armour, saying: "Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee," I realised what those words meant.' Allah announced that victory would come, and He is able to bring about whatever He announces, exactly as He announces it; for there is no other god who could prevent Him. So, all what Allah tells shall come true, and none can confront Him or overpower His Power.

In the Quranic verse under discussion (*al-A'raf*: 167), Allah says that he would send against the children of Israel those who would inflict cruel suffering upon them. The Quran clearly states that people would come to oppress them. In this case, Allah would not protect the children of Israel, but He would let the matter to those oppressors who would cause them to great suffering and torment. Allah also states, in another verse in chapter of *Maryam*, that He let loose Satan upon the disbelievers to seduce them. This does not

mean that Allah gives Satan the power that they cannot repel, but He does not protect those disbelievers against their temptations. Allah says, 'do you not see that We have sent the devils upon the disbelievers, inciting them to [evil] with [constant] incitement?' (*Maryam*: 83) Allah says, '... until the Day of Resurrection' (*al-A'raf*: 167). This implies that this rebellious group of Jews will remain in the world as a constant source of concern until the end of time. Why? They are a source of evil in this universe, and if such evil did not exist, or people did not suffer from its harm and corruption, no one would strive to seek the truth and goodness. Evil, therefore, comes to make the people suffer its torment and corruption so that they turn to what is good. This is why you find that the strongest responses take place in the hearts of the believers, and the most powerful physical reaction for the sake of Islam occurs when they encounter those who seek to persecute Muslims and attack Islam.

The purpose of the existence of evil is to cause those who call for what is good in this world to unite, and the purpose of the existence of falsehood is to stir up and encourage those who call for the truth to fight and counter the evil. This is because when falsehood becomes widespread, and the people suffer because of it, they cry for help and say, 'O people, do what is good!' If this does not happen, you will not find anyone striving to do what is good with passion and fervour.

The word *yasum* (afflict) is derived from the root *sam*. When it is used to refer to animals, the word *sa'ima* means 'freely grazing livestock', i.e. those animals which go out and graze; they do not need to be fed by their owners. As for the livestock which is tied up and does not graze freely, it needs someone to bring it its food. So the original meaning of *sam* is 'to seek.'

The word *sam* means also 'to seek the help of others in afflicting people with torment.' No one does so unless he has exhausted his own power to inflict it, so he asks someone, who is able to inflict torment, to do so. That is, Allah would send those who would inflict suffering upon them as much as possible, and then when their strength ran out or is weakened, they would seek assistance from others in tormenting the disbelievers. Accordingly, the meaning here is that he will torment them until he gets exhausted; he still finds this insufficient; therefore, he asks another one to inflict them with great torment.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse by saying: ‘Your Lord is swift in punishment, but He is most forgiving and merciful.’ (*al-A'raf*: 167) Swiftness means that something takes less time than expected. Swiftness here refers to both this life and the next; for when they committed a sin, He would send upon them those who would inflict on them suffering in this world, whilst in the Hereafter, there will be the ultimate swiftness because the distance between a disbeliever and his suffering is not the entire duration of this world. As soon as a man dies, the world ends for him. Prophet Muhammad says, ‘When one of you dies, his Resurrection Day is near.’⁽¹⁾

The Reckoning of the Hereafter will be swiftly done. Even if we assume that each one of us were to go without being reckoned until the end of this world, the reckoning would still be swift as every moment passes of man’s life brings him closer to his punishment. Moreover, if we assume that this world will last for million years ahead, every day which passes will cut it short.

After declaring the swiftness of His punishment, Allah *Glorified is He* states that He is most forgiving and merciful. Someone may ask how Allah combines the swiftness of punishment and forgiveness and mercy in the same verse. We reply that Allah is the One Who is speaking, and He is the All-Powerful; so, if He says that He is swift in inflicting punishment, this means that He is swift in punishing the spreaders of corruption and oppressors because He is forgiving and merciful to the oppressed people. Accordingly, Allah shows His mercy to the oppressed people by His swiftness in punishing the oppressors. It may be said also that after Allah stated that He is swift in punishment, and this may frighten people, He wanted to encourage people to seek His Mercy and, therefore, He stated that He is All Forgiving and All Merciful.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

(1) Narrated by *Ad-Daylami* on the authority of *Anas*

وَقَطَعْنَاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُمَّمًا مِّنْهُمْ الصَّالِحُونَ وَمِنْهُمْ دُونَ
 ذَٰلِكَ وَبَلَوْنَاهُمْ بِالْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٦٨﴾

We dispersed them over the earth in separate communities some are righteous and some less so: We tested them with blessings and misfortunes, so that they might all return [to righteousness] [168] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 168)

In this regard, Allah states in another verse that He has ‘divided them into twelve tribes or communities.’ (*al-A'raf*: 160) But here, the verse under discussion has another meaning. Allah *Glorified is He* dispersed them over the earth so that they would no longer have a homeland, and so they would live in humility. This is because they were in disagreement from the very beginning: as grandchildren and cousins.

The meaning of ‘We dispersed them’ is that the members of each separate group were intrinsically bound to one another, and also that they would not spread out in the places in which they lived. This is why we said before, that they [the Jews] never integrate into societies. When visiting Spain, for example, one finds that they have their own quarter. This is also the case in France and Germany; and wherever they are, they establish an exclusive community which no one can enter. Moreover, they do not adopt customs from anyone else. Allah *Glorified is He* decreed them to be dispersed in this way after He had ordered them to enter the holy land, and they refused to enter it unless those who were residing there left (*al-Ma'ida*: 21-24). Allah says: ‘They said, “O Moses, indeed within it is a people of tyrannical strength, and indeed, we will never enter it until they leave it; but if they leave it, then we will enter.’ (*al-Ma'ida*: 21) Allah also says: ‘They said, “O Moses, indeed we will not enter it, ever, as long as they are within it; so go, you and your Lord, and fight. Indeed, we are remaining right here”’ (*al-Ma'ida*: 24)

Therefore, Allah did not allow them to settle together in one homeland, and He made them scatter throughout the whole world. This is because when they live in one place, their corruption would be concentrated only in that place; and Allah wants to announce to the whole world that their corruption is comprehensive. So, if they ever gather in one place, they will be forced by

power to leave that place and be expelled from it or persecuted. I think that the recent actions of Hitler are not difficult for us to call to memory. We have explained this before when we commented on Allah's words: 'and We said after Pharaoh to the children of Israel, "Dwell in the land, and when there comes the promise of the Hereafter, We will bring you forth in [one] gathering"....' (*al-Isra'*: 104)

Here, we said that their dwelling on earth means for them to spread out upon it since He *Glorified is He* did not specify any particular place for them to live in; and when the promise of the Hereafter comes, Allah will exact punishment on them with a single blow. Allah *Glorified is He* will bring them forth in one gathering in preparation for this final punishment.

Some of the Jews came and settled in Medina. They became people of knowledge, Scripture and wealth and built great fortresses. When Prophet Muhammad immigrated to Medina, he made a treaty with them. Those who embraced Islam would be treated as the rest of the believers; they had the same rights and responsibilities. Allah states that there was a group of the people of Moses who were guided to the truth.

We said that this is called 'a consideration of the possibility' that some of them might follow Prophet Muhammad. The word *duna* in the Quran (*al-A'raf*: 168) has two meanings. It may mean 'other than'—as the opposite of the righteous people are the corrupt people. It may also mean that some of them were the most righteous, whilst others were less righteous. There are always people who aspire to perfection, and others who are content with what is merely good. Then, the verse continues: 'We tested them with blessings and misfortunes, so that they might all return [to righteousness].' (*al-A'raf*: 168) The last part of this sentence, 'so that they might all return [to righteousness],' reveals to us that the verse means that some of them were righteous and others were disbelievers because if it were only that some of them were good and others were better, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have said: 'so that they might all return.' However, it may mean that they aspire to what is best.

About the Arabic word *balawnahum* (we tested them), Allah has the absolute freedom to impose whatever tests He wills. He may test people with blessings in order to reveal their reactions towards Allah's favour upon

them—although He eternally knows how people will behave in every situation. But His pre-eternal knowledge is not considered a witness against us. Therefore, He puts us to the test so that our actions will be a testimony from us and against us. Hence, Allah tests with blessings as well as with afflictions. Allah *Glorified is He* tries people with blessings in order to see if the worldly wealth will delude us and cause us to forget the Creator of all means who gave them to us. Allah tells us that man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient, Allah says: “No! [But] indeed, man transgresses, because he sees himself self-sufficient” (*al-‘Alaq*: 6-7).

It is incumbent upon us to be thankful to Allah for His blessings and to use them in the best way we can. If a servant utilises the blessing whilst giving thanks to Allah, he passes the test; if he does not thank Allah, he fails the test. On the other hand, Allah may test people by putting them in into hardships in order to see whether His servant will show patience or not. This means that He only wants people to know themselves and how they will react to the test as He eternally knows it.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* states that when He tries some people by His generosity, they say that this is a proof that Allah is pleased with them, and when He tries some people straitening their means of livelihood, they consider it a sign for Allah’s displeasure with them. Allah says: ‘and as for man, when his Lord tries him and [thus] is generous to him and favours him, he says, “My Lord has honoured me”...’ (*al-Fajr*: 15-16) But Allah tells such people that they both speak falsely for blessings are not proof of honour, nor is the absence of blessings proof of disgrace. Rather, honour comes when one receives the blessing and is thankful to Allah and when he bears the misfortune with patience. So, the blessing in itself is nothing but a trial; likewise, if Allah straightens your provision and makes it scant, this is not a disgrace, but a test too.

Furthermore, Allah blames those people who think that if Allah gives them wealth, then he is pleased with them. He blames them that they do not feed the orphan or urge one another to feed the needy. Then, how can their wealth be considered a blessing? Rather, in this case, it is a sign of their misfortune.

In this verse, Allah clarifies that He put the children of Israel to various tests so that they return to Him. The example of this is when one says, ‘So-and-so has

worn me out! I tried dealing with him in both ways, yet the stick did not work on him, nor did the carrot; it did not avail when I was generous to him, nor when I was sparing with him.’ To Allah belongs the perfect example. Allah tested the children of Israel, yet they did not return to obedience which indicates that disobedience was one of their natural characteristics.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ وَرِثُوا الْكِتَابَ يَأْخُذُونَ عَرَضَ هَذَا الْأَدْنَىٰ وَيَقُولُونَ سَيُغْفَرُ
لَنَا وَإِن يَأْتِهِمْ عَرَضٌ مِّثْلَهُ يَأْخُذُوهُ أَلَمْ يُؤْخَذْ عَلَيْهِم مِّيثَاقُ الْكِتَابِ أَن لَّا يَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ
إِلَّا الْحَقَّ وَدَرَسُوا مَا فِيهِ وَالذَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

And they were succeeded by generations who, although they inherited the Scripture, took the fleeting gains of this lower world, saying, ‘We shall be forgiven,’ and indeed taking them again if other such gains came their way. Was a pledge not taken from them, written in the Scripture, to say nothing but the truth about God? And they have studied its contents well. For those who are mindful of God, the Hereafter is better. ‘Why do you not use your reason?’ [169] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 169)

The words *khalf*, *khalaf* and *khalifa* refer to that which comes after something else; it is said that someone is so-and-so’s successor; and we read in chapter of *al-A'raf*, ‘And We made an appointment with Musa (Moses) for thirty nights and perfected them by [the addition of] ten; so the term of his Lord was completed as forty nights. And Moses said to his brother Harun (Aaron), “Take my place among my people, do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters”’ (*al-A'raf*: 142) Allah *Glorified is He* used the Arabic verb *ukhluf* meaning ‘be my successor.’ However, when you hear the word *khalf*, which here means ‘generations,’ know that it implies a corrupt succession, whilst the word *khalaf* implies a good succession. This is why when you say a prayer for someone, it goes as follows, ‘O Lord, make him the best successor (*khalaf*) of the best forebears (*salaf*).’ The word *khalf*, in the Quranic verse, implies that they were corrupt in themselves and corrupted the others. Labid ibn Rabi’a, an Arab poet, said:

Gone are they in whose company one could live,
 And I remain, amongst their successors, like a mangy.

The poet here laments the death of the noble and generous ones because nothing remains of those in whose generosity and munificence he used to live; for those in whose company one could live are all gone, and it was a blessing just to be in their vicinity. When a man of straightened means lives in the vicinity of a good man, who has been blessed, the blessings of that good man are passed down to him. The poet says, 'And I remain, amongst their successors, like a mangy,' meaning that his skin is close and attached, but it is the skin of a scab.

We know the story of Abu Dalf, who was a generous man in Baghdad whose blessings were enjoyed by all the people, and he gave to all who needed. A neighbour of his had an emergency and wanted to sell his house so he put the house up for sale, and when they asked him what price he wanted he said, 'My house I will sell for a hundred *dinars*, but my position as the neighbour of Abu Dalf is worth a thousand *dinars*!' on hearing these words, Abu Dalf said, 'Any man who values being my neighbour ten times what he values his house must certainly not be abandoned! Tell him to remain our neighbour, and he may take whatever money he needs from us.'

In the Quranic verse, the Scripture refers to the Torah, taken as an inheritance by the succeeding generations, but something can only be inherited if the one bequeathing it kept it safe and passed it on to the inheritor. Being a people of corruption, what did they do with their Scripture? They inherited it, and it was conveyed unto them so that they knew what it contained. They took the fleeting gains of this lower world saying, 'We shall be forgiven,' and indeed taking them again if other such gains came their way, as stated in this verse of the chapter of *al-A'raf*; that is, they have no excuse for not following the righteous way, and they did not even pay attention to what the Scripture – the Torah – contained of covenants and declarations of the lawful and unlawful, and orders and prohibitions; they were utterly heedless of this saying to themselves: 'This book only gives the distant bliss of the Hereafter', whilst they wanted the nearer bliss; so, some of them took bribes and abused power, thereby clutching at the fleeting good of this lower life, this worldly life. They

did not manage their worldly life in accordance with Allah's way. This worldly life is composed of substances and accidents: the substance is what is essential, and man in his flesh and bones is 'substance' (*jawhar*); as for his colour and whether he is dark or white-skinned, this is an 'accident' (*'arad*) as is whether he is short or tall, well or ill, rich or poor; those are all accidents. So accidents are variable beings, whilst substances signify beings which remain invariable as long as they exist. As the logicians say, the substance is being as existing in and by itself, whilst the accident is being existing in another as its subject.

They took the 'fleeting gains' (*'arad*) of this worldly life; which may be obtained through unlawful wealth, cheating and bribery. We know that any man – even the believer – may commit a sin, and our Lord does not prevent this because when the Lawgiver ordains a punishment for a crime, this allows for the possibility that the crime will be committed. As Allah specifies the punishment for theft, as stated in verse 38 of the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, this implies that the lower soul of the believer might incite him into stealing, for example. However, Allah *Glorified is He* did not leave this crime without a punishment. Were we to see a Muslim stealing, we would say to him, 'This action is forbidden in Islam, and it requires a punishment.' The criminal cannot commit a sin and practise the religion at the same time; otherwise, he would be falsely ascribed to it; and when a Muslim commits a sin or an act of disobedience and then feels remorse, repents and resolves not to do it again, his repentance is genuine. The same is true if he, being tempted to commit the sin again, returns to it and then repents again. The important thing is that he does not insist on perpetuating the sin and saying each time, 'I will repent later.' They, the children of Israel, used to persist in their sin and say, 'Allah will forgive us,' but they did not even think about repenting. We find that some of them claimed to be Allah's children and his beloved ones, as stated in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*: 'But the Jews and the Christians say, "We are the children of Allah and His beloved" (*al-Ma'ida*: 18). The response comes: why should He, then, chastise you for your sins? "Say, "Then why does He punish you for your sins?" Rather, you are human beings from among those He has created" (*al-Ma'ida*: 18).

So, they clutch onto the fleeting gains of this lower world, seeking to justify it by saying that Allah *Glorified is He* will forgive them. In doing so, they make lawful what is unlawful, thereby passing from the realm of sinful disobedience to that of outright disbelief; for there is a distinction between doing something whilst acknowledging that it is a sin and committing the sin and saying, 'It is not a sin' – to do this is to turn from disobedience to disbelief. An example of that are those people who declare usury to be lawful. We say to them: accept that you are sinful, but do not throw yourself into disbelief because if you declare that which Allah has made unlawful to be lawful, you fall into disbelief and deserve to have it ascribed to you – Allah forbid! Yet if you say, 'It is forbidden, but my circumstances are difficult and I cannot control myself,' Allah might forgive you. Adamant in their sin, the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* used to say, 'Allah will forgive us.'

In the verse (*al-A'raf*: 196), Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that they left aside what is high and took the fleeting gains of the lower life, and persisted in their transgression committing sin after sin without knocking upon the door of repentance. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* warns them as stated in the Quranic verse under discussion that they inherited the Scripture within which a solemn pledge was taken from them that they would not attribute anything to Allah but what is true; but does the transgressor leave falsehood and return to truth? Of course, he does not, so they ignored what the Scripture said, despite the fact that they had studied it.

This is explained in the Quranic verse (*al-A'raf*: 169) where the verb *darasa* which means to read again and again or to study implies the repetition of the action. If it is said that so-and-so has studied (*darasa*) jurisprudence, this means that he read it continuously until it became an innate faculty for him. This is different from the one who merely reads the book only once; so, jurisprudence does not become an innate faculty for him. In order to understand the difference between 'knowledge' and 'faculty', we say: knowledge is to receive information, whilst he, who studies and applies this information to make it automatic, masters the knowledge, so it becomes an innate faculty for him. If a person, who is fasting, for example, meets with a jurist and asks him a question about fasting, he will answer him straight away because he knows everything about jurisprudence matters, both big and small. But if you ask a

junior student at Al-Azhar [university in Cairo], he might hesitate and need to go over his books to find the answer because jurisprudence has not yet become an innate faculty for him. Faculties in abstract matters are akin to automation in material matters; it requires training. The one who takes hold of the loom to weave and is adept at passing the shuttle between the threads, can only do this after much training; he has learned it with difficulty and constant training.

Hence, the verse under discussion indicates that they repeatedly studied the Scripture until they knew well the knowledge it contained. The Arabic word *dars* (to study) is derived from a tangible concept, namely that of threshing grain which in Arabic is also *dars*. Those who grew up in the countryside know how we thresh grain. When the thresher turns on the ears of wheat, the grains come out of its sheaves and the stalks are cut; in Arabic, this is called *dars*.

Their disobedience was not the result of their negligence of the pledge they had made not to attribute anything to Allah but the truth—because they had thoroughly studied the Scripture that was sent down to them, the Torah—but it was their preferring to take the fleeting gains of this lower world. It is then necessary that He clarifies for us the recompense for preferring the fleeting gains, in contrast to the great reward granted to those who seek the abode of the Hereafter—everlasting reward. Allah says: “And the home of the Hereafter is better for those who fear Allah, so will you not use reason?” (*al-A'raf*: 169) This is an essential precaution before acting: to consider what good your action will bring forth and to refrain from it, if it brings more evil than good. You must weigh things up using intelligence; only then, you will see that doing what is good is the most sensible course.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَالَّذِينَ يَمْسِكُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّا لَا نَضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُصْلِحِينَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

**But as for those who hold fast to the Scripture and
keep up the prayer, We do not deny righteous people
their rewards [170] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 170)**

Many of the children of Israel inherited the book and took the fleeting gains of this lower world, and did not weigh things up with their intelligence; therefore,

instead of holding fast to the Scripture, they abandoned it following their whims, as though they were not governed by a Divine Law dictating orders and prohibitions. However, in contrast to them, there were others who did hold fast to the Scripture they inherited and attributed nothing to Allah but the truth.

The Arabic root letters *m-s-k* imply a strong bond, and that which connects a man with something is his grasp called *masik*. The derivatives of the word are *masaka*, *massaka*, *amsaka*, *istamsaka* and *tamasaka* all of which have the same essential root meaning. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says 'hold fast' using the verb form *massaka* which is an intense form of *masaka* (to hold), just as there is *qata* 'a (to cut) and *qatta* 'a (to cut into pieces) which is more intense.

Massaka means to hold fast to what you clutch, whilst *istamsaka* means to seek to clutch (i.e. to take hold) and *tamasaka* means that two things hold onto each other. In His mercy, our Lord does not ask us to hold fast *massaka* to His Book, but rather, He asks us to 'take hold' (*istamsaka*) of it; Allah *Glorified is He* therefore clarifies: 'If you wish to draw close to Me and feel My nearness, leave aside the rest, for the aid comes from Me Myself.' Accordingly, it can be inferred that he who follows the way of the Quran, will never be forsaken, for he indeed has taken hold to the firmest handle, as clearly stated in the Quranic verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara*; Allah says: 'So whoever disbelieves in *Taghut* and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it.' (*al-Baqara*: 256) The verb 'to grasp' is used instead of 'to hold fast,' because he who directs his intention to do so will be given aid by Allah. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Qudsi Hadith:

'I am just as My slave thinks I am'—that is, 'I am able to do for him what he thinks I can do for him and I am with him if He remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group that is better than them; and if he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.'⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in his *Sahih*, in '*Kitab At-Tawhid*', and by *Muslim* in his *Sahih*, with three chains of narration on the authority of *Abu Hurayra* may Allah be pleased with him; also narrated by *At-Tirmidhi* and *Ibn Majah*

By your faith in Allah and His help, you get aid and strength. If you want Allah to remember you, and then remember Him; if you remember Him in yourself, He remembers you in Himself; and if you remember Him in a group, He remembers you in a better group; and if you draw a hand's span nearer to Him, He draws an arm's length nearer to you. So, what more could you ask for, especially that you add nothing to Him? Hence, it is all in your hands, and if you want Allah to be with you, then follow His way, and His aid will come to you directly. In this way, the whole affair lies with you, and you have it in hand, by virtue of your faith in Allah and your desire to draw near to Him.

This is why we said before that if a person wants to meet with a very important person in this worldly life, in pursuit of a benefit from him, he has to make a written request, and either the VIP agrees or not. If he does agree, he specifies the time and the place, and his office manager asks you to state the topics you intend to discuss with him. When you meet with him, and the time runs out, he stands up from his chair to end the meeting. This is the case of the great human being; but what about The Greatest of all and every being, with whom you meet on the grounds of faith? You can meet with Allah at any time, in any place, say whatever you want to Him and you are the one who ends the meeting. Is all this not enough for you to take hold of faith?

The Scripture, mentioned in the Quranic verse of (*al-A'raf*: 170), refers to the inherited Scripture, meaning the Torah, which they had studied over and over, and in which Allah took from them a pledge not to attribute anything to Him but the truth. In the Quranic verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that they used to observe prayer constantly. Did their Scripture contain nothing but prayer? No, but He mentions it specifically being the buttress of the faith; and in the *Shari'a* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayer is made obligatory by a direct command from Allah, whilst other obligations were enjoined through Revelation.

An example of that is when the head of any governmental department wants to give ordinary, routine instructions; he signs the document with the instructions and writes on it, 'For the attention of so-and-so', then it follows its regular course. When he is more concerned with the matter at hand, he speaks to the employee in question on the telephone; when the matter at hand

is of the utmost importance, he has the employee come and see him in person. Prayer was made obligatory in this way because it is a constant proclamation of fidelity to Allah established five times every day, and if you wish to offer more, you can perform supererogatory and night prayers.

Establishing prayer is a sign of continuous allegiance to Allah; by observing all His other Laws, you show your allegiance to Allah: by giving *zakat* once a year, by fasting for one month—*Ramadan*— and by performing the pilgrimage once in your lifetime if you are able to. But prayer is a constantly renewed proclamation of allegiance, and because prayer has this great importance, it is never excused. As we know, there are five pillars of Islam: the testimony that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah – faith in Allah and the Messenger as a single unit that cannot be separated – and it is sufficient for a person to say it once in order to fulfil the obligation; then comes the pillars of prayer, *zakat* (the obligatory alms), fasting and the pilgrimage— the latter is only obligatory on those who are able to perform it, and a person might not possess enough wealth to pay the obligatory alms, in which case he does not have to pay it at that time; he might be ill or on a journey so that he does not have to fast either.

A Muslim may be excused for not performing some Islamic obligations, except for prayer; neglecting it is never excused. Superficially speaking, prayer cuts you off from your work for a while— for example, if every obligatory prayer took half an hour, one would take two and a half hours daily to pray. Time is dear to man, and prayer consumes some of this time in which he could otherwise be earning money. Furthermore, during prayer one must fast, in that he has to abstain from eating, drinking and marital intimacy; so, prayer comprises all the constituents of the Pillars of Islam, which is why it is never excused.

Therefore, the notion of holding on is very plain in the verse under discussion, and observing prayer expresses adherence to the way of faith. This is why we hear people say, ‘When we went to Mecca and Medina, we experienced psychological clarity, spiritual illumination and overwhelming theophany and light.’ I say to those people: our Lord is here just as He is there; it is only that when you were there, you adhered to the faith; when you heard the call to prayer you rushed to pray. If you did here the same as you did there, you would feel the same illumination. Hence, if

you constantly pledge your allegiance to Him, Allah says: “But those who hold fast to the Book and establish prayer - indeed; We will not allow to be lost the reward of the reformers” (*al-A'raf*: 170). This is a universal truth: Allah *Glorified is He* never allows the reward of the one who enjoins what is right to be lost. The fact that He mentions the reward of the good doers after referring to holding fast to the Scripture and establishing prayer shows that any attempt to reform society depends on those who hold fast to the Scripture and observe prayer constantly because society cannot be rectified unless you maintain your link with The One Who created you and created society, and sends down His way of righteousness for your guidance.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ نُنَقِّنَا الْجَبَلَ فَوْقَهُمْ كَأَنَّهُ ظِلَّةٌ وَظَنُوا أَنَّهُ وَاقِعٌ بِهِمْ
 خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

When We made the mountain loom high above them like a shadow, and they thought it would fall on them, We said, ‘Hold fast to what We have given you, and remember what it contains, so that you may remain conscious of God’ [171] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 171)

It is known that mountains are made of compacted rocks and can be very high, reaching a thousand metres or more; Allah *Glorified is He* points out that He made mountains firm and says: ‘And the mountains He set firmly’ (*an-Nazi'at*: 32), using the Arabic verb *arsaha*, ‘He set firmly’ (to fix or anchor) which is not to be employed unless you are speaking about something heavy—you would not say, ‘I fixed the paper on the desk,’ but you would say, ‘I fixed the plate of glass onto the desk to protect it.’ So, the verb *arsa* refers to fixing in place something that is heavy.

Allah *Glorified is He* fixed the mountains firmly in place and made them as stakes or pegs on earth. A peg, as we know, is held in place by the base into which it is driven and fastened; if it comes loose, we wrap it with material to make it thicker and fasten it to the place into which it is driven. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He uprooted Mount Sinai and caused it to be raised

above them. In one verse (*an-Nisa'*: 154), Allah states that He has raised Mount Sinai above them at their pledge. In another verse (*al-Baqara*: 63), Allah reminds the children of Israel that He took their pledge and raised that mountain high above them.

There is a difference between *nataqa* (to cause to quake) and *rafa'a* (to raise)—mountains are firmly fixed on earth and held in place like pegs; hence, before a mountain is raised up, it first needs to be pulled and taken from the ground; then, it can be raised. Therefore, the verse in hand means that Allah *Glorified is He* has taken the mountain from its firm place before He raised it up. Allah raised up the mountain so that it would be a source of shade for them. Accordingly, there were three stages: the mountain was pulled and uprooted, raised, and then He *Glorified is He* made it cast its shadow over them. This means that the thing which was raised must have been directed in a particular direction. Allah *Glorified is He* reminds people of this great miracle when He caused the mountain to quake; then, He pulled it from the ground. Allah pulled it up from the earth in order to use it for a different purpose, which was to cast a shadow. Allah showered them with His favour by causing clouds to cast shadows on them. The shadow of clouds was a mercy for them, while the shadow of the mountain was a torment. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the Torah to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* so that he would convey it to them. But his people said to him, 'The laws of this Torah are too harsh.' One might wonder why they were so hesitant to accept the laws which came for the good of mankind. So, Allah sent this punishment, raising the mountain above them like a shadow to serve as a threat—as though it would fall upon them.

This is why we find that all Jews prostrate on their left temples, although proper prostration should be done with the forehead placed squarely on the ground. They prostrate with a slight inclination to the left because when the early Jews saw the mountain above them, they were overcome with fear lest it fall, so they watched the mountain as they prostrated. They continued to prostrate in this way thereafter, always placing their left temples on the ground because of the incident of the mountain which Allah raised above them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and they thought it would fall on them...' The Arabic word *zhann* (think) something signifies probability; some other times such

probability is so high that it signifies certainty. In the verse (*al-Baqara: 46*), the word *yazhun* gives the meaning of certainty.

When that situation continued, they feared that the mountain would fall upon them. Allah revealed a Scripture – the Torah – to them, and they disobeyed and rebelled against it; therefore, He *Glorified is He* ordered them to hold fast to it and put it into practice so that they might be mindful of their duties to Allah.

The Arabic word *khudhu* (to hold fast) is imperative which requires a commander and a command. The word *al-quwwah* which here means holding fast to something, is people's active energy. The original case is that we should approach all things in this entire universe with great enthusiasm because all what exists in this universe is subservient and controlled; it always responds when it is commanded. As we have said before, the sun has never become angry with people and said, 'I shall not rise today'; likewise, the air has never denied us; neither does the donkey, for example, refuse to carry manure, nor to be washed by its owner or saddled to be mounted. The whole universe is subject to fixed laws. Allah states clearly in the Quran that, 'it is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming.' (*Ya Sin: 40*)

Allah *Glorified is He* developed this definite system for the universe since it is compelled and not ordered to follow divine legislation. Those masses are governed by laws; thus, their existence is different from the human's existence because the latter has the right of free will. Despite his free will, there are many processes going on inside the human's body of which he is completely ignorant; yet, they are essential to one's very life. No one can control one's own heart beats, one's respiratory system, the processes of the digestive system and the excretion system—when the bladder is full of urine, a person feels the urge to answer the call of nature. All of those processes are regulated without ever being subject to man's free will. In addition, there are other things which are out of man's control. For example, if a person is eating and a grain of rice falls into his windpipe, and he drives it out by coughing, this is 'instinctive', that is, it is not governed by free will.

Likewise, if you bring food to an animal, it will not eat more than it can, even if its owner beats it; on the contrary, a human being may continue to eat even after he is satiated. For example, when a guest gets satiated, and his host says to him, 'You have not tried this kind of meat yet!' he eats it. This is why we find that man is prone to illnesses more than animals because human being's free will works in many different spheres, and that may harm or injure him.

To illustrate the difference between man and animals, we relate the following example. Man boils mint and drinks it, while he cooks mallow and eats it. He does so because he experimented with both of them and found that mint is suitable for drinking and mallow is suitable for eating, even though their leaves are very similar. However, if we are to place the mint plant and some dry hay before a buffalo or donkey, we will find that both will go straight to the dry hay and leave the fresh green mint aside—they do so instinctively. Those beings which are governed by instinct have their own order. If animals had free will, the system of life would all be disturbed, and it would become very difficult for man. Hence, we see that the essentials of life are governed by the natural laws which exist in the universe to serve us, human beings.

Electricity, for example, already existed before we discovered it, but afterwards we did indeed utilise it. The same applies to the force of gravity. It has always existed, but we were not aware of it, and when we discovered it, our ability to benefit from it increased. Thus, we see that although man is only one of the many beings in the universe, he is distinguished by having free will in certain affairs, whilst being compelled in other affairs. He shares with the rest of existence the aspect of compulsion, and is distinguished from the rest of creation – all save the jinn – by the free will in other affairs. For example, when a man who suffers from a heart problem climbs a ladder, he gasps and breathes rapidly out of exhaustion and exertion because he is governed by the instinct that informs his body that his lungs have to work harder to give him the oxygen he needs to climb the ladder.

Another example is that male animals approach females to smell them, and if they find them pregnant, they do not go near them. In this regard, animals are different from human beings because the animal's instinct that the sexual intercourse between them is meant to preserve the species, and since

the female is already pregnant, the male does not go near the female. People are different from animals in this regard because the pleasure man derives from sex is greater than that of the animal. This is because, in the case of animals, it is merely dependent on instinct, whilst, in the case of man, it depends on both instinct and the free will which Allah has endowed man. Thus, it is a mercy from Allah that man is compelled in some things, but has free will to choose amongst various other things.

In the verse under discussion, Allah has commanded the children of Israel to hold fast to what Allah gave them in the Scripture, the Torah; the Quran had told us about power before modern science elaborated on it. Science had enlightened us about power before we saw its practical applications. We can now perceive energy which gives power. Newton discovered the law of gravity and came up with the three laws of motion. He discovered that every object remains as it is; if it is static, it will remain thus until something comes to move it; and if it is in motion, it will not stop unless it collides with something or is held by something. The scientists call this the law of 'inertia;' that is, a force is what makes an object stay in the same position until it is moved, or it continues moving until it is stopped. If you get in a car and sit still, whilst the car moves, you will remain still unless the car stops suddenly; then, you will move from your place unless you are holding onto something.

In the marketplaces, we can encounter conjurors that play games to bewitch people's eyes. They take a table covered with a shiny and smooth piece of cloth and place cups and plates on it, and then they pull the piece of cloth so quickly and smoothly, that cups and plates do not even move when the cloth moves.

Newton made a comparison between power, motion and inertia. We said that inertia means that a static object remains motionless, and an object in motion stays in motion. This principle helped the science of aeronautics which is concerned with movement of spaceships and rockets. We see spaceships and imagine that they move through space using fuel despite the fact that they are not large enough to be able to carry enough fuel for years of travel. The truth is that they move according to the law of inertia without any fuel. They are propelled into space by the power of the rocket until they arrive in the outer space where they continue to move as long as nothing stops them. We can

observe this with a simple experiment: when one fires a bullet from a gun, the bullet travels by the power of the shot for a certain distance and then falls, if nothing gets in its way first. It falls after travelling a specific distance because it comes into contact with air and undergoes friction until it stops moving. Yet, in outer space there is no air, so the spaceship does not stop because it is moving according to the law of inertia. When taking off, those spaceships are accelerated by rockets that propel them beyond the atmosphere; the rockets are propelled by expelled gas in accordance with Newton's third law which states that every action has an opposite and equal reaction; when this expelled gas becomes hot and shoots powerfully out of the back of the rocket, the rocket is pushed forwards.

In this way, we see the True Lord's words, 'Take what We have given you with determination...' (*al-A'raf*: 171) in its materialistic and spiritual reality. Look at irreligious people; you will find that they are motionless in specific situations, and they do not move forward or go beyond them: one of them does not pray, neither gives the obligatory alms, nor speaks righteous words. However, he needs some power to move him from his motionless state instead of the obedience of Allah. We also find that some irreligious people drink wine, fornicate, steal or take bribes. However, they need some power to prevent them from this kind of motion. Thus, we say that, in his intentional actions, man requires two things: first, if he is motionless regarding good deeds, we provide him with a power which moves him towards this goodness; and if he is in motion towards evil deeds, we provide him with a power which causes him to stop – and this is what the way of faith presents to us in the form of 'Do' and 'Do not do.' If someone is lazy with regard to prayer and does not perform it, we say to him, 'Pray!' and if someone indulges in gambling and moves towards it, he will not stop unless there comes to him a power which stops him and restrains him. So, the legislative power of the way of Allah consists of 'Do's' which urge the motionless into action, and 'Do not's', which stop what is in motion, provided that all motion and motionlessness are in the way of Allah.

We should know that Allah *Glorified is He* enables the disbelievers so that they are able to explain the obscure matters of the universal law to us; they

discovered the laws of physical motion, and we understood it both physically and metaphysically. The fact that the disbelievers discovered these universal laws is no reason for us to be lazy and dependent on them, but rather, we must also do our best to participate in the progress in science which control the affairs of life. We should know that nothing can generate in us a new natural disposition since from ancient times man has possessed the natural disposition which tells him that this world has a Maker; and all of our atoms and our dimensions affirm for us the existence of the One God; Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, even when the philosophers investigated that which lies behind matter, this was confirmed for them. Most of the philosophers were non-believers, and by looking into what lies behind matter they were simply searching for *The Most High* Creator because a person does not look for something unless he believes that it exists. Because they all know that man has come into the universe, that this universe is built according to a wise design and is created with a power which not even the power of all men combined could equal, therefore, this universe must have a creator.

We have shown that the laws which appear to us in the physical world are similar to the laws of morality; yet, people tend to prefer material laws because they bring them benefit or keep them away from harm; so they take what benefits them and leave aside what causes harm to them. Man therefore, needed a way of guidance from heaven to clarify and explain to him the laws of morality by which he may obtain instant happiness in this world and lasting happiness in the Hereafter. As for the material laws of earth, Allah left them for the mind to discover by its endeavours so that those who do not believe in Allah would approach material laws and discover them while fleeing from moral laws because they restrain the passions of the soul and bring on the difficulties of moral responsibility, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* wished to say 'Take what We have given you with determination and remember what is in it that you might fear Allah.' (*al-A'raf*: 171)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to reveal to us those material laws which clarify for us the moral laws of action and reaction in order to understand that the soul may love an evil action because it satisfies one of its passions, but one is to be mindful that every action has an equal and

opposite reaction. If you are pleased by this act and you love and desire it, remember well the reaction it will bring about—an ensuing punishment. The same is true of the burden of legal responsibility: when you perform acts of obedience, it might be difficult for you, but you must remember the reaction they bring, which is comfort and perfect reward. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘[They will be told], “Eat and drink in satisfaction for what you put forth in the days past.”’ (*al-Haqqa*: 24) This statement comprises an action and a reaction: the action is the good deeds performed in days gone by, and the reaction is the pleasant food and drink in the Hereafter. To those who are deluded and proud of themselves, their might and their power, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘So let them laugh a little and [then] weep much...’ (*at-Tawba*: 82). Here we find heavy, copious weeping as a result of little laughter. On the Day of Resurrection, such a man will be brought forth, and it will be said to him: ‘Taste! Indeed, you are the honoured, the noble!’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 49) If you deem yourself to be so mighty and noble that you can wrong others, you will be punished. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to us, about His way of guidance: ‘...and remember what is in it that perhaps you may become righteous.’ (*al-A’raf*: 171) Beware of heedlessness in this regard; for it is what renders Allah’s ways difficult for people—obedience is hard and burdensome, while disobedience gives pleasure and satisfies lust. Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies: Bear in mind well the actions and reactions of these moral values.

We know that remembrance requires a great many things: the preacher, for example, continuously reminds them; we said that ‘preaching’ is a way of repeating and reminding others about a ruling: I preach to him, who already knows the rule because I want him to obey it so that instead of just knowing it, he puts it into practice. We all know that prayer, the pilgrimage and the *zakat* (prescribed alms) are Pillars of Islam, and we have all been informed of that, but some of us are too lazy to put this knowledge into practice. We, therefore, continue to alert his mind with reminders and preaching; and this is the nature of the superiority of the Prophet’s *Ummah* [followers]: ‘You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 110). Why is it a reminder? The True Lord *Glorified is He* replies: ‘...You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 110).

Enjoying what is right is a verbal admonition, and so is forbidding what is wrong. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* enumerated the various means of doing this so that the reminder would remain, and every Muslim would hold fast to Allah's Way with all his strength. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot, then with his heart – and that is the weakest faith.'⁽¹⁾

So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* raised the issue from enjoining and forbidding, which are verbal admonitions, to the level of direct action; and if one of us cannot amend an evil by his tongue or his hand, he should at least condemn it with his heart. You will find that the Quran presents this as a matter of enjoining and forbidding, while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* presented it as an action because there is a difference between information absorbed into the mind and one's actually bringing the soul to live up to what the information requires. This is why when we study religion in our schools, as well as algebra, geometry, chemistry and biology, it is not difficult to study religion, but rather to make the soul live up to what it requires. But when a pupil studies algebra, geometry or chemistry, all of which give the good things of this worldly life, he inclines to them; the matter of religion, however, is concerned with morality. Therefore, it is not enough for us merely to know the religion, but we must also act upon it, following a good example and a sound role model.

Imagine that one teaches religion and imparts it to pupils; however, they find it having no effect at all on his behaviour; what will be the result? The pupil's trust in his teacher will diminish, as will his trust in the religion itself because he learnt nothing about religion but empty words since those preaching it only pay lip service to it – much to the failure of religious education. The problem, then, is that people mistakenly think that the way of religious instruction stops at the teaching of religious information. No, religious education requires the implementation of such information, as opposed to the other sciences which only give information from which man may elect to derive benefit or not.

(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

Hence, sometimes, reminding takes the form of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and other times it takes the form of action: 'Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he cannot, then with his tongue.' But what does it mean to change with the tongue? It means that if a person is skilled and gifted in preaching and knows the proper way to give advice, he has the right to preach. Not every person is suitable for preaching; for the object of the preaching strays from Allah's Way, and the preacher stands in his way to bring him back; he takes him away from that which he loves and is passionate about; consequently, the one who advises him must be delicate in how he goes about this.

For example, we find that when a patient goes to the doctor, he prescribes medicine for him; and in the past, all medicines were bitter, and people found it difficult to take them; adults would take hold of children and force them to take the medicine. When pharmaceuticals developed, the laboratories began to wrap the dose of medicine with a cover concealing its bitterness in order to be delicate with the person who is bodily ill – so what about the person who is morally ill? He needs the very same thing. For this reason, we must make our advice gentle, and not dissuade the one we advise from what he loves in ways which he hates. This is why we said that advice is heavy because as you advise a person, you suppose that your behaviour is better than his, and that he is inferior to you in this regard—this is the first obstacle because the one you advise looks at you as though you deem yourself to be better than him. This is why the traditional saying goes, 'Advice is heavy, so do not make a mountain out of it, and do not turn it into an argument.' It is also said, 'Truth is bitter, so lend them subtle words.' This is how reminders should be given, and if you cannot prevent by action, then prevent by words because changing with the hand entails you having authority over the one to be changed, and this is only the case if he has some previous experience with him proving that the amender wants what is best for him. This might well go without saying, such as if you are his father or mother; the father and mother look after the son, and meet all his needs for food, drink, shelter and expenses; and each one of them does what is best for their son. If the adviser does not have this kind of connection with the one he advises, he must first soften him with something he loves; so, when

he asks him for something, he meets his need, and then he informs him of the thing about what needs to be addressed; having done him a favour, the adviser will entice him to accept advice.

Another example: suppose your son asks you to get him a watch, and then his mother tells you that he has not done any study; then you bring him the watch and say to him, 'Son, you asked me for a watch and I have brought you one;' you give it to him and say, 'Your mother tells me that you are not paying attention to your studies, and if I remembered what she had said, I would not have bought the watch!' You might rebuke him, but he smiles because you have softened his heart, and showed him that you love him, so he accepts the advice; and even if you give him a light blow, he will accept it because he knows that you want what is best for him. Therefore, reminding has many forms: preaching with words, amending with actions and condemning with the heart. '...And remember what is in it that you might fear Allah.' (*al-A'raf*: 171)

The basic meaning of *taqwa* (fearing Allah) is to shield one thing with another: you protect yourself from pain by making a shield (*wiqaya*) to protect yourself from it. This word, as we have already seen, can be used with things opposite to each other; the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And fear the Fire, which has been prepared for the disbelievers.' (*Al-Imran*: 131) Using the same word *taqwa* to mean 'beware', He also says: '... fear Allah that you may be successful.' (*al-Baqara*: 189)

Someone might wonder how Allah can say both 'fear (*ittaqu*) the fire' and 'fear (remain conscious—*ittaqu*) of Allah.' We say that it is indeed because to remain conscious of Allah means to beware lest Allah's wrath falls upon you and beware of Allah's chastisement by placing a shield between yourselves and His punishment. As we know, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has Attributes of Majesty and Attributes of Beauty; the Attributes of Beauty are those which give man happiness, such as His being 'The All-Forgiving,' and 'The Giver of Mercy' and 'The Munificent.' Further, just as Allah has Attributes of Beauty which cause you to desire Him and turn to Him, He *Glorified is He* also has Attributes of Majesty which inspire fear and awe, for He *Glorified is He* is the All-Compeller and the Lord of Retribution.

Hence, be conscious of Allah so that you may shield yourself from the manifestations of His Attributes of Majesty such as the All-Compeller and the Lord of Retribution.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

**[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and they replied, ‘Yes, we bear witness.’ So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘We were not aware of this’ [172]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 172)**

The Arabic word *idh* (and when) refers to time meaning ‘Remember the time when Allah took from the children of Adam...’ The subject of the action of taking was Allah, the indirect object was the children of Adam *peace be upon him* and the direct object was their offspring; these are the elements of the action here. Let us reflect on it carefully: our Lord was the Taker; the children of Adam had something that was taken from them, and what was taken was their offspring. The children of Adam *peace be upon him* are Adam’s descendants from his time until the Day of Resurrection which means that the thing taken, and those from whom it was taken, were, in fact, one and the same. We must have some kind of explanation for this because if something is taken from something else, the thing that is taken must be a part, while the thing from which it is taken is the whole.

For example, if I take something from you, the thing from which it is taken is the whole, and the thing which is actually taken is a part of it; however, the thing taken is the very same as the thing from which it is taken. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* erased the ambiguity from this verse when He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, as Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* tells us: ‘When Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam, He wiped his back and every person that He created among his offspring until the Day

of Resurrection fell out of his loins. He placed a ray of light between the eyes of every person. Then, He showed them to Adam, and he said: 'O Lord! Who are these people?' He said: 'These are your offspring.' He saw one of them whose ray between his eyes amazed him, so he said: 'O Lord! Who is this?' He said: 'This is a man from the latter nations of your offspring called Dawud.' He said: 'Lord! How long did you make his life span?' He said: 'Sixty years.' He said: 'O Lord! Add forty years from my life to his.' So, at the end of Adam's life, the Angel of death of came to him, and he said: 'Do I not have forty years remaining?' He said: 'Did you not give them to your son Dawud?' He said: 'Adam denied, so his offspring denied, and Adam forgot and his offspring forgot, and Adam sinned, so his offspring sinned.'⁽¹⁾

So, Adam's progeny came from Adam's loins; we have previously mentioned that before each one of our mothers became pregnant with us, we were seeds in our father's loins; and our fathers were seeds in their father's loins and so on, all the way back to Adam *peace be upon him*. Thus, we find that everyone was taken from his father's loins as a seed; and there were people who were taken as seeds but no seed was taken from them, such as those whom Allah destined to be infertile; likewise, the generation upon whom the Hour will rise so that they will not procreate. Adam *peace be upon him* was the one from whom all this was taken since he was the first man, and he was not taken from anyone; all those who came between Adam—the father and the final child to be born—are both taken and also taken from. In this way, everyone is both taken and taken from; so, it makes sense. Adam *peace be upon him* was taken from, and then everyone else—from the first children of Adam until the final generation who will not procreate.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified that our Lord *Glorified is He* wiped Adam's back with His hand and brought out his offspring, whereupon He asked, 'Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf*: 172) to which they said, 'Yes'. Thus, we understand that each seed was taken from the one which came before it; and from each was taken that which came after it so that all of them were both taken and taken from – all except from two: the first being Adam *peace be upon him* who had others taken from him, but was not himself taken from anyone; and

(1) Narrated by *At-Tirmidhi*

the second being the final of his offspring to be born, who were taken from others but had no one taken from them. This is because each one of us was made from his father's sperm, and had this sperm died the father would not have been born. Just as each one was made from his father's sperm; his father was made from the living sperm of his own father. If you follow it back to Adam *peace be upon him* you will find that every one of us has a living piece of Adam within us which will never die.

Therefore, our Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants...' (*al-A'raf*: 172). Do not say that everyone would be in his loins because what was taken from him was the basis which lay in his loins; and, as long as everything reproduces, it was made from the smallest thing, and we know that the greater lies hidden in the lesser.

Our Lord took the seeds from the loins of the children of Adam and spoke to them by saying: '...Am I not your Lord?...' (*al-A'raf*: 172) Someone may ask at this point, 'Had these seeds the ability to speak when they were seeds, each one waiting to be developed further and united, for example, with the egg in the mother's womb?' We reply by asking, why do you think it would be difficult for our Lord to speak to them? Some men are able to speak up to ten languages and have ability to marry four women; each of these wives bearing them children, and then stay one day with one of his wives and her children and teach them English, for example, and stay with the other and teach her German, and teach the third wife and her children Arabic and so on. Further, he can even communicate by means of signals with those of unknown languages to him. If a human can communicate in several ways, cannot our Lord communicate with His creatures in many different ways? Indeed, He is able to address them in numerous ways. Did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not say to the mountains, 'O mountains, repeat [Our] praises with him' (*Saba*': 10)?

How, then, could a man not realise that Allah is able to address any of His creatures? In fact, He is able to address each of His creatures with a unique language which the others may not understand; and He *Glorified is He* says, 'And We subjected the mountains to exalt [Us], along with David ...' (*al-Anbiya*': 79). We know from the Noble Quran that the mountains exalt

Allah's glory even without the Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* like any other creature, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '... And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His Praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting ...' (*al-Isra'*: 44).

Even the atoms of the disbeliever's hand glorify Allah; even if he does not will them to do so.

The True Lords' *Glorified is He* words, 'And We subjected the mountains to exalt [Us], along with David ...' (*al-Anbiya'*: 79) explain that the mountains would repeat David's exalting of Allah and reciting the psalmody; and the True Lord's command was not given only to the mountains, but rather to all beings. For example, we read in the Noble Quran that our Lord revealed the bee to build their dwellings in the mountains, in the trees and in the hives that humans build. So, Allah has ways of addressing His creatures because He is the One Who created the world and all creatures; and He *Glorified is He* addresses with words, with signals, with inspiration and with revelation. Thus, if we read that the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to the seeds of Adam *peace be upon him* 'Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf*: 172), this means that He said it to them in a language they could understand, as He Who said to the heavens and the earth, '... "Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion." They said, "We have come willingly."' (*Fussilat*: 11)

When the ant spoke, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* understood its speech; had Allah *Glorified is He* not taught Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* how to understand its speech, we would not have known that it can speak, as in the verse when an ant said, 'O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not.' (*an-Naml*: 18)

It understood what men do when they trample over small creatures without seeing them; but Solomon *peace be upon him* was one of Allah's prophets, and he would not hurt any of Allah's creatures, and the ant which spoke was keeping guard for the other ants. Likewise, the hoopoe spoke to inform Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* of the kingdom of Sheba, Bilqis, and her people.

So, Allah Almighty speaks to all of His creatures, and all of His creatures answer Him. Therefore, do not ask how The Lord could have spoken to the

seeds, seeds which were not yet morally responsible. The scholars have not attempted to investigate this matter because apparently, it seems to be very distant from the mind's conceptualization. It is enough that our Lord the *All-Powerful Creator* informed us that He spoke to the seeds, saying, 'Am I not your Lord?' to which they answered: yes. This statement indicates that this passage is meant to symbolise the natural disposition which has been placed in the human soul; it is as though He *Glorified is He* placed in the human soul and human essence a natural disposition which affirms the fact that there is a creator of this universe Who is All-Powerful Creator and Who arranges it.

Some years ago, we said: imagine that your plane crashed in the desert, and when you wake from the terror, you think about your situation and realise that you have no food, drink, or people. Then, you lose all hope because of that and fall asleep; when you wake, you find a table covered with the finest foods and drinks, would you not stop to wonder who prepared this feast for you, before you stretch your hand out to this fine food? Likewise, man came into existence in this universe of such wise design and amazing composition; is it not fitting that he asks himself who created this universe?

We know that the electric lamp required many scientists and skilled technicians to be made, and that it required countless resources to maintain light on, even in a small room. When we see the sun light up the whole world, without ever breaking down or malfunctioning, without requiring any maintenance from us, should we not ask who made it? Especially since no one else has claimed to have made it—and the Lord *Glorified is He* has informed us that He created the earth, the sun and the moon—either this statement is true, in which case we must worship Him or, if it is not true, we must search for whom actually did create and make the universe and worship him.

Because no one has ever claimed to have made these things, the claim must be given to the sole claimant; and it must be affirmed that there is no deity other than Allah. Hence, natural disposition guides us to the notion that, behind this magnificent universe, lies a power which is commensurate with this magnificence and precision; this precision from which we have taken our standards for the measurement of time. We have taken standards for the measurement of time from the celestial bodies; were it not for the movements

of the celestial bodies which control night and day, we would not have divided the day into hours; were the motions of the celestial bodies not created with such boundless precision, we would not have been able to use them as standards for the measurement of time. When we reflect on the True Lord's *Glorified is He* words, 'The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation (*ar-Rahman*: 5), we find that the words '[move] by precise calculation' apply to two things: the True Lord *Glorified is He* has informed us that He made the sun and moon run on appointed courses or commanded them precisely, and they are among the signs which indicate His perfect omnipotence and His tremendous power; He did not create them in jest, but rather, in great wisdom, '... you may know the number of years and account [of time]....' (*Yunus*: 5)

We have taken standards of measurement from the orbits of the sun and moon and we could not have done that except for the fact that they have been created in a precise order because the universe was created and made with this level of precision and exactingness. Therefore, we must be aware that there is a power behind this world commensurate with its magnificence; but can we know, using only our minds, what this power wants from us? The most important thing that the mind can do is to guide us to the knowledge that there is a power, but the mind cannot determine this power's name. Likewise, it cannot determine what this power wants from us. Therefore, it was essential that a messenger came to us from this power to tell us what It wanted, and the succession of messengers came to earth so that each messenger could tell men what the Creator wanted from them; and each messenger said: the name of the Power which created you is Allah; He has absolute power over this universe, and what the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants from man is that they thrive in this world in light of the way of worship of the True Lord *Glorified is He* who created man and created the universe. The mind could never have come to know these things by itself.

Thus, we see that the final limit of the mind is faith in the existence of a Creative Power behind this universe, and all naturally disposed minds are equal in this regard. As for the name of this Power, and the way of guidance that this Allah *Glorified is He* requires us to follow; only a Messenger can tell us this.

The philosophers exhausted their efforts searching for this Power and Its will, and they called this area of investigation 'metaphysics' meaning 'the study

of that which lies beyond nature.' Usually, the philosophers would be met by a believer who said to them, 'And who told you that there is a Power behind the material world which you must search for?' In reply, the philosophers would usually say, 'It was natural disposition which guided us to this.'

Philosophy split into many schools; each philosopher trying to imagine the nature of this Power; and this way is not true because although man is able to intellectually realise the existence of the Creative Power, he cannot imagine what its nature is. Many philosophers therefore drowned in destructive psychological anxiety, and some of them saved themselves by faith. Every philosopher should have turned his ear to hear what the messengers said to solve this puzzle, instead of wearing himself out by trying to combine the intellectual awareness of the existence of a power behind the physical world on the one hand, and an attempt to imagine the nature of this power on the other hand.

In this regard, I will give you the following parable which I hope you will not forget: when we are sitting in a room and all the doors are closed and then the doorbell rings, we all agree that there is someone at the door; we all agree on this because we have determined it rationally, but can we imagine who is at the door? Man or woman; young or old? We will certainly differ when it comes to imagination, even though we agreed when we used our reason.

We say to the philosophers: you are the first people who should turn your ears to a messenger who comes to solve the puzzle of this universe for you, to tell you the name of the Power behind this universe and what this Power wants from us.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* guides us to this by means of the Messengers; and here, He says, 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?"' They said, "Yes, we have testified.'" (*al-A'raf*: 172)

This is the testimony of natural disposition; and we see that this natural disposition exists in the newborn baby when it seeks out its mother's breast with its mouth, even if she is asleep, and takes hold of the breast to feed by natural disposition or instinct. This natural disposition is what protects each one of us in many things and in spontaneous reactions; for example, if you put

your fingers near to a baby's eye it closes them, without anyone having taught him to do this. The True Lord *Glorified is He* made us bear witness to His Oneness while we were in the world of the seed: '... "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified."...' (*al-A'raf*: 172)

The verb *ashhada* means to make someone a witness (*shahid*); to bear witness against oneself is a form of confession, and a confession is the most conclusive of all proofs because when you make someone bear witness against someone else, the witness might change his testimony, but, here, mankind bore witness against themselves, and Allah took from them the covenant of natural disposition, lest they say on the Day of Resurrection: '...Indeed, we were of this unaware.' (*al-A'raf*: 172) So, when the Day of Reckoning comes, there will be no cause for anyone to say, 'I was unaware.'

The Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

أَوْ نَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً
مَنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿١٧٣﴾

Or, 'It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to God, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?' [173] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 173)

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to cut off their argument for contravening the way of Allah, evoking the covenant of natural disposition which lies within every human being; hence, every being bore witness that He is One Single Allah; and He *Glorified is He* reminds us of this covenant of natural disposition which was made before the vicissitudes of passions existed in us.

'... "Am I not your Lord?" – to which they answered: "Yes"....' (*al-A'raf*: 172). Could any of these seeds, under the knowledge, will and power of Allah, have had the courage to say: 'No, You are not my Lord?' Of course this was impossible; and by their natural disposition, every seed answered 'Yes!' (*bala*) which in Arabic is meant to negate the negative and thus affirm the positive, such as the case with the True Lord's *Glorified is He* words: 'Is Allah not the most just of judges?' (*at-Tin*: 8) 'Is not' is a question about a negative

thing, which is why we are told that when you hear 'Is not' you must answer 'Yes, indeed' (*bala*), thereby negating the negative, that is, 'I affirm that the most just of judges is none other than Him *Glorified is He*.' Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf*: 172) and the answer came as Yes, we have testified! ...' (*al-A'raf*: 172) And what is the reason for all this? The True Lord *Glorified is He* said this to affirm for all mankind that, by their natural disposition, they believe that Allah is the Lord, and the thing that makes them heedless of this natural disposition is the urging of their passions in the sphere of free will; and despite the urging of their passions in the sphere of free will, if you ask them who created them, they will say 'Allah'—and as long as Allah *Glorified is He* created them, He is their Lord. 'If you asked them, "Who created the heavens and earth and subjected the sun and the moon?" they would surely say, "Allah"...' (*al-'Ankabut*: 61). The True Lord *Glorified is He* told the story of this testimony so that no one would say, '... It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before...' *(al-A'raf*: 173). Thus, we see that the excuses proffered by the sinners and disbelievers to absolve themselves all come down under two things: heedlessness of the covenant of the seeds and imitation of forefathers.

What is heedlessness? What is imitation? Heedlessness might not be preceded by disbelief or sin, and the people who come thereafter imitate it. The clear example of this is that Adam *peace be upon him* who conveyed to his children the way of righteousness, but they grew heedless of it; and it was not appropriate for any of them to say that their father was guilty of associating partners with Allah, but rather, this situation was the result of heedlessness. Then, the second stage was to ascribe one's error to his forefathers; if everyone who associated partners with Allah were imitating his forefathers, this would mean that this idolatry went all the way back to Adam *peace be upon him* yet Adam was not an idolater; but heedlessness of Allah's righteous way arose in some of the children of Adam, as a result of the delusion that the way of Allah imposed difficult responsibilities. So, some of the sons of Adam indulged in what they loved and ignored the way of Allah; it no longer remained at the forefront of their consciousness—and a person only implements what is at the forefront of his consciousness. As for those things which impose hardships upon him, he ignores them and is heedless of them. This was the first stage of

the severing of man from the way of Allah, namely heedlessness concerning his forefathers. Here, two factors were combined: the factor of heedlessness and the factor of the example of the family and forefathers—and the principles of faith were no longer at the forefront of consciousness. This is why it is said that people usually do not forget their rights, but they are quick to forget their responsibilities; a person keeps what others owe him at the forefront of his consciousness, but he casts what he owes other away from it. Since some people imagine that the responsibilities of faith constitute hardships, they try to keep themselves away from it and forget them; thus, some people try to distance themselves from these responsibilities.

Let us draw an example from our worldly lives: we might find a person, who owes money to a grocery store or a carpenter, and he does not have enough money to pay them; therefore, he will try to stay away from this store or avoid being seen by the carpenter. In this way, the artifice of heedlessness appears as a way to evade the supposed hardships of responsibilities; but when the covenant of the seeds was taken, mankind said, ‘Yes, we have testified.’ (*al-A'raf*: 172) This covenant was taken from them, and they acknowledge it, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* made them bear witness against themselves so that they could not say at the Day of Resurrection, ‘Indeed, we were of this unaware’ (*al-A'raf*: 172) because we should never be heedless of this covenant. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* knows that we are human beings, and He says about our father, Adam, ‘We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.’ (*Ta Ha*: 115) Since Adam *peace be upon him* forgot it, his forgetfulness would be counted against him. It has been clarified for us that the nations who came before Islam were accounted for their forgetfulness, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clearly told us: ‘My *Ummah* [followers] have been excused for their honest mistakes, forgetfulness and that which they are coerced into doing.’⁽¹⁾

The meaning of ‘mistake’ is clear such as when a person intends to do something but another thing happens; ‘forgetfulness’ means that the remembrance of a thing does not come to one’s mind; coercion means that someone who is more powerful than one forces him by threatening his life or his freedom. For

(1) Narrated by Ibn Majah

all three, responsibility is lifted from the Muslim, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, told us that Allah honoured the *ummah* [followers] of Prophet Muhammad with a special distinction by excusing the Muslim's forgetfulness. This indicates that those who lived before the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were held accountable for it; and if we follow the chain of all those who lived before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we will arrive back to our father Adam *peace be upon him* whom Allah created directly by His hand— and we are the children of Adam, created according the natural law of procreation between man and woman.

In the garden, which He made for him to undergo his preparation for living on the earth⁽¹⁾, Allah *Glorified is He* issued to Adam *peace be upon him* a commandment and a prohibition; He *Glorified is He* said to him, '...eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree.' (*al-Baqara: 35*)

Hence, the basis of every responsibility is a commandment 'Do,' and a prohibition, 'Do not do.' Adam *peace be upon him* forgot the responsibility of this one simple command; he was created by Allah's hand and given by Him one command, which was to eat whatever he wished but to refrain from eating from a specific tree – and if Adam did not remember that, what did he remember? It was not true that he forgot, for he was created directly by Allah's hand, and given his responsibility directly from Allah; and although this responsibility seemed to be two-fold, in reality it was really only one single thing, since eating from whatever he desired was for Adam's own interest, and 'do not approach' was the only real responsibility.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse, 'And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.' (*Ta Ha: 121*) It was an act of disobedience because it was the forgetting of one single commandment, and it was not right for him to forget it because it was not multiple. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says that [lest] you say, 'It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?' (*al-A'raf: 173*)

(1) Proofreader's Note: The existence of a 'preparation garden' is the Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi's opinion.

These words are meant to call attention to the fact that heedlessness should not be a role-model to be followed simply because the responsibilities are difficult, and a person might forget them and then pass this forgetfulness down to the following generations, so that the descendants may say that their fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and they were but descendants after them. ‘Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?’ (*al-A'raf*: 173) This means that their faith was based on imitation, despite the fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent them a clear message; and if the forefathers behaved falsely towards the message and the way of guidance, that is no reason for the descendants to be heedless of the true faith.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَكَذَلِكَ نَفْصَلُ الْآيَاتِ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٧٤﴾

**In this way We explain the messages, so
that they may turn [to the right path] [174]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 174)**

The Messages (*Ayat*) which Allah *Glorified is He* has clearly spelled out here are the special covenants, and the raising of the mountain so that they would hold fast to the Torah with all their strength; likewise, the universal covenant in which all of mankind from Adam *peace be upon him* until the coming of the Hour. Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned all this to affirm to them that the doctrinal principles of faith must be at the forefront of our consciousness. Therefore, those who are heedless must take heed, and those who imitate their forefathers, in anything which contravenes the straight path, must desist from this imitation— the responsibilities of faith are intrinsic responsibilities, and He *Glorified is He* does not make you responsible when you are still in need of your father or mother, but rather, He makes you responsible after you reach adulthood because when you reach adulthood, you become completely independent just like your father; and since you are much of a man as your father is, and ready to be a father yourself, you do not owe any religious allegiance to your father. Hence, do not say, ‘I am merely imitating my father, even if he was not following the right way’ as this kind of statement would only be acceptable if each person was made morally

responsible when he was still in childhood, when the father strove to feed his children and take care of them. But moral responsibility does not apply to a person until he reached adulthood, and the meaning of adulthood is that you are able to have children of your own and look after yourself. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* requires fathers to prepare their children and get them used to their responsibilities before the time comes when Allah *Glorified is He* holds them responsible; the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, said: ‘Command your children to perform the prayer when they are seven years old, and beat them for leaving it when they are ten years old, and separate them (girls from boys) in their beds.’⁽¹⁾

So, the father commands and punishes his children before the age of responsibility to prepare them for it, so that it becomes easy and they are not worn out by it once they reach adulthood. ‘And thus do We [explain in] detail the verses, and perhaps they will return.’ (*al-A’raf*: 174) That is, the heedless a person must get rid of and take heed, and the one who imitates his forefathers must desist from this imitation, in light of the True Lord’s *Glorified is He* words, ‘... when no father will avail his son, nor will a son avail his father at all’ (*Luqman*: 33).

The True Lord says:

وَأْتَلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ الَّذِي آتَيْنَاهُ آيَاتِنَا فَانْسَلَخَ مِنْهَا فَاتَّبَعَهُ
الشَّيْطَانُ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْغَاوِينَ

**[Prophet], tell them the story of the man to whom We gave
Our messages: he sloughed them off, so Satan took him as his
follower and he went astray [175] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 175)**

‘And because they said that indeed, we were of this unaware.’ (*al-A’raf*: 172) Allah *Glorified is He* wants to tell us the story of these people, so He says, ‘And recite to them, [O Muhammad], the news of him to whom we gave [knowledge of] Our signs, but he detached himself from them.’ (*al-A’raf*: 175)

The word ‘news’ (*naba*) means an important piece of information meant to inspire reflection which we can benefit from; it is not merely news. This is

(1) Narrated by Abu Dawud

why He *Glorified is He* says about the Last Day: ‘About what are they asking one another? About the great news ...’ (*an-Naba’*: 1-2).

Thus, He says, ‘And recite to them, [O Muhammad], the news of him to whom we gave [knowledge of] Our signs...’ (*al-A'raf*: 175), as though this news was very well known. It is said that it happened to a man named Ibn Ba'ura', or Umayya ibn Abu As-Sult, or 'Amir, the monk or that it was one of them; what matters is not his name, but that Allah gave His messages to someone who discarded the messages; instead of benefiting from them by amending himself and drawing near to his Lord, he ‘detached himself from them’ and followed his own desire and inclined to Satan.

The word ‘detached himself from them’ (*insalakha*)—literally meaning ‘to slough off’ or ‘peel off’—indicates that Allah’s message surrounds one powerfully, so that it requires the brute force of disobedience for a man to detach himself from them because the root meaning of *salkh* is to skin a sheep. It is as if our Lord wants to clarify that He *Glorified is He* gave man His messages but he discarded them, meaning that the messages surrounded man just as skin surrounds the body to protect man’s physical form—this form contains nerves, veins, flesh, fat and bones; likewise, Allah has made the responsibilities of faith a protection for man. This is why the one who leaves Allah’s way is called *fasiq* in Arabic (wicked) just like a fresh date: after being exposed to the sun, the date loses some of its moisture, and the fruit becomes wrinkled inside its shell and begins to break through its shell. Therefore, the one who leaves Allah’s way is called a *fasiq* after the word *fusuq* which describes the process of the fruit breaking out of its shell. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘... to whom we gave [knowledge of] Our signs,’ (*al-A'raf*: 175) and he should not have been heedless of them because the coming of these sign to him was a blessing which he should preserve, but he discarded them.

We all know about the snakeskins which can be found in the exact shape of a snake because the snake sheds its skin every once in a while; and it only gives up the old skin when the skin underneath matured so that it can bear the exposure to the weather and the air. Likewise, when boiling water is spilled on human skin, you can notice how the affected area swells up and has some liquid inside; if you were to make this liquid come out, the area would become

inflamed, while if you leave it, it protects the area until the skin beneath it develops, whereupon it dries and comes off. Likewise, we know, for example, that the sheep does not skin itself, but rather, we skin it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And a sign for them is the night. We remove from it [the light of] day, so they are [left] in darkness.' (*Ya Sin: 37*)

The image depicted here is that the night was like a skin covering the day; the night is black while the day is light, and we know that black is not one of the colours of the spectrum, nor is white because the colours of the spectrum are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The colour black takes the colours of the spectrum and makes them invisible because you cannot see things unless some rays of light reflect from them into your eyes, and the colour black absorbs all the rays that come to it so that no rays reflect from it back to the eye; thus, we see it as dark. White is a combination of several colours; that is, if you mix them, you are able to make white. Thus, we know that white is similar to black: black absorbs all the rays, so that no rays come from it to your eyes, and white reflects back all the rays, so that no specific ray reflects from it to your eyes. The True Lord's *Glorified is He* says, 'We remove from it (light of) day,' which implies that the blackness of night was covering the whiteness of day.

If the one to whom news of faith come discards and leaves Allah's way, Satan says: 'He is apt to follow me.' It is as though when Satan finds someone in whom he has some hope, he runs behind them in fear that they will return to what Allah gave them in His Book which conveys to them His way, and so Satan makes the flouting of our Lord's way seem alluring to them.

We have said before that sometimes sins come from the passions of the lower soul, and other times from Satan's instigations; we have also clarified the difference between these two situations. Satan does not dare to come to you unless you have first shown him through your behaviour that he has cause to have hope in you; but if you are good and righteous, then Satan whispers to you about an obedience and tries to make you hate it. For example, Satan does not go to bars, but rather, he lies in the straight path looking for people who have good intentions; as for the others, their souls are already ripe for his taking. So, when Satan sees someone begin to be heedless towards

Allah's messages, he follows him in fear that the messages will cause him to repent and return to them. Therefore, we must make a distinction as to whether the motivation for a sin is from the lower soul or from the instigation of Satan. If the sin comes to you, and your soul urges you to do it, but then for whatever reason, you are not able to do it; then your soul urges you to do exactly the same sin another time, know that it is from the desire of your soul. But if you are not able to do that sin and then you find yourself thinking of a different sin, this is the instigation of Satan; for Satan does not want you to commit any particular sin, but rather, he wants you to stray from the way of Allah, whereas the soul wants a particular sin and no other. Therefore, if you see a sin which your soul insists upon, know that it is from your own soul; and if you are unable to commit a sin and you leave it, but then you think of another sin, this is from the instigation of Satan. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '... so Satan pursued him, and he became of the deviators.' (*al-A'raf*: 175)

The 'deviator' is the one who loses the way and becomes lost in misguidance; we know that guidance is the way which leads to the goal; those, who stray from the way which leads to the goal, will get lost or wander into the wilderness; thus, they are in 'deviation.' Since they are in deviation concerning the way of Allah, corruption will come from them— for they are corrupt in themselves and will corrupt others. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَرَفَعْنَاهُ بِهَا وَلَكِنَّهُ أَخْلَدَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ الْكَلْبِ إِنْ تَحَمَلَ عَلَيْهِ يَلْهَثَ أَوْ تَتْرَكُهُ يَلْهَثُ ذَلِكَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَاقْصُصِ الْقَصَصَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٧٦﴾

If it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead he clung to the earth and followed his own desires – he was like a dog that pants with a lolling tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone. Such is the image of those who reject Our signs. Tell them the story so that they may reflect [176] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 176)

There are two matters here: there is 'elevation' which means to raise something; and then comes the second matter which is 'adherence to the earth;' that is, degeneration; these two verbs are ascribed here to two different agents.

‘And if We had willed, we could have elevated him thereby...’ (*al-A’raf*: 176) The verb ‘elevate’ here is ascribed to Allah, but the man chose to adhere to the earth. This is the case because it is logical that elevation would be ascribed to Allah, but degeneration cannot be ascribed to Allah, even if, ultimately, every action takes place by the command of the Master of the universe. Our Lord elevates those who follow His way; and when the True Lord, Almighty, says, ‘If We had willed,’ this means that it was a matter of His will: ‘Had We willed to exalt him, it would have been done.’ However, this would have been contrary to free will, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to preserve man’s free will; if he chooses what is right, he is welcome to do so, and his reward will be Paradise; if he chooses misguidance, he will find just punishment as a result. For us to further reflect on the narrations of the Quran, read with me the story of the ‘Righteous Servant’ and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘And they found a servant from among Our servants to whom we had given mercy from us and had taught him from Us a [certain] knowledge. Moses said to him, “May I follow you on [the condition] that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgement?”’ (*al-Kahf*: 65-66)

Despite the fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was a messenger sent by Allah, he did not find it far-fetched that one of Allah’s servants could have drawn close to Allah; so Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* followed him, asking, ‘May I follow you on [the condition] that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgement?’ (*al-Kahf*: 66) This was a confirmation of Musa’s desire to seek knowledge from all those to whom Allah gave knowledge. The Quran tells us this story to impart unto us the proper etiquette of studying with a teacher.

What did the righteous servant say? He excused Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saying, ‘Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience. And how can you have patience for what you do not encompass in knowledge?’ (*al-Kahf*: 67-68)

That is, ‘O Musa (Moses), you will not be able to have patience – not because of any defect in you, but because you will see things you are not aware of them.’ But Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to him, ‘You will find me, if Allah wills, patient...’ (*al-Kahf*: 69). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*

insisted on following the righteous servant, telling him that he would not disobey him in any way; and the righteous servant agreed on condition that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not ask him about anything until the righteous servant explained it to him. However, all of this was only theoretical speech which contained give and take; and when the matter actually came to pass, everything changed completely. After they boarded the ship and the righteous servant bore a hole in it, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not have patience but rather said, ‘You have certainly done a grave thing.’ (*al-Kahf*: 71)

Therefore, the practical experience showed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could not patiently bear the actions of the righteous servant; and when the righteous servant reminded him of his promise not to ask any questions, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* repented of his question; and he continued to ask and then remind himself until the righteous servant explained to him the secrets of all that of which he had no knowledge.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘If We had willed, We could have elevated him thereby...’ (*al-A'raf*: 176) – So, why? Because Allah’s will is absolute, and He does what He wills; but He *Glorified is He* had already ordained the reward for man’s free choices; therefore, He did not elevate him because of his disobedience—because this is the way of Allah – and you will never find any change in the way of Allah. The way of Allah is: those who do good deeds are rewarded by Allah; those who do bad deeds are punished by Him; His will is absolute; nothing can repel His will or amend His decree. The decree of Allah is that He punishes the sinner by His Justice and rewards the obedient by His Grace. He *Glorified is He* possesses absolute will and is Mighty and Wise in all that He does.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘If it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead, he clung to the earth and followed his own desire.’ (*al-A'raf*: 176) The saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...he clung to the earth...’ means that he chose to descend into the abyss even though Allah *Glorified is He* guided man and showed him the way of goodness so that he would ascend to the heights. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* orders the believers to come to Prophet Muhammad *peace and Blessings be upon him* so that he would tell them about what Allah has forbidden upon them,

Allah Says: “Say, "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you.” (*al-An‘am*: 151)

The Arabic word (*ta‘alaw*) carries both the two meanings of ‘coming’ and ‘the ascent to what is higher’. As a matter of fact, the Divine Law is meant to put man on the track by instructing him not to cling to the earth through indulgence in lusts and whims, but rather, it shows them how to purify their souls through strict and faithful adherence to the Way of Allah which will undoubtedly secure them high spiritual positions. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* urges people to come and exert their utmost efforts to raise themselves to attain higher spiritual positions through following the Way of Guidance set by Him *the Almighty*; a matter that will never be achieved if they follow manmade laws, which may contradict His Law. It goes without saying that in case people refrain from the divine guidance, they will undoubtedly fall into the abyss.

Allah says: ‘If it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead he clung to the earth and followed his own desire- he was like a dog that pants with a lolling tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone.’ (*al-A‘raf*: 176) The true explanation of Allah’s words, ‘...whether you drive it away or leave it alone...’ is given in the light of the fact that if a dog approaches you while sitting, you will hasten to chase it away. That is, you threaten it and chide it in order to drive it away, and so it pants and lolls its tongue. Likewise, if you leave the dog alone, without rebuking it and chasing it away, it will also pant and loll its tongue—a natural behaviour of dogs. Here, it is important to know that this is a unique trait in dogs; that is, they always breathe quickly with their tongues sticking out.

We know perfectly well that animals do not pant unless they are disturbed or in danger; thus, they run in order to miss the pain or torment that other creatures might inflict them. Scientists prove that when an animal runs, it needs energy, so the heart beats faster and faster in order to supply the blood full with oxygen to the whole body. As such, it is clear that the heart must work alongside the lungs to supply oxygen to the blood. On the other hand, when living creatures sit peacefully, without being disturbed, their breathing is so normal that it cannot be noticed or even heard. However, when they run, their chests regularly expand and contract to extract oxygen from the air, and

thus the blood will be full with extra amount of oxygen, which exactly and perfectly fits the extra motion. As a matter of fact, animals—except dogs—do not do this—the process of panting—unless they are hungry, tired or agitated. As for the dog, it does it whether it is hungry or full, thirsty or not, agitated or not; it pants all the time. So, why does He *the Almighty* compare such a person to a panting dog? It is because the one who acts in this way is always disliked because he follows his own caprice and allows his desires to control him to the extent that when he attains a particular caprice now, he wonders whether or not he will be able to do the same tomorrow. Hence, he will be entirely subject to his whims and caprices, living in constant and acute discomfort, always fearing that he will be deprived from this blessing or even that he will miss it. Therefore, he becomes akin to the dog, which pants all the time, whether it is safe or not, hungry or not, thirsty or not.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with by saying, ‘Such is the image of those who reject Our signs. Tell them the story so that they may reflect.’ (*al-A'raf*: 176) This particular part of the verse clearly tells about the destiny of those who reject the Signs and Messages of Allah *the Almighty*.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Tell them the story...’ indicates clearly that Allah does not want to teach us history, but rather, He *Glorified is He* wants to teach us how to take admonition from the lessons of history. That is why we find Him *Glorified is He* throughout the pages of the Quran narrating one story more than once; yet, every time the story contains and imparts a different piece of information; so, when we study and gather all of those pieces of information, we will certainly have a comprehensive view about it. If He only wanted to tell us history, there would be no point for narrating it more than once. Throughout the pages of the Quran, we find many stories about the clash of truth with falsehood, conflicts between the agents of falsehood and the agents of truth and of those who stubbornly opposed the Messengers of Allah *the Almighty*. We know for certain that a story talks about a real event, whilst legislation is a matter of words. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to clarify for us the way of guidance which is entirely related to reality because the reality of life gives the narrated story big impact and immediacy; that is, the divine way of guidance is not a matter of mere theoretical speech, which is divorced from reality.

In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He sent us His Way of Guidance by means of His Messengers and Prophets. However, some people may firmly believe in this divine way of guidance and then apply it to their way of life—a matter that leads them directly to be of higher spiritual positions. In the same connection, it was not right for those people to whom Allah gave this way of guidance to relinquish the attainment of their spiritual supremacy in favour of clinging to the lowness of the earth; unfortunately, this is what some men do when they make laws for themselves and run the affairs of their lives according to their own caprice and whims, setting aside the Way of Allah *the Almighty*—the One Who created them and made laws for them so that their kind will be preserved to the end of time.

As a matter of fact, this verse under discussion tells us about the real story of Ibn Ba'uraa' - a man whom Allah *the Almighty* gave knowledge but who preferred to cling to the earth and not to follow what he had learnt and thus detached himself from the divine way of guidance just as a sheep is skinned. This man, Ibnu Ba'uraa', is the one this verse talks about, 'he was like a dog that pants with a lolling tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone.' (*al-A'raf*: 176)

This part of the verse tells us clearly that Allah set for them the way of guidance, through which they could attain the spiritual heights of the Heaven, yet they chose to cling to earth are like dogs, if not worse than them; we know for certain that dogs, out of their nature, pant instinctively all the time, so they cannot be blamed for that, whether they are chased away or not. As for mankind, whom Allah *the Almighty* has honoured by the mind which protects their lives and whom He *Glorified is He* has created in a manner that makes them naturally incline to doing goodness, they should in no way do such act of detaching themselves from the divine way of guidance. Here, a good question arises; that is, 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* compare the act of disbelief to the instinctive act of panting on part of dogs?' We answer this question by stating that dogs do the act of panting instinctively. In addition, they are not legally charged and thus cannot be blamed for any act they do. As for man, whom Allah honoured by giving him the opportunity to choose whatever they want to do, be it good or evil, they should in no way detach himself from the divine way of guidance. In truth, this kind of behaviour—panting on the part of dogs— is

accepted by people because of the fact that this is a natural instinct in them; hence, people do not blame them for it. Once again, it is not right to ask questions like 'Why did Allah *the Almighty* set forth parables with certain creatures? Or what is the offence committed by these creatures so that they are used as illustrative example?' And so on.

