

vol. { 1 }

REFLECTIONS

**EL SHA'RAWY**  
**الشحراوى**

فواطـر

المجلد { 1 }



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

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**EL SHA'RAWY**  
**الشعر اوان**

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فواطـر

Published by :



AL HOŞN RESEARCH & STUDIES CENTRE

Tel +97126265151

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Printing & Binding:

**Printing Group**

info@printinggroup.com

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ISBN: 978-9948-36-806-9

First edition 1441 H. - 2020

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إلى روح والدي،

## الشيخ زايد بن سلطان آل نهيان

- رحمه الله تعالى -

وإلى روح شقيقي،

## الشيخ أحمد بن زايد بن سلطان آل نهيان

- رحمه الله تعالى -

أهدي

ترجمة خواطر

## الشعراوي

إلى اللغة الإنجليزية بمجلداته الكاملة ونسخه الإلكترونية؛

لإثراء المكتبة الإسلامية ولإتاحة الفرصة للناطقين بغير العربية ليزدادوا علمًا بمعاني القرآن الكريم التي شُرحت باستفاضة في خواطر الشيخ الشعراوي. سائلة الله تعالى أن يكون هذا العمل صدقةً جارية في ميزان حسنات والدي وشقيقي، وأن يتغمدهما البارئ عز وجل بالرحمة والرضوان.

عفراء بنت زايد بن سلطان آل نهيان



A decorative border of grapevines with leaves and clusters of grapes surrounds the text. At the bottom, there are two larger, more detailed illustrations of grapevines with clusters of grapes.

To my late father,

**His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan**

*-may God rest his soul in peace-*

To my late brother,

**His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Bin Zayed  
Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan**

*-may God rest his soul in peace-*

I dedicate

**“Translations of EL Sha’rawy Reflections”**

into the English language in all its complete volumes together with an electronic version, with the aim of enriching the Islamic Library and to provide an opportunity to non-Arabic speaking nations to expand their knowledge of the meaning of the Noble Quran which was comprehensively explained in EL Sha’rawy Reflections. May God accept this contribution as an ongoing charity to augment the good deeds of my father and my brother and may God envelope them in His mercy and contentment.

**Afra Bint Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan**





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

**Preface**

**P**raise be to God, who praised himself in the Book, and Who opened it with praise. He says, ‘Praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds’ and made praise as a completion to giving thanks to His Grace, the last of which is the supplication of His chosen servants on the Day of Judgment, of whom he mentioned that ‘their last supplication is: praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.’ God’s Prayers and blessings be on our master Prophet Muhammad, the best of the human beings and the last guidance of heaven to earth, the owner of sacred lights, and divine blessings, whom God sent to eliminate the darkness of polytheism, and to establish firmly the lights of truth.

Further, we read in the sayings of our ancient scholars that knowledge is not in the abundance of narration; rather, it is a light from God that is cast into the hearts of those whom He chooses from among his worshippers. Imam Al-Ghazali *may God have mercy on him* narrated that "he who works according to what he was taught, God would give him knowledge of what he does not know", and He would open doors for him that would not have been opened in any other way. Perhaps it is agreed upon, and is believed true, that there is no science or knowledge more honorable than the knowledge of the Book of *God the Almighty*, the comprehension of its verses, and the knowledge of its rulings because "the people of the Quran are the special people of God." [Narrated by Ahmad and Ibn Majah]

The Holy Quran won the attention of previous and later scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims alike; great studies were written about it, and many

interpretations of its verses were written, but none of them was widely spread and circulated like the interpretation of Imam Muhammad Metwalli EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him* which is a grace God bestows on whom He wants. God harnessed for him a lot of audio, visual and readable media tools of our time, which made his interpretation heard widely by the children of the Islamic nation, and this interpretation is still broadcast in the east and west of the earth to all those who like to benefit from the divine flow that the Lord Almighty has thrown into the heart of this Honorable Sheikh.

Perhaps the reason that many of the people of Islam find in these interpretations what satisfies their hunger, and quenches their thirst for further information on Islam is the abundance of knowledge God bestowed on Sheikh EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him*, and thanks to this knowledge that he was able to infiltrate into the hearts of all people so that all the righteous people of our time unanimously considered him the Imam of his era.

Perhaps these interpretations have acquired their specificity from being the first oral interpretation, since Sheikh EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him* intentionally chose the easiest terms and the closest and most understandable meanings of the Arabic language, mixing between the eloquent Arabic and the correct colloquial so that his audiences could easily understand his thoughts free from any feelings of boredom or aversion. No strange terms or ideas are used that would hamper the continuity of understanding what is said.

Add to that what these interpretations contain of the jewels and treasures of the Arab heritage, which were represented in their inclusion of the famous Arab poetry writings, and the sayings of the righteous predecessors, and what was mentioned in these sayings which summarized many heritage books such as wisdom Arab proverbs, and prose heritage stories, and brought them close to the audience by using accurate phrases, easy and tender words, and tightly-knit sayings, all with attractive and sweet style, which made the words of EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him* familiar, easy to understand, in which the educated people find eloquence ,and the types of rhetoric and the desired arts they wish to hear, and the illiterate persons enjoy knowing the required provisions of their religion.

Therefore, there was consensus among people on the importance and usefulness of this great interpretation, and these noble Reflections. Rather, everyone says: The man has done well and benefited us, and whoever wanted more from the virtue of his knowledge finds what fulfils his wish. He *may God have mercy on him* had a new vision regarding the interpretation of the verses of God Almighty without falsely creating or following immorality, but adhering to the linguistic concepts of the old, and he did not go beyond the boundaries of the contents of the correct *Sunnah*; he was an example to be followed in moderation, and a model of intellectual renewal which everyone wished for; so all people desired to hear his words.

What gave his interpretation the blessing of publicity and spreading is that people received it through hearing, so his admirers got what they wanted to hear directly from his tongue to their ears, and they could sense his sincerity and his pure and loving heart. It was said in the past that "listening" is the blessing of knowledge, and this was a blessing with which God distinguished Sheikh EL Sha'rawy to add to his virtue. As a result of all this, God enabled the Sheikh *may God have mercy on him* to take many people back to the Book of God, to recite its verses, to study its rulings, and to understand their meanings.

The importance of this interpretation also comes from the fact that it contained many of the heritage sources announced by Sheikh EL Sha'rawy in the folds of his interpretation, and he cited the names of its authors within context; as well, it is an honest mirror of the incidents of our time, and a beneficial treatment for the temptations of our days, and a summary of experiences lived by Sheikh EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him* between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, America and Europe, where all these trips made it possible for the Sheikh to meet with many Muslim scholars and orientalists. So his testimony was drawn from the scholars of his time, and his diligence was focused on dismissing suspicions from about the Holy Quran; so there emerged from the features characteristics of his interpretation the decisive response on the doubts of atheists and the skeptics in the greatness of God's Book and its miraculous aspect.

Sheikh EL Sha'rawy expressed in his interpretations his opinion on many social, political and religious issues in his era, relying on argument and proof, and adopting objective evidence, mental logic and the transmitted evidence;

so he revealed in the folds of his speech theses containing radical solutions to the problems faced by society.

And since the need in our time is urgent to publish everything that explains the rulings of our true religion which highlights the mercy it brought to the world, wise and educated people of prudence and eloquence saw that it is of great benefit that this interpretation be conveyed to non- Arabic speaking nations so that their benefit could spread and prevail and bear fruits on the widest range. To achieve this goal, the sponsor of the project, Her Highness (Afra' bint Zayed Al Nahyan) entrusted to a group of people of thought and specialization to work on implementing this project and go, with will and determination, by the will of God Almighty.

Accordingly, the righteous scholars who were chosen for this mission established a Scientific Center specialized in the translation of sciences, headed by (His Excellency, the late Dr. Hassan Abbas Zaki, Dr. Ali Juma'a and Dr. Muhammad Badawi), who in their turn entrusted as their working team to a team of the best scholars and professors of Egyptian and Arab universities, in addition to a group of translators whose mother-tongue is English, along with their mastery of the Arabic language. The institution provided them with everything they needed such as scientific references and technical devices. Thus, God willing, and thanks to the sincere efforts made by these people, this project came to light, and spread joy and pleasure among the scholars and intellectuals.

The sponsor of the project, may God bless her, intended to spread the benefit from this project to the people of foreign nations, along with the Islamic communities who live in these nations and who are not Arabic speakers.

This project, by the Grace of God, was completed in seven years, with the participation of a scientific and administrative team consisting of (Executive Director / Mr. Muhammad 'Abdul Latif and Consultant/ Dr. Muhammad Hosni, the supervising committee, advisor Dr. 'Abdulhamid 'Abdulhay - Mr. Tamer El Gharabawy - Mrs. Nourhan Noor - Dr. 'Abdul-Karim Al-Qaddoumi - Mr. Jihad Ibrahim - Mr. Ahmed Mustafa); they have become a scientific unit capable of producing this translation and other future translations, God willing, starting with the translation of interpretations of the Holy Quran, and expanding later to translate all what benefits Muslims and humanity to spread the teachings of Islam and the mercy and cooperation it advocated,

and the progress and advancement it urged on among as many people and societies as possible.

In fact, this is the first translation of this blessed interpretation of the chapters of the Quran, as no other organization or institution has ever done it before. In our translation, we have adopted this written copy of interpretation (quoted from the oral text) which was issued by Dar Akhbar Al-Youm in Egypt, and published in twenty-seven volumes; we added to this edition the thirtieth part of the Sheikh's interpretation issued by Dar Ar-Raya, and we verified the differences between the two editions.

After the translation and review were completed, and the committee was satisfied with its latest version, it was sent to (Printing Group - Beirut), where it was reviewed and edited by the editor and translator Mahmoud said, and then it was supervised by Mr. Nasser Assi, Mr. Ali Assi and Mrs. Randa Kurdi in matters of layout, design and printing supervision. The translation came in twenty-seven volumes in a unique edition, in the best form and in a well-adorned printing style, comforting the eyes of the viewers, and delighting the readers' hearts.

May God have mercy on His Excellency Dr. / Hassan Abbas Zaki, and may He bless him for what he contributed in order to have this great work published, and may God put this good work in the scale of his good deeds on the Day of Resurrection, as he is the owner of the credit for the formation of a team of scholars and specialized researchers who carried out this work, and for forming a committee to oversee the accomplishment of the project and its quality control; this committee has achieved consistency and standardization in the terms and concepts prevalent in the translation such that their implications do not differ from one location to another; the language drafting has been reviewed until harmony between the efforts of the work team has been achieved. The committee has made strenuous efforts in checking every small and large detail in this translation, and they were all shouldered with sincere will and determination. May God give them all the best reward.

Praise be to God in this world and in the hereafter.

**Ali Gomaa**

**The Council of Senior Religious Scholars of Al-Azhar**



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

**P**raise be to God, and prayers and peace and blessings be upon our master, Messenger of God, his family, Companions, and followers.

God Almighty has blessed me to be the son of the Imam of this era regarding the interpretations and honored me to be his disciple, and Glory be to him who enabled me to serve the largest interpretation in our modern era, which is visible and heard all over the world, reaching the hearts of the masses of Muslims and moving their conscience, and with its words Allah enlightened their insights and made doors wide open before them to understand the world and religion. Muslims felt that both the written Book of God, which is the Holy Quran, and also His visible book, which is the surrounding universe around us, were created by a most capable God Who is Knowledgeable and does whatever He wants.

While the Quran is the realm of command, the universe is the realm of creation. God *the Most High* said, "except for Him creation and command, Blessed be God, Lord of the Worlds", and my father *may God Almighty rest his soul in peace* read in both the Quran and the universe in compliance with the Almighty's Will Whose order was to read twice, as in His saying, "Read! In the name of your Lord Who created: He created man from a clinging form." And then in His saying: "Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who taught by the pen".

And God has enabled me to edit that interpretation from its audible and visual image to what is suitable to be written and read, and that editing has been reviewed many times to make sure that the interpretation is identical to what was issued by my father- Imam *may God Almighty have mercy on him*; praise be to God, Who, by His grace, righteousness is done, and Who preserved for

us the sound and image, along with the written production that I hope it would be accomplished in the best way. Then came this project of translating his great interpretation into the English language, being the most widespread language, so that it would be available for every one where ever they are to benefit from, and stand as a well-trusted reference that researchers can rely on, and intellectuals all over the world read through.

Thanks to the people of goodness who contributed to the completion of this project by spending generously on its management and on the teams of translation and revision. We think that it is a highly sophisticated translation that observed the meaning and did not stop at the literal translation that may disturb it. We ask God Almighty to make it useful as He made useful its origin; He is surely able to do so.

**Sami Mutwalli EL Sha'rawy**



## **EL Sha'rawy's Handwritten Introduction**

**P**raise be to God as He taught us to praise Him; may God bless and give peace to His Mercy, the Seal of His Messengers, our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This is the harvest of my scholarly life, and the fruit of my investigative labour. I am honoured to have lived in the shade of God's Book, and to have embraced and received God's blessed abundance. I hope I have done my very best, and fulfilled my debt of gratitude. I ask God the Glorified that these reflections of mine will be a key to open the reflections of those who come after me, for the wonders of God's Book will never cease until He takes back the earth and all who dwell upon it; and only then will we find out from God what He has in store for those whom He has guided.

And God is our sufficiency, and the best to rely on.

**Mohammad Mutwalli EL Sha'rawy**



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

**Introduction**

**I**n the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds. Peace and blessings be upon our master Muhammad and upon all his Companions and his family.

My reflections on the Noble Quran do not constitute an exegesis of the Quran; they are only the felicitous notions that visit the believer's heart concerning a verse, or some verses of the Quran. If the Quran could be explained, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would have been the first person to explain it because it descended upon him, affected him, and he delivered it, knew it, acted according to it, and through him were its miracles brought forth. Yet the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sufficed himself with explaining to people as much as they required to worship, in the form of the verses of moral responsibility in the Quran which came in the form of commands and prohibitions, of 'Dos' and 'Do not's': the rulings that a person is rewarded for obeying, and punished for disobeying. These are the foundations of the worship of God *the Glorious and Exalted* which He revealed in the Noble Quran as a way of guidance for mankind's life on earth. As for the secrets of existence hidden in the Quran, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sufficed himself with mentioning what was known of

them, for regarding the level of knowledge in those times, the intellects then, could not have accepted them; and mention of those issues would have caused such argumentation that would have corrupted the cause of religion, and made the people leave their understanding of God's guidance and worship for the sake of arguing about things that they could not hope to resolve.

The Quran did not come to teach us the secrets of the universe; it came with clear laws of moral responsibility; and the secrets of existence were hidden until civilisations advanced, and the understanding of the human intellect was able to deduce them. At this point, God *the Glorious and Exalted* revealed secrets of the universe that furthered our understanding of the secrets of existence that the Quran gave us. As time moved forward, and God revealed new secrets of the universe, the Quran's miraculous nature was further revealed because God *the Glorious and Exalted* had made indications of these universal signs in His glorious Book. The indication might be to one sign, or to several; but this sign, or these signs, show us a miraculous nature the precision of which science could never reach.

The Noble Quran manifested miracles at the time of its revelation, proving that it was truly sent from God *the Glorious and Exalted* and proving the truth of the message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. The first miracle was that the Quran was the speech of God, containing provisions from God which the human soul loves and inclines to.

It addresses subtle dispositions within the soul we ourselves may not be aware of, but which are known to God *the Glorious and Exalted*, the Creator of man Who knows him best. These dispositions respond when they hear the Quran, and so the heart softens, and faith enters it. Even the disbelievers were aware of the effect of the Noble Quran on the human soul – an effect that no one could explain yet it draws the soul to the way of faith, and plants mercy in the human heart.

For this reason, the thing that the leaders of the disbelievers feared most was that their followers might hear the Quran; and they tried to prevent this in any way they could, and attacking those who recited the Quran. If this Quran were not the speech of God, in which He placed secrets that addressed subtle dispositions within the human soul, the leaders of the disbelievers would not have cared whether anyone listened to the Quran or not. But their

recognition of the effect of God's speech made them not only attempt to prevent the Quran being listened to, but also led them to recommend to one another, as the Noble Quran relates to us, not to listen to the Quran, but rather to talk frivolously about it hoping that, by doing so, they might gain the upper hand over the believers (*Fussilat: 26*).

And so we see that even the people of disbelief would not only attempt to prevent the Quran being listened to, but they would also request their followers to speak over it so that they should obscure it with their voices. They could not have resorted to such actions except out of fear of how the Quran won over the human soul to faith. The mere reciting of it would draw even the disbelieving soul to God's guidance.