Likewise, we have another position in the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* says: "The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books]." (*al-Jumu'a*: 5)

Similarly, should a donkey be disparaged when it carries a load of books because it does not understand their contents? The answer is definitely 'no', because the donkey's job is not to understand the contents of the books, but simply to carry them. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wants to instruct us not to be like the donkey which carries books containing guidance, but does not know the value of what it carries. Furthermore, it is clear that He *Glorified is He* wants us to bear His Divine Way of Guidance and to act upon it so that we can obtain considerable benefit. So, these parables are not meant to disparage the dog or the donkey, but to disparage those who resemble them because they descend to such a low level which Allah does not want for them. In fact, Allah sets forth these parables with things which are not blameworthy in essence, whereas if a man does such things, he is to be blamed for them.

At this point, we should take into account that abandoning the divine way of guidance leads a person to an uncomfortable life, even if he already enjoys the blessings of life. That is because he, in such case, is detached from Allah and thus will constantly wonder, 'Will I enjoy these blessings to the end of my time or not?' Hence, he will permanently live in a state of worry and fear lest his blessings may leave him. That is why we say that such person looks like a dog which pants whether it is tired or not. So, when Allah *the Almighty* gives us a real example of that man, Ibn Bau'raa'; He *Glorified is He* does so to make us take admonition from that incident which actually took place.

That is, when Allah *the Almighty* wants to raise someone high, He *Glorified is He* gives him knowledge of His Way of Guidance; however, if he detaches himself from it, then he will look like those who reject the signs and Messages of

Allah. So, you (O Muslims!) are not the first ones to do this, for Ibn Bau'raa' had already done the same before you; that is, Allah had instructed him to the way of guidance, but he chose to cling to the earth by detaching himself from it. The Arabic word for 'parable' is *mathal*, a word derived from the root *m-th-l*. By the way, we can pronounce this particular word in two different ways: *mithl* or *mathal*. The word *al-mithl* gives the meaning of 'what is like or similar.' Arabs say, 'This person is like (*mithl*) so-and-so in his generosity, knowledge, height, and width;' this way, you can illustrate something unknown in the light of something which is already known. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'There is nothing like (*mithl*) unto Him.' (*ash-Shura*: 11) That is, nothing resembles Him in any way because He is transcendent in His Essence, Attributes, and Actions.

Similarly, we use the word *mathal* to convey the meaning of 'exemplar', meaning that the person we are describing is of a lower rank than the person we use as an exemplar. This goes when the person we see as an 'exemplar' is so famous that everyone knows his name. For example, we compare generous people to Hatim At-Ta'i, who is very famous for his generosity. The difference is that if you say, 'So-and-so is as generous as Hatim', this means that you might be the first person to ever say this about him. The same applies to the following statements; Arabs say: 'The exemplar of Hatim in generosity', 'the exemplar of Antara in courage' and 'the exemplar of Iyas in intelligence.' In fact, each of these names mentioned in the previous examples is very famous for a particular quality; thus, they are used as exemplars. Therefore, when a poet, Abu Tammam, wanted to praise the caliph, Ahmed ibn Al-Mu'tasim, he said about him:

The caliph has:

'Amr's bravery with Hatim's largess,

And Ahnaf's patience with Iyas's cunning.

One of the men attending the caliph's court at that moment said: 'How dare you compare the Caliph to such boorish Arabs?! The Caliph is above all of those whom you mentioned! Who is 'Amr next to the Caliph? And who is Hatim next to the Caliph? How dare you say this while another poet had previously said:

The praise-poets compare his bravery and munificence

With that of those who are like his feeblest servants:

In his army are fifty thousand the like of 'Antara,

And a thousand of his servants are as generous as Hatim!

That is, the caliph has at his command many servants like Hatim and 'Antara. Yet, Abu Tammam's brilliance and sharp wittedness helped him out of this predicament, and he said:

Censure me not for comparing him to his lessers,

Such aberrant examples of valour and bounty;

For Allah used a lesser thing to symbolise His Light:

A niche wherein a lamp is shining...

It is as though the poet was saying: 'I used them as examples because they had become the exemplars of these qualities and exemplars do not change.' In this regard, it is important to know that because the particular qualities of those people were so famous that their names became well-known, so Arabs used to omit their particular qualities when making comparisons to them; just mentioning their names used to suffice. For example, they used to say: 'So-and-so is Hatim,' 'So-and-so is 'Antara' and 'So-and-so is Iyas'. This actually means that the 'exemplar' is so famous and well known that all people know him perfectly well.

The Arabic word *al-mathal* can also mean a 'proverb' which is defined as a short saying or sentence people use to comment about a particular situation because of its resemblance to it. Let me offer the following example to illustrate this definition: a great Arab leader once sent a female envoy named 'Isam to make his marriage bid to Umm Iyas, whom he had heard was beautiful and enjoyed a number of good characteristics. The man, thus, said to her: 'Go, O 'Isam, so that you can tell me all about the daughter of 'Awf!' So, the envoy went, and the girl's mother left them alone together, saying to her daughter: 'My lady, this is your maternal aunt; she comes to bear witness to something about you, so do not conceal anything which she wishes to see or know about, neither of face, nor of character; tell her whatever she wants to

know'. The woman was then admitted to Umm 'Iyas's tent and closely examined the young lady. The Arab leader who sent her was waiting for her return expectantly and eagerly; so, when he saw her, he asked her, 'What happened, O 'Isam?' She replied, '*Abda al-Makhdu 'An Az-Zubd*', an Arabic proverb meaning that the journey has been fruitful. After that, whenever the Arabs sent a messenger, whether male, female or even a group of two or more, to know the results of the journey, they would ask, 'What happened O 'Isam?' in the Arabic feminine form, even if they were addressing a male messenger. This is actually based on the important fact that 'the form of a proverb is constant and does not change.' That is why Arabs always used the following proverb—The churn has brought forth butter— to refer to any successful effort. For example, when a student studies hard and gets the mark he wanted, it is said, 'The churn has brought forth butter.'

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran that He does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat or of something even less than that, Allah Says: "Indeed, Allah is not timid to present an example - that of a mosquito or what is smaller than it." (*al-Baqara: 26*) When commenting on this particular verse, some people asked, 'How could Allah propound a parable of a gnat?' However, in another place in the Quran, He *the Almighty* declares that They—the disbelievers—cannot create as much as a fly; even were they to join all their forces to that end! Allah says: "O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose." (*al-Hajj: 73*) Some people incorrectly understand the words of Allah *the Almighty* 'or of something [even] less than that' and mistakenly interpret it to mean that He *the Almighty* says that He can set forth a parable with something bigger than that—the gnat, which is not correct because He *Glorified is He* is giving a parable of the smallest thing. So, when He *the Almighty* said, 'or anything above that,' this actually means that He *the Almighty* can give a parable with a thing which is less important and smaller than the gnat. In order to properly understand this point, consider that we sometimes hear someone saying: 'So-and-so is sick;' then, another person responds, 'So-and-so is even sicker than him.' The words 'sicker than' do not mean that the illness is less, but rather, it is even worse and more acute.

Back to the chapter *al-A'raf*: Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Such is the image of those who reject Our signs. Tell them the story so that they may reflect.' (*al-A'raf*: 176) In this particular part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* addresses the Jews, saying to them: 'You, O Children of Israel, are akin to the man to whom we gave Our Messages, yet he discarded them; the Torah has been given to you; it contained glad tidings of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it told you about his signs and indications, so that if anyone of you saw him, he would know that he was the Messenger who had been foretold in the Torah, for you truly knew him by descriptions as you know your own sons. However, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* came to you bearing that which you knew of him, you refused to believe in him. Thus, the likeness of you is like that man to whom Allah gave His Messages but he discarded them'.

Because of their stubbornness, transgression, and disbelief, they even rejected the natural signs which are visible to the eye, such as the heavens, the earth, and the sun. In addition, they rejected and denied the miraculous signs which proved the veracity of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, they denied and rejected all what he *peace and blessings be upon him* brought to them from Allah *the Almighty* including the verses of the Quran which conveyed the divine way of guidance to them.

Allah *the Almighty* finally addresses Prophet Muhammad and orders him to tell them this true story from which they could take admonition and exhortation in such a way that would positively and significantly affect the course of their life.

He *Glorified is He* finally concludes the verse by saying, '... so that they may reflect.' (*al-A'raf*: 176) We have previously explained that the Quran, throughout its pages, gives orders and commands for people to contemplate, to remember and to reflect. We previously explained that *at-tafakkur* (contemplation) is a mental process in which various alternatives are compared in order to rationally give preference to one over another. As for the concept of *at-tadhakkur* (remembrance), it means to remember something you were heedless of. As for *at-tadabbur* (reflection), it is also a mental process in which we do not consider only the outward appearance of things, but rather, we consider them

from all their different angles and perspectives, aiming to reach a correct conclusion. For example, it is said: 'Read between the lines and you will find the subtle meaning of the words.' We can apply this principle of *at-tadabbur* to that particular verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* where Allah *the Almighty* says that He does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat or of something even less than that.

When we contemplated and reflected upon this verse, we realised that Allah *the Almighty* does not mean that 'He *Glorified is He* is going to give a parable with something bigger than the gnat, but rather, He *the Almighty* means that He can give a parable with a thing which is less important and smaller than the gnat.' This is why we must not consider the literal meaning of the words only, but rather, we must consider the connotative meaning as well.

Thus, Allah's words, 'Tell them the story so that they may reflect,' mean that they might think in a way which leads them to follow Allah's Way of Guidance; that they might have faith which is the point of the story.

He *Glorified is He* says:

سَاءَ مَثَلًا الْقَوْمُ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَأَنْفُسَهُمْ كَانُوا يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

**How foul is the image of those who reject Our signs! It is themselves they wrong [177]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 177)**

We must take into account the fact that Allah *the Almighty* had previously said that the Jews had rejected His signs and Messages. He *Glorified is He* has shown the similarity between them and Ibn Ba'uraa' - the man to whom He gave His Message, but he discarded it. However, their rejection and denial to the verses of Allah was even worse than that of Ibn Bau'raa', since they were a group, while the latter was an individual. That is why we must be fully aware of the fact that the Quran never repeats itself.


He *the Almighty* says: 'How foul is the image of those who reject Our signs!' (*al-A'raf*: 176) The Arabic word *sa'* (here translated as 'how foul is') means 'how ugly is'. Arabs say: 'How foul is such person' to give the meaning that his state is bad, but what is that particular aspect of his state which is bad?

We can say: 'He is in ill health,' meaning that he is sick, 'He has had some ill fortune,' meaning that he is poor or 'He has a bad moral character,' meaning that he is malicious. Therefore, it is clear that we must define the particular meaning we intend when using the Arabic word *sa'* because it conveys different meanings.

So, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'How foul is the image of those who reject Our signs!' This apparently means that it is that example of the Jews who became foul and evil; however, we know well that examples cannot be foul or evil because He *the Almighty* Himself is giving examples to elucidate, explain and clarify a particular point. So, what is true meaning of this particular part of the verse? We say that the exact meaning of this particular part of the verse is that either the condition of the Jews is evil and foul or they are evil because they rejected and denied the Messages of Allah, and thus wronged themselves. As a matter of fact, their denial neither impeded the implementation of the divine way of guidance on earth, nor their rejection caused any imbalance whatsoever in the affairs of the universe—which runs by due measure and under the Undefeatable Will of Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, their denial of the Signs and Messages of Allah could not harm Him *Glorified is He* in any way, but rather, they would certainly be the losers. Ironically, when the Jews rejected and denied the Prophetic miracles, those miracles have not been damaged, but rather, they are engraved in memories until this day; therefore, they have failed and became the losers. Moreover, when they rejected the divine way of guidance, they lost out here as well since no harm afflicted those miracles or the verses of the Quran. Hence, it is clear that they wronged themselves by doing that, just like the patient who does not obey the instructions of the doctor, thereby only harming himself, whilst the doctor is not harmed in the least. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* sent us His Way of Guidance to set the course of life in order; therefore, whoever adheres to it benefits himself, and whoever does not adhere to it does not harm Allah in the slightest.

The Jews wronged themselves and thus became the enemies of their own selves; yes, they could in no way harm Allah, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the community. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'It is themselves they wrong'; we find that the object has been mentioned before the verb. According to the Arabic language grammar, this case is known as 'restriction'

or *al-qasr* meaning that we confine the doing of a particular act to a particular subject. We could say: ‘They are sinning against their own selves;’ then, it would be possible for us to add ‘and against others;’ however, when we say, ‘it is themselves they wrong,’ this means that their sin does not affect anyone but themselves; therefore, the speech is restrictive and exclusive. It is exactly like the verse where Allah *the Almighty* says that with Him *the Almighty* rests all power of decision, first and last “To Allah belongs the command before and after” (*ar-Rum*: 4). That is, the power of decision is never given to any but to Him. Allah *Glorified is He* says:


 مَن يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِيٌّ وَمَن يُضِلِّ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

Whoever God guides is truly guided, and whoever God allows to stray is a loser [178] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 178)

This particular verse is the only verse in the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* uses the word *al-muhtadi*, with a long vowel (*i*), at the end, whilst it is given as *al-muhtad*, without the (*i*), in several other verses, including verses (*al-Isra'*: 97), (*al-Hadid*: 26) and (*al-Kahf*: 17).

The continuous battle between guidance and misguidance is as old as man himself is. We clarified this matter before, but we repeat it here for emphasis and reinforcement. At that point, some people always ask, ‘As long as Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who causes guidance and misguidance, why would He *Glorified is He* punish me if I go astray?’ As a matter of fact, this question has become widespread to the extent that the orientalist and philosophers have seized on it as a way of justifying the commitment of the different acts of disobedience by man. However, we say to all those who proffer this argument: ‘Why did you restrict your argument and objection to the topic of punishment in case you go astray while paying no attention to the reward you will receive for your good deeds and faith? The fact that you restricted yourself to the former and not the latter is in itself definitive proof that the guidance which came to you was a beneficial, but you left it aside in favour of what is harmful; nobody says such things except those who have transgressed against their own selves. We have previously given many examples to illustrate this point. Nevertheless, we must take into account a very important point; that is,

such people are totally unable to differentiate between two totally separate things: is it Allah *the Almighty* who creates people's actions or is it people who do so themselves?

To answer this question, we should the exact meaning of the word 'action'. It is to use your power to do something in particular. For example, one, upon using the power of the hand, can do any action; he can strike another man with it, help someone who has fallen down, or even pat on an orphan's shoulder to console him. So, it is clear now that the power of the hand can be used both to do good and to do evil. When you strike someone, which particular muscle do you move within your body? You do not really know the answer, but the hand responds to your will to strike once you want to do that. This is actually in contrast to the robot; it cannot carry out anything unless being directed through its programme. In the same connection, when you pat an orphan on the shoulder, what particular body parts do you have to operate in order to perform this act? Then, it is clear now that it is Allah *the Almighty* who gives you the power that allows you to carry out the action. Thus, if we consider this particular point of giving us the power necessary to do the actions, then Allah is the One Who creates all man's actions; however, of the action of directing the body parts to do something, be it good or bad, is what the person will be held accountable for.

Therefore, we will be held accountable for the fact that we had done the action, not because we created them, for Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of all actions. We act according to our free will and choice. For example, the tongue was created with such power that enables it to express all what the person wants to say. If you want to use it to declare the testimony of faith and say: 'There is no God but Allah,' it will respond positively to you. In the same way, it will undoubtedly obey the atheist if he wants to say— Allah forbids, 'there is no god.' Hence, the tongue obeys you in both cases.

We realize now that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who creates and supplies man's body parts with the power required to do actions; however, man, out of his free will, is the one who uses this particular power to do good or bad. At this point, we can declare that all people's actions are created by Allah *Glorified is He* because He has supplied them with the power to do the act,

but man himself is the one who uses the power to do good or evil. In this regard, it is important to know that Allah *the Almighty* has sent down His Way of Guidance to guide people to the Right Path. So, whoever accepts it—the divine way of guidance—with a faithful intention, He *the Almighty* helps him to do so. Therefore, it is not right to differ about such issue, rather, we must carefully reflect on how actions are created and what role man plays in them. Here, we should take into consideration a very important point, that is, Allah *the Almighty* can cause man to lose his power to do the act—such as the case when a man intends to harm another with his hand, but he is struck with paralysis and becomes unable to move it. If he were the one who created his actions, he would raise his hand and use it to harm whomever he wanted, but he does not create the power required to perform the actions.

Therefore, we can say that guidance is of two kinds. First, *Hidayat Ad-Dalalah* (or guiding people to the divine way of guidance) and it is given to everyone, believers and disbelievers alike. Concerning this kind, we should affirm that Allah *the Almighty* shows the way of guidance to the believer and the disbeliever alike; yet, whoever follows this way and accepts faith in Him, He *Glorified is He* will support him be on the Right Path. In addition, He *the Almighty* will make the matter of faith easy for him, give him the energy to do good deeds, expand his breast, and make things easy for him. In the Quran, Allah orders us to remain conscious of Him since it is He who teaches us. In another place in the Quran, He *Glorified is He* says that whomever He causes to err, these are the losers So, if Allah *the Almighty* makes a general statement and then restricts it by a specific one, it means that the specific statement governs the general one.

In this respect, Our Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies that He guides whomever He wills to the Right Path; and whomever He causes to err, He will help them to go astray. In addition, He *the Almighty* made clear that those whomever He, out of His Help to them, wishes to guide are truly guided. As for the disbelievers, the evildoers and the iniquitous, they will not be guided to the Right Path because He *the Almighty* deprives them of His Help and thus leaves them to their own free choice; a point which is clearly mentioned in the Quran in which He *Glorified is He* tells us about the people of Thamud saying that He *Glorified is He* offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to

guidance, Allah says: “And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance, so the thunderbolt of humiliating punishment seized them for what they used to earn.” (*Fussilat*: 17) The verse clearly shows that the guidance given to the people of Thamud belonged to the first kind of guidance, which is *Hidayat Ad-Dalalah*; it was not the guidance of Divine Help.

In another place in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that He *Glorified is He* increases the ability of those who are willing to be guided to follow His Guidance and causes them to grow in Allah-Consciousness. That is, He *Glorified is He* out of His Help, increases the ability of those who choose guidance to follow His Divine Way of guidance. In addition, He places a shield between them and hell. In a third place of the Quran, he *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that he cannot guide aright everyone he *peace and blessings be upon him* wants, Allah says: “Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided” (*al-Qasas*: 56).

In this aforementioned verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* that he cannot help anyone to be obedient, for this is something over which only Allah has dominion.

Moreover, in another position in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says to him *peace and blessings be upon him* that he shows the way to the right path. There is no contradiction whatsoever between the verse of *ash-Shu'ara'* and that of *al-Qasas*, because the former refers to the Guidance of Help, whereas the latter refers to the Guidance of showing the way to the right path.

So, if we see a particular action being attributed to a particular subject, but this action is affirmed once and negated at the same time, we should realize that the way of approaching the issue is different in each case. As for the case under discussion, it is decided by Allah *the Almighty*—the One Who is All-wise, All Knowing.

Back to the chapter of *al-'Araf*: why did Allah *the Almighty* say: ‘Whoever Allah guides is truly guided, and whoever Allah allows to stray is a loser’. It is because when He *Glorified is He* deprives His servant of His Help, the servant will surely go through his life alone, without any divine assistance

from his Lord; so, he will suffer a lot, whether he is materially comfortable or not. This is if we only consider the life of this world to be eternal; if we add to his heedlessness the fact that the life of this world is only a bridge leading to the Hereafter, the loss will be grievous indeed.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالإِنسِ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَا
يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَهُمْ آذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا
أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلَّ هُمْ أَضَلُّ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ ﴿١٧٩﴾

We have created many jinn and people who are destined for Hell, with hearts they do not use for comprehension, eyes they do not use for sight, ears they do not use for hearing. They are like cattle, no, even further astray: these are the ones who are entirely heedless [179] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 179)

The Arabic word *dhara'a* (here translated as 'created') literally means 'to spread' or 'to scatter'—this meaning is also mentioned in the very beginning of the chapter of *an-Nisa'*, where Allah *the Almighty* says that He spread abroad a multitude of men and women out of Adam and Eve. In addition, He *Glorified is He* says that He made mates for us from among ourselves, and mates of the cattle too, multiplying us thereby.

As for the verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* says: 'We have created many jinn and people who are destined for Hell.' (*al-A'raf*: 179) We know for certain that all the creatures in the universe, with the exception of man and jinn, are obedient to Allah by their nature. As for jinn and man, Allah gave them the free will to choose whatever they want to do. In the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, He *Glorified is He* called them the two armies. (*ar-Rahman*: 31) So, the Arabic word *dhara'na* means that He *the Almighty* has created jinn and man and caused them to spread, disperse, and multiply. Here, we should consider a very important point, that is, the fact that the word 'many' used here does not necessarily mean that those in the contrary situation are few in number, since something might be numerous and its opposite be numerous, too. This can be proved by the Quran in the chapter of *al-Hajj*; Allah *the Almighty* says that before

Him *the Almighty* prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures. (*al-Hajj*: 18)

This means that all beings and creatures, including inanimate objects, plants, and animals prostrate themselves before Allah *the Almighty* and glorify Him. However, when He *the Almighty* tells us about man, he says that many people prostrate themselves before Him *the Almighty* too, yet upon many the punishment has been justified, Allah says: “Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified.” (*al-Hajj*: 18) That is, there are many who prostrate and humble themselves before Him *the Almighty*, but meanwhile, there are many who disbelieve and refuse to prostrate and humble themselves before Him *the Almighty*; thus, they deserve to suffer as a result. About this particular part of the verse, some people might ask, ‘Did You create them solely for Hell, O Lord? What, then, can they do? They can do nothing, as long as You created them for this!’ We say that this is a misunderstanding that results from being fully unaware of Arabic grammar. As a matter of fact, we have a particular particle in Arabic known as *lam al-‘aqibah* which can be translated as (so, in order to, to, etc). This particle is used to state the consequence which occurred in a way that might not have been the same as that which you intended and wanted. If we apply this principle to our case under discussion, we will find that the ultimate objective behind the creation of jinn and man is to worship Allah *the Almighty* “And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.” (*adh-Dhariyat*: 56)

Worshipping means to obey the commands and orders of Allah *the Almighty* and to refrain from His prohibitions. Here, we consider that mankind and jinn are, out of their free will, able to choose either to do good or bad. Worshipping, then, requires that some people will obey, while others will not. Let me offer you the following example to illustrate this: someone comes to you and discusses another person’s life with you and says: ‘Why does he show you such enmity? Were you not the one who took him and gave him a job?’ Then, you reply, ‘I did him this favour, but he rewarded me with evil!’

So, did you take into account that he is going to hurt you when you first hired him? The answer is definitely 'no', but that is how it turned out in the end.

Likewise, we should take into account that the ultimate objective behind the creation of man is to worship Allah alone and not whether they are going to be admitted into Paradise or Hell. However, there are people who believe and act righteously and therefore, will be admitted into the Paradise, while others disobey and thus will be admitted into Hell. This is the true meaning of *lam al-'aqibah* which is something followed by a result different from that intended by man. Another example to illustrate this point: Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran that He *Glorified is He* inspired the mother of Musa (Moses) to suckle him and cast him away in the river in case she feared for him. He *the Almighty* also ordered her not to fear or grieve, for He *the Almighty* would bring him back to her. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the family of the Pharaoh picked him out of the river so that he could be an enemy to them. (*al-Qasas: 7-8*)

Hence, the question to be asked here is: did the Pharaoh's family really spare him so that he would become an enemy to them? No, they rather wished that he would be a comfort for the Pharaoh and his wife. (*al-Qasas: 9*) Therefore, it is clear that the main reason why they spared Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was that he would be a joy and comfort to their eyes, a matter which did not eventually happen because Moses became the enemy of the Pharaoh. This is actually the true meaning of *lam al-'aqibah*.

If we apply this to the verse under discussion, that is, the saying of Allah, 'We have created many jinn and people who are destined for Hell', we will fully realise that the ultimate objective behind the creation of man is to worship Allah alone and not whether they are going to be admitted into Paradise or Hell. However, there are those people who believe and act righteously and therefore will be admitted into the paradise, while others disobey and thus will be admitted into Hell. Let me remind you of the following example, so that we can fully understand this point: when the Minister for Education asks the headmaster of a school or the dean of a college about the level of the study and the level of the students, the headmaster or the dean may say: 'We know well who will fail and who will pass, and if you like, I will tell you their

names and list them for you.’ The headmaster or the dean does not actually say this because he is in control of the students’ answers; rather, it is because he knows perfectly well their level through their behaviour. At that point, we must affirm the fact that knowledge is based on observation; it does not exert any impact whatsoever on the person. Therefore, we can explain Allah’s words, ‘We have created many jinn and people who are destined for Hell,’ to mean that He *Glorified is He* had destined that many people and jinn—obviously those who turned away from the divine way of guidance—would be admitted into Hell. He *Glorified is He* tells us the reasons behind this divine judgement, as follows: first of all, those people who turned away from the divine way of guidance have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth; second, they have eyes with which they fail to see; and third, they have ears with which they fail to listen. “And we have certainly created for hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless” (*al-A'raf*: 179)

Thus, someone might ask: ‘If their hearts were created in such a way that they cannot grasp the truth; then, what is their sin? Also, if their eyes were created in such a way that they cannot see; then, what is their sin? Likewise, if their ears were created in such a way that they cannot hear; then, why are they punished for this?’ To those, we say that the matter does not go like this. Allah *the Almighty* did not create people to make them suffer; rather, those people were entirely and directly subject to their whims and lusts to the extent that their minds became such that they never thought about anything else and only planned for satisfying their desires and lusts. The same applies to their eyes which only saw what they lusted for, and so did their ears. That is to say that everyone from among them did not make use of these divine gifts given to him. In other words, they did not utilise those body parts towards things that would help them achieve prosperity in the Hereafter.

The difference between the discernment of the heart on the one hand, the sight of the eye and the hearing of the ear on the other, is that the discernment of the heart is the direct result of what man’s different senses perceive. We know for

certain that man perceives things by means of five senses. For example, we utilise our sense of touch to know that silk is soft. In the same way, we utilise our sense of smell to realise that musk has a fine scent, while we use our sense of taste to realise that honey is sweet. Further, it is clear that each sense has a particular job to do. Then, all these pieces of information perceived through these senses will be passed to the heart which will process them to eventually take the form of a mental issue which is overwhelmingly approved.

We all know for certain that fire burns because once a person touches fire, it burns him. Therefore, he, based on the previous experience, will keep away from fire. This experience was non-existent at first, when, through his sense of touch, man first realised that fire burns. This piece of information will then pass to the heart wherein it will turn into an idea. So, information is conveyed to the human soul by means of the external senses. At that point, we should take into account that there are other senses which are invisible, such as one's ability to ascertain the weight of things by lifting them. Scientists recently discovered that man has a particular sense called the 'muscular sense'. This particular sense functions when one lifts something very heavy beyond his capacity.

Hence, it is clear that all the pieces information obtained from man's different senses travel to the heart, wherein they are developed into ideas and concepts. This is why Allah *the Almighty* reminds people of His Grace upon them, saying that He *Glorified is He* has brought us forth from our mothers' wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed us with hearing, sight and minds so that we might have cause to be grateful, Allah *Glorified is He* says “And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful.” (*an-Nahl*: 78)

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-'Araf* that is, ‘... with hearts they do not use for comprehension...’ (*al-A'raf*: 179) The Arabic word *al-fiqh* literally means ‘to understand’. So, when something is properly and adequately understood, it becomes an established fact of which one is firmly convinced. However, the disbelievers see nothing with their eyes except their caprices, and their ears only hear what pleases them, so they do not listen to guidance. Furthermore, they do not notice the signs around them

in which they might see evidence of the Creator. In sum, their hearts live without grasping and understanding the truth. This means that they do indeed possess heart, eyes, and ears, but they exploit these body parts in what brings about their destruction.

That is why He *Glorified is He* describes such people by saying: ‘they are like cattle, no, even further astray: they are the ones who are entirely heedless.’ (*al-A'raf*: 179) Here arises a very important question, that is, ‘What is the sin of cattle to be compared to disbelievers? Especially if we take into account the fact that cattle are not legally charged, and that they do not have hearts to grasp the truth, neither do they have eyes to see the signs of Allah, nor do they have ears to listen to the Commands of Allah.’ All they do is to go to the pasture to feed; if they see a wolf, they instinctively flee away from it. They even grow accustomed to the sound they hear around them. As a matter of fact, the course of life of all animals is run by virtue of this special instinct placed in them by Allah *the Almighty* that allows them to distinguish what is good and what is bad.

At this point, we should affirm that there is a big difference between man and animal; the former does not keep away from harm unless he, based on previous experience, fully realises it, while the latter, based on its natural instinct, keeps away from all different kinds of harm. Because animals do not possess reason or the ability to choose between alternatives, Allah *the Almighty* has created them with instinct which guides them to choose what is beneficial for their life. For example, we might find a weak animal living in a particular environment; yet, Allah *Glorified is He* gives it a colour which matches the colour of this environment to protect it from more powerful animals.

Here is another example to illustrate this point: we know perfectly well that animals are created to benefit and serve mankind; thus, they must reproduce so that man benefits from their offspring in the future. That is why the animals copulate with each other for no reason but to reproduce; a point which is in obvious contradiction to that of man, who views sex as a means of reproduction and satisfying his desire at the same time. This is why we find that man learnt many of his life activities from animals. For example, when the son of Adam killed his brother, he did not know how to bury him, so

Allah *the Almighty* sent a raven which scratched the earth to show him how he might conceal the nakedness of his brother's body "Then Allah sent a crow searching in the ground to show him how to hide the disgrace of his brother." (*al-Ma'ida*: 31) Thus, it is obvious that the raven was guided by its instinct. Therefore, to those who ask how Allah could compare the misguided person to cattle, we say that the misguided person totally differs from cattle in that he possesses free will and has the ability to raise himself above the cattle, however, he has chosen to place himself at their level by not using his reason to choose between alternatives; in this way, he has become even less conscious of the right way than cattle. However, Allah's words, 'They are like cattle, no, even further astray,' makes it clear that cattle are not misguided because they are governed by instinct and have no free will to choose whatever they want to do. As for the disbelievers from among the jinn and men whom our Lord has destined for hell, they do not know their Lord, whilst animals, inanimate objects and plants indeed know their Lord. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that there is not a single thing but extols Allah's Limitless Glory and Praise, but we fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him. So, it is clear that cattle know their Lord and glorify and praise Him. In another place in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that each of the creatures knows indeed how to pray to Him and to glorify Him.

I have told you before about one of the stories of those who have deep knowledge of Allah. For your information, when those people sit together, they encourage one another to attain higher spiritual levels. Those people, the most conscious of Allah, used to meet and greet those who offer acts of worship better than them, with a smile. They, on the other hand, used to meet those who are superior to them in worldly matters, with a grimace. That is why when one of them asked another, 'Do you yearn for your Lord?' He replied, 'No.' 'How can you say that?' asked the first. 'Indeed,' he replied, 'only those who are absent are yearned for.'

That is why He *the Almighty* describes those who turn away from His Divine Way of Guidance, 'They are like cattle, no, even further astray: these are the ones who are entirely heedless.' (*al-A'raf*: 179) This particular part of the verse obviously indicates that those people, whom Allah had destined to

Hell are astray not because they had no way of guidance, nor had any one to remind them, and nor had any one to give them glad tidings or warnings; rather, it was because of their heedlessness; everything was made clear for them, but they ignored it and were wilfully heedless of it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا وَذَرُوا الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي
 أَسْمَائِهِ سَيُجْزَوْنَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٨٠﴾

The Most Excellent Names belong to God: use them to call on Him, and keep away from those who abuse them – they will be requited for what they do [180] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 180)

Allah's words, 'The Most Excellent Names belong to Allah,' mean that no names other than His names could be described as 'the Most Excellent.' If you say that a person is 'generous', this particular word is an attribute; it is also the case if you say that he is 'forbearing'. In fact, all those attributes are accidental; thus, they only become 'Most Excellent Names' if Allah is described by them. For example, you have a particular power through which you can perform many actions; however, this power of yours is totally different from that of Allah *the Almighty* who is Omnipotent. As for man's power, it is entirely subject to change because one may lose it at any time, for a reason or another. Likewise, you might be wealthy, yet your wealth is accidental; thus, it is totally different from that of Allah *the Almighty* who has the treasures of everything and who is Self-Sufficient.

Therefore, the 'Most Excellent Names' in their absolute sense belong only to Allah *the Almighty*; if they are applied to anything other than Him, they become limited attributes; no matter how great their extent may be. He *the Almighty* says: 'The Most Excellent Names belong to Allah: use them to call on Him.' (*al-A'raf*: 180) The Arabic word *al-husna* (here translated as 'the Most Excellent') is the feminine form of the word *al-ahsan* which is a superlative. They are the most perfect names inasmuch as they are suited to the divine qualities, and the divine qualities are suited to them. When we say that He *Glorified is He* is 'the

Most Merciful', this is something perfect both for me and for you because I consider the mercy He shows me, and you consider the mercy He shows you. The same applies when you say that He is 'All-Forgiving', for this has an effect on you, on me and on everyone else who hears it.

Furthermore, when you say that He *the Almighty* is 'All-Dominant', this means that those who are sinful will fear Him. At that point, it is important to know that Allah *the Almighty* has both attributes of beauty and attributes of majesty—the attributes of beauty are designated for those who obey Him, whilst the attributes of majesty are designated for those who disobey Him. Therefore, we should not only consider blessings by how they affect us personally, but rather, according to what Allah originally intends by them.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran that a flash of fire and smoke will be let loose upon people in case they pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth. In addition, they will be left without succour. He *the Almighty* then tells us that this is actually one of His Blessings that cannot be denied. (*ar-Rahman*: 35-36)

Here arises a very important question; that is, whether the loosing of fire and smoke can really be considered a blessing we should not deny. We say that indeed it is a great blessing since He *Glorified is He* warns us of the considerable power of such fire before it afflicts us, and thus we will take admonition and exhortations and keep away from it. So, the warning and admonition that He *Glorified is He* gives us before the fire comes is viewed as a great blessing. In addition, when the believers obey Him in this worldly life and adhere to His way of guidance, they are rewarded for their obedience. As for those who turn away from His way of guidance, He warns them against their acts of disobedience which is also a great blessing since they might show repentance.

As a matter of fact, He *Glorified is He* told us about His Name—Allah—through direct transmission from Him, so that we, relying on our intellect, might be able to know about His Omnipotent Power. However, we will be unable to know about the essence of the name itself. As I have said before, let us suppose that there are some people sitting in a room when there is a knock at the door. All of them will agree that there is someone at the door, but they will differ when they try to imagine who it might be. One might say, 'It is a

man;' but another may reply, 'No, it is a woman because the knock was light;' and then a third says, 'The knock came from the top of the door, so the caller must be tall, and he must be bearing ill news because he knocked hard.' So, they all agree that there is someone knocking at the door; yet, they all disagree on the identity of the knocker, and none of them really knows his name. So, if you want to know exactly who is knocking at the door, you should ask, 'Who's there?', whereupon he shall reply by telling you his name.

Hence, it is clear that names cannot be deduced or reached by the intellect or reason. Thus, if we carefully consider this fact, we shall know that Allah, the Creator of the entire universe, is Almighty, All-Powerful, All-Wise and All Knowing—all of which are qualities which are essential for the purpose of creation, and which can be deduced by man's intellect. As for His name, Allah, it is transmitted to us through revelation, and thus the intellect has nothing to do with it. The same applies to the rest of His Excellent Names which are all transmitted to us through revelation; that is why we are obliged to call upon Him *Glorified is He* only with use of these Most Excellent Names. Therefore, if one takes one of these names and applies them to other than Allah; he will be judged as invoking other than Him by the Most Perfect and Excellent Names which are exclusive to Allah alone. For example, Musaylima, the liar from Yamama, called himself 'the giver of mercy' or *Ar-Rahim*, and thereby distorted the true meaning of this Most Excellent Name by applying it to himself. The same goes for the Arabs who called one of their idols, '*al-Lat*' which is the feminine form of the word 'Allah;' another idol of theirs was called '*al-Uzza*' word derived from Allah's Most Excellent Name, '*al-Aziz*' or Almighty; and yet a third idol of theirs, '*Manat*' a word derived from Allah's Most Excellent Name, '*al-Mannan*' or 'the One Who gives continuously without expecting anything in return.' All of these had actually distorted the meaning of these Most Excellent Names of Allah by which we should invoke no one other than Him. This is why it is said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once supplicated to Allah and said: 'O Allah, I am Your servant, and the son of Your servant, and the son of Your servant-girl. My forelock is in Your hand; Your judgement holds sway over me, and Your decree is ever just to me. I ask You by every name which is Yours, by which You have named Yourself, or sent down in Your Book, or taught unto any of

Your creatures, or kept secret in the knowledge of the unseen which You possess, to make the Quran the spring of my heart, and the light of my breast, and the relief of my disquiet, and the release of my sorrow and worry.⁽¹⁾

Hence, it is clear that our Lord *Glorified is He* had told us about the Most Excellent Names through revelation because they cannot be discerned by the intellect. As for the unique qualities by means of which the universe was created, they can be realised and discerned by the intellect. Let me offer the following example to illustrate this point: we establish many big factories for the manufacture of light bulbs; we take glass and empty it of air and then place wires inside it so that it is able to conduct electricity. After a certain period of time, the light bulbs break. However, the sun has been illuminating the world for all this time, since the beginning of creation, and it does not require any spare parts from us. So, when we say that He *the Almighty* is 'All-Wise', we say this as a result of the cohesion and harmony we notice in the movement of the planets—every planet moves in its due orbit without crashing or colliding into one another; a point that definitely proves the Great Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty*.

In the verse, 'The Most Excellent Names belong to Allah: use them to call on Him,' (*al-A'raf*: 180) He *the Almighty* encourages us to invoke Him by the Most Perfect and Excellent Names. That is because He *the Almighty* wants His creatures to constantly remember Him—for He is the Lord Who created everything from nothing, replaced privation with provision and preserved creation with His sustenance. Thus, whenever you need something, you must remember the Most Perfect and Excellent Names of Allah and call upon Him by them. In addition, whenever you wish to draw closer to Allah, you should not call upon Him by any other Name than those which He gave to Himself, namely; Allah because this is the Most Beautiful and Excellent Name for Allah. In this connection, it is important to know that all of Allah's Most Perfect Names are Attributes which have reached the level of Names, and there are some Names which convey the meanings of various attributes.

For example, when you say, 'Zayd', the listener knows that this is the name of a person called Zayd, who also has other attributes besides that; he

(1) *Narrated by Ahmad*

might be a merchant, a knowledgeable jurist or even an engineer. However, his proper name is Zayd; you do not have other friends under this name even though your friends may have the same qualities of Zayd.

At this point, we say that Allah's Names are of two kinds: a name which indicates His Essence without any further connotation, namely Allah and Names which were originally attributes, such as 'The Most Merciful,' 'The Bestower of Mercy,' 'The Ultimate Sovereign,' 'The All-Holy,' 'The Peace,' 'The Giver Of Faith' and 'The Guardian.' However, these attributes have reached the highest and loftiest of levels where there is nothing higher than them, to the extent that, if they are used with their fullest meaning, they can refer to none but Him, and thus they have become Names. You might say that someone is rich, generous, or wise, but absolute richness belongs to Allah alone.

The Most Perfect and Excellent Names are originally derived from adjectives of the utmost intensity because He *the Almighty* is the Most Perfect and Excellent Embodiment of them, and they are essentially attributes which have active manifestations. Allah's Names are of two kinds: one kind in which both the Names and their opposites can be ascribed to Him, and another, in which the opposites of the Names cannot be ascribed to Him *Glorified is He*. Furthermore, there are other attributes which are derived from the same lexical root, so we say: 'The Rich' and also 'The Enricher', for He was rich in His Essence before there was anyone to enrich, and His Attribute of enriching was only manifested after there existed servants for Him to enrich. In the same way, He *the Almighty* is 'The Ever-Living' in His Essence, and He is also 'The One who grants life' to others, which is an action to be done to someone else, and it must have an opposite, so we say that He is 'The One who grants life' and also 'The One who causes death;' nevertheless, the opposite of this Name, *al-Mayyit* or the dead, cannot be ascribed to Him. Therefore, the Name which has an opposite is called an 'Attribute of Action', whilst the 'Attributes of the Essence' are those which have no opposites. What is truly meant with Allah's saying that they abuse the Most Excellent Names is that they ascribe them to others than Him, that they call Him *the Almighty* by the names of creatures or even that they take a meaningless or incomprehensible name and ascribe it to Him. Hence, *al-Ilhad fi Asma' Allah* (here translated as abusing

Allah's Names) can be interpreted as follows: either to ascribe one of Allah's Names to other than Him, to call Him *the Almighty* by the names of creatures or to ascribe a name to Him about which He did not tell us through revelation. '... And stand aloof from all who distort the meaning of His names: they shall be requited for all that they were wont to do!'

We know that 'to do' (*'amal*) means an action of any part of the body: the speech of the tongue is a deed; the smell of the nose is a deed; we know that there are things called 'speech and action.' An action is the deed of all the limbs except the tongue, and speech is the deed of the tongue; both of them are called 'deeds.' This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *as-Saff*: '...Why do you say one thing and do another?' Hence, speech is the contrast of action, and here the reward is for both speech and action because they are both 'deeds.'

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has so many names, can we derive names for Him from His actions? For example, He says: 'And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things...' (*al-Baqara*: 31) He says: '...and [He] has imparted unto you the knowledge of what you did not know...' (*an-Nisa*': 113). So, can we say that Allah is a 'Teacher' or 'Imparter of knowledge?' He says, 'but I shall bring all their scheming to nought' (*at-Tariq*: 16) which literally means, 'I shall devise a scheme'. Does this mean we can call Him 'The Schemer?'

This is not allowed because Allah's names must be imparted to us by Him; and if you see an action ascribed to Allah, go no further than the action; do not try to derive a name for Allah from it.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَنْ خَلَقْنَا أُمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ

**Among those We created are a group of people who
guide with truth and act justly according to it [181]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 181)**

After having said, 'And most certainly have We destined for hell many of the invisible beings and men...' (*al-A'raf*: 179). Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to

reassure those people who follow His way, so He did not say 'all men', but rather, '... many of the invisible beings and men...' (*al-A'raf*: 179). As we saw, those people in the opposite condition will also be many, since He says in the chapter of *al-Hajj*: '... And many human beings [submit to Allah consciously], whereas many [others, having defied Him,] will inevitably have to suffer...' (*al-Hajj*: 18) That is, many people prostrate themselves before Allah, whilst many others are destined to suffer.

The True Lord's words, 'Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light,' (*al-A'raf*: 181) mean that Allah's universe is never bereft of those who follow guidance and guide others, so that the right behaviour remains a role model in society.

The role model for society's behaviour is what produces natural belief in young people. A young person does not know how to pray or fast, and he does not know the difference between falsehood and truth, but he learns by imitating his parents. If the child sees that when the call to prayer is sounded, his mother and father each go to perform ablution and pray, he learns how to pray. When someone starts talking about other people's business, the father or the mother says, 'There is no need for us to delve into the affairs of others, lest our good deeds be decreased because of it;' this way, the child learns how to hold his tongue from delving into other people's business because he absorbs their behaviour. This happens because of the fact that when a young child, who has not yet reached the age of reason, hears the *muedhdhin*, he stands up of his own accord and gets to the prayer rug, imitating his mother and father.

From His words, 'and act justly in its light,' we understand that when they judge things, they apply true justice— 'justice' here might mean to negate the association of anything with Allah; it might refer to the issue of grave sins or it might mean that they act justly when it comes to giving people their rights.

'Now, among those whom We have created there are people...' (*al-A'raf*: 181). The word 'people' (*ummah*) in Allah's noble verse means that the perfect attributes of Allah's way of guidance are too vast for one single person to encompass and implement them all. Everyone has a piece of them which he implements: there are those who are distinguished by honesty, some by

bravery, and others by generosity. In this way, the role model for righteous qualities remains in society. Allah *Glorified is He* singled out Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when He said: ‘Verily, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a man who combined within himself all virtues, devoutly obeying Allah’s will, turning away from all that is false, and not being of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah.’ (*an-Nahl*: 120)

The words ‘...a man who combined within himself all virtues...’ (*an-Nahl*: 120) are a translation of one single Arabic word *ummah*. That is, he encompassed all the qualities of righteousness which are usually only found in a large community.

‘Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light.’ (*al-A’raf*: 181) Which community is it, then, out of all the communities on earth that guides others to the truth? Allah *Glorified is He* said about the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘And among the folk of Moses there have been people who would guide [others] in the way of the truth...’ (*al-A’raf*: 159).

Then, there came the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after whom there would come no other messenger; so, this Muslim community would remain entrusted with the preservation of the way of Allah until the end of time.

If you see disbelief spreading, know that Allah has assistance to give; and the more the people’s disbelief increases, the more Allah’s assistance increases. Even if a Muslim land becomes sunken in iniquity, there may be one single person in it who embodies all these noble qualities which guide to the truth so that Allah’s Law remains preserved by those people who behave righteously and follow the way of Allah.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has left corruption to work its evil. Someone might ask, ‘Why does this evil have to exist in a universe which Allah created with such order?’ We answer that if people were never harmed by evil, they would not be aware of the sweetness of good; were people never hurt by the followers of falsehood, no one would be ardent to protect the truth, so people would not know how essential it is that truth be deeply rooted in existence. Evil, therefore, has its own message to this existence, which is to inspire people to do good. Just as Allah has destined many jinn and men for

Hell, He *Glorified is He* has also clarified for us that: ‘Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light.’ (*al-A'raf*: 181) When judging, the peak of justice is to refrain from associating any partners with Him because the first contravention of justice is idolatry which is an enormous injustice. Idolatry, may Allah protect us from it, transfers something from where it is deserved to where it is not deserved; the same is true for the act of declaring to be forbidden that which Allah has permitted, or declaring to be permitted that which Allah has forbidden—all of this is unjust. The same is true of refraining from keeping the balance of people’s rights; if people’s rights are not preserved by judges, custodians and rulers, we will find that every person will only work enough in life to meet his basic needs so that he does not leave anything for the tyrant to seize from him. He will therefore only do limited work in life, doing no more than what is necessary to meet his basic needs; and if this happens, those who are too weak to work, will not find any excess wealth to live on.

Hence Allah wanted, by justice, to preserve everyone’s labours and toils, and therefore clarified for everyone that what you lawfully earn is your possession, but Allah has a right to a part of it, and the rest is for you; this way, those who are too weak to work for a living, will find someone to provide for them. This is why the way of faith warns you: beware of begrudging to give to the weak because the power you utilised to earn wealth is only accidental, and it will not last forever; so, if we take from you, whilst you are strong enough to work, we will take for you when you are unable to work— this is true insurance and justice.

Concerning the people mentioned in this verse, ‘Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light,’ (*al-A'raf*: 181) there is a tradition which states that the people meant in this noble verse are the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Qutada *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘I was told that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say when he recited this verse: ‘This is for you; and the people who came before you were given the like of it: “And among the folk of Moses there have been people who would guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light.”’ (*al-A'raf*: 159)⁽¹⁾ The

(1) *Tafsir Ibn Kathir Vol. 2... Tafsir At-Tabari, Vol. 6*

Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was addressing his Companions when he said, ‘This is for you,’ that is, ‘This refers to your community,’ which is further confirmed by the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for (The good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 110).

The words, ‘for (The good of) mankind,’ indicate that Allah did not only make the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the community who responded to his call, the best of believers, but rather, He made them the best of all mankind, believer and disbeliever alike. ‘Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light.’ (*al-A‘raf*: 181)

The word ‘people’ (*ummah*) is used here because all the qualities of goodness cannot be encompassed by a single person, but rather, each person takes a single element of goodness: this one is intelligent, that one is brave, the other has wealth, and another has good manners. It is as though there can be found, within the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* individuals who collectively encompass all the necessary gifts for fulfilling man’s vicegerency on earth.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then gives their opposite because to mention something along with its opposite has a deeper effect on the soul. He *Glorified is He* says:

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُم مِّنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٢﴾

**But We lead on those who reject Our messages,
step by step, without them realizing it [182]
(The Quran, *al-A‘raf*: 182)**

These are the opposite of those whom Allah created as a people who guide others in the way of the truth and act justly in its light. The word ‘messages’ (*ayat*) is the plural of *ayah* (‘sign’ or ‘message’). We have said before that there are three kinds of *ayat*: signs that you see in the cosmos which guide you to awareness of the existence of Him Who created this vast

universe with such great precision and exactitude—signs which capture your attention such as night and day, the sun and the moon; then, there are the signs which break the natural laws of the universe to prove that a messenger is truly sent by Allah; lastly, there are the verses of the Quran which convey the way of Allah. Those who deny the signs of the cosmos and take no heed of them, who do not derive from them realisation of the existence of a Wise, All-Powerful Allah, who deny the miraculous signs which prove the truth of prophethood and who, likewise, deny the verses of the Quran and refuse to apply them or adhere to them – those people will receive the verdict of Allah: He will not only make them enter hell, but He will also torment them in this worldly life because, if everything were left to the Hereafter, the transgression of the evildoer who does not believe in the afterlife, would be even worse. Meanwhile, the one who believed in the Hereafter would live in the world according to the protocol of faith, and his actions would all be beautiful and in accordance with Allah's way, in contrast to the one who behaved iniquitously in the world. Therefore, punishment must come during this worldly life to those who behave iniquitously in the world. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But verily, for those who are bent on doing evil, there is suffering in store [even] closer at hand than that [supreme suffering in the hereafter]...' (*at-Tur*: 47) That is, they will be punished before the Hereafter. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about the punishment of this world: 'But as for those who are bent on giving the lie to Our messages – We shall bring them low, step by step, without their perceiving how it came about.' (*al-A'raf*: 182)

When you say, 'I led so-and-so on,' (in Arabic *istidraj* which, in the verse above, is translated as 'to bring low step by step') you mean that you worked on him craftily until he admitted what he had done—like what the prosecutor does when he interrogates a criminal, posing questions to him from here and there until he admits his guilt and confesses; this is the meaning of *istidraj* or 'leading'. The word *istidraj* is derived from the word *darj* which means 'step' (something used to go from a low place to a high place or vice-versa). One cannot jump from the ground floor to the fifth floor of a building, that is why they made staircases with ascending steps, which can be traversed by walking in a normal fashion; for example, some of them make every step twelve centimetres high so that everyone can lift their feet and put them on the next

step without exhausting themselves; this means that we ascend or descend the staircase gradually (*bi'l-istidraj*). They say that in the Hereafter, Paradise contains the highest levels (*darajat*), and Hell the lowest.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘But as for those who are bent on giving the lie to Our messages – We shall bring them low, step by step, without their perceiving how it came about.’ (*al-A'raf*: 182) That is, We shall take them step by step giving them blessings and then wearing them out with what they attain, as He *Glorified is He* has said before: ‘... until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – We suddenly took them to task...’ (*al-An'am*: 44). This is because when Allah wants to punish someone, for his crime against his fellow man in this worldly life, He does not take him to task for the very first crime because this would be a light rebuke; but rather, He gives him rein for a while, raises him up, and then lets him fall from high.

‘Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things, until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – We suddenly took them to task...’ (*al-An'am*: 44). In this way, He takes them to task as only *the Almighty*, who determines all things, can.

Furthermore, when a human being leads someone on, the person he leads on also has intelligence, and he sees that he is being plotted against and that a trap is being laid out for him; but when our Lord, the Strong and Almighty, leads on, no one knows how to evade it. The cause for His words, ‘...We shall bring them low, step by step...’ (*al-A'raf*: 182) is found in His words, ‘...without their perceiving how it came about’ (*al-A'raf*: 182) because human beings know the different ways in which they lead one another on.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَأْمَلِي لَهُمْ إِنِّي كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ ﴿١٨٣﴾

**I will give them respite, but My plan is
sure [183] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 183)**

To ‘give rein’ means to delay and postpone; that is, He does not take them to task right away. When the corrupt person commits all kinds of evil in

society, we find that the righteous people increase their righteous deeds, and we always hear people say: 'Were there no such thing as faith, people would consume one another.' Faith imparts a sound role model and certitude. When the evildoing disbeliever is given rein, this is not because the Lord is ignoring him, but rather, it is only a postponement, after which Allah will take him to task, as only *the Almighty*, who determines all things, can. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies: 'If I lead them on step by step and give them rein, know that My subtle scheme is exceedingly firm.' A scheme (*kayd*) means a plot, and a plot means to take someone to task without his perceiving how it came about; a clandestine action which aggrieves the object of the plot.

A plot is a clandestine plan so that its object can have no way of warding it off. If human beings are able to plot and plan things without others being aware of it, how will it be when Allah *Glorified is He* plans a scheme or plot against the disbelievers? Will any of them be able to discover anything about it? Of course, no one will; this is the meaning of '... My subtle scheme is exceedingly firm.' (*al-A'raf*: 183) The word 'firm' (*matin*) means strong from the root word *matn* which means 'back'. We know that the back is composed of the spinal column and vertebrae, which are surrounded by muscles; if the spinal column was only made of bones, any load placed on it would break it. So, the manifestations of our Lord *the Exalted* decreed, and His mercy and power ordained, that these bones be surrounded by two large muscles called trapeziuses which protect and strengthen the back.

If we consider the word *matin*, we find that the word *matn* is used to mean something which is foundational to many things; for example, as part of the Islamic sciences, we study jurisprudence and grammar, and we utilise what are called 'primers' meaning short texts which summarise the subject using few words which intelligent students memorise entirely. The Arabic word for this 'primer' is *matn*. Usually, you will find that this *matn* will be accompanied by an interlinear commentary, and then there will also be a marginal commentary.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَلَمْ يَنْفَكُوا مَا بَصَّاحِهِمْ مِنْ جَنَّةٍ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٨٤﴾

**Has it not occurred to them that their companion
is not mad but is giving clear warning? [184]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 184)**

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* encourages all mankind to reflect on the matter of the Messenger who was sent to tell mankind what the Higher Power wanted from them. The first thing that we should think about is to determine whether this man, who claims to be a messenger, is truthful or untruthful. The truthfulness of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was confirmed before the message was ever sent down to him, and the message came to take hold of man's hand and lead him to faith in Allah. However, they did not want to listen; they had to invent justifications for their refusal to follow Allah's way, so some of them accused the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a madman, and others said that he was a sorcerer, a soothsayer or a poet; our Lord answered all of those vain claims.

You might ask: what is a madman (*majnun*)? We know that a madman is someone who has lost his ability to think rationally and choose between alternatives; when Allah takes from him this ability to think rationally, he is no longer morally responsible because responsibility requires the ability to choose whether to act or not to act, and the madman does not have the ability to make such judgement.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not hold a man morally responsible until he reaches physical and mental maturity; when he reaches maturity, he comes to have an identity which is independent from his family and parents. This is why we can observe that when a child is young, his parents choose his food and clothing for him; then, when he grows up and becomes a teenager, he rebels and demands to choose what he wants for himself because he has come to have his own identity. Identity, as we know, exists in plants, animals, and men as soon as the individual is able to reproduce, whether this individual is a plant, animal, or man. Yet, if a person has an identity, inasmuch as he is able to reproduce and have children, but he does not possess an intellectual identity and ability to think, he is not held to be morally responsible because he has involuntarily lost his reason.

We know, then, that moral responsibility does not apply to children, the insane, and those who are coerced by someone stronger than them; this is the just requital of the True Lord *Glorified is He*. Thus, we see that moral responsibility is only applied to those whose bodies and minds have matured; in this way, our Lord guards the world with His infinite sustenance.

If the madman is the one who has lost the rational balance to choose between alternatives, how could they say this about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he had lived among them and had never lost his ability to choose rationally between alternatives? Indeed, they knew him as ‘the honest and trustworthy one;’ and even after they had become disbelievers, they used to trust him to look after all their precious belongings; his fine character was intrinsic and constant.

They did Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* an injustice by saying that about him, repeating it non-stop; each one of them laying accusations which had no basis in fact. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* has said to those who laid those claims: ‘Say: ‘I counsel you one thing only: Be [ever conscious of] standing before Allah, whether you are in the company of others or alone; and then bethink yourselves [that] there is no madness in [this prophet,] your fellow man...’ (*Saba*: 46).

That is, every two people should sit together and discuss whether Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sane or insane, whereupon each of them would find, from their personal experience, that Muhammad was the most trustworthy of people, and everyone knew him as ‘the trustworthy one,’ even before the Revelation came to him; it did not make sense that the Revelation would harm him or cause him to lose his balance. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘*Nun*. Consider the pen, and all that they write (Therewith)! [1] You are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman! [2] And, verily, yours shall be a reward never-ending [3] for, behold, you keep indeed to a sublime way of life. [4]’ (*al-Qalam*: 1-4) The Prophet's way of life was sublime because ‘way of life’ (*khuluq*) means the attributes which make a person fit to live in peace in a healthy society; as long as his character and way of life were sound, his standards of judgment must also have been sound.

After that, they said he was a ‘sorcerer.’ We ask these people: why were the leaders of Quraysh not bewitched into believing in his message then? These are all futile arguments; there is no sorcery involved here at all.

‘Has it, then, never occurred to them that there is no madness whatever in [this] their fellow man? He is only a plain warner.’ (*al-A'raf*: 184) The madness which you invoke and with which you slander Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the anathema of all reason and the anathema of all good character; Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a clear warner who came first with glad tidings, but because of your iniquity, you do not deserve glad tidings, but you deserve only warnings. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

أَوَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوا فِي مَلَكُوتِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
 وَأَنْ عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونَ قَدِ اقْتَرَبَ أَجَلُهُمْ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Have they not contemplated the realm of the heavens and earth and all that God created, and that the end of their time might be near? What [other revelation] will they believe in if they do not believe in this? [185] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 185)

In this way, the focus of the dialogue turns from the issue of the Messenger sent to them to lead them by the hand to faith, to the concept of reflection, about which Allah says: ‘Have they, then, never considered [Allah’s] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth...?’ (*al-A'raf*: 185)

To reflect means to use the intellect so that no one can then say that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was a madman because to simply consider the universe, makes a man see that the sky is raised with no supports, the earth is spread out and the air moves according to a precise order. ‘Have they, then, never considered [Allah’s] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth...?’ (*al-A'raf*: 185)

So, above us is the sky, and there is something above the sky; beneath us is the earth, and there is something else beneath the earth; there is also something between the sky and the earth. What we can see in the external world is called the ‘kingdom’ (*mulk*); as for the subtle realm which you cannot reach by solving

mathematical equations, it is called the 'dominion' (*malakut*). Allah *Glorified is He* says about Prophet *Ibrahim* (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'And thus We gave Abraham [his first] insight into [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth...' (*al-An'am*: 75). The word *malakut* (dominion) is an intensive form of the word *mulk* (kingdom), just as *rahabut* means 'great dread' from the word *rahba* (dread); both words have a morphological pattern which adds *-ut* to the root letters to intensify their meaning.

'Have they, then, never considered [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth, and all the things that Allah has created...?' (*al-A'raf*: 185) We can see the sky and the earth clearly, but the greatness and secret do not only lie in the sky and the earth, but rather, there are things which are very minute and so subtle that they cannot be seen with the eye; despite that, they contain the great wisdom of creation. You might see the clock tower of 'Big Ben' in London, perhaps the largest clock in the world, but a skilled human craftsman has made a wristwatch as small as a ring, and we applaud and marvel at the precision of his work and craft. So, what can we say about the Mighty Creator Whose creatures see the heavens and the earth as so magnificent because they are beyond human perception, and Who also created tiny subtle things which you cannot see with your eye such as microbes, or that you can only see with difficulty such as flies and gnats (each one of these creatures possessing all the necessary constituents of their lives). Even those creatures which have no stomach are provided by their Lord with the ability to suck blood directly from other creatures, either by their intelligence or by their instinct, so they rush to eat and fill themselves and have organs which convert this blood into nourishment.

Thus, the magnificence is not only in the creation of the heavens and the earth, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '... and all the things that Allah has created, and [asked themselves] whether, perchance, the end of their own term might already have drawn nigh? In what other tidings, then, will they, after this, believe?' (*al-A'raf*: 185)

That is, from the very first thing which can be called a 'thing', everything is ordained to exist so that if you consider it, you will find the organs which give it life and aid it; some of these creatures possess intrinsic means of perception which even an intelligent person cannot replicate. For example, we

find that the animal that has the wit to flee before an earthquake occurs is the donkey which we accuse of being stupid.

When the intellect reflects on the things which science has discovered in the animal and the ocean worlds, it will realise that faith in the existence of a Wise Creator is inescapable. If the disbelievers refuse to consider the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and the creatures Allah has created which cannot be seen by the naked eye, they should look after their own interest, for it might be that the end of their term has come near.

We know that man is a species that has two forms, male and female; between the two forms, there is an ambiguous sex called 'hermaphrodite.' The sexes are composed of many individuals, each possessing a character, a talent and a purpose; the True Lord *Glorified is He* requires of us: "Beware of belittling something you have done to someone, and beware of exaggerating something you have done *for* someone; you must give the word 'thing' its proper measure" This is why the Sacred Law tells you that when you do a good deed, you must not exaggerate it, but rather say, 'It is of no great consequence;' and if anyone desires to do a bad deed, he must not say, 'And what harm will a single bad deed do to me?', thereby belittling this bad deed. To such a person, we say: no, because the word 'thing' must govern the universe. If you consider this matter, you will find that someone might be physically puny and weak, but have great talent; another person might be physically strong, but have no talent at all. This is because Allah might give the weak person a powerful intellect or great ingenuity or a special talent in a particular field. So, do not look at what is lacking in a person, but rather consider the beautiful qualities which he possesses, which may at first be hidden from you.

'... and [asked themselves] whether, perchance, the end of their own term might already have drawn nigh? In what other tiding, then, will they, after this, believe?' (*al-A'raf*: 185) Why is the nearness of their own term mentioned here? To answer this question, I say that this is something very important because as long as we are individuals belonging to either of the two sexes, or three, and our Lord has told us that we are His vicegerents on earth, we must know that the vicegerent on earth has come to succeed those who

came before him. Our Lord might cause a person to die when he is a month or a year old, or two or five years old because the life span of any person is something which the True Lord Himself has specified and is known to no one else. The final destination of equal beings must be equal; for example, if we ask law school students their goal for studying law, they will say, 'To earn a degree.' Yet, we will find that they are tall or short, black or white, intelligent or slow, strong or weak, and they have nothing in common except that they are all studying law. In the same way, as human beings, we are only equal before death; there are those who die in their mother's womb, those who die as infants, and those who die as youths. Though we differ with respect to what will happen after that, the believer and the disbeliever alike, both see these things happening before them, and neither of them can say, 'No, I will not die.'

Since you will eventually die, look to your own interests so that you are rewarded for what you did in this worldly life instead of being punished for it; it might be that the end of your term is near, and you do not know when the end will come. The fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has made our time of death ambiguous is a way to remind us of that, and ambiguity is the clearest reminder; when our Lord wants to elucidate something as clearly as can be, He makes it ambiguous.

For example, had Allah made an age for death, the matter would have been specific and hopeless; but He *Glorified is He* did not assign death any particular age or cause, spreading it out through all times, so a person could potentially face death at any moment. The coming of death is not dependant on any particular cause; it might have a cause or have no cause at all. Since man can expect death at any time, the sinner must endeavour not to meet death whilst engaged in disobedience to Allah.

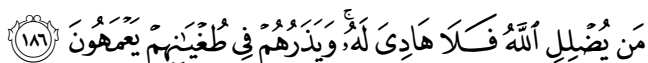
Beware of saying, 'How could so-and-so have died when he was not even ill?' because death has many causes, and among them is death without a cause. The person whom we lose through death has died because his term came to an end. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies: O disbelievers, do you not know that there are those of you who die at the age of one year, or two years, or three years; and there are those who die as evildoers, and those who die as victims of evil; and if there is no other life after this, what will bring equality to this life?

And what is the sin of those who only live for a single month in this worldly life? You must know, therefore, that there is a second destination waiting for you; the individual destinations of men come when their personal terms of life end, and the universal final end is represented by the Day of Resurrection.

When He says ‘...In what other tidings, then, will they, after this, believe?’ (*al-A'raf*: 185), the True Lord *the Exalted* clarifies that since this tidings which He sent down to them contains the miraculous nature and sublime rhetoric and encompasses all kind of perfections, what more than that could they want?

Can they find happiness by following their caprices and making laws for themselves? On the contrary, they will only suffer, and they should have had better etiquette with Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore He *Glorified is He* says:



**No one can guide those God allows to stray: He
 leaves them blundering about in their insolence [186]
 (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 186)**

The True Lord *Glorified is He* repeats this warning many times because if something might be difficult for the mind to understand, or have many applications in life, Allah repeats it so that it is always in the forefront of one's consciousness so that the repetition might be taken in by the listener, whilst he is in an attentive mood. Look at how the True Lord *Glorified is He* enumerates His blessings in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, saying after each blessing: ‘which, then, of your Sustainer powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman*: 13) He repeats the mention of the blessings so that the meaning will stick in the mind of the listener. ‘For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no guide...’ (*al-A'raf*: 186) He *Glorified is He* does not force anyone to follow His guidance; if a man follows guidance, it is for his own good; if he does not follow guidance, he will taste the bitterness of being astray.

We all know that the doctor writes a prescription for the patient so that he will be cured by Allah's leave; therefore, the medicine is a means of regaining health. But if the patient refuses to take the medicine, does this harm the

doctor? No. The same is true for Allah's way of guidance. 'For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no guide...' (*al-A'raf*: 186). But does Allah want anyone to go astray? No, but rather, He *Glorified is He* calls all people to follow His way of guidance, and for those who follow it, He increases them with the guidance of assistance; however, those who choose to go astray are free to disbelieve, if they so wish. This is why the Sacred Law tells us to beware of associating partners with Allah in any deed because our Lord says in a Qudsi Hadith related to us by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who told us that Allah *the Exalted* said: 'I am self-sufficient above any need for a partnership; if anyone offers a work to others alongside Me, I will leave it for those partners of his.' ⁽¹⁾

The meaning of 'partnership', according to human convention, is that a group of people know that their individual work, wealth and talent are not enough to undertake a given project alone, so they get together in partnership to undertake the venture – and does our Lord lack anything so that He would need to get it from anyone else? Glory be to Allah! Rather, the servant's mere inkling that Allah has any partner is enough to make Allah refuse his acts of worship. This is why the Qudsi Hadith says: 'I am self-sufficient above any need for a partnership, and so if anyone offers a work to others alongside Me, I will leave it for those partners of his.' Since Our Lord has refrained from looking after him, this person should expect all kinds of problems befalling him when he least suspects it.

From His words, 'For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no guide,' it becomes clear that, when Allah ordains that a person be guided and another be astray, no human being can second-guess Allah and turn any part of error into guidance or turn any part of guidance into error.

It also becomes clear from this noble verse that if someone has disease in his heart, Allah increases this disease and leaves him blindly stumbling in his evil arrogance; the '*amh* (blindness) meant here is the loss of the heart's insight, whilst '*amy* means the blindness of the eye.

The True Lord *the Most High* says:

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih*

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسِنُهَا قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي لَا يُجِيبُهَا لِوَقْتِهَا
 إِلَّا هُوَ نُفِثَتْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا تَأْتِيكُمْ إِلَّا بَغْتَةً يَسْأَلُونَكَ كَأَنَّكَ
 حَفِيٌّ عَنْهَا قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾

They ask you [Prophet] about the Hour, ‘When will it happen?’ Say, ‘My Lord alone has knowledge of it: He alone will reveal when its time will come, a time that is momentous in both the heavens and earth. All too suddenly it will come upon you.’ They ask you about it as if you were eager [to find out]. Say, ‘God alone has knowledge of [when it will come], though most people do not realize it’ [187] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 187)

The person, to whom this question is posed, is the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the questioners are the Jews, who asked him about the Last Hour, the Spirit and Dhu Al-Qarnayn. The answers he gave the Jews were in line with what the Torah says; they had expected that the answer that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave would only come from his own self without any ordinance, and not from a Lord Who sent it down to him. When he answered them, with the very same information they had in the Torah, they knew that he was not simply inventing things; then, they asked him about the People of the Cave and what happened to them—they were a group of people who lived in the distant past. When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* answered them, they agreed with everything he said except the matter of the duration because the Quran specified the duration with Allah's words: ‘And [some people assert], “They remained in their cave three hundred years;” and some have added nine [to that number].’ (*al-Kahf*: 25) The Jews said, ‘We know three hundred years, but not these nine other years.’ They did not realise that the True Lord *Glorified is He* chronicles the history of the world according to the precise measurements of the universe; our Lord says: ‘Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, [laid down] in Allah’s decree...’ (*at-Tawba*: 36).

So, all true measurements of time are according to the lunar calendar, and we know that, when they want to measure time to an exacting degree, they chronicle

it according to the new moon; for example, all of the measurements taken concerning the ocean are based on the new moon because it is more precise. Furthermore, the new moon is a means of telling us when the month begins which we cannot ascertain from the sun because the sun is a daily indicator of night and day, whilst the moon is an indicator of the months, and the total twelve months is an indicator of the year. But they were not aware of this, and they based their calculation of three hundred years on the solar calendar. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* added, 'and some have added nine,' because three hundred solar years are equal to three hundred and nine lunar years.

The Quran presents the asking of questions as a healthy phenomenon since the purpose of faith is to govern the actions of life with 'Do' and 'Do not do', and when the Sacred Law says 'Do', the action might appear on the surface to be difficult; when it says 'Do not do', the action might appear on the surface to be easy and desirable, whilst refraining from it goes against the desires of the soul. In confirmation that it is a healthy phenomenon for the believers to ask questions, we find that many questions were posed to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by his community which the Quran depicts in many forms: sometimes the question is mentioned in the Arabic present tense, 'They ask you,' and other times it is related in the conditional form, 'If they ask you.' Most often, questions are mentioned in the Arabic present tense, 'They ask you' because it can refer to both the present and the future.

Asking questions was mentioned fifteen times in the present tense in the Quran, and in the conditional form, only once. If you look at those fifteen instances, you will find that in every case they are meant to pronounce a ruling. If we consider the instances of the verb 'to ask' in the order they appear in the Quran, we will find that the Quran says: 'They ask you about the new moons. Say: "They indicate the periods for [various doings of] mankind"...' (*al-Baqara*: 189).

He *Glorified is He* says: 'They ask you as to what they should spend on others. Say: "Whatever of your wealth you spend shall [first] be for your parents, and for the near of kin"...' (*al-Baqara*: 215).

The True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'They question you (O Muhammad) with regard to warfare in the sacred month. Say: "Warfare therein is a great

(transgression), but to turn (men) from the way of Allah, and to disbelieve in Him and in the Inviolable Place of Worship, and to expel His people thence, is a greater with Allah; for persecution is worse than killing.” (*al-Baqara*: 217)

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: “In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man”...’ (*al-Baqara*: 219). In the very same verse, He says: ‘And they ask you as to what they should spend [in Allah’s cause]. Say: “Whatever you can spare.”’ (*al-Baqara*: 219) He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they ask you about [how to deal with] orphans. Say: “To improve their condition is best.”’ (*al-Baqara*: 220)

He *the Exalted* says: ‘They question you (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say: “It is an illness, so let women alone at such times.”’ (*al-Baqara*: 222)

The True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘They ask you as to what is lawful to them. Say: “Lawful to you are all the good things of life.”’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 4)

Then, in the chapter of *al-A’raf*, He says: ‘They ask you [O Prophet] about the Last Hour: “When will it come to pass?” Say: “Verily, knowledge thereof rests with my Sustainer alone”...’ (*al-A’raf*: 187).

He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘They ask you – as if you could gain insight into this [mystery] by dint of persistent inquiry!’ (*al-A’raf*: 187)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘They ask you (O Muhammad) of the spoils of war. Say: “The spoils of war belong to Allah and the messenger”...’ (*al-Anfal*: 1).

The True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘They ask you concerning the Spirit (of inspiration). Say: “The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord”...’ (*al-Isra’*: 85).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they ask you about the Two-Horned One. Say: “I will convey unto you something by which he ought to be remembered.”’ (*al-Kahf*: 83)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘and they will ask you about [what will happen to] the mountains [when this world comes to an end]. Say, then: “My Lord will scatter them far and wide.”’ (*Ta Ha*: 105)

The final mention of these questions comes in His words: ‘they ask you [O Prophet] about the Last Hour: “When will it come to pass?” [42] [But] how could you tell anything about it? [43]’ (*an-Nazi’at*: 42-43)

These are the fifteen verses in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘They ask you,’ there is one single verse in which the True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘And if My servants ask you about Me – behold, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls unto Me...’ (*al-Baqara*: 186).

In the fifteen verses in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic imperfect form, ‘they ask you’, we find that every response is prefixed by ‘Say...’, which is a command to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to say a certain thing. But in the one verse in which the conditional form is used, ‘If (They) ask’, He does not say, ‘Then say: I am near’, but rather, He says, ‘behold, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls...’. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* knows how much Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loves his community and how concerned he is for them; Allah says: ‘Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers.’ (*ash-Shu'ara*: 3)

He also says: ‘Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.’ (*al-Kahf*: 6)

This is why when the True Lord *Glorified is He* saw that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was so deeply concerned for his community; he was eager that Allah would encompass them with His forgiveness and mercy and that he would not disappoint Him concerning them; the Lord *the Most High* informed him that He would give him cause to be pleased about his community. There is a Hadith that confirms this: ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As, *may Allah be pleased with them* both, related that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* recited Allah’s words concerning Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: “For, verily, O my Lord, these [false objects of worship] have led many people astray! Hence, [only] he who follows me [in this my faith] is truly of me; and as for him who disobeys me – You are, verily, much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy!” (*Ibrahim*: 36)

Then, he recited Isa’s (Jesus’s) words: “If thou cause them to suffer – verily, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them – verily, You alone are almighty, truly wise!” (*al-Ma'ida*: 118)

Then, he *peace and blessings be upon him* raised his hands and said, “My community, my community!” and wept. So, Allah *Exalted is He* said, “Jibril (Gabriel), go to Muhammad – and your Lord knows best – and ask him why he weeps.” So, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* went to him, and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* told him what he had said – and He knew best – The Almighty said, ‘O Gabriel, go to Muhammad and say, “I shall give you cause to be pleased for your community, and shall not disappoint you.”’⁽¹⁾

In confirmation of the True Lord’s knowledge of the Prophet’s concern for his community, He wanted to honour this community in the same way that He had honoured the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* so He addressed them directly in the verse of supplication without preceding it with ‘Say’: ‘And if My servants ask you about Me – behold, I am near...’ (*al-Baqara*: 186).

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make it clear to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his community that Allah not only knows what you ask about, but He also knows what you will ask about in the future. This is why there are fourteen verses in which it is said ‘They ask you’ to which the answer is ‘Say’ (*qul*), and then in the fifteenth verse (*Ta Ha*: 105), we have ‘they will ask you’ – the form in Arabic in both instances is (*yas’alunak*) which can mean both ‘they ask you’ and ‘they will ask you’, but we know that in this case, the future tense is meant because the response is ‘Say, then’ (*faqul*), with the particle (*fa*) ‘then’ added to the imperative verb ‘say’ to indicate that the question had not yet been asked; it is as though the word ‘then’ indicates an implied conditional which can be interpreted as: ‘When they ask you about this, say, “My Lord will scatter them far and wide.”’ (*Ta Ha*: 105)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘They ask you [O Prophet] about the Last Hour: “When will it come to pass?” Say: “Verily, knowledge thereof rests with my Lord alone. None but He will reveal it in its time. Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; [and] it will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden.” They ask you – as if you could gain insight into this [mystery] by dint of persistent inquiry! Say: “Knowledge thereof rests with Allah alone; but [of this] most people are unaware.”’ (*al-A’raf*: 187)

(1) Narrated by Muslim

To 'reveal' (*yujalli*) means to make plain; in Arabic, we have what is called *jalwa* and *khalwa*: *jalwa* means for a person to show himself to the people, and (*khalwa*) means for him to withdraw himself from the people. Hence, 'None but He will reveal it' (*yujalliha*) means 'None but He will make it plain.' Notice that the phrase 'in its time' (*liwaqtiha*), the word for 'time' (*waqt*) is preceded by the Arabic particle *li* which usually means 'to' or 'for'—in Arabic linguistics, this is called 'the *li* of time.' For example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Be constant in [your] prayer from the time when the sun has passed its zenith...' (*al-Isra'*: 78). Here, the particle *li* is used before 'the time when the sun has passed its zenith' to mean 'at'; that is, 'at the time when the sun passes the halfway point of the sky and begins to incline to the west.' His words, '...None but He will reveal it in its time...' (*al-A'raf*: 187) mean that no one will make it plain at its appointed time except He *Glorified is He*.

'... Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; [and] it will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden...' (*al-A'raf*: 187). 'Heavy' means that the weight of something is greater than the strength which bears it because if the load is equal to the strength which bears it, it is not heavy.

It can also be that the strength which bears it cannot compete with the earth's gravitational pull, therefore the object is heavy. This heaviness might be physical such as if a man carries a measure of wheat on his back and is able to lift it, but if you add another half-measure it will weigh heavily on his back because his strength will not be able to bear this weight, and he will fall under its weight.

'...Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth...' (*al-A'raf*: 187). Heaviness is not only physical, but it can also be mental and intellectual such as when a student solves an exercise in geometry or algebra: sometimes, the student feels that these exercises are heavy on his mind and difficult to solve.

Also, something might be heavy for the soul and its faculties such as intense worry which is oppressive and heavy on the heart; this is the most intense form of heaviness, which is the why a poet of yore said:

A burden is not what tests the back;

A burden is what the heart must bear.

Hence, there are three kinds of heaviness: physical heaviness, mental heaviness and psychological heaviness.

‘... Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth...’ (*al-A'raf*: 187). We know that the heavens contain the angels and that the angels, too, do not know when the Last Hour will come; no one even tries to know it except man because of his passion for thinking; as for the angels, they are not morally responsible because they have no free will. Some of the angels serve mankind, and those are the ones who prostrated to Adam *peace be upon him*; they are entrusted with looking after his best interests and his life; they yielded to Allah’s decree that there would be a new master in the universe, so they were subdued to serve him. Those protect the angels and the noble scribes, and they were created with certain tendencies towards mankind: they tend to hate the disobedient and to love the obedient. They rejoice in those human beings who follow Allah’s way of guidance; if an obedient person should slip and commit sin, they feel sorry for him and hope that he will not do so again. As for those who follow the opposite of Allah’s way of guidance, the angels are angry with them. Abu Hurayra Allah *be pleased with him* related that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, said: ‘Not a day goes by save that when the servants awaken, two angels descend and one says, “O Allah, give those who spend (in Your cause) remuneration”, and the other says, “O Allah, give those who withhold (from spending in Your cause) loss!”’⁽¹⁾

We know that those who spend in Allah’s Cause will be rewarded for their spending; as for those who withhold, if their money is lost, and they bear this trial patiently, they will also be rewarded for that. Thus, the angels do pray for us.

The phrase, ‘Heavily will it weigh,’ here means that no one knows when the Last Hour will come except our Lord; this date is neither known to those who dwell in the heavens, nor to those who dwell on earth; everyone on earth is afraid of what will happen when the Last Hour comes, especially since the Chosen Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us a clear image to explain what the True Lord’s words, ‘... it will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden.’ (*al-A'raf*: 187)

(1) Narrated by Ad-Daraqatni in *As-Sunnan*

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* told us what the condition will be when the Last Hour comes when he said: ‘The Hour will beset the people whilst a man repairs his basin, and a man waters his livestock, and a man sets out his wares in the marketplace, and a man lowers and raises his scales.’⁽¹⁾ Such prophecies arouse fear in men.

The words of our True Lord ‘... Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; [and] it will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden...’ (*al-A'raf*: 187) mean that what happens on this day will be beyond the expectations of any man, and it will come all of a sudden, that is, it will come without any opportunity to psychologically prepare for it.

He *Glorified is He* continues: ‘...They ask you – as if you could gain insight into this [mystery] by dint of persistent inquiry!’ (*al-A'raf*: 187) The word *hafey* means to keep on incessantly requesting something such as the pupil who does not understand something he is studying, so he keeps on asking this person and that person until he gets an answer.

The person who persistently asks about something is thereby trying to attain knowledge of it; he also knows exactly what he is asking about, and this knowledge comes from the fact that he asks about it so incessantly.

A person either deals with something by remaining where he is—such as the case with intellectual or physical matters which are linked to a particular place—or he might want to deal with something far from him so that he has to cover the distance to the place where it is to be able to investigate it. Thus, he has to go and walk there, and the soles of his shoes get worn by all the walking until he is said to be ‘barefoot’ (*hafey*); this is why the verb *hafiya* has come to mean, ‘to inquire persistently after something’ because when the person who does this walks such large distances, his shoes get worn, so he has to walk barefoot. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about such people: ‘... as if you could gain insight into this [mystery] by dint of persistent inquiry ...’ (*al-A'raf*: 187). That is, as though you are concerned with it; as though you are always asking about it; as though you have knowledge of it.

(1) Related by Sa‘id on the authority of *Qutada*

Then, the response comes from the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘... Say: “Knowledge thereof rests with Allah alone”...’ (*al-A’raf*: 187). In the same verse, He has already said: ‘... Verily, knowledge thereof rests with my Lord alone...’ (*al-A’raf*: 187).

Lordship is connected to mankind and the care which Allah takes to sustain their best interests; Godhood is connected to worship and the implementation of Allah’s way. In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* first mentions Lordship and then Godhood; the former is the cause of the latter—you have chosen to worship Allah and obey Him because He created you and gave you His way of guidance; He does not disdain, out of His munificent Lordship, to offer everything to His righteous servant in addition to blessings; and also, to give anything to the disbeliever, who utilises the means to attain it; yet, without blessings and without any reward in this life or the next—therefore, He is the True Allah, whose guidance we follow.

‘Say, "Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him.”’ (*al-A’raf*: 187)

Most of the people who ask about the time of the Last Hour are not aware that our Lord has concealed it. He *the Exalted* says: ‘Indeed, the Hour is coming - I almost conceal it - so that every soul may be recompensed according to that for which it strives.’ (*Ta Ha*: 15) So, they are not aware that Allah has the [exclusive] knowledge of it. He then says:

قُلْ لَا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبِ
 لَأَسْتَكْبَرْتُ مِنْ الْخَيْرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوءُ إِنْ أَنَا إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Say [Prophet], ‘I have no control over benefit or harm, [even] to myself, except as God may please: if I had knowledge of what is hidden, I would have abundant good things and no harm could touch me. I am no more than a bearer of warning, and good news to those who believe’ [188] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 188)

The True Lord *the Exalted and Glorified* says, on the tongue of Prophet Muhammad: ‘You [Non-Muslims] ask me about the Last Hour, yet I am a human being who only tells what Allah tells him. The message comes to me

with a message from Allah, and I convey it. I have no knowledge of when the Last Hour will be, and I have no control over harm or benefit. I can neither avert harm from myself, nor bring myself any benefit.' Rather, when Allah sends forth benefit or withholds harm, every man has what Allah gives him. When the intelligent person attains something, he says: 'this possession is only accidental, and I cannot be sure it will not be taken from me.' Therefore, the True Lord, *Glorified and Exalted*, says: 'Say, "O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honor whom You will and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is [all] good. Indeed, You are over all things competent.'" (*Al-Imran*: 26)

And here, the True Lord says: 'Say, "I hold not for myself [the power of] benefit or harm, except what Allah has willed.'" That is, no one can attain anything unless Allah wills for him to attain it, and the Prophet Muhammad was a human being. He adds: 'And if I knew the unseen, I could have acquired much wealth, and no harm would have touched me.'

Had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* known the unseen, he would have had abundant good fortune, but he *peace and blessings be upon him* never knew the unseen except for certain matters which were revealed to him by Allah *the Almighty*; a point which is proved by the fact that he sometimes was victorious in his wars against the disbelievers, while other times his army were defeated by them. That is to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was a mere human being, but with the main difference that he was supported and guided by Divine Revelation. In this regard, we stress that some people may have had better knowledge of a technical skill in a worldly affair than him *peace and blessings be upon him*. For these reasons, he *peace and blessings be upon him* clearly states, as mentioned in the Quran, that he does not have the knowledge of the unseen. It is historically narrated that his relatives in Quraysh used to ask him to tell them the time of the Hour (Resurrection Day) for them to prepare for it, but he did not tell them anything for he himself knew nothing about it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'and no harm could have touched me. I am not anything but a warner and a bearer of good news to those who believe' (*al-A'raf*: 188).

As for the Arabic particle 'in' (not), it has various uses and indications; it may be used as a conditional particle and hence give the meaning of 'if'; people say, 'If you study hard, you will succeed'. It may also be used, when followed by a noun, to indicate negation. As such, the meaning of this particular part of the verse under discussion is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is only a warner and a herald of glad tidings to those who believe. In this part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* addresses the believers because they are the ones who receive benefit from the warnings and glad tidings. That is because they abstain from what they are warned against and at the same time firmly adhere to the Divine Way of guidance given to them.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ
إِلَيْهَا فَلَمَّا تَغَشَّاهَا حَمَلَتْ حَمْلًا خَفِيفًا فَمَرَّتَ بِهِ فَلَمَّا أَثْقَلَتْ
دَعَا اللَّهَ رَبَّهُمَا لَئِنْ آتَيْتَنَا صَالِحًا لَنُكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١٨٩﴾

It is He who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate so that he might find comfort in her: when one [of them] lies with his wife and she conceives a light burden, going about freely, then grows heavy, they both pray to God, their Lord, 'If You give us a good child we shall certainly be grateful' [189] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 189)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'It is He who created you all from one soul...' refers to Adam *peace be upon him*, whilst His saying: '...and from it made its mate...' refers to Eve. Careful reflection on this verse under discussion clearly indicates that the pronoun refers mainly to the woman. Yet, He *the Almighty* mentions that man is the one who finds comfort in his wife. Here, we should take into account that a woman cannot be viewed as a place of rest for the man unless the latter works hard and exerts a lot of effort in his daily life. As a matter of fact, it is after this that man can resort to his wife to enjoy her affection, love, and compassion. Yet, if she does not provide him with such tranquillity, he prefers to stay out of the house most of the day.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'and from it made its mate', it stresses the undeniable fact that Adam was created from clay and mud and then Allah

Glorified is He breathed the spirit into him. As for Eve, this particular part of the verse tells that she has been created out of Adam. That is to say that she was a part of him *peace be upon him*. Some scholars yet opine that Eve was created from a curved rib of Adam. In fact, they hold this position because Allah *Glorified is He* they believe wants both man and woman to be physically connected to one another. Similarly, each of us loves our sons as they are a part of us. Therefore, this saying that Eve was made from a rib of Adam indicates that they both should show mercy, compassion, and affection towards each other.

Here arises an important question some people might ask, ‘Why was the name of Eve not mentioned in the Quran, although she was created in the same way as Adam?’ The answer to this question may be clear because of the fact that Adam *peace be upon him* was the first human being ever to be created. In addition, he was a Messenger to whom Allah *the Almighty* ordered the angels to bow down. Furthermore, we know for certain that all the affairs of women are naturally built on concealment, which is why we, the Egyptians, prefer not to call women by their given names, but rather, we call them by their appellations instead.

Back to Allah’s saying: ‘and from it made’; we may have two possible explanations for the Arabic particle ‘*min*’ (translated here as ‘from’); it may give the meaning that Eve was created from a curved rib of Adam; it may also give the meaning that she was created in the same way Adam was created, and thus it is linguistically judged as an ‘explanatory’ preposition. Let us offer a striking example to fully clarify the meaning of the explanatory particles. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: ‘He it is Who raised among the inhabitants of Mecca a Messenger from among themselves...’ (*al-Jumu’a*: 2). This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a mere human being for people to be able to deal with him normally when he delivers the Divine Message to them. We previously explained that the deniers of the Truth had rejected the Message of Prophet Muhammad on grounds that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was nothing but a mere mortal Messenger. In the Quran, Allah says: ‘and nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said, “What! Has Allah raised up a mortal to be a Messenger? (*al-Isra*’: 94) That is why Allah *Glorified is He*

refutes their allegation, saying: ‘Say, “Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, we would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as a Messenger”’ (*al-Isra*: 95). In the same vein, let us assume that Allah had already sent down an angel as a Messenger, how could they then be able to see him in his original nature?! That is why the Messenger sent to them must have been from among themselves.

Further to this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...when one [of them] covers (*taghashshaha*) her (his wife), she conceives a light burden....’ The phrase ‘when one [of them] lie with his wife’ is a refined way of expressing sexual intercourse between a man and his wife. As for the Arabic word ‘*ghisha*’ (which comes from ‘*taghashshaha*’), it means a ‘cover’. Here, we should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* has allowed man to have lawful sex with women so that people will reproduce and give birth to many men and women. The meaning of this particular part of the verse is that she bears the embryo for a while without realising she is pregnant because the embryo develops little by little to the extent that mothers might not feel it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...carries it about [unnoticed]. When she grows heavy, they both pray to Allah their Lord [saying], “If you give us a good child, we shall certainly be grateful”’ (*al-A’raf*: 189). That is to say that the woman, due to the fact that she does not realise that she has become pregnant, normally continues her daily life’s activities, as usual until she becomes fully aware she is pregnant when her pregnancy grows heavy in the final months of its term. At this point, the husband also becomes aware that his wife is pregnant, and therefore they both invoke Allah *Glorified is He* to grant them a child who is free from any physical disabilities and who is also able to firmly adhere to the Divine Way of guidance.

As such, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...It is He Who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate so that he might find comfort in her...’ indicates males have due roles to perform in life and so have females. It also tells us that man, being exposed to the pressure of daily life, inclines to his wife to get comfort from her. Here, we should take into account the fact that even though this verse under discussion refers mainly to both Adam and Eve, it is also applicable to their offspring. We know for certain that Eve used

to give birth to one male and one female each time, and as a result they are the origin of the human race.

Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that even though the Quran might shed light on topics that are seemingly unrelated, each one of these different topics are written in a special way, each one teaching its own important and useful lessons. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He it is Who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships and they sail with them with a pleasant breeze and they rejoice, a violent wind overtakes them and the waves surge on them from all sides, and they become certain that they are encompassed....’ (*Yunus*: 22)

In this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Yunus*, He *the Almighty* does not tell the story of air, but rather, He mentions land and sea and then begins to speak about the coming of death. In the same vein, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And we have enjoined on man kindness to his parents...’ (*al-Ahqaf*: 15), that is, He orders children to do good to their parents, i.e. the father and the mother. Then He *Glorified is He* continues: ‘With trouble did his mother bear him and with trouble did she bring him forth; and the bearing of him and the weaning of him is thirty months...’ (*al-Ahqaf*: 15). That is to say that He *the Almighty* moves to explain in detail the matter about the mother, without giving any further mention of the father.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

فَلَمَّا ءَاتَتْهُمَا صَالِحًا جَعَلَا لَهُ شُرَكَاءَ فِيمَا
ءَاتَتْهُمَا فَتَعَلَّىٰ اللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿١٩٠﴾

**And yet when He gives them a good child they
ascribe some of what He has granted them to others
God is far above the partners they set up alongside
with him! [190] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 190)**

It is related that this verse under discussion has been revealed concerning one of Prophet Muhammad’s forefathers named Qusay, who is said to have asked Allah *the Almighty* to grant him good and righteous children; yet when He *Glorified is He* answered his call and gave him what he wanted, this man

gave them names indicating their slavery to idols, such as 'Abd Manaf, 'Abdud-Dar, 'Abd Al-'Uzza, etc. That is to say that he, i.e. Qusay, ascribed partners to Allah *the Almighty* when naming (his children), a point which is deduced from Allah's saying: '...they ascribe some of what He has granted them to others....' (*al-An'am*: 190) At that point, we stress that one, when in distress, resorts first and foremost to Allah *Glorified is He* to remove harm from him/her; yet when He *the Almighty* does so, the person is given to arrogance and forgets Allah's favour upon him/her. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And when affliction touches a man, he calls on Us, whether lying on his side, sitting or standing; but when We remove his affliction from him, he passes on as though he had never called on Us on account of an affliction that had touched him....' (*Yunus*: 12)

Consequently, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* inflicts harm upon us for us to turn and resort to Him *Glorified is He* to complain of our grief and sorrow to Him *the Almighty*. Here, we should take into account that a person offers acts of worship to Allah *the Almighty* in the best way while in distress and illness, which is why patients due to the fact they are showered with the Mercy of Allah, should seize this opportunity to ask Allah *the Almighty* of His Grace and Bounty. We have actually deduced this point from the supplication of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said, 'O Allah, to you do I complain of my weakness, my helplessness, and the disregard of people towards me. O Most Merciful of the merciful. You are the Lord of the oppressed, and you are My Lord. To whom do You entrust me? Is it to a stranger who would frown on me? Or is it to an enemy to whom You have given mastery over me? If you are not angry with me, then I do not care. But Your Protection is all embracing, enough to cover me as well. I seek refuge in the Light of Your Face whereby all darkness are illuminated, and the affairs of this worldly life and the Hereafter are set right, lest You should send down upon me Your Anger or Your Wrath should befall me. Yet it is Your Right alone to blame until You are Contented, and there is neither power nor might except Yours'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Ibn Hisham

As a matter of fact, when man suffers illness, s/he fully realises that this illness entails a great blessing; for it undoubtedly makes her/him remember Allah *the Almighty* all the time. In addition, her/his worldly lusts and desires will for sure be replaced with positive energy which, in turn, enables one to attain higher spiritual ranks. At that point, we can quote the following Qudsi Hadith in which Allah is related as saying, ‘Allah *Glorified is He* will say on the Day of Resurrection, “O son of Adam, I fell ill and you visited Me not”. He (man) will say, “O Lord, and how should I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds?” He will say, “Did you not know that My slave so-and-so had fallen ill and you visited him not? Did you not know that had you visited him you will have found Me with him? O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you fed Me not”. He will say, “O Lord, and how should I feed You when You are the Lord of the worlds?” He will say, “Did you not know that My slave so-and-so asked you for food and you fed him not? Did you not know that had you fed him you will surely have found that (the reward for doing so) with Me? O son of Adam, I asked you to give Me to drink and you gave Me not to drink”. He will say, “O Lord, how should I give You to drink when You are the Lord of the worlds?” He will say, “My slave so-and-so asked you to give him to drink and you gave him not to drink. Had you given him to drink you will have surely found that with Me.’⁽¹⁾ As such, it is crystal clear that patients enjoy lasting blessings, for they are all the time in the Presence of Allah *the Almighty*. Yet, when they recover, they enjoy the blessing of good health.

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And yet when He gives them a good child they ascribe some of what He has granted them to others. Allah is far above the partners they ascribe to Him!’ (*al-A'raf*: 190) This plainly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* says He never ever has any partner with Him that should be worshipped; an unshakeable fact which is yet proved by the following verse in which He *Glorified is He* says:

= From the proofreader: This Hadith is weak due to a weakness in the chain of narrators. Ruling given by: Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Ifta', Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

أَيْشِرْكُونَ مَا لَا يَخْلُقُ شَيْئًا وَهُمْ يُخْلَقُونَ ﴿١٩١﴾

**How can they set up with Him these partners that
create nothing and are themselves created [191]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 191)**

In this particular verse under discussion, He *Glorified is He* mocks at those polytheists who associate creatures, like themselves, with Him *Glorified is He* in worship, although He *the Almighty* is the One Who created them all. It thus goes without saying that those polytheists have neglected their intellect, which is why they have fallen prey to their illusion. In the same vein, there is another verse in the Quran in which Allah *Glorified is He* fully exposes the falsehood of those polytheists; He *the Almighty* says: ‘O people! A parable is set forth, therefore listen to it: surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create [even] a fly, though they all may gather for it (that purpose).’ (*al-Hajj*: 73)

We know for certain that today’s modern science is still unable to create a single cell. In this aforementioned verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells us clearly that we, human beings, are still unable to even take back from the fly that which it snatches from our food with its proboscis. That is to say, so weak are the seeker, i.e. man, and the sought, i.e. the fly.

We previously explained that Allah *the Almighty* created the universe due to His Unlimited Power; hence, how could those polytheists worship those idols with Allah *the Almighty* even though they themselves have admitted that they, i.e. the idols, are unable to create anything?! Yes, it is absolutely true; they do not create anything whatsoever—a point which is definitively proved by the fact that they do not reproduce. That is why when those polytheists wanted to add another idol, they made and created it themselves. In this regard, we should take into account that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...How can they associate [others] with Him...’ indicates exclamation; that is, He *Glorified is He* strongly denounces their act of polytheism, which is against man’s natural disposition. This style under discussion is strikingly similar to Allah’s saying in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which He *the Almighty* says: ‘How do you deny Allah...?’ (*al-Baqara*: 28) In this particular part of

the verse, Allah *the Almighty* mocks at the disbelievers, asking them how they could deny His Existence in spite of the fact that His signs and miracles were crystal clear to them?! That is to say that this act of disbelief causes surprise and strong denial. As a matter of fact, when Allah *Glorified is He* strongly denies something, we find Him *the Almighty* sometimes directing His speech to the believers, while other times directing it to the non-believers, a point which is crystal clear in this particular verse under discussion. Allah *the Almighty* by virtue of this verse wants to highlight two important points, namely; first, He *Glorified is He* wants to deny what the polytheists do of setting up others with Him in worship; second, He *the Almighty* wants to promote the self-confidence of the believers and to make them rejoice with their steadfast belief, since they did not act like the disbelievers.


Here arises a misconception concerning the Arabic rhetorical style of this verse; some people, due to their improper understanding of the rules of Arabic language, might ask, 'How could Allah *the Almighty* use a singular verb (literally 'does not create') in this particular context in which He *Glorified is He* directs His speech to a group?!' To those people, we say, 'You have come to this misconception because you have an improper understanding of the rules of Arabic Language. According to the rules of Arabic grammar, the relative pronouns 'ma', 'man' and 'al' all of which giving the meaning of 'that', can be used to refer to the singular, dual and plural forms of both masculine and feminine nouns.

As such, it is clear that even though the relative pronoun 'ma' in this verse is used with a verb indicting singular (literally 'does not create'), it refers to a plural noun (i.e. those in the phrase 'those that do not create'); a point which is proved by the fact that He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with a pronoun indicting the plural form.

Let us offer another example to fully clarify this point; Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *Muhammad*: 'And there are those of them who seek (literally 'one of them who seeks') to listen to you, until when they go forth from you...' (*Muhammad*: 16). In this verse, we notice that He *the Almighty* uses a verb (seek) clearly indicating a singular noun (literally 'one seeks') even though He *Glorified is He* speaks about the group of the disbelievers; yet

we stress that the Arabic style in this context is absolutely true, for this particular verb has been preceded with the relative pronoun, i.e. 'man' (who) which can be used to refer to the singular, dual and plural forms of both masculine and feminine nouns.

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'How can they associate with Him those that do not create anything and they are [themselves] created...' (*al-A'raf*: 191). We notice that there is a very important subtle rhetorical usage in this verse; Allah *the Almighty* uses the Arabic subject pronoun 'hum' (they) to refer to the idols which are inanimate, although this particular pronoun is used mainly to refer to mankind! Here, we stress that Allah *the Almighty* out of the fact that He knew that those disbelievers believed that idols could bring them benefit and harm, spoke with them in the same way they believed to take them step by step to the firm denial of their mistaken belief. That is why He *the Almighty* told them first that these idols are unable to create anything whatsoever. Then He *Glorified is He* told them that idols are actually created and thus are unable to give them any help. That is to say that they are utterly useless; for they, first, are unable to create anything, and they, second, are created. Having shown that idols are in no way able to do anything, He *the Almighty* moved to another level of interrogation by asking the disbelievers whether or not these idols are capable of helping them; a point which is perfectly clear in the following verse in which He *the Almighty* says:


 وَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ لَهُمْ نَصْرًا وَلَا أَنْفُسُهُمْ يَنْصُرُونَ

That cannot help them at all, or even help themselves? [192] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 192)

This verse clearly indicates that none of the idols is able to succour itself, let alone provide succour to others. Thus, we find that the discourse has developed to include four points: first of all, they, i.e. idols, cannot create anything; secondly, they are themselves created; thirdly, they cannot succour the disbelievers; and fourthly, they cannot succour themselves. Then, He *Glorified is He* highlights the fifth point, which is recorded in His saying.

وَإِنْ تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ لَا يَتَّبِعُوكُمْ سِوَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ أَدَعَوْتُمُوهُمْ أَمْ أَنْتُمْ صُمُوتُونَ ﴿١٩٣﴾

If you [believers] call such people to guidance, they do not follow you: it makes no difference whether you call them or remain silent [193] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 193)

In this way, Allah has developed the discussion to include five points, which I will repeat them to remain firm in your mind: first of all, they cannot create anything; secondly, they are themselves created; thirdly, they cannot succour the disbelievers; fourthly, they cannot succour themselves; and fifthly, they do not accept the guidance you call them to.

It is historically recorded that the polytheists of Mecca, when in distress, used to seek the help of their idols, such as Hubal, al-Lat and al-'Uzza; yet if they were not touched with any harm, they would not call these idols at all, which is why Allah tells them through revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'If you call them (the idols) to guidance, they will not follow you: it makes no difference whether you call them or you are silent' (*al-A'raf*: 193). That is, your calling these idols will make no difference; it will be exactly as if you are totally silent (as they cannot hear).

Careful reflection upon the Arabic style of this verse under discussion shows clearly that Allah *the Almighty* uses the Arabic noun '*samitun*' (translated here as 'you are silent'), that is, He does not say the verb '*samattum*' (you remained silent) in the same way He does with the verb '*da'wtumuhum*' (you call them). Here, we stress that the use of nouns, according to the Arabic grammar, indicates stability and constancy of the action, unlike the verb which indicates the renewal of the action. Based on this, we can say that this verse tells us clearly that the disbelievers used to seek the help of their idols only during times of hardships; that is, most of the time they did not mention them in the least. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* rebukes the polytheists and says to them, 'Whether or not you call these idols, their failure to respond to you is assured and guaranteed, and so is their inability to succour themselves or anyone else'.

He *the Almighty* then moves to cast light on another topic; He says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ عِبَادٌ أَمْثَلُكُمْ فَادْعُوهُمْ
 فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

Those you [idolaters] call upon instead of God are created beings like you. Call upon them, then, and let them respond to you if what you say is true [194] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 194)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘... you call ...’ has two possible interpretations, as follows: it may give the meaning that the polytheists have worshipped idols instead of Allah, or that they called them, i.e. they asked them for things; both meanings can be understood from this verse in question.

Here arises a good question, which is ‘How could Allah *the Almighty* use the word ‘*ibad*’ (translated here as ‘created beings’) to refer to the idols although this word is used mainly with living human beings?!’ As a matter of fact, there are two possible explanations for this point; first of all, the word may be understood in the light of its most usual meaning; second, it may be understood in the light of its linguistic root, which gives the meaning of humiliation; a point which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And is it a favour of which you remind me that you have enslaved (‘*abbadta*) the children of Israel?’ (*ash-Shu'ara*: 22) That is to say that Pharaoh had humiliated and enslaved (‘*abbadta*’ which has the same root as ‘*ibad*’) the people of Moses *peace be upon him*. If we understand the verse in question in the light of the latter explanation, we will reach the meaning that idols are also humiliated and enslaved; a point which is affirmed by the fact that whenever they because of heavy rain or strong wind, were destroyed, the polytheists, idols worshipers, rushed to find someone to repair these so-called ‘gods’ for them! In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* tells the polytheists that they, because of the fact that they are creatures of Allah *Glorified is He* Who gave them some strength, they are able to ward off harm if it touches them. As for the idols, they are completely powerless to ward off harm from themselves, and thus they are even weaker than you are. For this reason, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘... (idols) are created beings like you...’ is attributing more to the idols than they deserve. This is because it is now perfectly clear that idols are totally unable to defend themselves, a point

which is completely different for man who is able to ward off harm from him/herself if this harm is not stronger than him/her. Therefore, it is crystal clear that the word ‘*ibad*’ (created beings) is used to refer, in general, to all that which is subdued and enslaved (to Allah *the Almighty*).

Concerning this point, we should be fully aware of the fact that man is allowed to do particular things because of her/his free will, while there are other things over which this free will has no power, that is, the person is compelled to do these acts. For example, the disbeliever has the free will to choose whether to believe or not, yet s/he chooses disbelief. The believer, on the other hand, has the free will to choose whether to obey or disobey. But there are other things which happen to a man over which s/he has no free will, such as sickness and death. It is taken for granted that a person cannot choose whether to become ill or not. In addition, no one can reject death when it comes to take the soul away. Similarly, a person’s property may be ruined while s/he is unable to do anything. All of these examples fall under the category of compulsion, i.e. matters over which man has no will to decide, but rather, s/he is humbled and subdued, believer and disbeliever alike.

Here, clearly and strongly, emerges the benefit of belief, for the believer, by firmly adhering to the Divine way of guidance, subdues his/her free will to the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* and thus is different from the disbeliever. That is to say the believer is equal to all the other creatures that have no free will. Therefore, we say to the disbelievers, ‘You, O disbelievers, have denied the Truth and refused to have faith by means of the free will implanted in you and about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...so whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve...’ (*al-Kahf*: 29). Consequently, as long as each one of you, O disbelievers, stubbornly refuses to obey the commands of Allah, why do you not reject illness when it comes to afflict you. As a matter of fact, there is not one disbeliever who can do this since the disbeliever only disbelieves in that particular area which is subject to his/her free will, but otherwise they are subdued like all other creatures.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Call upon them...’ it means ‘ask them, i.e. idols, to fulfil any request for you’. Yet He *the Almighty* clearly tells us that these idols, out of their total inability, will not respond to you in

any way or another. As a matter of fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...Then, and let them respond to you...’ is viewed as posing a challenge to the idol-worshippers. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* is saying to them, ‘Even though you, O disbelievers, call upon the idols to fulfil your wishes, they, by their very nature, will be unable to do anything for you’.

Having stated that idols are nothing but created beings, like man, Allah *Glorified is He* will state that they are of a lower rank than human beings. In this regard, He says:

أَلَمْ أَرْجُلٌ يَمْشُونَ بِهَا أَمْ لَهُمْ أَيْدٍ يَبْطِشُونَ بِهَا أَمْ لَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ يُبْصِرُونَ
بِهَا أَمْ لَهُمْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا قُلْ ادْعُوا شُرَكَاءَكُمْ ثُمَّ كِيدُوا فَلَا تُنظِرُونَ ﴿١٩٥﴾

**Do they have feet to walk, hands to strike, eyes to see,
or ears to hear? Say [Prophet], ‘Call on your
“partners”! Scheme against me! Do not spare me! [195]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 195)**

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* wants to drive the attention of the disbelievers to a very important point which is they have feet upon which they can walk, hands with which they can strike, ears with which they can hear and eyes with which they can see, yet the idols they worship instead of Allah have none of these senses at all, and hence they are of a lower rank than man. Here arises the most important question, which is, ‘As long as these idols are of a lower rank than you, O idol-worshippers, how could you worship them instead of Allah *the Almighty*?!’ This is for sure the epitome of failure.

As for the cause of revelation of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Do they have feet by which they walk, hands by which they strike, eyes by which they see, or ears by which they hear?’ (*al-A’raf*: 195) It has been narrated that the idolaters sculpted idols with two feet, two ears, and two eyes. In addition, they used to set pearls in the places of the eyes so that they looked like the whites of eyes. As such, when one of them, i.e. the idolaters, looked at the idol, it seemed to him/her that it was looking towards him/her. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...and you see them looking towards you, yet they do not see.’ (*al-A’raf*: 198)

Back to the verse in question, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* puts this fact in the form of question. We may ask why? It is because He *Glorified is He* wants to definitively prove the falsehood of the polytheists. It is taken for granted that questions must have answers. Here, we stress that if Allah *the Almighty* phrased this verse under discussion in the form of a statement, the disbelievers, on their part, might or might not believe it; yet, when they themselves are the ones who give an answer to this question, their answer will certainly serve as a concrete proof against them, for they will confess that idols can in no way walk, or touch, or see or even hear. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* wants the disbelievers to confess this undeniable fact themselves. We have many examples like this in the Quran; in the chapter of *ash-Sharh*, Allah *the Almighty* asks Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Have We not opened up your heart for you [with Our Guidance]?’ (*ash-Sharh*: 1)

As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* could phrase the verse as follows, ‘We have opened up your heart for you’; yet He *Glorified is He* put it in the form of a question for Prophet Muhammad himself to admit the fact that his heart was opened up by the Will of Allah.

Once again, the verse under discussion draws a comparison between man and idols; man has legs by means of which they can walk, hands by means of which they can strike, eyes by means of which they can see and ears by means of which they can hear, but idols have none of these faculties at all. In this way, the polytheists should have ascertained that they are of a higher rank than those idols they worship. Here arises a very good question, which is ‘As long as idols are of a lower rank than man is, how could it be possible for man to worship them?!’ This is for sure a kind of insanity.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: ‘Say [Prophet], “Call on your ‘partners’! Scheme against me! Give me no respite!”’ (*al-A'raf*: 195) In truth, Allah *the Almighty* ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say this statement to the polytheists in order to show their falsehood in setting up these idols with Allah *the Almighty* and also to show that they lacked proper and correct understanding. That is to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* declared enmity against both the idols and their worshippers, which is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them, i.e. the polytheists, to make the idols

scheme against him, or even to prevent the victories won by Islam, if either they or their idols had any power to bring harm or benefit.

As for the Arabic word '*al-kayd*' (scheme), it means to 'make clever secret plans which often deceive others'. That is to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged them to inflict harm upon him, but what happened later on? Did they manage to hurt him *peace and blessings be upon him*?

But with regards to this point, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* might cause Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* suffer particular hardships for the believers to draw lessons from these hardships. The incident of magic being worked on him *peace and blessings be upon him* is a case in point. If we assume for the sake of argument that this incident actually took place, we may ask, 'How could Prophet Muhammad be affected by magic? And Who told us that what happened was magic in the first place?' We can reply that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who informed Prophet Muhammad of the actually kind of magic it was and the one who had worked it on him as well as the place in which it was put. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* proves that He will make all of their schemes clear.

The event of rescuing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from being murdered is another case in point. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And [remember, O Prophet] how those who were bent on denying the truth schemed against you in order to restrain you [from preaching], to slay you, or to drive you away....' (*al-Anfal*: 30)

This aforementioned verse in the chapter of *al-Anfal* tells us that even though the disbelievers of Mecca had plotted to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in such a way that could not give his family the opportunity to avenge his death, Allah *Glorified is He* uncovered their plot to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. As such, He *the Almighty* definitively proves that they, i.e. the deniers of the Truth, will in no way be able to prevent him *peace and blessings be upon him* from delivering the Message to people, even if they (the disbelievers) have recourse to their own powers or the powers of the jinn which are stronger than them. That is to say that as long as you, O disbelievers, fully realise that you were totally unable to prevent Prophet Muhammad from delivering the Message in one way or another, you should

be driven to despair and thus stop your enmity against him *peace and blessings be upon him*. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* challenges them: ‘Call on your “partners!” Scheme against me! Give me no respite!’ (*al-A'raf*: 195)

The Arabic phrase ‘*andhirhu*’ (give him respite) means to ‘give time and delay something’, that is, the verse means, ‘Do not delay, O disbelievers, your contrivances, and ask your partners to help you in inflicting harm upon me!’ In other words, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them not to delay their plotting against him. As a matter of fact, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said this because of the fact that he relied on the strongest of supports; a fact which is crystal clear in the following verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ وَلِيََّ اللَّهُ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْكِتَابَ ۖ وَهُوَ يَتَوَلَّى الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١٩٦﴾

**My protector is God: He has revealed the Scripture,
and it is He who protects the righteous [196]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 196)**

That is to say that as long as Allah *the Almighty* is the Protector, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should in no way take them into account. As for the Arabic word *al-wali* (protector), it means ‘the one who is near to you’ or ‘the one who follows you’. As a matter of fact, one does not take anyone as a protector unless this protector is closer to his/her soul and heart than anyone else and unless the protector has power and knowledge which are more considerable than his/hers. As for Allah’s saying: ‘My Protector is Allah...’; it means that Allah *Glorified is He* helps Prophet Muhammad to foil the plots hatched against him *peace and blessings be upon him* by the polytheists. That is to say that He *the Almighty* is his Protector and the One Who is near to him *peace and blessings be upon him* with His Attributes of Perfection and Majesty which belong only to Him. Here, we stress a very important point which is that when the believer feels weak, we find him/her turning to Allah *the Almighty* the One Who is Ever-Strong, a point which is proved by the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. When the Jews felt that Pharaoh was about to catch them, they said, as stated in the Quran: ‘...Most surely we are being overtaken.’ (*ash-Shu'ara*: 61) That is to

say that the people with Musa told him that Pharaoh's army will catch up with them and that they had nowhere to flee or any way to escape. As a result they will have to stand up to Pharaoh's army although they were powerless; yet Musa *peace be upon him* assured them and said: 'He said, "By no means; surely my Lord is with me: He will show me a way out."' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62) Upon this, the matter ceased to be one of human means and was thus given over to the Strongest Protector, i.e. to Allah *the Almighty* to Whom all Messengers and Prophets turned in times of need. It goes without saying that nobody makes such a statement unless s/he was absolutely certain of the Succour of Allah to her/him. I told you previously about the story of the European woman who embraced Islam upon reading the biography of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As a matter of fact, she fully realised that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the world's greatest hero and the man who made the world's greatest revolution. She reached this fact by reading the story in which he *peace and blessings be upon him* when Allah's saying: '...and Allah will protect you from the people' (*al-Ma'ida*: 67) was revealed, dismissed his Companions who had come to guard him. As a matter of fact, this woman, out of her discernment, fully realised that if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had lied to everyone (about the Message), he will not have lied to himself. Consequently, he will not have ordered the guards to leave him unless he was absolutely certain that Allah *the Almighty* will protect him and that He *Glorified is He* is fully capable of protecting him; he will not have experimented with his own life. This woman had already learnt this lesson from his biography. Likewise, since Prophet Muhammad was absolutely certain Allah will protect him, he *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged the polytheists and said to them: 'Call on your "partners"! Scheme against me! Give me no respite!' (*al-A'raf*: 195) That is, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* due to his absolute confidence in Allah, challenged the deniers of the Truth to harm him in any way and not to delay this harm. It goes without saying that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them to do this because he knew for certain that Allah is his Protector, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'My Protector is Allah: He has revealed the Scripture, and it is He Who protects the righteous.' (*al-A'raf*: 196)

In the same vein, this verse in question tells us that Allah *the Almighty* has sent down the Quran upon Prophet Muhammad for him to deliver it to mankind, which is why He *Glorified is He* will in no way let the disbelievers cause him any harm in any way. In other words, as long as the ultimate objective of revealing the Quran is for it to be delivered to mankind, Allah had to protect His Messenger Muhammad to fulfil this mission. As for Allah's saying *the Almighty*: '...and it is He Who protects the righteous' (*al-A'raf*: 196), it means that He *the Almighty* does not provide His Protection exclusively to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alone, but rather, He provides His Protection to all the righteous believers at any time and place. As a matter of fact, when Allah *the Almighty* mentions the ruling in a general way, He does this in order to assure the hearts of the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Consequently, we deduce that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who ordered Prophet Muhammad to deliver the Message to people, and that He *Glorified is He* is the One Who protects the righteous for them to thrive in the world. Moreover, we should not forget the fact that Allah *the Almighty* has made man His Vicegerent in the land within which to spread righteousness. In addition, we should be fully aware of the fact that the first level of righteousness is to leave that which is sound as it is or to make it even better if one can.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُونَ نَصْرَكُمْ وَلَا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَنْصُرُونَ ﴿١٩٧﴾

But those you call on instead of Him cannot help you or even help themselves' [197] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 197)

As a matter of fact, if there is someone who is able to succour you, but s/he does not, this means that this person does not want to give you any help, or that s/he does not sincerely love you, or even that s/he wants to keep the means by which s/he might succour you for her/himself. But the matter is totally different if this person is utterly unable to succour you, for s/he, in this case, does not possess the means to give you succour—that is the one whom you take as a protector is helpless and powerless, exactly as was the case with the polytheists who took helpless and powerless idols as gods. It is historically recorded that Muslims, on the Day of the Liberation of Mecca,

utterly destroyed the idols with their axes and none of them, i.e. idols, even offered any resistance whatsoever.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِنْ تَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ لَا يَسْمَعُوا وَتَرَاهُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ وَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٩٨﴾

If you [believers] call such people to guidance, they do not hear. You [Prophet] may observe them looking at you, but they cannot see [198] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 198)

It is taken for granted that these idols cannot be guided to the Truth even if they are called to do so. That is because they are mere inanimate objects which have no minds to reason with. This is actually the case in spite of the fact that we today might see the idols with eyes, just like those ones in the Hindu and Buddhist temples; people put pearls in the eye sockets to make people think that the idols are looking towards them, although in reality they cannot see anything.

Addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says:

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴿١٩٩﴾

Be tolerant and command what is right: pay no attention to foolish people [199] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 199)

As a matter of fact, this verse in question sheds light on all the aspects of a good moral character. Having ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call the idolaters along with their idols and devils to cause him any kind of harm if they are able to do so, He *the Almighty* then orders him *peace and blessings be upon him* to show tolerance to people. In fact, this Divine Order here applies to Prophet Muhammad and his followers. Here, we should take into account that even though we use the word 'afw (tolerance) in our daily life, we do not know that it imparts various meanings. First of all, it may give the meaning of 'ease', such as when someone asks you, 'Where did you

get this from?', and you reply, 'It came to me easily (*'afwan*)', that is, without any effort or work on your part.

It may also be used to give the meaning of 'spontaneity', i.e. without thinking about something such as when someone says, 'This idea has spontaneously come to my mind'. In this verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to accept what is easy, that is, to keep to those things which are trouble-free and simple and which require no undue effort. As such, people's affairs will be made easy for them. In other words, if things are made difficult for people, they will not be bothered to do them, which is why Allah *the Almighty* in another chapter in the Quran, orders Prophet Muhammad to say: 'Say, "I do not ask you for any reward for it; nor am I among the ones who take things upon themselves [more than they have to]."' (*Sad*: 86)

As a matter of fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the aforementioned verse: '...nor am I among the ones who take things upon themselves [more than they have to]' indicates clearly that he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not make things difficult or complicated in order for life to be simple, and for fierce disputes not to break out among people. In this regard, we should be fully aware of the fact that disputes arise when people are in distress and under compulsion which are the two elements that undermine the dealings and interactions between people, which is why it is said, 'The believer is the one who is lenient when he buys, lenient when he sells, lenient when he claims his rights, and lenient when rights are claimed from him'. That is, he shows leniency at all times. In this regard, we stress that Allah's saying: 'Take [the course of being] tolerant...' may give another possible explanation which is to pardon those who wrong you because this makes things easier.

In the same vein, the word '*afw*' may also give the meaning of 'beyond your needs', a meaning which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*, 'And they ask you as to what they should spend. Say, "What is beyond your needs."' (*al-Baqara*: 219)

In truth, this previously mentioned ruling of spending from that which is beyond one's needs was in practice before almsgiving was made obligatory. We notice a very important point for both of these matters. It is that they both

are meant to make things easy for people; it is a point which is proved by the fact that the believer is not required to give that which is needed for him/herself, but rather to give that which is above and beyond his/her needs.

Back to the verse under discussion; we notice that the verse starts with an imperative verb '*khudh*', translated here as 'take'—the opposite of which is 'give'. You might give something to a person, but this person might not take it from you if s/he sees that it is not good for him/her; but the matter is totally different when Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who gives you the order to do this, for this Divine Command will undoubtedly bring you benefit in one way or another. For example, even if it seems on the surface that forgiving the one who wrongs you is a loss for you, you should know fully well that you have already taken ease and forgiveness for yourself by doing so.

In this regard, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* loves for His believing slave to be lenient and amicable with his/her fellow believers, that is, if a believer is arrogant towards another believer, then s/he should be tolerant to him/her in reply. In the same vein, if a fellow believer is haughty or unjust with you, then do not be haughty or unjust with him/her in return, lest enmity breaks out between you; instead be tolerant and gentle, so that Allah *the Almighty* will exalt you in ranks and also increase your honour.

Consequently, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* wants us to be tolerant and lenient with each other for us to obtain goodness. Let us offer this striking example to illustrate this point more clearly; when you enter your house and find that one of your sons has been bad to his brother, your heart, and your compassion turn to the one who has been wronged. We are the dependants of our Lord, and thus if one person wrongs another, s/he thereby causes Allah *the Almighty* to succour the wronged, which is why we should treat those who wrong us well, since they are the main cause behind Allah's Care for us. Concerning this, we can quote one of the incidents that took place with Imam Al-Hasan Al-Basri; it is narrated that someone had been backbiting him and he called his servant and said to him, 'Take a plate of fresh dates and give it to so-and-so'—and he gave the servant the name of the man who had backbitten him. The servant was surprised by this, saying, 'How could you send him a gift of fresh dates when he has backbitten you?' whereupon the Imam replied, 'Should I not be kind to

the one who has placed Allah on my side? Go to him and say, "My master tells you that he has heard you have backbitten him, thereby gifting him your good deeds; so he wishes to gift you these fresh dates."

Furthermore, we notice that the verse also mentions the enjoining of what is right. As for the word '*al-'urf*' (translated here as 'what is right'), it refers to the behaviour which is judged sound and right by human reason and which makes the soul calm on condition that it conforms to the Divine Law. As a matter of fact, the word '*urf*' is used to mean 'custom' because everyone in the society is accustomed to it, that is, no one is ashamed of doing it. That is why we, all the time, find people here and there chanting the following statement, 'This is done in accordance with custom (*urf*)'. Here, we should stress a very important fact which is that 'sound custom' is viewed as one of the sources of legislation in the Islamic *Shari'a*.

The following is a striking example to fully clarify this point; we find that a young man is not ashamed of knocking on the door of a family's house to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage because this is a matter of custom which causes no shame. Yet, it is taken for granted that members of the Muslim society would be ashamed to find one from among them committing fornication even though the goal of both fornication and a marriage proposal is enjoyment—but there is a big difference between lawful pleasure and forbidden pleasure.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying: 'But turn away from the ignorant.' (*al-A'raf*: 199) Here arises the question, 'How does one leave alone those who choose to remain ignorant?' Wrong are those who think that the 'ignorant' simply means one who does not know! As a matter of fact, one who does not acquire knowledge is called '*ummi*' (unlettered), while the 'ignorant' is the one who 'knows' something in such a way which is actually contrary to reality. At that point, we should be aware that problems do not come from unlettered people who do not acquire knowledge, for they will believe anything you tell them on condition that it is approved by their natural disposition because they do not have any alternative to it. As for the ignorant person, he is the one who 'knows' something in such a particular way which is contrary to reality, and therefore his knowledge of this matter first needs to be changed, after which he needs to be convinced of the truth.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad and the believers with him to turn away from the ignorant person who believes something which contradicts reality and firmly clings to it. When you turn away from the ignorant person, you must not debate or argue with him because to debate with him, will not produce any beneficial result. With regards to this, I say to those people who oppose religion but have not read a single book about it, whilst they have read hundreds of anti-religious books, 'Logic, justice and objectivity entail that you should read books that are pro-religion in the same way you read books against religion'. Moreover, if one wants to examine religion in such a way which leads to attaining sound belief, s/he must first remove all previous convictions and emotions from her/his heart and then objectively and rationally study the two matters while the heart is completely detached from being inclined to one of them. After that, the person should accept the conclusion about which the heart is assured. Once again, all this process must be carried out in an atmosphere of sincerity and objectivity; a point which is deduced from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Allah has not made for any man two hearts within himself....' (*al-'Ahzab*: 4)

That is to say that man has only one heart, which will be filled either with certainty and faith, or with something else. The heart can only contain one thing, and therefore you, in pursuit of reaching the Truth, should not fill it with Falsehood; rather, you must first remove Falsehood from your heart and then keep both Falsehood and Truth outside it. After that, you are supposed to objectively examine the matter in such a way that enables you to reach a sound conclusion.

At that point, we have a Prophetic Hadith which also offers an explanation to the meaning of this verse in question; Ubayy ibn Ka'ab narrated that when the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Take [the course of being] tolerant [with others] and command what is right: but turn away from the ignorant' (*al-A'raf*: 199) was revealed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the Archangel Gabriel about its meaning, whereupon the latter told him, 'Allah commands you to pardon those who have wronged you, to give to those who have deprived you and to keep relations with those who have cut theirs with you'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Narrated by Ibn Abi Hatim

It is crystal clear that Allah *the Almighty* wants to teach us a lesson in humanity and faith, that is, a Muslim is supposed to give a hand to both those who are physically injured as well as those who suffer moral degradation.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَإِنَّمَا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْعٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

**If Satan should prompt you to do something, seek
refuge with God – He is all hearing, all knowing [200]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 200)**

The Arabic word for '*nazagha*' (instigate) literally means 'to prod', that is, to take an object and press it into the body of the person beside you or in front of you. The meaning of this word makes it clear to us that there is a certain amount of distance between the prodder and the one prodded, and that a tool is used in the process of prodding.

When one prods another with an object, the two do not feel the heat of each other's bodies; a matter which is different from the act of '*mass*' (touching) in which both the two parties feel the heat of each other's bodies. Here, we should take into account that there is also a difference between the latter act and that of '*lams*' (touching with the hand), for each of the two parties involved in the act of '*al-lams*' feels the softness as well as the heat of one another. As a matter of fact, it is on this point in question that wars are waged, that is, when the enemy is far away, its adversary must move away from it in order not to be hit by arrows, while at the same time attempting to hit the enemy with its own arrows. Likewise, modern armies send their planes to drop bombs on the enemy forces. Concerning this, we stress that the power of nations is judged by their ability to strike enemy forces without those forces being able to respond because they strike them from afar, exactly as when we see some countries launch long-range rockets against others. In truth, Allah *the Almighty* has already told us about this important notion in the chapter of *al-Anfal* in which He *the Almighty* says: 'Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster...' (*al-Anfal*: 60).

Explaining this verse, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us about the meaning of 'force' in the Hadith narrated by 'Uqba ibn

‘Amir who said, ‘I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recite when he was on the pulpit, “Against them, make ready your strength to the utmost of your power. Beware, strength consists in archery (shooting). Beware, strength consists in archery. Beware, strength consists in archery.”’⁽¹⁾

This is because shooting allows one’s bullets to reach the enemy from afar, and as a result one will keep away from its fire. In the past, an army would march toward the enemy’s land, which is why the latter fired arrows at it to the extent that the more the army became closer to the enemy, the more each of them shot others with arrows and spears. Yet, when the fight raged hot, swords met. That is, it is clear that actions taking place during war mainly revolve around the concepts of ‘prodding’, ‘touching’ and ‘handling’.

Back to the verse under discussion, it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Allah *the Almighty* how a person could suppress his anger, whereupon Allah *Glorified is He* sent down His saying: ‘And if [it should happen that] an evil instigation from Satan instigates [you to do otherwise], seek refuge with Allah. Indeed, He is All Hearing, All Knowing.’ (*al-A’raf*: 200)

But someone might ask, ‘Could Satan stir Prophet Muhammad to anger?’ The answer to this question is crystal clear in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* did not say, ‘And if an evil instigation from Satan instigates you to...’, but rather, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if [it should happen that] an evil instigation from Satan...’, meaning that this act of prompting might not happen to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, why should Allah *the Almighty* prevent him *peace and blessings be upon him* the pleasure of defying Satan? Concerning this, we can quote the Hadith narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud in which Prophet Muhammad is narrated to have said, ‘There is not one of you but he has an attaché from amongst the jinn (devils) with him’. They (the Companions) said, ‘Allah’s Messenger, with you too?’ Thereupon he said, ‘Yes, but Allah helps me against him and so I am safe from his hand and he does not command me to do anything but good’.⁽²⁾

(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim*

In the verse in question, He *the Almighty* says: ‘and if [it should happen that] an evil instigation from Satan instigates [you to do otherwise], seek refuge with Allah...’ (*al-A'raf*: 200). To seek refuge means to seek aid, sanctuary and protection. Indeed, one only seeks shelter from another who is more powerful than the one who wants to afflict him/her with harm. It is known that Satan has many means of subtle movements, penetration and infiltration; and therefore we should not seek refuge with one who is equal to him or weaker than him, but rather, we should seek refuge with the Creator of man, jinn and all creatures, Who is fully Able to relinquish the power of Satan. He *Glorified is He* is All-Hearing and All Knowing: two Divine Attributes which are very important in this regard; He sees all and knows all things. Hence, when we sincerely call to mind the meaning of seeking refuge and sanctuary with the One Who created us and created Satan too, Satan will surely flee from our path because he knows that we have sought the Sanctuary of Allah, the Creator *the Almighty* and the All-Powerful, and he has no power to resist the One Who created him. Moreover, we should take into account that He *the Almighty* hears us well when we say, ‘I seek refuge with Allah’. In addition, He knows full well our ultimate intention behind uttering this supplication.

If the Lord *Glorified is He* mentions here the case of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘And if there [should happen that] an evil instigation comes to you from Satan that instigates [you to do otherwise], seek refuge in Allah’ (*al-A'raf*: 200)—which means that Satan is far away and can only attempt to prod—what, then, about all the other Muslims in this regard? The Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٢٠١﴾

those who are aware of God think of Him when Satan prompts them to do something and immediately they can see [straight] [201] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 201)

It is out of Allah’s Mercy towards the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He says, ‘*massahum*’ (literally, slightly and imperceptibly touches them—translated in the verse at hand as ‘comes to them’) using the verb ‘*mass*’, which means ‘a light insubstantial and imperceptible

touch' and not '*lams*' which means 'a substantial and perceptible touch'. This is because those who have *taqwa* ('fear Allah', i.e. they are Allah-consciousness thereby protect themselves from all what Allah forbids) make this *taqwa* a shield between them and Allah's Attributes of Power and Retribution which make them careful and alert not to overstep the limits set by Allah. Therefore, Allah says: 'Verily, those who fear Allah, when an evil thought comes to them from Satan; they remember (Allah)' (*al-A'raf*: 201).

The Arabic word '*ta'if*' (evil thought signifies the imaginative thoughts that roam around in one's mind during the night. Since Satan is invisible, we depict him only in our imagination. Thus, whenever Satan goes around touching the thoughts of the Allah-conscious people, they remind themselves of the One Who created Satan and created them. They remember Allah's guiding principles that resist their wrong desires. They also remember the Ever-Watchful Eye of Allah that is upon them all the time and is never off them, and the fact that all that which Allah has forbidden is plain and clear. In a Hadith narrated by An-Nu'man ibn Bashir, our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was narrated to have said, 'That which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is clear, and between the two are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Whoever avoids these doubtful matters absolves himself of blame with respect to his religion and his honour. Whoever falls into doubtful matters falls into that which is unlawful. It is like the shepherd who grazes his flock too close to a private pasture, he greatly risks moving into it. Verily, every king has a sacred precinct. Verily, the sacred precinct of Allah is His Prohibitions. There lies within the body a morsel of flesh. If it is sound, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Verily, it is the heart'.⁽¹⁾

Once the believers recall the punishment resulting from any shameful act which Satan embellishes to make it sound acceptable to them, the veil before their eyes dissipates and they can see the straight path clearly again.

Allah then says:

(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the Book of Iman (Faith)

وَإِخْوَانُهُمْ يَمُدُّوهُمْ فِي الْغَيِّ ثُمَّ لَا يُقْصِرُونَ ﴿٢٠٢﴾

**The followers of devils are led relentlessly
into error by them and cannot stop [202]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 202)**

When we track the word ‘*yamuddunahum*’ (‘to plunge’ or ‘to lead further into error’) in the Quran, sometimes we find it in the form ‘*yamuddu*’ and other times we find it in the form ‘*yumdid*’ as is the case when the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And increased you in wealth and children, and bestow on you gardens and bestow on you rivers’ (*Nuh*: 12).

We know that the devils will never leave the believers alone. They will persist in trying to tempt them into error. The devils try to tempt the obedient believers more than they try to tempt the sinners because the sinners readily help Satan by submitting to their passions and desires. Neither the sinner nor the devil fails short in this regard, but rather, they both seek to tempt the believers into error. The verb ‘*aqsara*’ (to give up, desist, cease) comes from the root word ‘*qasr*’ (to shorten), that is, taking a short cut despite the ability to go the long way. This is the nature of Satan’s insistent attempts to mislead the believers.

Satan—as the Quran tells us—admitted his intention to pursue the believers, using evil insinuations and instigations, and embellishing sins and wrongdoings to them: ‘...I will lie in wait for them (human beings) on Your Straight Path’ (*al-A'raf*: 16).

Satan knows that those who are not conscious of Allah do not need to have sins made alluring to them, since they already desire to commit sins and are inclined to sin—Allah is our refuge. This is the reason why Satan does not put a lot of effort in trying to tempt them into error.

The Lord then says:

وَإِذَا لَمْ تَأْتِهِمْ بِآيَةٍ قَالُوا لَوْلَا أُجْتَبِيَّتْهَا قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَتَّبِعُ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ
 مِنْ رَبِّي هَذَا بَصَائِرٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٠٣﴾

When you do not bring them a fresh revelation, they say, ‘But can you not just ask for one?’ Say, ‘I merely repeat what is revealed to me from my Lord: this revelation brings you insights from your Lord, and guidance and mercy for those who believe [203] (The Quran, *al-A’raf*: 203)

In earlier verses, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the word ‘aya’ (plural of ‘aya’, which means ‘proof’, ‘verse’, ‘lesson’, ‘miraculous sign’, ‘revelation’); and, as already explained, the word ‘ayat’ can refer either to physical signs in the universe, to the miraculous wonders or miracles that prove and support the veracity of the Messengers, or to the verses of the Divine Scripture.

Here, Allah *the Exalted* and the Glorious, uses the word ‘aya’ in the singular, not ‘ayaat’ in the plural. This is because right before their eyes was this entire universe, filled with signs and wonders of Allah’s Power, and they had, in their hands, the clear law of guidance that had been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so the only thing that was missing—in their eyes—was a physical miracle. Although in the chapter of *al-Isra’*, the Lord *Glorified is He* cautioned them against saying this: ‘In this Quran, We have set out all kinds of examples for people, yet most of them persist in disbelieving. They say, “We will not believe in you (Muhammad) until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face; or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky — even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a [actual] book down for us to read”. Say, “Glory be to my Lord! Am I nothing but a mortal, a Messenger?”’ (*al-Isra’*: 89-93)

The Messenger could not produce on his own the miraculous wonders which his people asked for. Similarly, the teachings and revelations which he brought them were not his own, but revelations from the Mighty and All-Wise God. But they used to accuse him of having fabricated the Quran; therefore,

they asked him to produce a tangible, physical miracle, ignoring the fact that the Noble Quran itself was of such a miraculous nature that they could not produce a single verse like it. They said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Why have you not brought it (i.e. produced one yourself)?’ (*al-A'raf*: 203)

His Lord here instructed him to answer them saying: ‘I only follow what is revealed to me from my Lord’ (*al-A'raf*: 203). That is, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was charged with the responsibility of conveying the Divine Revelations that were brought down to him by the Trustworthy Angel of Revelation, Jibril (Gabriel *peace be upon him*). These Divine Revelations consisted of Quranic verses that contained Allah’s Guidance. This Divine Guidance in itself is an inexhaustible miracle, constantly overflowing with goodness; therefore, Allah adds: ‘...This (Quran) is insight from your Lord, and guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.’ (*al-A'raf*: 203)

The Noble Quran contains insights, guidance, and mercy. The word ‘*basa'ir*’ (insights) is the plural form of ‘*basira*’ (insight) and is derived from the word ‘*ibsar*’ (sight). A heart infused with the light of certainty makes the person see clearly and be enlightened. A person who has such a spiritual state is said to be possessed of insight. Ordinary sight is the role of the eye so far as material and physical entities are concerned. However, there are also abstract issues that can only be discovered by insight. Insight illuminates the heart thereby enabling it to discover these abstract issues, but the heart only possesses insight when it is charged with assured belief.

The Noble Quran is a means of insight; it endows those who believe in it and the contemplators of its words with a deep perception that provides them with renewed knowledge of spiritual realities. Consequently, these realities become more visible to them, it is as though they can see them and bear witness to them with the physical, naked eye.

This Glorious Quran is a means of insight and guidance, that is, it directs and guides the humans to the Truth and to Allah’s Straight Path. It is also a source of mercy for those who do not have insight that guides to belief, and lack the ability to accept the evidence that leads to guidance. Clearly, it is a grace and mercy to all people, guidance to those who seek direction, and insight to

those who have certitude in the essentials of belief to the extent that it is as though these essentials are actually present and they can actually see them.

As we have said before, Allah has informed the believers of certain matters of the Unseen, one of which is the existence of Paradise and Hell. The believers in Allah accept everything that is conveyed to them from their Lord. They know for certain that it is the Truth from Allah. This knowledge then develops into a solid conviction which all the believers have and acknowledge. And when the Day of Resurrection comes, and they see the bridge set over hell just as they believed it to be, their knowledge transforms into an actual vision in front of them. And when some of them actually enter hell—may Allah protect us—in order to expiate the sins they committed, this is the ‘experience-based certainty’ (realizing the absolute truth with certainty by personally experiencing it). I have given this example before to illustrate the point—but Allah is beyond all comparison: Our geography teachers used to tell us, when we were young, about the map of the United States. They said that its capital is Washington, the main port is New York, and in New York there are ‘skyscrapers’, that is, very tall buildings more than one hundred storeys high, which is over two hundred metres tall. We believed our geography teachers. Then, when some of us had the chance to travel and they saw Washington and New York from the plane, this sight gave them the ‘sight-based certainty’ after they had only had the ‘knowledge-based certainty’. Finally, when the plane landed at Washington airport, they came to have the ‘experience-based certainty’.

The Lord *Glorified is He* presents to us the concept of belief in the Unseen when He says: ‘Striving for more distracts you until you [die and] visit your graves. No indeed! You will come to know. No indeed! In the end you will come to know. No indeed! If only you could know now with the knowledge of certainty. You will most definitely see Hellfire; you will see it with the eye of certainty.’ (*at-Takaththur*: 1-7)

In the previous verses, Allah uses the terms ‘*ilm al-yaqin*’ (‘knowledge-based certainty’) and ‘*ayn al-yaqin*’ (sight-based certainty). As for ‘*haqq al-yaqin*’ (experience-based, assured certainty), it occurs in His statement: ‘If that dying person is one of those who will be brought near to Allah, he will have rest,

ease, and a Garden of Bliss (Paradise); if he is one of those on the Right (he will hear), “Peace be on you”, from his companions on the Right; but if he is one of those who denied the Truth and went astray, he will be welcomed with scalding water. He will burn in Hell. Verily, this! This is an absolute Truth of assured certainty’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 88-95).

The believers are on different levels in terms of certitude in matters of the Unseen: There are those who believe in what Allah tells them about the Unseen on the level of ‘sight-based certainty’, and others who believe in the information that Allah has revealed about the Unseen on the level of ‘experience-based certainty’. This is the reason why Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘If the veil were to be lifted from me, my certainty will not increase’.

The following dialogue between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the venerable Companion Al-Harith ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* reveals to us more about the real meaning of such a degree of certitude.

It was narrated that Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Anṣari passed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said to him: ‘How are you, O Harith?’ Al-Harith replied, ‘I have become a true believer’. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Be careful of what you say. Everything has a true state, so what is the true state of your belief?’ Al-Harith said, ‘I have lost interest in this world. I spend my nights awake praying, and my days thirsty (i.e. fasting). And it is as if I am looking at the Throne of my Lord, prominent in view. And it is as if I am looking at the people of Paradise visiting one another there. And it is as if I am looking at the people of Hell screaming in it’. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him three times, ‘O Harith, you have realized the Truth, so live according to it!’⁽¹⁾

This venerable Companion arrived at the point where everything Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told him became an experience-based, absolute reality for him, providing the insight that enabled him to behold all this as though he actually experienced it.

‘And if you do not bring them a miraculous sign (*aya*), they say, “Why have you not brought it (i.e. produced one yourself)?” Say, “I only follow

(1) Narrated by *At-Tabarani*

what is revealed to me from my Lord. This (Quran) is insight from your Lord, and guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.” (al-A'raf: 203)

This is how the Noble Quran provides insight to believers of high spiritual calibre, gives guidance to people seeking direction, and bestows mercy on all mankind.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ. وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٢٠٤﴾

**So pay attention and listen quietly when the Quran
is recited, so that you may be given mercy' [204]
(The Quran, al-A'raf: 204)**

Since the Lord *Glorified is He* has already clarified to you that this Quran provides insights from Him, and it is a guide and mercy, is it not appropriate that you, O believer, should receive it honourably? Are these three aspects insufficient to attract your full attention to the Quran, and not to ignore it?! You need to listen carefully to the Noble Quran in order to obtain these three benefits, namely insight, guidance and mercy; it merits and deserves that a person silently and attentively listens to it when it is recited.

We may notice that Allah *the Exalted* uses '*fastami'u*' (i.e. so listen attentively to it), and not merely '*asma'u*' (i.e. hear it). This is because attentive listening comprises the conscious will to hear. As for 'hearing', you may hear everything that is said around you, and you may pay or fail to pay attention to what you hear. Due to the merciful values that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* preached, no one should deliberately listen to the secrets of other people by way of spying on them, eager to know their faults and errors. Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Do not envy one another; do not hate one another; do not spy on one another; do not seek out one another's faults; and do not overbid one another. Rather, be Allah's slaves and brothers.'⁽¹⁾ This is a warning against five

(1) Narrated by Imam Muslim in the Book of al-Bir wa Al-Silah wa Al-Adab (Virtues, Relationships and Manners)

misbehaviours, among them spying and listening to people's secrets. 'When the Quran is recited, listen attentively to it and be silent that you may receive mercy.' (*al-A'raf*: 204)

A person may be listening silently, but without setting his intention on worshipping Allah by listening, thus depriving himself of the reward of listening to the Quran. One should listen carefully and quietly with the intention of worshipping Allah because Allah is the One speaking. It is neither reasonable nor appropriate that you turn or wander away while Allah is talking. Our master Ja'far Al-Sadiq⁽¹⁾ Allah *be pleased with him* alerted our attention to this when he said, 'I am amazed at the one who is afraid yet does not seek refuge in Allah's saying *Glorified is He*: 'Allah is sufficient for us; He is the Best Disposer of affairs' (*Al-'Imran*: 173), for I have heard Allah say after it: 'They returned with grace and bounty from Allah; no harm touched them...' (*Al-'Imran*: 174). And I am amazed at the one who is distressed yet does not seek refuge in Allah's saying *Glorified is He*: 'There is no God but You. Glory be to You. Indeed, I was of the wrongdoers' (*al-Anbiya'*: 87), for I have heard Allah say after it: 'We answered him and saved him from distress. And thus do We save the believers' (*al-Anbiya'*: 88). And I am amazed at the one who is plotted against yet does not seek refuge in Allah's saying *Glorified is He*: 'I entrust my affair to Allah; Allah is the All-Seer of His servants' (*Ghafir*: 44), for I have heard Allah say after it: 'So Allah saved him from the evils they planned...' (*Ghafir*: 45). And I am amazed at the one who seeks worldly boons, yet does not seek refuge in Allah's saying *Glorified is He*: 'This is Allah's Will. There is no power except in Allah' (*al-Kahf*: 39), for I have heard Allah say after it: 'My Lord may well give me something better than your garden...' (*al-Kahf*: 40).

Careful listening to the Quran recitation, with the intention of worshipping Allah, is the proper etiquette with which we should receive the lessons of the Quran that bring us blessings and benefits.

The scholars deliberated the nature of the commandment to be silent and listen to the Quran: should it be adhered to whenever the Quran is being recited or only when it is recited during the prayers or the Friday sermons?

(1) *Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq bin Muhammad Al-Baqir bin `Ali Zain Al-Abidin bin Al-Hussain*

They held different opinions regarding this ruling, some of them saying that silent attentive listening to the Quran is only required during the prayers. The basis for this opinion was that, during the Congregational Prayers, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the Quran, those performing prayer behind him would repeat every verse he uttered. For example, when he said: 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' (*al-Fatiha*: 1), they would also say, 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy'. And when he said: 'Praise belongs to Allah; Lord of the Worlds' (*al-Fatiha*: 2), they would say, 'Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds'. Consequently Allah *Glorified is He* told them to let Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* recite alone, and to listen to his recitation without repeating after him.

Other scholars said that the commandment meant that silent attentive listening to the Quran should be observed during prayers, the sermons on Fridays and during the Two *Eids* (Feasts) Prayers. They all consist of recitation of Quranic verses; however, these sermons contain more words of the preacher than Quranic verses. Others pointed out that the obligation of listening to the sermon had already been emphasized by the warning of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'If you say to your companion, "Be quiet and listen" while the Imam is delivering the Friday sermon, you have engaged in idle talk.'⁽¹⁾ Therefore, the obligation of listening to the sermons is affirmed by evidence from the *Sunnah*.

Other scholars held the opinion that silent attentive listening to the Quran is required at any time and in any situation as an expression of respect and awe for Allah's Words. The following opinion, pertaining to this point is ascribed to our master and Imam Abu `Abdullah Al-Hussain, who said, 'Whenever the Quran is being recited, whether you are praying in congregation, or attending a sermon, or you are free (not engaged in any specific task), you must listen to it. This is because the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make the Quran different from any other speech, hence He made it different in the following ways: when it is recited, you should listen to it; and when you touch a copy of the

(1) Narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra by Imam Malik in his *Musnad*, Imam Ahmad, *Al-Bayhaqi*, *Abu Dawud* and *Al-Nasa'i*

Quran, you must be in a state of ritual purity. This is to protect it from people handling it like any other book. It helps develop awe of Allah; as a result you do not touch the Quran unless you are in a state of ablution'. When we instil this into our children, by saying to one of them, 'Do not go near the book of the Quran unless you are in a state of ablution', we help build awe and respect for the Quran in the child's soul'.

Also, when it comes to orthography or the written representation of the recited text of the Quran, the Lord decreed that some words in His Book have a particular written form, different to how they are normally written. This makes the recitation of them have a special holy ambience. Thus it is a unique Book, unlike any other book; and its words are unlike any other words. 'When the Quran is recited, listen attentively to it and be silent that you may receive mercy.' (*al-A'raf*: 204)

Some scholars said that listening here does not just mean hearing with the ears, but rather responding to its duties. Do you not say, when you supplicate for one another, 'May Allah hear your supplication'? You say this even though you know that Allah can hear you because you mean 'May Allah *Glorified is He* answer this supplication'. Accordingly, listening to the Quran entails responding to its commands. Why? In order to gain mercy from the Lord, for He is the Most Merciful and the Giver of Mercy: 'that you may receive mercy.' (*al-A'raf*: 204)

We know that the Arabic words '*la'all*' (which is contained in '*la'allakum*') and '*asa*' express hope, and '*layta*' (if only) implies a wish that is impossible and not expected to happen. We express hopes using '*layta*' as a way of indicating that we love some situation but know it cannot possibly happen. An example of this is what the old poet said:

If only (*layta*) youth would return one day,
So I could tell it what old age has done to me!

He knows for sure that youth will never return, but his words indicate that youth was a beloved time to him. Another example is found in the poet's words:

If only (*layta*) the stars would come down to me, that I might arrange them
In a necklace of praise for you, since words are not enough!
But the stars will never come down.

The notion that comes first to your mind when you hear the words ‘asa’ and ‘la`all’ is the hope for something to occur; and when Allah uses an expression of hope, it is coming from the Bountiful Lord and therefore will certainly be fulfilled. Allah then says:

وَأَذْكُرُّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً وَدُونَ الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ
بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ وَلَا تَكُنْ مِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ﴿٢٠٥﴾

[Prophet], remember your Lord inwardly, in all humility and awe, without raising your voice, in the mornings and in the evenings – do not be one of the heedless [205]

(The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 205)

The Arabic word for ‘dhikr’ (remembrance) means to let something pass either through one’s mind, by remembering it within the soul, or through one’s lips (invocation). *Dhikr* done with the tongue which no one but oneself can hear is silent *dhikr*. When it is loud enough that others can hear it, it is of two kinds: acceptable and unacceptable loud *dhikr* based on the level of loudness. The unacceptable level of loudness is when *dhikr* turns into a disturbance—Allah forbid. Therefore, the Lord *Glorified is He*, says: ‘(O Prophet Muhammad), do not be too loud in your prayer, or too quiet, but seek a middle way.’ (*al-Isra’*: 110)

Hopefully our brothers, the Quran reciters, will pay heed to this verse in a way that makes them adhere to Allah’s Command in this regard and refrain from raising their voices so loudly that it becomes a disturbance. I say to each one of them, ‘Your Lord has not asked you to be loud of voice, but rather, He asked you to use a moderate tone of voice that is between loud and low’. I address this especially to those who spoil Allah’s blessing for others by crying out with loud voices during the night, thereby holding back Allah’s nightly Mercy from others, a Mercy which He described, saying: ‘In His mercy He has given you night and day, so that you may rest and seek His Bounty and be grateful.’ (*al-Qasas*: 73)

Do not ruin Allah’s Mercy for people. Reminding people of Allah is not a matter of yelling from pulpits; except if you are seeking to ‘advertise’ yourselves

through the Mosques of Allah and upon the pulpits of Allah—but this is something that is rejected and unacceptable according to the Sacred Law.

‘(O Prophet Muhammad), remember your Lord inwardly, with total humility and awe...’ (*al-A'raf*: 205). The Lord *Glorified is He* says in one place in the Quran: ‘Believers, remember Allah with much remembrance; and glorify Him morning and evening’ (*al-'Ahzab*: 41-42), and in another place He says: ‘Remember your Lord...’.

His words ‘remember God’ make the listener think of his moral responsibilities because God is the One Who is worshipped, meaning the One who is obeyed in all His commandments and prohibitions.

His Words: ‘Remember Allah’ make the listener recall his moral responsibilities because Allah is the only One Who deserves to be taken as a Deity and to be worshipped, meaning He is the One Who must be obeyed with regards to all His Commandments and Prohibitions. On the other hand, His Words: ‘Remember your Lord’, are a reminder to you of all the graces which He has extended to you: your Lord is the One Who created you, sustained you, and gave you endless blessings. Remember your Lord because if you do not feel love for Him through His commandments, you will feel love for Him because of the bounties He has extended to you. Allah *the Exalted* showers us with His Favours and continuous Blessings.

I will give the following example to illustrate this point—but Allah is beyond all comparison and transcends all similitudes: You have children, to whom you give pocket money. When you give them their allowance every month, you find that they will only try to see you once a month; but if you give them their allowance daily, you will find that they are always around you. For example, when you are asleep, your son may come to your bedroom, or walk by your side, or gently cough to get your attention that he needs something from the room. What about you, then, when you, in your totality, owe your entire existence to the munificence of your Lord? And, for as long as you remain completely reliant on your Lord’s Munificence, you should remember the One Who is munificent to you; i.e. remember your Lord all the time.

While remembering Allah you should maintain two states of mind: first, humble entreaty, meaning humbleness with excessive reverence for Him; for

you may think of someone but still with arrogance. Rather, remembrance of the Munificent Creator must be filled with the humility of servitude before the Glory of His Lordship. Second, remember your Lord 'in awe' which means fear with humbleness; for the more you humble yourself before Allah, the more He increases your honour. We find servitude to humans hateful, as it means enslavement. People hate those who enslave them. For a human to be enslaved by his equal is immense tyranny and injustice; it transfers all the good things of the slave into his master's possession. But your servitude to Allah results in the transfer of His Goodness and Blessings to you. Therefore, we find that the Lord reminds His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of His favours upon him, saying: 'Glory to Him who made His slave travel by night from the Sacred Mosque (at Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (in Jerusalem), whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He alone is the All Hearing, the All-seeing.' (*al-Isra'*: 1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rose to a high rank by virtue of the-Isra' (the miraculous night journey of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem), and it is mentioned here as a way of evoking the recognition and remembrance of the grace that Allah granted to His slave and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. A believing poet once said:

It is sufficient honour for me to be a slave
Whose Lord meets with him without any appointment:
Despite His Mighty Holiness,
I may meet Him when and where I please.

As a believing slave, you can meet Allah whenever you wish. If you let faith handle your life, you are in control of it. All you need is to make the intention to pray and say, '*Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest!)' and you are instantly transported to His Presence, whether you are at home, in the street, or anywhere else. This is the absolute height of honour for you.

'(O Prophet Muhammad), remember your Lord inwardly, with total humility and awe, without being loud of voice' (*al-A'raf*: 205). Allah has not said here, 'The Lord of the Worlds'. Rather, He has said, 'Your Lord, O Muhammad', and this remembrance is the most precious bounty conferred upon mankind. It

is the gift of sending Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a Messenger who represents a Special Blessing and a Favour from Allah to all those who believe in his Message. Every Muslim is then included in the favour that was granted to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah's Words to His Messenger: 'Remember your Lord inwardly...' (*al-A'raf*: 205) mean that He has not limited the proof of the care He bestows on you to what can only be seen on the outside and what exists far from you; for you may not see or hear some things in the universe since the universe is separate from you. But look into your own self and you will find there plenty of signs that all remind you of your Creator: 'And in yourselves too (there are signs), do you not see?' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 21)

Before our Lord placed the proof of His existence in the universe surrounding you, He placed this proof within your own self. Your self is never separated from you, and you know well its faculties, perceptions, and inclinations better than anyone else. Therefore, humble entreaty and awe before Allah have a role to play here since you can see the secrets of His creation within yourself. You can find there many signs which are greater than you are. They make you feel yourself dwindling away before the One Who has given you all this, and fear lest you fall short of fulfilling the duty that you owe to Him.

Let us return to Allah's saying: 'Remember your Lord inwardly, with total humility and awe, without being loud of voice, in the mornings and in the evenings...' (*al-A'raf*: 205). *Dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) is an action, and actions require a time and a place. Morning and evening are two times that cover virtually all the daylight hours: '*ghudu*' (early morning) is the beginning of the day, and '*asal*' (late afternoon) is the time between mid-afternoon and sunset, which we commonly referred to in the words '*shams al-asil*' (pre-sunset sun). This aspect of the universe is repeated in many verses in the Noble Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Believers, remember Allah often and glorify Him morning and evening.' (*al-Ahzab*: 41-42)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'We have truly sent you (O Prophet Muhammad) as a witness, a bringer of good news and a warner, in order that you (O people) may believe in Allah and His Messenger (Prophet Muhammad), and assist and honour him, and praise Him (Allah) morning (*bukra*) and evening (*asil*).' (*al-Fath*: 8-9)

The word '*asil*' (evening) is the common word used to refer to evening in these verses; as for its counterpart, namely morning, Allah sometimes refers to it using the word '*bukra*' and other times using '*ghudu*'. He *the Most High* says: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as (if there were) a niche and within it a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil almost glows forth (by itself) though no fire touches it. Light upon Light! Allah guides to His Light whom He wills. And Allah sets forth parables for mankind, and Allah knows all things. In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified in the mornings (*ghudu*) and in the evenings (*asal*).' (*an-Nur*: 35-36)

You realize on reading the words 'in houses' that there is an action involved here, because 'in houses' is an adverb of place. But if you go back and read what precedes it, you find that it has no semantic connection (*muta`alliq*). You may also notice then that what precedes it is: 'Light upon Light!' 'In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified...' (*an-Nur*: 36). When you come to the mosque to meet with Allah, this is Light; and when you pray to Him, this is also Light. And on stepping out, you take with you the Light that descends upon you in His Houses. All this is Light upon Light. Hence, whoever wishes to expose himself to the rays of Almighty Allah's Light let him frequently visit Allah's Houses. Mosques are filled with Light because they are places of prayer. We know that prayer is a time to be alone with one's Lord. Whenever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was faced with a difficult moment, he would stand and pray. If you follow the example of Prophet Muhammad and offer two *rak`as* (units of prayer) whenever you are faced with a difficult situation or a hard problem that is beyond your power to deal with, and you ask Allah and put the matter into His hands, Allah will not let you walk away without being content and satisfied. 'In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified in the mornings and in the evenings.' (*an-Nur*: 36)

As we know, morning ('*ghudu*' or '*bukra*') and evening ('*asal*' or '*asil*') are the first moments of the day and the first moments of evening. Why are the first moments of day and of evening mentioned here? It is because these

are the times when it is most needed to supplicate to Allah and remember Him. Before you go to work at the start of the day, you need a recharge of determination to carry out your work and provide for your living needs. At the end of the day, you also need to seek solace in your Lord for Him to heal your exhaustion after the day's toils. Therefore, beware of letting life distract you from the Giver of life; you can remember our Lord while you are performing any of your daily activities, and receive every outcome of your actions by saying, '*Alhamdu lillah* (praise is due to Allah)'; and when you see anything of the beautiful creation of the Bestower of life, you should say, '*Masha'-Allah* (Allah has willed this good)!'; and when you see anything amazing, you should say, '*Subhan Allah* (Glory be to Allah)!' This is the reason why, when Allah calls His believing slaves to prayer, He says: 'O you who believe! When the call to prayer is made on the day of Friday, come to the remembrance of Allah and quit all trading, That is better for you, if only you knew' (*al-Jumu'a*: 9). This duty is related to the Friday Prayer which must be offered in congregation; assemblage for the Friday Prayer is required, we must all gather to offer it as a congregation. A congregation is a condition for the validity of a Friday Prayer.

We know that the prayer is a means of invoking and remembering our Lord; so, what should follow prayer? 'Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek Allah's Bounty. And remember Allah often so that you may prosper' (*al-Jumu'a*: 10). That is, beware lest your pursuits on earth and your seeking to obtain Allah's Bounties through the use of worldly means distract you from your obligation to Allah; rather, you must constantly remember Him. '(O Prophet Muhammad), remember your Lord inwardly, with total humility and awe, without being loud of voice, in the mornings and in the evenings—do not be one of the heedless.' (*al-A'raf*: 205)

That is, do not be one of those who are heedless of Allah's Demands contained in the boundaries that He has explained to us. Heedlessness signifies the occupation of the mind with something other than its Creator. When you keep your Creator in your mind all the time, you cannot be neglectful of what He demands of you in the morning, evening, or any other time, whether you are offering the five prayers or moving throughout the land for any reason. Believers should follow the good example of the angels in this regard, as they

incessantly glorify their Lord during the night and day without slackening or slowing down. If this is how the angels behave, although they have never committed any sin and can never disobey Him, and neither eat nor procreate, and experience neither hunger nor lust—since all sins arise from these desires—because of all this, you should imitate their good example. This is because they are the ones who never disobey Allah's Commands and do whatever they are ordered to do. They do not disdain to worship Allah, nor do they become tired of worshipping Him. They glorify His Praise and prostrate themselves before Him without slackening. Therefore, the Lord then says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَيُسَبِّحُونَهُ، وَلَهُ يَسْجُدُونَ ﴿٢٠٦﴾

[even] those who live in the presence of your Lord are not too proud to worship Him: they glorify Him and bow down before Him [206] (The Quran, *al-A'raf*: 206)

But if we are all near to our Lord, and in the presence of all that which He has created for us, and have all equally benefitted from the bounty He has bestowed on us by creating us out of nothing, why is it that only these creatures are singled out as being near to Him? Do not misunderstand this 'nearness' as being a spatial nearness; for space is a container, and our Lord *Glorified is He* cannot be contained by any space. Rather, the nearness here is nearness of merit, nearness of grace, nearness of sovereignty and nearness of providence. Allah has established a sequence of causes and effects for all His creatures, yet some of His creatures glorify Him for His Intrinsic Glory and do nothing else but this. These are known as '*al-'alina*' (the exalted angels). This category of angels is different from '*al-mudabirat*' (the angels who execute Allah's Commands) and '*al-hafazha*' (angels who guard and write every human's good and bad deeds). For this reason, as we have said before, when the Lord *the Exalted* commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* and Satan refused to do so, Allah said to him: 'Are you too proud (to fall prostrate to Adam) or are you one of the high exalted (angels)?' (*Sad*: 75)

'The high exalted' here denotes the angels who were not included in the command to prostrate. Those angels exist for no other reason than to glorify the Divine Essence, and they know nothing about the many existing creatures

or the earthly world. Those angels differ from the angels who are made to serve us. Those who are near to our Lord are the angels who are wholly engaged and engrossed in the Glory of Allah, knowing nothing but the Divine Essence and doing nothing but glorifying Him. In the next verse, Allah specifies their role saying: '... (They) are not too proud to worship Him; they glorify Him and to Him they prostrate.' (*al-A'raf*: 206)

The scholars differed as to the nature of the angels' prostration. Does it mean submission; does it mean prayer? Or is it the physical prostration that we know? For us, prostration is the deepest expression of submission to Allah *Glorified is He* in the act of prayer. It is to place the noblest part of man, the face, onto the floor as the believer's token of obedience and surrender to Allah *the Most High*. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that when we come across one of the verses requiring prostration in the Book of Allah, due to containing a mention of this act, we should respond to it in a genuine way and offer a prostration known as '*sujud at-tilawa*' (the prostration of recitation). We do this when we recite the verse ourselves or hear it recited. The scholars have located the verses of prostration in the Quran and have placed marks there in the written text, and they have put a line underneath the word where prostration should be performed. The scholars have clarified the places where one should prostrate in the course of reading the Quran and found that the first of these verses is at the end of the chapter of *al-A'raf* whose meanings we are now contemplating, and the final one is in the chapter of *al-'Alaq*: 'Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists)...' (*al-'Alaq*: 1)

Between these two chapters, other verses of prostration occur. Some of the scholars hold that there are two verses of prostration in the chapter of *al-Hajj*, while others do not count the second of these two verses as a verse of prostration. Those who count the second disagreed-upon verse of prostration in the chapter of *al-Hajj* along with the first agreed-upon verse give a total of fifteen prostrations in the whole Quran. Those who do not count this second prostration in the chapter of *al-Hajj* give a total of fourteen.