Let us consider the example of the story of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* embracing Islam. He found out that his sister Fatima and her husband, his paternal cousin Sa'id ibn Zayd, had embraced Islam. He rushed to scold them, and tried to kill Sa'id ibn Zayd. When his wife Fatima tried to come between them to protect him, 'Umar *God be pleased with him* struck her, and made her bleed. When he saw the blood flowing from his sister Fatima's face, 'Umar's heart softened, and instead of violence, he responded with mercy. Stubbornness left his heart, and purity filled it, and he asked his sister for the paper of the Quran from which they had been reading. He read the beginning of the chapter of *Ta Ha*, and said, 'How beautiful and noble this speech is!' He then, hastened to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and declared his embracing of Islam. And so if stubbornness and disbelief leave a person's heart, and he listens to the Quran with purity, faith will enter his heart.

'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* had heard the Quran before this, yet he had not embraced Islam. But when he saw the blood flowing from his sister's face, and the fierce emotion in his heart was replaced with that of mercy, he accepted the Quran with a pure soul, and his heart was filled with faith, and he hastened to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and declared his embracing of Islam.

For this reason, the disbelievers tried to stir up feelings of disbelief in people's hearts so that the Quran would not enter them; for in order to accept faith, you must first cleanse your heart of disbelief.

In this way, we see that because the Noble Quran is God's speech, it has a special effect on the human soul. Even the disbelievers<sup>(1)</sup> would furtively eavesdrop on the Quran behind each other's backs, and they would say that it had sweetness, and a beauty, that at its highest it was fruitful, that at its lowest it was bountiful, that it always rose above, and nothing ever rose above it. This was the first miracle of the Noble Quran because it was the speech of God *the Most High*.

The Companions and the believers who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, when the Quran was revealed, went as far as their intellects could manage in their understanding of the secrets of the universe, and the secrets of the Noble Quran. No Companion of the Prophet ever asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about the meaning of the signs of the universe in the Quran, or about the Quran's use of language. For example, no one ever asked about '*alif-lam-mim*,' or '*ain-sin-qaf*,' or '*ha-mim*,'<sup>(2)</sup> even though the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* used to encounter many people who believed in God's Book, and also many people who disbelieved in what God revealed. Those who disbelieved wanted to disprove the Quran and make an argument against the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and against the Noble Quran. Yet even though they were people of high eloquence and articulacy, for whom language was a natural disposition and a gift, not a mere artificial product of learning, we have not heard that any of the disbelievers ever said, 'What does this '*alif-lam-mim*,' or this '*ha-mim*,' or this '*ain-sin-qaf*' mean?

How could the disbeliever pass over these apparently meaningless chapter-openings and not find anything with which he could confront the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*? This was their chance to

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(1) Like Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira

(2) These are examples of separately pronounced letters at the openings of some Quranic chapters.

make an argument. There is no doubt that the fact that the disbelievers did not capitalise on these chapter-openings, is proof that they were moved by them even if they did not believe in them. They did not find anything in them that they could use to attack the Quran or put any doubt in it. If these letters used to open the chapters had served these people's purposes, they would have said so, and made it known openly.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* upon whom the Quran was sent down, explained everything related to the responsibilities of faith, and left everything else to the coming generations. Time goes by, and God reveals to His servants whatever secrets of His signs on earth that He wills. The bestowal of the Quran comes commensurate with the level of the intellect. Why is this? It is because the messages that preceded Islam were bound to specific times and places whilst the Noble Quran will last until the Day of Resurrection. Because of this, it must offer a miracle to every generation so that the Quran remains a miracle in all times.

The revealed Quran challenged the Arabs linguistically and rhetorically, but as it is a religion for all people, it had also to challenge the non-Arabs with respect to their fields of distinction. Therefore, it was revealed as a challenge also to non-Arabs when it was sent down. For example, a war had taken place between the Persians and the Byzantines during the era of the Quran revelation, and the Persians and Byzantines could be considered comparable to the United States of America and the Soviet Union in modern times. They were the two mightiest and strongest nations- the super powers of that time. War broke out between them, and the Byzantines were defeated, and the Quran came down with God Almighty's words registering that the Byzantines had been defeated in the lands close-by, and stating that they, notwithstanding their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years, and with God rests all power of decision, first and last. And on that day the believers will have cause to rejoice (*ar-Rum*: 1-4). If this Quran were the invention of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, what would make him delve into such an issue? No one asked him to become involved in it. How could the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* have dared to

announce, with speech that would be recited as a form of worship, remaining unchanged until the Day of Resurrection, what the result of a battle that would take place a few years hence would be? What would have happened to the entire religion if the war had taken place, but the Persians had triumphed again, or if the war had not taken place at all, but the two sides had made peace? The entire religion would have come to pieces. But it was God *the Most High* Who was speaking, and He was the Agent, and this verse became a miracle for the non-Arabs to ponder when the Quran was revealed: The war indeed took place, and the Byzantines triumphed, just as the Noble Quran had foretold.

The Quran was not revealed as a miracle for a limited period of time. Rather, it is a miracle that will last until the coming of the Hour (the end of time). The Quran is God's speech, and the universe is God's creation. For this reason, the Quran came to give miracles to every generation with respect to their field of distinction. If we consider the scientific discoveries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (which have become scientific facts), we find that the Noble Quran miraculously and amazingly alluded to them in a way in which the expressions used did not conflict with the intellectual level of the time in which it was revealed, and nor did they contradict scientific findings after science developed, and God's secrets were discovered on earth. No one is capable of such an astounding miracle except God *the Most High*. For example, read the words of the True Lord saying that He has spread the earth wide, and that He has set firm mountains upon it, and that He caused it to bring forth plants of all beautiful kinds (*Qaf*: 7).

The meaning of the Arabic word *madda* used in the verse above is 'to spread'. When God *the Most High* said in the Quran that He has spread the earth wide, this presented no problem to the intellects at the time of its revelation because the people could see that the earth was spread out. But science then progressed, and people discovered that the earth was a sphere, and mankind ventured into outer space and saw the earth in its spherical form. Here, some people perceived that there is a conflict between the Noble Quran and science. To them, we say, Did God *the Most High* say which earth it was that was spread out? He did not; He said 'the earth' in its absolute



sense, i.e. in every place on earth, you see the earth spread out before you. If you go to the North Pole, you will see it spread out. If you go to the South Pole, you will see it spread out, and on the equator, you will see it spread out. If you go from any point on earth, and keep travelling back towards this point, the earth in front of you will always be spread out. It is not possible for this to happen unless the earth is spherical. If the earth were a triangle, a square, a hexagon, or any other geometric shape, you would come to an edge beyond which is nothing. But in order for the earth to be spread out before you everywhere you go, it must be spherical.

This miraculous nature was in agreement with the intellectual capacity of the time in which the Noble Quran was revealed. When science develops, and it discovers a fact that people did not previously believe in, you find that the verses of the Quran are in an amazing agreement with this new scientific fact. No one but God *the Most High* could do this.

If the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had demonstrated these signs of the universe in a way that was not appropriate to people's intellectual capacity at the time the Quran was revealed, people might have abandoned the essentials of the religion for the sake of debating the secrets of the universe that the intellect cannot uncover or comprehend. However, the True Lord *the Most High* left things in the universe to awaken the intellect to scientific endeavour so that every time science progresses, a link is found between God's signs in the universe and His signs in the Noble Quran. If the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had explained the realities of the Quran when it was revealed, the Quran would have become fixed because none of us would be able to explain it after the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had explained it, and so the Quran's offerings would have been frozen in the time of the revelation. However, when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* refrained from explaining everything, he left the opportunity for the Quran to keep on giving again and again until the rising of the Hour. In this way, withholding became absolute bestowal – and this is another of the Noble Quran's miracles.

When we hear the word 'Quran,' we understand that it is recited or read. The term Quran is the gerund form of the Arabic verb *qara'a*, 'to recite' or

'to read,' just as *ghufrān* 'forgiveness' is the gerund of *ghafara* 'to forgive'. But after the revelation of the Noble Quran, the word Quran became the proper name for the speech that was inspired by God *the Most High* to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with the purpose of giving a challenge. God *the Most High* also called it a Book. So it is the Quran if we consider it as recited and read, and it is the Book if we consider it as written. Recitation requires memorisation, whilst writing does not. When a person reads from a book, he does not need to memorise it. Therefore, the Quran has two means of being recited: It is memorised by heart, and written down. This means that you can recite or read from the Book at any time.

When the compilation of the Noble Quran was begun, no verse was written from it unless it was already recorded on a palm leaf, or a skin, or any other means of writing that existed at the time it was revealed. In addition to the verse being written down, there had to be at least two people from amongst the Companions of the Prophet who had memorised it. This applied to all verses with the exception of a single verse which was not written down in the presence of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* except by a single memoriser. Analogy and consistency would have dictated that this verse should be deleted and not written down. The verse in question states that among the believers are men who have been true to what they have vowed before God, and among them are such as have already redeemed their pledge by death, and such as yet await (its fulfilment) without having changed (their resolve) in the least (*al-Ahzab*: 23).

But look at the reflections of faith that the True Lord *the Most High* casts into the hearts of the believers in order that His way of guidance be completed: no one could be found who had memorised this verse save Khuzayma ibn Thabit *God be pleased with him*. When discussion arose as to whether or not to include it, mention was made of the statement of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Whomsoever Khuzayma testifies for, he is sufficient for him.'<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) The reference here is to the story of Khuzayma ibn Thabit Al-Ansari *God be pleased with him* witnessing of a transaction of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad, An-Nasa'i and At-Tirmidhi, who declared it to be rigorously authentic and sound.

Zayd ibn Thabit *God be pleased with him* said, ‘When we compiled the text (of the Quran), a single verse of the chapter of *al-Ahzab* that I used to hear the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* recite was missing. I could not find it with anyone save Khuzayma ibn Thabit Al-Ansari *God be pleased with him*, whose testimony the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* made equal to that of two men.’ Then he mentioned the verse.

The Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* gave Khuzayma ibn Thabit *God be pleased with him* alone the distinction of having a testimony equal to that of two men. This is the story behind this honour: The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* bought a horse from a Bedouin, and then asked him to follow him so he could pay him for it. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* walked quickly, the Bedouin slowly.

Some other men approached the Bedouin and made offers for the horse, without knowing that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had already bought it. The Bedouin called out to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘If you would, buy this horse; otherwise I will sell it,’ i.e. ‘do you want to buy this horse, or should I sell it to someone else?’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Have I not already bought it from you?’ The Bedouin replied, ‘I never sold it to you.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Indeed, I already bought it from you.’ The Bedouin said, ‘Then produce a witness!’ Khuzayma ibn Thabit *God be pleased with him* came forward and said, ‘I testify that you sold it to him’. After the people had left, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* approached Khuzayma *God be pleased with him* and said, ‘On what grounds did you testify?’ For Khuzayma *God be pleased with him* had not been present when the sale took place. Khuzayma *God be pleased with him* replied, ‘On my trust in you, O Messenger of God.’ It is as if Khuzayma was saying, shall we trust you in the revelation that you relay to us from Heaven, and not trust you in this matter? So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* made Khuzayma’s testimony equal to that of two men. So his testimony was taken as that of two, and the verse was written down and was included in the Quranic text. Consequently, Khuzayma *God be pleased with him* was known as ‘he of the double testimony’ because the

Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* declared his testimony to be equal to two<sup>(1)</sup>.

If we want to define the Quran, we must abandon human means of measurement. When people define things, they say that its size is such-and-such, and its shape is such-and-such, and so on. But in order for us to define the Noble Quran, we say that it is the Scripture beginning with God's words,

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

**'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy [1] Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds'[2]  
(The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 1-2)**

and ending with the word of God *the Most High*:

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ ﴿١﴾ مَلِكِ النَّاسِ ﴿٢﴾ إِلَهِ النَّاسِ ﴿٣﴾  
مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ ﴿٤﴾ الَّذِي يُوَسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ ﴿٥﴾  
مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ ﴿٦﴾

**'Say, I seek refuge with the Lord of men [1] the King of men [2]  
the God of men [3] from the evil of the whispering, elusive  
tempter [4] who whispers in the hearts of men [5] from among  
all jinn (demons) and men'[6] (The Quran, *an-Nas*: 1- 6)**

That is, it is from the start of the chapter of *al-Fatiha* until the end of the chapter of *an-Nas*. We first seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan before we recite any verse of the Quran, as the True Lord *the Most High* taught us to do when we read the Quran (*an-Nahl*: 98).

But the scholars wanted to make it easier for people when they defined the Noble Quran, so they said that it is God's speech which He sent down to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a challenge and a miracle to show the people God's guidance. The Quran is in agreement

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(1) *The story is recounted in Siyar A'lam An-Nubala' ('Biographies of Noble People'), 2:486. Its chain of narration is rigorously authentic.*

with the religions that came before it, but it added some things to them, and corrected what had been lost from them because it is inspiration from God. The Torah, the Gospel, and the Psalms are from God, but they carry religious guidance only. As for the Quran, it is both guidance and the miracle that proves the veracity of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Torah represented the method of Moses *peace be upon him*; his miracle was the staff. The Gospel represented the method of Jesus *peace be upon him*; his miracle was healing the blind and the leper by God's leave. So, for the previous messengers, the miracle was one thing, and the religion or method was another. The Quran, however, is distinguished by being the religion and the miracle at the same time. This is because the messages that God sent to the previous messengers were sent with the intention that they would one day be changed.

The Noble Quran, however, was revealed with the intention that it would remain until the Day of Resurrection; and so the religion had to be supported by a miracle so that anyone who followed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could say, 'Muhammad is the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and this is his miracle.' The miracles of the previous messengers, however, happened and then expired because they were physical miracles: whoever saw them believed in them, and whoever did not see them, was not intended by them because they happened to make the believers who followed that particular messenger firm. The miracle of Jesus *peace be upon him* cannot come back again now; and the staff of Moses *peace be upon him* that split the sea cannot be produced by the followers of Moses *peace be upon him* now in order that they can say 'This is his miracle.'

So each one of the messengers who came before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had a religion for guidance and a miracle to support the message, but each one of the two was separate from the other. A miracle that was the religious guidance itself is not the case in any of the messages, but in the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, it is indeed the case, and it can be recognised at any time.

With just one look at what God *the Most High* said concerning the universal phenomena of life that the human intellect has come to be able to grasp in the twentieth century, we find that the Noble Quran did allude to them; this is

because the life span of the Quranic message will last until the rising of the Hour. As long as this is the case, the Quran will remain a miracle until the rising of the Hour. This is why God *the Most High* says that He will show people His signs in the horizons and in themselves so that it will become obvious to them that this message (the Quran) is the truth (*Fussilat: 53*).

In other words, the Quran offers two kinds of miracles. The first kind is the signs in the horizons which are the signs of the universe. The second is the signs in themselves which are the signs connected to the secrets of the human body. Because of this, we can say that the signs of the universe will come in accordance with the signs of the Noble Quran, i.e. God *the Most High* placed within the Noble Quran indications about secrets of the universe and of the human body and its constitution that He might reveal to the believers or to the non-believers.

God *the Most High* revealed many signs of the universe to the believers, and great advances in science were made by the early Muslims, such as Jabir ibn Hayyan who laid the foundations of chemistry; Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who laid the foundations of medicine, astronomy and mathematics; Ibn an-Nafis who discovered the pulmonary (lesser) circulation of the blood, and described it scientifically with precision; Ibn Al-Haytham who made a great contribution to mathematics, biology and medicine and was the first to explain the makeup of the eye and how it functioned, and Abul-Qasim who excelled in surgery and other sciences.

Then, God *the Glorified* revealed some of the signs of the universe to non-believers which we see now demonstrated by the scientific advances in the western nations. This explains God's words that it will become obvious to them that this (revelation) is indeed the truth (*Fussilat: 53*), i.e. the signs of the universe will make those who reject the Noble Quran admit that it is the truth; for the believer knows that the Quran is the truth, but God will reveal to those who deny Islam signs of a miraculous nature that will show them that this religion is true. Recently, it so happened that at a conference discussing the scientific miracles of the Noble Quran, several scientists announced that they had embraced Islam.

If we want to know something about the miracle of the Quran, consider what it said about the universe, and the earth's spherical shape, and it is rotating about itself, and what occurs in the depths of the ocean, and the other things that were only discovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And if we want to know the miracle of the Quran in His statement 'within themselves' (*Fussilat*: 53), let us consider the stages of foetal development, the nerve centres in the human body, the constitution of the ears and the eyes, and the other miraculous things that no one could talk about in such detail except their Creator. This is what scientists who excelled in their fields attested to – while persisting in denying Islam and the Quran! The scientific facts that the Noble Quran alludes to, cannot be denied by anyone now because they have been confirmed to exist.

When the Quran lays down a challenge, it cannot bring a miracle that we creatures know nothing about. You do not challenge a disabled person to a race, or a weak old man to a weightlifting contest; if you lay down a challenge, you must challenge people in that in which they excel.

For this reason, we said that the Quran came to challenge the Arabs with its miraculous style and language; and this was a testimony to the Arabs that they excelled in the field of language. And when the Quran defeated them, and incapacitated them, this was the true challenge. When you want to challenge somebody, challenge him in what he excels in and has mastery over him. For this reason, the Arabs had to have had a natural mastery over language and sound and the distinctive use of language had to be well known to them in their poetry, prose, and oratory.

When the Noble Quran came to challenge the non-Arabs, it challenged them in relation to the signs of the universe and creation; and so we find, for example, the word of the True Lord *the Glorified* about the denizens of hell. God *the Glorified* warns those who are bent on denying the truth of His signs that He shall, in time, cause them to suffer fire, and that whenever their skins are burnt off, He shall replace them with new skins so that they may taste suffering. Verily, God is Almighty, Wise (*an-Nisa'*: 56).

When this noble verse was revealed, it was understood to mean that every time the skin was burned away, it would be replaced. When modern

science arrived at the discovery that the nerve centres are present directly beneath the skin such that if the skin is burned away, the sensation of pain is lost, this was a new miracle for the whole world in our times. Some people want to take up science as their god instead of God. So this is the constantly renewed miraculous nature that makes the Quran an eternal miracle, and this is another proof that the Quran is from God, and that it is God's speech.

After this, we come to another miracle: the choosing of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and getting him ready for receiving the message. If we follow the life of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, we find that God *the Most High* chose him as an unlettered man who neither read nor wrote. Despite this, He vouchsafed him many miracles that all spoke of the truth of his message. The first of them is that it was known that he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not have any outstanding ability in poetry or prose like Quss ibn Sa'ida or Aktham ibn Sayfi, for instance, and so his share of eloquence was ordinary, not outstanding.

Despite this, his message came challenging his people in the domain of rhetoric and language. If he *peace and blessings be upon him* were famous for poetry, prose, or oratory, they would have said that the Quran was a work of literary genius that arose from the talent that had been present in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since his youth. People's natural talents generally become clear before they are twenty years of age, or thirty if the talent is late in developing. Talents do not suddenly spring out from a person in their fortieth year of age; and no gift ever tarries until someone is forty. The people were surprised that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who never before had given a speech, or written anything, or composed any poetry, could bring up a Quran that the most eloquent of people and the most talented in the art of language could not match. Where from did he bring this miraculous speech with which he challenged all mankind and jinn, when he was this age?

Some people claim that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was gifted in language, and that he hid it from people until he was forty, then, he revealed it. We say that this claim makes no sense at all because we live in a world of vicissitudes where people die before they are twenty, or thirty, or forty. Who told Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he would not



die before he was forty so that he could conceal this gift until that age? His own father died, whilst he was still in his mother's womb, and his mother died when he was a young child.

Such events occurring early in his life, could not have brought forth in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the notion that he could conceal his presumed gift from people until he reached that age; for his own parents died in his infancy.

Because of this, when the disbelievers came and asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to change the Quran, as the Noble Quran informs us, they demanded that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* bring them a discourse other than the Quran, or to make alterations in it. The Prophet was commanded to retort that it is not up to him to alter it of his own volition, and that he only follows what is revealed to him, and that he dreads, were he (thus) to disobey his Lord, the suffering (which would befall him) on the awesome Day (of Judgement) (*Yunus: 15*).

If the Quran was Muhammad's own work, he might have agreed to change it so that those who disbelieved would come to believe; but the True Lord *the Most High* told His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to answer them with a decisive proof that, had God willed it (otherwise), he would not have conveyed this Scripture to them, and nor would he have brought it to their knowledge, and to add that indeed, he has dwelt amongst them a whole lifetime before this (revelation came to him); will they not, then, use their reason? (*Yunus: 16*)

God *the Most High* commands His Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to reply to the disbelievers saying that he had lived with them for forty years before the message came, and that he had not been known amongst them for oratory, poetry, or rhetoric. If they used their minds, they would know that the Quran was not his work, but rather, it was from God. And who would have perfection ascribed to him and reject it, saying 'It is not my doing'? People try to claim for themselves the good work of others, and there are many who see people pleased by an act whose doer is unknown and so claim it for themselves. Furthermore, some people fight one another to claim good praiseworthy actions

for themselves. How often have we seen legal disputes involving different people all claiming to be responsible for some good action?

Then, there is still another matter worthy of our attention: Could the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who never read or wrote, have three different styles of language, each differing completely from the other? These three styles are: the style of the Quran, the style of the Qudsi<sup>(1)</sup> (Divine) Hadith, and the style of the Prophetic Hadith. No genius on earth, from the day it was created until our time, has had three different styles of speech each having its own nature, none of them resembling the other. How could the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* make a distinction, while speaking, between the Quran, the Qudsi Hadith, and the Prophetic Hadith, giving each of them its own distinct nature and style different from the others?

Everyone has his own distinct style and way of speaking. If you are well versed in language and literature, by simply reading something, you can identify who said it because we all have our own distinctive style. How could have the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* been able to divide his speech so that he could say, this is the Quran, and this is a Qudsi Hadith, and this is a Prophetic Hadith?

So the difference between the Quran, the Qudsi Hadith, and the Prophetic Hadith is the greatest evidence that the Quran and the Qudsi Hadith are not from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; everyone's personal style of speaking is distinctive. It is also not possible for a person to react to life's events and write every time in a completely different style from the last one, or to write in one style today, and in another tomorrow, and still in another the day after, and then, return to the first one. If we listen to someone reciting the Quran, we will instantly recognise it as Quran; and if he recites a Qudsi Hadith, we will recognise it as a Qudsi Hadith; and if he quotes a Prophetic Hadith, we will recognise it as a Prophetic Hadith. Every one of us has one personal way of speaking only, and if we try to change it, it will overcome us. The great stylistic differences between the Quran, the Qudsi

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(1) A Qudsi Hadith can be defined as a statement the meaning of which is inspired by God *the Most High* while its wording is by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Hadith, and the Prophetic Hadith constitute the greatest evidence of the veracity of Muhammad's message.

The disbelievers were at a loss what to do, finding no flaw that they could exploit; so what did they say? They said he was a sorcerer! The simple answer to this is that a bewitched person has no will against the sorcerer so that he can protect himself from the sorcery; the sorcerer bewitches him openly against his will. If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were a sorcerer, why did he not bewitch you, too, so that you would believe in him? How did you protect yourselves from his sorcery?

Your claim is self-defeating; it refutes itself simply because you are able to sit here and call him a sorcerer. This shows that he has not bewitched you; and if he were a real sorcerer, he would have bewitched you to follow him. They then, described him as insane. We say to them that madness is an undisciplined action having no logical order in it, meaning that you can never predict what an insane person will do next. He might sit and talk to you and the next minute strike you. You may find him crying, and the next moment he is laughing. God *the Most High* answers them swearing by the Pen and all that they write, confirming that His Messenger was not, by his Lord's grace, a madman! And that he will have a never-ending reward, for he does indeed keep to a sublime way of life (*al-Qalam*: 1-4).

God's testimony to the sublime way of life of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is something that was not in conflict with what the disbelievers themselves knew of him before the message. By their own admission, he was known for honesty, trustworthiness, and good character; and they used to call him 'the trustworthy'. They trusted him with their possessions, and with their valuables. In order to see how the disbelievers contradicted themselves, we ask of them, how could you trust an insane man with your possessions? Does this make sense? Does a person go and leave his most valuable possessions in the care of a madman? Of course, it is impossible that a madman can have an exalted character.

They also called him a poet, and a soothsayer. The Noble Quran answered this affirming that this (Quran) is indeed the (inspired) word of a noble messenger, and is not the word of a poet; and nor is it the word of a soothsayer (*al-Haqq*: 40-42).

Their accusation that he was a poet is refuted by the fact that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* never composed any poetry in his whole life. Talents do not come along suddenly; they must be refined by trial and error, just as is the case with driving a car. When a person begins driving, he must have someone with him who knows how to drive to teach him, and he will sometimes make mistakes, and sometimes will do it right until he can drive proficiently. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not gifted with the ability to produce poetry, and no one ever taught him to do so.

In answer to their accusation that he was a soothsayer, we say that people tend to forget as time goes by, and so it is said that if you want to be a liar, you should have a good memory. If we want to know the truthfulness of a certain statement by somebody, we ask this person again and again after some time has passed; if he is lying, he will give different versions of his story. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, unable to read or write. The revelation would descend upon him with verses, and he would recite them to his Companions. Then, the call to prayer would be given some hours later, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would recite in the prayer the same verses that had just been revealed to him, without changing a single letter in them. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* reminds the disbelievers that they remember but a little (*al-Haqqa*: 42) because if the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was inventing the Quran himself, he would have forgotten, altered, and mixed it up; this is because the mind cannot reproduce what it had said before down to the very letter. If you ask a person to talk about something and record what he says, and then ask him half an hour later to repeat what he said, he will not be able to produce exactly the same speech with exactly the same words in exactly the same order.

The True Lord sends His guidance to His messengers by inspiration, subtly, and His means of doing so is hidden from us because God is hidden from us. God *the Most High* affirms that it is not given to mortal man that God should speak to him except through inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills (to reveal); for, verily, He is Exalted, Wise (*ash-Shura*: 51).

This is because the human constitution, by its very nature, cannot receive information from God directly; inspiration is the giving of information in a subtle manner. As an illustration, and in order to make this nearer to understanding, we say that if, for example, you do not want to receive a burdensome guest, you work out a signal with your servant so that if he comes and tells you in front of others that so-and-so has come, you give him this signal so that he does not bring that person into the house. No one else from among those present will understand this agreed signal, or know what it means. This is what we mean by saying that inspiration is the giving of information subtly. No one is aware of it except the one who gives it and the one who receives it. As long as inspiration means to give information subtly, it requires someone to inspire, and someone to be inspired, and something with which to inspire him.

The Quran states that God *the Most High* gave inspiration to His messengers, and to others. He gave inspiration to the angels, and to humans like the mother of Moses *peace be upon him* and to the Disciples of Jesus *peace be upon him*, and to animals like the bee, and to the earth. There is also a kind of inspiration that Satan gives to his allies. This is ‘inspiration’ in its pure linguistic meaning; as for the definition of the term ‘inspiration’ in the Sacred Law, it means inspiration from God to His Messengers. God’s means of inspiration to Moses *peace be upon him* was to speak to him from behind a veil; the True Lord’s inspiration to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was to send the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him to him*. The angel came to him with inspiration, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would hear something like the tolling of a bell as a way of alerting him. The meeting would take place between Gabriel *peace be upon him* and the Messenger, and the chemical balance of the Messenger’s body would change. It happened once that, when the revelation came to him, his noble knee touched the knee of a Companion of his who was sitting next to him, and it felt as heavy as a mountain. If the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was riding a camel (when inspiration came to him), it would lie down or fall to the ground, and be unable to move.

Another thing that God *the Most High* wants us to notice is that there is absolutely no contradiction between the Quran and science; if it happens

that a scientific theory is put forward that is in contradiction with the Quran, we know that the Quran is the truth, and the theory must be incorrect. There are some universal truths that God *the Most High* has kept hidden from us, but this does not harm us in any way.

For example, everyone benefits from the sun, yet no one knows the exact reality of it; such is the case with other phenomena in the universe. Our ignorance of anything that God has concealed from us is not ignorance that does harm to us, and nor does it reduce the benefit we draw from the universe.

The Quran is God's speech, and it cannot possibly be approached by falsehood from its front or its back. It has conveyed God's guidance to mankind to protect their free movement in the universe. As long as a person sticks to the way of the Noble Quran in his life, he will enjoy the beauty of the universe; however, if he goes against its teachings, he will rush headlong to his own perdition. Sickness and disease arose in societies when mankind went against divine guidance; thus, the True Lord *the Most High* says that He sends down of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy (*al-Isra'*: 82).

Why did God mention cure before mercy? It is because mercy protects people from any evil that is to come; but there must first be healing. When the Quran was revealed, disease and sickness filled societies: tyranny, human rights violations, slavery, and other societal diseases. Islam came first to cure these diseases if its guidance was followed; and after this came mercy to prevent these sicknesses from returning. When God's guidance is not heeded, sickness and disease spread; if you return to the pharmacy of the Quran and take its medicine, you will be cured.

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

**'I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan'**

God *the Most High* commands every believer to seek refuge in Him from the accursed Satan before they start reading the Quran (*an-Nahl*: 98), and so this seeking of refuge is the first thing a believer does when he begins to read the Noble Quran.

It is clear that this noble verse requires us to seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan before we read the Quran. This is because when a creature turns to his Creator for protection and seeks His refuge, he becomes stronger despite his weakness, and becomes victorious despite his inability. This is because when God is with you, your strength and power is above and beyond any other strength or power because you have God *the Almighty* on your side. When we read the Quran, we must purify our means of reception so that we can receive God's speech in the best way. In this state, we do not achieve this by our own power or our own strength; we do so by seeking aid from God's power and might. Why so? That is because the things that hinder a believer from following God's guidance are nothing but the works of Satan.

Satan always comes through the door where he sees the guidance in the soul is weak. If he finds a person is firm in one area, he comes to him from another. If a believer is firm in his prayer, maintaining it and offering it in its correct times, Satan comes to him through his wealth, whispering to him that he should not pay the poor-due because it will lead him to poverty, and he whispers to him that he should usurp the rights of others assuring him that he will thus become rich and secure in his future – yet, this is falsehood.

The truth of this matter is what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* told us when he said, 'No wealth is lost by (giving) charity.'<sup>(1)</sup> Charity increases wealth, and gives it blessing so that it multiplies and grows. Wealth belongs to God; it passes from hand to hand in this world, and then, one dies and leaves it behind. But Satan takes advantage of people's oblivion of this reality in order to urge them to amass unlawful wealth. If someone is upright when it comes to wealth, however, Satan comes to him through women, making a dissolute woman appear before him and allures him whispering to him until he commits adultery. If a person is strong in all of these areas, Satan makes wine tempting to him, or evil gatherings, or talebearing. The important crux of the matter is that Satan keeps searching for the weak points in a person to make him fall into sin.

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra. The rest of the Hadith is: '...and God gives the servant who forgives increasing honour; and no one lowers themselves before God, but God will raise them.'

For this reason, God *the Most High* makes seeking refuge with Him from the accursed Satan a means of strengthening your weak points so that Satan cannot approach you, whilst you read the Quran and place in your head misgivings that distract you from your reading. This is because God's Bestowal in the Noble Quran is equal for all creatures; the Quran's bestowal is equal, but every person takes it in a way commensurate with their faith. The Quran is recited, and people listen, but does everyone accept the Quran equally? The answer is: No; for God *the Most High* says that there are some people who would listen to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, but when they leave him, they will derisively ask those who have been granted knowledge about what he had said earlier. These scornors are those who follow their lusts and whose hearts God has sealed by their actions (*Muhammad: 16*).

That is, the Quran has not had any effect on them; rather, it affects the believers who listen to it attentively. This is the meaning of God's saying that if He had made the Quran in a foreign tongue, then the disbelievers would have asked why its verses had not been made plain and why it is in a foreign tongue, while it is sent to Arabs. God commands His Messenger to proclaim that the Quran is a guidance and a source of health for those who have faith, but as for those who do not have faith, they have a thickness in their ears, and to them it is a blindness; it is as if they are called upon from afar (*Fussilat: 44*).

So the Quran is for all, but the important factor here is the one who receives it, and the manner with which they receive it when it is recited to them. God *the Most High* wants us, when we read the Quran, to put a distance between Satan and ourselves before he diverts us from God's guidance and signs. We do not see Satan, but he sees us, and we do not know where he is, whilst he knows where we are, and God *the Most High* forewarns the children of Adam: they should not allow Satan to seduce them in the same way as he caused their ancestors to be driven out of the Garden and deprived them of their garment in order to make them aware of their nakedness. Indeed, he and his followers have sight of the children of Adam whence they cannot see them. Indeed, God has made the devils tutelars of those who do not have faith (*al-A'raf: 27*).



Therefore, we must seek the help of a power that has the ability to overcome Satan and destroy him. God *the Most High* requires us to seek His protection because He is the One able to protect us and purify our hearts and souls from demonic insinuations, thereby enhancing the way we receive the Quran; for if you purify your soul to receive the Quran, its noble verses will touch your heart and your soul, and they will be your guidance and light.

God *the Most High* rendered judgement over Satan's affair, and dismissed him from His mercy and made him accursed and exiled. Satan knows that he will end up in Hell, and he believes that Adam *peace be upon him* is the cause of his fall; the truth of the matter is that the beginning of sin was Satan's refusal to obey his Lord's command to lie prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*. The Noble Quran tells us that when God asked Satan what kept him from prostrating himself when He commanded him to do so, he answered that he was better than Adam as he was created from fire whereas Adam was created from clay (*al-A'raf*: 12).

Satan's sin was the apex of disobedience because he rejected the commandment of the Commander and said that he will not obey, and he will not prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him* because he is better than him: Adam is created from clay, and he is from fire. It was as though he was not satisfied by God's judgement, and wanted to change it; and this is the ultimate sinful disobedience which made God *the Glorified* dismiss Satan from His mercy, and describe him as 'accursed' so that we would know that he would end up in hell, and that God would not forgive him.