Any time you want to prostrate to Allah to offer thanks to Him or when reading any Quranic verse, you may prostrate yourself in thankfulness to Him. This takes the form of a single prostration, just the same as the prostration of recitation. It is recommended whenever a blessing is received by you,

some trouble is eliminated, or some evil is dispelled. This kind of prostration is only performed outside the Canonical Prayers.

A prostration naturally begins with the exclamation, '*Allahu Akbar*' (Allah is the Greatest) and a rising of the hands as though one is beginning the Canonical Prayer. It may be assumed that one says, '*Subhana Rabbiyal a`la*' (Glory be to my Lord the Most High)' as one usually does in the prescribed Prayers, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us what to say in the prostration of recitation. It was narrated that Ibn `Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said that he was with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when a man came to him and said, 'I dreamt last night that I was praying towards the base of a tree. I recited a verse of prostration and prostrated myself, and the tree prostrated along with me. I heard it saying, "O Allah, remove a sin from me for it, write down a reward for me for it, and store it with you for me"'. Ibn `Abbas added, 'I saw Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recite a verse containing a prostration and he prostrated himself. I heard him say the same words that the man had told him the tree had said'.⁽¹⁾

We have thus reached the end of the chapter of *al-A`raf* (*the Heights*). The name of this chapter is in itself appropriate, as it refers to the prominent place where those whose good and evil deeds weigh the same will sit. Their position will allow them to look at the people of Paradise on one side and the people of Hell on the other. In this sense, the word '*a`raf*' (heights) designates a place that is especially high. It is derived from the word for the mane of a horse '*urf*' which is on the highest part of the horse. The name of the next chapter '*al-Anfal*' (battle gains) also literally signifies an increase. Therefore, the names for the chapters of *al-A`raf* and *al-Anfal* are both appropriate for their respective chapters. There is also a connection between the two chapters which we can observe when we read Allah's Words near the end of the chapter of *al-A`raf*: 'Verily, those who fear Allah, when an evil thought comes to them from Satan, they remember (Allah), and (indeed) they then see (things as they truly are)' (*al-A`raf*: 201).

(1) Narrated by Ibn Majah and At-Tirmidhi, whose narration adds, '*...and accept it from me as you accepted it from Your slave David peace be upon him*'

The Chapter of

al-Anfal

**In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy
(Revealed in Medina)**

At the beginning of the chapter of *al-Anfal* Allah says: ‘They ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about (distributing) the battle gains. Say, “That is a matter for Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad), so fear Allah and make things right between you....”’ (*al-Anfal*: 1) One of Satan’s aims is to sow division between the believers through his insinuations; but as soon as they remember Allah and what He has in store for the believers, they are again able to clearly see the Truth which stands out higher than everything else, and that is belief in Allah. Such belief requires the heart to be cleansed of everything that may pollute it for it to remain sincere and pure.

Allah (God)⁽¹⁾ begins the chapter of *al-Anfal* by saying:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَنْفَالِ قُلِ الْأَنْفَالُ لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَصِلُوا
ذَاتَ يَدَيْكُمْ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١﴾

**They ask you [Prophet] about [distributing] the battle gains. Say,
‘That is a matter for God and His Messenger, so be mindful of
God and make things right between you. Obey God and His
Messenger if you are true believers [1] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 1)**

A question requires a questioner, who in this case are the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; a questioned person, who

(1) The Islamic conception of ‘Allah’ is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of ‘God’. However, the word ‘Allah’ does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (Who has no son). We prefer, however, to use ‘Allah’ rather than ‘God’ as it has a unique character; it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

in this case is the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and the topic of the question being asked. The topic of a question may be self-apparent, like when we ask a friend, 'What did you eat today?' This question limits the scope of the answer, and in turn the answer is specific and focused.

With regard to the topic of the question in Allah's saying: 'They ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about menstruation. Say, "Menstruation is a painful condition, so keep away from women during it. Do not approach them until they are cleansed; when they are cleansed, you may approach them as Allah has ordained"' (*al-Baqara: 222*). The topic asked about is indicated by the answer. Clearly the Companions did not ask about the causes of menstruation, or why menstrual periods stop when a woman becomes pregnant or when she reaches menopause. Rather, the subject under question, which is clear from the response of the Lord, was 'Is it permissible for a man to have sexual intercourse with his wife during her period?'

Orphans were the topic of another question which they posed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and again the answer specifies the topic being asked. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'they ask you concerning (the property of) orphans. Say, "The best thing is to work honestly with their property." And if you mix your affairs with theirs, they are your brothers. And Allah knows him who means mischief (i.e. to consume their property) from him who means good (i.e. to save their property). And if Allah had wished, He could have put you into difficulties. Truly, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise' (*al-Baqara: 220*).

Out of piety and the desire to stay away from doubtful matters, the Companions were afraid of mixing the orphans' wealth with their own wealth, whether through the expenses of feeding them or other forms of interaction. For this reason, the answer addressed this specific topic.

Sometimes a question is posed in which the basis of the answer has to be limited because it is too general, like in the saying of the Lord *Glorified is He*: 'They ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about crescent moons. Say, "They show the times appointed for people, and for the pilgrimage"' (*al-Baqara: 189*).

They asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the reason why the moon begins small and then grows larger? And why it then

disappears as it wanes? This is a question related to astronomy. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only responded within the limits of what would benefit them, by focusing on the practical and useful significance of their question. Thus, the answer came as: ‘They show the times appointed for people and for the pilgrimage’ (*al-Baqara*: 189).

Even now, despite being in the twentieth century, some people still deny the scientific facts which have been proven beyond any measure of doubt. Our clarification to the common people in this regard is: truly, the moon resembles a nail clipping, then it becomes larger and rounder, then it disappears gradually. In this matter, the poet says:

The end of the light of the waning Moon, I imagined
as the clipping shaved from fingernails.

If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said to them, ‘Actually, the moon appears when the earth is halfway between the sun and the moon, and after that the illuminated part of the moon begins to become larger’, their minds will not have been able to comprehend the matter. Instead, he told them the direct and practical wisdom that their minds could completely grasp. Later, our understanding of science became more refined and the study of astrophysics has provided explanations for the minute details of the celestial bodies.

There is also a type of question that was raised about a particular issue, like when Allah says: ‘They ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about the sacred month—about fighting therein. Say, “Fighting therein is great [sin], but averting [people] from the way of Allah and disbelief in Him and [preventing access to] *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* and the expulsion of its people therefrom are greater [evil] in the sight of Allah”’ (*al-Baqara*: 217). As such, we realize that the topic of the question is the ruling on fighting during the sacred months, and not specifying or defining the sacred months themselves.

Here in the chapter of *al-Anfal*, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘they ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about (distributing) the battle gains’ (*al-Anfal*: 1). The word ‘*anfāl*’ (translated in the verse at hand as ‘battle gains’) is the plural of ‘*nafāl*’ pronounced with a ‘*fatha*’ or short ‘a’ vowel on the first and second

Arabic letters ('*n*' and '*f*'), much like the word '*sabab*' (reason) whose plural is '*asbab*'. The meaning intended by '*anfāl*' in this verse is booty which is one of Allah's Bounties; as booty was made lawful to Prophet Muhammad as a special favour from Allah to him and his followers; a privilege that was not granted to previous nations. The word '*nafl*' without a vowel on the second letter means something additional or extra, from which comes the term '*salat an-nafla*' (Supererogatory Prayer). It signifies additional prayers which are extra to the prescribed obligatory prayers. It is with this meaning that Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra devotion (*naflah*) for you...' (*al-Isra*': 79).

So '*nafla*' means something extra or beyond what is necessary. For this reason, we say that '*nafl*' is additional worship, and it has to fulfil the condition of being the same form as the obligatory forms of worship. This is because a human does not worship His Lord according to his personal whims, but rather offers any form of worship in the exact manner that His Lord has ordained. As such, if one wants to perform additional worship, let it be of the kind and form that Allah has prescribed for him so the worshipper does not concoct rites and rituals that are not lawful. Therefore, the Lord *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra offering of your own, so that your Lord may raise you to a (highly) praised status' (*al-Isra*': 79).

Based on the above-mentioned definition, '*nafl*' is an extra-obligatory act of worship. When Allah *Glorified is He* tested Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* by ordering him to sacrifice his son Isma'il (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* the test came to him not by explicit revelation but in a vision. Indeed, it was a hard trial, for the burdensome task of slaughtering our master Isma'il was not—for example—assigned to another person besides Ibrahim, and after that our master *Ibrahim* was to patiently endure his loss. No; rather, Prophet Ibrahim was commanded to perform the act of slaughtering his own son Isma'il himself. This was a grievous trial especially because Isma'il was born only when Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* was already quite old. It was one of the many circumstances that must have been very painful and hard on his soul. For this reason, our Lord *Glorified is He* described Ibrahim as an

'*ummah*', or a community unto himself, which is to say that all the good righteous qualities necessary for an entire community were all gathered in him. 'And (remember) when the Lord of Ibrahim (Abraham) tried him with (certain) Commands, which he fulfilled' (*al-Baqara*: 124).

We can discern the mercifulness with which our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* discharged the prophethood duty. Visions of the prophets are true revelations. From the outset, when Ibrahim undertook to fulfil the command he received in his vision to sacrifice his son, he did not want to take his son away before informing him of the truth. Not mentioning the truth to him might, for a moment, drive his son to a thought of filial disobedience. The son might think to himself, 'What kind of a father is this who slaughters his own son?' Our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* also wanted his son to have his share in the reward for this sacrifice. He also wanted that his son, like himself, would be submissive and obedient to the Order of the Lord *Glorified is He*. For this reason he said to him: 'My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?' (*as-Saffat*: 102) Our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* thus explained the trial he was put through by this vision. How did the son answer his father? 'He said, "Father, do as you are commanded and, Allah willing, you will find me steadfast"' (*as-Saffat*: 102). This means that Isma'il *peace be upon him* surrendered the reins to Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *the Most High* resumes describing the progress of the trial that Ibrahim faced in being asked to sacrifice his own son, by saying: 'When they had both submitted to Allah, and he had laid his son down on the side of his face, We called out to him, "O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the vision". This is how We reward those who do good' (*as-Saffat*: 103-105).

After both our masters, Ibrahim and Isma'il *peace be upon them* accepted and resigned themselves to Allah's Will, and they obediently started to fulfil Allah's Order, Allah, in His Mercy, lifted His Order. Allah *Glorified is He* describes this trial and the sacrificial ram that He sent to be sacrificed instead of Isma'il, saying: 'It was a test to prove (their true characters)—We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice' (*as-Saffat*: 106-107).

This event teaches us Muslims that, when faced with some predestination from Allah, we should not show despair, anxiety, and anger or discontent; in

doing so we only protract the duration of the sentence. Instead, we should submit ourselves to Allah's Decree. Only then will it be lifted; for the sentence is not lifted until one accepts it. Ransoming the life of Isma'il was not the only reward that Ibrahim received for his steadfastness during this trial; in addition, our Lord gave him the good tidings of more gifts. He says: 'And We gave him the glad tidings of Ishaq (Isaac), a Prophet from the righteous' (*as-Saffat*: 112).

In other words, Allah did not bless him with just any second child, for He gave him a child who would be a righteous Prophet. Even more abundance came in another Divine Gift to our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* as Allah further says: 'And We bestowed upon him Ishaq (Isaac) and, as an additional gift, Ya'qub (Jacob), and made each of them righteous' (*al-Anbiya*': 72).

This manifests the Bounteous Gifts of the Lord *the Most High* to our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him*. Not only did Allah grant Ibrahim *peace be upon him* a child who preserved his father's name, but one who also preserved the legacy of the Islamic faith. All this is a '*nafla*' (extra giving) from Allah, or, in plain words, generous gifts surpassing the expected reward and a great bounty to the father of all prophets.

So '*an-nafl*' is the additional excess beyond the basic standard. An example of this is found in the special favours that Allah conferred on His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Messenger of Allah stated, 'I have been given five things that were not given to any of the prophets before me: I have been granted victory by fear (being cast into the hearts of my enemies) for a distance of one month's travel; the earth has been made a place of prostration and a means of purification for me, so when the time of prayer comes for any person among my followers, let him pray; battle booty has been made lawful for me, when it was not lawful for anyone before me; I have been granted the right of intercession; and a prophet was sent only to his own people, but I have been sent to all mankind.'⁽¹⁾

Thus, Allah's Decision to make booty lawful in Islam is something above and beyond the original standard because taking booty was not permissible to any of the prophets before our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Jabir Allah be pleased with him; it was also recorded by As-Siuyuti in (Jami' Al-ahadith), vol. 1, p. 635.*

There is '*nafal*' (excess) and there is '*ghanim*' (booty gained by fighting), and there is '*fai*' (booty gained without fighting) and '*qabad*' (the yet-undivided booty).

We shall briefly explain the meaning of each of them. We will briefly describe each of these words. *Al-Ghanimah* is what Muslims take from defeated enemies and is divided amongst themselves according to specific shares- The foot soldier takes one share and the horseman takes two shares. But this is only by way of example, for the division of spoils of war is according to the Laws of Allah *Glorified is He*. As for *an-nafal* and *an-nafl*, (battle gains), an explanation has already been previously given. *Al-Fai*' is anything that becomes the property of Muslims by any means other than war or subjugation. *Al-Qabd* means whatever was captured, i.e. that loot and booty which is gathered before being divided.

But if the commander told the fighters, as Prophet Muhammad did, 'Whoever kills a disbeliever gets his spoils of war', in order to embolden them to enter the battle, then that would be an addition to the portion of that fighter in the loot.

The leader might send out a brigade; and to embolden them to dive headfirst into difficult situations, he might say to the members of that brigade, 'To you is half of what you take in loot, or a fourth, or a fifth'. This means that it is their right to take the portion which their leader has allotted to them as an added bonus, and then they would divide the remaining loot after that. When the fighters take the treasure, gear, equipment, and money from prisoners of war, these are all considered *ghana'im* (spoils of war), but when they are all gathered together before the commander, its name becomes *Al-Qabd* which was previously explained.

On the day of the battle of Badr an incident occurred as narrated by the noble Companion Sa'd ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* who related that he said to Prophet Muhammad, 'O Messenger of Allah, today Allah has made me feel satisfied and removed the rage from my heart regarding the idolaters, so grant me this sword'. Prophet Muhammad said, 'This sword is not for you, nor for me; put it down'. Sa'd ibn Malik continued, 'So I put it down, and then went away. I thought he was trying to give this sword to someone who had not been tested as I had been tested. But suddenly Prophet Muhammad

peace and blessings be upon him called to me from behind me. I asked, “Has Allah sent a revelation about me?” Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, “You were asking me for the sword and I said it was not mine. But verily it has now been given to me as a gift, so now it is yours”. At that time the Prophet said that Allah has revealed this verse: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about [distributing] the battle gains. Say, “That is a matter for Allah and His Messenger”’ (*al-Anfal*: 1). This means that it was not for the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to determine the matter of the sword until the Ruling of Allah *Glorified is He* was revealed. We all know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to the battle of Badr without the intention to fight; rather, the foray was intended to intercept the caravan carrying goods for the Quraysh coming from the Levant which had no more than forty guards. Accordingly, the Muslims set out with only three hundred and thirteen men without their battle gear or equipment and no more than two mounts because they did not set out to engage in battle; they had set out for the caravan, intending to gain something for themselves in return for what had been plundered from them in Mecca. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them that Abu-Sufyan (the leader of the caravan) had taken the seaside road, i.e. he had taken a path far from the Muslims and had not come in the direction of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those with him. Meanwhile, Quraysh had called all their men to war to protect the caravan, and the question became whether the believers should withdraw without a fight, or face the amassing army which numbered a thousand men, geared and equipped for war. In light of the enemy’s numbers, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to encourage the younger men to face the enemy, and that is why he said to them, ‘Whoever kills a disbeliever gets his spoils’, i.e. he set aside for them an added bonus to their portion in the spoils of the battle. When the elders from among the Companions and older men learned of this, they said, ‘O Prophet Muhammad, they killed and were killed, but we stood by the banners. They would have sought our protection if a defeat had befallen them, and for this reason we must all take our share equally’. Clamour and discord broke out, but Allah *Glorified is He* has responded to this discord with the revelation of His saying: ‘they ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about

[distributing] the battle gains. Say, “that is a matter for Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad), so fear Allah” (*al-Anfal*: 1).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has explained for them that the distribution of all the spoils of war among the people was the right of Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and as a result they have to be wary of transgressing against the Command of Allah *Glorified is He* in this matter, and keep a protective barrier between themselves and His Anger. Therefore, they must not quarrel or bicker among yourselves.

If a little quarrel had broken out between the two sides, the youths and the older men, the matter should be made right between them. When you hear: 'Make things right between you', you might ask, what does *bayn* (between) mean here? The answer is that it is anything between two things. If you lined people up sitting side by side, that which is between each person is called the *bayn*. That which lies between us could be friendship or it could be animosity. That which is between people has a form and shape; if the form of what is between you has a bit of animosity, adjust and repair the cause of this animosity until there is no longer any bitterness or enmity among you.

After this Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah and His Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)’ (*al-Anfal*: 1). We have said that the command to obey means being submissive to Allah *Glorified is He* and obedience is not only restricted to the commands but also to the prohibitions, for a command is a demand to do something, and a prohibition is a demand not to do something, each of which is a kind of order. Consequently, whenever Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to obey Him and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you should understand this saying in light of what we have learned before, i.e. that the issue of obedience takes three forms in the Quran. In the first form, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah and the Messenger (Muhammad)’ (*al-Anfal*: 1). Here, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions two people to be obeyed: He and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, but He mentions the command to obey only one time. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad)’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 92). In this form, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the two people to be obeyed and repeats the command to obey. In a third verse, He *Glorified is He*

commands us to obey the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We obey Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding the commands issued by Allah because in His Message there are affairs mentioned by Him and also mentioned by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and furthermore the *Sunnah* is in unison with the Quran regarding them. Further, there are some commandments that were revealed as general principles which necessitate explanations and specifications. One such example is the prayer about which Allah says: ‘Establish regular prayers; for such prayers are a prescribed obligation for the believers at appointed times’ (*an-Nisa*: 103).

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed prayer as a general principle and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained this principle and how to perform it. It consists of five prayers, two required units of prayer in the *Fajr* (Dawn Prayer), four for *Zhuhr* (Noon Prayer), four for ‘*Asr* (Afternoon Prayer), three for *Maghrib* (Sunset Prayer), and four for ‘*Isha*’ (Early-Night Prayer). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also specified the prayers in which we recite *al-Fatiha*—the Opening chapter of the Quran—and some verses from the Quran aloud, and that in which we do not recite aloud.

Hence, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah’, that means to submit to Him by following the rulings in general; and when He says: ‘Obey the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)’, this means to follow the Prophet’s explanation of the rulings. And when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah and the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)’, this means that Allah *Glorified is He* has issued the command, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has reported it, and the purpose of both is one and the same. However, if there is no Decree from Allah *Glorified is He* but the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said something, we should obey him as Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded us to obey Prophet Muhammad and Allah has vested authority in him with His Command: ‘So [Muslims] take whatever the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) gives you and refrain from anything he withholds from you’ (*al-Hashr*: 7). That is to say every command from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the result of the established authority which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon him.

In the verse under discussion, Allah says: ‘So fear Allah and make things right between you. Obey Allah and His Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)’ (*al-Anfal*: 1). This means that if you are true believers, then fear Allah *Glorified is He* out of piety, and follow His Commands and the commands of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because the meaning of faith is that the heart should be so firmly convinced of an issue that it does not come up for discussion again such as the conviction that the universe has but One God, and He has a Message conveyed by a Messenger (Muhammad) who has proven his prophethood with a miracle from Allah *Glorified is He*. This faith and the Message call upon you to be pious and to fear Allah in amending discord and enjoin you to obey Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad in every matter. Those matters which are before you now, require obedience from you, as they are very sensitive points.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* goes on to clarify who the believers are. He says:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَّتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٢﴾ الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord [2] who keep up the prayer and give to others out of what We provide for them [3] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 2-3)

These two noble verses list five attributes with regards to the belief, behaviour and bodily actions of a believer, and with these the meaning of the word ‘believers’ is defined. The first attribute is that if Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned, their hearts tremble with awe. The second of the attributes is that if the verses of Allah are recited to them, their faith increases. The third attribute is that they put their trust in their Lord. The fourth is that they perform the prayer. And the fifth attribute is that they give in charity from what Allah *Glorified is He* has provided them.

Consequently, the first attribute of believers is that if Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned, their hearts tremble with awe. Here, trembling means fear and

panic which causes a person to shake a little and results in some disturbance in his/her heart. From the poets who tried to provide an image for this sensation, we find one of them who said:

The heart, when it is said that Layla of 'Amir
Is departing in the morning or evening, is like
a sand grouse fooled by a net
Which it pulls at and its wing is stuck.

The poet pictures the state of his heart when he hears the news of his beloved's departure as if he has become a pigeon trying to free itself from a net or a snare into which it fell. It struggles at the net trying to escape, flustered at this predicament. This is the condition of the poet's heart at the moment of separation from his beloved one.

But, if the remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* prompts believers' hearts to tremble, does that not contradict another saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Truly, in the Remembrance of Allah does hearts find satisfaction?' (*ar-Ra'd*: 28) In reality, there is no contradiction between the two verses because invoking the Name of Allah *Glorified is He* happens in varying circumstances. Clearly, if the man harms himself by his own excesses, he trembles when he mentions the Name of Allah *Glorified is He* whose Commands he has broken. But if the man is mindful of the rights of Allah *Glorified is He* as best as he can in all his dealings, then certainly his heart will find peace when Allah's Name is mentioned.

This fear or trembling arises from the remembrance of the exaltedness and supremacy of Allah's Attributes of Majesty, and the contentment of a restful heart results from being reminded of the compassion and kindness of Allah's Attributes of Beauty. One verse contains both of these when Allah says: 'Allah has revealed the most beautiful Message, a book, consistent with itself and repeating (its teachings on various aspects). The skins of those who fear their Lord shiver from it. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of Allah' (*az-Zumar*: 23).

The skin shivers out of dread and fear of Allah *Glorified is He* and then softens after being reassured and given hope by the Gentle Benefactor because our Lord says: 'Tell my slaves that I am indeed the Oft-Forgiving,

the Dispenser of mercy' (*al-Hijr*: 49). Thus, let none say that there is a contradiction between these two statements as both the trembling of a fearful heart and the contentment of a restful heart spring from invoking Allah's Name when man is in different situations. And if a man trembles in fear at the mention of Allah's Name, he will change and start doing righteous deeds, and thereby find restfulness and contentment, according to Allah's saying: 'Good deeds remove evil deeds' (*Hud*: 114).

Does this mean that faith increases and decreases? Scholars have differed on this matter. When we look to what Allah *Glorified is He* has said, we find that it affirms that faith increases, and whenever you ask, 'What is Belief?' and 'What is Islam?', etc., you will find the answer in Prophet Muhammad's answer to the questioner in the following Hadith narrated by the venerable Companion Abu Hurayrah *Allah be pleased with him* wherein he said, 'One day, while Prophet Muhammad was sitting with the people, a man came to him walking and he said, "O Allah's Messenger, what is Belief?"' Prophet Muhammad said, "Belief is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the meeting with Him, and to believe in the Resurrection". The man asked, "O Allah's Messenger, what is Islam?" Prophet Muhammad replied, "Islam is to worship Allah and not worship anything besides Him, to offer prayers perfectly, to pay the (compulsory) charity i.e. *zakat* and to fast the month of *Ramadan*". The man again asked, "O Allah's Messenger, what is *Ihsan* (i.e. perfection or benevolence)?" Prophet Muhammad said, "*Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not achieve this state of devotion, then (take it for granted that) Allah sees you". The man further asked, "O Allah's Messenger, when will the Hour be established?" Prophet Muhammad replied, "The one who is asked about it does not know more than the questioner, but I will describe to you its portents. When the female slave gives birth to her mistress that will be one of its portents; when the bare-footed naked people become the chiefs of the people that will be one of its portents, The Hour is one of five things which nobody knows except Allah. Allah says, 'Verily, the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah (alone). He sends down the rain, and knows that which is in the wombs' (*Luqman*: 34). Then the man left. Prophet Muhammad said, "Call him back to me." They went to call him back

but could not find him. Prophet Muhammad said, “That was Gabriel who came to teach the people their religion.”⁽¹⁾

When Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came asking questions to teach some of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Prophet Muhammad said to him that *al-'iman* (Belief) is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment. A different narration also lists belief in the Divine Decree and both the good and evil that may be fated for us.

All of these are unseen matters. Belief does not concern matters that we can physically sense. For example, one does not say, 'I believe that I am moving about on the ground' because this is a matter of the senses. Belief is only in intangible and unseen matters, and the first of these matters is to believe in one God Whom sight cannot grasp and Who is unseen, and to believe in His Angels who are also unseen and whose existence we accept as true because Allah *Glorified is He* has told us of their existence. We should also believe in the Messengers of Allah and the Books revealed to them. It is true that a Book is something physical and the Messenger also has a physical presence, but one was not able to see the Divine Revelation when the Book was being sent down to the Messenger, and hence it is a matter of the unseen. Similarly, the belief in the Resurrection Day, the Divine Decree, and Fate whose wisdom is hidden from us— all of these are thus unseen matters.

This is the highest level of Belief. But there is another kind of Belief as well. We know that Divine Laws did not come all at once, but rather came in stages. The first Command that was revealed states that we must believe that the Law is from Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, what increases or decreases with regards to Belief is our faith concerning what Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to do, and that these commandments are issued by Him. Whenever a verse was revealed with a new law, Belief of the faithful increased. For example, when the command to pray was revealed, they believed in its performance, complied and carried it out. Next was the order to fast, and they submitted to it. Next came the order to pay *zakat* (charity), and it was obeyed and carried out. Naturally, there is a difference between believing in a thing and doing it.

(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

As such, believing is one thing and action is another; for Islam involves outward compliance to Allah's Message. And applying everything which Islam lays down is a way of continually increasing one's Belief because we believe that anything that is in the Message is from Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, what increases is the responsibilities that come from these commandments and the level of submission to them. As an example of that, we all know the saying of Allah: 'Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah for those who are able to undertake it' (*Al-Imran: 97*).

But there are people who cling to a literal understanding of the next part of Allah's saying: 'those who disbelieve [should know that] Allah has no need of any [of His creatures]' (*Al-Imran: 97*).

Those who cling to a literal understanding of this saying of Allah *Glorified is He* did not ask themselves, 'How did someone disbelieve? Did someone disbelieve because he did not perform the pilgrimage?' No, surely, disbelief in this issue is nothing other than to deny that the pilgrimage is one of the pillars of Islam. Consequently, what is demanded of us is to faithfully accept the performance of the pilgrimage as one of the pillars of Islam according to one's ability to undertake it. Thus, if the person undertook it, he obeys the command, and if he did not undertake it, this should be due only to his inability to do it.

And lastly Allah *Glorified is He* ends the noble verse before us from the chapter of *al-Anfal* saying: 'in their Lord [the believers] put their trust'. Usually, the prepositional phrase comes towards the end of a sentence, whereas here it comes first. In this way, the sentence style indicates both restriction and limitation, like the idiom, 'For Zayd is the money' (meaning, 'The money is for Zayd', but with the prepositional phrase 'for Zayd' coming first) which is to say that the money belongs to Zayd and no one else has a right to it. Similarly, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'and in their Lord [the believers] put their trust' means that they do not put their trust in anyone else, and they limit whom they trust to Allah *Glorified is He*. By *at-tawakkul* (putting trust in someone) we mean to believe that you have a trustee who takes care of your most essential affairs for you, as demonstrated by the fact that when there is something you are incapable of, you say, 'I trusted so-and-so to do it for me successfully'; and because you chose who you trust, and he is well-suited to

carry out that task, you are able to announce with self-assurance that you have trusted him to do so-and-so.

Thus, the meaning of putting trust in Allah is that they entrust their affairs to the One Who they can trust their well-being with, and that one is Allah the fully Capable, the Most Great Who has created the universe, and Who has created the means whereby results will be achieved. Beyond that, He has left the root causes of some things unapparent except that we always note that it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who causes all things. For this reason, do not despair that something will not come to pass simply because you do not have the means to make it happen. Instead, say, 'This is with regards to the means, but as for me, I have a Lord Who created the means, and He is the Fully Capable Who controls all the means'. In our daily lives, we notice that people confuse the work of the limbs with that of the heart. Someone might think that he has trusted in Allah and therefore does not make use of any means; instead he resorts to laziness and idleness. He says, 'I am trusting in Allah'. To such a person we say that this is considered indifference and not trusting in Allah because trusting in Allah is not the work of the limbs, but of the heart.

The believer who accepts and understands Allah's Message will find the means which he should concern himself with, and Allah is the One Who creates absolutely all of the means. Faith stresses that the body and limbs perform work, and the heart trusts in Allah. Consequently, the limbs must plough the earth, choose good seed, sow them in the earth, irrigate the land, and care for them; all of these are means. Lastly, do not depend on the means alone, but rather say, 'Above all means, there is the One Who creates absolutely all of the means'; it is possible that the crop will prosper and grow only for an outbreak of rain or heat to strike and ruin it in an instant.

And whoever moves, trusting in Allah *Glorified is He* the work of the heart to the work of the limbs, we say to him, 'You have become indifferent and have shifted the work of the heart onto the limbs'. Whoever does this deludes himself and deceives mankind because he has neglected making use of the means and has claimed that he is trusting in Allah *Glorified is He*. If anyone like this truly trusted in Allah *Glorified is He* he will have concerned himself with the means. I always tell whoever claims to trust in Allah while he is lazy, 'Why do you not let the food come on its own to your mouth? Why do you

stretch your hand out to it?’ Whoever mistakes laziness for trusting in Allah lies concerning his claim of trusting in Allah, for no one waits for a piece of meat to jump from a plate of food into his mouth, for instance; rather, he picks it up with his hand, chews it with his teeth and swallows it after chewing. However, if he truly believed that trusting in Allah *Glorified is He* meant that his limbs do not do any work, he will not do any of these actions. Instead, he falsely trusts in Allah concerning anything that tires him; that is, he makes his limbs work with regards to what pleases him but does not use them for matters which weary him. Allah's saying: ‘And in their Lord [the believers] put [all] their trust’ means that they believe that the means are part of Allah's Creation. And when the believer concerns himself with the means, he shows his belief when he takes refuge with Allah and depends on Him. But if the means were ever beyond him, he knows that he has a Lord who sustains him. For this reason, the name ‘Lord’ was used in the verse. *Ar-Rabb* (The Lord) is the One Who creates out of nothing and Who furnishes aid out of nothing, and so long as it is He Who has aided you and created you out of nothing, is it conceivable that He will do you wrong? Of course, He will not, but it is your responsibility to understand that He has created limbs for you; you must use them for the purposes for which He has created them.

The subsequent verse goes on to clarify that the limbs’ work is to carry out both the fourth and fifth attributes of a believer: ‘Who establish the prayer and spend from what Allah has provided them’ (*al-Anfal*: 3). In prayer, assuming the standing position, the sitting position, reciting and saying ‘*Subhanallah*’ (Glorified is Allah) and ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ (Allah is the Greatest) are all the work of the limbs and body. Likewise, *zakat* (compulsory charity) is a kind of work resulting from previous effort. In order to give it, you must exert effort and concern yourself with the means to produce what is needed to support yourself and those close to you — your wife, your children, and then your relatives — and after that *zakat* is deducted from the remaining money. Naturally, this does not pertain to the agricultural *zakat* about which Allah says: ‘But render the dues that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered’ (*al-An’am*: 141).

We always find prayer and *zakat* coupled together. Every verse you can find which mentions prayer also makes mention of *zakat*. This is because prayer entails leaving behind your worldly concerns in which you toil by taking

lowly means, going to Allah *Glorified is He* and standing before Him, i.e. you set aside a portion of the time that you will otherwise have spent in the activities of your daily life to pause before your Lord, the Creator of all means.

Meanwhile, *zakat* entails setting aside a portion of your money and that is why we say that by performing prayer you give *zakat* and even more. Whatever extra remains to you after you have met the basic needs and your money has reached a certain amount, 2.5% of that is the amount subject to *zakat*. But with prayer you sacrifice some of the time that you will otherwise have spent in work which serves as the source of your money; thus prayer is *zakat* and more. In *zakat*, you relinquish some money, but in prayer you give up some of your time, and with time you work and earn your wages, which are the means to pay *zakat*.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse saying that the believers spend from what He has provided them. And as the scholars mention, we know that *ar-rizq* (provision) is everything useful for the man. Even what the robber steals and gains by theft is considered to be provision for him, but it is an unsanctioned gain; that is, if he is caught, he will be punished in this world, and surely he will not escape the punishment of Allah, the Just Judge of this world and the next. Naturally, the provision of the robber is different from lawful gains such as those from lawful work, and the true believer is he who spends from these lawful gains either on the necessities of his life or in service to his religious community.

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ حَقًّا لَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

Those are the ones who truly believe. They have high standing with their Lord, forgiveness, and generous provision [4] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 4)

The pronoun 'those' refers to those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has blessed with the five attributes of faith that He mentions previously: they are whose hearts tremble at the mention of Allah whose faith is increased when they hear His Verses, who put their trust in Him, establish Prayer and give *zakat*: 'Those are the ones who are true believers' (*al-Anfal*: 4).

And verily, we know that Truth is constant; it does not change or let changes sweep it away. All people are subordinate to it for it is tied to the welfare and well-being of their lives. If falsehood tried to shake Truth, Truth is solid and unmoving because Truth is strong and powerful. Let us recite the saying of Allah: ‘He [Allah] sends down water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries a growing layer of froth on its surface. Furthermore, from that (metal ore) which they heat in the fire to make ornaments and tools, there is a froth likewise. In this way Allah illustrates (by parables) Truth and falsehood—the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind. This is how Allah sets forth parables’ (*ar-Ra‘d*: 17). When the rain comes down from the sky, every valley draws from the rainwater according to the measure of its breadth and depth. Floating above the flood almost as if it were a capricious wind, you see the scum and dross caused by the presence of impurities like bits of straw and other things. This is a parable for what we see in our own lives, for we find that the earth, mankind, and all creatures benefit from water, but they do not benefit from the scum or dross. Then, in the very same verse Allah *Glorified is He* moves from the parable about water, to the parable of fire: ‘Furthermore, from that (metal ore) which they heat in the fire to make ornaments and tools, there is froth likewise’ (*ar-Ra‘d*: 17).

When you watch a piece of metal being melted in fire and transformed into liquid, you see sparks of impurities fly from it, and then they float on the surface of the molten metal; this is what is called ‘the dross of the metal’. Eliminating this dross is done to leave the pure metal for us to use it to make swords, daggers or other similar tools. This same process occurs with gold when the goldsmith melts it to remove any impurities and reshape it into an ornament or jewellery.

The scum in water and the dross in metal and gold are gathered to the sides until the water, and similarly the iron and gold, remain pure. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘In this way does Allah set forth the parable of Truth and falsehood’ (*ar-Ra‘d*: 17). This is to say that Truth remains pure and unchanged, while falsehood rises just to be gathered to the sides for it to be removed, without any benefit.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the supremacy of His Word in another verse, saying: 'And [Allah] brought low the word of those who disbelieved whereas His Words remain supreme' (*at-Tawba*: 40). We note that Allah *Glorified is He* has brought low the word of the disbelievers, but His Word possesses an unchanging supremacy.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that the believers who are characterized by these five attributes are believers of true faith. He says: 'Those are the ones who are true believers' (*al-Anfal*: 4). This means that there are believers who are not of a high degree of faith, and that there are different ranks and levels of faith. Moreover, the rank and reward correspond to the extent to which one possesses the five attributes of a true believer.

We can see examples of people of this calibre in someone who is showered with kindness from people once he bestows his friendship on them, or someone who is not a scholar but finds some knowledge from scholars whom he befriends, or the weak person who forms a friendship with a strong person who comes to his aid, or the poor person who gives his friendship to a rich person who then gives him some of his money, and the irrational person takes a measure of sensibility from among the rational people whom he befriends.

Thus, the pious and people close to Allah are given profuse blessings from the Lord, and it is they whom Allah *Glorified is He* has singled out with gifts, for whosoever has these attributes and is a true believer has a rank with His Lord equal to the extent of his Truth and purity. Indeed, we know that walking in the path of Truth has much to offer. Let us provide an example of this. Suppose there is someone who prays the five prayers in their prescribed times which is a general requirement. If he performs the *Qiyam Al-Layl* prayers (Supererogatory Night Prayers), or keeps attending Congregational Prayers, and adheres to the path of Allah, this person will gain a measure of purity that he did not have before. He will find compassion and clarity in his heart, and the concerns of his life will proceed smoothly and with ease.

Such a blessed person could be someone who—by way of example—on his way out of the house is asked by his wife, 'What should we make for dinner today?' and he answers, 'Let us finish off what we have left over from yesterday.' But when he returns, he might be surprised to learn that his brother has come

into town from the countryside and brought a gift of a duck, some cream, and a cake. His wife asks him, 'Did you know that your brother was coming?' and he says, 'No, I did not know he was coming.'

This story is merely an example. But the blessings and gifts, both spiritual and material, to those who are pure are much greater than this. Whoever keeps up worship and increases his worship, and does all this correctly, will be increasingly blessed by Allah *Glorified is He* because He never tires of giving the people who are pure. Whoever makes an effort to worship like this and increases his worship, he will increasingly find himself surrounded by Allah's Blessings.

The following example is one I always offer to illustrate this point, but Allah is above all possible comparison for He is not similar to anything. Let us suppose that a person wanted to travel from Cairo to Alexandria and asked another for advice. That other person then says, 'If you went along route (A), you will find a pleasant rest stop, whereas along route (B), you will find no such thing'. The traveller heeds the advice of the person guiding him and finds him to be truthful; hence, from then on, he relies on that person's opinion. In ways like this, people who are pure receive similar care and blessings from Allah according to the extent of their purity. Being surrounded by the radiance on Allah's Care is what encourages people to go to great lengths in worship and piety. There are some who call devout ascetics lunatics, but in reality what the people who call them this actually see (when the ascetics worship a lot) is a high status and sublime rank, which is what attracts the ascetic to worship so much. From another vantage point the ascetic looks at those who are caught up in earthly wants, and he prays for them, considering them, not himself, to be the unfortunate and the poor ones. I tell whoever meets someone like this, 'Those ascetics are of no concern to you, therefore leave them alone and do not interfere with them as long as they do not ask anything of you, for they have their own status and rank assigned to them from Allah *Glorified is He*'.

Rankings among people are like promotions to be striven after, so what do we think of the rankings that come from Allah *Glorified is He*? As long as Allah *Glorified is He* has promised exalted ranks for them, they are sure to be forgiven and they will be cleansed by such forgiveness. The assignment of ranks from

Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned in the verse before forgiveness because He has created all of creation and knows that people are subject to change. He knows that there are some people who transgress against themselves through extravagance. They try to do good deeds only because they believe that the good deeds take away their sins and misdeeds. Allah *Glorified is He* has taught us that the outlining features of Islam are there because of the impious and those who wrong themselves because one finds that those who are not impious and do no wrong to themselves, obey Allah *Glorified is He* naturally and calmly, without anything burdening them. As for those who do evil, these misdeeds disrupt their nightly solace. The impious person, at the moment of his erroneous extravagances, thinks that he has slipped something past the Plan of Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* tells him in clear terms, 'Do not dare believe that there exists anyone who can deceive Allah *Glorified is He*. You will exert much effort when repenting, yearning to serve Allah's Plan'. And at the moment they become aware and repent, we find the impious person compelled to do good deeds, thereby confirming the saying of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Verily, Allah upholds His religion through the impious'.⁽¹⁾

The impious person feels compelled to do good works in order to erase his misdeeds because his sinful excesses seem to take on bodily form before him, showing him the evil of his life. As for those who do not err, we find them with peace in their hearts, contentment in their souls and without needing anything to force them to avoid straying.

Those believers will have a generous provision, but can this provision be described only as something which is given by a generous person? The answer is no, because generosity transcends the originally generous person until the provision itself is described as generous, as if the provision itself loves its owner. For when Allah *Glorified is He* bestows a blessing upon someone, and he uses it to obey Allah, the blessing itself feels overjoyed in going to this person, knowing that he will use it in pious works and in whatever pleases Allah *Glorified is He*.

(1) Narrated by At-Tabarani

It behoves you to know that Provision from Allah *Glorified is He* will never miss us, for no one knows how to find the provision which Allah *Glorified is He* has destined for him, but the provision knows how to find the person it is meant for and searches for him everywhere until it finds him. In this way we understand the fact that generosity is attributed to the provision itself, and for this reason it can be said that the provision itself is generous.

All of these issues came as a result of the argument over the spoils of war. Allah *Glorified is He* has laid out the legal ruling, making it clear that the distribution of the spoils is the right of Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and none can rightfully disagree with Allah *Glorified is He* after He has spoken. This incident with the spoils of war occurred while they were heading out for battle. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* first wanted to set out, there was a party of Muslims who were at first averse to the idea, but later accepted it; however, their attitude differed with regards to the spoils of war and some of them demanded more than they deserved. Allah *Glorified is He* refers to these Muslims saying:

﴿ كَمَا أَخْرَجَكَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَيْتِكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لَكَرِهُوا ﴾

For it was your Lord who made you [Prophet] venture from your home for a true purpose — though a group of the believers disliked it [5] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 5)

Here, the word ‘*Kama*’ (Just as) refers to a comparison of two situations: they accepted Allah's apportioning of the spoils of war after they had first refused it, just as they previously had agreed to meet up with the departing party of war after their initial reluctance to do so. Instead, they set out, engaged the enemy in battle, and were victorious. Then they quarrelled over the spoils of victory and finally accepted the division of the spoils laid down by Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Is the mention of their aversion to going to war done to impugn this group of people? No, rather, this story presents a very human perspective: whoever wants to plunge into battle must be seized with the belief that he will emerge victorious, otherwise he will consider his venturing out to fight as being recklessness. At the time the Muslims were few in number and unequipped, having no more than two horses with them. They set out to overtake the

caravan and take possession of its goods, not to face a full army. As such, the reluctance of some to engage in battle was not the result of refusing Allah's Orders or the orders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It was only that they weighed the entire matter out by human standards and did not find the expected balance of powers. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to show them that if they had gone and just gained victory over the caravan, then it will have been said of them that they were merely a band of highway robbers who swooped down on the caravan and plundered it. Remember that there were no more than forty men with the caravan, and the Muslims were more than three hundred; clearly, it stands to reason that they will be the victors. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to aid them against the army that the disbelievers of Mecca had dispatched. This army was massive in number and included both valorous and clever members of Quraysh. But Allah's Desire to wipe out those who supported falsehood came to pass.

Going out from the home in the verse signifies Prophet Muhammad's going out from Medina to confront the disbelievers. Furthermore, the reluctance of this party of believers did not mean they fell out of the bounds of Belief. This is because the meaning of 'a party' is merely one group that differs from another group within a larger entity all held together with a common bond. An army, for instance, consists of many divisions within the same army. These parties, which are the subject of discussion here, are the ones which were reluctant to go out to battle, although they are also believers. We know that the reluctance to fight is a normal condition for the people because Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Fighting is prescribed for the believers, even though it is hateful to you' (*al-Baqara*: 216).

After that, in the next verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal*, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يُجَادِلُونَكَ فِي الْحَقِّ بَعْدَ مَا بَيَّنَّ كَأَنَّمَا يُسَاقُونَ إِلَى الْمَوْتِ وَهُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٦﴾

and argued with you about the truth after it had been made clear, as if they were being driven towards a death they could see with their own eyes [6] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 6)

Arguing with Prophet Muhammad refers to the argument about going out to confront the army even after the true promise from Allah *Glorified is He* had

become clear to them. This promise was that one of two enemy hosts will be theirs, either the caravan or the massive army that Quraysh had amassed to confront them. Now, so long as Allah *Glorified is He* had promised you one of the two, why did you not choose the stronger of the two?! Why did you want the promise to be for the weaker one? Indeed, He has guaranteed that one of the two will be yours, and hence reason and logic would assert that as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has promised us one of the two, we should pursue whichever is most beneficial to Islam and the Truth in whose cause we struggle. Logic and reason also have it that we pursue the target which possesses power and formidable might because while it may be true that victory will be easily assured against the caravan, afterwards that victory will be no more than a trifling victory spoken of in idle prattle. Indeed, it will be merely the victory of highway robbers, not of a people fighting in the cause of Belief and Religion. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* afterwards says: ‘You wanted the unarmed group to be yours, but it was Allah’s Will to establish the Truth according to His Word and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers’ (*al-Anfal*: 7).

Therefore, reason presumes that as long as Allah *Glorified is He* promises Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* one of the two enemy parties, the first being a caravan and the other an army, reason dictates that the believers will be keen on pursuing the stronger of the two, for victory over the army is nobler than victory over the caravan.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that they argued with Prophet Muhammad about the Truth after it had been made clear, as if they were being driven towards a death they could see with their own eyes.

Note that there is the act of ‘driving’ people and there is ‘leading’. Leading means that you are at the forefront to guide people along the path, and driving people is done from the rear in order to spur those in front of you onward for them to complete the journey in a shorter amount of time; thus, instead of traversing a given distance in an hour — for example — it is traversed in half an hour. Consequently, Allah's saying that they were as if they were being driven towards death means that they did not march of their own volition, rather, they were forced while seeing the ugly spectre of death, as they thought that facing a thousand young Qurayshi warriors was extremely

difficult for them. A battle of three hundred against a thousand is no trifling matter; this means that each Muslim has to face three equipped and geared men. Therefore, the picture that presented itself to them seemed grave, but in the course of adopting this view they did not realize that they had a Lord Who will make them victorious over all those gathered against them.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَذِيعِدْكُمْ اللَّهُ إِحْدَى الطَّائِفَيْنِ أَنَّهُمَا لَكُمْ وَتَوَدُّونَ أَنَّ غَيْرَ ذَاتِ الشَّوْكَةِ
تَكُونُ لَكُمْ وَيُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُحَقِّقَ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَيَقْطَعَ دَابِرَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧﴾

Remember how God promised you [believers] that one of the two enemy groups would fall to you: you wanted the unarmed group to be yours, but it was God's will to establish the truth according to His Word and to finish off the disbelievers [7] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 7)

Whoever is promised something from Allah *Glorified is He* has to accept what is promised by Him as a truthful promise. The promises of mankind are questionable because man is changeable. For instance, you might have promised something to someone and tried to fulfil your promise but were unable to, or you might have been able to fulfil your promise when you made it but then lost the power to do so, or you might have simply changed your mind. As such, promises from human peers are not certain, but with respect to the fully Capable, the Powerful, before whom no barriers stand to prevent the realization of what He desires, His promise is truthful and must be accepted as truth.

The verse means that if you preferred to have the enemy party which guards the caravan and which lacks power, or not *ash-shawkah*...: and *ash-shawkah* can also mean a thorn which is something with a very sharp point that easily pierces through things. It is slim and tapered at the tip and then increases in width towards its bottom until its thickness fits its base. This way it can pierce a wider area. As for saying the party of *Ash-Shawkah*, this implies that they possess enough strength to pierce through to their desired goals, and will not be denied their objective. For this reason we have the phrase, *shaki al-silah* (armed to the teeth). That is, the verse means, to those

who might wish to avoid confronting the army of the disbelievers in battle, Allah *Glorified is He* says to them that He has willed to establish the Truth according to His Word and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers. He has desired to make Islam victorious by putting a weak meagre unequipped force against a powerful army in order for them to know that it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who truly supported them. Thus, He has established the Truth with His Words, that is, His promise. And there was also the promise from Allah: ‘And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit both the east and the west of the land wherein We have bestowed blessings’ (*al-A'raf*: 137).

Likewise, the promise of Allah to cut off the roots of the disbelievers was fulfilled. ‘The roots’ and remainder mean what is left behind, and therefore, to say, ‘I cut off the roots of something’, is to say I made it so that not a trace of that thing was left.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِيُحَقِّقَ الْحَقَّ وَيُبْطِلَ الْبَاطِلَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٨﴾

**To prove the Truth to be true, and the false to be false, much as the guilty might dislike it [8]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 8)**

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* previously says that He wanted to ‘...establish the Truth...’ (*al-Anfal*: 7), and here He says again: ‘To prove the Truth to be true...’ (*al-Anfal*: 8). The first ‘Truth’ refers to the victory of the feeble few over the mighty multitude. That is the first Truth which Allah *Glorified is He* has promised by His Words, that is, to establish the Path of Islam even if it is hateful to those who are lost in sin.

And after that that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَاسْتَجَابَ لَكُمْ أَنِّي مُمِدُّكُمْ بِأَلْفٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُرَدِّفِينَ ﴿٩﴾

**When you begged your Lord for help, He answered you, ‘I will reinforce you with a thousand angels in succession’ [9]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 9)**

The form of the word ‘*istaghath*’ (to beg for aid) denotes the meaning of asking for help, just as ‘*istasqa*’ which means to ask for a drink, and ‘*istafhama*’

which means to ask for understanding. As such, the pattern of words that begin with the Arabic letters (*alif, sin* and *ta*) are used when asking for something. *Istighathah* is to ask for aid from someone more powerful who is capable of providing help, the root of that word comes from the word '*al-ghayth*' that means 'rain'. For this reason, when the earth is dry for want of rainfall and no one can find water, they say, 'We asked for aid (*al-ghawth*)'. And because water is the root of all life, this word is used in the context of preserving life, thus warriors ask for aid from Allah *Glorified is He* because they risk death during times of war.

The words '*tastagheethun Rabbakum*' (you beg your Lord) are in the second person plural, as if all of them were praying for aid at the same time. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had prayed for aid when everyone was in line for battle and Abu Jahl said, 'O God, give victory to those who are right among us'. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* raised his hand, turned towards the *qibla*, and said: 'O Allah, fulfil what you have promised me. O Allah, bring me what you have promised me. O Allah, if you destroy this band of Muslims no one will be left to worship you on this earth.'⁽¹⁾

What Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said shows that he was seeking the Aid of the Creator who has promised him victory. After the Prophet finished, the people behind him said, 'Amen' because whenever a believer utters 'Amen' after an imam or leader says a supplication, it is as if he had also made the supplication spoken by the leader or imam. For this reason, whoever says 'Amen' is one of the supplicants in the same supplication. Allah *Glorified is He* says that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* supplicated Allah: 'Our Lord! Obliterate their (Pharaoh's and his chief's) wealth and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the agonizing torment' (*Yunus*: 88). This is what the noble Quran has conveyed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said. After that, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has said, "Accepted is your supplication"' (*Yunus*: 89).

Hence, despite the fact that it was Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who supplicated, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Accepted is your supplication' (*Yunus*: 89)

(1) Narrated by Muslim

stating the dual form of the word ‘your’ which shows that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* offered supplication and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* said, ‘Amen’, and in this way he became a supplicant as well like his brother Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So He answered you, “I will aid you with a thousand angels in succession”’ (*al-Anfal*: 9). The Arabic ‘*fastajab lakum*’ (so He answered you) also has the letters (*alif, sin, ta*) which—as we learned earlier—are used to ask for things. When Allah *Glorified is He* says He answered their supplication, it means that He has asked His soldiers on earth to side with and support Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions. For Allah *Glorified is He* has created the universe and He has created reasons and the means in it which we ourselves can see, and behind that world are the hidden forces of angels. Angels are Allah's hidden Creation which we cannot see or know anything about if Allah does not tell us that He has angels.

So angels are not among the creatures visible to us, and only our faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and our belief in what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has conveyed from Allah have made us aware that He has created angels. Allah *Glorified is He* also informs us that He has created the jinn and we believe that as well. Thus the reason for our belief in the existence of angels and jinn are the reports of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is truthful in what he communicates from Allah *Glorified is He*. Should one’s mind pause before this issue and wonder, ‘How can someone exist and not be seen?’ we say to him, ‘This is information from Allah’. There are those who deny the existence of angels and jinn, and say, ‘It’s just the forces of mechanics working in the physical world’, and they take no note when Allah *Glorified is He* talks about anything unseen and intangible. But Allah leaves signs of that invisible world to help the mind grasp its existence. For instance, He causes you not to know of a thing’s existence, but you feel its effects and notice its traces. Then, with the passing of time, you become aware of its existence. These things are not created when you discover them, but rather, they existed and you could not detect them. There is a difference between the existence of some matter and realizing the existence of this

matter. An example of this is the discovery of the microbe which took place in the seventeenth century, and which of course had already existed before it was discovered. It had been entering people's bodies and penetrating their skin, and when it was discovered, this simply proved that it had existed before, but they did not possess the tools to detect it. Consequently, when you are told that Allah *Glorified is He* has a world and a creation that you cannot perceive, take what you know now, but had not been able to perceive before as true evidence of that imperceptible world.

Allah *Glorified is He* has told us of the existence of angels and that every person's affairs are conducted for him by angels. They are 'those who conduct affairs' and they are the guardians, for Allah says: 'for each [person] there are [guardian angels] in succession, before and behind him, watching over him by Allah's Command' (*ar-Ra'd*: 11).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Not a word does one utter but there is [with him] an ever-present observer' (*Qaf*: 18). These angels are the agents responsible for man's welfare and concerns on earth. Rain, for instance, has its own angel, and agriculture has its angel, as does everything else. This is the hidden unseen means that makes everything come about. Allah says: 'He answered you, "I will aid you with a thousand angels in succession"' (*al-Anfal*: 9). The aid was reinforcements for the army, just as whenever any army is faced with a battle, it cannot win with its present amount of troops and supplies, the army's leader will call for reinforcements and backup to be sent. Similarly, Allah reinforced them with a thousand angels in succession.

We know that when our Lord ordered the angels to bow before Adam *peace be upon him* the order was not to every type of angel, but it was issued to angels responsible for the interests and affairs of the earth. As for the other angels, the issue had nothing to do with them. This is why when Satan rebelled, Allah *Glorified is He* reproached him saying: 'Are you too proud or are you one of the exalted?' (*Sad*: 75) What is meant by 'exalted' are those higher angels to whom the order to bow did not pertain.

In this verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal*, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He has aided the Muslims fighting in the battle of Badr with a thousand angels in succession.

Ar-Ridf is what follows behind you, that is why people say, ‘So-and-so a person sat on his mount and *ardafa* (put behind him) such-and-such a person’ which means he put the other person behind him. That is, the doer of such an action, *almurdif*, is the person at the front, and the person who this is done to, *almurdaf*, is the person in the back. The verse thus makes it clear to us that the angels were in front of the Muslims because it describes them as *murdifeen*. Indeed, because the army of Muslims was few in number, and the army of the disbelievers was many in number, the angels came to increase the number of the Muslim army. There were a thousand warriors arrayed against the Muslims, and therefore Allah *Glorified is He* sent an equal number of angels, thereby increasing the army of the believers until its number surpassed the disbelievers by the number of Muslims who had originally left from Medina. It would have been sufficient for Allah *Glorified is He* to send just one angel, as the stories of what happen to the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* show. It is narrated that Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* struck one of his wings beneath the cities of the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and lifted them into the sky until the angels in heaven could hear the braying of donkeys, the barking of dogs, and the cries of roosters, but through all this not a jar fell over nor a pitcher spilled, and then he turned them upside down and hurled them onto the earth in one motion.

In addition, a single shriek shook the people of Thamud, destroying them with an earthquake. Why then did Allah *Glorified is He* send a thousand angels? He did that in order to increase the numbers against the enemy and aid them in two ways: The first way was to strike fear into the hearts of the enemy, and the second was to strengthen the believers’ resolution. However, did the angels physically do anything in the battle? There is some disagreement about the answer.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرَىٰ وَلِتَطْمَئِنَّ بِهِ قُلُوبُكُمْ وَمَا النَّصْرُ إِلَّا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

God made this a message of hope to reassure your hearts: help comes only from God, He is mighty and wise [10] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 10)

This means that the angels were only heralds of good tidings for them, and the believers were the ones who fought their enemies. Allah *Glorified is He*

also says: 'Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands and will disgrace them and give you victory over them, and [He will] heal the breasts (feelings) of the believers' (*at-Tawba*: 14).

Allah *Glorified is He* said this to the believers as they embarked on their first battle and encountered the first battle between them and the disbelievers because if they had known that the angels would fight in the battle, they might have slackened while fighting and entered the battle unprepared and without enthusiasm. Allah clarifies that He sent the angels as good tidings: 'for your hearts to be assured thereby' (*al-Anfal*: 10). This also means that the number of angels corresponded to the number in the disbelievers' army, and the remainder was those who originally set out to fight. The angels were sent to the battle in order for the believers' hearts to be assured, but Allah wants to chastise the disbelievers at the hands of only the Muslims, because Allah wants the disbelievers to fear and respect the believers and to hold them in awe.

There are different narrations concerning the role of the angels in the battle of Badr. Abu Jahl said to Ibn Mas'ud, 'What are these voices I hear on the battlefield?' There were voices which frightened the disbelievers in the Battle of Badr. Ibn Mas'ud responded to Abu Jahl saying, 'They are the voices of angels'. Abu Jahl said, 'Then it is the angels that make you conquer'.

Allah instructs the believers not to be tempted even by angels, for victory does not come from you or from the angels; it comes only from Allah. A person must be confident that the one whom he wants to give him victory is able to do so. When human beings depend on other human beings, they cannot be sure of gaining victory, as the opposing party may conquer, but true victory comes only from Allah *Glorified is He* Who cannot be conquered: 'And victory comes only from Allah...' (*al-Anfal*: 10).

When you seek someone's help to make you victorious over your enemies, he may cause you to conquer your enemy or both of you may be conquered by the enemy, even though you think you will win with the help of the person aiding you. As for Allah *Glorified is He*; He alone cannot be overcome or conquered: 'And victory comes only from Allah. Indeed, Allah *is the Almighty, the All-Wise.*' (*al-Anfal*: 10)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who gives true victory and help, a fact which gives the believer the zeal of faith and certainty of victory. There is wisdom behind Allah's help for the believers. If they slack in any matter, they will not be victorious because Allah does not change His way with people. In the Battle of Uhud, when the Muslims slackened and did not carry out the orders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, they did not achieve victory because wisdom necessitated that they should not gain victory. If Allah made them victorious, they will have thereafter made light of Prophet Muhammad's orders. Some of them will have said that although they disobeyed his order, they won the battle. Accordingly, one sees how important it is to obey Allah and Prophet Muhammad and to make use of all possible means. Prophet Muhammad ordered the archers in the Battle of Uhud not to leave their places and to carry out their tasks, even if they saw the rest of the army fleeing back towards Medina or being conquered. However, they disobeyed his order, and as a result Allah caused them to be defeated. Accordingly, they became sure that victory comes only from Allah *the Almighty* Who cannot be defeated. Al-Bukhari narrated on the authority of Al-Bara' ibn 'Azib who said, 'We met the disbelievers on that day and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* positioned a batch of archers and appointed 'Abdullah ibn Jubair as their commander. Then he said, "Do not leave this place; if you see us conquering the enemy, do not leave this place, and if you see them conquering us, do not (come to) help us."' (1)

We notice that the number of angels who were sent down to help the believers is mentioned once as a thousand and another time as three thousand; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Remember when you said to the believers, "Will you be satisfied if your Lord reinforces you by sending down three thousand angels?"' (Al-*Imran*: 124) If three thousand angels were not enough, Allah would increase their number. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Truly, if you are steadfast and fear Allah, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand swooping angels...' (Al-*Imran*: 125). Accordingly, sending down the reinforcements depended on the status of the believers. This is proven by Allah's saying: 'truly, if you are steadfast and fear Allah....' (Al-*Imran*: 125)

(1) Related by Al-Bukhari

Patience alone is insufficient, as piety and perseverance in fighting the enemy are necessary as well. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, ‘...be patient and persevere, and outdo [all others] in perseverance...’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 200). This is because the enemy may also possess the trait of being perseverant. But Allah rewards the believers who remain perseverant in order to overcome such enemies. Accordingly, if the enemy is perseverant, the believers must be more perseverant.

Allah *Glorified is He* sent the reinforcement of angels as good tidings in order for their hearts to be at rest and for them to be certain that victory comes from Allah *Glorified is He*.

‘And Allah made it (the promise of help) but only as good tidings and for your hearts to be assured thereby. And victory comes only from Allah. Indeed, Allah is the Almighty, the All-Wise’ (*al-Anfal*: 10). As soon as the battle had begun, a series of blessings that brought victory were sent. These blessings include a reinforcement of angels, good tidings to set hearts at rest, and certainty that victory comes from Allah *the Almighty* and the Wise.

The following verse gives the proof of this, as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذْ يُغَشِّيكُمُ النُّعَاسَ أَمَنَةً مِّنْهُ وَيُنزِلُ عَلَيْكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لِّيُطَهِّرَكُم بِهِ
 وَيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُم رِجْسَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيَرْبِطَ عَلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتَ بِهِ الْأَقْدَامَ ﴿١١﴾

Remember when He gave you sleep as a reassurance from Him, and sent down water from the sky to cleanse you, to remove Satan’s pollution from you, to make your hearts strong and your feet firm [11] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 11)

The word ‘*al-nu’as*’ means drowsiness that overtakes a person when he wants to sleep. The common folk in Egypt call it ‘*ta’sila*’ and say someone is ‘*m’assil*’ when he becomes drowsy. One of Allah’s signs is to give man a temporary respite of this type. Allah *Glorified is He* says about His exalted Self: ‘...neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep...’ (*al-Baqara*: 225). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* is never overcome by light or deep sleep because drowsiness implies that the body needs to sleep. However, there is nothing like Allah Who is not embodied or represented in anything; neither drowsiness nor sleep overcomes Him. If a person is talking to another

beside a drowsy person, the later will wake up, but the sleeper may not wake up. This verse means that Allah gave them drowsiness for them to find some tranquillity. We know that sleep is one of the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* in His creation. When a person eats food, drinks water, or breathes, the body changes all these substances into energy needed for movement. This energy is formed through interactions between different parts of the body, represented in metabolism and transformation of food into various components that give the appropriate nutrients to every cell in the body. Then, the lungs take oxygen by breathing and release carbon dioxide. There are thousands of other chemical reactions which do not release wastes as well as other reactions that produce wastes, which are expelled through the urinary passage, anus, the ear canal, or other ways. These wastes which are produced through a combustion process are called exhaust in mechanical machines. Exhaust refers to the gases which are ejected for the motion to continue. In the human body, it corresponds to faeces, earwax, rheum, and sweat. However, there is a type of process which produces energy without expelling wastes.

The primary means to restore the chemical balance in the human body is to have some rest for the body's substances to interact with each other and for the body to restore its natural state which can only happen during sleep. For this reason, when a person stays up very late and then goes to sleep, he feels his legs have gone numb because the body's substances are unable to interact as required due to staying awake too long. All of these are involuntary processes, as sometimes a person tries to sleep, but he cannot as sleep is one of the processes for which Allah is responsible, and is considered one of His amazing signs. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And of His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking of His bounty. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who listen' (*ar-Rum: 23*).

When researchers tried to explain the phenomenon of sleep, they put forth dozens of theories. In the latest experiment that was carried out, they brought a person and suspended him from his middle, as though he were a stick being lifted up at its middle by a construction crane so that the two halves of the stick are evenly balanced. They made certain that each half was equal in weight. When the person in the experiment fell asleep, the scientists found

that he leaned to one of the two sides, as if some weight had been added to one half and had increased its mass. This experiment proved that sleep is a marvel that deserves Allah to say about it: 'And of His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking of His bounty. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who listen' (*ar-Rum*: 23).

The word '*an-nahar*' (day) is mentioned in the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And of His signs is your sleep by night...' (*ar-Rum*: 23) to reveal that if a person could not sleep at night due to any reason, he may sleep during the day.

It is out of Allah's wisdom that He concluded this verse with His saying: '...Indeed, in that are signs for a people who listen' (*ar-Rum*: 23). Allah says this because sleep stops all bodily senses except hearing. Therefore, when someone calls a sleeper, he can hear it. When a person is asleep, he cannot voluntarily move his body, and the eye, for example, does not see during sleep. However, the ear does not stop functioning during sleep. When a father calls his sleeping son, his son can hear the call. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* caused the people in the cave to sleep for three hundred and nine years, He said: 'Then We drew [a veil] over their ears [with sleep] for a number of years in the cave' (*al-Kahf*: 11). If He had not sealed the ears of the people with sleep in the cave, they will have been able to hear, and hurricanes, the howls of coyotes, or the roars of lions would have awakened them, and they will not have been able to sleep for such a long period of time.

In the verse under consideration, Allah says: '[Remember] when He covered you with drowsiness as reassurance from Him...' (*al-Anfal*: 11). Perhaps a question crosses one's mind: Is there a kind of drowsiness which does not give reassurance? Yes, because drowsiness is no more than rest and relief from tiredness in order for a person to regain energy. Therefore, the word '*amanah*' (reassurance) is mentioned in the verse in order to reassure the hearts of believers in the midst of the surrounding causes of tension, as the number of their enemy's army was large, and they (the believers) were not equipped enough. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not want them to lose the energy necessary for battle by thinking of this matter, and for this reason He gave them a special type of drowsiness which was a form of reassurance.

Allah *Glorified is He* also caused this to be one of His signs, as it happened to all of them as a whole. If they had been overwhelmed by deep sleep, their enemies might have attacked them all. Instead, they were given some rest that includes some alertness: '[Remember] when He covered you with drowsiness as reassurance from Him...' (*al-Anfal*: 11).

In this verse, the word '*nu'as*' (drowsiness) is a direct object which includes reassurance from Allah *Glorified is He* Who says in another verse: 'Then after distress, He sent down upon you security [in the form of] drowsiness...' (*Al-Imran*: 154).

In *al-Anfal*, the word '*nu'as*' (drowsiness) is followed by '*amanah*' (reassurance), but in this verse in the chapter of *Al-Imran*, the word '*amanah*' (reassurance) is followed by '*nu'as*' (drowsiness). The conditions were different when each verse was revealed; the verse of the chapter of *Al-Imran* explains that drowsiness overwhelmed one group of the fighters during the Battle of Uhud. These fighters were the true believers who were encircling (and guarding) Prophet Muhammad. However, the verse mentioned in the chapter of *al-Anfal* clarifies that drowsiness overwhelmed the entire army (in the Battle of Badr) as all the believers were united during that battle, and there was no hypocrite or suspicious person among them. Therefore, this drowsiness which came as reassurance overwhelmed them all in order to rid them of fear and to fill their hearts with tranquillity and confidence in Allah's Help. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the same verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal*: '... and sent down upon you from the sky rain by which to purify you and remove from you the evil [whisperings] of Satan...' (*al-Anfal*: 11).

Purification implies that an incident occurred and consequently they needed to purify themselves, but they could not find water in order to do this because the disbelievers controlled the water and deprived the Muslims of it at the beginning of the battle. Therefore, the Muslims felt thirsty and were preoccupied with their thirst and need to purify their bodies. This implied that the believer has to remain clean even if he is in a battle; but if the battle lasts a day or two thereby preventing him from washing himself, no one will blame him for not washing during that time. This verse was revealed to point out the believer's strong desire to maintain his cleanliness if some secretions or sweat are discharged. The believers referred to in the verse might also need

purification from evil whisperings of Satan because he might cause them to have wet dreams and whisper to them saying not to pray in this state of ritual impurity. The fact that this idea happened to all of them is another of Allah's signs. Then Allah *Glorified is He* infuriated Satan by sending down water for them to drink and purify themselves.

In the same verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and to make steadfast your hearts and plant firmly thereby your feet' (*al-Anfal*: 11). Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to reassure the believers and calm their feelings. As soon as it began to rain, the believers dug holes to collect the rainwater. Accordingly, Allah protected them from the lack of water. In addition, raining on a sandy terrain is a further blessing as it keeps the sand on the ground and prevents dust from flying up. We know that when someone walks on the ground, his weight presses down on the land under him with a force that corresponds to his weight. When a child walks on sand, the traces he leaves are shallow in comparison to the traces left by a heavy man walking on sand. If you measure the depth of the traces in relation to the weight of a child and that of a huge man, you will find that the land sank in proportion to the mass of the person that walked on it. When people walk only for leisure, their pressure on the land is less than their pressure on it during a battle. During a battle their feet sink into the sand and part of the warrior's ability to move may be impaired because feet maintain the body's balance. Clearly, the sending of rain is an example of Allah's Wisdom. In our own lives, people in the countryside place the trunks of palm trees or a wooden bar across streams for people to get from one bank to another. However, if the person crossing the stream thinks about crossing the stream too much, he might fall into the water, but if he lets his legs move automatically, he will be well balanced and cross easily. A similar situation occurs in the construction of home staircases. Each step is of the same level for a person to ascend easily without thinking. However, if the level of one-step in the staircase is different from the level of the other steps, the person may lose his balance and fall because that person's legs have been automatically adjusted to the height of the step.

Similarly, ascending spiral staircases is exhausting because such staircases are widely spaced on one side and close to each other on another side. A person

might easily misjudge the distance while ascending. Accordingly, armies subject recruits to medical examinations and only choose people with balanced feet so their feet can help them in unusual circumstances. Out of the Creators' Majesty, He has bestowed unique features on every part of the body.

Allah concludes the verse, saying: ‘...and your feet firm’ (*al-Anfal*: 11). In one sense, making feet firm in the verse represents a spiritual matter, and in another sense, it refers to the fact that rainfall made the land firm and prevented dust and sand from flying up. In another verse, Allah says: ‘and how many a prophet [fought and] with him fought many religious men. But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the Cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allah loves the steadfast. And their words were not but that they said, "Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excesses [we may have committed] in our affairs [thereby transgressing our duties], and establish our feet firmly and give us victory over the disbelieving people”’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 146-147). Accordingly, we understand that making feet firm has several meanings, both spiritual and physical. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذْ يُوحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنِّي مَعَكُمْ فَثَبِّتُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا سَأَلَيْ فِي قُلُوبِ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعْبَ فَأَصْرِبُوا فَوْقَ الْأَعْنَاقِ وَأَصْرِبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ ﴿١٢﴾

Your Lord revealed to the angels: ‘I am with you: give the believers firmness; I shall put terror into the hearts of the disbelievers – strike above their necks and strike all their fingertip’ [12] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* inspired the angels that He will support and help them, saying: ‘So strengthen those who have believed...’ (*al-Anfal*: 12). Allah wanted the angels to strengthen the believers’ resolution and make their hearts firm, and as a result they will not fear their enemy. This further clarifies to the believers that they should not think that the large number of fighters or powerfulness of weapons is the reason for victory, as victory always comes from Allah *Glorified is He* who says: ‘How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allah...’ (*al-Baqara*: 249).

Allah told the angels to strengthen the believers because the ratio of believers to disbelievers was unbalanced and necessitated aid from Allah. We have said

that Allah intervenes if the matter transcends the normal means known by people. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him?' (*an-Naml*: 62). If someone says that he has supplicated Allah several times but He has not answered his supplication, we respond to him saying, 'Your supplication is not that of the distressed; it is for a luxury, like the supplication of the person who lives in an apartment and supplicates Allah to give him a small palace. It is also like the supplication of the person who walks on foot or takes the company's vehicle and supplicates Allah to give him his own car. Moreover, it is like the supplication of the person who owns a television and asks Allah to give him a video player. None of these supplications are considered that of the distressed because the distressed people are those who have lost their means of subsistence'.

Allah says in this verse: 'I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve so strike [them] on the necks and strike from them every fingertip' (*al-Anfal*: 12). Once Allah *Glorified is He* casts terror and fear into the hearts of the enemy, no matter what their numbers are or how well equipped they are, the enemy will leave everything behind and flee in terror. This is what some of the disbelievers did in this battle. Allah *Glorified is He* blessed the believers by supporting them with angels that gave them good tidings and reassurance, and also by sending them water, purifying them and expelling the whisperings of Satan from them. These were just precursors to the battle which indicates fulfilment of Allah's Promise to help the believers. All that they had to do was to join the battle with the faithful determination of a brave warrior who develops plans and prepares for confrontation.

The war weapons in the past were the sword, spear, and arrow, and the warrior had to use his mind to plan for the battle and his hands and fingers to grip the sword. Therefore, Allah drew the believers' attention to two essential points. He says: '...so strike [them] on the necks and strike from them every fingertip' (*al-Anfal*: 12).

When the neck is struck, the person either loses the ability to think or dies. If he remains alive, he will witness the death, defeat, and humiliation of his companions. Striking fingertips refers to striking the disbelievers' hands with swords because such a strike wounds the hands and renders them incapable of fighting.

Allah orders them to do that for a reason mentioned in the following verse:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ شَاقُّوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ
 اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿١٣﴾

**That was because they opposed God and His
 Messenger, and if anyone opposes God and His
 Messenger, God punishes them severely [13]
 (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 13)**

Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* and his Companions victorious and inflicted defeat upon the disbelievers because the disbelievers ‘opposed Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]...’ (*al-Anfal*: 13) The Arabic word ‘*shaqqu*’ (opposed) is derived from the word ‘*shaq*’ which means dividing something into two parts. It was incumbent on them to accept Allah’s Religion and Guidance which will guide their actions in this world, and there was no need to waste energy by splitting into two groups: one siding with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the other siding with disbelief and idolatry. The energy required for rectifying the affairs of humankind and the world is partially wasted in wars between Truth and falsehood. If the wars had stopped, all the human faculties and energies will have been directed towards reform, progress and doing good for humankind. However, the disbelievers separated from the path of Truth and opposed Allah, His Messenger Muhammad and the believers, so they deserved Allah’s severe punishment. Allah says: ‘And whoever opposes Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]—indeed, Allah is severe in punishment’ (*al-Anfal*: 13). This is a general issue; Allah’s way in this regard encompasses all those who oppose Him and His Messengers, and this has been the case since when the Message was first sent, and it will remain like this until the Day of Resurrection.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكُمْ فَذُوقُوهُ وَأَنَّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿١٤﴾

**‘That is what you get! Taste that!’ — and the torment of the Fire awaits the disbelievers [14]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 14)**

“That” refers to what happened at the Battle of Badr when the believers stroke the disbeliever’s necks and fingertips. The disbelievers had to taste Allah’s severe Torment. Tasting means sensing the flavour of the food or drink, but it can also go beyond the senses when it does not refer to food or drink. Our Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘[It will be said], "Taste! Indeed, you are the honoured, the noble!"’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 49)

This verse does not refer to tasting food or drink, but it refers to the feeling of shame and humiliation; tasting food is an apparent human sense. A person may taste something bitter or sweet, rough or smooth, etc. In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* gives an example of a general case, saying: ‘And Allah presents an example: a city which was safe and secure, its provision coming to it in abundance from every location, but it was ungrateful for the Favours of Allah; so Allah made it taste the garment of hunger and fear because of [the evil] which they had done’ (*an-Nahl*: 112).

Hunger is the need for food, so how can someone taste hunger? Hunger and clothes cannot be tasted, but we understand from Allah’s saying that the Arabic word ‘*idhaqah*’ (taste) refers to a strong awareness, with your senses, of what you are eating. Clothes—as we know—surround the body, hence this *idhaqah* (a strong awareness of what one is eating) encompasses the whole body to the extent that the fingertips, the leg, the chest and neck has the ability to ‘taste’. This implies that hunger surrounded the person completely. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘That [is what you receive in this life], so taste it’ (*al-Anfal*: 14).

However, tasting is different from swallowing and eating to one’s fill. There is an example of this meaning in the field of trade. When you buy—for example—guavas, dates or figs, the seller says to you, ‘They are sweet fruits, taste one’. He does not say, ‘Eat to your fill’. He tells you to taste the flavour of the fruit and then buy some for you to eat as you wish. What we experience

in this world is merely an act of tasting to which the following rural proverb applies, ‘Do not forget to grant me some of your favour even if it be something that can merely be tasted’. The torment that the disbelievers experienced at the hands of the believers was very brief compared to the severe punishment and painful torment they will experience in the Hereafter. Why? ‘That is because they opposed Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]. And whoever opposes Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]—indeed, Allah is severe in punishment’ (*al-Anfal*: 13).

Making these obstinate disbelievers taste shame and humiliation in this world is merely a sample of Allah’s severe Punishment for disbelief. On the Day of Judgement Allah will apply on them the ruling that is clarified in His saying: ‘And indeed for the disbelievers is the punishment of the Fire’ (*al-Anfal*: 14).

The shame and humiliation of the disbelievers represented merely a modest sample of the painful torment that will happen to them on the Day of Judgement. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and surely those who are unjust shall have a punishment besides this [in this life], but most of them do know not’ (*at-Tur*: 47). The torment in the Afterlife will be dreadful. The Arabic word ‘*al-‘adhab*’ means feeling great pain and sufferings. The feeling of pain and sufferings will remain as long as the sensory organs are exposed to the source of pain. Hence, when Allah *Glorified is He* recounts the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) and the hoopoe, He says: ‘And he took attendance of the birds and said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe? Is he absent? I will punish him with a severe punishment, or slaughter him, unless he brings me a convincing excuse for his absence’ (*an-Naml*: 20-21). The verse implies that slaughtering ends the punishment, and the evidence is that the other alternative for punishment is slaughtering.

What about the punishment of the fire? Fire known in our lives to burn anything thrown into it, but the fire of the Hereafter fundamentally differs from this because Allah says about it: ‘So oft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the torment’ (*an-Nisa*’: 56).

The next verse in the chapter of *al-Anfal* states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا لَقِيتُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا زَحَفًا فَلَا تَوَلُّوهُمْ ءَلَأَدْبَارَ ۝١٥

**Believers, when you meet the disbelievers in
battle, never turn your backs on them [15]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 15)**

We know that Allah addresses the believers in the Quran saying: ‘O you who believe’ (*al-Anfal*: 15). Then He mentions a matter related to faith and its requirements, or faith itself. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who believe, believe in Allah...’ (*an-Nisa*: 136). Some people may say, ‘How does Allah call them believers then asks them to believe?’ These inquisitive people have not realized that when Allah addresses the believers, He knows that they have believed, but the resolution of some of them may waver, causing them to neglect some of the prerequisites of Belief. Consequently, when Allah tells them: ‘...believe in Allah...’ (*an-Nisa*: 136), this means to renovate their Belief and to have continuous faith.

If Allah mentions after ‘O you who believe’ a command pertaining to faith including a legal ruling or a moral lesson, this means that those who believe in Allah as a Deity Who is Omnipotent and Wise should be sure that all His Commands involve benefits for them, and not for Him. Since His Attribute of Perfection is eternal, Allah’s creation of people has not given Him an extra Attribute of Perfection. Hence, all of Allah’s Commands to the believers involve their benefit and well-being. An example of this—but Allah is beyond comparison as He is the utmost example of perfection—is when you go to a doctor after conferring with your family and friends and making sure that he can treat you. He diagnoses your condition and prescribes medicine for you. You are free to decide whether to take the medicine or not, and the consequences of that decision affect only you and will not harm the doctor at all. If you do not take the medicine, you will harm yourself. Similarly, if you follow the instructions of Allah’s religion which He made as a model and guide for rectifying the affairs of life, you will benefit yourself. If you do not follow it, you will harm yourself. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “The Truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish believe, and let those who wish reject [it]”’ (*al-Kahf*: 29).

Clearly, the choice is left to the human being, whom Allah created. He also created the whole universe before creating man in order for it to serve him. Man was created after the creation of the sun, the moon, the earth, the mountains, water, and everything else in this universe. He Who created everything before creating you must inevitably possess the Attribute of Absolute Perfection, for He created everything with wisdom and in a perfect order. As He possesses the comprehensive Attribute of Absolute Perfection, He does not ask human beings to grant Him a new attribute of perfection when they perform His Commands. Allah is Self-Sufficient and does not need you; when you believe in Him, you will benefit from your faith, and He has only ordained the rulings which will rectify your affairs. And each ruling is preceded by ‘O you who believe’ (*al-Anfal*: 15).

The believer should not search for the reason behind Allah’s Rulings because if the believer does so, he will be acting the same way the disbeliever acts. When a believer—for example—knows about the Command to abstain from intoxicants, he should follow the Ruling because it is ordained by Allah. After the ordainment of the Ruling on intoxicants, some of the non-Muslims found out through scientific analysis that intoxicants are harmful and as a result they abstained from it; however, this action did not come out of faith.

Consequently, the believer should follow Allah’s Commands because they are ordained by Allah. The Muslim should perform righteous deeds without searching for the reason why Allah has ordained them. For example, it is true that one of the benefits of fasting is that the rich feels the sufferings of hunger and sympathizes with the poor, but the poor person who has nothing to give to anyone else should also offer fast.