Then, Satan began his attempts to beguile Adam *peace be upon him*. Adam lived in a garden where he was provided with all his sustenance without any need for him to strive and work. This garden contained thousands of trees which produced all kinds of fruits which were permitted for Adam and Eve to eat from as they pleased – except for one tree which God forbade for them. This tree was the beginning of all human sins. Satan began to beguile Adam and Eve into sinning. How? He tried to convince them that not eating from this tree would deprive them of some great good. The Quran tells about Satan whispering to the couple in an attempt to make them conscious of their nakedness which had been hidden from them both; and he told them that

their Lord has not forbidden them that tree but lest they become angels, or become immortals (*al-A'raf*: 20).

There was another instance of enticement: Satan whispered to Adam, promising to lead him to the tree of immortality, and to a kingdom that will never decay (*Ta Ha*: 120).

Thus, we know that Satan comes to mankind in more than one way. The first way was to insinuate that anyone who ate from this tree would become an angel, or an immortal; the second deception was to insinuate that this tree would give to whoever ate from it endless wealth as well as eternal life.

So, Satan insinuates to mankind that those things that God has made prohibited for them are good for them and that if they disobey, they will attain wealth and power. Adam and Eve ate from the tree, but they did not become immortals, and nor did they attain eternal wealth. Rather, their nakedness became apparent to them, and they realised that Satan was nothing but a liar and deceiver, and that God *the Most High*, with His Guidance, and by His Prohibitions, only wanted good for them.

But Satan comes along and embellishes the way of falsehood and makes it alluring to mankind. If Adam had judged with his intellect, he would have recognised that Satan's whisper was a lie. Satan claimed to have been showing Adam the tree of eternal life. If this tree really gave eternal life, Satan would not have asked God to keep him alive until the Day of Resurrection; rather, he would have eaten from the tree himself, and gained immortality.

But Satan took advantage of the forgetfulness of the human soul in order to misguide Adam *peace be upon him* to fall into sin – and he also takes advantage of the heedlessness of the sons of Adam. If the sons of Adam would only use their intellects, knowing that there is an ancient enmity between their father Adam and Satan, and that Satan asked God to keep him alive until the Day of Resurrection in order that he might exact revenge upon Adam and his sons by leading them into sin – if only they were aware of this, they would be on their guard; when Satan's whispering is revealed, he flees away.

Satan gained entrance into the realm of beguilement by swearing by God's might; and God is mighty; He has no need of His creatures, and those who

disbelieve do not harm Him, and those who believe do not increase his dominion in anything. The verses of the Noble Quran tell us that Satan swore by God's might that he will most certainly beguile the children of Adam all into grievous error (*Sad*: 82).

But the True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He expelled Satan from His mercy, and named him the Accursed so that we would all know that he can never enter into God's mercy.

Satan began his enticement of the children of Adam by means of going around God's might over His creatures. If God had wanted all of His creatures to be guided, Satan would not have been able to get near any of them. God *the Most High* states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down unto the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 4).

God gave mankind the right to choose; had He willed, He would have forced them to obey like all other creatures instead of giving them free will. God also commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim to people that the truth is from their Lord: Then, let him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it. For all offenders and wrongdoers God has made ready a fire whose billowing folds will encompass them from all sides; and if they beg for water, they will be given water (hot) like molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how evil a place to rest (*al-Kahf*: 29).

So God *the Most High* shows us the way of guidance and the way of disobedience, and then leaves us to choose between obedience to God and thus attaining His mercy, or disobedience to God, and thus leading to His chastisement. The True Lord did not give us this choice except for a limited period of time which is our worldly lives. When a person comes to die, his human nature and entitlements expire, and he no longer has any free will. Furthermore, God *the Glorified* also did not give us free will in all worldly matters; rather, he gave it to us only with respect to accepting or rejecting His Guidance, and choosing whether to obey or disobey.

In order for us to guard against the influence of Satan in our lives, the noble Quran explains to us how Satan plans to beguile the children of Adam

*peace be upon him*: having fallen from grace by his disobedience, he resolved to lie in ambush for the children of Adam along God's Straight Path (*al-A'raf*: 16).

In other words, Satan does not put any effort to deceive those who have already sold their souls in disobedience, going against everything with which God commands them. The soul that enjoins evil has its own devil, and does not need to be seduced or enticed because it presses its owner towards evil. Because of this, Satan does not stalk bars and brothels endeavouring to entice those who frequent them since everyone who goes to these places is already a human devil. Rather, Satan goes to places of obedience and worship, and tries his best, and uses all of his tricks, to dissuade the people there from worshipping God. For this reason, we must heed the fact that Satan did not say 'I will sit in wait for them on the crooked path;' as the crooked path follows Satan by its very nature. Satan wants to lure the people of virtue, so he can make sin seem tempting to them, and entice them with things like unlawful wealth.

The Noble Quran tells us how Satan, in his rebellion against God, gave the details of his plan to beguile the children of Adam: he will come upon them from their front, from their back, from their right, and from their left, and God will not find the greater part of them grateful (*al-A'raf*: 17).

These are, then, the directions through which Satan practises his allurements: the first is from the front, the second from behind, the third from the right, and the fourth from the left. We all know that there are six directions, not only four; so what are the two directions from which Satan does not come? They are above, and below; Satan fled from these two particular directions. He did not say 'I will come to them from above them and below them' because he knows that the higher direction represents divine loftiness and the lower direction represents human servitude when a person prostrates to God. For this reason, Satan completely avoided these two directions.

It is amazing that if you consider the calls of atheism that come out in every era, you will find that they come from the same directions as Satan does. They say 'progressive,' from the front; 'reactionary,' from behind; and 'right-wing,' on the right; and 'left-wing,' on the left. We say to them that we are not on any of these directions: we are not 'progressive,' calling for

licentiousness and wickedness; nor are we reactionary, saying ‘This is what we found our forefathers doing,’ sticking to their way irrespective of whether it was right or wrong; nor are we left-wing, denying religion and supporting disbelief; nor are we right-wing, believing in capitalism and the exploitation of people. Rather, we are the lofty Muhammadan community, and we receive all our commands from God *the Most High*. As long as all our affairs are from God *the Most High*, we will not bend to the will of our equals; rather, we bend only to the Will of God, the Sublime, and All-Mighty. If you submit to one higher than yourself, this is never shameful; rather, it is a source of honour and sublimity, as God *the Most High* says that all honour and might rest with God, and His Messenger, and those who have faith; but the hypocrites do not understand (*al-Munafiqun*: 8).

We are the lofty Muhammadan community, and we proclaim our servitude and submission to God, and we follow divine guidance. For this reason, we are distinguished from all humanity because every person in this world who does not submit to God *the Most High* and take guidance from Him, and submits instead to some form of human guidance, given to him by a human being who is equal to him in terms of humanity. The human soul has caprices that it wishes to fulfil. For this reason, it concocts a system that will lead to its being distinguished above other people, and a system that it alone will benefit from. The system might be concocted by a group or class or people: we say that their systems are for their own benefit; but God *the Most High* establishes His system of guidance for your own good, not that He can benefit from you, as He is the source of all goodness, and is not in need of what you possess, nor of what all humanity possesses. So justice, goodness, and honour are embodied in the system of divine guidance, for God does not take from you, He gives to you; and He does not debase you, but rather, He honours you.

There is something here of which we must be aware. From this loftiness, God chose an unlettered community in which to make the final connection between heaven and earth, and He chose from this community an unlettered Messenger (that is, in the pristine state his mother bore him). He did not

take education from someone equal to him; he was educated neither by East nor by West; he did not read anyone's works and hence was affected by them; and nor did he read any philosophy and so followed it. The One Who taught him was none but God *the Most High*. So, illiteracy was an honour for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* because it confirmed that everything he brought was from God *the Glorious and Exalted*. So everything that he brought was a miracle, as it was born of divine inspiration. Had the Quran been sent down to a civilised nation like the Persians or the Byzantines, or to a prophet who was not illiterate and who might have read the books of the philosophers and scholars of the East and West, it would have been said, 'The Quran was the product of the meeting of civilisations, intellectual gifts, and reformation movements, to guide people in their lives.' But no; it was an illiterate community, and an illiterate Messenger, confirming its connection to heaven; and the source of what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought had nothing to do with human beings, or education, or civilisation, and was not the product of human intellect; it was from the True Lord *the Most High* in order that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the Unlettered Messenger, would become a teacher for all humanity. In this way, we realise that Satan cannot come near to the place where prayers and good works rise upward to the sky, and nor from the place of submission and servitude to God.

Satan insisted on deceiving mankind so that he would not be the only sinner. Since he had sinned, and dismissed from God's mercy, why should he be the only sinner? Why not make everyone a sinner, too? Since Satan's sin was the refusal to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*, why not take the sons of Adam to hell with him, to take revenge on them, and on their father? Some people say, 'Satan sinned, and Adam sinned; and God *the Most High* dismissed Satan from His mercy, yet forgave Adam'. In answer to this we say that there was a difference between the two sins. The sin of Satan was at the height of sin: a point-blank rejection and refusal of a command. He said, 'No, I will not prostrate, and I will not obey because I am created of fire, whilst he is of clay'. It is as though he rejected the command of The Commander. On the other hand, Adam said, 'O Lord, Your command is the truth, and Your word is the truth, and Your guidance is the truth; but I am weak, and could

not bring myself to obey; so, forgive my weakness, Lord!’ For this reason, God *the Glorious and Exalted* established repentance for him, and taught him words by means of which He would forgive him.

So there is a difference between the two sins: one sin in which you say, ‘I will not obey because I am better than him,’ and another sin in which the servant admits his mistake, and his weakness, and turns to God seeking forgiveness and mercy. It is a fact that God *the Most High* told us in the Noble Quran that Satan is an enemy to us and that we should take him as an enemy: he calls on his followers so that they may become inmates of Hellfire (*Fatir*: 6).

Despite this forewarning, it is observed that people do not often heed the warning and take proper precautions; this is why every time we read the Quran, God *the Most High* wants us to seek refuge in Him from the accursed Satan. This is because if Satan has touched us, or overcome us in some aspect of our lives, God *the Most High* will keep him away from us when we read the Quran so that our hearts become pure, and we are kept safe from Satan and all his attempts to insinuate to us and detract us from God’s guidance.

When we seek refuge with God from the accursed Satan, we should keep in mind that the One Whose protection we are seeking is God *the Glorious and Exalted*. Now, Satan is nothing but one of God’s creatures, and so are you. It is possible that one of God’s creatures could be in battle with another of God’s creatures, and in such a case, the one with greater strength will prevail. However, if one of them adheres to his Creator, the other will not be able to harm him. If you leave yourself to Satan, you will be fighting him alone with no help. For this reason, you seek refuge in God who created you, and created Satan, and He supports you against him. And so when you find a group of believers in rivalry with a group of disbelievers, the disbelievers will never be able to defeat them if the believers remained connected to their Lord.

If they leave aside God’s guidance, however, the disbelievers will defeat them because in that situation, it will be a battle between two groups who are distant from God. When creatures are left alone to their own means, the stronger side will win. But when creatures seek the protection of their Creator,

no one will be able to harm them. Human beings are able to harm one another if both sides are distant from God. If both sides seek God's refuge, they will not fight one another to begin with.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants you, when you read the Quran, to purify your means of reception so that you can receive the Quran properly, by distancing yourself from Satan's insinuations; only then, can you receive the Quran with purity, and take everything that it can give you. If you seek God's protection from the accursed Satan, you are on God's side, and Satan can never have a way to you. The Quran tells us that on the Day of Resurrection, Satan will address those whom he had deceived telling them that God had promised them the truth, and that he had promised them, but he deceived them, and that he had no power over them except that he called upon them and they answered; therefore, they should not blame him but should blame themselves. He will also tell them that he will not be able to respond to their cries for help, nor will they be able to respond to his cries for help. Then, Satan will proclaim his rejection of what they had done before by joining him in divinity with God. A grievous suffering is in store for the unjust and wrongdoers (*Ibrahim: 22*).

Satan has no power over mankind to force them to do anything against their will, i.e. he has no power to compel. He has no power to persuade mankind to sin, which is called the 'power to convince'. Power is of two kinds: compelling people against their will, and convincing them to act willingly. Satan does not have the power to compel us to act against our will, or possesses the power to convince us to do what we do not want to do. All Satan does is whisper and insinuate, and our souls' desire causes us to follow him.

God *the Most High* wants to bar this whispering from reaching us when we read the Quran. Then, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* is the One Who created Satan, and gave him the ability to whisper to mankind – why? It is because if obedience existed without any resistance, the warmth of the enthusiasm of faith would not appear, and nor would the strength of accepting moral responsibility. When there is temptation, and enticement, yet you are firm in obedience to God, this is proof of strong faith; this is just as when you



do not know the trustworthiness of an employee, for example, until you try him by tempting him to take a bribe. If he is never exposed to this temptation, we will never be able to test his trustworthiness. However, if he is not tempted, and holds fast to his honesty and integrity, this is true trustworthiness.

God *the Most High* gave us free will because He wants His creatures to obey Him, whilst they have the ability to do the contrary, and believe in Him whilst they are able not to because this proves the purity of their love for God. Those creatures that God has chosen to compel will come to Him out of compulsion, unable to disobey; this confirms God's overwhelming power and majesty. But the True Lord *the Most High* chose to give free will to other creatures so that they come to Him out of love. This love might be for the favours God bestows in the Hereafter and for His Paradise, and God does not begrudge His servants any of this. Or, on the other hand, this love might be for God Himself (divine love). In this regard, some of the people of purity of heart have something to say about the meaning of a noble verse in the Quran. The verse indicates that God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim to all, that he is but a mortal man like all of them. It has been revealed to him that their God is the One and Only God. Hence, whoever looks forward (with hope and awe) to meeting his Lord (on Judgement Day), let him do righteous deeds, and let him not give any other creature a share in the worship of his Lord (*al-Kahf*: 110).

They say that Paradise is a creature, one of the creatures mentioned in the verse; so if you are working for the sake of God Himself, not for the bounties He bestows, you will be in God's company on the Day of Resurrection. Those who work for the sake of paradise will find it, and those who work for the sake of what is above paradise, will also find it.

If God Almighty had not created paradise or Hell, would He not still be worthy to be worshipped? Rabi'a Al-Adawiyya<sup>(1)</sup> said, 'O God, if You see that I worship you out of desire for Your Paradise, then deny me it; and if

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(1) Rabi'a Al-Adawiyya (8<sup>th</sup> century CE) was a Muslim Sufi mystic and poet, known for her poems of divine love – Ed.

You see that I worship You out of fear of Your Hell, then cast me into it; I worship You because You deserve to be worshipped.'

The True Lord *the Most High* wants you, when you read the Quran, to purify your soul for Him alone. He has knowledge of the tricks that Satan uses to penetrate the human soul, and that he whispers to you things that spoil your pristine natural faithful disposition so that the Quran will come to a natural disposition that has been spoiled, and its bounties will not be received by the human soul. But if you seek refuge in God, you seek refuge in the Creator, and no created being will dare to approach you. For this reason, you should want your means of reception to be ready to receive the pure messages and listen to God's speech – for God is the One Who is speaking, and the Quran is not the speech of the one who recites it, but is rather God's speech; and for this reason, our master Ja'far As-Sadiq *God be pleased with him*, who was the member of the descendants of the Messenger of God having most knowledge of the secrets of the Noble Quran, said about the distresses of life that afflict mankind, such as fear, worry, concern, harm, and the loss of blessings, 'I am amazed by those who have fear, and do not take refuge in God's words: Our sufficiency is God, and He is an excellent protector (*Al-Imran*: 173); for I heard God *the Most High* say after it that those who said it returned with God's favour and bounty, without having been touched by harm. (*Al-Imran*: 174). And I am amazed by those who are afflicted with harm, and do not take refuge (in the supplication of Ayyub (Job) recounted in the Quran) in God's saying: Harm has touched me; and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful ones (*al-Anbiya*': 83); for I heard God *the Most High* say after it that He answered him, and removed the harm that had befallen him (*al-Anbiya*': 84). And I am amazed by those who are afflicted with worry, and do not take refuge in (the supplication of Yunus (Jonah) recounted in the Quran) in God's saying: There is no god but You! Limitless You are in Your glory! I have been one of the wrongdoers (*al-Anbiya*': 87); because I heard God say after it that He responded to him and delivered him from (his) distress; and this is how He delivers all who have faith (*al-Anbiya*': 88). And I am amazed at someone who is plotted against, and does not take refuge (in the supplication recounted in the Quran) in God's words: I commit my case

to God; for, verily, God sees all that is in His servants' (*Ghafir*: 44); for I heard God say after it that He preserved him from the evil of their scheming (*Ghafir*: 45). As long as you are in the company of your Creator, Satan will never dare approach you.

When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was in the cave of Thawr with Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *God be pleased with him* during the journey of departure from Mecca to Medina, and the disbelievers were at the entrance to the cave, carrying the weapons, what did Abu Bakr say? He said, 'If any of them looks beneath his feet, he will surely see us.' This is a situation that only the pure of faith could be unfazed by, and so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his companion: 'What do you think of two whose third is God?' This is what the noble verse alludes to in the Quran's narrative about the incident, in relating the Prophet's comforting words to his companion: 'Grieve not: verily, God is with us' (*at-Tawba*: 40).

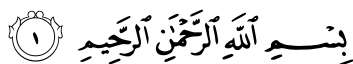
So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* were together in the company of God. But was their being in the company of God the answer to Abu Bakr's concern, 'If any of them looks beneath his feet, he will surely see us'? Yes, in fact it is, because they were in God's company; and no eye can see God, and so no eye would be able to see the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* as long as they were with God.



**The Chapter of**

***al-Fatiha***





**In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,  
the Dispenser of Mercy [1]  
(The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 1)**

**F**rom the moment it was sent down, the Noble Quran was connected with the Name of God *the Most High*. When we recite it, we start in the exact way that God *the Most High* wanted it, that is, to start with God's Name. The first words that were revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were: 'Read in the Name of your Lord Who has created' (*al-'Alaq*: 1).

This was how the revelation of the Noble Quran began to fulfil its task in the universe: with the Name of God. Now; when we read the Quran, we begin in the same way.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in the cave of Hira' when the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to him, and the first meeting between him, who was charged with carrying the revelation of the Quran, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* began with the word from the True Lord: 'Read.'

An instruction to read/recite necessitates that the person either have something memorised in his head, or that he has something written down in front of him that he can recite; but the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had not memorised anything to read, and he had nothing in front of him to read from – and even if he had a book in front of him, he was unlettered, unable to read or write.

When Gabriel said, 'Read,' the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'I am not a reciter,' for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was realistic about his abilities. The exchange was repeated three times: Gabriel *peace be upon him* would say to the Messenger, according to divine inspiration: 'Read,' and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would reply, 'I am not a reciter.' The enemies of Islam have used this event to try to throw doubt on the message by saying, 'How could it be that God told His Messenger to recite, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'I am not a reciter'?

In answer, we say that God *the Most High* was speaking according to His omnipotent power by which He merely says to a thing, 'Be!' and it is; whilst the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was speaking according to his human nature: 'I am unable to read a single word.' But it was God's power that would take up this Prophet who was unable to read and write, and turn him into a teacher for all humanity until the Day of Resurrection; for every human being is taught by another human being, but Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be taught by God *the Most High* in order that he would be a teacher for the greatest scholars of the human race who would take from him knowledge and learning. For this reason, the answer came from God *the Most High*: 'Read in the Name of your Lord Who has created' (*al-'Alaq*: 1).

In other words, God *the Most High* Who creates from nothing, will cause you to read to the people something the like of which the intellectuals of the whole world, and the civilisations of the whole world will be unable to produce. Furthermore, all that you recite whilst being the Unlettered Prophet will be a miracle not only for those who hear it directly from you but for the whole world, and not only in the time when it is revealed, but throughout the ages until the rising of the Hour. For this reason, God *the Glorious and Exalted* commanded Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to read – for his Lord is the Most Bountiful One Who has taught (man) the use of the pen (*al-'Alaq*: 3-4).

In other words, O Muhammad, what you will recite will remain as a guide to all mankind until the end of the world. And because the teacher is



God *the Most High*, He describes Himself as ‘the Most Bountiful One,’ using the Arabic superlative adjectival form (*al-akram*); for there is ‘bountiful’ (*karim*), and there is the ‘most bountiful’ (*al-akram*). When you learn from a human being, this is a sign of God’s generosity because He makes the learning easy for you by its being transmitted from a human being like you. But when God is the One Who teaches you, He is ‘Most Bountiful’ because your Lord has raised you to a high station by teaching you.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not recite the Quran because he had learned how to read; rather, he recited it by the Name of God. As long as it was by the Name of God, it does not matter whether the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* learned from a human being or he did not because the One Who taught him was God – and He taught him at a level far above that of all humanity.

We also begin reciting the Quran with the Name of God because God *the Most High* is the One Who sent it down to us and made it easy for us to know and recite. The whole matter is in the Hand of God when it comes to knowledge, power, and understanding. Let us look again at God’s Command to His Prophet to put the matter to the disbelievers that: had God willed it otherwise, he would not have conveyed this Scripture to them, and nor would He have brought it to their knowledge. Add to it that he has indeed dwelt amongst them a whole lifetime before this (revelation came to him); will they not, then, use their reason? (*Yunus*: 16)

For this reason, you read the Quran in the Name of God because He is the One Who made it easy for you in speech, revelation, and recitation. But are we required to begin only Quranic recitation with the Name of God? In fact, we are required to begin every action with the Name of God because we must respect God’s Bestowal to His creation. When we farm the land, for example, we must begin with the Name of God since we did not create the earth that we plough, or the seeds we sow, and nor did we bring down water from the sky to nourish the crops.

The farmer who takes up the hoe and plants the seeds might be the most ignorant of people with regard to the constituents of the earth, and the contents

of the seeds, and what exactly the water does to the soil to make the crops grow. All a person does is use the mind God created in him and apply its findings on the material which God created using the power that God has placed within our bodies in order to undertake the farming.

Mankind has no power to force the earth into giving up its fruits. He has neither the power to create seeds that grow into trees, nor the power to bring down water from the sky. When he begins his work with the Name of God, he is beginning with the Name of the One Who subjected the earth for him, and subjected the seed, and subjected the water, all of which he had no power to do himself, and nor did any of it fall within his capabilities. It is as though he is announcing that he is undertaking all these things in the Name of the One Who facilitated it all for him.

God *the Most High* facilitated for us the entire universe and gave us signs to show this; so do not think that you have any power or intrinsic right over this universe, and do not think that the means and rules of this universe are intrinsic. Rather, they all work under the omnipotent power of their Creator Who sets them into motion when He wills and causes them to cease when He wills.

The large camel and the enormous elephant, when tamed, might be led by a small child, obeying him; but no man is able to tame even a small snake. If we achieve this solely by our own power, the taming of a snake or a serpent should be easier because of their diminutive size. But God wanted to make them an example so that we would know that by His omnipotent power, He subjected some things for us and not others, and this is by His will. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* draws the attention of mankind to the fact that He has created for them, among all the things which His Hands have made, the domestic animals of which they are (now) masters, and that He has subjected them to men's will so that some of them they may use for riding, and of some they may eat (*Ya Sin*: 71-72).

Thus, we see that the submissiveness of these animals to us is the result of God's subjugation of them, not of our own abilities.

God causes rain to fall plentifully on a certain land; scientists say that this occurs according to the laws of nature. God shows us the inaccuracy of this

statement by bringing about periods of drought in which not a single drop of rain falls so that we know that rain does not fall according to natural law, but rather by the Will of the Creator of the universe. If it is only natural law in motion, what has caused it to cease working? The Will of the Creator, however, is above any natural law: if He wills, He makes it work, and if not, it does not. So everything in the universe is by the Name of God, for it is He Who subdues and bestows, and it is He who gives and withholds. This is true even in those things in which mankind have some free will. God states that His alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills: He grants female offspring to whomever He wills, and male offspring to whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female (to whomever He wills), and causes to be childless whomever He wills; He is all-knowing and Infinite in His Power (*ash-Shura*: 48-49).

The origin of offspring is the coupling of a male and a female; this is the natural law. But natural laws do not work without God's leave, and so sometimes men and women marry, but produce no offspring. This is because it is not the natural law that creates; it is the will of the Creator of that law: if He wills, He lets it operate, and if He wills, He prevents it from operating. God *the Most High* is not ruled by any laws; He is the One Who rules them.

Just as God *the Glorified* is capable of either making natural laws work or not, He is also capable of breaking these laws. For example, consider the story of Zechariah *peace be upon him*. He took care of Mary *peace be upon her* and brought her everything she needed; and he would come to her and find that she had provisions that he had not brought for her. He asked her – and she was a devout holy woman who kept to her prayer-niche – where she got that from (*Al-Imran*: 37).

The True Lord narrates this scene for our benefit – in spite of the fact that Mary *peace be upon her*, with her behaviour, and her devotion, and her piety, was beyond any suspicion – in order that we could know that it corrupts the universe to refrain from asking about the source of things that are not commensurate with the means of those who come to possess them. A mother might see her husband spending money in a way that is not commensurate with his salary, and might see her daughter wearing clothes that are much too expensive for her to afford. If she only asks her husband or daughter where

they got this from, society will be preserved from corruption. Corruption comes, however, when we close our eyes and ignore unlawful wealth. So how did Mary *peace be upon her* respond? She told Zechariah that it was from God Who grants sustenance to whom He wills beyond all reckoning (*Al- 'Imran: 37*).

God's Omnipotent Power is not ruled by any law. Mary *peace be upon her* alerted Zechariah to God's omnipotence, and Zechariah *peace be upon him* prayed to his Lord for a matter that could only be helped by omnipotent power. He was an elderly man, and his wife was elderly and barren, yet he wanted a son. This matter is contrary to natural law because conception can only occur in youth. If a man and woman become old, they can no longer conceive children; so what if we add to this that the woman was also barren in the first place? She did not conceive even when she and her husband were young, so, how could she conceive when she was old, as was her husband? This issue is contrary to the laws that ordinarily govern human beings; but God alone is able to bring another law contrary to it. And so He willed to give Zechariah *peace be upon him* a son, and so it came about, and Zechariah was given his son John *peace be upon him*.

So, everything in this universe exists by the Name of God, and is brought into existence by the Name of God, and by God's leave. True, the universe is governed by means, but God's will is above all means. When you begin everything with God's Name, it is as though you are making God on your side to help you. By His Mercy, God *the Glorified* taught us to begin everything with His Name because 'God' is the Name that embodies all attributes of perfection. Most actions require several attributes in order that they be performed. When you begin an action, you need God's Power, His Strength, His Aid and His Mercy. If God *the Glorified* did not tell us the name that embodied all His attributes, we would have to specify the attributes that we needed, so we would have to say, 'In the Name of God, the Strong, and in the Name of God, the All-Sustainer, and in the Name of God, the Responsive, and in the Name of God, the Fully Capable, and in the Name of God, the Bestower of benefit,' and so on, referring to all the names and attributes that we needed the aid of. But God *the Most High* made us say, 'In the Name of God,' 'In the Name of God,' 'In the Name of God,' which embodies all these attributes.

We must take a moment here to consider those who do not begin their actions in the Name of God, those who seek only material benefits in life. A non-believing person, who does not begin his actions in the Name of God, and a believing person, who begins all his actions with God on his mind both take sustenance from this world because God is Lord to all, and He gives Lordly sustenance to every creature that He has brought into life. But this world is not a person's real life; the Hereafter is the real life. Those who have only this world on their minds take their share of God's sustenance and their share of God's Bestowal in this life. Those who have God on their minds take their share of God's Bestowal in both this life and the next, and so the True Lord *the Glorified* tells us that Praise be to Him, to Whom belong all that is in the heavens and in the earth; and to Him will be due all praise in the life to come; He is the All-Wise, All Knowing (*Saba'*: 1). This is because the believer praises God for His favours in this life, and then praises Him again when He saves him from hell and suffering, and admits him into paradise in the Hereafter. Praise be to God in this life and the next!

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Every serious/important action not begun with "In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy"' is curtailed'<sup>(1)</sup>. The meaning of 'curtailed' is that it has part of it cut off, that is, it is incomplete and lacking something. This is because when you do not begin your action in the Name of God, you might be taken by self-conceit to believe that you are the one who has subdued things in the universe for your own service and benefit. When you do not begin an action with God's Name, you have no reward for it in the Hereafter because you have taken reward for it in this world, and cut off yourself from its reward in the Hereafter. If you want the reward of this world and the next, begin every action with the Name of God. Before you eat, say 'In the Name of God' because He is the One Who created this food for you and provided you with it; when you have a test in an exam, say 'In the Name of God,' and He will help you to succeed; when you enter your house, say 'In

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(1) Narrated by *As-Siyuti* in *Al-Jami' As-Saghir*, attributed to '*Abd Al-Qadir Ar-Rahawi* in *Al-'Arba'in*, on the authority of *Abu Hurayra*, with a sound chain of narration. Also narrated, with a slightly different wording, by *Ibn Kathir* in his *Tafsir*.

the Name of God' because He is the One Who provided you with this house; when you marry, say 'In the Name of God' because He is the One Who created this spouse and made them lawful for you. Every action you do, begin it with 'In the Name of God' because this action prevents you from doing something else that might incur the wrath of God *the Most High*. However, you cannot begin an action that would incur God's anger in God's Name; if you want to steal, drink wine, or do any action that incurs God's wrath, and then you remember God's Name, you will refrain from the action, and you will be ashamed to begin an action that angers God by mentioning God's Name; and in this, way all your actions will be things which God has permitted.

When we begin our recitation of God's speech with his Name, we are reading this speech because it is from God, and God is the Only Entity deserving to be worshipped by all in His universe. The meaning of 'worshipped' is that He is obeyed in all that He commands, and we do not come near anything that He forbids. It is as though you are receiving the Noble Quran along with God's Bestowal by worshipping Him, and by obeying His Commandments and Prohibitions, and this is the reason why you begin your recitation of the Quran with the Name of God, in whom you believe as Lord and Divinity; and to Whom you have vowed to obey in all that He commands and prohibits; and He Who, on account of your worship of Him, you read His Book, to act in accordance with what it contains; and He Who has created, and made, and given life, and brought death; and He to Whom belong the affairs of this life and the next; and He before Whom you will stand on the Day of Resurrection, that He might judge whether you have done well, or poorly. So the beginning is from God, and the end is to God *the Glorified*.

Some people wonder: 'How can I begin with the Name of God, when I have sinned, and done wrong?' We say that you must not be too ashamed to recite the Quran, and begin with God's Name simply because you have sinned. For this reason, God *the Most High* gave us the method of beginning our recitation of the Quran, which is that we say 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy.' God *the Most High* does not forsake the sinner, but rather opens for him the door of repentance, encourages him to enter it, and asks him to repent and return to Him, that He might forgive for

him his misdeed because God is Most Merciful and Compassionate. Do not say, 'I am ashamed to begin with God's Name because I have sinned,' for God *the Most High* wants every sinner to return to the fold of faith, and He is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy. If you ask how you can say 'In the Name of God,' when you fell into sin only yesterday, we say to you, Say 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy;' for God's mercy encompasses all the sins of His creatures, and He *the Most High* forgives all sins.

The Arabic words *rahma* (mercy), *Rahman* (Most Merciful), and *Rahim* (Dispenser of Mercy) are all etymologically related in Arabic to the word *rahim*, meaning the womb in which a foetus dwells inside its mother. This is the place where provision comes without any effort or power from the embryo, which finds everything it needs to grow ready and waiting for it. Its provision is direct from God without any toil or cost. Look at the affection and tenderness a mother shows to her child, and how she overlooks his faults, and how happy she is when he comes back to her. For this reason, the True Lord says, in a Qudsi Hadith, 'I am the Dispenser of Mercy; I created the womb, and derived for it a name from My name. Whosoever maintains its ties [of kinship], I maintain their ties; and whoever cuts himself off from it, I cut him off from Me.'<sup>(1)</sup>

God *the Most High* wants us to always remember that He cares for us, and sustains us, and opens for us the doors of repentance, one door after another. We sin, but He does not requite us for our sins, nor withhold from us His blessings, and He does not destroy us for what we have done. And so we begin the recitation of the Noble Quran with 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy,' so that we may always remember that the doors of mercy are open for us so that we raise our hands to the sky and say, 'O Lord, have mercy! Forgive us our sins and ill deeds!' In this way, the one who reads the Quran, remains connected to the doors of God's mercy, and every time he strays from God's guidance, he rushes back to it. As long as God is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy, the doors of mercy will never close.

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(1) Narrated, by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawoud, and At-Tirmidhi

The words 'Most Merciful' (*Rahman*) and 'Dispenser of Mercy' (*Rahim*) are in the Arabic grammatical intensive noun form (*sighat al-mubalagha*). Here, we have three words: *Rahim* (Merciful), *Rahman* (Most Merciful) and *Rahim* (Dispenser of Mercy). The word 'merciful' implies the attribute of mercy; the term 'most merciful' implies an intensive attribute of mercy, as does the term 'Dispenser of mercy'. God *the Most High* is the Most Merciful in this world, and the Dispenser of Mercy in the Hereafter.