The believer fasts because Allah has ordained fasting. Most of Allah’s Orders are preceded by ‘O you who believe’ (*al-Anfal*: 15). Allah calls the believers to obey His Commands. If they try to find the reason for the Ruling, they will not be considered as believers in Allah, the Commander, and Lawgiver; rather, they believe only in the reason behind the commands. Allah wants the believers to submit to Him alone, and for this reason He gives certain commands and prohibitions. For example, when you perform pilgrimage you should greet the Black Stone according to Allah’s Command, and you

may have the chance to kiss this stone like Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* did. In all cases, you do not submit to the stone but to the Most Sublime Commander who appointed Prophet Muhammad to tell the people to abstain from worshipping idols and stones. You should follow the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* with complete faith and submissiveness. Then during pilgrimage, you should throw pebbles at the stone pillars that symbolize Satan out of submission to the Orders of Allah *Glorified is He* which were conveyed through His Messenger Muhammad.

In the verse under discussion, Allah says: ‘O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve [while you are] advancing [for battle], do not turn your backs on them’ (*al-Anfal*: 15). So long as you believe in Allah, you also have to defend His Religion for your benefit because when you believe in Allah, all the society will benefit from your goodness, as Allah orders you to do only good. Consequently, you will not steal, commit adultery, drink intoxicants, harm people, or take bribes. Such behaviour will benefit the society because a society is harmed by the members who are misguided, and you will attain benefits when you strive to guide people to belief. In order for you to be a true believer, you should pass the values of belief to other people for you and other people to benefit from the conduct of those who have been guided to belief.

As Allah charges you to struggle in His Cause, you will benefit when you do so. ‘O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve [while you are] advancing [for battle]...’ (*al-Anfal*: 15). The word ‘*zahf*’ (advancing) is the verbal noun of the verb ‘*zahafa*’ the meaning of which is to move from one place to another using the upper half of the body. As such, the phrase ‘the baby *zahafa*’ means that he moved from his place by moving his hands and dragging the rest of his body along. When we say, ‘The baby *haba*’, this means the baby used his thighs and knees to move his body. Then when we say, ‘The baby *masha*’, this means that he stood on his own two feet and walked. The stages of movement start with *zahf* (moving using the upper part of the body), then *habuw* (moving using the lower part of the body), and finally *mashy* (walking). A child begins his first movements with moving his head, and then he moves his upper part of his body after controlling the

movement of his head. Next he becomes able to sit. After his thighs become strong, he begins to crawl, and when his legs become stronger, he walks. That is, the strength of a child begins from the upper part of his body.

What is meant by the word '*zahf*' (advancing) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse? Why does Allah not say '*harwilu*' (rush into battle)? In this verse, the word '*zahf*' means moving as one block without any visible separation in it, so that it appears to the viewer that the entire block is moving as one body, well planned.

This means that Allah wants the believers to move to war as one cohesive block for it to seem as if they are crawling forward (slowly and well planned). The word '*zahfa*' originally comes from the active participle '*zahifin*', but Allah does not mention the active participle and uses the verbal noun instead. For example, when you say about a fair person that he is fairness itself, this means that fairness is embodied in him. A poet says about the advancing army:

The khumays⁽¹⁾ in the east and west of the land advances (*zahfuh*),
Like thunder in the ear of the Gemini

The poet describes the advancing army as one cohesive block, and in this way no one can distinguish the movement of one soldier from that of the other soldiers, and one imagines that the entire group are moving at the same pace. An example of this movement can be seen during *Hajj* when one ascends to the second floor of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, as the people circumambulating the *Ka'ba* are so closely cohered together that they move as one block. For this reason, such a movement in battle is described as a flood.

The wide valley flooded with the necks of mounts.

The movement of these mounts is like the flow of flood in which no single drop can be distinguished from another.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that believers should encounter the disbelievers as a cohesive block. The disbelievers will be terrified when

(1) It means a huge army which consists of five regiments: the vanguard, centre, right, left, and rear.

they see the massive block of the believers whose members are indistinguishable from one another. This is how real confrontation should be.

Allah continues to warn the believers, saying: ‘...do not turn your backs on them’ (*al-Anfal*: 15). This means that Allah instructs them not to run away from them. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...do not turn back [from fighting in Allah's Cause] and [thus] become losers’ (*al-Ma'ida*: 21).

Allah intends to portray a horrible image in the people's minds. The word ‘*al-adbar*’ is the plural of ‘*dubur*’ the back, and it is the opposite of the front. This is a warning to the believers against turning their back to their enemy as this allows the enemy to attack you from behind, and an enemy attacking anyone from behind is abominable. Hence, when someone told Imam ‘Ali that his armour had a breastplate but did not have a back piece, i.e., his armour covered his chest but not his back, Imam ‘Ali Allah be pleased with him said, ‘May my mother be bereft of me if I enabled my enemy to approach my back’. This implies that Imam ‘Ali’s courage and nobility caused him to leave his back unprotected as he will never turn his back on the enemy.

Allah’s saying: ‘...do not turn your backs on them’ is a warning against fleeing from confrontation with the enemy. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَنْ يُوَلِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ دُبُرَهُ إِلَّا مُتَحَرِّفًا لِقِتَالٍ أَوْ مُتَحَيِّزًا إِلَىٰ فِئَةٍ
فَقَدْ بَاءَ بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَمَأْوَاهُ جَهَنَّمُ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٦﴾

if anyone does so on such a day – unless manoeuvring to fight or to join a fighting group – he incurs the wrath of God, and Hell will be his home, a wretched destination! wrath of Allah, and Hell will be his home, a wretched destination! [16] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 16)

In this noble verse, we note that Allah’s anger is incurred only on the one who turns his back fleeing from the battle with the enemy. As for he who turns his back (on the enemy) manoeuvring to fight or to give the enemy the false impression that he is retreating but then resumes the attack against the enemy in a pincer movement, he is a real warrior of true faith who is beguiling his enemy. The same is true for someone who turns his back to join

another troop of believers for him to continue battling against the enemy with them and not lose his life in vain (by trying to fight alone). This person also uses his mind to inflict defeat on the enemy's army, for the believer always wants his death to be in return for something valuable. As Allah has promised him with paradise, he should fight in order to defeat his enemies. The price of a believer at first was ten disbelievers, i.e., Allah granted each believer enough power to vanquish ten disbelievers. This is confirmed by Allah's saying: 'Prophet, urge the believers to fight: if there are twenty of you who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred, and a hundred of you, if steadfast, will overcome a thousand of the disbelievers, for they are people who do not understand' (*al-Anfal*: 65).

However, Allah knows that there was a weakness in the believers, so He made the believer equivalent to two disbelievers in battle. This is confirmed by Allah's saying: 'But Allah has lightened your burden for now, knowing that there is weakness in you—a steadfast hundred of you will defeat two hundred and a steadfast thousand of you will defeat two thousand, by Allah's permission: Allah is with the steadfast' (*al-Anfal*: 66).

Consequently, the person who retreats from three enemies is not referred to as a fleeing coward in the Islamic legislation, but the person who retreats from two enemies is considered a fleeing coward because before this weakness existed in us, Allah says: 'If there are twenty of you who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred...' (*al-Anfal*: 65).

In other words, one believing warrior was capable of facing ten disbelievers. And, if the number of opponents was less than ten disbelievers, the believer had to guard himself well in order not to die cheaply without achieving much or without killing many disbelievers in the process. Allah *Glorified is He* explained that weakness later afflicted the believers hence He says: 'Now Allah has lightened your burden, knowing that there is weakness in you—a steadfast hundred of you will defeat two hundred...' (*al-Anfal*: 66). Thus, the ratio between believers and disbelievers changed from one to ten to one to two. This was out of the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* and as a result, whoever found himself facing more than two enemies at once, Allah instructs him to join a group of believers to protect himself from being defeated in vain.

‘If anyone does this on such a day—unless manoeuvring to fight or to join a fighting group...’ (*al-Anfal*: 16). We learned that ‘*al-mutaharrif lil-qital*’ (one manoeuvring to fight) is the person who manoeuvres in battle and makes others think that he is defeated, but his manoeuvres bring about victory. In our daily-life language, we say someone is ‘*harrif*’ meaning that he is cunning and outwits others. And Allah’s saying ‘*mutahayyiz*’ (join a fighting group) is derived from the word ‘*hayyiz*’ meaning the space occupied by one’s body, and each of us occupies a space, i.e. every one of us is *mutahayyiz*. *Hayyiz* is an adverb of place that encompasses a person. In this verse, the word ‘*mutahayyiz*’ instructs every battling believer to take a suitable place for himself that enables him to achieve his target, and the word similarly indicates that it is necessary for the warrior to join a troop of other warriors in order to reinforce their efforts against the enemy. Whoever does not obey Allah’s Commands will be punished by Him. This punishment is made clear in Allah’s saying: ‘...he returns bringing upon himself the wrath of Allah’ (*al-Anfal*: 16).

The word ‘*ba*’ (returns bringing upon himself) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of this verse, means returning with something, and therefore the wording of the Quran in this case is fitting for what they did. This is because the one who turns his back to the enemy is retreating from the battlefield; however, he who returns with the intent of fooling the enemies and manoeuvring on the battlefield or reinforcing another group of believers, his case is entirely different. He is an advocate of Allah’s religion, contrary to the retreating coward who is associated with Allah’s Wrath which is known as one of the reasons for receiving punishment. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...he returns bringing upon him the wrath of Allah, and Hell will be his home, a wretched destination.’ (*al-Anfal*: 16)

The word ‘*al-ma’wa*’ (destination) is the place in which one seeks shelter. We know that when someone seeks rest, he takes shelter in a place where he can find peace and security from evil. The coward, who flees from confronting the enemy in a battle for the sake of Islam, will only find shelter in Hell which will welcome him. There will be a dialogue between Hell and Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Judgment as mentioned in the following noble verse: ‘On the Day We will say to Hell, "Have you been filled?" and it will say, "Are there any more?"’ (*Qaf*: 30)

Allah proves that hell is furious with the disbelievers because it is one of Allah's soldiers that is harnessed to carry out Allah's judgment. Whoever disobeys the instructions of Allah's Religion in this world will be received by hell's fury and roaring. The disbelievers will hear hell's furious moans when it sees them from a distance, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When the hellfire sees them from a distant place, they will hear its fury and roaring' (*al-Furqan*: 12). When hell is shelter, is that not a miserable destination? This means that the person who retreats from the confrontation with the enemy fearing death will go to something worse than death.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* safeguards and protects the believers instructing them not to be distracted by worldly means. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمْ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ قَتَلَهُمْ وَمَا رَمَيْتُمْ إِذْ رَمَيْتُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ
 رَمَىٰ وَلِيْلِيَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْهُ بَلََاءٌ حَسَنًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧﴾

It was not you who killed them but God, and when you [Prophet] threw [sand at them] it was not your throw [that defeated them] but God's, to do the believers a favour: God is all seeing and all Knowing [17] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 17)

Allah's saying: 'It was not you who killed them but Allah ...' (*al-Anfal*: 17) is similar in meaning to Allah's saying: 'and victory is only from Allah' (*Al-Imran*: 126). That is, Allah *Glorified is He* safeguards the believers, and victory is from Allah for the person who makes use of all the available means. In addition, the death of disbelievers at the hands of the believers was according to Allah's Will. The believer struck the disbeliever with a sword causing him to bleed and be wounded. However, a wounded person may not die and an unwounded person may die. This shows that death is caused by Allah.

Glory be to My Lord Whose Will inevitably takes effect,

How many wounded people have survived while the unwounded have died?

Thus, whenever believers fight the disbelievers, they only wound them, but death is caused by Allah *Glorified is He*. 'It was not you who killed them but Allah' (*al-Anfal*: 17). A person can say that Allah says in another verse: 'Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands...' (*at-Tawba*: 14) Accordingly, the

fighting believer fights the disbelievers and Allah causes them to die. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and when you [Prophet] threw [sand at them] it was not your throw [that defeated them] but Allah’s’ (*al-Anfal: 17*).

In this holy verse, something unknown to them was given by something known to them. Accordingly, something unknown was measured against something known. We learned previously that if a verb or an event has been negated and affirmed at the same time, it may involve a contradiction. In this verse, for example, Allah negates the verb in His saying: ‘It was not your throw’ (*al-Anfal: 17*) and affirms it in His saying ‘when you [Prophet] threw’ (*al-Anfal: 17*).

The act of throwing is well known, and the person who threw is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. But how is the verb negated then affirmed? We know that the speaker is the Lord, the Wise, and He speaks in the most eloquent language possible. In order to understand this issue, we should know that every incident has a certain purpose; sometimes the incident takes place, but its purpose is not realized. For example, when a father says to his son, ‘The exam is coming soon; you must stay in your room and study’, and then the son stays in his room only turning the pages of the book. After an hour, the father enters his son’s room and says, ‘Give me the book to question you about what you have studied’. The father asks his son questions, but the son does not know the answers and the father says, ‘you (apparently) studied, but you have not (actually) studied’. This means that he went to study, but he did not actually do what he had to do because the purpose of studying has not been fulfilled.

During the Battle of Badr, Prophet Muhammad turned to his Lord for help and supplicated Him raising his hands and saying, ‘O Lord, if you destroy this band of adherents to Islam, you will not be worshipped upon the earth’. Then Jibril (Gabriel) said to him, ‘Take a fistful of sand and throw it at them’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took a handful of sand and threw it at their faces, and it stuck in all the disbelievers’ eyes, noses and mouths and caused them to flee.⁽¹⁾ It is well-known that when a grain of sand enters a person’s eyes, he becomes distracted from anything else. Allah says:

(1) *Related by At-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir*

‘And when you [Prophet] threw [sand at them] it was not your throw [that defeated them] but Allah’s...’ (*al-Anfal*: 17).

This means that when Prophet Muhammad threw a handful of sand, he was not the one who caused it to become stuck in the eyes of all the enemies because no one is capable of doing this; He only carried out Jibril’s (Gabriel) advice. However, Allah the All-Powerful and the Omnipotent caused the sand to strike the enemies’ eyes. Then Allah *Glorified is He* continues His saying: ‘...that He might test the believers by a fair trial [from Him]: Allah is All-Seeing and All Knowing’ (*al-Anfal*: 17).

The fair trial in this verse refers to (the believers) joining the battle and fighting fiercely during it. It is erroneous to think that the Arabic word ‘*bala*’ (trial) refers to only calamities, as it refers to any type of trial. For example, an exam is considered a fair trial for the student who has reviewed his lessons, but a bad trial for the person who has not studied his lessons. Thus, trial itself is neither absolutely bad nor good, as it depends on whether the person has succeeded or not. In order to realise that the different verses of the Quran clarify each other, let us read the following saying of Allah: ‘We test you with evil and with good as a trial’ (*al-Anbiya*: 35). Good and evil are considered types of tests. Using good in the service of Allah’s religion without adopting any aggressive approach, and tolerating afflictions without rebelling against Divine Fate are considered tests from Allah. To clarify, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[The nature of] man is that, when his Lord tries him through honour and blessings, he says, “My Lord has honoured me”’ (*al-Fajr*: 15).

This refers to being tested with good blessings. As for being tested with difficulties, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But when He tries him, restricting his provision for him, he says, “My Lord has humiliated me”’ (*al-Fajr*: 16). Being tested by good or evil is merely a trial which as we have explained, is neither an object of blame nor praise in itself, but it depends on the person being tested whether they have achieved the purpose of the trial or not. If he succeeds, then he has done well in the test; if he fails, he has done badly in the test.

We notice—by way of example—that the student who focuses and devotes his mind, time and energy to learning and studying throughout the academic year will, once he begins to take his exam, try to requite himself for the pains

he suffered while studying. Thus, he answers the questions with diligence, and every time he answers a question correctly, he feels a bit of relief. If one of his peers tries to disturb him, he will pay him no mind and turn him away, or he might even call the proctor on him. The believer who participates with other believers in a goodly test is like the pupil who carries out his tasks assiduously.

It is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who hears the whispers and sees the actions of every believer, which is why after talking about goodly tests Allah says: ‘...Verily, Allah is all-hearing, all knowing!’ (*al-Anfal: 17*) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* hears all that you say aloud to him, and Knows all that you conceal in your hearts. Allah knows those who fight with the strength of faith and those whose intentions are tainted with wanting others to see his fighting skill in battle so they will praise his prowess; no one is capable of deceiving Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*. After that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذٰلِكُمْ وَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَمُوْهِنٌ كَيْدِ الْكٰفِرِيْنَ ﴿١٨﴾

That is what you get! — and God will weaken the disbelievers’ designs [18] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 18*)

‘That’ alludes to the fact that things were as stated (in the previous verse). ‘Weakening disbelief kindles and rouses faith, making faith dearer to the believers when they see the effects of disbelief damaging the earth even in their weakened state. Thus, letting disbelief remain is a form of preserving faith, since the fervour of belief increases when Islam is opposed by its enemies. After this, Allah says:

اِنْ تَسْتَفْتِحُوْا فَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ الْفَتْحُ وَاِنْ تَنْتَهُوْا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَاِنْ تَعُوْذُوْا نَعُوْذْ وَلَنْ تُغْنِيَ عَنْكُمْ فِئَتُكُمْ شَيْئًا وَّلَوْ كَثُرَتْ وَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ ﴿١٩﴾

[Disbelievers], if you were seeking a decision, now you have witnessed one: if you stop here, it will be better for you. If you return, so shall We, and your forces, though greater in number, will be of no use to you. God is with the believers [19] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 19*)

Tastaftihu, is derived from *istiftah* which literally means seeking the unlocking or opening of something because when the Arabic letters *sin* and *ta`*

come together at the beginning of a word it gives the meaning of asking or requiring. We know that all abstract ideas are derived from sensory perception because the first familiarity a person has with knowledge comes from sensory matters which subsequently comprise a person's cognitive knowledge. An example of that is our saying 'fire burns'. We learnt this fact from a physical experience that has happened to more than one person and then became a rational theory which a person knows even if he does not see a fire or feel a burning sensation. When the things we sense are all compiled together, they constitute the seeds of a person's abstract thoughts and the comprehensive hypotheses by which they will manage their general affairs. As an example of this is when someone tries hard, they succeed; we have drawn this fact from reality, just as we learnt the fact that the negligent and careless fails.

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to this topic saying, 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing...' (*an-Nahl: 78*). In other words, we as people are created with empty minds and the emptiness of our minds require that they would be filled. When a young mind receives any information, it can immediately acquire. That is why a young pupil is better able to memorize the Quran than a teenager since the mind of this older youth is crammed with cognitive thoughts.

Psychologists have explained this matter to us by saying that every consciousness has a focal point which is the centre of that consciousness. When you think about a subject you instantly find the information pertaining to it in your brain. This information could be moved aside to the margins of your awareness, when you think about another topic, and thus replaced by the information related to the new topic.

A limited space in abstract matters is like a limited space in tangible matters. When you fill a bottle with water, there must be an orifice that is wide enough for water to pass through while going in and for air to pass through while going out. If the bottle's orifice is too narrow like that of a perfume bottle, for instance, it would be very hard to fill it with water, except by using a certain tool that has a thin nozzle, like a syringe through which sucking the air in the bottle and ejecting water to fill the bottle is possible. Thus, we see that a limited space that contains tangible matters cannot hold in

two quantities of different matters, and that the size of each of them is equal to the size of that space. The brain works very similarly, for you only recall information pertinent to a specific topic when that topic is at the centre of your consciousness. If the topic is far from your thoughts, then the information related to it is removed to the far edges of consciousness. That is why the young child whose mind is empty absorbs and recalls information more rapidly.

Therefore, we should not accuse one person of stupidity and another of intelligence based merely on one's ability to remember swiftly and the inability of the other to keep up with his colleague. Intelligence has many different measures which scientists continue to debate about even till now. But in matters of memory, several scientists agree that the mind, like a camera, takes in information at first exposure, on condition that the seat of consciousness is empty and ready for that information. If the consciousness is busy with some other matter, it does not pick up on a different piece of information. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl: 78*)

Hearing and sight are on top of all senses through which we receive what we sense, then use them to form cognitive thoughts. The True Lord says, '[Disbelievers], if you were seeking a judgment, the judgment has then indeed come to you: if you stop here, it will be better for you. If you return, so shall We, and your forces, though greater in number, will be of no use to you. Allah is with the believers.' (*al-Anfal: 19*)

Al-fath (literally opening – unlocking) has various meanings, some of them physical like *fath al-bab* (to opening a door) or *fath al-kees* (opening the bag). Here *fath* means unlocking something that safeguards something else, like opening a door which safeguards whatever is inside the room behind it. The Holy Quran presents the physical meanings of *fath* in the saying of the True Lord, 'Then, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their goods had been returned to them...' (*Yusuf: 65*). This indicates that when Yousef's (Joseph's) *peace be upon him* brothers opened their saddlebags—which were used at the time instead of regular bags—they found the goods they had taken, intending to exchange them for other commodities. This is the physical meaning of *fath*.

Fath might also be used in abstract matters, like the opening of goods or knowledge, or like the saying of the True Lord, ‘No one can withhold the blessing Allah opens up for people...’ (*Fatir*: 2). Here, the opening of mercy is a figurative usage of the abstract meaning of opening.

Al-fath might also be used in the context of arbitration and judgment because arbitration occurs between conflicting parties in a case each party lays claims against the other, and judgment reveals and opens whatever is hidden in the case. An example of this is what happened between Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his people, who said, ‘...Noah, if you do not stop this, you will be stoned...’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 116). So, what did Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* say? ‘He said, “My Lord, my people have rejected me, so make a firm judgement between me and them, and save me and my believing followers.”’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 117-118) In other words, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* prayed to Allah to judge which side was right in the conflict between him and his people knowing that Allah was on his side. That is why he asked Allah to save him and the believers who were with him.

In the current noble verse under consideration, we see that *al-fath* means the judgment between conflicting parties. The core of the judgement would decide between two sides: the side of true guidance and those who call for it, i.e. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers who follow him, and the opposing side, that of misguidance and the disbelieving people of Quraysh. Both sides asked for *al-fath*. When Abu Jahl met with his people, he said, ‘Oh Allah, he -referring to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*- has transgressed against ties of kinship and brought upon us the unknown. Vanquish him tomorrow (in the morning).’⁽¹⁾ Abu Jahl believed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was going against the bonds of kinship, causing sons to part ways with their fathers and mothers. Additionally, when the idolaters came from Mecca to the battle of Badr, they brought with them the cover of the *Ka'ba* and asked Allah for victory saying, ‘Oh Allah, bring victory upon the mightiest of the two armies, the most blessed of the two parties and the best of the two tribes. That was the prayer of the disbelievers! As for the prayer of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

(1) Narrated by Ahmad, *An-Nisa'i* and Hakim

it was: 'Oh Allah, if you destroy this band of Muslims no one will be left to worship you on this Earth.'⁽¹⁾

The fact that both sides implored Allah for victory suggests that each of them was as strained as the other is because if one of them had been at ease and the other exhausted, then only the exhausted party would have asked for victory. In this case, judgment came from Allah *Glorified is He* when He ruled that the disbelievers be stripped of their arms, defeated, and made into a laughing stock to all who saw them. They deserved this because of their disbelief, misguidance, obstinacy, and opposition to the truth. What made it likely that victory came as Allah's answer to the believers' prayers was corroborated by the True Lord's saying, '...the judgment has then indeed come to you...' (*al-Anfal*: 19) meaning you had all asked for victory and judgment from Allah. So, *al-fath* came to you and it was to the advantage of the believers. Yet it also came in answer to the disbelievers' prayer. It came in both forms: victory for the believers, and in keeping with the disbelievers' prayer. The disbelievers had prayed and Allah's answer to their prayer was to their detriment. This is proof that they were foolish in their prayers, and each party had to accept their lot. The disbelievers had to accept that they were defeated, and the believers had to accept that they were victorious. '...if you stop here, it will be better for you...' (*al-Anfal*: 19).

This 'stopping' seems to be foremost for the good of the disbelievers. In other words, if you cease your enmity towards Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and stopped insisting on making him your enemy or conspiring against him, if you abstained from all this, it will be good for your earthly affairs because you have seen the result (if you do not). Some of your prominent leaders have been killed and the rest have been captured and their belongings plundered. If you abstained from the behaviour that leads to this, that would be good for you in this world and it would be good for you in the Hereafter; that if abstaining brings you to embrace the religion that you once saw as your enemy.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues His saying with, '...If you return, so shall We, and your forces, though greater in number, will be of no use to you...'

(1) Narrated by Muslim on the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab

(*al-Anfal*: 19). So if you do not cease, but instead resume your opposition to this religion, we will make the believers victorious over you once more. Do not say that you are the group with the greater number because your group will not avail you against Allah and the proof of that is that you were defeated at Badr when you were many and had the advantage of numbers on your side. But your strength in numbers will gain you nothing: ‘...and your forces, though greater in number, will be of no use to you. Allah is with the believers.’ (*al-Anfal*: 19) The believers had been outnumbered, and despite that they had been triumphant.

So far, our discussion pertains to the disbelievers, but what about the believers? What are they to abstain from? They must cease quarrelling over war booty, and it is in this context that the True Lord says, ‘...Say, “The spoils of war belong to Allah and His Messenger...”’ (*al-Anfal*: 1).

Their quarrelling over booty obliged the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray to his Lord. If they went back to bickering and arguing amongst themselves, as if they were two opposing groups and forgot that they have a common faith, neither side will avail the other. Oh people of faith! If a portion of you has gained power, let the rest be humble before them. And do not think that you have become great in victory because victory comes neither from people nor from angels, but verily it comes from Allah *the Almighty*, the Wise.

After that, the True Lord says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَا تَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ وَأَنْتُمْ تَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Believers, obey God and His Messenger: do not turn away when you are listening to him [20] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 20)

This is a clear call from Allah *Glorified is He* to the believers, and a specific command to obey Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because faith is the firm and sincere belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, *peace and blessings be upon them* and fate with both the good and the bad it brings. Believers are to carry out the requirements of faith, which are - oh you believers - to perform the tasks and ordinances of the Plan of Allah *Glorified is He* and the orders and prohibitions of that Plan as conveyed

to us by Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As we have previously explained, obedience to Allah is a general principle and obedience to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is through adherence to the specific and practical application that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* set for the general principle. As such, obeying any command or rule by the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is obligatory because Allah delegated authority to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys Allah.’ (*an-Nisa'*: 80)

The delegation of authority from the True Lord to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is presented in the True Lord’s saying, ‘...so accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you...’ (*al-Hashr*: 7)

In the noble verse that is currently under consideration, we find the same concept in eloquent Quranic rendering, ‘O, you who have believed! Obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not turn from him while you hear [his order].’ (*al-Anfal*: 20)

To turn from, as we know, is to shun. The command here is to not shun; so long as you are believers, do not turn from or shun what you believe in. The eloquent wording is in the fact that Allah did not say ‘Turn not away from both’ (Muhammad and his Lord) the way that human beings might have phrased it. Instead, he said, ‘do not turn from him’. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* united the speech about the two cases into one—obeying Allah and obeying His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* — because Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys Allah’s message. So, there is no distinction between obeying Muhammad and obeying the One Who sent him. Obeying Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an act of obedience to Allah.

Or we could also say that ‘turning from’ can never be said of Allah because no one is able to turn away from Allah, for Allah overtakes him at every turn and is aware of him at all times. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse, ‘They (hypocrites) swear by Allah to please you [believers]: if they were true believers it would be more fitting for them to please Allah and His Messenger.’ (*at-Tawba*: 62) In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* unites earning the approval of Allah with earning that of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Some of these hypocrites only swear that they have not

done anything contrary to faith so that they might please the believers and establish their innocence to the people. But there is a higher approval that is earned by complying with and applying the plan that Allah *Glorified is He* revealed and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed. There is Allah *the Almighty and All-Sustaining* Who watches over every action and knows both what is shown and what is hidden. So, if we were left to our own devices, every person would have to confront the other according to his own strength; but through our faith we know that we are under the watchful supervision of the Omnipotent, the All-Sustaining. So, whoever oppresses his brother, or whenever the oppressed forgives his oppressor, Allah *Glorified is He* is both Lord of the oppressor and Lord of the oppressed, and He does not forgive the oppressor, but rather holds him to account.

Allah combined pleasing Him with pleasing Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this verse as well. He did not say, ‘it is Allah and His Apostle whose pleasures they should seek’ in the way that human speech might dictate, but rather, He saw fit to combine the two ‘pleasures’ into a singular word because it revolves around a single command and a single act of obedience with one ultimate goal.

‘O you who have believed, obey Allah and His Messenger and do not turn from him while you hear [his order].’ (*al-Anfal*: 20) This command to obey Allah and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a communication from Allah, and the first means of communication is oral because the ear is the first instrument of comprehension. So, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave orders to people verbally rather than in writing because the people could not read, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* relayed the Quran revealed to him to the people in speech; he also ordered it to be written down so it would be preserved.

We know that listening is rudimentary for learning how to read because you cannot read what is written nor can you write what is heard unless you know grammar and phonics. A teacher first teaches a student how to read and write orally. Thus, listening is the precursor to everything, and no one during the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have been able to say, ‘The call to Islam never reached me’ because the call to Islam was

communicated to people verbally. And His saying 'while you hear [his order]...' (*al-Anfal*: 20) tells us that if a person had not heard the call to Islam yet, he was not accountable to follow the injunction because Our Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...nor do We punish until We have sent a messenger.' (*al-Isra*': 15)

Societies that live in ignorance and have not had a messenger or have not received a word of Allah's Path will not be punished by Allah. Nowadays, such a situation is possible in distant countries far removed from contact with Islam and hearing about the way of Allah. They have never heard anything about Islam and know nothing of its Path, and thus are saved from punishment, in accordance with Allah's statement: '...nor do We punish until We have sent a messenger.' (*al-Isra*': 15)

The benefit of sending a messenger is that he conveys the message to people. Therefore, we have drawn an important principle from the saying of the True Lord, '...while you hear [his order].' (*al-Anfal*: 20) From this statement, we have surmised that whoever has not been conveyed the Path of Islam, is not called into account for it. But is hearing about the Path enough to know it? No, it does not suffice to hear and know that a messenger has come to succeed a preceding messenger, but rather, it is incumbent upon you to investigate. If anyone on earth has not been informed of it, he is saved, but whoever has received news of the coming of a prophet without being told of the entire Path, he must search for it himself; for man occupies himself with investigating even the most trifling of things merely upon hearing about them.

Let us suppose that someone in a village said that the government is going to alter the rations cards. Will every individual in the village not take a deep concern in the matter and set out to ask about it? Thus, all it took for the communication to be made was for a person to hear that a messenger from among the Arabs had come to all of mankind with a universal message, and that this message followed up on the previous messages from other messengers *peace be upon all of them*. Whoever heard this was obliged to treat it as he would his earthly interests; for if the affairs of this world are important, what are we to make of the issue of righteousness in both this world and the next? Partial responsibility for that falls upon the Muslims who do not make an effort to convey the religion of Allah to others.

After this, the True Lord says:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Do not be like those who say, ‘We heard,’ though in fact they were not listening [21] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 21)

In this noble verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* forbids us to be like those who say, ‘We heard’ (*al-Anfal*: 21), but Allah judges them to have not listened. They applied the norm of superficial changes of outward appearance on hearing. So, they heard but did not listen attentively. In this context ‘hearing’ does not mean to merely hear, but to carry out the commands you have heard, and whoever does not carry them out, is like someone who has not heard anything. If you do so, you have heard, and the call to Islam has reached you, but you have not answered it or done what it asks of you. So, Allah’s statement: ‘‘We heard,’ though in fact they were not listening’ (*al-Anfal*: 21) explains to us that their hearing was merely the transference of the vibration of the speaker’s voice to their ears, when they did not really take what they have heard seriously so that it can have a profound impact on their lives. Without this profound impact, it is as if they have not heard anything at all. Thus, it would have been better if they have not heard anything because hearing without answering the call is worse than not hearing. ‘And do not be like those who say, ‘We heard,’ though in fact they were not listening.’ (*al-Anfal*: 21)

It could also be that ‘hearing’ in this verse refers to acceptance, like when we say, ‘Allah, please hear the prayer of so-and-so’. You know that Allah hears all prayers even if you had not said that, but you say, ‘Allah, hear the prayer of so-and-so’ meaning ‘Allah, please accept the prayer of so-and-so’. So, the meaning of ‘to hear’ is ‘to accept’.

After this the True Lord says:

إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الصُّمُّ الْبُكْمُ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

the worst creatures in God’s eyes are those who are [wilfully] deaf and dumb, who do not reason [22] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 22)

The word *dabbah* is everything that walks or crawls on the ground although it is usually reserved for four-legged creatures. The plural of *dabbah* is *dawab*.

Ad-dawwab as animals constitute the third sphere in the world, for existence is divided into ascending spheres: the first is inanimate materials, second is plants, the third is animals, and the fourth is mankind. A single chain connects these four things. We find that the highest layer of the lowest sphere is the first layer in the next highest sphere. So, the lowest sphere is inanimate materials, and above them are plants. The highest thing in the inanimate sphere represents the first aspect of plants, like corals, as if the sphere of inanimate materials itself had ascending layers which stop at a specific impassable boundary. So, they cannot become plants, nor can plants become animals. Rather, each sphere remains independent in itself with internal ascending sub-layers that stop at a specific limit. Even though the highest inanimate thing is almost equivalent to the lowest form of plant life, it does not become a plant, like the phenomenon of growing coral reefs which take on the aspect of plants but are still only the apex of inanimate materials rather than a plant. Similarly, with plants we find that they progress and develop until reaching the highest level of plant life. Plants are at different levels, the highest of which is the existence of a plant that can sense things because perception leads to the beginning of animal life, and that is exactly what we see in some plants that grow in the shade and by nature, orient themselves towards sunlight as if they possessed a kind of sensory perception; if the position of the light changes, the plant reorients itself or part of it towards the new place.

Some plant species wilt as soon as it is touched. We also know of a plant that people in the countryside call 'The Shy Lady' that closes its leaves around its fruit as soon as it is touched. These occupy the highest level of plant life, and are the first level before animal life, but they are not in the sphere of animal creatures, remaining instead in their sphere as plants.

Then, we come to the animals, finding that they too are grouped into ascending categories. There are animals that can be tamed and animals that cannot be tamed and remain wild, for they are created that way by Our Lord for some reason. Man can domesticate camels, but cannot domesticate foxes or fleas. It is as if Allah wanted to let us know that it is not we who tamed the domesticated animals with our intelligence and abilities, but rather, it was He who empowered us to tame them. Thus, you might tame a camel so that even a small girl can

ride it, ordering it to stand and sit, but a little flea makes man sleepless throughout the night eluding his attempts to catch and kill it. These matters demonstrate a piece of wisdom that the True Lord sums up saying, ‘Can they not see how, among the things made by Our hands, We have created livestock they control, and made them obedient, so that some can be used for riding, some for food...’ (*Ya Sin*: 71-72).

If the True Lord *Glorified is He* had not subdued these animals, then man would not have been able to subdue them. Tiny creatures that man is incapable of taming remind us that the tamer is not man, but rather, Allah *Glorified is He*. Among the animals which can be domesticated are species that can accustom themselves to some actions and perform them, like when a trainer asks his monkey to perform a dance called (in Egypt) ‘the old woman’s dough’, and the monkey—with its natural inclination to imitate—obeys. Apes have a special level of comprehension. They are the highest in the order of animal ranking. Despite this, they stop at that limit and do not advance beyond it. This is shown by the fact that if you train a monkey, it can reproduce all the motions you have taught it to amuse people, but it cannot teach those motions to its own kind. Thus, we find circus men training lions and tigers to perform tricks for entertainment, but the lion cannot teach its cubs what it learns from the circus trainer.

Thus, not one of the four spheres in the world—inanimate material, plant life, animal life, and mankind—exceed its upper level, but rather stops at a specific limit. It occurred to some thinkers who believe that ape is the origin of man because living organisms are in ascending order leading from one to the next and the lowest level in one sphere is the highest level within the limits of the previous sphere. But what rules out Darwin’s Theory of Evolution from the outset is the understanding of the nature of evolution.

Allah says, ‘And of everything We have created pairs...’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 49) meaning that every living organism was created first by Allah, and no species developed from another species. To those who are not religious, we present rational evidence for this, asking ‘Why did the conditions that led to the first ape becoming a human not also lead all apes to become humans?’ Thus, Darwin’s theory falls apart in its entirety, and even now there are taxonomists who dispute it. The True Lord has told us that these animals that belong to the

highest sphere just below man cannot set up calculations or derive solutions to them nor can they comprehend the idea of deciding by choosing from different options. The most advanced of animals do not consciously weigh choices; they know only one task and nothing more. Man possesses the ability to choose among options, whereas animals cannot reason. For example, suppose you try to tease a cat, it will attack you and scratch you with its claws even though you were only trying to be friendly and play with it. As for the devout and rational believer who is legally competent to perform religious duties in Islam, he has different responses to situations. If someone harms him, he might respond violently in the same way he harms him, or he might forgive him or he might suppress his anger. Allah loves those who, ‘...hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow-men...’ (*Al-Imran*: 134). So, you, believer, have many options to choose from, but animals have none.

We previously referenced the example of when you feed an animal until it is full, if you introduce the tastiest of foods to it, it will not eat it. On the other hand, if a person is full, nothing prevents him from eating more of the food he likes.


Another example is: whenever a donkey comes across a stream that is too wide for it to jump across, it refuses to jump or cross this stream. Can the donkey measure the distance visually or weigh it against its abilities? It will leap over a stream that suits its ability to do so, but refuses what is beyond that ability unlike humans. Yet, we describe donkeys as extremely stupid. This shows that every species acts according to its natural disposition to carry out the purposes that Allah willed for it. Some might say, ‘how can the True Lord say, ‘Verily, the vilest of all creatures in the sight of Allah’ (*al-Anfal*: 22), when all creatures are subjugated’? Our reply is that you, as a human being, assume the lowest position in this hierarchy, when you choose to be viler than animals because the lowest creature in rank is subject to its natural disposition, and does things instinctually without thinking for it lacks the concept of deciding among different options. However, Allah made human beings unique by giving them a mind to choose among options. So, if you stop using your mind and surrender your ability to take in the spoken word of revelation, are you not worse than animals?

Whenever we regard the words ‘good and evil’, we remember the statement by the True Lord, ‘Whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it, but

whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that.' (*az-Zalzala: 7-8*) Good is the opposite of evil, and man can differentiate between them because good is pleasant and useful, whereas bad is noxious and repugnant.

But the word *khayr* (good) sometimes has a different meaning which is not the opposite of *sharr* (evil). Sometimes we say, 'this is better than the other'. This means that both are good, but one is better than the other, like the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which was narrated by Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* 'The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, but there is good in each of them.' Indeed, both—the strong believer and the weak believer—have goodness in them, but goodness has ascending degrees. There is a kind of goodness that exceeds others, and Allah tells us, 'The worst creatures in Allah's eyes are those who are [wilfully] deaf and dumb, who do not reason...' (*al-Anfal: 22*). In other words, the disbelievers are worse than creatures that crawl on the ground because they have lost the means to true guidance which is hearing. Thus, they have also become dumb, meaning they do not utter words of right guidance.

After that the True Lord says:


 وَلَوْ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ فِيهِمْ خَيْرًا لَأَسْمَعَهُمْ وَلَوْ أَسْمَعَهُمْ لَتَوَلَّوْا وَهُمْ مُعْرِضُونَ

If God had known there was any good in them, He would have made them hear, but even if He had, they would still have turned away and taken no notice [23] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 23*)

Allah *Glorified is He* knew that there was no good in them so He did not grant them responsive hearing. Allah *Glorified is He* was above making them unable to hear and be receptive to the truth, but rather, He did it because there was no good in them. Here, 'good' refers to the initial belief in the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They did not believe, so, they did not listen to the call to True Guidance from Allah through His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, the absence of goodness began on their part. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and Allah does not guide the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara: 264*) They had refused to acknowledge the truth from the beginning, for that reason Allah did not guide them. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '...Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.' (*al-Baqara: 258*)

They had already done wrong, so Allah did not guide them. And Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah does not guide the defiantly iniquitous people. (*al-Ma'ida*: 108) They were already iniquitous, so Allah did not guide them.

Allah is impeccably above unfairly accusing His servants. So, He did not grant them the hearing necessary to receive and respond to the call of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. 'If Allah had known there was any good in them, He would have made them hear, but even if He had, they would still have turned away and taken no notice.' (*al-Anfal*: 23)

Allah is Omniscient and His knowledge is eternal, but He does not judge His servants according to His prescient knowledge of them. Rather, He bequeaths them the right to make decisions in practical day-to-day experiences. Take the following story for example (to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection). A father suffers from the tragedy of his son failing in his studies or being independent. The son lives luxuriously without thought for life's responsibilities. The father's friends say, 'Why do you not set up a business project for your son to keep him busy and keep him away from wasting his time in amusement'? The father replies, 'I know this boy well. He will take the business so he can sell it and fritter the money away on diversions'. The father says that out of his experience with his son. However, is it not conceivable that the son might be weary of his profligacy and want to repent, or at the least prove to people that his father's opinion of him is untrue? Thus, the father opens a business project for his son, but the son's weaknesses overcome him and he sells the project to spend the proceeds in sinful waste.

Did this happen because of a flaw in the father's understanding of his son? No, the father knew his son's unreliability and how easily he would succumb to his whims. So, what then would we make of the True Lord, the Highest, and eternally All Knowing of all that His servants hide and all that they show? Allah *Glorified is He* did not want to hold His servants to account according to His eternal and everlasting knowledge, but rather, He holds them accountable for their actions. So, He says, 'Allah will be sure to mark out which ones are the believers, and which the hypocrites.' (*al-'Ankabut*: 11) Allah *Glorified is He* is All Knowing of creation eternally, but He wanted that His servants to acknowledge their deeds because if Allah judged His worshippers

according to His eternal knowledge, they would say, ‘I would have done what the Path asks of me, oh Lord (but I have not because You pre-determined it)’. That is why the True Lord granted humanity the ability to choose so that they might act according to their choices so that what they do becomes the recognition of what they choose.

‘If Allah had known there was any good in them, He would have made them hear, but even if He had, they would still have turned away and taken no notice.’ (*al-Anfal*: 23) Even if Allah *Glorified is He* had made them hear, they would have turned away from what they heard because Allah knows that they have chosen to be worse than animals to Him. They are the deaf who do not hear the call of True Guidance and the dumb who do not speak a word to proclaim the unity of Allah. They do not comprehend the benefit of Allah’s way which He set, to make right their lives in this world and the next.

Next, the True Lord says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ
 وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّهُ اللَّهُ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

Believers, respond to God and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life. Know that God comes between a man and his heart, and that you will be gathered to Him [24] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 24)

Here the issue has shifted from listening to responding because the point of listening is to respond. ‘O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.’ (*al-Anfal*: 24) meaning respond to the laws Allah has set, and to what the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has conveyed. The aim of legislation and conveyance are one and the same. Narrating what The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed also complies with the legislations of Allah. Moreover, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is delegated to legislate. He does so by decree of none other than Allah Who says, ‘And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from.’ (*al-Hashr*: 7)

I use the following example (to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection); suppose we hear that someone has been fired because he was absent for fifteen days from work. His lawyer (trying to dispute the legality of the dismissal) reviews the country's constitution and does not find anything related to this case in the content of the constitution. He learns from a more experienced lawyer that this law is derived from the constitution's authorization of an institution to oversee labour and employment. Similarly, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is authorized by his Lord to convey (Allah's message) and to legislate: 'O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you...' (*al-Anfal*: 24).

The True Lord said, 'when he calls you' and did not say 'when they (Allah and His Messenger Muhammad) call you'. Therein is a unification of their purposes, for Allah did not distinguish between the legal rulings of Allah and the communications of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to us. We know that the matters when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made a judgement, and Allah amended it, this amendment originated with Allah, but Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not amend anything from Allah and created rulings only for matters left unlegislated by Allah. Whenever Allah revealed a ruling contrary to those of Muhammad the Prophet out of his greatness conveyed that alteration to us. So Muhammad's rulings were thus: if they were in accordance with the truth, then they were unaltered, but if they were not as such, the Prophet would amend them for us. This way, to Allah, every single ruling ultimately and eventually is returned. And if someone asks, 'How can you say that Muhammad's statements are from Allah'? We answer with what Allah says, 'He does not speak from his own desire. It is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him.' (*an-Najm*: 3-4)

To speak from one's own desire means to deviate from what one knows to be a true ruling and instead creates one that is contrary to the truth, to serve one's own whims and desires. Whenever Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took up any ruling he made without having a ruling from Allah, he received an amendment for it, which he then conveyed to us. Thus, talking about 'his own desire' means things that he *peace and blessings be upon him* might have ruled beyond what Allah had revealed. But Muhammad *peace and*

blessings be upon him had no such capricious desires to influence his rulings. Allah says, ‘O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...’ (*al-Anfal*: 24).

The verb *da`akum* (calls you) is singular, just like the verb *yardouhu* (please) in His statement addressed to you believers, ‘...it would be more fitting for them to please Allah and His Messenger.’ (*at-Tawba*: 62)

The same is the case with the pronoun in *anahu* (from him) in His saying, ‘O you who have believed, obey Allah and His Messenger and do not turn from him while you hear [his order].’ (*al-Anfal*: 20)

In these noble verses, two nouns are unified into a singular pronoun after mentioning both Allah *Glorified is He* and his Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This grammatical unification aroused the scepticism of orientalists, who said, ‘How can He mention two, then make them into one?’ To whoever asks this, we say, ‘You have not understood because you approached the Quran without command of the Arabic language’. If the disbelievers found something in the language of the Quran that breaks with the grammar of the language, they would have obstinately created a fuss about it, and if they encountered a single inconsistent word in the Quran, they would have loudly broadcasted this inconsistency. This signifies that the disbelievers understood the aims and meanings of everything that the Quran says. They understood, for example, the verse that orientalists frequently speak of to incite people to doubt the Holy Quran. That verse of the True Lord being, ‘If two groups of the believers fight, you [believers] should try to reconcile them; if one of them is [clearly] oppressing the other, fight the oppressors until they submit to Allah's command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them: Allah loves those who are even-handed.’ (*al-Hujurat*: 9)

Orientalists wonder, disapprovingly, how is it that the Quran talks about two groups, and then uses a plural form verb for them (instead of the Arabic dual form)? We reply that ‘*ta`ifatan*’ (two groups) is the dual form of *ta`ifah* (group) which is never used to refer to an individual but is only used to refer to several people, like when we say, ‘The two schools met together’. Though a ‘school’ is singular, but each school has many students. ‘Two groups’ is just like that; each group consists of individuals, and so when the ‘fighting’ happens,

it occurs between two plurals (as opposed to two singular nouns, which would require a verb in the dual form). Thus, the Holy Quran is concise when it says, 'If two groups of the believers fight...' (*al-Hujurat: 9*). *Iqtatalu* (fight) addresses the plural. The Quran did not say, 'Hence if two groups of believers fight' where fighting is in the dual form *iqtatala* instead of the plural form *iqtatalu* because that sentence would not concisely express the nature of the fighting. As two groups, if the conflict between them leads to fighting, each individual does not go aside to fight another individual; rather, each individual confronts all the individuals of the other group. Thus, the fighting is among the large mass of individuals from both groups.

After that the True Lord continues to layout the conditions of the fighting in detail. Allah says, '...fight the one that acts wrongfully until they submit to Allah's command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them...' (*al-Hujurat: 9*). Allah *Glorified is He* returns to the dual form and says *aslihu baynahuma*, (make peace between the two of them). Thus, He refrains from using the plural conjugation that went along with 'to fight' and instead uses the dual because in making peace we are reconciling between two contending sides, and each side is represented by its leaders or a delegation rather than every individual from one group having to go make peace with all the individuals of the other group. Thus, the True Lord uses the dual in its appropriate place, and He uses the plural in its appropriate place. Allah *Glorified is He* is infallible and does not err.

In the verse still under consideration, Allah Our Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...' (*al-Anfal: 24*). The verse begins by addressing the believers. Addressing someone, first, requires that those who are addressed are alive. For, Allah says, '...nor are the living and the dead alike. Allah makes anyone He wills hear, and you cannot make those in their graves hear.' (*Fatir: 22*) So how can Allah say to those whom He addresses, and are already alive, '...he calls you to that which gives you life'? (*al-Anfal: 24*) First, what is life? We know that life takes on two qualities, perception and movement, and that only happens after a soul exists in the body. This is what comprises life, and in this matter, both the believer and disbeliever are equal.

The profit in this life is for a person to live happily, not to live in war and hate, or to hurt others and be hurt by others. True life exists when the abilities to move and feel exist, on the condition that the movement of each person is of benefit to the person and those around him. Thus, all potentials collaborate for spreading goodness and benefit for all. As for when the abilities derived from perception and motion are squandered and life is lost in the antagonism of some to others, this life becomes one of weariness and misery devoid of all good and repose. This contravenes what the True Lord wants for the world, since Allah made man His vicegerent on earth to spread righteousness, not to corrupt, and so that what is good becomes even better. Thus, the movement of the individual would not create conflict with others; for every person, is a vicegerent of Allah on earth. So, why do we not act cooperatively with one another instead of against each other?

For example, if someone wants to help himself and those around him by digging a well, it behoves everyone who will benefit from the well to provide him their assistance. That way one group can dig and another group can carry the dirt away until the water comes up and everyone benefits from it. But if someone were to sneak over and collapse the well, that would be working in conflict with others rather than supporting them.

The Path was revealed by Allah, to make us live and move cooperatively. That is why the True Lord says, ‘O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.’ (*al-Anfal*: 24) The call here is from Allah to the believers alone. If Allah were to say, ‘O you who believe, respond to and fulfil your beliefs’, then obviously, He does not require those who do not believe in Him to respond. He asks you to respond only if you have already embraced faith in Allah, been guided to it by your mind and universal signs and begun to believe that when Allah asks something of you, He does not do so for naught; He asks it of you because you believe in Him as the Lord, Creator, Provider and the All-Wise and the Most Just.

Whenever the One with such attributes gives you an order, you must respond to what He calls you to do. For example (to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection), parents provide for the most important needs of their child. The father says to his child, ‘Listen to me and follow my instructions

because I work hard for you to live comfortably'. The mother adds, 'obey your father for he is no stranger to you; you are family and he is not your enemy. By experience, he has always been helpful to you and wished you well'. Thus, the son responds to his father. So, when Allah says, 'O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger who speaks on the authority of Allah; for, he will call you to what gives you life', then, it is incumbent upon us to respond to this call. The One Who calls here is Allah Whose blessings you had received before He commanded you to do anything. He had sent Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* provided by the evidence of miracles that no other can perform; he calls each person to goodness. Nothing would prevent anyone from responding to this call unless he is a fool.

In our daily lives, we notice that when a person is sick and is afflicted by an ailment that affects the most precious thing he has, his good health, he will try to seek a cure for his illness and ask after a doctor specialized in his ailment. There is a specialisation for every part of the body, so if this person is familiar with doctors, he will go to the appropriate physician, and if not, he will ask around until he finds the right one. In doing so, he has completed the mental work to reach someone who will see to his health. Then, when he goes to the doctor and a prescription for medicine is written, the sick person would not say at that moment, 'I will not take the medicine until you convince me of its efficacy and tell me what it does to my body'. The doctor would say, 'If you want to be sure of the usefulness of this medicine, join the school of medicine to learn like I did'. Of course, the sick person would not do that because the matter concerns his health. He will go to the pharmacy, buy the medicine, and ask how he should take it. When the sick person does that, he acts out of his own self-interest, not that of the doctor's or the pharmacist's.

When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* calls us to what gives us life, he does so because Allah assigned him to communicate to us the Plan that would put right our lives. If life is movement and perception once the soul has entered the body, from then onward a person deals with the realities of life until the time of his or her death. This is life for both the believer and the disbeliever. Life might be full of agitation and clashes; one home might be rife with conflict between children or with the neighbours until one says,

‘This is a hard and cruel life, and death is much better’. A poet said, ‘It is enough a disease for you to see in death a cure.’ Another poet said, ‘He is wretched who envies a humiliated person’s life; for, *himam* (death) is much better than living in humiliation.’

Himam means death, as if death—in the poet’s eyes—is lighter than a life full of tribulations. Thus, it is not merely basic life that is required, but the life of a vicegerent of Allah in a society of such vicegerents on earth. Each of us is charged to work together and put right our respective domain. It is unseemly for His agents to bicker with one another; rather, their duty is to work in unity because they are agents of the One and Only. This is how Allah made man his vicegerent: he created him to be His deputy on earth. That vicegerent begot many other such vicegerents to carry out their charge in cooperation with each other.

For example, when we consider what goes into making one *jilbab* (robe), a peasant grows the cotton, a spinner spins it and a weaver weaves it. After that, we buy it to bring it to the tailor who makes the appropriate measurements, then he sews the *jilbab* on a machine, which other individuals had manufactured before he bought it. Thus, one *jilbab* needs many people working and cooperating. In the same way, our lives cooperate.

When we look at the world we live in, we find it full of hardships, especially in backward nations. Yet, in advanced nations life is full of hardships too. Lowlifes from any country board a plane belonging to the advanced country then threaten to bomb the plane along with everyone inside it. They impose their demands, thus bringing low the great nation. So, even life in advanced nations has its burdens.

Take also for example, the wars that have erupted in our region with Israel since 1948, and continued for decades, the civil war in Lebanon, and the war between Iraq and Iran. These wars cost billions which would have advanced our countries if they had been put to better use.

That which makes the world tiresome is counterpoising our efforts against one another. The True Lord revealed the True Path to us to make the actions of our lives in harmony with one another. If we are true to the Path, we begin

to take our orders from the One Lord, and each of us is charged to cooperate with the other. This only occurs if we respond to Allah's call, His laws, and Muhammad's divinely inspired message. This is how life flows harmoniously and with pleasure; a life which Allah describes in his statement, 'To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, We shall give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions.' (*an-Nahl*: 97) As for whoever lives without a plan from Allah, they fall under Allah's saying, 'But whoever turns away from it will have a life of great hardship. We shall bring him blind to the Assembly on the Day of Resurrection.' (*Ta Ha*: 124) Based on this, the punishment for failing to follow the divine Path does not wait until the Day of Judgment. It starts in this world, where life becomes full of exhaustion and hardship.

So, beware of thinking that the religious path of Allah has the afterlife as its sole purpose; no. While one following the Islamic Path of Allah is rewarded in the Afterlife; whoever has the good fortune to live rightly and cooperate with others in this world will be rewarded by Allah with a comfortable life in this world in addition to his reward in the next. Now, we understand the aim of religion is our worldly life. As for the Afterlife, it is a reward for our worldly test.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...when he calls you to that which gives you life...' (*al-Anfal*: 24). In other words, Allah set for you the path which does not bring good upon Him or upon His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who conveyed it to us, but verily it brings good upon you, O believers. This is the rationale behind responding to the call, and whoever does not respond is deluded. '...respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...' (*al-Anfal*: 24).

Thus, good comes by the order of the Allah, the One. Each one of us should not make a god of his own desire (whims), and desires become numerous, '...but if the truth were in accordance with their desires, the heavens, the earth and everyone in them would disintegrate. We have brought them their Reminder and they turn away from it. ...' (*al-Mu'minun*: 71) This way, Allah's legislations will never be subject to things that might fall prey to desires. As for things that will not be affected by a person's desires, it is left for that person to confront with whatever capacities Allah gave him. Allah's

legislations intervene only in matters that are subject to desire. As for other matters which are not affected by a person's whims, even the most inveterate of enemies agree upon them.

Life nowadays is witnessing a wave of ambitious scientific progress. This scientific progress has its roots in the experience gained from the work of scientists and scholars who spent long periods of time innovating and developing. One example of this is Thomas Edison who spent a lot of time inventing the electric light bulb. Other scientists then developed his inventions and created new ones. All we know about them is that their inventions astound us. If you were to see such a scientist, he would look dishevelled and unkempt, largely unaware and careless of his appearance; perhaps he would not eat or drink very much. But all you know about him is the fruits of his work and innovation. We say, 'somebody invented something' (e.g. Morse invented the Morse Code). Meanwhile you benefit from his invention even though you did not suffer his hardships and toil to enjoy the advantages resulting from it.

We see that opposing camps in our modern world seek to steal scientific technologies from one another. These camps differ only superficially: this one is a communist, another is a capitalist, and a third is existentialist. The difference, then, is only according to desires uncurbed by substance or experience. It is truly saddening that the inventions we have agreed upon, like universal material sciences which are the outcome of experimentation, should be used to advance our differences. Thus, we find that hardship in the world comes from our whimsical ambitions, and not from scientific ones. Allah's legislations mediate and remove our whims and desires so that each of us is a servant of Allah and each of us is held free by the other. With His Plan Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* calls the living—those who possess both perception and movement—to a pleasant, goodly life without the narrowness of hardship. This is if we consider our way of living. As for when we measure life against the length of the Afterlife, it is hardly comparable because as Allah's vicegerents on earth, we can all agree that the vicegerents must have an end purpose. Our Lord might create one person to die in his mother's womb, another to die an hour after his birth and a third to die a month after his birth; there are some who live a hundred years. Matters that are subject to difference can never form an end purpose for

those of the same kind. The end purpose is to furnish this world with righteous and pious deeds so that we might have the good fortune to pass from this world to something more splendid, the Afterlife, where we will be sure never to die or tire because whatever we desire, will simply appear before us. This is the pinnacle of having a good life.

Assuming that you will toil in the cause of communicating Allah's Methodology, defend it through battle, struggle and financially sacrifice; eventually you will gain an eternal, goodly life. Allah clarifies the nature of this life as He says, 'Whereas, behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life; if they but knew this!' (*al-'Ankabut: 64*)

So, the concept of life in the Hereafter is much extended; your mortal life is timed and finite; you benefit from it by the virtue of your potential and perceptions while life in the Hereafter is eternal and infinite and you are blessed by the virtue of the capabilities of your Creator, the fully Capable Bestower of blessings. As such, we are assured that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has called us for what entitles us to the pleasures and liveness of the real goodly life.

Whenever Allah *Glorified be He* calls us to a goodly life, He calls to living according to His designated Methodology 'a real life' because it is a happy life leading up to an eternal life. Thus, too does He name the first life which is created when Allah breathed spirit into matter; He said of Adam and his descendants, 'and when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit...?' (*Sad: 72*).

Allah granted this kind of life to both the believer and the disbeliever, and He also calls the medium that carries the Methodology 'a spirit', 'So We have revealed a spirit to you (Prophet) by Our command...?' (*ash-Shura: 52*).

The Methodology then, is life at Allah's command by which the Holy Spirit, Jibril (Gabriel) descended; Allah wants us to live happily, cooperatively and in paradise eternally. Thus, He revealed the Methodology to prevent quarrelling and friction among the believers, and for each believer to protect himself against blunder, and slipping into sin; as such he resists wrongdoing in its earlier stage before it worsens and becomes irremediable.

Then Allah says, ‘...and know that Allah intervenes between man and (the desires of) his heart, and that unto Him you shall be gathered.’ (*al-Anfal*: 24) What does Allah mean when He says, ‘and know that Allah intervenes between man and (the desires of) his heart’? I say, do not think that the disbeliever’s heart is inextricably enmeshed in disbelief because he might try to rid himself of his ill-begotten whims and consider the truth of belief and become convinced of it still without being overcome by his whims. More than one evil heart has turned to good, like the disbelieving hardliners of Quraysh who eventually believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Their hearts were wrapped in evil, yet still they did not persist; rather, Allah has stood between each one of them and his heart.

The heart is the seat of hopes and wishes, and the first of those is to hope for a lengthy life, especially when a person sees someone his own age pass away, or when he sees someone his father’s age pass away or when his grandfather passes away. As people like their lives to be prolonged, they hope to have lineage to hold their name; they aspire for life, even though it was granted to other than themselves so long as those others bear their bloodline.

Similarly, man loves to hope and aspire, building up much in his dreams that he wishes to achieve. However, he must not forget that this world has a Lord that might end the life of any one of us regardless of this man’s desires for life prolongation. Allah might stand between a person and the hopes he wishes to fulfil. None of us are secluded from our Creator; we are all in the hand of the Creator. He did not create the world only to let it run according to disorganised orders irrespective of His Will; rather, every order and rule is under His control.

Allah *Glorified is He* intervenes between man and the desires of his heart—prolonging of his life, realizing his dreams—and acts as a cover hiding death, its causes, and its hour. All that is so that we might always incline towards doing good deeds and living in the light of the Methodology unaware of our appointed and definite hour of death; our fate is at the hands of Allah.

Allah says:

وَاتَّقُوا فِتْنَةً لَا تُصِيبَنَّ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْكُمْ خَاصَّةً
وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

**Beware of discord that harms not only the wrongdoers
among you: know that God is severe in His punishment [25]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 25)**

Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to beware of temptations and nip them in the bud before they get out of hand. A person should avoid offences, and society should stand firmly against any transgression because whoever is a bank robber now first began with petty theft stealing from his brother or from the house, then the neighbours then the bank. If every transgression were quickly followed up by reprimand and punishment for whoever did it when they were still young, they would not grow up to be law-breakers and their transgressions would not become increasingly severe. Grave crimes would be buried alive in their infancy because whoever committed a minor offence was punished. Do not be languid in combating any deviant behaviour as long as you are not susceptible. Whoever brazenly wrongs someone can easily wrong you as well. We all know the story⁽¹⁾ of the three bulls, the red, the white and the black. The lion attacked the white bull and ate it, while neither the red bull nor black one defended it. Then the lion attacked the red bull and so the black bull said to itself, ‘As long as the lion does not eat me, it is no business of mine’, and when the lion came to the black bull, as he approached he said, ‘You were already eaten the day I devoured the white bull’. Therefore, Allah says, ‘And beware of that temptation to evil which does not befall only those among you who are bent on denying the truth, to the exclusion of others...’ (*al-Anfal*: 25).

This verse suggests that being wary of temptation begins with chastising the insinuator as early as he engages in impairing by mongering for temptation or discord. I cite this following example to ingrain it permanently in your memory. A mother divided the food—meat, vegetables and fruit—among her children; one of them ate his share, then the mother put the rest of the food, i.e. his brothers’ shares in the refrigerator for safekeeping; after that the mother noticed that the son who had already eaten his portion was eating his brother’s

(1) The story of the three bulls, the red, the white and the black

food behind her back without permission. In this case, the mother must reprimand and punish him for behaving like this so that it does not happen again. Similarly, if a boy comes home with a toy or something whose price is beyond the child's means, the father must reprimand the boy so that he does not go too far and corrupt his own integrity. We see that in the event of a murder, Allah created the system of blood money for the Bedouin tribe that is akin to the killer on his father's side. The tribe is considered the killer's family because the members of this family will chastise someone for constantly terrorizing or threatening outsiders, knowing that each of them will have to pay a part of the money for being of the killer's clan.

In the same manner, we notice that if people spot a tyrannical wrongdoer and let him go unpunished, Allah unleashes His wrath on them, for the wrongdoer would persist in his oppression and tyranny unless clamped down on with an iron fist. Then injustice runs rampant in society and Allah's punishment falls upon everyone. Imam Ahmad *rest his soul* narrates that Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* explained this matter; Imam Ahmad narrated: 'Abu Bakr stood up, praised and glorified Allah, then said, "O people, you read this verse, "O you who have attained to faith! ... Those who go astray can do you no harm..." (*al-Ma'ida*: 105), and you misunderstand its implicit meaning. Indeed, I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, "Truly, if people are witness to wrongdoing and do not change it, then the wrath of Allah would encompass them all."'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* illuminates the uninterrupted path for us in legal and doctrinal matters, and He provides a clear example of this case, which is unanimously agreed upon. As narrated on the authority of Nu'man ibn Bashir, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Whoever respects the proper limits set down by Allah are like the people who drew lots on a boat; some of them drew the top of the boat, and some the bottom, and whenever those in the bottom drew water, they passed by those above them. They in the bottom said, "If we pierced through our quarters, we would not harm those above us." If those on top left them do what they wanted, they would all perish, but if they held their hands at bay, they would all be saved.'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* provides us with this example of a group of people who were riding a boat and hold a lottery to divide

themselves into two groups, one group residing on the top half of the boat, i.e. its deck, and another group living below decks according to the results of the lottery which is also called drawing lots.

This suggests that they were kind and good-hearted people among whom the strong did not impose upon the weak. Those who were occupying the bottom of the boat would go up to whenever they wanted water and would let down buckets from the deck to the river. If those in the bottom of the boat were left to carry out their urge to pierce the hull of the boat so they could draw water directly from the river, then the boat would have floundered and gone under, but when those living on the top half of the boat restrained and reprimanded those who wanted to pierce the boat, they were all saved.

Similarly, we understand the statement of, ‘And beware of that temptation to evil which does not befall only those among you who are bent on denying the truth, to the exclusion of others; and know that Allah is severe in retribution.’ (*al-Anfal: 25*)

It befits one to say, ‘The punishment here falls upon both the oppressor as well as the oppressed. A concern here may be raised, the oppressor deserves the punishment for the injustice he has perpetrated, but what is the fault of the oppressed? The answer is that the oppressed had it in his grasp to denounce the injustice, but instead he remained silent and so deserved to be included in the punishment.

If societies pay no heed to resisting temptations, Allah would afflict them with collective punishment, and the punishment of Allah is more severe than any other punishment in creation. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَذْكُرُوا إِذْ أَنْتُمْ قَلِيلٌ مُسْتَضْعَفُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَخَافُونَ أَنْ يَخَطِفَكُمْ النَّاسُ
فَأَوَّانِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ بِنَصْرِهِ وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Remember when you were few, victimized in the land, afraid that people might catch you, but God sheltered you and strengthened you with His help, and provided you with good things so that you might be grateful [26] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 26*)

After all the events that have transpired, now Allah reminds those who enjoy a privileged present status of their modest past one, stressing to them that He

who raised you up from the dregs of life to its pinnacle is ever-present, and so long as He, in His Omnipotence, saw fit to raise you up high so, too, can He in His Omnipotence bring you low if He so wished. So, if you are in a position of privilege, be wary of forgetting that you were once in a position of humbleness. You must acknowledge the beauty of the gift of the Bounteous Creator Who bestows His blessings upon us. We say, ‘My Lord, the Powerful, the Most Great, He is the One Who blessed me and elevated my standing, I did not do that by my own skill, or even if I did, those skills are also a gift from Allah’. Consequently, Allah says, ‘And remembers the time when you were few [and] helpless on Earth...’ (*al-Anfal*: 26). In other words, be mindful of this fact always, and do not fear any (other) power, no matter what its strength or force, but rather prepare an appropriate strategy to confront it because you are the bearers of the call to Islam, and whosoever bears the call to Islam incurs hardships and difficulties.

But that must not undermine your strength and resolve. The first generation of Muslims were a small minority suffering from oppression and persecution at the hands of the more powerful disbelievers, and occasionally when one of those early Muslims found no one to protect them from the harsh mistreatment of the cruel disbelievers, they would seek refuge with a non-Muslim whom they hoped would treat them with mercy. They would say, ‘Grant us asylum from your disbelieving brethren’. When the early Muslims were most vulnerable, they could not find anyone to protect them from the tyranny and cruelty of the disbelievers, so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proposed that they emigrate to Abyssinia (roughly present day Ethiopia) because in that land there was a king who did not oppress any among his people. The emigration to Abyssinia was to escape the power of their enemies, but the Muslims’ state of affairs did not remain that way, rather, Allah *the Exalted* made them victorious, not through their strength, but instead He willed them to be victorious by adopting His given divine means. And so, the Word of Allah was raised high.

We derive from this fact an argument and an example to use against those who cast doubt on the ability of Muslims to manage society and better it; for the entire world once witnessed a thousand years of Muslim pioneering in

science, philosophy and technological innovation at a period when the majority of nations were subservient to the rule of the Islamic nation.

As I have previously said, the Muslim Caliph, Harun Ar-Rashid⁽¹⁾ dispatched a gift to the king of France (Charlemagne) a fine repeater watch that used water to function and was crafted with exquisite detail beyond the people's capacity to imagine in France. Upon seeing the watch, the French thought that demons must be what made it move because the scientific and technical advancement of Baghdad at that time surpassed all belief of Europeans who were living in drastic scientific backwardness.

But in this age of ours the balance has reversed and we have begun to suffer from backwardness in using our reasons to benefit from science. When the radio and television were introduced to some of the Islamic countries, some would say of the radio, 'A demon must be speaking from inside of it and imitating a human voice'. People of this opinion only stopped rejecting and refusing the placement of broadcasting stations and radio technology in their countries when we asked them to, 'Turn the radio frequency indicator and it will air the recitation of Holy Quran'. When they did that, they listened to the voice of Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at as he read the chapter of *Maryam* and we told, 'Demons do not recite the Quran. Broadcasting and transistor radios are scientific inventions discovered by people who used their reason in applied science.'

Another example when the microphone was introduced, and many demanded it be installed in mosques for Friday Prayers, some refused to introduce the microphone to mosques, ignoring the fact that people in large mosques could have used more microphones for sound amplification during Friday Prayers. I told one such person, 'May Allah straighten you out and your mind-set, why do you wear prescription glasses and place them over your eyes?' He answered me: 'Because my vision is poor, and the glasses make writing clearer to me.' I said, 'The microphone does the same thing, it makes sound clearer to those who sit far from the Imam and the *minbar* (like a 'pulpit') during congregational prayers generally and Friday prayers specifically.'

Considering the state of affairs in some Islamic countries and that they have become so incapable of absorbing and accepting technology, it is whistle

(1) The story of the clock offered by the Arab king to the French king Charlemagne

blowing to renew interest in the scientific principles of Allah's Universe and advancing the sciences to use them in service to Allah's Plan instead of remaining backwards even though Allah's Plan urges us to take an interest in the underlying principles at work in the world. Each of us knows that Allah's Universe is under His control as are its laws and codes, and He makes them serviceable to whoever adopts those means to reach the desired end.

Allah reminds us in His saying, 'and remember the time when you were few (and) helpless on Earth, fearful lest people snatch you away...' (*al-Anfal*: 26). And *al-khatf*, (translated above as 'snatch you away') is to take something quickly, i.e. a person or group of persons takes something or someone without the right to do so, and as we know such an action can take various forms. For example, a merchant is displaying his goods, say dates, or apples, and some passer-by comes to look over the offered commodities without having any money to buy them, so instead, he snatches an apple or a handful of dates and quickly runs away. The rightful owner of the goods tries to run after him but cannot catch up. This is to nab something (*al-khatf*). But if the shopkeeper catches up with him and the thief tries to do away with him and escape, in law this is called 'coercion'. As for theft, it is taking money surreptitiously from wherever it is secreted, while the owner is absent which is also different from embezzlement, the taking of something that has been entrusted to you and is in your possession but not under your ownership. Thus, taking wrongfully has several forms, nabbing, coercion, theft, and embezzlement. Allah says, '...fearful lest people do away with you – whereupon He sheltered you, and strengthened you with His succour...' (*al-Anfal*: 26).

In other words, they had feared to be taken away without anyone to defend them, but now you Muslims have become stronger through the well-seated faith of your hearts and the aid of Allah. Thus, you must remember Him with eternal gratitude, servitude, and obedience. Allah granted you stability in the new refuge—Medina—and a community of faithful to welcome you.

And when the Muslims came to Medina, they erected the mosque there as a marker of the continuance of light from the heavens as a gift to the world. This was the first act for Muslims there, and they concerned themselves with none other before it. The community of The *Ansar* (supporters) considered

the Muslims as brothers, and so the Muslims became strong with the help of their brethren in faith, as did their supports become strong with their newfound Muslim brethren after the Jews of Medina there had tried to enlist the help of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* against them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came in the cause of victory for the oppressed. The Methodology he called for was a source of strength for the Muslims and their supports. Muslim immigrants from Mecca found invitations from The *Ansar* to their houses not just to eat and drink, but to live as well.

Interestingly enough, when Allah blesses a man with many and diverse comforts, he might gladly share all of them with his friend, that is, all except his woman, for a husband guards his women jealously. But whoever among these *Ansar* was married to two women was willing to divorce one of his women, whichever the emigrant desires, to marry her off to his emigrant brother after her waiting period ends; in the plea that the latter has left behind all his family in Mecca. Never could an Arab man have imagined such an extraordinary selflessness.

Allah closes this noble verse saying, ‘...and provided for you sustenance out of the good things of life, so that you might have cause to be grateful.’ (*al-Anfal*: 26) Allah provided them with sustenance and stocked them with resources, weapons and treasure and they defeated the disbelievers of Quraysh. Besides, War booty was not lawful to any of the previous prophets, but they were made lawful for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; anyone who could do all that for you, O Muslims, is truly worthy of eternal remembrance and gratitude.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا لَا تَخُوْنُوْا اللّٰهَ وَالرَّسُوْلَ وَتَخُوْنُوْا اٰمَنَتِكُمْ وَاَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Believers, do not betray God and the Messenger, or knowingly betray [other people's] trust in you [27] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 27)

The opposite of betrayal is trust, and a trust is something a person gives to another without any writ to record it, nor witnesses to bear testimony to it. Rather, the matter is left to the entrusted person, whether he wants to

acknowledge it or refuse it because a trust has no contract, nor witnesses, nor bill of sale and is governed only by the accountability of the entrusted. Allah says, ‘Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.’ (*al-Ahzab*: 72)

Every creature and entity in creation such as, animal life, plant life, inorganic objects etc. all, but mankind, are subjugated and denied the freedom of choice. The sun cannot choose to say, ‘I will rise today over these people’, or ‘I will not rise today’. The wind has no will to choose; all created things that Allah brought into existence in the Universe except mankind can be made to serve the believer and the disbeliever. These creatures and created things all refused to bear the trust of decision-making. But man said, ‘I have mind to well decide on the various options; I accept bearing this trust and will discharge all the due obligations, because I am capable of choice’. But man attributed to himself the ability to tend to what was entrusted to him as if he were certain he could take good care of its due obligations, he issued his prior judgement although he neither can predict the future nor have clues to the unseen.

It is true that at the time man took up this burden, his intention was to faithfully take hold of what was entrusted to him, but what about when it comes time to discharge his duty? You do not know how the vicissitudes will unfold to you. Some circumstances might arise whereby you are forced to annul or abandon the trust. As such, the rational person would say, ‘Keep the trust of decision-making away from me, for I do not know what the vicissitudes of time will do to me when it comes to fulfilling their due obligations’. Every other thing had announced its unwillingness to bear this trust before they were all made insentient, but man declared that he would accept the trust and that he would discharge it faithfully. Of him the Holy Quran says, ‘... Lo! He has proved a tyrant and a fool.’ (*al-Ahzab*: 72) Man is a ‘tyrant’ to himself because he charged himself with bearing something beyond his control, and man is a ‘fool’ because he took stock at the time of assuming the task, but did not consider the time when he would discharge it, nor did he take into consideration the updates that time would cause him. Allah says, ‘[Hence], O you who have

attained to faith, do not betray Allah and the Apostle, and do not knowingly be false to the trusts that have been reposed in you.' (*al-Anfal: 27*)

Many of people's actions and behaviour are hidden from the eyes of the public. When those eyes spot a crime of some nature, they call upon men of law to exact society due from the criminal. But what is it about clandestine criminal acts? We know that for every crime that clearly comes to light, there are many hidden crimes underlying it. Whoever commits murder surely is concealing other crimes, like purchasing a weapon without a permit, or if he did not have enough money, he might have stolen money to buy the weapon, and then he may also have enlisted others to help him in the murder. All these are hidden crimes. Unquestionably there exist secret, private actions that precede the type of explicitly criminal behaviour that troubles society, for the purview of human law is to guard society only from explicit crimes. The eye of the law does not penetrate through the hidden or secret crimes, but matters differ with regards to the eye of religion which guides a person's depths to righteousness because religion is the trust that Allah—who created the entire Universe—places in the consciences of men. Do not betray the trust in matters unseen which none can know but Allah. You can defend yourself against whatever people know if you stand accused before those people which is not the case in unseen, hidden affairs and they are the most important because they are what control the genesis of later behaviour. Never betray Allah nor His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by betraying the trust given to you. You have no excuse for that but your own decision-making. If you want to do something, you will do it, or you will shun it if you so choose. It is upon mankind not to betray the trust between man and the Lord, and if people's consciences are not possessed of an abundant religious watchfulness over unseen actions, they might stray, for every explicit crime happens only through the collusions of some hidden affair.

So long as you believe in Allah entirely of your own choosing, you should follow and observe the things revealed to you by the One you believe in. You know that faith is the underlying reason to carry out every command. For example, you pray five obligatory prayers every day because the Law-Maker ordered you to do that; you pray two *rak`as* (a unit of prayer) in the morning, four at midday, four again in the afternoon, three at sunset and four *rak`as* in

the evening, all because the Law-Maker is Allah the Lord, and He ordered you to do so. You fast because Allah ordered you to fast. If you realised there are benefits to fasting after the fact, this is a completely different matter because despite those benefits, the underlying reason for fasting is that Allah commanded it. Similarly, the underlying reason for obeying each provision of Islamic law is faith and belief in He Who decreed that law.

‘[Hence], O you, who have attained to faith, do not betray Allah and the Apostle...’ (*al-Anfal*: 27). What is betrayal? The essence of betrayal is one of deficiency and falling short, contrary to completeness; it is also contrary to fidelity that is the opposite of treachery and deception. Because Allah says to us, ‘Do not betray Allah and His Messenger’, we must sincerely adhere to faith, for the canon of Islamic law came to us from Allah through His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and whoever obeys the Messenger obeys Allah because Allah did not address us directly, but rather through a messenger whom He selected from His people and whom He provided with miracles. Every statement and communication we received came through the intermediation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Do not betray Allah and the Apostle...’ (*al-Anfal*: 27). So, do not betray Allah neither vis-a-vis the content of the Quran, nor Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was given authority by Allah to enact laws. The right of Prophet Muhammad’s law making comes in Allah's saying, ‘...And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from...’ (*al-Hashr*: 7).

So a trust is something owed to Allah through the Quran’s stipulations, and another trust is owed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through whatever topics the Quran has left untouched save by the direction of He who first spoke the Quran to empower the one entrusted, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to make laws such that whenever you obey the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you have obeyed Allah.

We previously learned that betrayal is a failure to measure up meaning falling short of the required completion or fulfilment. When a person is a believer, the faith in his soul comes with an obligation, a trust of sorts. So, you believe that there is no deity but Allah; and the trust of this testimony

obliges you not to make anyone your sovereign ruler, nor give allegiance to him, unless that allegiance derives from following the Methodology of Allah. This is the trust of the *shahada* ('testimony of faith', i.e. to bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah); as for the trust of the message, it manifests itself in a keen willingness to apply everything Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to us from his Lord to the best of one's ability.

The trust we take from Allah is to stay true to the utterance of faith in 'there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah' meaning rest assured only Allah is capable of disposing your affairs, nor harm or benefit you, nor that your best interests can lay far from Allah, for everything is by the power of Allah *the Almighty*; there is no deity but Him. And do not ever think that any legal provision comes to you through any other than the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If you stray from this framework of understanding, you would be someone who did not fulfil the trust of Allah or the trust of the His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The pinnacle of this trust is belief in Allah, and in the Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for Allah has charged you with legally binding provisions and once you accept them, they too come with an obligation, a trust to be borne. Their trust is to carry them out without any mistake whether public or private, even in speech, for the trust of faith extends over all things, just like the trust and obligations of a meeting you might attend: you have no right to convey the secrets of others to this meeting, nor the secrets of this meeting to others.

Ziyad ibn Abiya⁽¹⁾ was one of the leaders of the Arabs and was most judicious. One day, a slanderer denounced Hamam ibn Abdullah As-Saluli to Ziyad. People expected Hamam to be punished severely because Ziyad seemed convinced of the suspicion, but Allah inspired Hamam with reasoning that proved an effective way out. So, when Ziyad summoned Hamam, Ziyad said, 'I was informed that that you were mocking me.' Hamam said, 'Of course not, may Allah make amends. I did not do such a thing, and so you

(1) The story of the false accusation of Hamam ibn Abdullah As-Saluli to Ziyad ibn Abiya

must be mistaken.’ Ziyad said, ‘This man told me so’, and he drew the man out from hiding. Hamam looked at the man, and when he saw he was a friend and companion, he went up to him and said, ‘You are someone whom I either trusted foolishly and who then betrayed me, or you spoke of something you had no knowledge of. So, whatever was between us ultimately reaches the status of betrayal and sinning. In other words, you are either a traitor or a sinner, for if you are someone I trusted with something I uttered myself, you are a traitor, but if you falsely attributed it to me, then you are a liar.’ Ziyad was pleased with this logic, so he sent the slanderer away and refused to listen to him. It is said that he bestowed gifts and presents to Hamam, and when Hamam next saw the slanderer he said to him, ‘Do you have any more slandering with which you wish to make me richer?!’

Prophet Muhammad’s biography records some incidents of betrayal that happened in his time as well, even from some of the Companions. For example, we know that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, he made a covenant with the Jews there. He treated them well so long as they abided by the pledge, but when they broke the covenant, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to punish them, and he did. The first tribe to do so was the tribe of Banu An-Nadir. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made it clear to them that he would not kill them but would instead be satisfied with merely expelling them from their homes and exiling them to the Levant. Then another act of betrayal came from the tribe of Banu Qurayza, so he laid siege to them for a period. They sent an emissary to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, the Qurayzha want you to treat them as you did the Nadir’ meaning the Qurayzha offered to leave the country and go to the Levant. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused to do anything until hearing the judgment of Sa’d ibn Mu`adh who had some connection to the Qurayzha tribe and was considered a bosom friend to them. The Qurayzha tribe knew that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was deferring to Sa’d ibn Mu`adh, so they said, ‘No, first send us Abu Lubaba’⁽¹⁾, which was his surname. His real name was Marwan ibn `Abd Al-Mundhir and his money was in

(1) The story of the Jews consulting Abu Lubaba

the hands of the Jews who with his money engaged in mercantile trade for him; in short, he had a financial connection to them.

Abu Lubaba went to the Jews and they consulted him in the matter asking, 'Will we be pleased with the judgment of Sa`d ibn Mu`adh?' So, what did Abu Lubaba say? He said, 'It will be slaughtering', and pointed to their throats. Immediately after that Abu Lubaba rebuked himself, saying, 'By Allah, no sooner do my feet take a step than I feel certain that I have just betrayed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.' Contemplate faith, conviction of faith and the preponderance of the afterlife over the present life. Thoughts of a person's disgrace in this world pales in comparison to disgrace in the afterlife.

Abu Lubaba went to the *sariya* (the columns in the middle of the mosque) of the mosque, i.e. in plain view of the people, and sentenced himself to be tied to the columns by his hand. He stayed there without food or drink for seven days until his strength gave out and he fainted. Allah took pity on him and the Messenger of Allah told him that Allah had forgiven him. So, the people said to him, 'Untie yourself, for you are the one who first bound yourself there.' But he said, 'By Allah, I will not undo the bonds until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself unties me.' So he *peace and blessing be upon him* went and untied him. Why did Abu Lubaba do that to himself? Because he felt that he had betrayed the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying to the Jews that slaughtering would be the judgment.

There is another Companion, Hatib ibn Abu Balta`a⁽¹⁾, (who betrayed the Prophet Muhammad's trust). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was planning to liberate Mecca, and he wanted to conceal his proceeding to take Quraysh by surprise and thus avoid the outbreak of a bloody struggle; for peaceful conquest to be concluded. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* kept the matter secret until one day, while he was sitting among his Companions and Allah informed him that Hatib had sent word to Quraysh

(1) The story of Hatib ibn Abu Balta`a sending a message to Quraysh in the pigtail of a woman informing them of the intention of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to conquer Mecca

(of his plans). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commissioned `Ali and two other Companions *Allah be pleased with them* to go to a certain place of his choosing on the road to Mecca where they would find a young woman bearing a letter for Quraysh. When they arrived at the said place, they found the young woman, and `Ali said to her, 'Show us what you are carrying'. She said, 'I am not carrying anything'. So `Ali ibn Abu Taleb grabbed her by the locks of her hair and withdrew the letter from where she kept her belongings. `Ali discovered it was a letter warning Quraysh, so he brought the letter back to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who asked Hatib, 'What drove you to do this, O Hatib?' He said, 'By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, I knew that it would do you no harm because Allah would surely grant you victory, but I wanted to curry favour with Quraysh, for I am a weak, lowly man without money or family to support me.'

So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pardoned him even though his act was, in a sense, a betrayal of the Messenger. But despite this you must keep in mind that whenever you break a directive you have already accepted from Allah Whom you believe, such a violation is considered a betrayal of the trust (of faith). '...Betray not Allah and His messenger, nor knowingly betray your trusts.' (*al-Anfal: 27*)

In other words, do not betray Allah and the His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by betraying their erected Path; do not knowingly betray the trusts you have with Allah and the Messenger, and let none of you intentionally betray his people. From this verse, the basis for forgiving instances of unheedful forgetfulness and error is taken because what is forbidden is an act of knowing and intentional betrayal. If something happens because of a slip of the tongue, know that our Lord is Forgiving and Merciful. He possesses a sublime graciousness and would not hold you to something you did unknowingly if you knew deep down that such an act was reprehensible and immoral to any decent person, even those who are not exceedingly religious. You should gauge this matter with a clear litmus test: would you like someone else to do to you what you have done to others? The answer to that question will reveal one's natural disposition. If you learn that your innate character balks at the act and rejects it, then you should not do it because it is opposing to the innate

character that Allah ingrained in humans. For example, if a thief imagined himself as someone who has been robbed, stealing would no longer appeal to him. Similarly if a scandalmonger disgraced someone and put himself in their shoes, he would not have transgressed only to satisfy his own lusts. We must wish for others what we wish for ourselves. Would you like someone to betray a trust you had entrusted him with or betray you by divulging what you breathed out in confidence? No. Thus, you must not simply view everything as if it were done to a second party, but rather, as if it were done to you yourself.

So the saying of Allah, ‘...knowingly betray...’ (*al-Anfal: 27*) pertains to things done intentionally, not out of forgetfulness or absentmindedness or a slip of the tongue; if you were aware and cognizant, however, committing these deeds would constitute a betrayal, and Allah forbids that by saying, ‘...O ye who believe! Betray not Allah and His messenger, nor knowingly betray your trusts...’ (*al-Anfal: 27*).

We take note that the statement here is addressed to the totality of believers in the plural, and the word ‘trusts’ is also plural; so once you divided the multiple trusts among the multiple people being addressed, you see that each person is charged with one specific command: not to betray his own trust. A similar situation is when the teacher says to his students, ‘Take out your pencils’. The command is to the group of students for each one of them to take out his pencil. In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

**Be aware that your possessions and your children
are only a test, and that there is a tremendous
reward with God [28] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 28*)**

When distinguishing, this verse is clearly related to the one immediately preceding it because betraying Allah and the His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and betraying one’s trusts are almost always done to realise some base desire or gain for one’s self. You must have self-control since your own self is the only thing you can control with certainty. For example, you might not be able to control your children’s wants and desires, and you may not

have enough money to meet their needs, but does that mean you should steal from a trust that someone else entrusted to you? No. Does that mean you should act deceitfully in your daily trade to meet some needs or self-interest? No. Does that mean you should betray people's trust for the sake of your children or to attain riches? No.

Here Allah brings up two things, money and children, and tells us that they are a *fitnah* (trial and temptation) which as we learned previously can be worthy of blame or praise depending on the consequences of that trial or temptation. It is praise-worthy if one rises above the test, and invites blame when one fails the test mentioned in the above noble verse.

Those with an avid interest in the nuances of Quranic recitation know that every letter, every word and sentence is crafted with some wisdom in mind. Thus, some ponder, 'Why did Allah place 'worldly goods' before 'children' in this verse'? We say, 'Because everyone has worldly goods, even if all he has is his clothes, but naturally not everyone has children. Furthermore, children are the product of marriage between two spouses, and finding a spouse first requires money, thus it stands to reason that Allah would bring up worldly goods first, and children second'. The stylistics of the Holy Quran takes up this issue in varying fashions. For example, Allah says, 'Alluring unto man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver...' (*Al-Imran*: 14).

In this verse, the 'heaped-up treasures of gold and silver' come after 'women' and 'children' rather than mentioning worldly goods as the first temptation and children second. We should see that Allah placed the 'heaped-up treasures' as He did because they come after a person who has already consumed the first allure, women, and the second, children. We know that whoever has enough money for marriage and rearing children might desire more money. 'Heaped-up treasures' denotes a great many of the singular 'treasure' meaning that whoever possesses one treasure covets more, just like whoever has a penny hankers to increase what he owns to a million pounds, and so on and so forth. Thus, the heaped-up treasures refer to the desire for excessive riches.

In the verse currently under examination, Allah says, 'And know that your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation...' (*al-Anfal*: 28).

In another verse, He says, 'O you who have attained to faith! Behold, some of your spouses and your children are enemies unto you: so beware of them....' (*at-Taghabun*: 14) In this verse, we see that the enmity of spouses comes before that of children, and we know that in some instances the spouse is the first to sow hate, and then the children are influenced by this hatred and imitate it; all of this is rhetorically logical because He who speaks it is but the Wise Lord. 'And know that your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation...' (*al-Anfal*: 28).

There is a clear warning in this verse. Beware failing this trial, for whoever accumulates money unlawfully so that his children can live in luxury has betrayed his trust (with Allah and the Messenger) and will be punished. Thus, at the end of this verse, Allah reminds us of the incentive to succeed in this test as He says, 'And that with Allah there is a tremendous reward.' (*al-Anfal*: 28)

We know that the human spirit, by its innate natural disposition, is driven to love self-gain, what distinguishes one from another is how to assess the value and longevity of these gains. Whoever steals wants merely to benefit himself through other people's efforts, and whoever refrains from stealing also wants to make gains for himself, but in his case, it is by having Allah bless him with money and a lawful livelihood. Thus, there is some utility behind each action, whether negative or positive.

The example I always cite is that of the student who neglects his studies, who only gets up in the morning after his family goes to great lengths to waken him up, and who then leaves the house only to loaf around in the streets. The second student wakes up every morning and goes to his school and engrosses himself in his studies. Each of the two students sought out some gain for himself: the failing student sought out the foolish gain, while the successful student sought out the gain in the long run. We know that beneficial gain is the desired goal of every person. The important part is the value and longevity of what is gained. If betrayal gains you something in children or worldly goods, remember the reward promised by Allah which acts as collateral for the trust (reposed in us by Him). Place that in one hand, then place the other gain in the other hand, and tip your scale in favour of the heavier which is the reward of Allah. That is why Al-Mutanabbi (a renowned poet) wrote,

I think each of us covets life for himself

Guarding it jealously, hopelessly infatuated of it

The coward's love of self makes him fearful

The valiants' love of self-conveys him to battle

So, each of us loves life: the cowardly person frightened of war cherishes his life, and the valiant person who cherishes his soul and knows that its value is with its Creator plunges into battle desiring the life of a martyr, a life devoted to Allah until the Hour of Resurrection which will be followed by an eternal life in paradise.

So, the standards we use to measure a gain are what are open to dispute. In human practice, the rewards or wages are equivalent to the value of the work done for them, but Allah's reward is more than equivalent; it is made prodigious by the Omnipotence of Allah.

In the next verse, Allah *the Exalted* says:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا اِنْ تَنَّقَوْا لِلّٰهِ يَجْعَلْ لَّكُمْ فُرْقٰنًا وَيُكَفِّرْ
عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئٰتِكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللّٰهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيْمِ ﴿٢٩﴾

Believers, if you remain mindful of God, He will give you a criterion [to tell right from wrong] and wipe out your bad deeds, and forgive you: God's favour is great indeed [29] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 29)

Allah *Glorified is He* opens this noble verse with a call to the faithful, then adds a restrictive conditional clause, '...If you remain conscious of Allah...' (*al-Anfal*: 29), and if the conditional is fulfilled, then a standard is created for us; our bad deeds are erased, and our sins are forgiven, for Allah is Bountiful, and possesses a limitless bounty. Being conscious of Allah or having fear of Him is adhering to and abiding by the provisions of Islamic law, and the apex of adherence to those provisions is faith in Allah. Whenever the two are present, both faith in Allah and adherence to the ordinances of Islamic law, no doubt the promise of Allah will be fulfilled as presented in His saying, '...He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false,

and will efface your bad deeds, and will forgive you your sins: for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.' (*al-Anfal: 29*)

Al-furqan (translated above as criterion) is a word based on the root *frq*, 'fa', 'ra', and 'qaf' which is always used to distinguish or divide two things. For instance, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea with his staff, each half or (*firq*) was like a great mountain. And Allah says, 'And when We cleft the sea before you...' (*al-Baqara: 50*). 'We cleft' is *faraqna* in Arabic. In other words, Allah severed the continuity between the two connected parts and a great division, or *farq*, appeared between them. Suppose, for example, that you bought a robe made from cloth of a good weave and dye, and you ripped at part of the robe. Here one would not say that you split (*faraqt*) it into the two pieces, rather, we would say you (*fasalt*) ripped or tore them because one uses (*farq*) only if the tear creates two separate pieces totally distinctive from each other; each with its respective parts and things attached. So *al-farq*, in a broader sense, is more than just a cut or a tear through a formerly cohesive body, it is a cut or tear that creates entirely separate distinctive portions, each with its own particulars and characteristics.

'...He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false...' (*al-Anfal: 29*). *Yaj'al lakum furqanan* means He will split apart two incongruous things because if there were congruity between them, they would be a single whole, but instead, they differ from each other, and there must necessarily be an incompatibility between them. Allah *Glorified is He* says that He will 'create for you a criterion by which to discern...'. An example of this is that there are some who are rightly guided, and there are some who stray. Naturally there is a division between being guided and straying. Allah took the heart of the rightly guided and opened it to Islam, and He made the heart of the disbeliever constricted and full of rancour, envy, deception, and wile. Thus, Our Lord divides out whoever has the serenity of faith in his heart and whoever has malice in his heart. The believer belongs to a different grouping than those with rancorous hearts. Allah says, '...He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false...' (*al-Anfal: 29*). That means that Allah divides you out into people of truth and people of falsehood because He wants the ebb and flow of life to move harmoniously as one unit, not for it to be governed by the clash between the capricious desires of different groups. All

of them (the people of truth) are vicegerents of Allah on earth, all of them are Allah's creatures, and all of them enjoy the blessings of Allah. Thus, their lives and actions should be in cooperation and coordination, not in conflict.

And *at-tafarruq*, or discord, as we know arises from a clash between two groups, one of whom represents the band of the rightly guided, and the other group are those who rightfully deserve the punishment of Allah. '...He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false...' (*al-Anfal*: 29). The criterion by which you discern the true from the false is represented by the rightful guidance of the heart, by mental acuity and knowledge, i.e. things that can distinguish between truth and falsehood. Man's affairs, as we know, fall into two categories, those of this world, and those of the next world. The affairs of this world include hidden internal matters, and visible outward matters. If we look to the affairs of this world, we find they are comprised of both outward matters or tangible and perceivable actions, and internal matters, which none know other than Allah *the Exalted* and the person under question. The discerning criterion touches upon the hidden, internal affairs of this world in the difference between one who is rightly guided and one who has gone astray. In case of the rightly guided Allah has opened his heart to Islam, while one who has gone astray, Allah has not opened his heart to Islam. The rightly guided live among people who are without rancour, while those who stray live among the malicious and malevolent. This is with regards to hidden, internal matters. As for outward actions, Allah creates the discerning criterion between those of belief and those of disbelief by making one powerful, victorious, and dominant.

But what is it of the discerning standard in the afterlife? Allah creates this discerning criterion because the believers will have an everlasting blessing and a sublime reward, and the disbelievers will receive a most severe punishment and awesome retribution.

'...If you remain conscious of Allah, He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false, and will efface your bad deeds, and will forgive you your sins: for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.' (*al-Anfal*: 29)

But if we were going to remain conscious of Allah, would we really commit bad deeds? I think that if '...conscious of Allah...' is supposed to

mean belief and faith in Him, then Allah forgives your bad deeds whether minor or major, trifling or grievous, and a few infractions will not adversely affect your faith, for you will receive Allah's pardon and His forgiveness. However, if 'conscious of Allah' was supposed to mean obeying commands and commandments, then for our bad deeds to be effaced we must be conscious of Allah by remaining free of major, grievous sins, and Allah will forgive us our bad deeds, which are the minor, trifling sins. This forgiveness is of two forms: one form is having your sins overlooked in this world, and the other form having your punishment withheld in the afterlife. Therefore Allah says, in a beautiful closing to the verse, that He, '...will forgive you your sins: for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.' (*al-Anfal: 29*)

Because Allah's bounteous gift is described as great, that means there is a gift and a bounty which is less than great, as is there a gift which excels 'great'. We know that people socialize by exchanging gifts and presents. For instance, some person might confer a gift of food to another person, or of clothing or drink or lodgings. There are diverse and numerous kinds of bounty, but they are not characterized by greatness because the great bounty is from Allah alone, for all gifts are derived from Him and none other. So, whenever a person gives someone a loaf of bread, we know that behind him is another person who brought the bread from the bakery, and another person who brought the flour from the mill and a third one to sow and to harvest the wheat.

All bounties are from Allah and their value is derived from Allah; that is the great bounty. We also find that whenever someone bestows a gift to someone else, they are almost always trying to attain something through that gift, like self-gratification, or praise and thanks or peace of mind for a humanistic soul. One notices people being generous to others to dull their own pains not because they are executing Allah's Plan. They merely want peace of mind, like the disbelievers who make useful things for other people, but they do so without Allah being in their minds; the only thing they give regard to is the serenity and repose of their own hearts.

So, someone who confers a favour wants something in return, whether that be monetary returns, praise or peace of mind from whatever painful visions haunt him. This is a sign that he suffers from void he needs to fill. If it

were Allah giving the bounty, would He desire recompense?! No. That is the great bounty and He bestows it upon His servants as a gift from Him without desiring praise or anything else in return. Also, every favour done by any but Allah implicitly entails a debt of gratitude. However, Allah's bounty does not entail such a debt; nor does it ever tarnish or belittle the recipient's stature or worth. A person might loathe accepting something from someone else, but who is there that would be loathsome towards Allah's bounty? No one would, because life in its entirety is a blessing from Allah. That is why the following parable is told of a young woman who said to Ma'n ibn Za'ida:

Come back; verily the generous always has a place to return to

I suspect, O son of Arwa, that he will come back

The young woman⁽¹⁾ was asking ibn Za'ida to return to generously bestowing them with blessings, so her father scolded her. She said to him, 'O father, kings are not put out by making requests of them': '...for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.' (*al-Anfal*: 29)

Allah *the Exalted* wants you to be mindful of every aspect of your life, your continued existence, and the totality of your blessings. If you trace them back to their origin, they will lead you to Allah. Suppose, for example, that you were to buy furnishings for your house and you chose rosewood to be the material with which the carpenter will make your furniture. So, you bring in this wood from Indonesia or Pakistan perhaps because the forests there produce this kind of wood. If you were to follow the roots of everything in your life, you would find that the works and labour of humankind are ultimately the creation of Allah and His gift to man. That is the great bounty from Allah.

And now after Allah has expounded this directive—do not betray Allah or the Messenger; do not betray the trusts reposed in you for the sake of your children or your spouses; know that all bounty and blessing spring from Allah; and be mindful of the world around you and its realities— (one asks) is there truth to these matters, or not? Verily they are all true, just as He said

(1) The story of the girl who asked Ma'n ibn Za'ida for a bounty and her father scolded her, so she told him that one should not be ashamed of asking kings

before, ‘And remember the time when you were few [and] helpless on Earth, fearful lest people do away with you...’ (*al-Anfal: 26*). This verse was related with respect to Muslims, but what about the Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Allah says:

وَإِذْ يَمْكُرُ بِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيُثْبِتُوكَ أَوْ يَقْتُلُوكَ أَوْ يُخْرِجُوكَ
 وَيَمْكُرُونَ وَيَمْكُرُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَكْرِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Remember [Prophet] when the disbelievers plotted to take you captive, kill, or expel you. They schemed and so did God: He is the best of schemers [30] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 30*)

We notice that Allah does not explicitly ask the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remember. He did not say, ‘Remember how those who were bent on denying the truth...’, but when addressing the companions, Allah does explicitly enjoin them to remember, saying ‘And remember the time when you were few...’ (*al-Anfal: 26*), so what is the reason for this difference? This is because it is inconceivable that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would neglect to remember (and be mindful of) Allah because remembrance of Allah is the core of his mission, for Allah says, ‘and so, (O Prophet), remind them; thy task is only to remind them.’ (*al-Ghashiya: 21*) Remembrance and reminding are the duties charged to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, while the purpose of faith in the life of believers is different because it is purely to set their lives right. Thus, what He says here is only a modifying statement.

‘...And, O Prophet, see how those who were bent on denying the truth were scheming against thee, in order to restrain thee (from preaching), or to slay thee, or to drive thee away: thus, have they (always) schemed: but Allah brought their scheming to nought – for Allah is above all schemers.’ (*al-Anfal: 30*) All of this serves to qualify and elaborate Allah’s saying, ‘...for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.’ (*al-Anfal: 29*)

To scheme is to plan some hidden thing to harm one’s enemy. He who schemes and plots something hidden for his enemies lacks the ability to confront them head on, so he plans behind their backs. If he had possessed the ability

to confront them, he would not scheme. That is why only the weak resort to scheming. Allah says, ‘...verily, Satan’s guile is weak indeed!’ (*an-Nisa’*: 76) And we know Allah says, ‘...O womankind! Verily, awesome is your guile!’ (*Yusuf*: 28) While their cunning is great, their weakness is greater. In this regard, we find Abu Tammam, an Arabic poet saying,

If a powerless woman finds a chance,
She strikes to kill; so is the power of the weak.

When a weak person finds an opportunity, he takes advantage of it, knowing that he may not have another chance; therefore he rushes to destroy his enemy. On the other hand, a strong self-confident man always gives his enemies several chances, then punishes them according to their wrongdoing towards him.

‘Remember [Prophet Muhammad] when the disbelievers plotted to restrain, kill or expel you...’ (*al-Anfal*: 30). The cunning disbelievers intend to plot and scheme against Prophet Muhammad but they do not realise that nothing is hidden from the One Who has sent him *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, they may be able to scheme against those who resemble them in power, but the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is safeguarded by the Power and Care of Allah *Glorified is He*. Since Prophet Muhammad was entrusted with conveying His Message, he was always under His Providence and Protection. He was not alone because he took refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* Who revealed to him all their plans. These schemes and plans are also uncovered and laid bare by Allah *Glorified is He* to all people. Thus, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...They schemed and so did Allah: He is the best of schemers.’ (*al-Anfal*: 30)

When the disbelievers of Quraysh plotted against him *peace and blessings be upon him* they had their own means and goals. They schemed to restrain (from preaching), kill, or expel him. Each one of these three goals had its own motive. When they learned that the Tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj in Medina had pledged to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they would help him, they were frightened and intended to put an end to those threats. They held a meeting in Dar An-Nadwah (House of Assembly) to find a solution that could stop the call of Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Meanwhile, an Arab of the desert walked in and found them conferring on this matter. They proposed, ‘Let us restrain him’; restraining opposes

movement. So, Allah's Phrase, 'to restrain you' (*al-Anfal: 30*), means to shackle his movements in order not to let him spread the call of Islam because this call shakes them. If not for his Message, they would have continued to welcome him *peace and blessings be upon him* for they had seen him as the most truthful and trustworthy one among them. The only thing that upset them was his move to spread Allah's religion on earth. That is why they wanted to curb his movement.

To restrain someone is either to prevent them from moving or to make them move within a limited circle. So, restraining is done through either shackles or imprisonment. One of the plotters said, 'Restraining will not do because if you restrain or imprison him (Prophet Muhammad), his people will rise up to fight or find a way to release him from his bonds or imprisonment. You know that you had an unsuccessful siege experience'. Another said, 'Let us expel him from our town'; they discussed this proposal but could not reach an agreement. Some argued, 'If he leaves, he will influence the people he would meet and get more followers who will come to fight us afterwards'. The Bedouin man suggested the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* be assassinated but the chiefs among Quraysh said, 'We fear his followers will seek revenge against us'. Then Abu Jahl made a proposal saying, 'Let us select one strong, self-confident young man from each of our tribes. Those young men will go to Muhammad while he is asleep in bed to strike him at the same time as if they were one man. When he dies, his blood will be lost among all the tribes and Muhammad's tribe will not be able to face all the other tribes together. They will have to accept blood money; once we pay it to them, it is over'.

Thus, the disbelievers discussed the different options concerning the cunning plan of disposal of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; restraining him and shackling his movement, expelling him from Mecca or assassinating him. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed all these plans to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and helped him emigrate from Mecca to Medina to prove to Quraysh that Allah *Glorified is He* is the best of schemers.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا نُتِلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا قَالُوا قَدْ سَمِعْنَا لَوْ نَشَاءُ لَقُلْنَا
 مِثْلَ هَذَا إِنَّا نَحْنُ الْآسَافُ الْأُولَىٰ ﴿٣١﴾

Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them they say, ‘We have heard all this before – we could say something like this if we wanted – this is nothing but ancient fables’ [31] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 31)

‘Our Revelation’ refers to the verses of the Quran. As we previously said, *ayaat* (verses, miracles etc.) can also mean the signs of the universe that denote the existence of the Highest Creator such as the night, the day, the sun and the moon, or they can mean miracles: ‘When you [O Muhammad] do not bring them a fresh Revelation as a miracle, they say, “But can you not just ask for one...”’ (*al-A’raf*: 203). These miraculous verses are evidence that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* speaks the truth. Furthermore, *ayaat* can mean the verses which constitute the Quran, the Divine Way of Life.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them...’ (*al-Anfal*: 31). The word ‘recited’ underscores that the intended meaning is the verses of the Holy Quran. So, what did the disbelievers say when the verses were conveyed to them? ‘...they say, “We have heard all this before—we could say something like this if we wanted...”’ (*al-Anfal*: 31).

The clause ‘if we wanted’ implies that they did not actually compose similar verses because the particle (*lau*) in Arabic (translated as the conditional ‘if’) is used to indicate that such a thing is impossible. This is just as we say, ‘If you came, I would warmly welcome you’; this means that I did not welcome you because you did not come. To clarify this point, here is another example, ‘If I had money, I would buy a palace’; since I have no money I cannot buy a palace. Then, the disbelievers neither ‘willed’, nor ‘said’; so their claim was a mere hollow threat.

Thus, the miraculous nature of the Quran became a fact because Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* first demanded that they bring the like of this Quran. When they said that the Quran was so long that they could not produce something of its volume, he *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged them to come up with the equivalent of ten chapters. When they failed to do that,

he challenged them again to produce one chapter, but they could not. This was a gradual process to prove the inimitability of the Glorious Quran.

When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged those disbelievers, he pushed them to muster all their might to meet the challenge. When they felt that they were too weak to meet the challenge, they retreated. However, one among them named An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith went to Persia (now Iran) where he found a book containing myths and anecdotes. When he came back to Quraysh, he said, 'look, I am going to speak as Muhammad does'. But his speech was purposeless and had no methodology; the words were far away from their denotations. So, the people turned away from him.

'Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them, they say, "We have heard all this before—we could say something like this if we wanted—this is nothing but ancient fables."' (al-Anfal: 31) This was what they said, even though they had previously acknowledged the truthfulness of the Quran when they asked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring them one of the following signs to believe in him. 'They say, "We will not believe in you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us, or until you have a garden of date palms and vines and make rivers pour through them, or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen, or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face, or have a house made of gold or ascend into the sky—even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read." Say, "Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?"' (al-Isra': 90-93)

When we read these noble verses, and count their demands, we find that they asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to do unattainable things: make a spring gush out of the ground, have a garden of date palms and vines and make rivers pour through them, make the sky fall on them in pieces, as he claimed will happen, bring Allah and the angels before them face to face, have a house made of gold or ascend into the sky. Since all their statements have been included in the Quran, does this mean that their words can be considered Quran? No. Look to the precise expressions of the Quran. These demands were not made by a single person. They are rather voiced by different persons through different styles. However, the Holy Quran combined

all these styles and expressed them with great eloquence and unique clarity. So, whenever we hear statements uttered by people in the Quran, we must be sure that they are just words said by some people and then miraculously rephrased by Allah *Glorified is He*. Let us cite the following example—Allah is above all. You called one of your children and say to him, ‘O Son, go to your uncle and tell him that your father invites you to have dinner with him tomorrow evening, for he will host guests whom he would like you to get to know them since it is an honour to have you here’. Now, when the son goes to his uncle, does he say these words to the letter? Of course not, as the father might be well educated and the son would be unable to repeat the exact words. Or the father might be illiterate while the son might be lettered, thus communicating his father’s message in a more obvious way.

Thus, if you ever hear or read words that are voiced by someone except Allah *Glorified is He* be certain that this is the way Allah *Glorified is He* expresses the speaker’s ideas and statements.

‘Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them, they say, “We have heard all this before—we could say something like this if we wanted—this is nothing but ancient fables.”’ (*al-Anfal*: 31) *Asatir* in Arabic, translated above as ‘fables’ is the plural of *ustura* which means make-believe stories and happenings like ‘One Thousand and One Nights’, ‘The Panchatantra’, ‘The Iliad’ ...etc.

Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قَالُوا اللَّهُمَّ إِن كَانَتْ هَذِهِ حَقًّا مِّنْ عِنْدِكَ فَامْطُرْ
عَلَيْنَا حِجَارَةً مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ أَوْ آتِنَا بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

They also said, ‘God, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment’ [32] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 32)

Idh in Arabic, translated above as ‘also’ can be used to indicate an adverb of time according to Arabic styles. Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘Remember [Muhammad] that they said...’, but He says, ‘They also said....’ They were so helpless that they said, ‘If this Quran is the Truth coming from You, then rain

down upon us stones or inflict upon us a painful suffering'. Is this speech not an evidence of the stupidity of the speaker? If they had clear and logical thinking, would they say such nonsense?

Would it not be appropriate for them to say, 'O Allah, if this is the Truth from You, then guide us to know it, or make it easy for us to accept it'? Since they said, 'O Allah', they were addressing none but Him *Glorified is He*.

'...if this really is the Truth from You, then rain...' (*al-Anfal*: 32). They were aware that Allah *Glorified is He* is the source of the Truth, thus acknowledging the existence of Allah Whom the Truth belongs to Him. So, what would your reaction be if someone came to you and said, 'Verily I am a Messenger from Allah. This is the Divine Way of Life which represents a miracle at the same time'. Would it not be their duty to listen to that one who conveyed this Truth from Allah *Glorified is He* and follow him? Their request to be cursed and punished shows their hatred of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the extent that they called upon Allah *Glorified is He* to inflict punishment upon them as He had done with the previous nations. Their request for punishment indicates that they knew that whoever gives the lie to the messengers and rejects the religion is subject to the wrathful punishment of Allah *Glorified is He*. Hence, it becomes clear that the one thing that prevented them from declaring their belief is their refusal of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a person. This point is supported by another verse that says, 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf*: 31)

Thus, if the Quran had been revealed to a different person, they would have believed in it. This is considered evidence on their part that the Quran is a miracle and a Divine Way of Life. Allah's Words: 'They also said, "O Allah, if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment"' (*al-Anfal*: 32) were repeated by Abu Jahl showing how ignorant, suspicious and obstinate he and the other disbelieving idolaters were. Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that 'Abu Jahl ibn Hisham said, "O Allah, if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment." Then the following verse was revealed, "But Allah

would not send them punishment while you [Prophet Muhammad] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness.” (*al-Anfal: 33*)⁽¹⁾ Those stubborn people also said, ‘...or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen...’ (*al-Isra’: 92*).

This denotes confused statements and lack of reason, ‘...or send us some other painful punishment.’ (*al-Anfal: 32*) The True Lord *Glorified is He* is fully Capable of inflicting punishment upon certain people while saving the believers amongst them. But, Allah *Glorified is He* intended not to inflict punishment on the disbelievers because the sight of someone suffering a lot of pain, even if he is an enemy, causes viewers to feel pain too. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا كَانَتْ أَلَلَهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَأَنْتَ فِيهِمْ وَمَا كَانَتْ أَلَلَهُ مُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَهُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

But God would not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness [33] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 33*)

Allah’s method towards His slaves who disbelieve in messengers is to bring the messenger and his followers out of their city before Allah *Glorified is He* inflicts a punishment. An example of this is when Allah *Glorified is He* commanded Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to build the Ark so that he would be saved from the flood. Every society that disbelieved its messenger experienced something like this. Each disobedient nation had its share of punishment. Thus, Allah’s messenger leaves his city before the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings His wrath down. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* explains the grace of people taking refuge in Him by seeking forgiveness, ‘...nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness’ (*al-Anfal: 33*).

If they were to ask Allah *Glorified is He* for forgiveness, this would mean that they believed in Him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed this verse to show them the way to get rid of the offence of disbelief. It is as if Allah, the Most Merciful, was urging them to ask for forgiveness and provide them with a lifeboat to escape punishment.

(1) *Al-Bukhari*

‘But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet Muhammad] are in their midst...’ (*al-Anfal: 33*). As long as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lives amongst those disbelievers, Allah *Glorified is He* will not punish them. So, the Messenger’s presence in their midst is given special consideration and appreciation. Regarding the disbelievers, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness.’ (*al-Anfal: 33*)

Here, we see the facts of faith. A good pure believer never harbours a grudge against his enemies. He does not gloat when they are stricken with misfortunes. These are the good manners of the faithful believer who feels pain when he sees his enemies in a state of impotence and humiliation. So Allah *Glorified is He* refrains from punishing people as long as there are some who ask for His Forgiveness. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to us, ‘Let the good-doers among you save the wrong-doers’, which means that those who do good shelter those who do wrong and do not expose them. Thus, we find Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was denied the visit to the *Ka`ba* according to the Treaty of Hudaibia concluded with the disbelievers of Mecca. The treaty stipulated that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers return to Medina and not enter Mecca for performing *Hajj* that year, but do it the following year. There were some believers who objected to this treaty. One of them, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Is this how we repay villainous conduct in our religion?’ And there is another sign of disapproval. When writing the treaty clauses, ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was about to write in its preamble, ‘This is an agreement between the Messenger of Allah...’, but the negotiator representing the side of the disbelievers objected, saying, ‘If we acknowledged you (Muhammad) as the Messenger of Allah, we would not go to war with you; instead write “This is an agreement between ‘Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah’”. Ali *Allah be pleased with him* abstained from writing this saying, ‘I will not write anything but ‘Messenger of Allah’. But the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered him to write the phrase as they wished in order to solve this problem and further tell about a self-fulfilling prophecy concerning this good Companion. Filled with pleasure, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* looked at ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* saying, ‘Write it. You shall do the same in a similar incident when

you are hard-pressed.’⁽¹⁾ We did not see this prophecy come true, except after the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* nor in the caliphate of Abu Bakr, the caliphate of ‘Umar and the caliphate of ‘Uthman *Allah be pleased with them*. It occurred during the caliphate of ‘Ali himself *Allah be pleased with him* with its crucial events. Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not speak from his own desire.

‘Write it. You shall do the same in a similar incident when you are hard-pressed.’ This statement means, ‘you will find yourself in a similar situation and you will accept the status quo’. So, after Mu`awiyah *Allah be pleased with him* and his army had got into a dispute with ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* and his army, they sought to draw up a treaty between them to prevent splits among Muslims. ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* wrote, ‘This is what the Leader of the Believers, ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb, agrees to’. But the negotiator for Mu`awiyah *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘If you were the Leader of the Believers, should we fight against you?’ At that time, ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* recalled what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said on the day of the Treaty of Hdaybia, ‘Write it. You shall do the same in a similar incident...’

This shows that politics requires that you should be flexible with a far-sighted vision and not be cast in one mould to cope with difficult situations. If each party had insisted obstinately upon their position, the Treaty of Hdaybia would not have been reached at all. The treaty was necessary as an appropriate truce so that the Muslims could have the opportunity—now that they were safe from Quraysh—to spread the call of Islam and the Divine Way of Life all over the globe. This is exactly what happened over the ten years that followed this treaty. Islam spread to all quarters of the Arabian Peninsula and then to all parts the world. So, those in authority must be of great insight and flexibility; otherwise they, alongside their peoples will lose much. Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to instruct us how to be flexible and adaptable when he signed the Treaty of Hdaybia even though some companions, including ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with them* said as we previously showed, ‘Is this how we repay villainous conduct in our

(1) Cited by Al-Bukhari in ‘Kitab As-Sulh’ Book of Compromise

religion?’ Other Companions said in an inquiring blaming tone, ‘Have you not promised us, O Messenger of Allah, that we would enter the *Ka`ba*?’ The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, ‘Have I said that it would be this year?’

Hearing such words, the Muslims did not grasp the importance of thoughtful and well-planned political decisions for steering the course of events. So, splits threatened the Muslims’ unity. Sad as he was, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to his wife Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* saying, ‘O Umm Salama, the Muslims are about to be destroyed! I gave them orders, but they have not obeyed them.’ We see Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* as a faithful wife and a wise advisor. She said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, they are just upset. They came in the hope of entering the *Ka`ba* after long exile and severe isolation, only to be denied this blessing, while they are within sight of Mecca. Get up, O Messenger of Allah, and proceed with what Allah has ordered you. Do not say anything to them; go ahead with slaughtering your sacrifice. When they see you doing so, they will do the same.’

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* actually went out and slaughtered a sacrificial animal and the Muslims followed suit. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said about the Treaty of Hudaibia, ‘It was the greatest triumph for Islam.’ Indeed, there was no greater victory than that of Hudaibia, but people’s minds could not realise the way of Allah *Glorified is He*. People are always in a hurry, while Allah *Glorified is He* is not rushed by the haste of His slaves till matters reach their intended end.

Those who disagreed with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were zealous Muslims who advocated their religion according to the best of their knowledge, being unaware of Allah’s Indefinite Knowledge. The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to explain to the Muslims why He refrained from turning Hudaibia into a battleground. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘They were the ones who disbelieved, who barred you from the Sacred Mosque, and who prevented the offering from reaching its place of sacrifice. If there had not been among them, unknown to you, believing men and women whom you would have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their

account—Allah brings whoever He wills into His Mercy—if the [believers] had been clearly separated, We would have inflicted a painful punishment on the disbelievers.’ (*al-Fath*: 25) Indeed, there were believing men and women hidden amid the disbelievers since there were no separate quarters in Mecca for the Muslims who concealed their faith before the Treaty of Hdaybia described by the Quran as ‘Triumph’. At that time, all people lived side by side; so, if war was waged between the people of Mecca and the (Muslim) army heading toward Hdaybia, coming Muslims would kill their resident brethren who had not publicly declared their faith. Were it possible to separate the believers who hid their religion from the disbelievers, then Allah *Glorified is He* will inflict a grievous punishment upon the disbelievers at the hands of the Muslims. Here, in this noble verse that we are now contemplating, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness’ (*al-Anfal*: 33).

This means that if some of them asked for forgiveness, Allah *Glorified is He* will save them all from punishment, just as He refrained from punishing the disbelievers due to the Treaty of Hdaybia because there were Muslims hidden among them.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا لَهُمْ أَلَّا يُعَذِّبَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَمَا كَانُوا
أَوْلِيَاءَ هُوَ إِلَّا أُولِيَاءُؤُهُ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقُونَ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Yet why should God not punish them when they debar people from the Sacred Mosque, although they are not its [rightful] guardians? Only those mindful of God are its rightful guardians, but most of the disbelievers do not realize this [34] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 34)

We may wonder about the thing that can save them from being punished by Allah *Glorified is He*. Punishment is fitting requital for them because they deserve it. They prevented Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims from visiting the Sacred Mosque in Mecca because they thought they controlled it, even though some of them heard about the story of Abraha Al-Ashram who had invaded Mecca with elephants to destroy the *Ka`ba*. Abraha seized a hundred camels owned by the chief of Quraysh, Abd Al-Muttalib,

the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, 'Abd Al-Muttalib went to him and said, 'You have taken a hundred camels from me; kindly return them.' Abraha said to him, 'I have come to demolish your house of worship, the one of your forefathers; instead of speaking to me on this issue, you speak of your hundred camels I seized!' 'Abd Al-Muttalib then said, 'I am the owner of these camels. Concerning the House, it has its own Lord and Protector.' These words are only uttered by someone who is fully confident that the Sacred House has a Lord to safeguard it. Indeed, flocks of birds came to pelt Abraha and his army with stones, making them like eaten straw.

Thus, how could Quraysh debar Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers from entering the Sacred House, while they learned, according to their old chief's words, that the House has its own Lord Who protects it? How then could they claim control over it? They should have learned that the protection and guardianship of the House of Allah *Glorified is He* is only granted by Allah *Glorified is He* Who gives it to the righteous people who fear Him; Quraysh were not that kind.

Then, the justification for having them punished is represented in their preventing the Muslims to enter the Holy Mosque, while they were not its rightful guardians. Why? '...Only those mindful of Allah are its rightful guardians, but most of the disbelievers do not realise this.' (*al-Anfal*: 34) While most of them did not realise this fact, a few of them were definitely aware of the truth of the Sacred House. The Holiness of the *Ka'ba* learned by most Quraysh disbelievers and forgotten by the minority is demonstrated in this verse of the Quran. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says through the words of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* '...Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer, make people's hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce...' (*Ibrahim*: 37).

Allah *Glorified is He* made them (Ibrahim's [Abraham's] family) reside in this place to keep the prayer because He is pleased with being eternally worshipped on earth even if only by a single person in this particular spot. The might and influence of this group of Quraysh betrayed them when they turned people away from the Sacred House because Quraysh followed their own whims. After all, Allah *Glorified is He* does as He wills. Thus, He, caused Quraysh to be defeated and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be

victorious, and the sanctity of the *Ka`ba* to be restored as a place for worshipping Allah *Glorified is He* forever.

We see the Wisdom of the True Lord *Glorified is He* demonstrated in the times of prayer. The dawn prayer in a country might be the noon prayer in another; and the noon prayer for one country is the dawn prayer in another. Similarly, the afternoon prayer for some people is the dawn prayer, the sunset prayer, or the evening prayer for other people. Thus, we find that every part of the day is occupied with periods for worshipping Allah *Glorified is He*. At every moment, we find people involved in timely prayers towards Allah's Sacred House. Not a single spot on earth does not have someone saying, '*Allah Akbar*' (Allah is the Greatest). Indeed, the Sacred House was built for establishing these prayers.

However, Quraysh made of the prayers that represent submission, subjugation and bowing in worship to Allah *Glorified is He* with His Majesty and Greatness, a different thing demonstrated by the True Lord *Glorified is He*:

وَمَا كَانَ صَلَاتُهُمْ عِنْدَ الْبَيْتِ إِلَّا مُكَاءً
وَتَصْدِيَةً فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Their prayers before the House are nothing but whistling and clapping. 'So taste the punishment for your disbelief' [35] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 35)

Their prayers took the shape of amusement and play to the point that they prayed through whistling and clapping. Those prayers were like a loud whistling noise ringing in the ears, along with clapping with a certain rhythm. Are these real prayers? And how dared they drive people away from the Sacred House, while they had no control over it? Those who oversee the Sacred House must be righteous and must fear Allah *Glorified is He* whereas those disbelievers were the opposite. They did not perform the type of prayers required for this House, in which Allah *Glorified is He* must be remembered and worshipped. Thus, punishment was the ultimate requital for those who insisted on being misguided in worship after Allah's religion had been revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ لِيَصُدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَسَيُنْفِقُونَهَا ثُمَّ تَكُونُ
 عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَةً ثُمَّ يُغْلَبُونَ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ يُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

They use their wealth to bar people from the path of God, and they will go on doing so. In the end this will be a source of intense regret for them: they will be overcome and herded towards Hell [36] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 36)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that these idolaters were bent on denying Allah *Glorified is He* and spent money to hinder the path of Allah *Glorified is He*. Nevertheless, they achieved nothing and their hopes were in vain. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* pushes the disbelievers into overspending to fight faith; thus, they lose their money and feel great regret, for Allah *Glorified is He* will overcome them in the end.

When the disbelievers heard Allah *Glorified is He* say, ‘...and they will go on doing so. In the end this will be a source of intense regret for them: they will be overcome and herded towards Hell.’ (*al-Anfal*: 36), they did not realise that the True Lord *Glorified is He* was talking about the future, and that their funds, no matter how big they might have been, used in combatting Allah’s religion, would never accomplish their aspirations. Indeed, events have shown the truthfulness of the Glorious Quran. Why did they fail to realise this fact? Why did they not save their riches, seeing the triumph of Allah’s religion? Indeed, this is the practise of those who lack insight and good thinking. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...and they will go on doing so...’ which is the translation of (*fasayunfiqunaha*), this means that spending will continue to be made in the future. The future has two forms: the near future and the distant future. If spending is related to the near future, He says, (*fasayunfiqunaha*) as in this verse, but if it is for the distant future, He will say (*fasawfa yunfiqunaha*). This is similar to another verse in the Glorious Quran: ‘The foolish people will say, ‘What has turned them away from the prayer direction they used to face?’ (*al-Baqara*: 142) The Noble Quran revealed that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* changed his direction

(*qibla*) while praying; and the companions thus, proclaimed that piece of news. Though the disbelievers learned about the incident demonstrated by this verse, they did not take heed of the statement which the Quran said they were going to utter. The statement became a reality, giving evidence that they had a bad nature and crooked disposition. Back to the verse that we are discussing now, we say that the disbelievers were overcome with intense regret after they had wasted their money without fulfilling their goals and ambitions. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse by saying, ‘...they will be overcome and herded towards Hell.’ (*al-Anfal*: 36)

Whenever the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the great punishment that befalls the disbelievers in the hellfire, He does not intend to make the fire their refuge, but He rather, frightens and terrifies them away from disbelief, while calling upon them to accept faith and urging them not to be deniers of the Truth so that they will not be driven into hell.

After that, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

لِيَمِيزَ اللَّهُ الْخَيْثَ مِنَ الطَّيِّبِ وَيَجْعَلَ الْخَيْثَ بَعْضُهُ عَلَى بَعْضٍ
فَيَرْكُمُهُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيَجْعَلُهُمْ فِي جَهَنَّمَ أَوْلِيَّكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

God will separate the bad from the good, place the bad on top of one another – heaping them all up together – and put them in Hell. They will be the losers [37] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 37)

This verse reveals to us that the struggles that erupt between Islam and its followers on one hand, and the enemies of Islam and their followers on the other, are initiated by the Will and Command of Allah *Glorified is He*. The hardships that the believers face during these confrontations are aimed at testing their faith. An example of these tests is what happened after the Night Journey when those having little faith wondered, ‘Is it reasonable that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went as far as the holy city of Jerusalem and return in a single night?’ Meanwhile, those with unshakeable faith like Abu Bakr As-Siddiq (the Truthful) *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘If he has said it, then it is true.’ Those with strong and firm faith always act

truthfully, while those with weak faith always act deceitfully. Thus, the great historical events throughout the eras of Islam have come to separate the good elements from the bad ones, place the bad elements on top of one another, heaping them all up together so that Allah *Glorified is He* finally puts them in hell.

The historical Islamic events happened for the sake of purification, just as exposing metals to fire to make them pure after discarding impurities. Thus, Islam helps the believers to have good hearts and strong faith through the numerous tests they experience, since they carry the Message of Allah *Glorified is He* to all corners of the earth. Such tests which are aimed at cleansing the believers resemble qualifiers in sports. Weightlifters, for example, undergo domestic contests and whoever can lift the heaviest weights qualify to take part in international competitions which come up with the strongest world champions. ‘Allah will separate the bad from the good, place the bad on top of one another—heaping them all up together—and put them in Hell. They will be the losers.’ (*al-Anfal: 37*)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given us several examples of events that separate the bad from the good since you can hardly judge people in normal conditions. People often claim to be courageous, generous, and noble when they feel safe. They allege that they have strong faith that qualifies them to be ready to make any sacrifice in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He*. However, experiences and events are the real test of people’s sincerity and earnestness. A person might say to a friend of his, ‘I am at your disposal will all my money’; but when a calamity befalls this friend, he seeks to evade him. What, then, proves the sincerity of our claims and allegations? Experiences and events do this mission. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to separate the bad from the good through having the believers involved in crucial events and harsh tests, and exposing those with hollow faith, so that people could bear witness to themselves. The believers come out of these experiences with soft hearts and great faith. When Allah *Glorified is He* sorts the good out from the bad, He wants to keep the good intact. The bad comes in various forms and aspects and does not take a single mould. Allah *Glorified is He* gathers all bad things to put them together in hell.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِن يَنْتَهُوا يُعْفَرْ لَهُمْ مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ
 وَإِنْ يَعُودُوا فَقَدْ مَضَتْ سُنَّتُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

[Prophet], tell the disbelievers that if they desist their past will be forgiven, but if they persist, they have an example in the fate of those who went before [38] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 38)

‘Tell’ is in the imperative and refers to a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. A command requires someone to convey it; this means that there is a speaker and someone spoken to. The speaker here is Allah *Glorified is He* and the person spoken to is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says to him, ‘Tell’; the message he is required to transmit to people is included in Allah’s statement, ‘[Prophet Muhammad] Tell the disbelievers that if they desist, their past will be forgiven...’ (*al-Anfal*: 38). In other words, if they cease denying the Truth, the sins they committed during their days of disbelief will be forgiven. Here, we notice a change of pronouns as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is supposed to address the disbelievers this way, ‘If *you* desist, *your* past will be forgiven’. However, Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘[Prophet Muhammad] Tell the disbelievers that if *they* desist, *their* past will be forgiven...’ (*al-Anfal*: 38). Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If *they* desist’ instead of saying, ‘If *you* desist’, even though the disbelievers are present and being addressed. How then does He address them in the third person? Allah *Glorified is He* wants to include everyone who might hear these words from any believer; it is as if He makes a general speech to preclude anyone from being excused or excluded. This is much like another statement voiced by the True Lord *Glorified is He* ‘Those who disbelieve say of the believers, “If there were any good in this Quran, *they* would not have believed in it before we did...”’ (*al-Ahqaf*: 11)

If we thought the same way, then the sentence should have been, ‘If there were any good in this Quran, *you* would not have believed in it before we did...’ Since this statement has been said by many a disbeliever to the believers at several places, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to draw our attention to the fact that the speech is general and covers all people, being not confined to

a single incident, but rather pertaining to all similar situations. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...if they desist, their past will be forgiven...’ (*al-Anfal*: 38). This means that if they stop plotting against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and hindering his call, Allah *Glorified is He* will forgive them. Hatching plots and hindrance of the call of faith are a result of disbelief; and if they turn to Allah *Glorified is He* and desist from fighting His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* they will be good people since Islam removes the previous history of disbelief.

This story supports such a fact: a warrior declared his faith, embraced Islam, and bore witness that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger. This warrior then took part in a battle and was killed and thus became a martyr since all the sins committed during the period of disbelief and concerning his duties towards Allah *Glorified is He* were forgiven when he uttered the Two Testimonies of Islam. Regarding his obligations to people, it was incumbent upon his heirs to fulfil them.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes this verse, saying, ‘...but if they persist, they have an example in the fate of those who went before.’ (*al-Anfal*: 38) When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...but if they persist, He intends to tell us that this message must be conveyed to the believers all the time. If they revert again to disbelief, obstinacy, and plotting, they will be cast away from the Mercy and Forgiveness of Allah *Glorified is He*. Granting them forgiveness is contingent upon their maintenance of faith and not returning to the state of disbelief.

The word ‘example’ (which is the translation of *sunnah*) mentioned in ‘...they have an example in the fate of those who went before’ refers to the way and the manner through which the previous people were punished or the state in which they became afterwards. In another verse, the word *sunnah* is translated as ‘established way’: ‘...you will find no change in Allah’s established way.’ (*al-Ahzab*: 62) In other words, this is the way that Allah *Glorified is He* has selected to enforce His Will by means of truth and justice. Thus, ‘...they have an example in the fate of those who went before’ (*al-Anfal*: 38) refers to the way that people of disbelief know well which Allah *Glorified is He* used with those who stubbornly opposed and fought His messengers. That is much like what happened to the disbelievers at the battle of Badr; for whoever

stands in the path of Allah’s Call and Religion will be inevitably destroyed as occurred to all those who opposed the prophets. You already know what Allah *Glorified is He* did to the peoples of `Ad, Thamud, and Pharaoh. You have gained knowledge of all these events and have seen Allah’s way with all the previous disbelieving nations when they tried to hinder the prophets from calling upon people to believe in Allah *Glorified is He*.

Either the words in this part of the verse address the disbelievers in their homeland concerning what happened to the transgressors at the battle of Badr, or they represent a general demonstration of Allah’s way with the wrongdoers who oppose His Way, and whose inevitable destiny is destruction.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ لِلدِّينِ كَلِمَةٌ
 لِلَّهِ فَإِنِ انْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

Believers], fight them until there is no more persecution, and all worship is devoted to God alone: if they desist, then God sees all that they do [39] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 39)

This is a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to the Muslims to fight. Fighting is an action that occurs between two or more people, i.e. a clash between two fighting parties. So, when one hears the word ‘fighting,’ the first thing that comes to mind is that it happens between two sides or between two groups of people, not one. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Fight them’, we understand that this command is for the believers to fight the disbelievers. Undoubtedly, the disbelievers must have done something that led them to be fought. Or they must have arranged for fighting the believers; so the believers had to confront them. Here Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘Kill them’ but he says, ‘Fight them’. This means that there is a confrontation, a conflict or an action between two opposing sides just as when you say, ‘I met someone or I took part with someone in doing so-and-so.’ i.e. you two held the meeting or participated in doing something. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Fight them until there is no more persecution...’ (*al-Anfal*: 39).

This means that the confrontations are continuous, one leading to the other, until matters are decided upon by fierce fighting. Leaving those disbelievers to oppress the Muslims and spend their wealth in support of falsehood may be seen as weakness and humiliation on the part of the believers, and as mighty and prideful on the part of the disbelievers. Thus, there can be persecution and oppression to the followers of Islam; people are tortured and insulted because of maintaining their religion, with no efforts exerted for combatting the aggressors and defending the weak.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to put an end to this persecution which is a kind of test to the disbelievers. As we earlier said, tests are not a bad thing in themselves, but they are such if the results are shameful or disappointing. For instance, if a student fails the tests, the results of the tests become blameworthy, whereas if he succeeds, they become praiseworthy. The disbelievers of Quraysh severely tortured people for their religion until their bodies gave out and they became subservient to the disbelievers' orders. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to put an end to this injustice; so He commanded them to fight the disbelievers since they had acted in a way that justified their fighting.

In this verse, we find Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and all worship is devoted to Allah alone...' (*al-Anfal*: 39), while in another verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, the word 'all' is not mentioned: '...and worship is devoted to Allah alone...' (*al-Baqara*: 192). Each verse has its own meaning and impact since every word in the Glorious Quran has a particular indication. Hence, Allah's statement, '...and all worship is devoted to Allah alone...' (*al-Anfal*: 39) means that there must not be more than one religion in the Arabian Peninsula and this actually came true. But Allah's statement: '...and worship is devoted to Allah alone...' (*al-Baqara*: 192) gives us another shot. The first statement refers to the Arabs and the Arabian Peninsula, whereas the second statement denotes that Islam is for the entire world.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says as a conclusion of the verse, '...if they desist, then Allah sees all that they do.' (*al-Anfal*: 39) The clause 'if they desist' means that if they respond and obey. Allah's statement, '...then Allah sees all that they do.' means that they must beware doing so in a deceitful tricky way, for Allah *Glorified is He* sees all that they do and is always aware of

their intentions and actions. Since they move from disbelief to faith, Allah *Glorified is He* wipes their bad deeds out and replaces them with good ones. It is not so easy for people who had lived as disbelievers for a long time and committed shameful sins to get accustomed to the new life of faith. They are required to do their best to overcome their desires. After all, Allah *Glorified is He* helps those who help themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Generous Who greatly rewards His slaves when they prove themselves sincere and faithful.

There is another nice meaningful gesture in Allah's statement, '...then Allah sees all that they do.' (*al-Anfal*: 39) A message is supposed to be directed to the believers to the effect, 'O those who have suffered much because of your faith and strived to guide the disbelievers and turn them into truthful well-mannered people, feel sure that Allah *Glorified is He* witnesses all what you have done for the sake of ensuring that all worship is dedicated to Him'. Thus, both explanations of the verse complement each other.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَعَلِمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَوْلَاكُمْ نِعَمَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَنِعَمَ النَّصِيرِ ﴿٤٠﴾

But if they pay no heed, be sure that God is your protector, the best protector and the best helper [40]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 40)

Allah *Glorified is He* urges people to believe in Him, but at the same time He makes it clear to them that the great number of believers is not the thing that raises the banner of Islam and ensures victory for the faithful. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But if they pay no heed...' (*al-Anfal*: 40). One might suppose that Allah *Glorified is He* moves people's hearts to believe, embrace Islam and side with the Truth, so that Islam can be made stronger through their numbers. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'But if they pay no heed...' (*al-Anfal*: 40) to warn the believers not to get desperate or lose heart should those disbelievers turn away for you are made victorious only through the aid of Allah *the Most High, the All-Powerful*. If they do not truly believe, know that Islam does not depend on them for victory; Islam does not spread by the large number of Muslims since victory is from Allah Who does not

need His Creation. Again, Islam does not rely on the number of its believers to win a victory because Allah *Glorified is He* leads them to victory if they follow His path whether they are few or many. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* draws the believers' attention to the fact that if the disbelievers turn away and do not believe, you should not lose heart because your victory is not based on the aid of those who reject faith, but on the Aid of Allah *Glorified is He* for He is your Protector. Allah *Glorified is He* is not only your Protector Who supports you and leads you to victory, but also He is 'the Best Protector and the Best Helper.' (*al-Anfal*: 40)

Why? Because if the protector were someone other than Allah *Glorified is He*, then he would be subject to changes and variables. He might be strong and able to support us and lead us to victory today, but he might die tomorrow; so, he is unfit to be a protector. The dominion and power of a false protector may depart him, thus rendering him weak and in need of others to support him; he is no longer able to aid or protect anyone. The True Protector in Whom we must seek refuge, is the One Who is not affected by changes and variables because He is the Ever-Living Who never dies. He is the All-Powerful Whose Absolute Might never becomes lesser. This is the Protector in whom you must place your confidence and trust. Thus, we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* always underscores that we must put our trust in Him to fulfil our hopes and aspirations. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Put your trust in the Living [Allah] who never dies...' (*al-Furqan*: 58). If you truly want to place your trust in someone, do trust in the One Who is the Ever-Living, the All-Powerful; do trust in Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah's Words: 'the Best Protector...' (*al-Anfal*: 40) affirm that Allah is the All-Strong, the All- Capable and the Ever-Living, while Allah's Words, 'the Best Helper' (*al-Anfal*: 40) stress that Allah *Glorified is He* surrounds your enemies and their plots against you; nothing escapes Him. You fight your enemies according to the fighting strategies and techniques you know and they do the same thing. But Allah *Glorified is He* knows their schemes and tricks and foils them while leading you to victory by inspiring you to adopt strategies that cannot be confronted by them. Allah *Glorified is He* provides you with a supplement that helps you to emerge victorious.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about battle gains saying:

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا غَنِمْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ خُمُسَهُ، وَلِلرَّسُولِ وَلِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ
وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ آمَنْتُمْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا يَوْمَ
الْفُرْقَانِ يَوْمَ التَّلَقَىٰ الْجَمْعَانَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤١﴾

Know that one- fifth of your battle gains belongs to God and the Messenger, to close relatives and orphans, to the needy and travelers, if you believe in God and the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the day of the decision, the day when the two forces met in battle. God has power over all things [41] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 41)

What is the reason for mentioning battle gains here? What is the occasion for this? Allah *Glorified is He* talks about fighting. There were battle gains at the end of every battle in which the Muslims emerged victorious. Thus, the battle gains are mentioned in this chapter. In the previous verse, Allah *Glorified is He* talks about His aid to the believers, underscoring that He is the Best Protector and Helper Who leads the believers to victory. We know that battle gains come as a result of victory in battle. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wants the believers to feel sure that victory will be theirs since He moves to talk about battle gains which are movable property seized by the Muslims from disbelieving fighters. It is clearly established that battle gains were not lawful for any of the prophets prior to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Know that one-fifth of your battle gains belongs to Allah...’ (*al-Anfal*: 41). So, one-fifth belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*, while the four-fifths are distributed among the fighters. How is the fifth that belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* divided?

The Glorious Quran mentions the method of distributing this fifth, but religious scholars disagree over the explanation. The verse says, ‘Know that one-fifth of your battle gains belongs to Allah and the Messenger [Muhammad]...’ (*al-Anfal*: 41). Then, it goes on to say, ‘...to close relatives and orphans, to the needy and travellers...’ (*al-Anfal*: 41).

Some scholars explain the noble verse to the letter saying that this fifth of battle gains is distributed among the six recipients that Allah *Glorified is He* names in His Holy Book—Allah *Glorified is He*, Messenger Muhammad *peace*

and blessings be upon him close relatives, orphans, the needy and travellers. Thus, we have six shares. But most scholars agree that this fifth of battle gains should be divided into five portions because one portion would go to Allah *Glorified is He* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* together since the two are not separated from each other, while the remaining four portions of this fifth are distributed equally among the other four groups — close relatives, orphans, the needy and travellers.

Scholars also differ over the meaning of ‘close relatives’. Are they the relatives of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the relatives of others? There is no disagreement on the shares of orphans, the needy and travellers. In summary, the total of battle gains is divided into five parts: one part belongs to the above-mentioned categories, while the other four-fifths belong to the fighters because Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the recipients of this fifth and mentions nothing about the other fifths; this indicates that they belong to those involved in fighting. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* adds, ‘...if you believe in Allah...’ (*al-Anfal*: 41). They definitely believe in Allah *Glorified is He*, but it seems that these words are voiced to make them check their faith in case they object to this division of battle gains. If one of them desired the fifth set aside for Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* and was not content with the four-fifths devoted for the fighters—as ordained by Allah *Glorified is He*—he would then do harm to his faith through objecting to the One Who issues this Command. It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who orders this specific division of battle gains. So, those who stray and desire others’ possessions should dispose of these feelings because the One Who ordains this distribution is Allah *Glorified is He* Who brings victory to fighters. While victory results in battle gains, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who grants victory. Man must submissively accept Allah’s distribution of His Blessings among His servants.

An example of man’s acceptance of Allah’s division of blessings is the shares of inheritance. Allah *Glorified is He* wants the Muslim’s money to be justly distributed. During one’s life, man is given free will to spend his money as he desires. Furthermore, at the time of making the will, Allah *Glorified is He* gives man the right to designate a third of his will to go to certain quarters and

persons in appreciation of the social, human, and emotional considerations in the society. For instance, you might wish to reward some people who are not among your relatives who are entitled to inherit, because they have served you for a long time or have helped you during your illness or old age. Or you might find that some of your acquaintances need money more than your sons do; so you would designate a part of your wealth for them. You are allowed to take this step provided that the donations do not exceed a third of your fortune. Again, the True Lord *Glorified is He* stresses the importance of human and religious sentiments in the society. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* grants you the freedom to donate a third of your estate to whoever you want, while the remaining two thirds are divided as ordained by Allah *Glorified is He*.

So, the True Lord's Words '...if you believe in Allah...' (*al-Anfal*: 41) means that Allah *Glorified is He* makes it a matter of faith that battle gains be divided in the manner prescribed by Him. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...and the Revelation We sent down to Our Servant on the day of *al-Furqan* [the decisive encounter], the day when the two forces met in battle...' (*al-Anfal*: 41).

Al-furqan, translated above as 'the decisive encounter', is the thing (the Battle of Badr) that distinguishes the Truth from falsehood in a way that is quite clear to everyone. Allah *Glorified is He* also uses the word *al-Furqan* to describe the Holy Quran in the chapter of *Al-'Imran*. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...He sent down the Torah and the Gospel earlier as a guide for people and He has sent down *al-Furqan* [the Quran which is the distinction between right and wrong] ...' (*Al-'Imran*: 3-4).

When Allah *Glorified is He* sent down the Torah and the Gospel, they were both revealed to distinguish between the Truth and falsehood. But Allah *Glorified is He* ordains that the word *al-Furqan* be used exclusively to describe the Holy Quran because it is the final and definitive criterion that differentiates between the Truth and falsehood; No divine books and no other criteria will come after it. '...and the Revelation We sent down to Our Servant on the day of *al-Furqan* [the decisive encounter]...' (*al-Anfal*: 41). Allah *the Almighty* refers in this verse, '... And the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the day of *al-Furqan* [the decisive encounter] ...' (*al-Anfal*: 41) to the extremely

distinctive day of the Battle of Badr in which truth was distinguished from falsehood. The Muslims were few, while the disbelievers were a great many. The Muslims had set out to seize the merchandise of the caravan without having battle gear, whereas, the disbelievers came ready with their great numbers, equipment and soldiers needed for the battle. It is known that the Muslims merely hoped to seize the caravan of Quraysh which they thought would not require much time or great effort because it was only guarded by a small troop of men that did not pose any real threat. However, Allah decrees the victory of the small party of Muslims to be a result of their confrontation with a fully equipped outnumbered army of disbelievers so that everyone would acknowledge that this small poorly equipped party of believers had won out against an army of superior numbers and gear. In this manner, the decisive distinction has been clearly made between belief and disbelief, as well as between the victory of Allah to His faction and the deceit of Satan to his minions. Had the Muslims merely seized the caravan of Quraysh, sceptics would have alleged that the caravan might have been plundered by an armed group. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* instead of endowing them the easy capture of the caravan tested them in a war against the well-equipped and strong army advancing from Mecca. Thereby, Allah *Glorified is He* focuses on the concept of the possibility of the victory of the believers unqualified to fight in a war over the disbelievers. The winning of the three hundred believers over the one thousand disbelievers affirmed that the scales had begun to tip in the favour of the believers. If anyone feels incredulity that this small number of unequipped fighters could defeat such a large number of equipped fighters, he should read the saying of Allah: ‘... Allah has power over all things’ (*al-Anfal*: 41). This means that the Divine Will is the motive that tipped the balance in favour of the believers.

Near the end of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *the Almighty* relates the story of Talut (Saul) and Jalut (Goliath). The story tells that the children of Israel asked one of their prophets to ask Allah to divinely elect someone to be a king over them to lead the battle against Jalut (Goliath), the tyrant who had turned them out of their homes and put them to flight. When the Divine Command came that Talut (Saul) would be the king, the children of Israel contended his leadership: ‘... But they said, “How can he be king over us

when we have a greater right to rule than he? He does not even have great wealth.” (*al-Baqara: 247*) It was they who had asked for a king to rule over them, but they objected to Talut (Saul), though he came by divine selection. When Talut (Saul) set out to fight with his followers, Allah tested them with thirst and disallowed them from deeply drinking from a passing-by river. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘When Talut (Saul) set out with his forces, he said to them, “Allah will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me; if he scoops up just one handful [he will be excused].” But they all drank [deep] from it, except for a few.’ (*al-Baqara: 249*)

Allah *Glorified is He* tested the believing faction by disallowing them from drinking to their full from a nearby river even though they were thirsty and commanded them to drink only a handful amount of water that could restore moisture to the mouth. As they reached the river, the majority stampeded to the river and gulped down their fill. Only a small minority did not fully drink and followed the Command of Allah; those were the ones who stayed with Talut (Saul) and crossed the river. When they saw the opposing army, most of them said as the Munificent Quran narrates, ‘...When he crossed it with those who had kept faith, they said, “We have no strength today against Jalut (Goliath) and his warriors...”’ (*al-Baqara: 249*). Their words mean that they feared the confrontation with the army of Jalut (Goliath); everyone but a very few refused to fight. Thus, the army of believers underwent two selection tests; by choice and by trial. The former was done by perseverance over thirst and the latter by choosing to face the opposing army. Those who remained were the purely and deeply faithful few followers. The Quran quotes their saying, ‘...But those who knew that they were going to meet their Lord said, “How often a small force has defeated a large army with Allah’s permission! Allah is with those who are steadfast.”’ (*al-Baqara: 249*)

The remaining faction of believers who feared the reckoning of Allah in the Hereafter were undaunted by the scarcity of their numbers against the abundance of the soldiers of Jalut (Goliath). However, they stressed that the small host can overcome a large army by Allah’s leave and they were indeed victorious. A clear-cut distinction is made by Allah to separate the truth from

the falsehood as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...the day of *al-Furqan* [the decisive encounter] is the day when the two forces met in a battle...’ (*al-Anfal*: 41). This refers to the day when the host of believers won the battle despite their poorer numbers and equipment as compared to the disbelievers. Accordingly, Allah ends the verse by saying, ‘...Allah has power over all things.’ (*al-Anfal*: 41) This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has the power to bring victory to the believers even though they are few and unequipped.

In the next verse, Allah says:

إِذْ أَنْتُمْ بِالْعُدْوَةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ بِالْعُدْوَةِ الْقُصْوَى وَالرَّكْبُ أَسْفَلَ مِنْكُمْ وَلَوْ تَوَاعَدْتُمْ لَأَخْتَلَفْتُمْ فِي الْمِيعَادِ وَلَكِنْ لِيَقْضِيَ اللَّهُ أَمْرًا كَانَ مَفْعُولًا لِيَهْلِكَ مَنْ هَلَكَ عَن بَيْنِنَا وَيَحْيَى مَنْ حَيَّ عَن بَيْنِنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَسَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٢﴾

Remember when you were on the near side of the valley, and they were on the far side and the caravan was below you. If you had made an appointment to fight, you would have failed to keep it [but the battle took place] so that God might bring about something already ordained, so that those who were to die might die after seeing a clear proof, and so that those who were to live might live after seeing a clear proof – God is all hearing and all seeing[42] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 42)

The verse begins with an Arabic adverb of time; *idh* (when). Allah *Glorified is He* reminds the believer of such day when they were on *`udwa ad-dunya* (the nearer side of the valley). Since ‘valley’ is the name given to a depression enclosed between mountains; thus, the high places to the right and left of the valley are called *`udwa*. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* refers to the topographical landmarks to explain the geographical settings of the battlefield.

Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word *ad-dunya* (near) to refer to the Muslims who were at the site of the Battle of Badr nearer to Medina, whereas, the disbelievers of Quraysh advanced from Mecca, which is at *al-`udwa al-quswa* (a far place from Medina) and occupied the farthest side of Badr. Allah continues this verse, saying, ‘...And the caravan was below you...’ (*al-Anfal*: 42). The caravan, of course, refers to the camels hauling the merchants and the

goods that the Muslims had initially set out to capture. When Abu Sufyan, the leader of the caravan, learned of the intentions of the Muslims, he rerouted the caravan towards the seashore. In this part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the switched path taken by Abu Sufyan. It is well known that the seashore is the lowest part of dry land and the global sea level is used, today, as the standard measurement for altitude. Thus, the altitude of a place is said to be one hundred metres, for example, above sea level. The seashore is always at the same height as that of the sea level; yet, mountains and valleys have different heights and depths so they are poorly suited to serve as the standard measurement for altitude. However, the global sea level is flat and uniform. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* draws the attention to the fact that the lowest part of the earth is the seashore.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...if you had made an appointment to fight, you would have failed to keep it, [but the battle took place] so that Allah might bring about something already ordained...’ (*al-Anfal*: 42). This signifies that if the believers had agreed with the disbelievers upon the time and the field of the battle, some of them would have come late and others would have strayed away from the designated battleground. However, Allah had decreed the time and the battlefield with utmost precision so that the confrontation would take place at the specified time and place and so that the believers would be victorious over the disbelievers.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘...so that those who were to die might die after seeing a clear proof, and so that those who were to live might live after seeing a clear proof...’ (*al-Anfal*: 42). Does Allah mean that the disbelievers literally or figuratively die in this context? Though some believers also died, but they became martyrs. Moreover, does Allah mean that the believers merely survive; though many disbelievers survived after the Battle of Badr? Thus, ‘to die’ does not mean actual death here; but rather, it is applied to all disbelievers, whether they physically died or not, because death here happens in a spiritual sense. Whichever of the disbelievers were killed died and whichever survived of them morally died. By fighting against the believers, they would eventually perish by the punishment and pain that awaited them in the Hereafter unless they found the Mercy of Allah and came to believe before their time on earth

expired. Similarly, 'to live' does not mean actual survival, but rather, it refers to the believers who will live in eternal bliss even though they died. The intended meaning is then, 'Let he who disbelieves, disbelieve, and let he who believes, believe with certainty'.

As aforementioned, the word 'life' is used in the Quran in various meanings; there is the life which is defined by movement and perception and which exists from the moment the soul enters the body to give life. This kind of life is enjoyed by both believers and disbelievers and is ended in an untimed death. However, the intended life is that led by believers for the sake of Allah in the Hereafter without death, tiredness, or misery. As Allah *the Almighty* says, '...The true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew.' (*al-'Ankabut*: 64) This is the true life; thus, Allah *Glorified is He* grants whoever truly believes a life of eternity in paradise. As Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you the life...' (*al-Anfal*: 24). Someone may wonder, 'How does Allah address living people while He says to them, 'gives you the life'? Allah *the Almighty* ordains that the believers will lead an eternal life in paradise due to their faith.

Allah concludes this verse by saying, '... Allah is indeed All-Hearing, All Knowing' (*al-Anfal*: 42). All-Hearing and All Knowing mean that Allah *Glorified is He* is aware of everything and every thought. Whatever is to be heard, He hears, whatever is to be seen, He sees and whatever is hidden in the hearts or emotions of man He knows, because He is the Omniscient and the Cognizant of all things.

A human perceives information through senses: hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, and smelling. These are the five senses that provide information to a person even when he has no prior knowledge of anything. Allah says, 'Allah is He Who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl*: 78) Thus, these means of perception provide the person with newly perceived information. Accordingly, whenever the person learns something new, he should praise Allah.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* shows how He shapes destiny saying:

إِذْ يُرِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي مَنَامِكَ قَلِيلًا ۖ وَلَوْ أَرَدْنَاكَ أَكْثَرًا لَفُشَلِّمَنَّكَ اللَّهُ لِنَازِعَتِهِمْ
 فِي الْأَمْرِ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ سَلَّمَ ۗ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٤٣﴾

[Prophet], remember when God made you see them in your sleep as few: if He had shown them to you [believers] as many, you would certainly have lost heart and argued about it, but God saved you. He knows the secrets of the heart [43] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 43)

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* ordains that a decisive battle takes place, so He incites the thoughts of each party to be bent on war because He decrees the confrontation of the two parties to distinguish between the good and the evil. If this encounter were humanly planned without divinely intervention, the lesser party might be too frightened to face the outnumbered opponent. Aiming at joining the battle, each party should have faith in attaining victory; otherwise, they would not go into the battle.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers how He has psychologically prepared them for the battle by conveying a vision upon Prophet Muhammad. In a nightly vision, Muhammad *peace be upon him* saw that the disbelievers were few so that he would consider that the Muslims could easily defeat them and he informed his people as such. Allah has made the number of disbelievers seems few in the eyes of the believers and the number of believers seems few in the eyes of the disbelievers in order that the battle raged between them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says,

وَإِذْ يُرِيكُمُوهُمْ إِذِ التَّفَيُّمِ ۖ فِي أَعْيُنِكُمْ قَلِيلًا وَيُقَلِّلُكُمْ فِي أَعْيُنِهِمْ
 لِيَقْضَى اللَّهُ أَمْرًا كَانَ مَفْعُولًا ۗ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٤٤﴾

When you met He showed them to you as few, and He made you few in their eyes, so that He might bring about what has been ordained: everything goes back to God[44] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 44)

Therefore, the believers thought that the disbelievers were few and vice versa. But for the will of Allah to give the believers the impression that the

disbelievers were few, or to give the disbelievers the impression that the believers were few, the battle would not have taken place. Allah decreed to make each side seem less challenging to the other so that the battle would begin. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud *Allah be pleased with him* narrates, 'I said to someone next to me, "I think they are seventy." He said, "Nay, they are a hundred."' Allah *Glorified is He* also decreed to use this vision to serve as a clear indication of prophethood. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw that the number of disbelievers were few, he informed his followers; thus, the battle decreed by Allah had taken place.

The prescribed decree of Allah is to bring about the two challenging parties at the Battle of Badr to distinguish between the belief and disbelief to attribute all things to Allah. Each fighter in the battle had his reward from Allah; the believer was compensated in accordance with his good intentions and loyalty to the struggle, while the disbeliever received the wrath of Allah according to his evil deeds. In the saying of Allah, 'everything goes back to Allah' (*al-Anfal*: 44), the word *al-`umoor*, is translated as 'everything'. In this context, it either refers to 'every command' issued in battles, where there are all types of commands for each fighter, or it refers to the 'outcome' of any battle; i.e. the triumph of a party and the defeat of another. To ensure victory for the believers, Allah directs them to be firm in the battle. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا لَقِيتُمْ فِئَةً فَاثْبُتُوا وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ
كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Believers, when you meet a force in battle, stand firm and keep God firmly in mind, so that you may prosper [45] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 45)

In this context, the word 'force' denotes a group of people gathered specifically to take up arms on the battlefield; it is not just any group; rather, it is a cohesive unit of warriors where each fighter forms part of a larger whole. Any other incoherent group can be easily broken apart, whereas, disciplined fighters are hardly overpowered. Accordingly, each one protects his comrades so that each one of them is indivisible from the others.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions ‘force’ in His saying: ‘...How often a small force has defeated a large army with Allah’s permission! Allah is with those who are steadfast.’ (*al-Baqara*: 249) He also says, ‘You have already seen a sign in the two forces that met in battle, one fighting for Allah’s Cause and the other made up of disbelievers.’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 13)

In the verse under consideration, Allah *the Almighty* instructs the believers to be firm during battle when the fighting breaks out. War firstly requires preparation, then planning undertaken afterwards followed by deployment and confrontation. Allah’s saying, ‘when you meet’ means that confrontation with the disbelievers had taken place and ‘being firm’ means ‘being brave’. In battle, the disbelievers would pose a great threat if the believers were not firm. The weak fighter can easily be intimidated and, consequently, is forced to retreat.

Since the Muslims had willingly gone into battle under such adverse conditions, their enemies could not help but be convinced of their bravery. But for the firmness and bravery of Muslims, the opponents would have borne witness to their weakness. Thus, training to be firm in combat is essential. Pre-war planning consists of strenuous training and precise planning so that no one would flee during confrontation because such act of desertion is an utmost grievous sin. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If anyone does so on such a day— unless manoeuvring to fight or to join a fighting force— he incurs the wrath of Allah.’ (*al-Anfal*: 16)

‘Turning his back on them’ is an invective epithet for the process of retreat because the back is the part of the body that is meant to be guarded and protected. ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was once asked, ‘Why does your armour only have a breastplate without a back plate?’ He said, ‘I would prefer to die than to enable the enemy to hurt my back’. So, if his armour were to have both a back and a front, it would seem, in that case, that he intended to show his back to an enemy during confrontation. This shows that he will never disgracefully turn his back to the enemy. This is an example of self-restraint, confronting adversities even in a moment of duress. When the fighter goes into the battle with only his chest protected, this means that he will not turn his back or flee away because he knows that if he turns around he will turn his back unprotected to his enemies and he will be killed.

Allah asks the believers to 'stand firm' (*al-Anfal*: 45), in an absolute sense; but rather, He wants them to be firm in battle. Since the believers face a large-numbered and well-equipped force, preparation and consideration are indispensable for the situation. Allah *Glorified is He* guides them to stand firm as they should certainly know that they will not face their enemy with their own mere strength, but rather, they will do so with the power and support of Allah for Whom they fight. That is why Allah says, '...and keep Allah firmly in mind' (*al-Anfal*: 45). As they are fighting, they should remember that Allah supports them with His aid and victory; so, if their means are insufficient according to a worldly account of normal reasons, then Allah, the Omnipotent, is the One Who achieves victory.

It is well known that Allah *the Almighty* has created causality in the universe. Whenever the theistic adoption on causality has been taken; thus, the believers should be relying upon Allah, the Creator of causality. Therefore, the worldly account of normal reasons fails an atheist; he often commits suicide, suffers a total nervous breakdown, or goes insane. However, the believer seeks refuge in Allah, the unshakeable source of support, by saying to himself, 'The world of cause and effect has been proved to be treacherous, but Allah, the Lord, and Creator of causality is the Ultimate Cause'.

When a young child encounters a mistreatment from someone else, he says, 'I have a father or brother who will keep me out of harm's way' because he does not have the means to protect himself. This is the case with the support of people; so, what about having the support and strength of Allah Who possesses the unfailing and the incomparable Might over the entire universe. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* along with his followers reached the seashore, they were enclosed between the sea before them and the soldiers of Pharaoh approaching behind them. The Quran quotes their saying, '...We shall definitely be caught...' (*ash-Shu'ara*': 61). What they said made rational sense; the sea was in front of them, their enemy behind them, and they had no way of being saved through the worldly account of normal reasons. But Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* due to his strong faith in Allah, said, 'No, my Lord is with me; He will guide me.' (*ash-Shu'ara*': 62) He said that Pharaoh and his soldiers could not overtake them although his followers

did not understand because the sea blocked their way forwards and the soldiers blocked their way backwards. Yet, he acknowledged the fact that he should forsake relying on causes and completely depend on Allah, the Creator of causality. Accordingly, Allah commanded him to strike the sea with his staff whereupon it was parted into two halves and (a path of) dry earth appeared in-between. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his followers reached the other shore, he wanted to strike the sea with his staff once more so that the sea would return to its original state to prevent the soldiers from reaching them, but Allah says, ‘Leave the sea behind you parted and their army will be drowned.’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 24) Allah tells Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* not to strike the sea with his staff in order that the water will not rush back too early, but instead to leave it for Allah Who will drown the soldiers of Pharaoh by the same means with which He saved the believers of the children Israel. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* saves and kills in a single stroke, where only Allah is capable of such feats.