God's attributes do not waver between strength and weakness; never imagine that God's attributes sometimes apply to Him a little, and sometimes a lot. Rather, they are all attributes of absolute perfection; the thing that changes is the applications of these attributes in actual happenings. God the True Lord states that He does not wrong (anyone) by as much as an atom's weight (*an-Nisa'*: 40).

This noble verse excludes any possibility that God *the Most High* could be unjust in any way. And we have another noble verse in which God *the Glorified* says that he never does the least wrong to His creatures (*Fussilat*: 46).

We notice here that the grammatical intensive noun form is used *Zhallam*, i.e. extremely unjust. Some might say that God's statement here does not deny injustice; it only denies extreme injustice, denying that He would do even an atom's weight of injustice. To those who say that, we say that you do not understand the real meaning. God does not wrong anyone: the first verse denies that God would do even the slightest injustice to any of His servants; the second verse deals not with one person, but with all His servants. Everyone is a creation of God, and if every one of them were to be afflicted with the slightest injustice, in their huge numbers, this would amount to a very gross injustice, even though individually it was small because the number afflicted would be so great. So the first verse denies that God *the Most High* would do any injustice, and the second verse also denies this, but the intensive noun form is used because of the large number of people to whom the verse applies.

After this, we come to 'Most Merciful' and 'Dispenser of Mercy'. He is the Most Merciful in this world because of the great many people whom He encompasses with His mercy. God's mercy in this world encompasses the



believer, the sinner, and the disbeliever. God gives them their life's sustenance, and does not chastise them for their sins; He provides for both those who believe in Him and those who do not; and He forgives much. So those who are encompassed by His mercy in this world include all of His creatures, regardless of whether they believe or not.

In the Hereafter, however, God is merciful to the believers alone, and the disbelievers and idolaters are excluded from His mercy. So those who are encompassed by God's mercy in the Hereafter are fewer in number than those encompassed by His mercy in this life – so why is the intensive noun form used? It is used because of the intensity of the bestowal and the eternality of this intensiveness. God's blessing in the Hereafter is much greater than in this world, and so the intensive form here pertains to the abundance of the blessing, and its eternality. So it is as though the quality of exaggeration in this world is based on the all-encompassing nature of the bestowal, whereas in the Hereafter, it is based on the special bestowal for the believers, and the abundant blessing that lasts for all eternity.

There is a difference between many scholars on whether the phrase 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy,' which is present in 113 chapters of the Noble Quran, is to be counted as one of the verses of the chapters. In other words, is the phrase counted as the first verse of every chapter, or is it only the first verse in the case of the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, after which it is considered to be a way of separating between chapters?

Scholars say that 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' is a verse from the Noble Quran only in *al-Fatiha*, but it is not a verse of every chapter. There is one chapter in the Quran that does not begin with 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy,' which is the chapter of *at-Tawba*. The phrase 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' is repeated in the 30<sup>th</sup> verse of the chapter of *an-Naml*, at the beginning of Solomon's letter to the Queen of Sheba: It is from Solomon, and it says, 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' (*an-Naml*: 30).



**Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds [2]  
the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [3]  
(The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 2-3)**

The Opening of the Book is also known as the Mother of the Book, and a Muslim's prayer is not valid without it. In every *rak'a*<sup>(1)</sup> of your prayer, you can recite a different verse from the Noble Quran from the one you recited in the last *rak'a*, and from the one you recited in your other prayers, but if you do not recite *al-Fatiha*, your prayer is invalid. For this reason, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever prays a prayer in which he does not recite the Mother of the Quran, it is deficient,' and He *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated this three times, i.e. 'it is not complete, and not valid.'<sup>(2)</sup> So the chapter of *al-Fatiha* is the Mother of the Book without which the prayer is not valid. God *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith,

I have divided the prayer into two halves between Myself and My servant; and My servant shall have what he asks for. When the servant says, 'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds' (*al-Fatiha*: 2), God says, 'My servant has praised Me.' And when he says, 'the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' (*al-Fatiha*: 3), God says, 'My servant has extolled Me.' And when he says, 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' (*al-Fatiha*: 4), God says, 'My servant has glorified Me.' And when he says, 'You alone do we worship; and to You alone do we turn for aid' (*al-Fatiha*: 5), God says, 'This is between Me and My servant; and My servant shall have what he asks for.' And when he says, 'Guide us to the straight way' (*al-Fatiha*: 6) 'the way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings, not of those who have been condemned, nor of those who go astray' (*al-Fatiha*: 7), God says, 'This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for.'<sup>(3)</sup>

(1) In Islamic prayer, a *rak'a* is a unit of prayer consisting of certain supplications, readings, and acts of devotion. The term *rak'a* originally means bowing or prostration. Islamic daily prayers comprise 2, 3, or 4 *rak'as* depending on the time of day of a specific prayer - Ed.

(2) Narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih collection*, on the authority of Abu Hurayra

(3) A Qudsi Hadith narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, Abu Dawoud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah and Ibn Hayyan on the authority of Abu Hurayra

We need be aware when we read this Qudsi Hadith that God says, ‘I have divided the prayer into two halves between Myself and My servant;’ He did not say, ‘I have divided *al-Fatiha* between Myself and My servant.’ This implies that the Opening of the Book (*al-Fatiha*) is in fact the basis of prayer, and the Mother of the Book.

We also notice that there are three names for God repeated in the phrase ‘In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ and in *al-Fatiha*, which are: Allah ‘God,’ *Rahman*, ‘the Most Merciful,’ and *Rahim*, ‘the Dispenser of Mercy.’ We say that there is no repetition in the Noble Quran and that if a word is repeated, its meaning is different in every separate occurrence because God *the Glorified* is the One Who is speaking, and so He puts every utterance in its right place, with its correct and appropriate meaning.

Our saying ‘In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ is a way of seeking the aid of God’s omnipotent power when we begin doing anything. So, the divine name ‘God’ in this phrase means the seeking of aid from God’s Powers and attributes so that He will help us in what we are doing. But when we say ‘Praise be to God,’ this is a way of offering thanks to God for what He has done for us. We cannot offer thanks to God without using the divine name that embodies all the different attributes of God because we praise Him for all His attributes, and His mercy so that we do not have to say ‘In the Name of the All-Dominant,’ and ‘In the Name of the All-Giver,’ and ‘In the Name of the All-Generous,’ and ‘In the Name of the Most Merciful,’ and so on. We praise God for the perfection of His attributes, and this praise includes the perfection of all of these attributes.

There is a difference between the phrase ‘In the Name of God,’ by which we seek aid for that which we have no power to accomplish alone because God is the One Who subjugated for us everything in this universe and made it serve us, and the statement ‘Praise be to God.’ The divine name only comes here so that we can praise God for all that He has done for us. It is as though ‘In the Name of God’ is a way of seeking help from God with all His perfect attributes, and that ‘Praise be to God’ in *al-Fatiha* is a way of offering thanks to God with all His perfect attributes.

The meaning of the phrase 'the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' in the phrase 'In the Name of God...' is not the same as when the same phrase occurs in *al-Fatiha*. In the phrase 'In the Name of God...', it reminds us of God's mercy and forgiveness so that we are not ashamed or afraid to seek the aid of God's Name, even if we have sinned. God *the Most High* wants us to seek aid always through His name in everything we do. If any of us falls into sin, and says, 'How can I seek the aid of God's Name, when I have disobeyed Him?' We say to him, approach Him from the door of mercy, and He will forgive you; and seek His aid, and He will answer you. When you fall into sin, you seek refuge in God's Mercy from His justice because God's justice does not leave any sin great or small without counting it.

This is what we understand from the Quranic verse that explains that on the Day of Judgement, the record (of everyone's deeds) will be laid open; and one will see the guilty filled with dread at what (they see) in it; and they will be bewailing the record which leaves out nothing, be it small or great, and takes count of everything. And they will find all that they had done facing them; your Lord does not wrong anyone (*al-Kahf*: 49).

Were it not that God's mercy comes before His justice, no blessing would remain for people, and not a single one of them would remain alive on the face of the earth. God *the Glorified* says that if He were to take men (immediately) to task for all the evil that they do (on earth), He would not leave a single living creature upon its face. However, He grants them respite until a term set (by Him): but when the end of their term comes, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor hasten it (*an-Nahl*: 61).

Man was created weak, and prone to restlessness. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* once said to his companions, 'None of you will enter Paradise by virtue of your works, unless God covers them with His mercy.' They asked, 'Not even you, o Messenger of God?' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Not even I.'

The sins of man in this world are numerous. If he judges, he might judge unjustly; if he guesses about someone, he might guess badly; if he talks, he might lie; if he testifies, he might perjure and not tell the truth; if he speaks, he might backbite.

We commit all these sins in different degrees, and none of us can ascribe perfection to himself even those who do their utmost to obey God do not reach perfection, for perfection is for God alone. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘All of the children of Adam do wrong; and the best of those who do wrong are the repentant.’<sup>(1)</sup>

In the Noble Quran, God *the Glorified* describes man’s response to the bounties God grants to mankind, stating that He has given them of all that they asked of Him; and should they try to count God’s blessings, they could never compute them. Surely, man is indeed unjust, ungrateful (*Ibrahim*: 34).

Because of this, the True Lord did not want sins to prevent us from beginning every action with mention of His name, and so he taught us to say, ‘In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ so that we would know that the door is open for seeking God’s aid, and that sins should not prevent us from seeking aid in God’s Name in everything we do. God is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy, and so He relieves your desolation for your sin by allowing you to seek aid in Him.

On the other hand, the phrase ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ in *al-Fatiha* (3) comes in the context of ‘Lord of the worlds’ (2), the Lord Who created you from nothing, and sustained you with blessings that cannot be enumerated or counted. You praise Him for these blessings which you took by means of His mercy in His Lordliness; for lordliness does not imply as much severity as it does mercy.

God *the Glorified* is the Lord of both the believer and the disbeliever, for He is the One Who called them all into being. Because of this, He grants them bounties by His mercy, not by what they deserve. The sun rises on the believer and the disbeliever; its rays are not veiled from the disbeliever and given to the believer alone; and rain falls on those who worship God, and on those who worship idols instead of God; and the air is breathed by those who say ‘There is no god but God,’ and by those who do not say it.

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad*, and by At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Al-Hakim, on the authority of Anas God be pleased with him

Every favour that God grants in this world, out of His lordly grace, is for all of His creatures – and this indeed is mercy. God is Lord of all, both those who obey Him and those who disobey Him – and this is indeed mercy. And God accepts repentance – and this is indeed mercy.

So, in *al-Fatiha*, the phrase ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ (3) refers to God’s Mercy in His Lordship over His creation: He reprieves the sinner, and opens the doors of repentance for all who seek refuge with Him.

God *the Glorified* gave His mercy precedence over His wrath, and this in itself is a mercy that merits gratitude. So, the meaning of ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ (3) in the phrase ‘In the Name of God...’ is different from its meaning in the text of *al-Fatiha*.

If we now move to the verse ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds’ (2), we see that God is praised for His Self, and praised for His attributes, and praised for His blessings, and praised for His Mercy, and praised for His Guidance, and praised for His Decree; and in fact God was praised (praiseworthy) before He even created anyone to praise Him. Out of His mercy, God *the Glorified* made the means to thank Him in a simple, (in Arabic) two-word phrase: *al-hamdu li-Lah* ‘Praise be to God’ (2).

It is amazing that when you thank a human being for his kindness, you spend hours and hours and use all kinds of words of thanks and praise, and you subtract and add and follow people’s opinions, even composing a poem or a speech full of praise and thanks; but God *the Glorified, the Almighty* Whose blessings cannot be counted or measured, taught us to thank Him using only a couple of words: ‘Praise be to God’ (2).

We might understand that exaggeration in thanking human beings is blameworthy because it can give rise to all sorts of delusions and hypocrisy and may make a sinful person more sinful. Therefore, we should be sparing in how much we thank and express praise to other human beings because we thank God for all of the great blessing He grants us with only two words: ‘Praise be to God’ (2). Out of His mercy on us, God *the Glorified* taught us the phrase that we should use to praise Him. Had He left us without specifying these two words, it would have been difficult for human beings to find the right way to praise God for

this divine perfection. However much people were gifted with eloquence and fine expression, they would be unable to reach an expression of praise that would befit the majesty of the One Who bestowed on them all that. How can we praise God when the intellect is unable to even comprehend His power, or to measure His blessing, or to encompass His mercy? The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* demonstrated to us the human incapability of praising the divine perfection of God, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I cannot praise You as You have praised Yourself.’

Furthermore, by the phrase ‘Praise be to God’ (2), God *the Glorified* has made all mankind equal. Had He left the concept of praising Him without specific delimitation, the levels of praise that people offered would have differed in accordance with their differing rhetorical abilities. An illiterate person who cannot read or write would be unable to find the right words with which to praise God, whilst a scholarly person with good rhetorical ability would be able to come up with expressions of praise commensurate with his learning and eloquence. In this way, the degrees by which humanity praised God would differ in accordance with their status in the world.

But the True Lord willed that by His justice He would make His servants equal together with a single expression of praise, and so He taught them, with His first words in the Quran, to say ‘Praise be to God’ (2), giving an equal chance to all of His servants so that the educated and the uneducated, and the eloquent and the ineloquent would be equal in offering praise.

Therefore, we praise God *the Glorified* for teaching us how to praise Him so that a servant of God remains ever-offering praise, and God remains at all times praised. Before God created us, He created for us blessings which are reason for us to praise Him: He created for us the heavens and the earth, and made for us water and air, and placed upon the earth sustenance enough to all humanity until the end of time. This favour deserves praise because He made it before He even created the first human being so that when He created mankind, these blessings were already there. Moreover, before God *the Glorified* created Adam *peace be upon him*, the father of all humanity, he was preceded by the Paradise in which he would dwell, neither tiring nor toiling; and He created all that he would eat, and drink, and all he needed to live and derive

enjoyment from was already present and ready for him before he was created. When Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* came down to earth, all these blessings were already there before them, and so they found things to eat and drink and nourish themselves with. If these blessings had not come before man, and had they been destined to be created after him, he would have perished while waiting for them to come.

Moreover, the divine bestowal upon mankind gives him a blessing simply by virtue of his having been created in his mother's womb, finding therein everything needed to receive him and feed him for as long as the pregnancy lasts. When he comes out into the world, God places in his mother's breast milk that flows when he is hungry, and stops when he is full, and stops for good when the breastfeeding term ends. He finds a mother and father who provide for him his life needs until he is able to support himself. All of this takes place before the person reaches the age of responsibility, and before he can even say the words: 'Praise be to God' (2).

So we see how the blessing always precedes the one who is favoured by it. When a person says 'Praise be to God' (2), he says so because the reasons for his offering praise – the blessing he has received – was present in existence even before he was.

God *the Glorified* created for us things in this universe that provide for mankind without any effort from him, and without being subjected to him. Man is unable to provide for himself the blessings that the True Lord gives him without any effort on man's part. The sun gives heat and life to the earth without any repayment, or any endeavour on the part of man. Rain falls from the sky without you doing anything, or having any power to bring it down. Air is present for you everywhere so you can breathe it without any effort or power. The earth gives you its fruits simply by your planting seeds and watering them. Crops grow by God's power. Night and day follow one another so you can rest and sleep, and then go about your life. You do not bring forth the light of day; and nor do you make the dark of night; yet you take repose at night, and work during the day, by means of God's power, without you having to do anything.

Man created none of these things; rather, he was created to find them present in the universe, providing for him without any payment or effort on his part. Is it



not right then, that you say: ‘Praise be to God for the blessing of subduing the universe to serve mankind’? All of this makes praise a moral imperative.

God’s signs in His creation also merit praise: for the life that God has given us, and the signs that He has placed in His universe to show us that this universe has a Mighty Creator: the universe, with its sun, moon, stars, earth and everything in it, and all far beyond the powers of mankind, and no one can claim it as his own work. No one, however far his knowledge reaches, can claim that he created the sun, or made the stars, or the earth, or established natural law, or gave the earth its atmosphere, or created himself, or created anyone else.

These signs all prove the existence of a higher power which created and made everything. These signs are not static so that we might forget them; rather, they are always moving, to alert us to the Creator of this mighty universe.

The rising sun in the morning reminds us of the miracle of creation, and the setting sun in the evening reminds us of the might of the Creator. The succession of night and day happens before our eyes every day so that we can pay attention and wake up. Rain falls from the sky to remind us of the divinity of the One Who sent it down. Crops rise from the earth, nourished by the same kind of water, yet they grow diverse in colour, shape, taste, and scent, each developing in a different way from the other. The harvest comes, and the fruits and crops disappear; and then the crop season comes again, and they reappear.

Everything in this universe is moving to remind us if we happen to forget, and to show us that there is a Mighty Creator. We can continue like this without end because God’s blessings cannot be counted or measured. Every one of them guides us to the existence of the True Lord, and proves to us that this universe has a Splendid Creator, and that no one can claim to have created the universe or anything in it because the whole question is settled. Praise be to God because He has placed pristine natural faith in our souls, and then, supported it with intellectual faith with His signs in the universe.

Everything in this universe merits praise, yet men lavish praise on created things whilst forgetting the Creator! When you see a beautiful jewel, for example, or an amazing flower, or any of God’s creations, your soul is filled with its beauty, and you praise this creation, saying: ‘How beautiful this flower is!’ or this jewel, or whatever it may be. But the created thing that you praise

did not give itself this beauty; the flower has no say in whether it is beautiful or not, and the jewel has no say in the magnificence of its creation. Nothing in this universe gave itself beauty; the One Who gave it beauty was God *the Most High* – so do not be confused, praising the creation, whilst forgetting the Creator. Rather, say: Praise be to God Who placed within the universe things that remind us of the might of the Creator, and the precision of His creation!

God's Way and Guidance also merit praise from us because God has sent us His Guidance to show us the way of good, and keep us from the way of evil. God's Guidance which He has sent down to His messengers, told us that God *the Most High* is the One Who created for us this universe, and created us, too. The precision and magnificence of creation show us that there is a Mighty Creator, but they cannot tell us who the Creator is, or what He wants from us. Because of this, God sent His messengers to tell us that it was God Who created this universe, and created us; and this merits praise.

God's Guidance made clear to us what the True Lord wants of us, and how we are to worship Him; and this merits praise. God's Guidance showed us the correct and optimum way to live. God does not discriminate between us as His creation, and does not favour one of us over another except by virtue of their piety. We are all equal creatures before God *the Glorified*.

So true legislation, true speech, and true judgement, are all from God. As for man-made legal systems, they are characterised by being deeply influenced by personal, group, or sectarian interests, whims, and discrimination. Such laws usually take the rights of some and give them to others; and so in every human legal system, we are bound to forms of human injustice.

In communist countries, the members of the Party Central Committee are quite well-off, whilst their people are all living in poverty and hardship. This is because the lawmakers follow their own caprices, and put their own interests first. The same is true of capitalist countries. The people who own the capital take all the good. But when God *the Glorified* sent down His Guidance to us, He judged fairly among people, and gave everyone their rights, and taught us how to make life on earth upright, by keeping it far from human caprice and subservient to God's Justice – and this in itself merits praise.

The True Lord deserves praise from us because –unlike worldly lords– He does not take anything from us, but He only gives to us. In every age, human beings try to exploit fellow human beings because they covet the wealth and riches that they possess. God *the Glorified* does not need what we possess; He gives to us, and does not take from us, and He possesses the stores of everything, as He says that there is not a single thing but its storehouses are with Him, and He sends it down with a settled measure (*al-Hijr*: 21). So God *the Glorified* is always giving to His creatures, and the creature is always taking from God's blessings. Worshipping God only gives to you; it does not take anything from you – and this merits praise. Because of God's infinite bestowal, mankind must ask Him, supplicate to Him, and seek His aid. This merits praise because it spares us from humiliating ourselves in this world. If you ask for something from an influential person, he will set an appointment for you, and assign a limited time to speak with you; and he might become uncomfortable with you, and might stand up to end the meeting. But God's door is always open, and you can go before Him whenever you like, and raise your hands to the sky and pray whenever you like, asking God for whatever you like, and He will give you what you want if it is good for you, and withhold it from you if it proves bad for you.

God *the Glorified* asks you to pray to Him, and to ask of Him; He calls His servants to supplicate to Him, (and) He will respond to them. Those who are too proud to worship Him will enter hell, abased (*Ghafir*: 60).

And God *the Glorified* also commands His Messenger to proclaim that if His servants ask him (the Messenger) about Him (God) – He is near; He responds to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls to Him: let them, then, respond to Him, and believe in Him so that they might be guided to the right way (*al-Baqara*: 186).

God *the Most High* knows what is in your soul, and so He gives you even without your asking. Read the Qudsi Hadith, in which the Lord of Might says, 'Whoever is too occupied by My remembrance to ask of Me, I will give him better than I give to those who do ask.'<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari*, *Al-Bazzar*, and *Al-Bayhaqi* on the authority of Ibn 'Umar

God's Bestowal never runs out, and the stores of His favours are never empty, and whatever you ask Him, and however often you ask Him *the Exalted*, He has more; there is nothing difficult for God *the Most High*, if He wants to grant it to you. Read the poet's lines:

It is enough honour for me that I am a slave

Whose Lord will meet him without any appointment;

He occupies the station of utmost sanctity, but

I can meet with Him whenever and wherever I like.

So God's Bestowal merits praise, and His withholding of this bestowal also merits praise.

And the existence of God, the absolutely independent and self-sufficient Being,<sup>(1)</sup> merits praise. God deserves praise for His very being. Were it not for God's justice, people would have transgressed and done much injustice upon the earth; but when God's Hand closes upon an oppressor, it makes of him a cautionary tale and a lesson of warning to others so that people would fear and refrain from committing injustice. And everyone who escapes punishment in this world for their sins, injustice, and tyranny will meet God in the Hereafter so that they would be punished for the wrongs they had done – and this merits praise. The one who is wronged in this life knows that he will eventually receive his requital, and so his soul calms down, and is reassured in his heart that the day will come when he will see the one who oppressed him being punished in Hell. And so, he is rid of his sorrow, and he is able to bear the bitterness of injustice when he knows that God is in control of His creation, and that no one can escape His Justice.

When we say 'Praise be to God', we are expressing various different emotions, which together comprise worship, love, praise, thanks and gratitude. Many

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(1) This phrase is used as the nearest equivalent of the Arabic term *wajib al-wujud*, which translates as aseity, a concept in Christian theology that denotes a being (God) Who is uncaused, the source of all causes, is absolutely independent and self-sufficient. The Islamic version of the term also stresses the idea that he is not in need of other beings, while all other beings need him for their existence and survival. Muslim philosophers also add that the *wajib al-wujud* is a being whose non-existence cannot be conceived as possible – Ed.

emotions fill the soul when we say ‘Praise be to God,’ all of them embodying praise that is incapable of expressing thanks for God’s perfection and largesse. These emotions come from the soul and settle in the heart, and then flow out of the body organs to the entire universe.

Praise is not mere utterances that I repeat by the tongue: it first passes as an idea through the mind, establishing the awareness of the meaning of God’s blessings in the mind; then, it settles as a sentiment in the heart which responds to it; then, it moves to the limbs, and I stand up and pray to God in heart-felt thanks, and my body trembles, and tears flow from my eyes – and all of these reactions spread to all those around me.

An illustration is in place here: let us suppose that I am facing a crisis or a hardship, or a difficult situation that may lead to disgrace; and then someone comes along and alleviates my affliction, by, for example, giving me money, or finding a way out of the crisis for me. The first thing I would do is recognise this kindness, and see that this person deserves to be thanked. Then, this notion would go to my heart which would become attached to the one who did this kindness to me. Then, my limbs would react, so I can translate this emotion into an action that would be to the satisfaction of the one who did me the kindness. Then, I would praise the person and tell people about his kindness and generosity, and they would seek recourse to him, and so the circle of praise would widen, and more favours would come to people, and they would experience the same thing I had experienced, and so the circle of gratitude and praise would widen further and further.

Offering praise to God brings us more of His blessings as He states that if people – as receivers of His favours – are grateful, He would increase His bestowals more and more; but if they are thankless, His Punishment is severe (*Ibrahim*: 7). Thus, we see that rendering praise and thanks to God’s favours will bring us more blessings; and we offer thanks for them, and this brings us more. In this way, praise remains permanent, and bestowal remains permanent. If we consider our entire lives, every moment of them merits praise: when we sleep, and God *the Most High* takes our souls, and then, returns them to us when we wake, this merits praise. God says that He causes all souls to die at the time of their death; and (causes to be as dead), during their sleep, those that

have not yet died; He withholds (from life) those upon whom He has decreed death, and lets the others go free for a set term. In this, there are signs for people who reflect (*az-Zumar*: 42).

And so, our mere waking from sleep and the fact that God *the Most High* has returned our souls to us – merit praise. When we get out of bed, it is God Who gives us the power to move; were it not for His bestowal, we would not be able to rise – and this merits praise. When we eat our breakfast, God provides food for us from His favour: He has created it and made it grow, and He provides us with it – and this merits praise.

When we go out into the street, God facilitates and subjects for us the vehicles that transport us to our places of work. Whether we own cars or use public transport, Praise be to Him. When we converse with people, God *the Most High* is the One Who gives our tongues the ability to speak; if He so willed, He could make us mute, unable to speak. All of this merits praise. When we go to work, God facilitates for us jobs by which we earn our livelihood so that we can eat from our lawful earning. All of this merits praise. And when we return home, we go back to our spouses and children whom we have by the Grace of God – and this merits praise.

So every deed a man does in this worldly life merits praise to God, and so one of us must constantly offer praise. Even more, one must also praise God for every misfortune that afflicts one. This is because what might appear to one to be an adversity might actually be nothing but good. We have an illustration of this fact in the Quranic verse where God *the Most High* commands the men in the believing community to associate kindly with their wives, for if they dislike them, it may well be that they dislike something in which God puts abundant good (*an-Nisa'*: 19).

So you praise God because He decrees what is good; whether you like what He decrees or not, you believe that it is good for you because you do not have full knowledge of things, whilst God does. And so, we must praise God for everything that happens in our lives. By doing this, we refer the matter back to God Who created us and Who knows what is best for us.

The opening chapter of the Book, i.e. *al-Fatiha* begins with the verse 'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds' (2). A question worth asking here is:

Why did God *the Most High* say, ‘...Lord of all the worlds’?<sup>(1)</sup> We say that ‘Praise be to God’ means praise for divinity because the word ‘God’ implies ‘truly deserving of worship.’ Worship is a moral responsibility; and moral responsibilities come from God to His servants. It is as though praise is first and foremost due to God (the Sender of Laws), and then after that, praise is also due to God the Lord Who created us from nothing, and Who sustains us and keeps us from starvation with His provisions. This is because the One Who bestows blessings and favours, might be praised by all people; but the case might be different with praise to the Sender of Laws, as moral responsibility may be difficult for some people. If people knew the value of moral responsibility in life, they would hasten to praise God for His commands and prohibitions because by means of them He has guaranteed the prevention of conflict in people’s lives, and allowed their lives to proceed with concordance and harmony. So the first blessing was that God *the Most High* showed us the way to worship Him, and the second blessing is that He is the Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds.

In this worldly life, there are people who obey God, and people who disobey, and there are believers, and non-believers. Those who enter under the bestowal of the divine are the believers; as for the provision of lordliness, all are encompassed by it. We praise God for the bestowal of His Divinity, and we praise Him for the provision of His Lordliness because He is the One Who created, and He is the Lord of the worlds. Nothing in the universe is out of His control, so let the people in this world be content that His favours will continue for them by means of the provision of lordliness. The sun cannot set and then, refuse to rise, and the stars cannot clash with one another in the universe, and the earth cannot refuse to grow crops, and the atmosphere cannot leave the earth and let everyone suffocate.

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(1) The discussion in this paragraph (and references to the topic would be made repeatedly in the book) involves a fine distinction between the concepts of godliness/divinity (*ulouhiyya* in Arabic) and lordliness (*ruboubiyya* in Arabic). These are two attributes of God that should be distinguished from each other. The first (*ulouhiyya*) relates to God as the Deity deserving of true worship and Who has the right to send down laws to govern man’s life. On the other hand, *ruboubiyya* denotes the attribute of God as Creator and Sustainer of all the creation.

So God *the Most High* wants to reassure His servants that He is Lord to everything in the universe, and that no force that serves mankind is able to refrain from serving them because God is in control of His universe and all that He created. He is the Lord of the worlds – and this merits praise; for God *the Most High* has prepared for mankind things to serve them, and He furthermore has made man master of the universe. And so the believer should not fear tomorrow – how could he fear, when God is the Lord of the worlds? If he has no food, he is sure that God will provide for him because He is the Lord of all the worlds; and if a calamity befalls him, his heart is assured that God will relieve his distress, and remove his hardship because He is the Lord of the worlds. And if a blessing visits him, he remembers God, and thanks Him for it because He is the Lord of the worlds Who has granted him this blessing. The True Lord is praised because He is the Lord of the worlds, and nothing in His creation is beyond His will. As for the bestowal of divinity, its reward is in the Hereafter. This world is the abode of trial of one's faith, whilst the Hereafter is the abode of recompense. Some people do not worship God; they are equal to the believers with respect to the provision of lordliness in this world, but in the Hereafter, divine bestowal will be for the believers alone. God's blessings will be for the denizens of paradise, and His Bestowal will be for those who believe in Him. God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to put forward the repudiating question as to who has forbidden God's goodly raiment and healthful viands that He has provided for His servants. Then, He commands the Messenger to proclaim that these things are made lawful to the faithful in the life of this world – to be theirs alone on Resurrection Day. Thus, God makes clear His messages to people of knowledge (*al-A'raf*: 32).

Praise be to God not only in this world, but in the Hereafter as well. God is always praised: in this world, for the provision of His Lordliness to all of His creatures, and the divine bestowal to all those who believe in Him; and in the Hereafter for the provision He grants to His believing servants. God relates to us how His believing servants will, in the Hereafter, proclaim their praise to God Who has made good His promise to them, and Who has made the earth as their heritage so that they may dwell in paradise as they please. And how excellent a reward will it be for those who laboured in God's way (*az-Zumar*: 74). Their call in it



is ‘Glory be to You, o God’; their greeting in it is ‘Peace!’ and the close of their call is ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds’ (*Yunus*: 10).

By moving to the phrase ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ (*al-Fatiha*: 3), we find that another thing that necessitates praise is that God *the Most High* is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy. He grants His bounties in this world to all His servants by the agency of lordliness which is for both the believer and the non-believer, and this is not cut off until death.

God does not veil His bounties from His servants in this world, and God’s blessings or bounties cannot be counted or measured. Despite all the advances in instruments of calculation and computers and so on, we do not find anyone who comes along and says that he will count God’s blessings. This is because one condition of counting is that you should be able to do it to begin with; you cannot count anything unless you have the capacity to enumerate it. As long as it is beyond your capability and your power, you cannot even approach it. For this reason, no one from now until the Day of Resurrection will be able to enumerate God’s blessings because no one can count them.

We also need to pay attention to the fact that the entire universe is perturbed by mankind, and that the subdued world that serves us by compulsion, becomes upset when it sees sinful people. This is because the subjected world goes straight by God’s Guidance by compulsion, and so when it sees mankind, whom it serves, disobeying God, it becomes weary.

Read the Qudsi Hadith if you wish to learn something about God’s mercy with His servants: There is no day upon which the sun rises except that the sky calls out, saying, ‘Lord, permit me to fall upon the son of Adam in smithereens, for he has eaten from Your goodness, and refused to thank You;’ and the seas say, ‘Lord, permit us to drown the son of Adam, for he has eaten from Your goodness, and refused to thank You;’ and the mountains say, ‘Lord, permit us to collapse upon the son of Adam, for he has eaten from Your goodness, and refused to thank You.’ God *the Most High* replies, ‘Leave them, leave them; had you created them, you would have had mercy on them! They are My servants: if they turn to Me in repentance, I am their Beloved; and if they do not turn to Me, I am their doctor.’<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Narrated by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Musnad*

These are the manifestations of the names *ar-Rahman* ‘the Most Merciful’ and *ar-Rahim* ‘the Dispenser of Mercy,’ and how they have guaranteed for us the continuation of everything that serves us in this universe, despite mankind’s disobedience. They all serve us by means of the agency of lordliness, and they remain in our service by God’s subjugation of them because He is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy.

Some people might wonder: Are the earth, the sky, and other inanimate objects, and plants and animals, able to talk? We say yes; they have a language of which we are not aware, known only to their Creator. The True Lord *the Most High* informs us that since the early stages of creation, each one of these creatures have had a language: God addressed the sky – and it was but smoke – and the Earth and ordered them to come – willingly or against their will – and they replied that they would come in obedience (*Fussilat*: 11).

So the earth and the sky both understood God, and they replied to Him that they would come willingly. Did God not teach Solomon *peace be upon him* the discourse of the birds, and the language of the ants? Did the mountains not extol God alongside David *peace be upon him*? So every creature of God has its own appropriate senses and even its own emotions. When God *the Most High* spoke about the people of Pharaoh, He said that they perished and left behind gardens, water-runnels, fields, and noble dwellings, and the life of ease in which they used to delight. And God made another people the heirs to what they had left; and neither sky nor earth shed tears over them, nor were they allowed a respite (*ad-Dukhan*: 25-29).

So the heavens and the earth have emotional reactions even to the point of weeping. They did not weep for Pharaoh and his people, but they weep in sorrow when they are parted from a believer who prays and follows God’s guidance. Ali ibn Abu Taleb *God be pleased with him* said: ‘When the believer dies, two places weep for him: one place on earth, and one place in the sky. As for the place on earth, it is the place he would set aside to pray in; as for the place in the sky, it is the place through which his good deeds would rise.’