Allah is the Creator of the human soul; He knows everything inside whenever it faces an incalculable force, as well as acknowledges the great intolerable distress, particularly on the battlefield. Thus, He asks the believers to always remember that they are not alone in battle, but Allah is with them. They ought to often remember that He intermittently aids them in victory over their enemies. As they persistently remember Allah, as the remembrance will strengthen their faith and give their hearts the required courage to attain victory.

Allah *the Almighty* uses the word ‘often’ to suggest that the person might only remember Him in times of despair; whereas, he might forget to remember Him, later, as his life becomes comfortable and luxurious. That is why Allah emphasizes that He should often be remembered to aid the believer to win over his enemies. An example of this is when Allah *Glorified is He* summons the believers to the congregational Friday Prayer, saying, ‘O you who believe, when the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew. Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah’s bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.’ (*al-Jumu’a*: 9-10) Allah asks the believers to remember Him on the day of congregation even

though He is ever aware of their continued fealty to Him five times a day. Afterwards, He guides them to disperse freely in the land after the Friday Prayer to seek the bounties of Allah. He notifies the believers to remember Him diligently and perpetually, as well as He alerts people against letting their earthly concerns and occupations distract them from remembering Him. The remembrance of Allah is never limited within the mosque or to the times of prayer; but rather, it should be diligently done throughout all life events; it means feeling at every moment that Allah is with you, so you fear Him, praise Him, and seek succour from Him. Remembering Allah frequently will lead man to eternal bliss because there will always be a permanent link with Allah.

The 1973 War on the tenth of *Ramadan* is a good example of victory due to remembering Allah. The remembrance filled the hearts of the Egyptian soldiers by repeating 'Allah is the Greatest'. It empowered the Egyptians with tremendous drive to face the enemy and break through the Israelis' Bar Lev Line. Allah aided them by bolstering their faith and imbuing every soul with an indomitable energy to achieve victory. They deserve success because of rigorous training and diligent remembrance of Allah.

In the next verse, Allah says:

وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ، وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ
رِيحُكُمْ وَأَصْبِرُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Obey God and His Messenger, and do not quarrel with one another, or you may lose heart and your spirit may desert you. Be steadfast: God is with the steadfast [46] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 46)

As previously mentioned, paying heed to Allah *Glorified is He* is done through obeying the prescriptions and avoiding prohibitions. Moreover, paying heed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is applied by obeying him in everyday behaviour which is another form of obeying Allah as well because the messenger conveys the commands of his Lord. He who obeys should avoid being at variance with his believing brethren because quarrelling is a waste of energy and resources since the adverse forces are at odds. Mutually

opposed forces squander their energies until each becomes weak and ineffectual. Alternatively, acting as one unit is better than being in conflict which breaks up your strength and causes failure. Accordingly, quarrelling parties will not accomplish any of their goals because they will no longer possess the power to attain their desires, as well as they will lose their gravity. Failure is going to spin their wheels without coming any closer to their desires.

Considering the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...and your strength may desert you...’ (*al-Anfal*: 46), the word *rih* (strength) can also be used to refer to air or wind. It is known that the atmospheric air freely occupies the vacuum space of earth. There is no air found inside a pillar made of cement and metal because there is no empty space inside. However, air externally surrounds pillars since nothing but empty space lies there. It is known that the essentials of life are food, drink and air, salient of which is the air since you cannot wait except for only a few breathes of air before dying.

Thus, so long as air surrounds an object from all sides, it exerts the same amount of pressure on all sides. However, if a vacuum is created on one side, the air pressure can destroy that object. In laboratory experiments, the effect of air pressure is concluded by bringing a tin can filled with water; boil the water over a flame until the steam expelled the air and eventually filled the empty space of the can. Afterwards, the can is air-tightly sealed and cold water is poured on it from the outside so the steam condensed and diminished so that a part of the can was vacuumed. The walls of the can collapsed inwards because of the air pressure from outside due to the vacuum inside the can. Likewise, Allah punished wrongdoers by sending them destructive winds, as He says, ‘‘Ad was destroyed by a furious wind, that Allah let loose against them for seven consecutive nights, eight consecutive days so that you could have seen its people lying dead like hollow palm-trunks.’’ (*al-Haqqa*: 6-7) Allah *Glorified is He* also, says, ‘...this cloud will give us rain! “No indeed! It is what you wanted to hasten: a storm-wind bearing a painful punishment, which will destroy everything by its Lord’s command...”’ (*al-Ahqaf*: 24-25).

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* speaks of the mountain breaking wind-blown waves, ‘... You are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favourable wind, a storm arrives, waves come at those on board from all sides and they feel there is no escape....’ (*Yunus*: 22)

As referring to the destructive power of the air, Allah mentions the powerful wind which destroys through the combination of its direction and forceful power. If two winds collide with each other, a state of equilibrium is reached between them and no destruction takes place. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* uses the single form, *ar-rih* 'the wind' only to refer to destruction; He will cause it to blow from a definite direction so that the power of the wind will not be mitigated by the force of another one from the opposite direction, whereas, He uses the plural form, *ar-riyah* 'the winds' to refer to good events because the variation in the directions of the wind leads to life equilibrium. As Allah says, 'Allah is He who sends the winds as heralds of good news before His Mercy...' (*al-Furqan*: 48), and, 'We send the winds to fertilise lands...' (*al-Hijr*: 22). This refers to the fact that the winds bring pollen grains to fertilise plants to bear fruit; thus, the winds in plural come with good. However, there is only one verse where the singular form 'wind' is used to denote good events. Allah says, '...until, when you are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favourable wind....' (*Yunus*: 22)

In this verse, Allah uses the singular form of 'wind' and describes it as 'favourable'; whereas, in the verse under consideration, He refers with 'wind' to strength, because here the word indicates the destructive force with which the person will assail his enemies. It is recognised that ships in the past used to sail using the power of wind; but with the advances of science, steam power and electricity made the sailboat obsolete and were used instead of wind to move the boat.

The word *rih* is also used to mean the scent or smell. Scents linger in a room even after the scented person left; everyone has a unique scent much like the unique fingerprint. Although, we are not able to discern different individual scents, trained dogs are able to do. This is the way that a dog can smell a person's scent, and then track him wherever he went and pick him out from a crowd of dozens of people. So, the person's scent does not mix with that of the others even if they are all in the same room; otherwise, the trained dog would not be able to distinguish the scent of a specific person from among many people.

In this sense, Allah's saying, '... And your strength may desert you...' (*al-Anfal*: 46) comes to mean that you would cease to exist and that no trace would remain of you. So long as you remain in the world, you will have a

scent that distinguishes you from others and which can be used to trace you by trained dogs, as previously said. However, the dead and buried have no scent. The Holy Quran alludes to this fact when it tells the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* who was thrown into the well by his brothers. A passing-by caravan found him there and eventually sold him to the king of Egypt. As the story progressed, he was imprisoned, freed and in time became a close advisor to the king. When his brothers came to him, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* gave them his shirt, telling them to put it over their father's face to regain his sight lost due to sadness when he was firstly deprived of Yusuf (Joseph). Allah says about the caravan that departed from Egypt to the Levant where Prophet Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* lived: 'Later, when the caravan departed, their father said, "You may think I am senile but I can smell the scent of Yusuf (Joseph)."' (*Yusuf: 94*)

This verse shows that the buildings of the city can easily hide the scent because they emit their own smells (from within) which may mask another scent or smell. But, once the caravan departed out of the city, Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* smelled the scent of his son Yusuf (Joseph) from the shirt that they carried with them.

Eventually, Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verse currently under consideration by saying, '...be steadfast: Allah is with the steadfast.' (*al-Anfal: 46*) This harbours the same idea of being firm while fighting. Allah *the Almighty* draws the attention to confrontation requisites, namely: strength, abstention from inter-bickering and patience in the face of adversity, particularly if your enemy is unflaggingly perseverant.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* asks the believers to be firm in the battle, to remember Allah often, to refrain from quarrelling amongst each other in order not to waste their power and finally, to be patient. Since the enemy might possess great patience and steadfastness, the believer should necessarily have an abundant store of them as well, to be able to defeat him. An example of patience is the underwater diving competition where the person remaining underwater longest proves that he can hold his breath longer than the competitor. For that reason, Al-Abbas and 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them* competed to see who can stay underwater for a longer time and be the most steadfast; i.e. endure more distress than his opponents.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* highlights that each believer should feel that Allah is the One Who appoints him to undertake this military action. Allah is with him so he should not be feeble because if the weak is fortified by Allah the Powerful, he will have the courage and strength to endure, just like the small child who might be bullied by other children if he is wandering alone, but who will not be harmed if he is with his father. A stronger example, Allah has the utmost example of protection; Allah *the Almighty* enjoins each warrior to remember that he is in the company of his Lord, and that no harm in the world can befall him, no matter how weak he is because he is fortified by the Power of Allah.

It was narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah *the Almighty and Glorified is He* says on the Day of Resurrection, “O son of Adam, I fell ill and you visited Me not”. He will say, “O Lord, how should I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds?” Allah says, “Did you not know that My servant so-and-so had fallen ill and you visited him not? Did you not know that had you visited him you would have found Me with him? O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you fed Me not”. He will say, “O Lord, and how should I feed You when You are the Lord of the worlds?” Allah says, “Did you not know that My servant so-and-so asked you for food and you fed him not? Did you not know that had you fed him you would surely have found that (the reward for doing so) with Me? O son of Adam, I asked you to give Me drink and you gave Me not drink”. He will say, “O Lord, how should I give You drink when You are the Lord of the worlds?” Allah says, “My servant so-and-so asked you to give him drink and you gave him not drink. Had you given him drink you would have surely found that with Me.”⁽¹⁾

If a person falls ill, he is unable to walk or move, but burns with fever in bed. Allah explains that He blessed the ill person by taking his good health back because he is in the company of Allah. Thus, the person should not be upset if Allah’s blessings desert him so long as He Who provides all blessings is taking care of him. When a Muslim is in the company of Allah, worldly and human normative standards are no longer applied. An example of that is when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr

(1) *It was related by Muslim in Kitab At-Targhib wa At-Tarhib (Book of Awareness and Apprehension), Part IV, pg. 317.*

Allah be pleased with him were hiding in the cave as they fled from Mecca to Medina. When the disbelievers came right up to the entrance of the cave, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* saw them and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, if one of them but looks beneath his feet surely, he will see us.’ This was only logical from the rational point of view, for if one of the disbelievers had turned around and looked down the entrance of the cave, he would have seen them. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to reassure Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and dispel the fear that the disbelievers would see them. Anyone would have assumed that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have told Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* to be at ease, for surely, they will not look inside the cave. Nevertheless, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said instead, ‘O Abu Bakr! What do you think of two (persons) the third of whom is Allah?’ On this subject, Imam Ahmad *Allah rest his soul* relates on the authority of Anas *Allah be pleased with them* that Abu Bakr told him, ‘I said to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* while we were in the Cave, “If any of them should look under his feet, he would see us”. He [The Messenger] said, “O Abu Bakr! What do you think of two (persons) the third of whom is Allah?”⁽¹⁾ Since they were in the company of Allah Who cannot be captured by sight, they would not be seen by their enemies. O Allah, make us always remain in Your company.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* enjoins the believers to refrain from the bad deeds performed by the disbelievers during times of adversity. He says:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بَطَرًا وَرِشَاءَ النَّاسِ
وَيَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ

Do not be like those who came out of their homes full of conceit, showing off to people, and barring others from the way of God – God has full knowledge of all that they do [47] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 47)

The disbelievers who went forth from Mecca full of self-conceit to rescue the caravan from the Muslims, learned that Abu Sufyan had survived along

(1) *It is related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

with the caravan and that the Muslims had failed to capture it. Even though, they heard that the caravan had returned safely under the leadership of Abu Sufyan, yet this was not sufficient for them. They insisted on going forth, doing battle with Muhammad and his followers, defeating them, beating the drums, and offering sacrifices so that the entire Arabian Peninsula might know of their defeat until no one would dare to threaten any of their caravans.

Thus, they were not satisfied with the fact that their money and goods had returned to them safely; they wanted to set out for war in a false show of pride and arrogance to prove their strength. If they had only been content with the safe return of the caravan, the story would have ended then and they would have returned home. However, they wanted to be engaged in a completely superfluous show of force.

Hence, it was a matter of conceit and arrogance; i.e. when the person is gifted by some blessings, but he does not sufficiently appreciate them and desires more than that. Such a person is as ungrateful as the disbelievers of Quraysh who failed to be satisfied with the safe return of the caravan, depreciating this blessing and asking for more. As Allah *the Almighty* says, 'showing off to people' (*al-Anfal: 47*), He means that they make war to be held in the highest esteem by the Arabs of the peninsula once it was known that they had gone out to Medina and fought Muhammad and his companions.

Allah's saying, 'and barring others from the way of Allah' (*al-Anfal: 47*), shows that people would be tempted to follow the path of the disbelievers who had stood against the way of Allah and His Messenger, celebrating their victory and having gained the upper hand in the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, people would be tempted by the disbelievers when they found the Muslims afraid of confronting them. Thus, it would have been as if the disbelievers were turning people away from the path of Allah through their desire to fight Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions *Allah be pleased with them*. Afterwards, Allah further clarifies that He knows everything done by the disbelievers, '...Allah has full knowledge of all that they do.' (*al-Anfal: 47*) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* fully encompasses everything they do and they cannot elude Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* draws the attention to the role of Satan and his minions in enticing the disbelievers. He says,

وَإِذْ زَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَلَهُمْ وَقَالَ لَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ الْيَوْمَ مِنَ النَّاسِ
وَإِنِّي جَارٌ لَكُمْ فَلَمَّا تَرَأَتِ الْفِئْتَانِ نَكَصَ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَقَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ
مِّنْكُمْ إِنِّي أَرَىٰ مَا لَا تَرَوْنَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ اللَّهَ وَاللَّهُ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿٤٨﴾

Satan made their foul deeds seem fair to them, and said, ‘No one will conquer you today, for I will be right beside you,’ but when the armies came within sight of one another he turned on his heels, saying, ‘This is where I leave you: I see what you do not, and I fear God – God is severe in His punishment’ [48] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 48)

In his vision, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw, by the ordainment of Allah that the disbelievers were few to bolster and strengthen them so that the battle would take place. Conversely, Satan began to make all the deeds of the disbelievers seem praiseworthy; he tempted them, saying, ‘You are many, and unparalleled in martial skills; you will attain victory in the blink of an eye’. Allah shows His Messenger that the disbelievers were few; still, the truth was that they were few indeed because victory is not achieved by numbers but by the aid of Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, no matter how many disbelievers there are, they are nothing compared to the support and aid of Allah. Satan tried to give the disbelievers the impression that fighting the believers would be praiseworthy. Accordingly, he boosted their egos and told them that they would achieve victory, thereby, becoming great figures feared and dignified by the entire Arabian Peninsula. Thus, Satan has shown an entire stupidity and inability to know the judgment of Allah, for if he had known the outcome of the Battle of Badr, he would not have painted such a rosy picture of the battle for the disbelievers. Conversely, the battle ended with the victory of the Muslims, the death of many of the leaders of the Quraysh and the establishment of the reputation of the believers in the entire Arabian Peninsula. Victory was not what Satan wanted, but rather, he ignorantly enjoined the disbelievers to the battle unknowing what would happen.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* shows that the Satanic whispers to the disbelievers exaggerated their strength and told them that they would not be beaten in the Battle of Badr because he would bring them victory and protect them against any harm that could happen. However, Satan does not have power or authority to aid the disbelievers. It is known that his only power is to flatter or provoke misleading thoughts, but he impossibly could hold sway over the result of the confrontation between truth and falsehood. In the afterlife, the disbelievers will ask Satan to protect them from Allah's wrath because it was he who tempted them into committing their transgressions and led them down to Hell. But he acquits himself from guilt and says, '...I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries (help you), nor can you respond to mine (help me)...' (*Ibrahim*: 22). Satan says to the disbelievers that he did not oblige them to commit misdeeds because he does not have the power to compel them or to reluctantly persuade them to misbehave. He only tempted them and they responded to his enticement because they wanted to disobey and follow their desires.

Responding to the cries of someone necessitates that he heard the cries and then went to rescue him. When a person is subjected to a greater power, he resorts to screaming, hoping that someone will hear his cry and come save him. He who hears the cry is either weak and so cannot save the person in danger, or he is strong enough to save him. In case he responded to the cries of others, he, thereby, rescued them from the cause of their cry. Contrariwise, the words of Satan mean that he is as unable to save his minions from their torturous castigation or end the cause of their cries as they cannot save him from the affliction of Allah's punishment.

Satan had made the deeds of the disbelievers seem praiseworthy and falsely promised them of protection, aid and victory, only before the believers and disbelievers saw each other in the battle. Allah says, '...but when the armies came within sight of one another he turned on his heels, saying, "This is where I leave you..."' (*al-Anfal*: 48). As soon as the believers and disbelievers saw each other before they clashed together, Satan fled far away and disavowed the disbelievers. This situation is furtherly explained in Allah's saying, 'Like Satan,

who says to man, “Do not believe!” but when man disbelieves, he says, “I disown you; I fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.” (*al-Hashr*: 16) This is logically consistent with Satan's previous experience when he was expelled and cursed for refusing to obey Allah’s Command to bow to Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah tells him, ‘My curse will follow you till the Day of Judgement!’ (*Sad*: 78) Accordingly, Satan implored Allah to spare him until the Day of Judgment, saying, ‘Give me respite until the Day people are raised from the dead.’ (*al-A’raf*: 14) Thus, Satan acknowledged that Allah is the All-Powerful and that he exercises limited power as compared to that of Allah. So, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘You have respite, until the Day of the Appointed Time.’ (*al-Hijr*: 37-38)

Satan is powerless, and incapable of doing anything; all he can do is to trick, lie, and entice. That is the reason that he used trickery and deceit against the disbelievers. As soon as the believers and disbelievers saw each other in battle, Satan turned on his heels and fled revealing his own fear of Allah for he knows that Allah punishes severely. Hence, the source of Satan's trepidation is the fear of the punishment that awaits and will inevitably befall him; thus, he is not afraid out of love for Allah as the believers are.

Subsequently, Allah conveys:

إِذْ يَقُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ غَرَّ هَؤُلَاءِ
دِينَهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

The hypocrites and those who have sickness in their hearts said, ‘These people [the believers] must be deluded by their religion,’ but if anyone puts his trust in God, God is mighty and wise [49] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 49)

The term *munafiq* (hypocrite) in Arabic is taken from the name of a small rat-like creature which is a species of the Jerboa that lives in the deserts and flees to its underground den as soon as it senses a predator stalking it. It creates more than one opening to the den such that it has multiple exits, like backdoors so it can be safe from predators. It essentially opens a multi-exit tunnel by which it can beguile others so they are unable to catch it. Similarly,

the deeds of the hypocrite are inconsistent with his thoughts; and he says things that he does not believe, whereas, the believer is at peace with himself and says things from his heart. Perhaps the disbeliever can also be in harmony with his inner self when he says things keeping up with the godless disbelief in his heart. On the other hand, the hypocrite is always at odds with himself; his mouth utters words of faith, while his heart hides disbelief, thus his actions and character are rife with contradictions. Whenever the heart and mouth disagree, there can be no peace of mind. It is identifiable that the words of the hypocrite are inconsistent to what lies in his heart. Allah *Glorified is He* describes hypocrites by saying, ‘When they meet the believers, they say, “We believe,” but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, “We are really with you; we were only mocking.”’ (*al-Baqara: 14*)

In this case, the inner self is weak because the person does not easily go amiss if his actions and personality traits are all in harmony with one another, but when they are not, he lives in constant confusion and psychological nervousness. That is the reason that the hypocrite tries to escape from reality resorting to narcotics or other bad habits. The solution is not escapism through narcotics; but rather, the person should confront the reality and try to solve his problematic events, yet the hypocrite is incapable of doing that, so he eventually breaks down.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘The hypocrites and those who have sickness in their hearts said, “These people [the believers] must be deluded by their religion....”’ (*al-Anfal: 49*) After the believers won the Battle of Badr, their faith and self-glory strongly grew, so the hypocrites maliciously envied and hated them. By their double standards, the hypocrites became disbelievers who heartedly had a deep rancour towards the believers. Secretly, they told each other that the believers have been deluded by their religion, but they are not because delusion means that they are misled due to their natural disposition or due to some traits by which they consider themselves superior to others. Yet, the believers, at the time of victory, did not take pride in themselves, but instead they took pride in Allah *the All-Powerful and the All-Mighty*. They were increasingly humble before Him, out of unflagging gratitude for the blessed victory they were endowed. As for the deluded arrogant people, they overlook

the reference of blessings to Allah, the Grantor, and attribute them to their own efforts, whereas, the believer attributes everything to Allah because he knows that His Hand is stretched with uncountable blessings. So long as the blessings do not make the person forget Allah, he will be further enriched with blessings because he is grateful and attributes everything to Allah. On the other hand, the arrogant person feels superior above others by points of excellence distinguishing himself from others. Thus, Allah describes the believers as, ‘...those who follow him (Muhammad) are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other...’ (*al-Fath*: 29).

Harshness is not out of arrogance; rather, it is a trait that characterizes the believers’ attitudes at sometimes. Had they been harsh out of arrogance, they act accordingly even with their fellow believers. However, the believer is harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards other believers, never acting haughty with them. A believer’s faith cannot lead him to have a rigid pattern of behaviour because faith allows believers the flexibility to deal with different situations. In this way, we see that a believer is not harsh in all situations because there are some circumstances which require mercy when interacting with fellow believers; and likewise, he is not merciful in all situations because there are circumstances that require harshness when dealing with disbelievers.

Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was known to break out in weeping from his fearful reverence of Allah and his heart was filled with mercy and kindness towards the believers. However, what happened when some people refused to pay *zakat* (obligatory alms giving) after the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Abu Bakr and ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab had a session to deliberate on the matter. ‘Umar was known to be very harsh and adamant. However, he opined that they should not go to war with those who had renounced the believers and refrained from paying them *zakat* because they were still testifying that there is no deity but Allah. But then Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘By Allah, I will fight any who distinguishes between prayer and *zakat* supposing the latter as a divisible aspect of Islam, for *zakat* is the due right drawn from their property, and by Allah if they deny me even a camel’s rope’s worth of what they would have given to the Prophet, *Peace and blessings be upon him*, I will fight them over it.’

Remember, this was Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* who was known to break into weeping merely out of his pious fear of Allah *Glorified is He*. His heart was full of mercy and compassion towards the believers. In that hard time, he determinedly swore by Allah that he would fight those who violated Allah's obligations and refused to pay the *zakat*. Had this attitude been shown by 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* people would have said, 'Such a pattern of harshness is what is expected from 'Umar'. But as this attitude is shown by such a compassionate and delicate man, it truly impresses upon us the severity of the believer in confronting disbelief. In this way, we find that a believer is not always severe, by nature, nor is he by nature merciful at all times. Yet, a believer shows harshness when his religion calls for severity, shows compassion when his religion calls for mercifulness, shows force when it calls for strength, and shows humbleness when it calls for meekness.

So, when the hypocrites said, 'Their faith has deluded these [believers]!' (*al-Anfal*: 49), it was not a sound statement. Rather, it was out of their hypocrisy. Why was that? This was because believers always put their trust in Allah and attribute every blessing to Him *the Almighty and All Wise* (*al-Anfal*: 49). As Allah is the Almighty; He gives honour to those who believe in Him. Allah clearly states that might belongs to Allah, His Messenger and the believers. (*al-Munafiqun*: 8) *Glorified is He*, as Allah is All Wise, He instils wisdom into the believers. Relying on Allah means that one entrusts all one's affairs to Him *Glorified is He*. However, the first and foremost thing is that one should exert one's effort in attaining anything and then rely on Allah. However, if you exert all your efforts and still cannot attain what you aim at, then, you still have the One Who created all means. Allah tells the believers who fight the disbelievers for His sake that Allah is One Who afflict those people with torment at the hands of the believers. (*at-Tawba*: 14), and Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to strive hard in all walks of earth in pursuit of sustenance. (*al-Mulk*: 15)

Just as Allah *Glorified is He* orders the believers to fight and concern themselves with preparations necessary for this because Allah *Glorified is He* wants to afflict the disbelievers with torment at their hands, so too did Allah *Glorified is He* command them to work and strive for their attaining their sustenance.

If ever you turn your trust in Allah into an excuse for idleness or apathy, you reverse one role with another because trusting in Allah is an affair of the heart, whereas action and activity is the mission of the body. Therefore, one should not turn trusting in Allah into the work of the body because the limbs do their work through cause and effect, while the heart trusts in Allah. Thus, we understand that the true way for the body to express its trust in Allah is through labour and enterprise, and so one must work and concern oneself with the cause and effect in addition to trusting in Allah.

Moreover, it behoves us to bear in mind the position of the hypocrites of whom Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘At the same time, the hypocrites and those in whose hearts was disease were saying, “Their faith has deluded these believers]!”’ (*al-Anfal*: 49)

Hypocrites as we have said are those people who have inherent differences. They say with their tongues what is not within their hearts. As to those who have weak faith, they used to declare that they were Muslims at times when Islam was triumphant, and renounce Islam at times of hardships. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions two groups: the hypocrites who were from the two tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj whose expressions had discrepancies. They were assuming power over Medina. Even one of them was about to be crowned the king of Medina. But with the coming of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he lost his opportunity to attain kingship and leadership which sowed rancorous malice in his soul. However, the people of Medina were eager to accept and convert to Islam rendering those hypocrites incapable of resistance or lashing out, so they uttered the *shahada* (to testify that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) with their tongues, though enmity against Islam remained in their hearts, and as such they were being pulled in two opposite directions.

On the other hand, those in whose hearts was sickness were not pure hypocrites so much as they were weak in their belief of Islam. They simply embraced Islam to take benefits from it, not to sacrifice for it. So, when Islam brought them some worldly blessings, they rejoiced and welcomed them, but if hardship befell them, they fled. This category included also some people

who embraced Islam in Mecca but did not have strong faith enough to migrate to Medina; they feared that they should leave their property and children behind and, therefore, they remained in Mecca. These people, who had unfaithful hearts, were not disbelievers as their unfaithfulness to Islam does not render them disbelievers. When the time to fight in the Battle of Badr came, they took counsel among each other: would they go with the disbelievers or not? With which side would they fight? They said, 'We will set out with the disbelievers, and if we find that they are the stronger, we will stay with them, but if we find that the Muslims are stronger, we will then join them on the battlefield.'

Among such individuals were Qays ibn Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, 'Ali ibn Umayya ibn Khalaf, Al-'As ibn Munabbiah ibn Al-Hajjaj, Harith ibn Za'ma ibn Al-Aswad ibn Muttallib and Abu Qays ibn Fakih ibn Al-Mughira. All of them gathered together and went to battle intending to join the winning side whether it be the believers or the disbelievers. These individuals adopted such an attitude because their hearts lacked true faith and were strongly attached to the love of earthly things.

The sayings of the hypocrites and those whose hearts were unfaithful demonstrate that they both were wishing to avoid harm. Even though some of them were in Medina and some were in Mecca, they all uttered the same statements. This proves that Satan's temptation of the two groups was also one and the same, which is why the wording is uniform across both groups' expressions. Both said, 'Their faith has deluded these [believers]!' (*al-Anfal*: 49)

Both groups, the hypocrites and those whose hearts were unfaithful, said this despite being in different places—one being in Mecca and the other in Medina, as we have said. So, it stands to reason that there must be a common denominator between them that prompted them to utter the same statements. Satan must have whispered these words to them. They should have realised that the uniformity of their words was clear evidence that they were under the influence of Satan's temptation.

But what does 'Their faith has deluded these [believers]!' (*al-Anfal*: 49) mean? In Arabic, when you say, '*gharartu* so and so', this signifies that you made something very attractive for someone to the extent that he became

eager to have it, even though he did not have the ability to afford it. But you bolstered his resolve, or increased his readiness to accept something or go through with something. For example, if you want to convince and tempt a person of limited means into buying a car, you -in order to make the decision much easier for him- would say to him, ‘Borrow money from someone, and pay the rest in instalments’. As such you tempt him into making a decision that he did not intend to take.

Then, what about *ghurur* with regards to religion? In this respect, the believers were made to feel that they were many even though they were few in number. They willingly advanced to engage in the battle because of the promise Allah made them of victory and because of the vision Allah *Glorified is He* gave to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* which showed the disbelievers as being only a few. Perhaps they seemed unnaturally optimistic because Allah had made clear to them that whoever would die in that war would become a martyr and be granted an eternal residence in paradise, thus making both the weak and the strong among them fight vigorously so they could go to heaven as martyrs. In these ways, for the hypocrites, the believers seemed deluded by their religion. Allah *Glorified is He* responds to them saying, ‘But if anyone puts his trust in Allah, Allah is exalted in Might and wise.’ (*al-Anfal*: 49)

The rebuttal here is that the believers were not deluded by their religion; rather, they put their trust in Allah. Whosoever puts his trust in Allah, He *Glorified is He* suffices and protects him. Allah *Glorified is He* is Exalted in Might and therefore, is Undefeatable and He is Wise as He causes victory and defeat to happen in their proper, fated times. So, the heart of the matter is that these believers had chosen Allah, and thus He made them mighty and victorious.

But was this invective expression of the hypocrites said aloud publicly? No, they did not dare to say such a thing openly, instead they said it silently to themselves, and Allah *Glorified is He* informed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of what transpired in the privacy of their souls. Allah *Glorified is He* drew attention to the shameful truth about them so that they might at some point discern what was happening inside themselves and leave their hypocrisy behind to return to the fold of true faith. This would be particularly true if they took heed of that fact Allah communicated in the

Quran that these hypocrites were wishing that a bad thing would happen to the believers, while the fact of the matter is that the believers are either victorious, and in this case, they defeat the disbelievers, kill them and take their booty, or they become martyrs and be admitted to paradise. Either of the two possibilities is a blessing (*at-Tawba*: 52). Allah *Glorified is He* exposed what was hidden in the hearts of the hypocrites which served as a warning to the believers that they would not let themselves be affected by the hypocrites' reasoning and rhetoric. The believers had put their trust in Allah and He dictates all affairs as He wills.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ يَتَوَفَّى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ
 وُجُوهُهُمْ وَأَدْبُرَهُمْ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿٥٠﴾

If only you [Prophet] could see, when the angels take the souls of the disbelievers, how they strike their faces and backs: it will be said, 'Taste the punishment of the Fire [50] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 50)

The person being addressed here is the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and the meaning is essentially 'If we revealed to you the unknown, you would see'. Note that Allah *Glorified is He* does not state the apodosis of this conditional clause. He does not say what happens to these people who are bent on denying the truth when the angels strike them. As the apodosis is omitted, it is left to each person to imagine the worst of what could happen. If Allah *Glorified is He* had stated the apodosis of this sentence, then we would know what happens, but leaving it out induces each of us to conjure fantastic, incredible scenarios. In this way, whatever will happen is made to seem even more horrific.

This Quranic verse shifts us away from the punishment of the disbelievers in this world and turns our attention to death and dying. Death is the moment when the angels come to take the souls of human beings. Throughout the Quran, death is at one point attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* (*al-An'am*: 60); in some other references it is attributed to messengers from Allah, i.e. angels of death (*al-An'am*: 61) and at other occurrences it is attributed to the Angel of death,

`Azra`il (*as-Sajda*: 11). As such, causing people to die is attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* in some instances, to `Azra`il in other instances and to the Messengers of death in yet some other instances. This may seem contradicting. However, I say that there is no contradiction at all because the order to cause someone to die is always issued by Allah *Glorified is He* and it is either carried out by `Azra`il or any of his many assistants from among angels. In other words, a death order is principally originated from Allah. It is sometimes attributed to `Azra`il, the direct recipient of the order from Allah, or it is attributed to the angels who are asked by `Azra`il to carry out the order.

The painful torment mentioned in this verse happens at dying minutes; the moment when a person can no longer lie to himself. A person might deceive himself during his life. For example, one may suffer from an incurable illness, but still say to oneself, 'I will soon get better' to offer oneself a glimmer of hope. Another person may be poor and does not possess any worldly means, but still says to himself, 'I will become rich'. This is because man always hopes against hope. However, when one makes sure that he is dying and that there is no escape from his meeting with Allah, one gives up deceiving oneself. At this moment, a dying person who once treated someone else unjustly would say to his children, 'Bring so-and-so here. I treated him wrongly, so recompense him for whatever I owe him'. At the hour of death, a person recalls the record of all his deeds. So, if he is a believer, he sees a shining record and he smiles and welcomes death contentedly. But if his deeds are evil, he sees only darkness and fear grips him because he knows what fate waits for him.

Satan promised the disbelievers victory and coaxed them into fighting the believers saying, 'I will be your protector should you are stricken by misfortune,' but once the disbelievers and believers were within eyesight of each other, Satan fled because, unlike the disbelievers, he experienced Allah's Punishment. Satan's position is ever like this. As soon as he sees the punishment of Allah, he flees and confesses that everything he said were merely false promises. His actions are born of the rancour in his heart that began the day he was punished by Allah *Glorified is He* for refusing to prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him*. It is Allah Who forced this punishment upon him. Allah tells us that Satan swears by Allah's Might that he will beguile all human beings into grievous error (*Sad*: 82).

Allah's Might (*'izza*) signifies that Allah is in no need of any of His creation. He has the Most Sublime Attributes before any of His creations existed. He created the entire universe without any assistance whatsoever. Even if all of humanity believed in him, that would not increase His Supremacy one bit and if all of humanity turned to blasphemy and disbelief, that would not decrease His Supremacy one bit. Satan's swearing is an acknowledgement of his behalf of Allah's Might; Satan swore by the Might of Allah that he would tempt humankind. As the belief of people neither augments nor diminishes Allah's Supremacy, He has given humanity freedom of choice. If Allah had wanted all of humankind to be believers, Satan would not have been able to tempt any of them. Out of his malice and hatred for mankind, Satan tries to divert people from the path of faith. But does Satan really possess the power to tempt a true believer? No. That is why when Satan made a promise to tempt all humankind, he made an exception that he would not be able to beguile the true believers into grievous errors (*Sad*: 83). This clearly proves that Satan cannot influence a devoted believer who has true faith. Therefore, we should pay heed to what Satan is recorded as saying in the Quranic verse, 'I fear Allah— Allah is severe in His punishment.' (*al-Anfal*: 48)

So, given that Satan feared Allah and given that he knew that Allah is severe in retribution, what was it that allayed this fear and led him to disobey Allah's Order to prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him*? If he had thought that Allah did not punish transgressors or would punish them only lightly, then we might think that the lenience of Allah's punishment tempted Satan to disobey, but his knowledge of the severity of Allah's retribution must have compelled him to obey Allah from the outset.

We say that in a moment of pride and arrogance, Satan forgot all that he knew! At times of pride and arrogance, you may become haughty. Even in the face of the most unfavourable circumstances and when you know that a severe punishment might await you, all that is inconsequential to you if pride and arrogance enter your soul. That is why a person may be brutally beaten, but pride prevents him from screaming or yelling. Moreover, in a moment of arrogance, a person might make a decision with dire consequences, but he tries to endure them. As for Satan, he was full of pride and conceit when he refused to follow Allah's order to bow before Adam *peace be upon him*.

Arrogance possessed him so that he refused to obey Allah's order wondering why he should he prostrate himself before one whom Allah had created out of clay (*al-Isra'*: 61). In a moment of pride, Satan forgot everything, and his vanity propelled him towards disobedience. Despite being aware that Allah is severe in retribution, he persisted in crossing Him. In the fiftieth verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal*, the apodosis of the conditional sentence starting with the Arabic article *lau* (if) is omitted. Accordingly, the meaning is 'if the angels' concealment was removed so that you could see them as they took the souls of the disbelievers, it would be a truly awe-striking sight. Does this process happen when disbelievers are killed in battle, or does it only happen during a natural death? The answer is that it happens in both cases. Furthermore, the torment described in the above verse suggests the movements of advancing and retreating as indicated in the verse, 'how they strike their faces and backs.' (*al-Anfal*: 50) In other words, they strike those who are advancing on their faces, and if they turn back to shield their faces from the blow, they are stricken on their backs. The disbelievers of Quraysh used to mistreat the early Muslims in this same fashion; they would strike a believer on his face as he approached them, and if he tried to flee, they would strike him on his back and his head.

So, Allah made the disbelievers taste the torment the believers endured at their hands, but the difference is that a blow from the disbelievers is delivered with their limited human strength, whereas a blow from the angels is delivered with their inhuman might. It is said that the angels have bludgeons of steel with which they strike the disbelievers' faces and backs. Due to the force of the blow and the contact of the steel with the disbelievers' bodies, sparks of fire fly from them to burn and singe their bodies.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says to them, 'Taste the punishment of the Fire.' (*al-Anfal*: 50) At the time of death, they forcibly strike the disbelievers, causing them immense pain, but that blow, despite its severity and the flames and sparks that it emits, does not absolve them of suffering through fire in the afterlife.

One of the Companions went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah, I saw a mark like the tie

string of a sandal on the back of Abu Jahl, i.e. a welt or bruise from a forceful blow appeared on his back. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'That was the blow of the angels that took Abu Jahl's soul.' Another Companion came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I was about to kill someone so I swung my sword toward him, but before my sword would reach his neck I saw his head chopped off his body.' So the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'An angel got there before you.' This is all in accordance with the Quranic verse under consideration in which Allah orders His angels to support the believers against the disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If only you [Muhammad] could see, when the angels take the souls of the disbelievers, how they strike their faces and backs.' (*al-Anfal: 50*)

This signifies that striking and beating is more shaming and humiliating than being tormented, even though torment is surely more painful. For example, when a criminal commits a crime and then is caught and severely beaten, he might endure beating, but if he is beaten in public, this will be more shameful and humiliating for him. Moreover, if his victim is the one who beats him that is yet again even more shaming.

Nevertheless, this beating and torture do not absolve the disbelievers of punishment in eternal fire; rather, it is only the overture to a more severe punishment on the Day of Judgment, which is a natural consequence of their actions, their disbelief in Allah, their mistreatment of the believers and their spreading of corruption on the earth.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْتُمْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ ﴿٥١﴾

This is caused by what your own hands have stored up for you: God is never unjust to His creatures [51] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 51*)

It is known that the human being uses his hands for carrying out most things. Although he may do some things using his feet or tongue, most of his work is done by hand because hands are best suited for activity.

Accordingly, we find that Allah's reference to hands only in this verse is not an exaggeration.

The Arabic demonstrative pronoun *dhalika* (this) in the verse under discussion refers to the beating and torture which the disbelievers suffer in return for what their hands have made. Allah *Glorified is He* underlines, 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures.' (*al-Anfal*: 51) This means that the disbelievers' punishment is the result of two factors: first, the sins and acts of disobedience they have committed by their own hands and second, the Justice of Allah *Glorified is He*. Throughout the Glorious Quran, we find that the statement, 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures' is repeated three times; in *Al-'Imran*: 181-182, *al-Anfal*: 51 and *al-Hajj*: 10.

Those who eagerly seek to prove that there are contradictions and mistakes in the Quran state that this statement is mentioned in the Quran several times but does that mean that He—Allah save us—might still be unjust, or *zhalim*, to some degree? We say, no, Allah *Glorified is He* denies that any manner of injustice can be attributed to Him. When man does injustice, then he is called *zhalim* and when his acts of injustice multiply and worsen, he is called *zhallam* which is a word that refers to grave injustice. This Arabic word form, following the pattern *fa'al*, is a hyperbole, exaggeration or excessiveness. So, we might say a person is an *'akil* meaning he is an eater, but when we say someone is *'akkal*, or a glutton, this means that he eats an excessive amount of food. Also, we might say a person is *'najir*, meaning that he picked up a piece of wood and, without any experience, crafted something from it. But when we say that someone is a *najjar*, this means that he is experienced in woodworking. Similarly, there is *kha'it* and *khayyat*, the first meaning one who can sew a cloth without experience, and the second meaning a tailor. Also, someone can be a *jazir*, meaning he knows how to butcher an animal, but when we say that someone is a *jazzar*, this means that he is a butcher by profession.

So, the Arabic pattern *fa'al*, is for hyperbole, exaggeration or excessiveness in some action or activity. It can be used in the negative or affirmative; when you say someone is an *akkal*, or a glutton, you state that he is an overeater.

This signifies by necessity that he eats. So long as you affirm the excessiveness or exaggeration for something, then by necessity, you are also stating that the normative characteristic is true. Accordingly, when you say someone is a *khayyat*, or a tailor, then you affirm that he knows how to sew, or is a *kha'it* and has perfected that skill. Similarly, if you say someone is a *najjar*, or a carpenter, then you affirm that he is a *najir* that has mastered his trade. But in terms of the negation of words on this pattern; *fa'al*, if you say someone is not a glutton, *akkal*, you negate that he is an overeater, but that does not mean that he does not eat. When you say that someone is not a *najjar* (carpenter), then you negate that he masters woodworking, but you do not negate that he can still work with wood. Likewise, when you say that someone is not an *'allama* (an erudite scholar), this does not rule out the possibility that he is an *'alim* (learned and knowledgeable). So, when you affirm the stronger characteristic, you also affirm the lesser characteristic, but if you negate the stronger, that does not negate the lesser. Accordingly, when you say someone is not a *zhallam*, (great tyrant), you have negated the stronger, hyperbolic form, but not necessarily the weaker, normative form. Thus, he could still be a *zhalim* (someone who commits unjust deeds). Accordingly, In Allah's saying, 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures' He negates the great tyranny, but this does not rule out the possibility of lesser wrongdoing. In this respect, orientalist said that the verses of the Quran are inconsistent, for one verse says that Allah is not a *zhallam*, but that does not necessarily mean He might not cause some injustice and Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, 'Verily, Allah does not wrong [anyone] by as much as an atom's weight' (*an-Nisa'*: 40). In this verse, both the hyperbolic and the weaker, normative forms are negated. This, in orientalist's opinion, is an inconsistency. Then, does it stand to reason that if the hyperbolic form is negated that the normative form must be true? No, of course, it does not. If the hyperbolic form is negated, that does not prevent the affirmation of the weaker, normative form, but neither does it necessitate its affirmation.

In (*an-Nisa'*: 40), Allah *Glorified is He* categorically negates injustice, or wrongdoing, and in the verse under consideration, He negates the hyperbolic form. The verses of the Quran complement and complete each other; so if

someone says, ‘Allah negates the hyperbolic form, *zhallam*, and this affirms the normative form, *zhalim*,’ we say in response that negating the hyperbolic word form does not necessarily affirm the normative word form, nor does it negate the possibility of it being true. So, if there is another verse that negates the normative form, then Allah is neither a *zhallam* nor a *zhalim*.

Moreover, we must keep in mind the rhetorical and stylistic inimitability of the Quran, for the speaker is none other than Allah Himself. Now we ask, did Allah say He never does the least wrong to His creatures which could also be translated as servant or slave, or did Allah say He never does the least wrong to His creatures? The hyperbolic word form can sometimes be used to indicate the severity of a single act of injustice, even if it does not reoccur, and other times it may indicate the repetition of such acts. When someone commits clear and wanton injustice, he is called *zhallam* because he was excessive in his wrongdoing. Yet, if a person was not grossly unjust, but he makes many small acts of oppression and injustice against a great many people, he is also *zhallam*, given the large number of people whom he wronged.

Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘for Allah is not unjust to His creatures’ (*al-Anfal*: 51), and He did not say, ‘never does Allah do the least wrong to His creatures or servants’ because doing wrongdoing and injustice is commensurate with a person’s power to commit injustices. We find, for example, that the ruler’s power to do injustice is much greater than the power of someone of influence, and the power of the latter is still greater than the power of an ordinary person to commit injustices and wrongdoing. So, if Allah *Glorified is He* treated each of His creatures with injustice, even if only an atom’s weight, He would be called a *zhallam*. Thus, in this verse Allah shows us that He does not do injustice to anyone, not even as much as an atom’s weight of wrongdoing. Even this little bit of injustice does not befall anyone from Allah; *Glorified is He* because He does not do injustice to any of His creatures.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* cites some of the worst examples of disbelief which had occurred beforehand.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَذَّابٍ ءَالَ فِرْعَوْنَ^١ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ
فَأَخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ^٢ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ^٣

They are like Pharaoh's people and those before them who ignored God's signs, so God punished them for their sins: God is strong and severe in His punishment [52] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 52)

In Arabic *ad-da`b* means a custom or habit that a person repeats. So, when one says, 'someone is *da`ub* on doing something', it means that he does it regularly. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Their comportment with you, O Muhammad, is like that of Pharaoh's people with their Messenger', i.e. they are doing to you like what Pharaoh's people were doing with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

Allah's *Glorified is He* saying, 'And those before them' refers to the people of Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Lut (Lot) and others *peace be upon them*. What happened to these people? They suffered destruction, extinction, torture, or drowning. The disbelievers of Quraysh enmity to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and their desire to fight and do him harm resembles the attitude and comportment of Pharaoh's people with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that of Lut's (Lot's) people *peace be upon him* and that of those people who lived before them with their respective messengers.

Allah *Glorified is He* then continues to state that those people, 'ignored Allah's signs.' Did Allah simply leave them so? No, Allah punished them for their sins. Some of these sinners were drowned, some were struck by lightning, and some were swallowed up by the earth at Allah's Command. As Allah punished previous disbelievers as clearly stated in the Quran, then Allah *Glorified is He* will also send down His punishment upon the disbelievers who disbelieve in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is the general applicable principle of dealing with people who disbelieve in Allah's messengers *peace be upon them*. History tells many similar true stories. The people of Pharaoh, for instance, had reached the highest level of progress and civilization in their age, Allah *Glorified is He* states that the people of Pharaoh were of enormous strength and power (*al-Fajr*: 10). As for the

Thamud, if you went out to the cities of Saleh in Saudi Arabia, you would find the ruins of Thamud where they had carved their houses out of the stone of the mountains. Allah urges people to take example of the people of Thamud who hewed into the rocks in the valley (*al-Fajr*: 9).

Every ancient civilization came to an end, and most of them left no trace behind, except for some vestige or monument which do not reflect all aspects of civilization. The most prominent exception is the civilization of Pharaoh's people whose monuments include massive obelisks, towering columns and great pyramids; all of which still exist today. As for the civilization of the people of `Ad, Allah *Glorified is He* obliterated its remains so that we have not discovered anything thereof so far. Most of the relics and monuments of past civilizations have been destroyed, save that of Pharaoh's people. People come from all corners of the world to watch and wonder at the grandeur of their construction, the magnificence of their art and the excellence of their engineering. People marvel at how these massive stones were transported to high places without scaffolding or how the stones have all remained locked together in their original configuration throughout the ages and without the use of cement or any other sticky substance. Instead all of that was done by air discharge. How did they reach such level of engineering which enabled them to discharge air between two huge stones so that they clung together without any adhesive materials, so perfectly that no one can dislodge them?! As the civilization of the pharaohs had attained such a level of technical engineering by discharging the air between two massive pieces of stone, then, considering the art of masonry, it must have truly been an advanced civilization. However, considering the mummification the secrets of which that keep mummies preserved against decay for thousands of years are still unknown and given drawings painted on temples whose colours remain as vivid as they used to be despite the passage of millennia, and considering the beans that were so well preserved by the mummification process that they did not spoil and indeed are still edible, all these achievements of that civilization had secrets which have not yet been discovered till this day. There is no doubt, that civilization was a magnificent and powerful one. However, it could not survive and stand against collapse, eventually becoming ruins and nothing more. How did those who made such a great civilization and held the reins

of the world during their age be overcome? It must be true that there was a higher power that was greater than them and destroyed them. Why does Allah mention Pharaoh's people specifically and by name in this verse while He only mentions the civilizations before them as a collective group in this verse (*al-Anfal: 52*)?

Allah enabled people to unearth the monuments of Pharaoh's people and made them attractive to them so that they are keen to visit that highly advanced civilization which could not survive. The Pharaoh who claimed that he was a god could not secure himself immortality. Allah *Glorified is He* willed that the monuments of that civilization should be preserved so that everyone could see them, and see how Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed the establishers of this civilization and it became remains after it was a real fact so that people shall know that all power resides with Allah, and that divinity rests with Allah alone, for everything fades and dies but Allah. That is why the civilization of Pharaoh's people is singled out here, and this reference to the ruins of Pharaoh's people is one of the many unique aspects of the miraculous nature of the Quran because Allah *Glorified is He* mentions this civilization particularly and then states all the other civilizations collectively. The people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and the people of `Ad, Iram and Thamud; all of them denied Allah's miracles and disbelieved in Him.

Allah says, 'They disbelieved in Allah's verses (*al-Anfal: 52*). We stated earlier that, in Arabic, the word *ayat* signifies three types: the cosmic proofs or signs which prove the existence of the Highest Creator, such as alternation of night and day, sun and moon (*Fussilat: 37*). Then there are the miracles with which Allah supports His messengers so that they can prove the truthfulness of what they convey from Allah, like parting the sea for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* curing lepers and the sick and bringing the dead back to life by Allah's Will for `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Lastly there are the verses of the Glorious Quran which contain the legislation of Allah to be applied on this earth.

This proves that they denied the existence of the Creator. In Arabic, *kufir* originally means 'to cover' or 'to conceal'. That is why the word *zari`* (farmer) is called *kafir* because he covers the seed with soil. Likewise, the word *al-layl*

(night) is also linguistically called *kafir* because it covers and conceals things. An Arab poet says to the night,

Because of you I shall get a warrior's reward

If it is true that the night is *kafir*

Thus, saying that they denied the truth means that they covered or concealed the belief in the existence of Allah *Glorified is He*. This proves that Allah *the Exalted* exists undeniably and existed eternally before they denied Him, for faith is the essence of people's existence and they were all created as believers and thereafter some of them concealed this faith. So, the word *al-kufr* is an evidence of the truth of faith. Otherwise, if Allah did not exist, how could they conceal something that does not exist? Therefore, when someone says to you that he denied the truth or *kafara*, say to him, '*al-kufr* means to cover or conceal, so what is it that you have concealed? Whatever you have covered must be something that exists'.

Allah's saying, 'denied Allah's *ayat*' means that they denied the cosmic signs created by Allah and disbelieved in Allah, despite the manifest signs that the universe abounds with, and they disbelieved in the messengers even though they came to them with miracles that defied the standard laws of life. Moreover, they denied the verses of the Quran which were sent to reveal to people Allah's legislation.

The beginning of the verse under investigation which reads, 'They are like Pharaoh's people and those before them who ignored Allah's signs,' succinctly accounts for the punishment Allah inflicted upon them, which is clearly stated in the ending of the verse, 'so Allah punished them for their sins; Allah is Strong and Severe in His punishment.'

Allah clearly states that He punished them for the sins they committed and the corruption they made on the earth. When man finds himself surrounded by misfortune and facing grave torment, he tries to flee from it. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* states in another verse that He is Mighty and Powerful in His punishment (*al-Qamar*: 42). This means that when Allah *Glorified is He* decides to punish a disbeliever, He grips him firmly and tightly so that he cannot escape.

Accordingly, Allah's *Glorified is He* saying, 'Allah is Strong and Severe in His punishment.' (*al-Anfal: 52*) means that Allah is more powerful than anything you can make or contrive within His universe, and His retribution is severe and painful. We know that Allah's retribution befalls people only in proportion to their sins, so Allah being severe in retribution does not mean that the most severe punishment is meted out for some minor trifling sin, but rather, each is given his due punishment in accordance with his sins. At the same time this punishment, no matter how light, is extremely painful because Allah's punishment is proportionate to Allah's Strength and Power, so it is very painful even at its slightest.

Although Allah states that He punishes people for their sins, this has nothing to do with the viewpoints of the determinists which have some indication in the following verse:

He threw him shackled into the vast ocean and said to him

Be careful so that you should not get wet

It would be erroneous to think that Allah fates a person to be a disbeliever against his own will and then casts him into the hellfire. Such a scenario is antithetical to Allah's justness. It is you who is charged with deciding between obedience and disobedience, between faith and disbelief, and in the light of this we understand Allah's statement that He punishes disbelievers for their sins. As Allah *Glorified is He* threatens them with the most severe retribution for their sins that only serves as an evidence of the gravity of their sins.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* provides us with the rationale for that, saying:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِّعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ
يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

[He did] this because God would never change a favour He had conferred on a people unless they changed what was within themselves. God is all hearing, All Knowing [53] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 53*)

'This' refers to what was said in the preceding verse. If you refer to the beginning of humankind, you will see that Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam

peace be upon him for the sake of making him a successor on earth, and He created Eve *peace be upon her* for the sake of the continuation of the human species. Before placing Adam *peace be upon him* on earth, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to him divine commands. From Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* sprang the progeny of mankind. Had the progeny of Adam followed and obeyed the divine commands given to him, humans would have lived in prosperity. However, some descendants of Adam and Eve became ungrateful for the blessings bestowed on them and denied that there was a Creator who bestowed such blessings on them. In this case, would Allah maintain them in safety and prosperity now that they had changed as such? No, rather, it must be the case that Allah would also change what they had been blessed with; otherwise religion would become a senseless thing. Mankind descended upon the blessings of this world, meaning that Allah did not create mankind and then create the blessings of this world for him, rather, He created those blessings first and then humankind came into a world that had already been completely prepared for him with all the amenities essential for life and the perpetuation of life. For a long stretch of time, man remained in the infancy of his development, at ease among the blessings of Allah. Before he knew how to farm, he found plenty of fruit to eat and before he knew how to search for water, he found water to drink in plenty. Allah taught him how to live, and for him Allah subdued the animals that provided milk and meat. Man was to receive all these blessings and more, showing profound gratitude and faithful devotion to Allah, the Blessing Creator.

However, man began to take the blessings of Allah for granted, denying that there is a Provider. Would happiness and a secure life on this earth continue to be his in this case? Of course, it would not. Since mankind had changed his attitude, Allah *Glorified is He* had to transform blessings into a curse. Out of His Compassion and Mercy, Allah *Glorified is He* had willed mankind to change his attitude at first. Allah *Glorified is He* would not ever be keen to do injustice to humankind; rather, man began to do injustice to himself. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* states clearly that He ‘would never change a favour He had conferred on a people unless they changed what was within themselves. Allah is All Hearing, All Knowing.’ (*al-Anfal*: 53)

So, Adam's descendants first began to change the blessing of faith into disbelief and to change gratitude for the blessings bestowed on them into ungratefulness, so Allah *Glorified is He* requited them by sending the Great Flood, lightning bolts and devastation because they changed what was inside themselves. If they had returned to worshipping Allah and thanking Him, Allah would have returned to them their blessings, security, stability and well off life.

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that following His Path increases our blessings, not diminishes them. Allah *Glorified is He* states that should people believe and be mindful of Him, and He will shower them with blessings from the heavens and earth (*al-A'raf*: 96). In accordance with this divine law, we find that whenever people shift from faith to disbelief, it is necessarily matched by a corresponding shift in Allah's blessings to them; otherwise Allah's Commandment would become worthless. For example, all students take an exam, but only the ones who study will do well. As for those who did not study, they will fail. Otherwise there will be a state of chaos in the world, for if Allah *Glorified is He* gives to the one who follows His Path the same reward that He gives to the one who does not, what then is the value of following Allah's Path? Thus, one must have faith, and that faith must not be merely for superficial show, rather, it should be deeply rooted in the heart and soul. You should not claim to be righteous, while you are corrupt; do not claim to be honourable and trustworthy, while you steal and do not claim to be just, while you wrong the poor and side with the rich. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* only gives His blessings, whether spiritual or physical, to those who follow His Path. So, if you see that corruption is widespread throughout a community, know then that their inner selves have not changed even though they make a show of following the divine Path.

Accordingly, before we complain of our misfortune, we should first know what we did wrong, and change it to behaviour that will please Allah *Glorified is He*. Then Allah will change our fortunes. Thus, when you find that a certain group of people are in hardship, know that this is because Allah altered the blessings they had received from Him after they changed their inner selves. In other words, in their original state, they had enjoyed the blessings of Allah and had

been following Allah’s Path. Then they disobeyed Allah and deviated from the Path, so their worldly comforts changed as well. Essentially, there are two fundamental factors: Allah changes the blessings He bestows on people and that happens only when they change what is inside their selves.

The conclusion of the verse which states, ‘Allah is All Hearing, All Knowing.’ is that Allah *Glorified is He* knows the truth of what people do, and He hears what they say to their own selves in secret and what they say aloud in public. So, if we change anything, Allah *Glorified is He* hears and knows it because change happens by either visible action or spoken word. If the change is something communicated by speech, Allah *Glorified is He* hears it, even if it is only a thought in our minds. Likewise, if we change something through our actions, Allah sees it, regardless of how keen we are to hide it.

In the next verse Allah *Glorified is He* returns once again to tell us about Pharaoh’s people. He says:

كَدَّابِٓءَ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ
فَأَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ ۖ بَدُّوا إِلَهُهُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ ۖ وَكُلُّ كَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

They are indeed like Pharaoh’s people and those before them, who denied the signs of their Lord: We destroyed them for their sins, and We drowned Pharaoh’s people – they were all evildoers [54] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 54)

Some people may ask, ‘Why did Allah *Glorified is He* tell us again about Pharaoh’s people here, while He already spoke of them the preceding verse?’ We respond that there is a subtle nuance of meaning between the two verses. In the earlier verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘they disbelieved in Allah’s *ayat*.’ (*al-Anfal*: 52) In the present verse, He says, ‘who denied the signs of their Lord’ (*al-Anfal*: 54).

The first verse quoted above denotes that they denied the cosmic signs that prove the existence of Allah *Glorified is He*, the miracles of Allah’s messengers and the verses of the Scriptures that were revealed to them. As for the verse under discussion, it signifies that they did not show gratitude for the blessings that Allah bestowed upon them. As Allah is the only One Lord, He bestows

blessings upon people, and as He is the Only One God; He reveals to people commands and Legislations. So, in the first verse they denied Allah as the Only One God and thus disbelieved in Him, whereas in the second verse, they denied Allah as the Only One Lord and thus they denied that He is the Only Provider of all blessings. The Blessings of the Only One Lord is that He is the One Who created the universe from nothing and provides all creatures which are unable to secure anything for themselves so that man could be imparted with all the essentials for his life. With regards to sustenance, Allah treats all people equally; the disbelievers and the believers and the disobedient and the obedient people, making no distinction between faith and disbelief in this respect.

At this point, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and We drowned Pharaoh’s people’. As they all were disbelievers, then there were not believers to be singled out and saved. Rather, all of them had done evil to themselves by disbelieving in Allah as stated clearly in the verse. Allah *Glorified is He* specifically mentions Pharaoh’s people here because they are the only nation whose civilization’s remains can still be seen to testify to the extent of their advancement, the secrets of which are still a mystery to this day. The establishers of such a civilization could only be overcome by the workings of a greater power that was stronger and mightier than them. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* specifically wants to draw our attention to Pharaoh’s people because He ordained that their monuments and ruins will be discovered and will capture the attention of the entire world. Allah decrees that people will feel the desire to come and see the civilization of Pharaoh to marvel at how they attained such progress only to have their civilization collapse—and all this to act as a sign of the existence of a higher power, Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* brought ruin to Pharaoh’s people because they denied the truth of His divinity and instead took Pharaoh as their lord and god. Moreover, they denied Allah’s blessings. In the Quran, Allah tells us He bestowed upon them many favours such as gardens, water-runnels, fields of grain, noble dwellings, and well off life. However, they disbelieved in Him and therefore He perished them and made them to leave all such blessings (*ad-Dukhan: 25-27*).

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* clearly states that He gave them agricultural land and water in great abundance. Moreover, He gave them riches and power

which uphold their honour and dignity and made them the masters of the world in their age. In this way, they built noble dwellings and none dared to affront them or oppress them. Theirs were the treasures of the earth, and theirs was the power required to secure for them welfare (*ad-Dukhan: 26-27*).

Furthermore, Allah increased them in knowledge which helped them secure a luxury and well off life in all its aspects. But they denied that all these blessings were bestowed upon them by the Only One God worthy of worship and the Only One Lord Who provides all creatures with sustenance. So, they deserved to be punished and their ruins remained to show what a great civilization they made. Their monuments include gold and treasure buried with their dead, perfectly engraved inscriptions on their temples which relate the story of their civilization and battles and it also depicts tremendous blessings that Pharaoh and his people lived with. But they did not show gratitude towards Allah *the Creator and Bestower of all Blessings* and, instead, they disbelieved in Him.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

**The worst creatures in the sight of God are
those who reject Him and will not believe [55]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal: 55*)**

In Arabic, *ad-dawab* (creatures) is the plural of *dabba* which is anything that walks or crawls on the face of the earth. According to this definition, humans are included here as well, but linguists limit the meaning of *dabba* to four legged creatures, i.e. animals. The Creator *Glorified is He* honoured man by not making him walk on all fours so he could thus be excluded from this categorical grouping. In the light of this meaning, it becomes evident to us that Allah *Glorified is He* has appended the disbelievers to the category of *ad-dawab* and exempted only the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* created creatures and all other species in the world as insentient beings, carrying out their various endeavours instinctively without any decision making. Something which is done by instinct occurs without rational deliberation. Thus, we find that many of the things we have learned as sentient beings, we learned from

insentient animals and insects because animals act by instinct that never errs. For instance, when we recite the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Thereupon Allah sent forth a raven which scratched the earth, to show him how he might conceal the nakedness of his brother's body...' (*al-Ma'ida: 31*), we see that the raven, who does not have a mind for conscious decision making, taught something to man who has a mind and can make conscious decisions. That happened because the raven is driven by its instincts, so every animal's behaviours and mannerisms are made so by the choosing of Allah *Glorified is He* because animals are compelled to follow His commands. It is out of the Mercy and Compassion of Allah *Glorified is He* that all creatures, except for human beings, were created insentient; acting according to instinct rather than by deliberative reasoning. However, human beings, whom Allah blessed with the ability to reason, can disbelieve and disobey, even though it was Allah *Glorified is He* Who bestowed upon them the gift of mediation and choice.

It is amazing to see that animals driven by instinct never change the course of behaviour designed for them, always carrying on with their lives exactly as was planned for them. A cow will, for instance, give birth and not be upset when one of her calves is taken from her to be slaughtered because that is their purpose in life, to provide mankind with meat. The pigeon incubates her eggs and when the little chick emerges, she takes care of it for only a very short period of time until it knows how to independently fly and eat. After that, she leaves it to lead its life on its own because it is driven by instincts which never err. Animals act according to instinct without ever having to learn it.

When we turn to human beings, we still find all kinds of instinctual behaviour that is not consciously learned. If a person becomes hungry, he wants for food without anyone having to teach him what it means to feel hungry—this is instinctual. Likewise, when someone becomes thirsty, he wants for water without anyone having to teach him what thirst is or how to drink. We are all similar in terms of instincts. The rich, the poor, the mighty king and the lowly soldier, all of them, when they feel hungry, they seek food and when they feel thirsty, they seek water—all of this is governed by a general instinct that is shared with everyone.

It is incredible, for instance, that when a donkey wants to cross a river, it looks at it and from just one glance it can tell if it will be able to get across or

not. If it can jump the river in one leap, it does, and if not then it finds another way. You cannot force a donkey to try to leap over a stream or river that is too wide for it. No matter how much you beat the animal, it will not respond to you and it will not leap. But with a person, if you command him to cross a waterway, he might say to himself, 'I will garner all my force and cross it in one mighty leap'! But if his assessment is incorrect, he falls into the water. That is because he erred and the faculty of decision-making led him to believe that he could do something of which he is incapable. In this sense, animals that are governed by instinct are more keenly shrewd than we are.

When we consider eating, we find that primal instinct is again more keenly shrewd because an animal will eat until it is full and then it will not touch anything more, even if it comes across the most savoury foods. You cannot force an animal to eat an extra twig of clover, handful of hay or pod of peas once it is full. Whatever exceeds its needs, it will simply stomp it beneath its feet. When we come to people, however, we see them eating their full and washing their hands, and once enticed by a friend, 'You forgot this piece of fruit', or, 'these pastries', they go back to eating once more even though they were already full. So, they upset their stomachs and the natural rhythm of their bodies. Because humans are wantonly excessive in so many ways, they are afflicted with many diseases that do not afflict animals. Truly, most of the diseases that afflict animals are the result of contamination or dirty surroundings; things which are all caused by humans.

The True Lord wants to show us that being insentient creatures governed by instinct is still better than being disbelievers because the animal carries out its life's purpose flawlessly, while the disbeliever does not. Instead he wreaks havoc on the earth and spills innocent blood. As such he is worse than an animal since, as we said, an animal will carry you from place to place without complaining, and it will carry your burdens without making a fuss. When you ride atop it, it will keep walking for a long time without being bothered by you or throwing you off its back. Truly it was created for this purpose, and it does what it was created for without complaining or grieving because it is governed by an accurate set of actions which it follows to precision. But look at man who invented and developed the cars, yet we find him falling asleep behind the wheel sometimes, ending with a gruesome accident and hurting himself as well as others.

Man is designed with the intent of following the Path of Allah the way it was revealed to us, but some humans rejected this Path and instil strife and discord in the world—this way they are worse than animals because they refrain from using their rationale in utilizing the basics of existence. If they did, they would know that they have been brought into a universe that was fully subjected to them. A sun that illuminates half the world to provide it with daylight, then sets to leave them to rest during the night, the moon and stars to guide their way whether on land or at sea, the rain that falls so that plants and crops can grow and the domesticated animals to provide milk and meat and to carry the loads. Unavoidably any person with a sound mind would think, ‘Who created all these wonderful things for me’? That is the whole purpose from being empowered with a ‘mind; to guide us to the truth of the Creator. In this respect, it only stands to reason that a person with a mind would realise that the One Who created all these blessings and made animals serviceable for him, is indeed someone who wishes him well. So, when the Path comes to him from Allah, he should follow it because he knows that the path is good and right for him, having come from his Creator.

In this case, if humankind had unanimously followed the Path, doubtlessly the affairs of the world would have gone smoothly and properly, but some of us concealed the existence of Allah and denied Him. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that they are worse than animals because they do not believe.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says next:

الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتَ مِنْهُمْ ثُمَّ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَهُمْ فِي كُلِّ مَرَّةٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

Who, whenever you [Prophet] make a treaty with them, break it, for they have no fear of God [56]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 56)

After having talked about the disbelievers who made war against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the True Lord moves on to talking about the group of people with whom Prophet Muhammad had entered a treaty, wherein they agreed to desist from harming him. These were the Jews

of Medina. Did they remain faithful to the treaty? No, they breached it. The Qurayza tribe, for instance, made a pact with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declaring that they would not support any of his enemies. But, when the Battle of Badr started, they broke the pact and supplied the disbelievers with weapons. Then they returned after the disbelievers were defeated and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave them a second chance, and made a treaty with them once again. When the Battle of Khandaq (The Battle of the Trench) started, the Qurayzha tribe agreed to let the soldiers of Quraysh penetrate through the area under their control so they could surprise the Muslims from behind. But Allah sent a wind that disbanded the disbelievers. The True Lord says, ‘who, whenever you [Prophet] make a treaty with them, break it...’ (*al-Anfal*: 56). They acted as such because they abandoned the Path and feared Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so they tried to deceive him and break their treaty with him. Allah says, ‘...for they have no fear of Allah.’ (*al-Anfal*: 56)

They were not conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* even though they believed in Him because they were people of The Book (Jews and Christians). They were given the Torah and a messenger, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; this means they were not left without a divine book. Yet, they did not adhere to what was in that book and they were not conscious or fearful of Allah. So, they violated the treaty. *An-naqd* meaning ‘to violate’ is the antonym of *al-ibram*; which means both ‘to ratify’ a treaty and ‘to entwine’ a string or rope. *Al-ibram* is to strengthen something, exactly as you would entwine a rope to make it stronger. When you entwine a rope, you twist it around itself, thus making it thicker and stronger. An entwined rope will be reduced to the half of its length since it will be twisted around itself and thus getting much tougher. But upon *an-naqd* or breaking it apart, makes it weak again. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in another verse of the Quran not to be like the woman who breaks and completely untwists her yarn which she herself has spun and made stronger (*an-Nahl*: 92).

The True Lord gives us the bottom line on individuals of this ken: they are those who do not believe, do not fear Allah, and break their covenants. So, the True Lord says of them:

فَإِذَا تَقَفَّفْتَهُمْ فِي الْحَرْبِ فَشَرِّدْ بِهِمْ مَنْ خَلْفَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَدَّكُرُونَ

If you meet them in battle, make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them, so that they may take heed [57] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 57)

In other words, if you meet them in battle, make an example of them such that those who follow their path or method would be terrified of what you did. Note that in Arabic, this verse begins with the word *imma* simply translated above as 'if'. *Imma* is a combination of the conditional particle (*in*) and the additional particle (*ma*). Other conditional sentences can come with a different structure like (*in ja`aka Zaydun fakrimhu*) or 'If Zayd comes to you, honour him'. This sentence contains an if-clause 'If Zayd comes to you', and a main clause 'honour him' with just the conditional particle (*in*). This means that if the condition is fulfilled, then the prescribed request needs to be fulfilled only once. However, when we use (*ma*) in conjunction with (*in*), this indicates that every time the condition comes about we are to fulfil the request as Allah ordered us. It is like saying, 'Every time you receive more than your need, be generous with it' because (*imma*) indicates continuity like saying 'every time'. 'Every time you receive extra, be generous with it, even if it should happen a hundred times'. If this verse were constructed with just (*in*) as the conditional particle, it would mean that fulfilling the request just once is enough.

Allah says, 'If you meet them in battle...' (*al-Anfal*: 57) meaning every time you find them at war with you, '...make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them...' (*al-Anfal*: 57), in other words use them to frighten and scatter those who would come after them; you must teach them a lesson of such magnitude that those who come after them will fear you and want to avoid you. Or, as the saying goes, 'Beating one to frighten another'. So, we are being asked to fight them pitilessly and forcefully so that those who follow their example would not be tempted to fight on their side or come to their aid. *At-tashrid* translated above as 'make a fearsome example of...' is the same as *at-tashtit* and *at-tafriq* or to disband and *al-ib`ad* to eliminate with cruelty; thus, even if they wanted to flee, prevent their escape and then disband them against their will. Then the True Lord says, '...so that they may

take heed.’ (*al-Anfal*: 57) This means that this experience should be a lesson for them such that they do not think again of making war against you, for they will remember what happened and shy from confronting you again.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

﴿٥٨﴾ وَإِمَّا تَخَافُ مِنْ قَوْمٍ خِيَانَةً فَانْزِلْ إِلَيْهِمْ عَلَىٰ سَوَاءٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْخَائِبِينَ

And if you learn of treachery on the part of any people, throw their treaty back at them, for God does not love the treacherous [58] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 58)

Allah *Glorified is He*, begins this verse with *imma*, just as he began the previous verse. The usage of *imma* has already been explained in the previous verse. Allah is talking about people of another kind who do not fight openly in war, instead they plot in the dark to betray Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We ask, ‘Is this a definitive or presumptive treachery?’ Allah *Glorified is He* out of His justice distinguishes between the presumptive treachery and the definitive one. So, the treachery that has been put into action is treated one way, and the meditated treachery is treated another. Thus, the True Lord says, ‘And if you learn of treachery on the part of any people...’ (*al-Anfal*: 58).

Meaning, when definite words reach you that they are plotting to betray you, how should you act? The True Lord says, ‘...throw their treaty back at them...’ (*al-Anfal*: 58). Since there is a treaty governing the two signatories, one party being us, the other being them, you should not attack them or exact any pre-emptive action; rather, you should throw the treaty back at them. In other words, you should first annul the treaty between you and them. So, as soon as you fear or suspect treachery distance yourself from them, but do not attack them before informing them that you have annulled the treaty for a clear and stated reason.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that the Khuza`a tribe was among his allies after the Treaty of Hudaibiya. The treaty dictated that Quraysh were not to aggress against the allies of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* nor would Prophet Muhammad and his allies attack them or any of their allies. Some of the people of Quraysh went to the Khuza`a

tribe and attacked them, thereby violating the treaty between them and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They aided the tribe of Banu Bakr in their aggression against Khuza`a (the Prophet's allies), so what did the surviving members of the Khuza`a tribe do? They delegated `Amr ibn Salim of Khuza`a to go to Medina and proclaim to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Quraysh had broken their word and violated the treaty with him. When this happened, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not keep the matter a secret. He informed the people of Quraysh of what had happened and told them that he was now annulling the Treaty of Hudaibiya which he had entered with them. When Abu Sufyan came to mediate to try to justify what had happened, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused to meet him.

So, if someone from among those with whom you have made a treaty plots treachery, first reject and annul the covenant. And if you are certain that they have truly betrayed you, and then take a pre-emptive act against them. Just as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did with the Jews who betrayed him in the Battle of the Trench; leading to breaching their covenant with the Muslims.

The True Lord says, '...for Allah does not love the treacherous.' (*al-Anfal*: 58) This is as if to say that Allah, Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims are all not beyond committing any act of treachery even towards the disbelievers. This proves to us that Islam came to poise the norms of the world, not just for the believers, but for all people. So, when we hear the True Lord telling us that He has sent down the Scripture to Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* with the truth so that he can judge between the people in accordance with what Allah has shown him. (*an-Nisa*': 105); we note that Allah did not say 'judge between the believers', but 'between the people'. This means that there should be no distinction between justice for the Muslims and non-Muslims; a non-Muslim is still a creature of Allah, whom Allah summoned into this life and prepared for him place in this universe. That is why we must defer to justness and fairness in all aspects of our dealings with him; rather than wrong him, we must give him his due right because in doing so we are a reinforcement extended to him by Allah. Equitable treatment like this, by the

order of Allah, was one reason why so many people came to Islam. Even more, reason why the True Lord tells us not to be an advocate for those who betray trust (*an-Nisa'*: 105), which is to say, 'O Muhammad, do not side with the treacherous, even if they are from among your followers'. This verse was revealed when a shield⁽¹⁾ was stolen from Qatada ibn An-Nu`man; one of the *Ansar*. The ongoing suspicions incriminated a man from the *Ansar* from a tribe called Banu-Ubayriq. The owner of the shield went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Ta`ma ibn Ubayriq stole my shield.' So, when the thief caught on to what was being said, he placed the shield in a sack of flour and quickly disposed of it in the house of another man who was Jewish and whose name was Zayd ibn Samin. Then he said to his tribe, 'I have placed the shield in the house of Zayd ibn Samin the Jew.' His tribe members went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, our friend is innocent. The one who stole the shield was ibn Samin, the Jew. When the Companions went to Zayd ibn Samin's house and found the shield in the sack of flour, the man rejected the accusation saying, 'Ta`ma of the Ubayriq tribe brought this here!' As it so turned out, while Ta`ma was carrying the shield to Zayd ibn Samin's place he failed to notice that there was a small hole in the sack from which flour had leaked and left a trail on the ground. Ta`ma was too careless to notice, for Allah leaves signs of what happens so that those responsible for justice would be able to reveal the truth. Hence, the Muslims followed the trail of the flour until it brought them to the house of Ta`ma ibn Ubayriq, and suddenly the matter at hand precipitated to be a Muslim thief falsely accusing a Jew of robbery. The companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If you judge in favour of a Jew against a Muslim, all the Muslims will be put to shame.' It was here and then that a revelation was sent down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to protect him from swerving in the direction of his natural inclinations and Allah commanded him saying, 'We have sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust.' (*an-Nisa'*: 105)

(1) The story of the theft of the shield of Qatada ibn An-Nu`man

In other words, do not defend anyone for the sake of treacherous people, even if they are Muslims. As such the fairness and equity of Islam is that Allah will not wrong a Jew who stands by the right, nor will He favour a Muslim who stands by the wrong. Do they not see that the compelling forces of truth and righteousness within this religion? Does that not call them to approach Islam, the religion of justice and equity so that they might be embraced by it?

Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And if you learn of treachery on the part of any people, throw their treaty back at them...’ (*al-Anfal: 58*). In other words, ‘Tell them “I have abrogated this treaty between us and now I am absolved from its obligations.”’ Allah says, ‘...for Allah does not love the treacherous!’ (*al-Anfal: 58*) He makes it clear that He does not love the treacherous, even those who are committed to Islam.

In the next verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَبَقُوا إِتْمَهُمْ لَا يُعْجِزُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

**The disbelievers should not think they have won;
they cannot escape [59] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 59*)**

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* engaged the disbelievers in the Battle of Badr, one portion of the disbelievers were killed, another portion were taken prisoners and a third portion fled. Those who were killed or taken prisoners had their equipment and belongings seized as spoils of war. As for those who ‘*sabaqu*’, translated above as ‘escape’, they were those whom the Muslims were unable to overtake to kill or capture. *Sabaqu* is the past tense verb in the third person plural, i.e. when someone wants to catch up with something else in front of him, but cannot. It can also mean ‘precede’ or ‘outrun’ which is to say that the escaping disbelievers outran the Muslims who, had they been caught, would have been killed or taken as prisoners of war.

The True Lord wants us to know that even though this is what seems to have happened, yet the truth of the matter is that even though these runaway disbelievers were unharmed by Muslim hands that day, still they cannot frustrate Allah and they have not eluded His Mastery *Glorified is He*. Their

punishment will catch up with them at a future time, either when their time in this life has come to an end, or in some other battle.

Most of the time in such situations both the pursuer and the pursued use every ounce of their energy; the runaway and the one in his pursuit. Thus, when you see them, you might be surprised at how fast each of them runs. This is human instinct. Under normal circumstances, a person has a certain amount of strength and ability, but under extraordinary circumstances, his abilities are amplified. So, if a ship sinks at sea, for example, and one of its passengers manages to float adrift a piece of wood from the wreckage, he might swim for a long time without getting weary, but once he reaches the shore he collapses and his power ebbs.

Physiologists revealed to us the reason beyond this behaviour and attributed it to the adrenal glands which secrete the adrenaline hormone. When a person finds himself in an unexpected hazard, the adrenaline boosts his strength exponentially. If the danger persists, the gland slows down until it reaches the normal amount of adrenaline that the body requires. That is why an imperilled man in the sea can swim so well that he might seem like just another wave in the ocean; this gland provides him with extra energy, but once he reaches the shore and the danger is gone that gland goes back to normal and his strength ebbs. He might even spend as much as three days sleeping to recover from the ordeal.

There is a fable told about⁽¹⁾ a hunter who sent his hound chasing after a gazelle to bring it down for him. The hound wanted to catch the gazelle, and the gazelle tried to save itself. Suddenly the gazelle turned around and said to the hound, ‘You will not catch me because I am running for my life, but you are running for your master’.

So, whenever someone is acting for his own survival he will be stronger. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘The disbelievers should not think they have won.’ (*al-Anfal*: 59) They are in the grip of Allah’s will, and they remain subject to the Omnipotence of Allah who one day will summon them and pass His judgment on them.

(1) The story of the hunter’s hound and gazelle

After having talked about those who fought in battle, those who entered treaties, those who were treacherous, those who fled and escaped and those who tried to pursue them, the True Lord wants to draw our attention to an important point. We should not fall short in preparing whatever force is necessary to face our enemies whether in time of war or peace. War might be impending and we would be unable to adequately prepare for it. Thus, we must not slack in garrisoning for warfare up to and including the onset of battle. We must be ready both in times of peace and war. Thus, the True Lord says next:

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهَبُونَ بِهِ
 عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَآخَرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا نَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ وَمَا
 تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off God’s enemies and yours, and warn others unknown to you but known to God. Whatever you give in God’s cause will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged [60] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 60)

When Allah says, ‘Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster...’, this refers to all those categories of people previously discussed: those who fight, who are killed and whose families are obliged to avenge their deaths, those who are taken captive and those who betray their treaties blatantly or those who are suspected of betraying their treaties. We must be prepared (for war with) all these types of people, in accordance with the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘...whatever forces you [believers] can muster...’ (*al-Anfal*: 60). For the believing servants of Allah who strive and struggle to uphold His word, this is a command to be always ready with whatever force they are capable of mustering. Why ‘whatever you can’? Because humans are of limited capacities, and beyond the capacities of the believers lies the Ability of Allah.

Thus, we are to get ready and equip until we are empowered, then and only then, we ask for Allah’s aid (for what is outside our ability). When you do all your best, you must never think, ‘This will not be enough to outdo the weaponry that my enemies have arrayed against me’. Your enemy is not

aided by Allah; you are the one with divine succour, and so long as you have this source of support, with the help of Allah your strength will be superior, no matter who your enemy is. Thus, when Allah addresses the believers, He makes it clear that they are not to be frightened by the sheer numbers of the enemies. All one needs to do is to muster whatever forces he is able to, even when he is certain that Allah is with him. Remember that Allah told us that He will cast terror into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the truth (*Al-‘Imran*: 151). Once Allah *Glorified is He* casts terror into the hearts of the disbelievers, they will be on the brink of casting off their weapons and fleeing the battle even if they were equipped with the best of weaponry. Then the believers will seize them and be victorious over them through whatever forces they had prepared (for the battle). Allah says, ‘...whatever forces you [believers] can muster...’ (*al-Anfal*: 60). This force can be in the form of a fearless heart, or a strong and healthy physic empowered by a sound mind, eager to fight with courage and bravery. Or it can be in the form of an advanced long range and state-of-the-art weaponry. So, the believers must be keen on possessing everything that can boost their power. Ever since the beginning of time, the goal (in war) has been for the warriors to possess an edge over their enemies and prevent them from getting the best out of them. During the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the range of the archers was the criteria that measured power. Upon a battle’s initial onset, they would start with the arrows and slingshots. Then if the enemy advanced and came closer, they would use spears, and if at last they met in close combat, they would use swords. So, the best force war of at that time was an archer’s capability of hitting the enemy from as far as possible before they could advance. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained ‘force’ the way he did in the following Hadith. ‘Uqaba ibn ‘Amir narrated: ‘When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was delivering a sermon, I heard him say, “Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster...”’ (*al-Anfal*: 60). Then he said, “Take note, ‘forces’ means archery, ‘forces’ means archery ‘forces’ means archery.”⁽¹⁾ This is because archers provided an edge over their opponent and allowed attacking without being attacked. So, excelling in archery was one way to victory. But how can this logic be applied to modern

(1) *Related by Muslim and others*

day warfare now that weaponry has become so advanced? For a while the cannon was the weapon of choice because it provided a good edge with its long range. Then planes became the most powerful weapon because they could cover great distances, drop bombs, and return. An air force became the factor that determined the victor in warfare because it could inflict massive damage on the enemy without exposing the main corps to a counterattack, so long as their air power was superior to their enemy's. Then missiles and intercontinental ballistic missiles came about. And so forth up to the latest advanced weaponry that nations are racing to invent at this very moment. All these are long-range weapons. The goal is for each nation to be able to reach its enemy's territory without allowing the enemy to reach its own territory. In the verse under discussion, the True Lord *Glorified is He* also adds, 'including warhorses' (*al-Anfal: 60*). War mounts and cavalry are the force that seizes or occupies land. No matter how strong your weapons are, you will not be able to seize your enemy's land with them alone. So, in the past after the archers attacked, the mounted warriors would enter battle to seize the land. In modern times this is done by tanks and armoured vehicles. Battle begins with long distance attacks from missiles and planes until the enemy's force is demolished. Then tanks and armoured vehicles advance to occupy the lands. So, planes and missiles break the enemy, but they cannot seize land. The forces that allow us to seize land are war mounts, tanks, or armoured infantry. Horses must be prepared, fed, and trained if they are to be ready for war at any moment. Same with tanks and armoured vehicles; to be ready for battle at a moment's notice, they must be well supplied with spare parts and be properly tweaked, and their operators must be trained on their usage. Thus, Abu Huraryah *Allah be pleased with him* narrates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The best among those living is a man who is ever ready to grip his steed's reins for the Path of Allah, to fly onto its back whenever he hears a cry for help and to ride to places where he can expect lethal danger. (Next comes) a man who shepherds sheep among the hills or in the heart of a valley and prays regularly, gives his due in charity and worships His Lord. Truly there are none better than these two among mankind.'⁽¹⁾ In

(1) *Related by Muslim and an-Nisa`i and referenced from the book 'At-Tarhib Wa-Tarhib', volume 3, page 246*

other words, such a person does not dally or linger; he sets out straightaway upon hearing any scream. Part of the miracle of the Quran is that it provides us with a general outline for battle. A battle begins with an attack to demolish the enemy's force from afar, whether by rockets, planes or other similar means. Then close-range battle ensues—never the other way around. The True Lord designed for us how to deploy forces during battle: first the long-range attacks and through them you weaken the destination, then you move in and seize the land. In the past, this was done with war mounts which have now been replaced by tanks and armoured vehicles.

The True Lord revealed the Noble Quran with signs of human inventions from days to come. Nowadays we see that the power of cars, or vehicles or tanks is measured still by horsepower. So, people say that this engine is five horsepower, or five-hundred horsepower and so forth. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off Allah's enemies and yours....' (*al-Anfal*: 60) You prepare your forces to strike terror into your enemy's heart so that he will not think you are an easy target. Merely preparing a force intimidates the enemy, which is why military exhibitions are held, so that enemies can see a country's full display of power. And when your enemy sees the strength and power that you possess, they will not have the audacity to aggress against you. This is how we can attain what is known nowadays as, 'The Balance of Power'. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the international community maintained 'The Balance of Power' through peace alliances between a group of powerful nations. After introducing economy as a cause of war, power no longer lies in weaponry and military prowess alone, but it depends on several factors, including economy and the media. Concern over other nations' reactions has become a strong disincentive against going to war. Each country worries about what the other is hiding. Thus, preparing for war has become a way for preventing war. 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off Allah's enemies and yours....' (*al-Anfal*: 60) Do not think that the people before you are Allah's enemies alone, even if Allah has put you in a position of authority over them. You should know that Allah's enemies are yours as well because they try to corrupt the lives of believers. An enemy of Allah always tries to get at the believers, to pull them away and force or tempt

them into disbelief if he can. The True Lord is not angered because they do not believe in him, but rather because they do not follow The Path that brings mankind prosperity on earth. Allah *Glorified is He* does not hate them; rather, He punishes them only because of the ruin, wrong and tyranny that they wreak upon the world. ‘...and warn others unknown to you but known to Allah ...’ (*al-Anfal: 60*).

This is the True Lord’s way of telling us that the Muslims’ enemies are not only those who rose at the time of the revelation of the Quran, such as the disbelievers of Quraysh, the Jewish tribes of Medina, the hypocrites, and others. Many enemies would come long after the advent of the Quran; people of whom we are not aware, but of whom Allah *Glorified is He* is ever aware. At the same time, Allah tells us that the Muslims’ enemies are not only those who rise to fight Muslims on the battlefield; rather, there are many who do not fight on a battlefield but nonetheless fight against Islam, the true religion, and its adherents. The import of this noble verse held true back then, and it has continued to hold true for Muslims. Since that time, the animosity of Persia materialised, Rome waged war against the Muslims, and the Crusaders invaded Muslim lands. In other times other enemies will emerge, people of whom Allah is aware and we are not. The events of history have always unfolded in ways to affirm the truth and accuracy of the Noble Quran. Then the True Lord addresses the apprehensions that naturally arise in the human heart upon hearing these verses about military prowess. There are those who think to themselves, ‘Preparations like these need funding, effort and time above and beyond what is already needed to see to our own needs and interests’. We must not neglect to be prepared and at the ready because everything that we spend in Allah’s Cause is accounted for by Allah. And we must not say, ‘Keeping our people’s forces prepared requires money and thus diminishes what we can spend on our children’. Allah will provide you what you need, and as Allah told us, whatever we expend in His cause will be repaid to us in full, and we will not be wronged. (*al-Anfal: 60*)

In other words, whatever you expend, no matter how small or big, is returned to you (by Allah). This expression, whatever you expend, came in another verse about war booty. (*al-Anfal: 41*) Without the word ‘whatever’ the classification would not have included simple items. But Allah meant to

say that this includes even the most basic or simplest of things. Even a piece of string owned by a defeated enemy should go to the spoils of war. Anything that you expend in Allah's Cause is held to be returned to you so long as you spent it with nothing but Allah in mind at the time. As for the expenditures that are made ostensibly for Allah's sake, whereas they are after fame, pride or other selfish causes; these are excluded from the mentioned verse. Only that which is spent sincerely for Allah's Cause will be returned to you in keeping with the said verse (*al-Anfal*: 60).

But since the True Lord wants us to stay on the path of justice and avoid the path of falsehood and tyranny, He commands us not to abuse our prowess or use it to wage war against the creatures of Allah. Although we have the capability, and although we prepared our forces and weapons, but that does not mean that we should presume to aggress against the creatures of Allah. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* warns us saying:

وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٦١﴾

**But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet]
must also incline towards it, and put your trust in
God: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [61]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 61)**

In other words, Allah does not call upon us to be strong for us to oppress others. He does not want us to prepare our forces for the sake of aggression. He wants us to be prepared so that war is averted and peace pervades throughout the world. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* forbids us from using our military prowess as a means for attacking innocent people. So, if the enemy inclines towards peace, it becomes incumbent upon us to make peace with them. You ought not to say, 'They are just tricking us. It is only a ruse!' because everything you accomplish is not through your strength, but rather through your faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and trusting that He is with you. Allah *Glorified is He* wants the universe to be in harmonious and cooperation, rather than being in conflict and antagonism. Allah *Glorified is He* asks you to use your might to intimidate and frighten your enemies, not to spread tyranny or oppression without reason. The True Lord says, 'But if they incline

towards peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it....' (*al-Anfal*: 61) In other words, if they desire peace, and they make peaceful approaches towards you, then, you should move towards making peace with them as well. There is no point in accusing them of trickery or fearing any treachery, for Allah is with you and ultimately, He is the One Who will provide you with protection and victory. But with that in mind, you should always be ready with whatever force you can muster.

The True Lord says, '...and put your trust in Allah....' (*al-Anfal*: 61) This means that you should not put your trust in whatever forces you have prepared because no matter what, ultimately you will be depending on Allah to protect you. Next the True Lord gives us the rationale for why we should depend on Him alone. '...He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.' (*al-Anfal*: 61) In other words, no words escape His hearing and no acts escape His knowledge. Remember that you must not confuse trusting Allah with using this trust as a pretext for laxity or apathy. Putting your trust in Allah is done on the level of the heart, whereas the limbs take care of the actions. So, do not abandon your obligations and claim that in doing so you are putting your trust in Allah. A Muslim must be ever watchful of the world around him, and if you notice someone slipping into laxity, you must alert him to the need for being attentive and industrious, and you would do so in words and actions. So, we all have a role here, and thus Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.' (*al-Anfal*: 61) Let us note that this verse 'But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it, and put your trust in Allah: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing,' (*al-Anfal*: 61) comes after the verse, 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off Allah's enemies and yours....' (*al-Anfal*: 60) This verse exhorts us to be prepared for battle by priming our military prowess and forces.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make us see that the believers' military prowess must not be a tool for tyranny or pointless warfare. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He*, tells us that if they incline to peace, we must not ignore them or insist on war, for our religion wants peace for all of humanity, and Islam is not spread by force but by persuasion and wisdom. Warfare is not necessary for Islam to flourish and grow; it is the religion of the True Lord

Who convinces people (of the truth of Islam) by the power of His proofs and grasps people's hearts with His Eminence. All of this helps in building up faith and belief to their pinnacle. Let us be as prepared as possible to face the disbelievers, but without being reckless or calling for improper use of our forces. If they incline to peace, we must incline to peace as well because Allah *Glorified is He* wants stability and safety to reign over mankind. If you are worried that their peace approaches are merely a ruse to trick you into a false sense of security so they can get you by surprise, know that their trickery will surely come to naught. They have schemed and plotted to ensnare human beings (like them), but the true believers' planning and strategies are inspired by the True Lord. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأِنْ يُرِيدُوا أَنْ يَخْدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسْبَكَ اللَّهُ هُوَ
الَّذِي أَيَّدَكَ بِتَصَرُّوهِ وَبِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٢﴾

**If they intend to deceive you, God is enough for you:
it was He who strengthened you with His help and
with the believers [62] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 62)**

If you suspect that their peace approach to you is merely a manoeuvre so that they can gain more time for their own preparations, or to be able to get you off guard, then know that Allah is All Knowing, and He knows of their scheming. He will reveal it to you, and so long as Allah is with you, they will not be able to trick you. If you need any assurances, then think of the Battle of Badr. The Muslims' victory in that battle was truly from Allah. The apparent causes underlying their success were their readiness to fight and their decision to embark on a battle. The hidden causes underlying their victory were the invisible soldiers Allah sent to fight against the disbelievers and the terror He cast into their hearts. Victory was their ally that day by the will and power of Allah. The True Lord says, 'If they intend to deceive you...' (*al-Anfal*: 62). *Al-khid'a* (deception) entails displaying something desirable, and concealing entails something undesirable. We say, 'Someone *khada`ani*' meaning 'Someone cheated me'. In other words, this person came to me and showed me the facet which I liked, and concealed that which I disliked. But does that mean the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was left at their mercy, or did he have a

Lord who was his steady pillar of support and his source of safety? The answer comes from the True Lord: 'if they intend to deceive you, Allah is enough for you; it was He who strengthened you with His help.' (*al-Anfal: 62*)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* is sufficient for you. Allah is your source of strength and your pillar of support because He is responsible for your victories and your strength. The proof to this is obviously that Allah made you, Muslims, victorious at the Battle of Badr despite your inferior numbers and equipment. By the power of Allah's Aid, the Muslims achieved the best possible outcome. So, long as it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who aids you, and then surely events will unfold such that the desired outcome is achieved. After that the True Lord says:

وَأَلْفَ بَيْتٍ قُلُوبِهِمْ لَوْ أَنْفَقْتَ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مَا أَلْفَتْ
بَيْتَ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَلَئِنَّ اللَّهَ أَلْفَ بَيْنَهُمْ إِنَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦٣﴾

**And brought their hearts together. Even if you had given
away everything in the earth you could not have done this,
but God brought them together: God is mighty and wise [63]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal: 63*)**

Allah's Aid came to them in three forms: He aided them with His succour, and aided them through guiding others to follow Islam and lastly, He brought together the hearts of the believers. Allah had to join the hearts of the believers because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to a people who had tribal and arduous traditions. He was sent among a people of disparate tribes and clans who waged war with each other for the flimsiest of reasons. Elements of disband were stronger in their temperaments than the elements of accord and harmony.

A whole tribe would take a collective plunge to defend any of its members for any small cause or situation. All it took was for someone from the Aws tribe, for example, to spit on someone from Al-Khazraj tribe, and a war would erupt between the two. If their hearts had remained disbanded, these tribes would never have been able to confront the enemies of Islam and their internal belligerence would have distracted them from contributing to

the victory and defence of Islam. But Allah joined their hearts, and after having been enemies, they became the closest friends. After having been in a state of discord and disunion, they were united in fraternal concord.

That is how Allah joined the hearts of Muslims, by making Islam the strongest common tie among them, in their hearts, their deeds, and their way of life. A brother in faith became closer and more important than a brother in blood. Once hearts were joined, faith became the strongest bond among them because everything a person does springs from conviction in the heart.

Behaviour is subordinate to intention, and the heart is the seat of our intentions. It is the heart that can propel a person into disliking you or provokes them to act against you. So, if you see someone frowning at you, know that there is something in his heart (that prompts him to do so). If a person tries to lash at you, know that there is something even more intense in his heart. And if someone tries to kill you, he has in his heart the deepest of loathing and hatred for you. So, the source of all emotion is the heart. That is why we see some people sacrifice everything, perhaps their freedom or wealth, for the sake of a cause they believe in, and yet they remain content in their hearts. Scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, deprive themselves of the comforts of this worldly life, living only among their classes for many years because knowledge has become like a creed or article of faith in their hearts. It is as if the heart's intentions and its fulfilment became the strongest aspect in this life for them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that joining the believers' hearts together is a great blessing from Him. He says, '...and brought their hearts together. Even if you had given away everything in the earth you could not have done this, but Allah brought them together: Allah is mighty and wise.' (*al-Anfal*: 63) When hearts are joined together, people are gathered in friendship and common alliance. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in a Hadith narrated by Nu`man ibn Bashir, '...In the body there is a piece of flesh which, if it is sound, all of the body is sound, and which, if it is diseased, all of the body is diseased....'

The Hadith in its entirety says, 'That which is lawful is clear, and that which is unlawful is clear and between the two of them are ambiguous

matters about which not many people are knowledgeable. Thus, he who avoids these ambiguous matters certainly clears himself regarding his religion and his honour. But he who falls into the ambiguous matters falls into that which is unlawful, like the shepherd who pastures around a sanctuary, all but grazing therein. Verily, every king has a sanctuary, and Allah's sanctuary is His prohibitions. In the body, there is a piece of flesh which, if it is sound, all the body is sound, and which, if it is diseased, all the body is diseased. This part of the body is the heart.'⁽¹⁾

Joining the hearts together was never about the need for money or exchange of material benefits. Money cannot create true bonds of fraternity and love. We see around us a lot of ties coming from worldly interests, and we see others coming from the hearts. The bonds coming from mundane interests reach an end abruptly once those interests have been met or ceased to be important. On the other hand, heartfelt bonds can withstand all challenges and ordeals. You cannot make a person love you, no matter how much money you give him because true love cannot be sold or bought. Hypocrisy and pretences can be bought as can many other phoney emotions. The Arabs whose hearts were joined together by Allah, were not interested in money so much as they were fixated on tribalism and fanaticism. Most of them had riches, but what kept them in disband the whole time was their tribalism and fanaticism. This was what evoked envy and ire in the hearts of others and roused them to action. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...but Allah brought them together; Allah is Mighty and Wise.' (*al-Anfal*: 63) Because Allah is Almighty, He is unconquerable and because He is Wise, He causes things to happen in their proper place. Allah alone is capable of compelling hearts to come together because our hearts are in the Hands of the All-Merciful, and He can alter them as He desires. That is why we call Allah with the supplication of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that says, '...O Changer of the hearts, make my heart firm upon Your religion.' Shahr ibn Hawshab said, 'I said to Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her* O Umm Salama, which supplication did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say most often when he was in your house?' She said, 'His most frequent supplication was, 'O Changer

(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

of the hearts, make my heart firm upon Your religion.’⁽¹⁾ Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...Allah intervenes between man and (the desires of) his heart...’ (*al-Anfal*: 24). Next Allah *Glorified is He* brings to our attention an important issue of faith. He says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ حَسْبُكَ اللَّهُ وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

**Prophet, God is enough for you, and for the believers
who follow you [64] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 64)**

Do not think for once that Allah *Glorified is He* punishes the disbelievers just because they did not believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He punishes them because their actions corrupt the universe. Allah does not need anyone to believe in Him, and surely, the True religion would be victorious whether people believed in it or not. Allah wants, by revealing His Path, to provide His servants with wellbeing and prosperity. That is why Allah tells us not to consider our submission as a favour to Him because it is Allah who has done us a favour by guiding us to faith (*al-Hujurat*: 17). So, when someone converts to Islam, he must not see his conversion as a favour he did to Allah since it will not add a speck to Allah’s Magnificence. That person needs to know that Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed a gift upon him by leading him to Islam for his own good. Allah does not want Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pay any heed to the number or power of the disbelievers because he has Allah, the Most Powerful, on his side. Thus, He says, ‘...Allah is enough for you....’ (*al-Anfal*: 64) In other words, you do not need anything but Allah. And He says, ‘...and for the believers who follow you,’ (*al-Anfal*: 64) probably pertaining to ‘...Allah is enough for you...’ as well because it is Allah who guided those believers to faith. Meaning, that Allah is enough for you and enough for those believers who follow you. As such, do not seek strength from any but the True Lord. It could also mean that Allah is enough for you with regards to things you do not have any means to achieve, and the believers (who follow you) are enough for you with regards to things you have the needed means to achieve.

(1) Narrated by *At-Tirmidhi* and categorized as a *Hasan Hadith*

We note that the True Lord says here, ‘O Prophet...’ (*al-Anfal*: 64) This form of address is used for a particular orientation; when the matter at hand relates to setting a model for exemplary behaviour. But when the topic involves conveying the revelation or relaying a divine law, Allah would address him as ‘O Messenger’. Like in the verse, ‘O Messenger, proclaim everything that has been sent down to you from your Lord...’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 67) This is because the messengers came as conduits to announce and relate the Path on the authority of Allah, and they also lived according to that Path as models of exemplary behaviour. However, we notice that in the Noble Quran, the True Lord addresses every messenger by name except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, Allah would say, ‘Musa (Moses)...’, or ‘Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary)’ or ‘Ibrahim (Abraham)’ *peace be upon them*. But with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He would address him as ‘Prophet!’ or ‘Messenger!’ Erudite scholars have taken note of this fact and they saw in this form of address, a special reverence to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah addresses Adam, Nuh (Noah), Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) using their names *peace be upon them* in different verses of the Quran:

- ‘...Adam, live with your wife in this garden...’ (*al-Baqara*: 35)
- ‘...Nuh (Noah), descend in peace from Us, with blessings on you...’ (*Hud*: 48)
- ‘...Musa (Moses)! Verily, I am Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!’ (*al-Qasas*: 30)
- ‘...`Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Did you say to the people, “Take me and my mother as two deities alongside Allah?”’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 116)

But when addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah does not merely say to him, ‘Muhammad’, instead He says, ‘O Messenger!’ or ‘O Prophet!’ In the noble verse currently under our consideration, the True Lord wants to tell His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah is enough for him and for the believers to triumph over the disbelievers, no matter how few the believers are. Then Allah Our Lord *Glorified is He* uses a second form of address in His saying:

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّبِيُّ حَرَضًا عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَى الْقِتَالِ إِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ عَشْرُونَ
صَبِيرُونَ يَغْلِبُوا مِائَتِينَ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفًا مِنَ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

Prophet, urge the believers to fight: if there are twenty of you who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred, and a hundred of you, if steadfast, will overcome a thousand of the disbelievers, for they are people who do not understand [65] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 65)

Whenever you hear that someone “urged” someone else to do something, it means that he impelled him to do it, or aroused his desire to do it. There are many ways to ask someone to do something. There is a call to do something, an order to do something and a prohibition against doing something. These are all methods for asking someone to do something, and they are often preceded by addressing that person. For instance, one can ask someone to approach, or to withdraw or to run an errand for them. Each of these entails the speaker proposing that the listener do this or that. But there is one such request that is not a binding imperative, rather, a proposition; a friendly request, Like you might say to one of higher social standing than you, ‘I am not saying you must do this, I am merely suggesting it’. Then there is the verb to urge or *yahudd* which is a way of urging someone to do something by providing them an incentive. For instance, when you urge your children to study, the prospects of succeeding in life are an incentive for them. Whenever you urge people to do something, you are neither ordering nor prohibiting them from anything because you want them to do it eagerly and of their own will. If you order them to do something like a dictator, they might start to hate it, but when it comes as a suggestion, you will see that they will be happy to do it without any persistent orders from you. So, Allah says, ‘O Prophet, urge the believers to fight....’ (*al-Anfal*: 65) In other words, incite them and encourage them. The verb consists of the Arabic letters *ra`*, *ha`* and *daad* from which we get the verb *harad* or *yahrid* which means to be on the verge of death. This word was used by the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* to their father when they told him that he will keep remembering Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* till his body and spirit would be broken or till he is

on the brink of death. (*Yusuf*: 85) In other words, he will continue mentioning or remembering Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* until he is almost dead.

But the word *harrad* in the verse currently under our consideration is slightly different. Does 'harrid the believers' (translated above as 'Urge the believers') mean 'bring the believers to the brink of death'? No. This is an instance of a derived verb that eliminates the origin of its derivation. For instance, when we say, '*Qashshart* an orange' (i.e. I peeled an orange), it means that I removed the *qishra* or the peel of the orange. Similarly, when we say a doctor *marrad* someone (i.e. treated him), it does not mean he gave that person a *marad* (an illness); rather, it means that the doctor cured the illness. There are many verbs that follow this semantic pattern (meaning to remove), and they are characterized by the doubling of the middle letter as in *harrad* and *qashshar*, although sometimes verbs of similar meaning are instead indicated by a *hamza* (an Arabic letter corresponding to a glottal stop) at the beginning. For instance, if someone *`ajam* a book, i.e. he removed the *`ujma* or the errors and mistakes from it. That is why dictionaries and language reference books are called *m`ajim* because they remove the ambiguities of the meanings of words. We have previously explained the meaning of *qasat* and *aqsat*. And *qasat* means injustice or tyranny, like when Allah speaks about the 'tyrants' who will be the fuel of Hellfire. (*al-Jinn*: 15)

Conversely, *aqsata* signifies the act of removing injustice. As seen, the prefix (i.e. *hamzah* 'a' in *aqsata*) may change the meaning entirely. Likewise, some forms of diphthongs e.g., *qash-shar* (to peel) indicate the removal of the original root *qishr*, (peel). Other similar examples include *marrada* and *harrada* (to nurse and cure) which denote the treatment and removal of *marad* and *harad*. Thus, the Quranic verse essentially says, 'O Muhammad, encourage them to fend off (remove) the danger of death by means of fight. We can use this linguistic mechanism in understanding many Quranic verses. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Final Hour, 'Behold, [although] (*akad `ukhfih*) I have willed to keep it hidden, the Last Hour is bound to come' (*Ta Ha*: 15). For those who only approach the literal meaning, it means 'I have almost hidden it and, thus, kept it from disclosure'. However, we say the prefix *hamzah* (a) at the beginning of *akad* implies the removal of

concealment. Then, it means ‘I almost revealed the coming of the Last Hour’ by removing its covering through the major and minor signs of which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told people. Some people may exhaust themselves in endeavours to explain ‘*akad `ukhfiha*’ and never realise that the Arabic verbal form of removal takes two forms: doubling the middle letter and adding the prefix of *hamzah* (a) at the beginning of verbs. Allah *the Most High* says, ‘O Prophet! Urge the believers to battle...’ (*al-Anfal*: 65).

In other words, Allah *the Exalted* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to encourage the believers to fight and struggle. In other words, ‘invite your people to distance themselves from death and destruction; if they do not fight, the disbelievers will surely conquer them’. The disbelievers only recognize the warlike path of arrogance, dominance, and tyranny. Consequently, when the believers fight them, they hold them at bay on their borders. The True Lord *the Exalted* says, ‘O Prophet! Urge the believers to battle’ (*al-Anfal*: 65). Death and destruction would encircle them in this world and the in afterlife only if they abstain from strife against the disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to secure a safe and dignified life for the believers in this life and in the Afterlife. Noticeably, Allah *Glorified is He* has put a faith criterion for the etiquettes of war between the believing and disbelieving parties. The maker of this criterion is the Creator—the Creator of their very powers, abilities and sentiments. In this regard, Allah says, ‘If there be twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred; and [that,] if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome a thousand of those who are bent on denying the truth.’ (*al-Anfal*: 65) In short, it is a one-ten ratio; the power of faith makes the strength of a believer equal to the strength of ten disbelievers. Many people hold that the rhetoric of the Quran is brief, concise, and miraculous. Why did Allah then say, ‘...twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred...’ (*al-Anfal*: 65), and then repeat, ‘...if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome one thousand...’ (*al-Anfal*: 65)? Would it not be more concise to say, ‘One believer will overcome ten disbelievers’? However, you have not considered the facts of Islamic history. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* participated in some battles with the believers, which are technically known as ‘*ghazawaat*’ whereas the armed expeditions in which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* only sent a

few believers—usually from twenty to one hundred warriors without taking part in them are called *sayarah* (expeditions). Allah *the Exalted* stresses the numbers ‘twenty’ and ‘hundred’; ‘twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred....’ (*al-Anfal*: 65)

Evidently, what matters most is not the numbers of warriors but their patience and endurance. Another verse affirms patience and perseverance as necessary for warriors because the enemies may also be patient. In that case, you must outdo them in patience. If they endure the hardships of battles, you must endure more than they can. The military power necessary for victory includes patience and steadfast faith to endure the difficulties and violence of battles. In justification of this faith-related ruling, the True Lord *the Exalted* says, ‘O Prophet! Inspire the believers to conquer all fear of death when fighting, [so that,] if there be twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred; and [that,] if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome a thousand of those who are bent on denying the truth because they are people who cannot grasp it.’ (*al-Anfal*: 65). The fact that one believer may overcome ten disbelievers finds its rationale in the power of belief—the disbelievers cannot grasp the truth as they do not understand it. Conversely, the believers do understand it. Thus, we draw a comparison between the believer who grasps the truth, and the disbeliever who does not. When the disbeliever fights, they faithlessly do it with no belief in the Afterlife. All they have is this world and the fear of losing it. When the disbeliever finds himself in the arena of war, they want to maintain their own life even if this leads them to flee from the battle. However, for the believer, this world is but a fleeting period in their life, whereas martyrdom admits them to the pleasures of Allah and paradise without any need to pass through judgement. As such, a believer is keen on battle and fights bravely. Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* once said to the Persians, ‘I have come to you with warriors who love death as much as you love life.’ If the disbelievers grasp the truth and understand that this world is a transient bridge to the everlasting Afterlife, they will have a keen drive for the battle. Instead, they want to keep this life because—to them—it is all they have. The Noble Quran says ‘Say, “Are you, perchance, hopefully waiting for something [bad] to happen to us – [the while nothing can happen to us] save one of the two best things?”’ (*at-Tawba*: 52)

Eventually, the outcome of wars is either victory and gains or martyrdom leading to paradise. Both are undoubtedly good things. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying, ‘But as far as you are concerned, we are hopefully waiting for Allah to inflict chastisement upon you, [either] from Himself or by our hands! Wait, then, hopefully; behold, we shall hopefully wait with you!’ (*at-Tawba*: 52) In other words, the disbelievers will meet anything but disgrace and misfortune. They suffer either the severe punishment or defeat. They only expect misfortune when they enter the battle; if killed, they suffer painful punishment in hell or suffer the disgrace of fear divinely placed in their hearts in battles. In battles, the disbelievers rely only on their numbers, strength and equipment, whereas the believers rely first and foremost on Allah the All-Powerful and the Almighty. The believers trust that He will bring them victory. They are eager for battle as their faith lends them an incredible energy to overpower all numbers and equipment. The believing warriors are mighty in combat and eager for battle because they feel that they receive aid from Allah Himself. We know that every person is eager to fulfil their life’s purposes, but the disbelievers’ purpose is nothing but enjoying this limited earthly life. As for a believer, it covers both lives in this world and in the Afterlife. The disbeliever fights only with their worldly strength which is devoid of any true faith. Notice that several clauses are declarative statements in Allah’s saying, ‘O Prophet! Inspire the believers to conquer all fear of death when fighting, [so that,] if there be twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred; and [that,] if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome a thousand of those who are bent on denying the truth because they are people who cannot grasp it.’ (*al-Anfal*: 65)

Declarative statements do not contain a request or demand. If a request or demand takes on the form of a declarative statement, it might mislead you to believe that it is describing a constant and normative condition. For instance, some years ago when several armed renegades entered the Sacred House in Mecca and took worshippers as hostages, some people misunderstood the Quranic verse, ‘Whoever enters it [the Sacred House] is safe,’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 97) guarantees security to everyone who enters the Sacred House in Mecca. In response, we say that it obliges the obedient believers to ensure the safety of those who enter it. A person may obey Allah and ensure the safety of those in

the Sacred House or disobey and fail to ensure the safety of the said people. The issue is whether you are obedient or disobedient to Allah. The same goes true for the Lord's saying, 'The divorced women shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting-period of three monthly courses.' (*al-Baqara*: 228) It is a similar declarative sentence, but they only wait this period if they obey Allah. If they are disobedient, they may not forbear it. Allah also says, 'Good women are for good men and good men are for good women....' (*an-Nour*: 26) However, many marriages fail and go against this statement. It may happen that a despicable man marries a good woman or a depraved woman marries a good man. You might then wonder why the good man has not married the good woman and vice versa as Allah says? In response, this understanding is untrue. Allah only advises and guides us to the right choice; the righteous women should choose good and righteous men as marital partners leaving the disobedient partners to meet one another. Accordingly, you have a straightforward life, but if you disobey, unrest follows. For example, when ill-tempered partners insult one another, they exchange offense and ugliness. Misery and wretchedness occur when a bad man marries a good woman or a bad woman marries a good man—one party will always suffer! The true meaning of the verse is not that you will never find a good husband with a bad wife or vice versa, but it is a moral command to obey and upon which to act. As a good person, you shall have a good marital partner. Or else, you commit an act of disobedience.

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

الَّذِينَ خَفَّفَ اللَّهُ عَنْكُمْ وَعَلِمَ أَنَّ فِيكُمْ ضَعْفًا فَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ صَابِرَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا
 مِائَتَيْنِ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أَلْفٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفَيْنِ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

But God has lightened your burden for now, knowing that there is weakness in you — a steadfast hundred of you will defeat two hundred and a steadfast thousand of you will defeat two thousand, by God's permission: God is with the steadfast [66] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 66)

This mitigating enactment moderates the previous verse in which twenty believers who are patient in adversity can overcome two hundred disbelievers. As known, there are many requisite preparations for a battle. A warrior must be of sound body, strong faith and knowledgeable in tactics and strategies of

war such as military manoeuvres, change of position and camouflage. The outcome of battles is not determined by combat alone. Indeed, the victory depends upon timely advances, retreats, preparations and other ruses just as Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* did on many occasions. To ensure that twenty patient warriors can overcome two hundred opponents, they must all possess patience, strength, and endurance. However, a given person might not have the reserves of strength and lasting endurance needed, for sometimes spells of weakness afflict people for a period of time, as do spells of strength and good health. It is through the Divine Mercy and Compassion for the believers that Allah *the Exalted* has lightened their burden; He knows that there are times when people are weak whatever the reason is. Thus, He changed the proportion of believers to disbelievers from one to ten to one to two. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Now, Allah, for the time being, has lightened your burden, for He knows that you are weak. So, if there be one hundred of you who are patient in adversity, they should [be able to] overcome two hundred; and if there be a thousand of you, they should [be able to] overcome two thousand by God’s leave: for Allah is with those who are patient in adversity.’ (*al-Anfal*: 66)

Does it abrogate the previous verse? No, rather, the second verse merely provides for and considers the fluctuating circumstances and human weaknesses. In conclusion, the first verse is effective and acts as the maximum proportion, just as the second verse is also effective and acts as the minimum proportion. As such, if a believer encounters three disbelievers and flees, he neither is a cowardly deserter, nor blamed for flight in that case. However, if he faces two disbelievers and flees, he is a deserter because the lowest ratio is that a believer can overcome two disbelievers. This proportion oscillates between one to two and one to ten according to the believer’s patience and physical prowess among other factors which may give support to one side over the other.

Naturally, we know that a strong person may become weak and the patience may fade away when people change quickly. Furthermore, as numbers of believers increase, it becomes possible for them to rely on their collective strength. However, when they are a few, each one of them exerts his utmost strength and energy in battle to defend his beliefs. Allah, the Lawgiver, does

not make decrees so He can heap unbearable burdens upon the believers; rather, He makes laws for them to lighten their burdens. For example, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* made it permissible to break the obligatory fast during *Ramadan* if a person is sick or travelling.

Similarly, the True Lord *the Exalted* provides rules for shortened prayers during travel. Allah knows that human souls have their points of weakness which sometimes make impossible to carry out all Divine Commands. In this circumstance, Allah Himself lightens the believers' burdens rather than leaving them to lighten their own burdens as may appear proper to us. Some people argue that modern life does not allow the effective implementation of these rules and commandments; we cannot observe them. They even present the Quranic verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear...' (*al-Baqara*: 286) as evidence. In reply, we say that you misunderstood the meaning of 'what any human being is well able to bear'. People should measure their strength based on what Allah has commanded them to do rather than measuring the Divine Commandments against their assessment of strength. If Allah has commanded it, then His command is an assurance that it lies within human ability. Do not say to yourself, 'I will gauge my ability to comply first and then contemplate whether the command lies within the scope of my ability'. You should first contemplate whether you have been commanded to do something. If Allah has commanded it, then it lies within your power to carry it out; Allah does not burden a human being with more than they can bear; He does not command a human being to do something without first providing enough strength for it. Do not subordinate the Divine Commands to your presupposed level of strength; rather measure your abilities according to what you have been commanded to do.

The True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'Now, Allah, for the time being, has lightened your burden, for He knows that you are weak....' (*al-Anfal*: 66) It is Allah *Glorified is He* who has lightened your burden by alleviating your hardships. A person can say that something is light or heavy, but do you know how people can weigh or measure the burden they endure in picking up some objects? If you pick up a pen, you may say, 'It is light' but if you pick up a large slab of stone, you say, 'It is heavy'. How did you gauge their weight?

Was it by sight alone? No. You may distinguish between the weights of two bags of similar dimensions when you see one full of iron and the other of lighter items. You cannot weigh things by the senses of hearing, smelling or touching, e.g., you cannot tell if something is light or heavy simply by touching it. All the five senses are incapable of perceiving the heaviness or lightness of an object. By what means do we then measure it? Scientists of kinesiology have finally concluded that weight perception has its own sense associated with muscles—the sense of muscles. When there is some weight straining a person's muscles, it is heavy, which differs perceptibly from a weight that does not greatly tire the muscles or require much exertion—a weight like that is light. Thus, we have some means of perception, which we had not identified in the past but modern science has discovered it.

For example, you might grasp a piece of cloth between fingers and say, ‘This cloth is thick or thin and light’. What is the sense of perception that tells you this? It is the perception of proximity and width. Your fingers may be slightly apart from each other when grasping the thick cloth and slightly closer to the thin cloth. The distance may be as slight as a millimetre or less which you cannot measure by sight alone. However, you can feel it between your fingers. Now, you must not assess matters purely by numbers and think that victory lies in numbers. In that case, you distance yourself from Allah and delude yourself with false senses. Truly, the victory comes from Allah and belongs to Allah *the Exalted*. Why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not say, ‘Allah knows that you are weak, so He has lightened your burden’ instead of the reverse order, ‘Allah has lightened your burden, for He knows that you are weak’ (*al-Anfal*: 66)? Simply, Allah *the Exalted* puts more emphasis on the reduction granted more than on its reasons, even though the lightening of burdens may spring from several reasons, of which the everlasting characteristic of the Divine Law. Allah *the Exalted* provides the maximum limit as well as the minimum limit for the fluctuating powers, certainties of faith and love of worldly desires that differ from the early Muslim generations to the following generations. It also considers the temptations and domestic chaos that changed from the age of prophecy and became widespread in our age.

Concluding this verse, the Lord *the Most High* says, ‘for Allah is with those who are patient in adversity.’ (*al-Anfal*: 66) Suppose you said to a

friend, 'So-and-so travelled to the Arab Gulf States with only five dollars in their pocket.' When your friend expresses astonishment and asks, 'How could he do that with such a small amount?' You answer, 'Oh, he has a millionaire friend with him.' Your friend's astonishment fades away. Again, if it is said that an old man went up mountains to quarry some stone, you would ask, 'How is that possible?' In response, it is told that a strong person went with him. So, you feel it is all right. When the weak is in the company of the strong or the poor in the company of the rich, it creates a kind of transference. The strong supports the weak, the rich provides for the poor and the knowledgeable guides the ignorant. Their coupling lends some strength from the superior ones to the weak ones.

Here, Allah *the Exalted* clearly tells the believers: your human strength and ability to keep patient are limited, so do not attempt to make do with this limited strength in isolation from the Limitless Divine Power. Be patient because Allah *the Exalted* is with those who are patient; Allah *the Most High* is with you all. He will support you with His Strength such that no other power will be able to overcome or force you into submission. This brings us to an opportune moment to talk about the story of the cave. During the Muslim emigration to Medina, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* went into a cave to hide. However, the disbelievers chased them to the very entrance of the cave. What did Abu Bakr say to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*? He said, 'If they but look below their feet, they will see us.' This was, of course, a form of logical thinking. In response, what did the Prophet say to calm Abu Bakr? He said, 'What do think you of two persons whose third is Allah?' What is the rationale here? The Prophet was essentially saying that so long as Allah is with you, fear no one as no human sight can discover you in the presence of His Providence. Like the previous verse, this verse talks about battles and victory. Winning battles usually implies the seizure of spoils of war. The spoils taken at the Battle of Badr included movable objects which were divinely decided to set one fifth thereof to Allah and His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in addition to the prisoners of war. In the Battle of Badr, seventy men of Quraysh were killed and another seventy were taken as prisoners of war. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* consulted his Companions on this

matter⁽¹⁾ saying: ‘What is your opinion regarding these prisoners? Truly, Allah has put them under your grasp. Meanwhile, they were your brothers until recently.’ Abu Bakr, *Allah be pleased with him*, said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, they are your people; Allah made you triumphant over them. Let them survive; they are our brothers, our uncles, and our clansmen. I say that you ransom them and whatever we earn from them will add to our strength against the disbelievers. Perhaps Allah will guide them to Islam and they become allies to you.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘What is your opinion, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab?’ ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, these people have expelled you, fought against you and denied the truth of your message. I am not of the opinion of Abu Bakr. Rather, I think you should let me have so-and-so (a relative of ‘Umar) to kill him and let ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* have ‘Aqeel (his brother) to kill him and give Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* his brother for the same reason. As such, Allah may know that we bear no affinity in our hearts for the idolaters. They are the most courageous leaders and prestigious elites of Quraysh, so kill them. I do not think it is proper to take them prisoners; we are just a new-built diverse community.’ Expressing his opinion, ‘Abdullah ibn Rawaha *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I see a valley full of wood for kindling. Let us light a fire to kill the captives in flames.’ Al-‘Abbas, who was hearing nearby, said, ‘Then, you break your ties of kinship.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* followed the opinion of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and said, ‘Truly, Allah softens hearts of some people until they are softer than milk⁽²⁾ and hardens some hearts until they are harder than stones. Like the angel Michael *peace be upon him* Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* comes with mercy and compassion. He is also like Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who said, ‘Hence, he who follows me [in this my faith] is truly of me. Yet, whoever disobeys me, You are, verily, Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy!’ (*Ibrahim*: 36) Abu Bakr is also following the example, of ‘Isa (Jesus)—son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him* who said, ‘If You cause them to suffer, verily, they are your servants and if You forgive them, verily

(1) *Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad, (Hadith numbers: 3632-3634) with various wordings*

(2) *Al-Waqidi has related these words as ‘Softer than butter’ (Waqidi, v.1 pg. 110).*

You alone are Almighty, Wise!’ (*al-Ma‘ida*: 118) You, O `Umar, are like the angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who brings sorrow and retribution upon the enemies of Allah and like Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* who said, ‘O my Lord! Leave not on earth any of those who deny the truth’ (*Nuh*: 26) and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who said, ‘O our Lord! Wipe out their riches and harden their hearts so that they may not attain to faith ere they see the grievous suffering [that awaits them]!’ (*Yunus*: 88) If you both agree on one opinion, I will not depart your opinion. O Muslims, you are impoverished, so none of the prisoners shall be released freely; they either pay ransom or suffer execution.’ The prisoners had several wealthy relatives. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had consulted the companions before the Battle of Badr. When he chose the position of the Muslim army, Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir ibn Al- Jamuh⁽¹⁾ *Allah be pleased with him* approached him and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, are these locations places that Allah has revealed to you in order that we station ourselves here and only here, or is it only a matter of opinion, warfare and strategy?’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘It is merely a matter of opinion, warfare, and strategy.’ So Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir *Allah be pleased with him* advised him to change the position to have the water sources behind them, so they could drink freely instead of letting the disbelievers have access to them. If, however, the position was divinely decided, none would dare to speak up against it, for Allah possesses the Absolute Knowledge. We are merely human beings with limited understanding while Allah has the infinite Omniscience. In the issue of taking prisoners, there was no law sent down by Allah to regulate it. Thus, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* consulted his Companions. `Umar ibn Al-Khattab and `Abdullah ibn Rawaha *Allah be pleased with them* expressed similar strict opinions while Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* expressed an opposing kind view. Finally, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke to them and summed up their opinions— the opinion of clemency led by Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and that of punishment led by `Umar ibn Al-Khattab

(1) The story of the advice of Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir ibn Al-Jamuh *Allah be pleased with him* on the day of the Battle of Badr

Allah be pleased with him. Eventually, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* preferred the opinion of taking ransoms from the captives and made the ransom of each captive between one and four thousand *dirhams*. Al-`Abbas, the Prophet's uncle was one of them. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* heard his uncle moaning in bonds. He said, 'Release him from his shackles.' Some people understood it as a sign of the Prophet favouring his uncle, although in actuality, it was a repayment for the kindness that Al-`Abbas did for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Pledge of `Aqabah when a delegation from Medina visited Al-`Aqaba to declare their Islam and pledges of allegiance to the Prophet. Al-`Abbas attended that meeting. And he was the first to speak, even though he was still a disbeliever.

Al-`Abbas addressed them saying, 'O people of Al-Khazraj—the Arab called the citizens of Medina 'Al-Khazraj' from the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj alike—You know that Muhammad is living in honour and safety in his own birthplace and his clan had so far protected him from our tribal men's persecution, even if we share the same view about his message. Now, he desires to join you in Medina, so if you expect to be loyal to him, keep your words, and protect him from enemies, then take him to Medina. However, if you will surrender him to enemies and leave him in a lurch, it is better for you to leave him here now; he is among the best and most precious people.'⁽¹⁾ Al-`Abbas had taken an admirable stance that could only be repaid in kindness. However, he was a disbeliever, his disbelief did not interfere with his affectionate inclination to protect the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* rewarded Al-`Abbas for his kindness. The Islamic principle on this issue is clear as the True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'And when you are greeted with a greeting [of peace], answer with an even better greeting, or [at least] with the like thereof....' (*an-Nisa*': 86)

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not favour his uncle but paid him his right. The Prophet said to him, 'O Al-`Abbas, ransom yourself and your nephews `Aqeel ibn Abu Taleb and Nufal ibn Al-Harith and your friend `Uqabah ibn `Amr ibn Jahdam—the brother of Banu Al-Harith ibn

(1) *Sirat Ibn Hisham, (Al-Anwar Al-Muhamadiyya edition), 2:44*

Fahr, for you are a rich man.' Al-'Abbas replied, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am a Muslim but the disbelievers forced me to fight against you.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If you say the truth, Allah knows of your Islam and will reward you for it, but apparently, you fought against us, so ransom yourself.' Now, Muslims had taken twenty ounces of gold from Al-'Abbas as spoils of war in the Battle of Badr, so he said, 'O Messenger of Allah, count this sum as part of my ransom.' In reply, the Prophet said, 'Nay, that is something taken from you and given to us by Allah *the Exalted*.' Al-'Abbas said, 'I do not have any money; you force me to beseech Quraysh for support.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* laughed and said, 'Then, what about the money you secretly left with your wife Umm Al-Fadl Bint Al-Harith before leaving Mecca? You said to her, 'If I am killed on this journey, distribute the money to Fadl, 'Abdullah, Qutham, and 'Ubaydullah in such and such manner!' Upon hearing this, Al-'Abbas said, 'True, by Allah no one knew about that but she and I. I know now that you are the Messenger of Allah.' Al-'Abbas ransomed himself for four thousand dirhams and ransomed his nephews and friend for a thousand each.⁽¹⁾ As far as the financial assessment is concerned, Al-'Abbas paid the ransom fourfold. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* also had his son-in-law Abu Al-'As⁽²⁾ ibn Al-Rabee' among the prisoners.⁽³⁾ He was the husband of the Prophet's daughter—Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her*.⁽⁴⁾ Khirash ibn As-Simma captured him at Badr. When the people of Quraysh sent the ransoms to release their prisoners, Zaynab sent money for the release of Abu Al-'As and his brother 'Amr ibn Al-Rabee'. Along with the money, she sent her own necklace—a gift she had from her mother Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* upon her marriage. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw the necklace, he was deeply moved and said, 'If you all see it alright to release her captive and return her money, do it.' In response, the companions said, 'It is alright, O Messenger of Allah.' They released Abu Al-'As and returned her money.

(1) *Al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir with somewhat different wordings*

(2) *At-Tabari has his name listed as Abu Al-'Asi*.

(3) *See the Hadith collections of Abu Dawud (1:267); At-Tabari (2:290); Ibn Hisham (pp.306-308).*

(4) The story of the necklace of Zaynab, the daughter of the Prophet, when she sent her necklace to free Abu Al-'As and his brother 'Amr ibn Rabee'

For his release, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* also secretly made a condition that Abu Al-`As allows his wife departure to her father in Medina. No one knew about it but the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Al-`As. When Abu Al-`As left, the Messenger of Allah sent Zayd ibn Harithah and a man from among *Al-Ansar* and said to them, ‘Await in the valley of Ya`jah until Zaynab comes across you, then accompany her and bring her to me.’ They went out one month or so after the Battle of Badr. Once Abu Al-`As arrived in Mecca, he ordered his wife to depart to her father. She immediately made preparation for the journey. Allah says:

مَا كَانَتْ لِنَبِيِّ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ أَسْرَى حَتَّى يُشَخِّنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ
تُرِيدُونَ عَرَضَ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ يُرِيدُ الْآخِرَةَ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦٧﴾

It is not right for a prophet to take captives before he has conquered the battle field. You [people] desire the transient goods of this world, but God desires the Hereafter [for you] – God is mighty and wise [67] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 67)

In Arabic, the word *asra* is the plural of *aseer* which is defined as someone who is chained and restrained so that he is squarely in the hands of the person who captured him. In Islam, prisoners of war are the only left source of slavery; the prisoner is under the control of his powerful enemy who may either kill or enslave them. Generally, when one falls to capture, the comparison is not between a free man and a slave but between killing or slavery under the then international laws.

Of course, keeping them alive is preferable and recommended that Allah *the Exalted* revealed this ruling concerning the captives to spare their lives from death. It was possible to simply allow killing them, but Allah *the Exalted* wanted to preserve life even the lives of the disbelievers. It was Allah who brought them to life and made them stewards on earth. Perhaps, they find guidance and become true believers. We know that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* condemned those who killed human beings unjustly. Some falsely slandered Islam as legitimizing slavery, whereas slavery preceded the advent of Islam; Islam did not invent or found it. It was the status-quo of the past times. The sources of slavery, just and unjust, were proliferating at times of war and peace. For example, someone, who committed a small infringement

against another and failed to compensate for it, would say, 'Take me as a slave instead'. Likewise, an insolent debtor would say, 'Take my son or my daughter as a slave.'

Evidently, the sources of slavery were many, while the only way to freedom was the emancipation by the will of masters. In other words, the sources of slavery were many and the numbers of slaves had been steadily increasing with only one way left for freedom. When Islam appeared in these circumstances, it worked seriously upon resolving the problem. Characteristically, Islam treats social problems gradually, rather than radically. First, Islam annulled all sources of slavery, excepting the legitimate warfare declared by the legitimate political leader. Taking slaves by any means other than lawful warfare was declared forbidden. Meanwhile, Islam increased the available means to freedom, making the emancipation of slaves a form of penance for numerous sins, many of which Allah *the Exalted* will not forgive except if freedom is granted. Moreover, if someone frees a slave out of faith and love for Allah, they earn a substantial reward in the Afterlife. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But he would not try to ascend the steep uphill road, and what could make you conceive what it is, that steep uphill road? [It is] the freeing of one's neck [from the burden of sin].' (*al-Balad*: 11-13) If a master of a slave has not committed any sin necessitating the emancipation of a slave and does not like to free the slave out of religious goodwill, they must treat them kindly. Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* narrates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Your slaves are as brothers/sisters to you whom Allah has placed under your control, so whoever has their brother/sister under authority should feed them from their own food and dress them the like of their own clothes. They should not make unreasonable demands of their slave but if they do, they should help their slave to carry them out.'⁽¹⁾

This noble Hadith lays down equality between slaves and masters and nullifies the imbalanced distinction between them, giving slaves full right to wear clothes and have food equal to that of their masters who shall even help them in labour. The masters should treat their slaves like brethren and call them respectfully. To distil slavery was rampant at the advent of Islam with

(1) *Ibn Hanbal, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*

many ways to get slaves or become a slave. Only one way left for freedom. Then, Islam closed all ways to slavery and while opened all doors wide for emancipation of slaves to gradually abolish slavery in its entirety. As for bondwomen, the following divine commandment was revealed, ‘But if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then have only one [wife] or from among those [bondwomen] whom you rightfully possess...’ (*an-Nisa*: 3). This verse marked an additional means to terminate slavery. When a bondwoman marries a male slave, they and their children are still slaves. However, when a freeman takes her to bed and she becomes pregnant, she becomes an unsalable mother and her offspring is free. In this way, Islam takes yet another step to do away with slavery. Meanwhile, Islam keeps the slave woman safe from licentious sexual activities that might lead her astray if she is far from home and family, while other women around her enjoy protection and amorous affections of their husbands. Normally, female passion moves in that case. So, it was made permissible for a man to have intercourse with her if their passions get the better of them. She becomes an equal wife after giving birth and, meanwhile, slavery is liquidated. Slavery has since been abolished by numerous international treaties which established the very same principles that Islam espoused such as the humane and reciprocal exchange of prisoners. This principle was first introduced by Islam, because it would have been unreasonable for my enemy to take my children as prisoners of war under his authority and expect me to release his children. Instead the principle of reciprocity says that if they are lenient, we will be too, but if they ransom their captives, so will we. The Lord even wills to limit the slavery arising from prisoners of war by saying ‘It does not behove a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on earth...’ (*al-Anfal*: 67)

We hold that there is a distinction between a command preceding an event, in which case the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would not violate it and a command coinciding with an event. One must distinguish between the two scenarios. If a command precedes the relevant event is broken, it is a transgression. However, if a command is revealed at the time of the relevant incident, it is a completely different matter. Suppose that you are sitting and someone comes to you saying, ‘Your relative has agreed to some foolish trade and is writing out a bill of exchange at this very moment, so you had better go

stop him from making a mistake'. Then, you can go and prevent his foolishness. This is like a commandment coming before its pertinent event has happened, so there is no violation of the commandment. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'It does not behove a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on earth....' (*al-Anfal: 67*) This command was revealed after the disbelievers had been taken as prisoners and transported to Medina following the Prophet's consultation with the companions and after his decision was made. The commandment came after the entire process as evidenced by the fact that Allah *the Exalted* did not order them to change the decision, even if they were still prisoners and taking ransom continued effective in accordance with the original plan.

'It does not behove a prophet to keep captives....' (*al-Anfal: 67*) This means that it is improper for a prophet to keep prisoners until he completely subdues the disbelievers in warfare. The Lord *the Exalted* discourages the believers from keeping the prisoners of war as slaves for some worldly reasons, e.g. to make them servants, or to satisfy their desire for women or make money to create a pleasant life. All that is rejected; Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the believer to make this world a foremost priority. Allah *the Exalted* wants the believers to strive and better their stewardship over the earth to establish justice to the best of their ability. Allah will reward them with eternal life in paradise. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'It does not behove a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on earth. You may desire the fleeting gains of this world – but Allah desires [for you the good of] the life to come; and Allah is Almighty, Wise.' (*al-Anfal: 67*)

Allah *Glorified is He* the Unconquerable, the Wise Who puts everything in its proper place and time, follows up on this with His saying:

لَوْلَا كُنْتُ مِنَ اللَّهِ سَبَقَ لِمَسَّكُمْ فِيمَا أَخَذْتُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٦٨﴾

and had it not been preordained by God, a severe punishment would have come upon you for what you have taken [68] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 68*)

This noble verse explains that the True Lord *the Exalted* does not hold anyone to account until after He reveals the laws and regulates the procedures

and results to define the nature of possible violations and punishments. Otherwise the believers would have suffered punishment for taking prisoners before realizing absolute victory. The True Lord *the Exalted* does not unleash His punishment unless a previously revealed command has been broken. Since this act had not been outlawed yet, there is no retribution for it. The True Lord *the Exalted* then explores the topic of the spoils of war attained after the Battle of Badr saying:

فَكُلُوا مِمَّا غَنِمْتُمْ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٦٩﴾

So enjoy in a good and lawful manner the things you have gained in war and be mindful of God: He is forgiving and merciful [69] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 69)

In other words, do not spend the spoils of war frivolously on some trite pointless things; rather, be conscious of Allah in what He has given you and the spoils of war that He has awarded you, be they money, chattels or prisoners who may be used in profitable works. Remain continuously conscious of Allah and do not fritter it away foolishly. His saying, ‘Allah is Much-Forgiving’ (*al-Anfal*: 69) means that Allah *Glorified is He* had forgiven the believers for what they did before this verse was revealed. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the prisoners saying:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُلْ لِمَن فِي أَيْدِيكُمْ مِنَ الْأَسْرَىٰ إِن يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ خَيْرًا يُؤْتِكُمْ خَيْرًا مِّمَّا أُخِذَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَغْفِرَ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

Prophet, tell those you have taken captive, ‘If God knows of any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you: God is forgiving and merciful’ [70] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 70)

In other words, if Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* truly did convert to Islam in secret as he said, Allah knows what is in his heart and will give him greater reward for what he paid. At-Tabari quoted Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* saying, ‘This verse was revealed when I told the Messenger of Allah

peace and blessings be upon him about my conversion to Islam and asked him to take my ransom from the twenty ounces of gold that had been taken from me but he refused and excused for they were seized in fight. Allah eventually requited me for that with twenty slaves, all of whom became a source of profit.⁽¹⁾ According to the narration of Ibn Kathir, Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'In place of the twenty ounces that I paid in Islam, Allah *Glorified is He* gave me twenty skilled slaves, with each of them sums of money in which he traded. Yet, I wish for Allah's Forgiveness.'⁽²⁾ As such, Allah's promise came true, 'He will give you something better than all that has been taken from you....' (*al-Anfal: 70*)

This verse came in accordance with the Prophet's decision. He *peace and blessings be upon him* had informed the prisoners that they should either pay the ransom or suffer execution. At this point, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said, 'O Messenger of Allah, exclude Sahl ibn Bayda, for I knew that he is very near to Islam.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* fell completely silent for a while. 'Never have I been so apprehensive as I was on that day, so much so that I feared that a stone might fall from the heavens and strike me down until he said, "Except for Sahl ibn Bayda."' Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* said, '...for Allah is Much Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy.' (*al-Anfal: 70*) So long as your hearts are filled with good and you believe in Allah, Allah knows the truth in your hearts and will forgive you; He is Much Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy. Once the matter had been settled, some prisoners said, 'O Messenger of Allah, we have money in Mecca. Allow us going there to send the ransom to you.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* feared lest it should be a subterfuge, so what did he do? Would he release them and trust them? Would they not harbour treachery and deceit in their hearts?

The Lord says:

(1) *At-Tabari*

(2) *Ibn Kathir*

وَإِنْ يُرِيدُوا خِيَانَتَكَ فَقَدْ خَانُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَأَمْكَنَ مِنْهُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٧١﴾

But if they mean to betray you, they have betrayed God before, and He has given you mastery over them: He is all knowing, all wise [71] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 71)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is telling His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* not to accept their claims, for they sought to deceive Allah in the past. They hide treachery in their hearts. Allah has given you mastery over them, so do not trust them; Allah *the Exalted* knows what is in their hearts. After Allah *the Exalted* had talked about the story of the Battle of Badr, the prisoners of war and the views of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions, Allah *the Exalted* explained to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the elements of the contemporary Muslim society. We know that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* initiated his call to Islam in Mecca—the seat of the Arab leadership as Quraysh dominated all Arab tribes and Arabia. They were the masters of Mecca honoured with the Holy House. During pilgrimage, each Arab tribe had regular visitors in Mecca and thus had to beseech for protection from Quraysh. No tribe ever showed hostility or attacked Quraysh because they knew that a day would come when they would be at the mercy of Quraysh during their pilgrimage to the Holy House. Quraysh won its position from the existence of the Holy House in Mecca. But for it, their territory would have been just like that of any other Arab tribe. If the Sacred House had been destroyed by Abraha, the dominance of Quraysh would have come to an end. Clearly, the True Lord *the Exalted* says in the chapter of the *Elephant*, ‘Are you not aware of how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant? Did He not utterly confound their artful planning? Thus, He let loose upon them great swarms of flying creatures, which smote them with stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained, and caused them to become like a field of grain that has been eaten down to stubble.’ (*al-Fil*: 1-5)

After that chapter telling how Allah *the Exalted* protected His House, a chapter bearing the name of *Quraysh* follows in affirmation of their authority. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So that the Quraysh might remain secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. Let them, therefore, worship the Lord of

this House, Who has given them food against hunger and made them safe from danger.' (*Quraysh*: 1-4) It was the Holy Mosque that gave Quraysh their power. That is why they could send their commercial caravans as far as Yemen and the Levant without anyone daring to touch them. If the Holy Mosque had not been in Mecca or if Quraysh had not been the masters of Mecca, they would not have enjoyed this privileged position in Arabia. The power and security of Quraysh lay in the Sacred House and their dominance lay in the fact that they could rest easy, knowing that their caravans could traverse the distance from Yemen to the Levant, and then return safely laden with goods and money. Now, when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* first made the call to Islam, he did so in Mecca in the presence of some of the most powerful and influential people in Arabia. If he had begun his call to Islam outside Mecca, among a weak tribe, certainly people would have said, 'He is merely taking advantage of their weakness and fooling them'. They would have also said, 'This tribe means to use him to gain power'. Since they are weak, they might have accepted his message not out of faith but to conquer the entire Arabian Peninsula. However, the Lord willed the birth of Islam to occur in Mecca and willed the leaders and masters of Quraysh to be the first people to receive it. So, the message was unveiled at the seat of power. Bringing forth the truth was the purpose of the message and laying that truth before the most influential people in Arabia was the reason it was revealed in Mecca. Then came the conflict between the leaders of Quraysh and Islam. They harassed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers and tried to stop the spread of Islam by all possible means and ploys.

Now, had they proved successful? Or had Islam prospered and spread from Mecca? No, the migration to Medina had to take place and then Islam spread from Medina. Islam began in the seat of power in Arabia, but it expanded and grew from a place without any power or authority associated with it. Why is that? If Islam had spread from Mecca, people would have said, 'The people of Quraysh customarily held sway over others and they just banded together under one leader to extend their dominion from Arabia to other places in the world'. Instead victory came from Medina, so that the entire world would know that faith in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* inspired his ardent followers and lead to his victories. The

devotion he inspired was not the fact that he was a member of the strongest tribe of Arabia. The True Lord *Glorified is He* categorizes the types of people who believed in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*:

- Those who emigrated— *Al-Muhajirun*
- The Helpers of Medina—*Al-Ansar*
- A third group that embraced Islam but later emigrated to Medina and joined the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.
- A fourth group that accepted Islam but remained in Mecca until the liberation of Mecca.

There are four groups: the immigrants who left to be with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to Medina; *Al-Ansar*, who welcomed them and offered them refuge; those who believed but did not migrate immediately to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who remained in Mecca until it was liberated by the Muslims.

The True Lord says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَهَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
وَالَّذِينَ ءَاوَأُوا وَنَصَرُوا أَوْلِيَاءَكَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَلَمْ يَهَاجِرُوا مَا
لَكُمْ مِنْ وَلِيَّتِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ يَهَاجِرُوا وَإِنِ اسْتَنْصَرُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ فَعَلَيْكُمْ
النَّصْرُ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ مِيثَاقٌ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا نَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٧٢﴾

Those who believed and emigrated [to Medina] and struggled for God’s cause with their possessions and persons, and those who gave refuge and help, are all allies of one another. As for those who believed but did not emigrate, you are not responsible for their protection until they have done so. But if they seek help from you against persecution, it is your duty to assist them, except against people with whom you have a treaty: God sees all that you do [72] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 72)

- The first group is *Al-Muhajirun*—the emigrants. The True Lord *the Exalted* says, ‘Those who have believed and emigrated and strived with their money and lives in the cause of Allah...’ (*al-Anfal*: 72).

- The second group is *Al-Ansar*. The True Lord *the Exalted* says, '...those who have sheltered and supported; these are the allies of one another...' (*al-Anfal*: 72). Then Allah draws a connection between these two groups saying, 'These are truly the friends and protectors of one another.' Some scholars understand Allah's saying, 'The friends and protectors of one another.' as denoting a complete alignment of the two groups insomuch that they would have the right to inherit one another when the following verse was revealed: 'And they who are [thus] closely related have the highest claim on one another in [accordance with] Allah's decree' (*al-Anfal*: 75), and the verses on inheritance were sent down and abrogated their right to inherit one another.

As such, the last-mentioned verse precluded that meaning. Other scholars said that *al-wilaya* (friendship/alliance) implies mutual support of one another backed by showing kindness and respect to one another. These are the characteristics of *al-wilaya*. There is also another verse that speaks of *Al-Ansar* in which the Lord *the Exalted* says, 'And [it shall be offered, too, unto the poor from among] those who, before them, had their abode in this realm and in faith – [those] who love all that come to them in search of refuge, and who harbour in their hearts no grudge for whatever the others may have been given, but rather give them preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot.' (*al-Hashr*: 9) We have known so much of the matchless generosity of *Al-Ansar* which reached such an unprecedented limit virtually impossible for usual human beings unless it be through the power of faith. For instance, a man who lives a somewhat luxurious life might share those blessings with friends or beloved ones.

A true friend would let you have his car, invite you to his fine house, share his clothes with you and would not begrudge you any precious thing he has. But would he give up his wife for you to marry? This is the one thing a man would begrudge his friend, and this what makes the instance we are dealing with so unique! When the Emigrants (*Al-Muhajirun*; Meccan Muslims) headed for Medina, they left behind in Mecca all they had, including their wives, so a man from the Helpers (*Al-Ansar*; Muslims of Medina) would ask a man

from the Emigrants to look at his wives and choose whoever pleased him! The Helpers were ready to divorce some of their wives for their brothers, the Emigrants, to marry! Only true, firm faith could drive a man to offer that. Faith was deeply ingrained in their hearts that it uprooted any other feeling of desire or jealousy. Men of the Helpers would not let their brothers, the Emigrants, stay without wives, while each of them had more than one wife.

Allah *Glorified is He* has described in the Quran the attributes of each group of the believers. The first group was that of the Emigrants. They were those who believed in Allah and forsook their former religion, migrated to Medina, leaving behind their homes, their homeland, their riches, their wives, their children, their crops and their livestock. They started a new life in Medina and worked to earn money to provide for themselves and spend on fighting for the cause of Allah, which they did even though they had left all their properties and money in Mecca. They readily fought against the massive army of the disbelievers at the Battle of Badr even though they were a small group that by no means exceeded three hundred Muslims; they were not confident of victory, but they aspired to martyrdom. Thus, Allah praised the Emigrants, for they were the first to believe, they emigrated, leaving everything behind for Islam, they fought in Allah's Cause with their wealth and they readily gave their lives for that cause. They were a good example for others to follow, for their sacrifices would ever encourage others to embrace faith and sacrifice for it. Whoever initiates a good practice will have his reward as well as the rewards of those who follow him- without diminishing the followers' rewards the slightest bit. The Emigrants were the first to embrace faith and fight for the cause of Allah, and they have the reward of whoever follows this blessed path.

The second group was that of the Helpers (*Al-Ansar*), or Medina's Muslims. It was they who provided refuge for the emigrants. They were the first community who offered support to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and His earlier companions. Third, they lovingly befriended the Meccan Muslims who emigrated to them. To honour the two groups, Allah has established among them the bond of alliance which manifested itself in mutual aid and mutual esteem.

Then, Allah says, '... As for those who believed but did not emigrate, you are not responsible for their protection until they have done so....' (*al-Anfal*: 72)

This noble verse speaks about the third group of the believers. They were those who have embraced Islam and cast aside their old beliefs, but did not emigrate from Mecca nor left their homes, families, and wealth. Thus, one aspect of their behaviour was praiseworthy, while the other was not in their favour. Their status was rather uncertain, so Allah revealed regarding them the aforesaid decree stated in the verse. Even though they were believers, their reluctance to migrate to Medina exempted the rest of the believers, who have emigrated, from any obligation to provide them with protection ‘...until they have done so...’ (*al-Anfal: 72*); namely, until they have migrated to Medina, too. In this verse, there is also a kind of encouragement to this group of the believers to emigrate. It is like someone saying to his son, ‘I am not giving you your pocket money until you do your homework’. This is an incentive for the child to take care of his lessons. Likewise, this verse is not meant to punish those believers or block the way to deliverance before them. Perhaps they thought that emigration was only required of the earliest group who embraced faith, so this verse was meant to clear the misconception and encourage them to take that essential step.

The Arabic for emigrate is *haajara* which shares the same root of the verb *hajara* which means abandon. The latter implies to leave one’s place of residence due to a desire to do so or inability to remain. As for *haajara* (emigrate), it denotes a conflict between two parties where one compels the other to leave his country. If the believers had not been oppressed by the disbelievers, if they had been allowed to declare their faith and practice it safely, then the emigration to Medina might never have happened. However, the harassment and oppression Muslims were made to suffer by the disbelievers lead to their departure. This reminds me of this line from a poem by Al-Mutanabbi (a renowned Arab poet):

If you part with people who do not appreciate your company,
then it is they who have chosen to part with you!

The Muslims’ emigration to Medina took place because they were forced to do so. Allah has willed to teach them that a place where they were oppressed and prevented from their right to publicly practice and call for their religion was no home and they, therefore, had to leave it.

After thus explaining to the believers they were not responsible for protecting that group who did not emigrate to Medina, Allah Almighty further

explains, ‘...but if they seek help from you against persecution, it is your duty to assist them...’ (*al-Anfal: 72*) This was meant to draw the believers’ attention to the fact that they were still their brothers even though they did not emigrate. Even though they were under no obligation to protect them, the bond of faith made it incumbent on them to assist them in case they were persecuted. However, that assistance was bound by a condition, ‘...except against people with whom you have a treaty...’ (*al-Anfal: 72*) In such a case, you are commanded, O believers, to comply with that treaty because Islam calls for respecting agreements. In case there is a covenant between you and those they seek your assistance against, you must remain within the bounds of your covenant so long as the other party also respects what you have agreed upon with them.

Allah concludes the verse by saying, ‘... Allah sees all that you do.’ (*al-Anfal: 72*) Indeed, Allah knows and sees everything that we do. He mentions all three groups of the believers in one verse to convey the message that all the believers are brothers and they all form parts of a whole.

In the following verse, Allah speaks about the other party, that of the disbelievers:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ إِلَّا تَفْعَلُوهُ تَكُنْ
فِتْنَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ وَفَسَادٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

The disbelievers support one another. If you do not do the same, there will be persecution in the land and great corruption [73] (The Quran, *al-Anfal: 73*)

The disbelievers, as we know and as this noble verse tells us, are allies and protectors of one another, so if the believers do not come together and act as a united entity, the disbelievers will come together by the bond of their disbelief and enmity to Islam and defeat the believers, hence Allah’s warning to the believers, ‘... If you do not do the same, there will be persecution in the land and great corruption.’ (*al-Anfal: 73*)

What will bring persecution and great corruption to the world? If the believers do not come together in solidarity, this will surely give a chance to the disbelievers to infiltrate them and work to abolish the Islamic identity,

generation after generation. If the Muslim community is thus fragmented, children will grow up in societies where the taint of disbelief mixes with faith, and they will be brought up with beliefs and practices alien to their religion and they will gradually be severed from the roots and essence of Islam. The inevitable result is a community of Muslims in name only where in fact they have only grown into an aimless community that has lost its identity and given itself up to worldly temptations. However, if Muslims live in solidarity, as faith commands, this will form a powerful safeguard against infiltration by their enemies who would then be too weak to do them any harm. Not only will Muslims thus protect their faith, but in being stronger, they will be able to attract others to Islam as well. The great corruption the verse mentions is inevitable when Muslims are not united, in which case their enemies become bolder and Muslims, however so many in number, will turn weak and abject. Instead of being the best community singled out for people, Muslims then will present Islam in a most unfair light by their miserable condition and deviation from the Straight Path.

In the verse, Allah says, 'The disbelievers support one another....' (*al-Anfal: 73*) In the previous verse, Allah commands the believers to be allies of one another, so is this verse a command to the disbelievers to be allies of one another, too? Definitely, it is not! The disbelievers would not even bother to recite the word of Allah, and if they do, they would not follow His commands. This is not a command to the disbelievers, but a statement of fact about them. When Almighty Allah asks the believers to be protectors of one another, this is a command that the believers are expected to willingly comply with. However, when He says that the disbelievers are protectors of one another; this is simply a declaration of the state of the disbelievers and a warning to the believers. Islam was first presented to the idolaters of Quraysh, the Jews of Medina- who were people of the Book- and in Medina too there were then Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj tribes who were disbelievers like Quraysh. Before the advent of Islam, there had been animosity between the Jews of Medina on the one hand and Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj tribes on the other hand. It never came to war since Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj depended on the Jews for money, knowledge and other benefits. The Jews had been praying for victory against the disbelievers- Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj- when the awaited Prophet of Allah

who was mentioned in their Torah finally came. They would tell Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, ‘When the Prophet of Allah comes, we will follow him and destroy you as the people of `Ad and Iram were destroyed!’ As people of the Book, the Jews thus threatened to defeat the disbelievers under the banner of faith. However, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did come, they denied the truth of his message and allied instead with the disbelievers of Quraysh. They said, as Allah quotes them in the Noble Quran, ‘... They say of the disbelievers, “They are more rightly guided than the believers.”’ (*an-Nisa*: 51) The Jews took the side of the idolaters of Quraysh, claiming they were more rightly guided than those who believed with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The disbelievers and the Jews had historically been enemies, but they entered an alliance after the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The believers, too, had to be allies and protectors of each other so they would defeat their united enemies.

This understanding refutes the claim that the word *awliya`* (allies, friends, protectors etc.) denotes a right to inheritance among the believers. Some argue that the verse means the believers are ‘heirs’ to one another. If this were the case, then the disbelievers too would have the right to inherit each other since Allah uses the same word *awliya`* to describe them as well. This is untrue and illogical, for Allah does not issue rulings to govern the lives of the disbelievers.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَهَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ ءَاوُوا وَنَصَرُوا
 أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ حَقًّا لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٧٤﴾

Those who believed and emigrated, and struggled for God’s cause, and those who gave refuge and help – they are the true believers and they will have forgiveness and generous provision [74] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 74)

Allah has already spoken of those who believed, emigrated, and struggled in His cause, as well as those who offered shelter and aid, so is this verse a redundant repetition? No. In the previous verse, Allah mentions these two groups of the believers to illustrate the juristic ruling binding them: that they

should be allies and protectors of one another. The previous verse is concerned with the command Allah gives to the believers based on their faith. In this verse, however, Allah mentions the reward they will have for serving His cause. He says, ‘...they are the true believers...’ (*al-Anfal*: 74). This is a reward they have in this worldly life: Allah praises them in the Glorious Quran for their firm faith. The expression used in the original Arabic text of the verse literally translates: *only these are the true believers*. This is a structure in the Arabic language used to confine a certain description on a certain group of people which implies that none but them have the stated description. Allah praises the Emigrants and Helpers by stating that only they are the true believers, which means whoever deviates from their way is not a true believer. This is like saying, ‘Such-and-such is the true man here’ which means others around are not true men.

After praising the believers, Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘... they will have forgiveness and generous provision.’ (*al-Anfal*: 74) This is their reward in the Hereafter. So, Allah rewards them in this life by declaring them to be the true believers and will reward them in the Afterlife by wiping out their sins and elevating them to a higher station. ‘Forgiveness’ means their bad deeds will be erased and ‘generous provision’ means their good deeds on earth will be repaid to them several folds in paradise.

So, the previous verse is intended to illustrate a command to the believers to ally and protect each other, and the second verse speaks about their reward in this world and in the Afterlife. In this world, their reward is being true believers, which is the greatest blessing Allah bestows on His servants. In the Afterlife, their rewards will be forgiveness of their sins so they will not be punished for them, and generous provision, which is several times greater than the good deeds they have done on earth. Even though they are the true believers, but no one is infallible except the prophets whom Allah has guarded against straying. The true believers do have their sins, but Allah will pardon them. They will have generous provision as well. Provision means whatever sustains and maintains a person. Some people think that the word *rizq* (provision) refers only to material things, like money, property, food, or clothes, but the meaning is far wider. *Rizq* encompasses various things, some of which are material and others nonmaterial. If Allah makes you righteous,

this is *rizq*. Virtue and knowledge are precious kinds of *rizq*. Everything that adds to a person's life is a *rizq*, a provision. In the verse, Allah describes the provision He has prepared for the believers in paradise as 'generous'. The word 'generous' describes unconditional provision. Whatever provision that comes without labour or effort is therefore generous provision. Air blows and you can breathe without having to do any work for it, and water falls on us from the sky without having to reach for it. Food is a kind of provision that requires a little bit of work since you need to plant seeds and water them; still, this remains 'generous' provision as it is not you who put the sap into the plant to make it grow, nor is it you who yield the fruits; Allah does by His Will and Grace. The benefits far outweigh the effort you make. When you pay someone their deserved wages, this is not any kind of generosity because it is his due recompense for his work. Generosity means offering without expecting or receiving anything in return. Such is the provision Allah has prepared for the true believers in paradise: whatever wish crosses the mind of anyone of its dwellers will be made true instantly before he has time to think!

Allah has decreed for everyone his provision in this life; you do not know how, when or where to expect it, but your provision knows how, when and where to find you. All are predestined by the Almighty Creator. You might work diligently to till and plant your land, yet only to have some pests strike your crop and destroy everything, leaving you without sustenance. On the other hand, you might go to some place without anything particular in mind only to meet by chance someone who concludes with you a deal that causes to bring you plenty of sustenance. What Allah has decreed for you will reach you at the appointed time and place. Almighty Allah has already determined the provisions of all His servants, so every bit of provision that is meant for you will go to you and no other. You might eat some delicious morsel of food then have an upset stomach and vomit what you have eaten, only for a bird to pass and eat what you have thrown up. The food is thus meant for the bird, not for you. You might eat some food which turns into useful nutrients that run in your blood; then, you go donate blood to someone, so that food has been decreed to go to someone besides you. This reminds me of a verse where Allah says, 'Allah presents the example of a town that was secure and at ease, with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places....' (*an-Nahl*: 112)

The verse gives the example of a town that was ungrateful to Allah even though sustenance reached it from everywhere without having to seek it out. Generally, if sustenance in this life is dependent on one's doing his part, in the Afterlife, sustenance will come to the people of paradise without any work.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ وَهَجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا مَعَكُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مِنْكُمْ وَأُولُو
 الْأَرْحَامِ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِبَعْضٍ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٥﴾

And those who came to believe afterwards, and emigrated and struggled alongside you, they are part of you, but relatives still have prior claim over one another in God's Scripture: God has full knowledge of all things [75] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 75)

This means whoever embraces Islam later, forsakes the domain of evil, and fights sincerely for Allah's Cause will also be granted forgiveness and generous provision.

In these verses, Allah describes the groups of the believers and puts each in the proper place. All those who believe belong first and foremost to Allah. Allah has given us free will in some matters, yet strips us of control over some others. In what we have the choice, a true believer chooses to do what Allah commands and avoid what He forbids. His choices are within the limits of religion and in compliance with the ordinance of Allah. The essence of faith is to believe sincerely from your heart in Allah Who has all the Attributes of Perfection and Majesty. It is to believe that He has created us and created this world for our service. We came into this world and found it already well prepared for our reception and everything in it serviceable to our needs. Allah gives us the freedom to choose in some matters, and, out of His Mercy, gives us no power or control over some others.

The heart beats without any interference on our part. Blood circulates round one's body and all the internal processes of the body take place directly under the Will and Control of Allah *Glorified is He*. We do not choose to make them function or stop at any moment. We breathe, and we fall asleep, but we do not consciously think or do anything to make such

things happen. Only the actions you take after conscious thought are those Allah has given you control over and for which He will hold you accountable. If He so willed, Allah would make us creatures with no will of their own and no freedom to choose. If He so willed, He would make all humankind believe in Him. However, Allah means to let us have the choice. Let whoever wills believe and let whoever wills disbelieve. This freedom entails responsibility: those who love and obey Allah will have their reward and those who defy Him will be given their due. A true Muslim is defined by his faith first and foremost. People have different ways of defining themselves: by their countries, family lines, wealth etc. As for a Muslim, his most essential quality is his religion; he belongs to his Lord in the first place. Faith should be his first and foremost belonging. He should be ready to leave his country, his family, and worldly possessions for the sake of religion if the situation requires such sacrifices. A true believer prefers to do what Allah commands, cost him what it may; he is ready to give his money and his life for the cause of Allah. A true believer ultimately belongs to His Lord and Creator. Those who migrated to Medina, as well as those who sheltered and aided them, give up their children and their worldly possessions out of sincere devotion to Him *the Exalted and Almighty*. The Helpers did not emigrate, but they did put every single resource they had possession of at the service of their fellow believers, the Emigrants, driven by their firm faith in Allah and love for Him. They divided their homes and riches with their brothers and even offered to give up some of their wives by divorcing them and marrying them off to those of the Emigrants who left their wives in Mecca. They did all of that sincerely for Allah's cause. They were the true believers. As for the third group of Muslims, those who embraced faith but did not emigrate, their faith was not firm yet, since they preferred to stay with their families and keep their riches to emigrating with their brothers to support Allah's cause. Allah told the Emigrants and Helpers concerning that group: '...you are not responsible for their protection...' (*al-Anfal*: 72) They were thus denied the advantage given to the believers who emigrated. Still, they retained the advantage of faith, and that is why Allah commands the other groups of the believers to help them if they asked for assistance against religious persecution.

Another group of the believers are those who embraced Islam later when there was no need for emigration. However, they believed in Allah, fought for His cause, and completely submitted to His Will, so they had the same elevated station of the early Muslims because they made religion above all other considerations. With this noble verse, Allah concludes the chapter of *al-Anfal*: ‘And those who came to believe afterwards, and emigrated and struggled alongside you, they are part of you, but relatives still have prior claim over one another in Allah’s Scripture; Allah has full knowledge of all things.’ (*al-Anfal*: 75).

Having ended our reflections on the chapter of *al-Anfal*, we move to the following.

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