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝

**Master of the Day of Judgement [4]**

**It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help [5]**

**(The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 4-5)**

If all of God's blessings deserve praise, being the 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' deserves immense praise because if there were no day of reckoning, those who fill the world with evil, would get away with what they did, and those who remained steadfast to their moral obligations and worship, denying themselves many worldly pleasures to please God, would lose out in this worldly life. But because God *the Most High* is 'Owner of the Day of Judgement,' He established balance in the universe. God's ownership of the Day of Judgement protected the weak and the oppressed and preserved right in God's creation. The thing that prevents this world from becoming a jungle, where the strong prey on the weak, and the oppressors prey on the oppressed, is that, there will be an afterlife, and a reckoning, and that God *the Most High* is the One Who will pass judgement over His creatures.

The upright person benefits others because he fears God, and gives everyone their rights and pardons and forgives, and so everyone around him benefits from his noble character and his allegiance to truth and justice.

On the other hand, a sinful person does harm to the society because no one is safe from his evil, and everyone is affected by his iniquity. For this reason, the 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' provides the balance. You know that the Hereafter awaits those who corrupt the universe, and there, they will not escape no matter how great their power and influence; and so you are totally assured that God's justice will overtake every wrongdoer.

The fourth verse of *al-Fatiha* (which has been hitherto rendered as 'Owner of the Day of Judgement') can, in fact, be read in two different ways in Arabic, both of which are authentic and acceptable: the Arabic word *maalik* (with a long first vowel) is the equivalent for 'Owner;' however, it is alternatively read *malik* (with a short first vowel), which translates as 'King'. God *the Most High* describes Himself in the Noble Quran as being the 'Owner of the Day of Judgement'. The owner of a thing has sole control over it, and no one else has

any say in the matter. I own my cloak, and I own my belongings, and I own my house, and I can do what I please with them.

The phrase 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' then means that God *the Most High* will control the affairs of His servants directly on that day without recourse to any means, and that everything will come directly from God without anyone being able to interfere with it even on the face of matters.

In this world, God gives power to certain people as it may appear to the observer; but on the Day of Resurrection, there will be no appearances versus reality, and everything will come directly from God *the Most High*. For this reason, in addressing the non-believers, God tells them that they treat the Day of Judgement as a lie (*al-Infitar*: 9).

It is as if God *the Most High* created man in this world so that he could go on with his life; but in the Hereafter, there are no means for man to control. In the outward appearance of this world, God gives ownership and control to whomever He wills. Then, let us consider the verse where God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim in His prayers: 'O God, Lord of all dominion! You grant dominion to whom You will, and take away dominion from whom You will; and You exalt whom You will, and abase whom You will. In Your Hand is all good. Verily, You have the power over everything' (*Al-Imran*: 26).

Perhaps the term 'take away' should alert us to the fact that no one in this world, would willingly give up dominion, but dominion must be taken from them by force; and it is God who takes dominion from whomever He wills.

Here, we wonder: Does all dominion not belong to God both in this life and the Hereafter? We say that it belongs to God at all times, but God *the Most High* gives vice- regency to some of His creatures, or places them in positions of dominion on earth. For this reason, we find that God *the Most High* relates to us in the Noble Quran the incident of the arrogant infidel who, proud of the kingship that God had granted him, argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord. Abraham said, 'My Lord is the One Who grants life and deals death,' and he replied, 'I too grant life and deal death.' Abraham then said, 'God causes the sun to rise in the east, so you bring it up, then, in the west!' Thereupon the infidel was dumbfounded; God does not give guidance to evildoers and the unjust (*al-Baqara*: 258).

The person who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord was a disbeliever, a denier of divinity. Despite this, he did not acquire dominion of his own accord; rather, it was God *the Glorified* Who gave him dominion. So, God *the Most High* is the One Who gives some of His creatures vice-regency and dominion on earth, and they only appear to have real control. This means that it is only outward dominion that people obtain. A human being might become a king, but dominion does not spring intrinsically from those who rule; rather, it springs from God's command. If it came inherently from those who rule, it would remain with them, and never be taken from them. Ostensible dominion/control is a test for people, and God will hold them accountable for it on the Day of Resurrection. How did they behave and what did they do with it? Ordinary people are also tested as to whether they remained silent under tyrannical rule, and favoured sin; or whether they stood up for justice and truth against tyranny. God *the Most High* does not test people so that He can tell the corrupt from the righteous; He tests them so they can be witnesses over themselves so that none of them can come on the Day of Resurrection and say, 'Lord, if You had given me dominion/control, I would have followed the way of truth and implemented Your guidance.'

Here, a question arises: if God *the Most High* knows everything, why does He have to test people? We say that we need to give an example to explain this delicate concept more clearly – and God has the highest example. All over the world, universities conduct examinations to their students. Are the teachers in these universities – who have taught the students – unaware of what the students know, and if they really need the exam to know the level of performance of the students? Of course not, but exams are conducted anyway so that if a student fails the exam, and complains against his grade, they can show him his paper, and so he will be speechless. If the exam were not held, every student would claim that he deserved the highest grade.

When we read the phrase 'Owner of the Day of Judgement,' we know it means that the One Who possesses this day can act therein however He wills. However, if we read it as 'King of the Day of Judgement' (the alternate reading), the implications of this meaning are greater because an owner (*maalik*) only has control over his own possessions, whilst a king (*malik*) has control not only over his own possessions, but also over the possessions of others

because he can issue laws and decrees that allow him to seize or nationalise what other people possess.

Those who read it as 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' affirm for God that He owns this day, and can act as He pleases with it, without anyone else having any say even in appearances. Those who read it as 'King of the Day of Judgement' say that on that day, God *the Glorified* will rule over His creation's affairs even in the case of those to whom He gave dominion ostensibly in this world. We say that when the Day of Resurrection comes, there will be no owner and no king except God.

God *the Most High* wants to reassure His servants that if they have been subjected to tribulation because of any tyrannical owner or king in worldly life, on the Day of Judgement, there will be no owner or king except Him. When you say 'Owner' or 'King' of the Day of Judgement, you have two words: 'day' and 'judgement'. A day in our reckoning lasts from sunrise to sunrise, which we call an astronomical day; a 'day,' moreover, is a period of time in which events take place. Interpreters of the Quran say that the phrase 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' should be understood as 'Owner of the affairs of the Day of Judgement' because a period of time cannot be owned. We say that this is true according to the confines of human ownership; we cannot own time. We cannot bring back the past, or hasten forth the future. But God *the Most High* is the Creator of time, and He *the Glorified* is not constrained by time or place. Such is the case with His words: 'Owner of the Day of Judgement': it is not constrained by time or place. In comforting and enlightening His Messenger, God *the Most High* tells him that the disbelievers challenge him to hasten the coming of (God's) chastisement; but God never fails His promise – and in the sight of your Lord, a day is like a thousand years of your reckoning (*al-Hajj*: 47). God also tells us that the angels and the spirit ascend to Him in a day whose length is fifty thousand years (*al-Ma'arij*: 4).

If we reflect on these two verses, we will see the meaning of a day with respect to God *the Glorified*. God created time, and so He can create a day that lasts an hour, or a day like the days of the earth, lasting twenty-four hours, or a day that lasts one thousand years, or a day that lasts fifty thousand years, or a day that lasts a million years. This is all subject to God's will.

The Day of Judgement exists in God's knowledge (potentially), along with all that will take place in it, and Paradise and Hell, and all the creatures that will be brought to account on that day. When He wills that day to be (actually), and the knowledge of it will pass from God's knowledge to the knowledge of His creatures, whether angels, humans, or jinn, He will say to it, 'Be!' God alone is the Creator of this day, and He alone defines all its dimensions. We define a day superficially as being a period of twenty-four hours, divided into night and daytime; but the reality is that night and day are always present on earth, and when the earth moves, every movement spells the end of day in one place, and the beginning of day in another, and the beginning of night in one place, and the end of night in another. So in every moment, a day ends and another begins. If we consider the planet earth as a whole, day never ends upon it, and nor does night. So a day is relative to every place on earth, whilst in reality, it is always present on planet earth.

God *the Glorified* wants to reassure His servants that if they suffer injustice in this world, there will come a day in which there is no injustice. The affairs of this day will belong to God alone, directly and without any means. Anyone who escapes justice and recompense in this world will find it waiting for him in the next; and those who follow God's guidance, and limit their actions in life in accordance with God's teachings, God informs them that there will come a day when they take their reward. The magnificence of the Hereafter is that it will give you Paradise – a delight that will never be taken from you, nor you from it.

It is related that someone once went to a pious man and asked him, 'I want to know: am I one of the people of (attached to) this worldly life, or am I one of the people of the Hereafter?' The pious man said, 'God is so Merciful with His servants that He did not place power for judging them in the hands of others like them. The reckoning of every person is in his own hands. Why is this? It is because you can fool people, but you cannot fool yourself. Your reckoning is in your own hands, and you are the one to know whether you are one of the people of this worldly life or one of the people of the Hereafter.'

The man said, 'How can I do this?' The pious servant replied, 'If a person comes and gives you money, and another comes and takes charity from you, which one makes you happier?' The man was silent, and so the pious servant

said, 'If you are happier with the one who gives you money, you are one of the people of this world; if you are happier with the one who takes from you, you are of the people of the Hereafter.' People rejoice when others give them what they love. The one who gives me money, gives me (something of) this world; the one who takes charity from me, gives me (something related to) the Hereafter. If you are from the people of the Hereafter, rejoice in the one who takes charity from you more than you rejoice in the one who gives you money. This is why when someone comes to people of virtue, asking them for charity, they would say, 'Welcome to the one who comes to carry my good deeds to the Hereafter without any payment!' And they would receive them with joy and a hearty welcome.

God's words 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' carry an immense doctrinal issue because they tell us that the beginning is from God, and the end is to God; and since we will all meet God, we must work for this day. For this reason, the believer should not do anything in his life without having God in mind, and thinking of the fact that He will hold him to account on the Day of Resurrection. The non-believer, however, does what he does without thinking of God. The True Lord *the Most High* likens the deeds of non-believers to a mirage in the desert which the thirsty supposes to be water, until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing; instead, he finds God with him, and He will pay him his account in full – for God is swift in reckoning (*an-Nur*: 39).

Such is the case of those who act without thinking of God: they will be surprised on the Day of Resurrection when they discover that God *the Most High*, Who was not in their minds, is actually there, and that He is the One Who will bring them to account.

Furthermore, the concept of 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' is the foundation of the religion of Islam because those who do not believe in the Hereafter do as they please, and as long as they believe that there is no afterlife, and no account, what do they fear? And for the sake of whom will they limit their actions in life?

Religion in its entirety, with all its devotions, and its system of guidance, is based upon the fact that there will be a reckoning in the Hereafter, and that there will be a day when everyone will stand before God *the Most High*, that He



might hold the sinner to account, and reward the acts of obedience. This is the wisdom behind all our acts of faith; if there was no day of reckoning, why would we pray? And why would we fast? And why would we give charity?

All the actions encouraged by the system of divine guidance, have their foundation in belief in that day from which no one will escape, and for which we must all prepare. God *the Most High* called this day, with respect to the believers, a day of great triumph, and this is what causes us to bear difficulties, and strive for martyrdom in God's Way, and spend our money to help the poor and the needy. The basis of all of this is that there will come a day when we stand before God, a day which God *the Most High* has called the Day of Judgement because it is a day when every person will be judged according to whether he worked by his religion or squandered it. Those who believed, and followed the religion, will be rewarded with eternal life in Paradise, and those who denied religion, and refused God's guidance, will be requited for eternity in Hell.

It is of God's Justice that there will be a day of reckoning because some people who act with tyranny and iniquity on earth, might escape the punishment of this world; but will those who have escaped punishment in this world, be able to escape from God's justice? They will never escape. Rather, they will be transferred from a limited punishment to an eternal one, fleeing from punishment by human worldly capacity straight to punishment by God's limitless power in the Hereafter. For this reason, there has to be a day when justice will be done, and where everyone who spread corruption in the land and escaped punishment will be requited. Indeed, it is by God's Will that a person might escape punishment in this world; but they should not think that it is good for them; it is bad for them because they have escaped a limited punishment for an unending one.

Great praise is due to God *the Most High* because He is 'Owner of the Day of Judgement,' and He alone will judge His creation; for God *the Glorious and Exalted* treats all His creatures equally. The basis of God-consciousness is the Day of Judgement.

Before we turn to the next verse in *al-Fatiha*, 'You alone do we worship; and to You alone do we turn for aid' (4), we need first to address an important issue. There are two kinds of vision: the vision of the eye, and the vision of

faith, i.e. of the heart. They differ from each other. The vision of the eye requires that the thing be present before you so that you can look at it with your eyes; and this is not a matter of faith, and so you do not say, 'I believe I see you before me' because you actually do see me. As long as you see me, this is certainty. The vision of faith, however, is that you believe in something unseen as though you see it before you. This vision is of greater certainty than the vision of the eye because it is a vision of faith and insight – and this is a very important issue. 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* relates:

One day, we were with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, when a man came to us wearing clothes of brilliant white, with jet black hair, upon whom were no traces of his having travelled, though none of us knew him. He came and sat right before the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, and placed his knees against his, and placed his hand on his thigh, and said, 'O Muhammad, tell me about Islam.' The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Islam (surrender to God) is that you testify that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; and that you perform prayer, and pay the poor-due, and fast Ramadan, and make pilgrimage to the House if you are able.' He said, 'You have spoken the truth.' We were amazed that he asked him and then confirmed his answer. Then he said, 'And tell me of faith.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'It is that you believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, His messengers, and the Last Day.' 'You tell the truth,' he said. 'Now tell me of excellence.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'It is that you worship God as though you see Him; for if you do not see Him, He sees you.' 'Now tell me of the Hour,' he said. He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'The one asked knows no more about it than the asker.' 'So tell me of its signs,' he said. He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'That the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress, and that you will see barefoot, naked, destitute shepherds competing in the construction of tall buildings.'

Then he departed, and I waited a while in silence. Then, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to me, 'O 'Umar, do you know who the questioner was?' I answered, 'God and His Messenger know better'. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'It was Gabriel: he came to teach you your religion.'<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Narrated by Muslim

The statement of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'It is that you worship God as though you see Him; for if you do not see Him, He sees you' is an illustration of the vision of faith in the believer's soul. When a person believes, he must approach all his affairs with a faithful vision so that when he reads a verse about paradise, it is as though he sees the residents of paradise in their enjoyment; and when he reads a verse about the denizens of hell, his body trembles, and it is as though he sees the inmates of hell being tormented.

One day, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* saw one of his companions, whose name was Al-Harith *God be pleased with him*, and asked him, 'How are you, Al-Harith?' He replied, 'I have become a true believer.' The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Consider what you say, for every statement has a reality. What is the reality of your faith?' Al-Harith *God be pleased with him* answered: 'I have forsaken this world: I spent my nights awake (in worship), and my days thirsty (in fasting); and it is as though I am looking at the throne of my Lord here before me, and it is as though I see the residents of paradise visiting one another therein, and as though I see the inmates of hell bellowing therein.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O Al-Harith, you know: so be steadfast!'<sup>(1)</sup>

For this reason, we find that the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says, addressing the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, with a rhetorical question: 'Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?' (*al-Fil*: 1)

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(1) Narrated by At-Tabarani in *Al-Kabir* and by Abu Na'im in *Al-Hilya*, and the like of it was narrated by Al-Bayhaqi, and Abu Hilal Al-'Askari in *Al-Amthal*, and Ibn An-Najjar in *At-Tarikh*. The Hadith has supporting narrations that lift it to the level of a sound Hadith. Al-Bayhaqi narrated in *Az-Zuhd* that Al-Harith ibn Malik *God be pleased with him* related: 'I went to God's Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, who had wrapped his cloak around his neck under his head. I greeted him, and he said to me: 'How are you, O Harith?' I said: 'I am a man of the believers.' He said: 'Consider what you say!' I said: 'Yes, a man of the believers, in truth!' He sat up *peace and blessings be upon him*, and then said, 'Everything has a reality; what is the reality of this?' I said: 'I abstained from this world: I spent my nights awake, and my days hungry; and it is as though I am looking at the throne of my Lord here before me, and it is as though I see the denizens of paradise visiting one another therein, and it is as though I hear the howling of the denizens of hell therein.' He said: 'You know so be steadfast, O servant whose heart God has enlightened with faith!'

Some orientalists' lists use this verse in an attempt to find fault with the Noble Quran. God *the Most High* addresses His Messenger: 'Have you not seen...' though the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, so he could not have witnessed it, as he was only an infant—a few days or months old. If God used the expression, 'Do you not know...' we would say that it means that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* could have heard it from someone else because you either obtain knowledge yourself, or someone else gives it to you, i.e. another human being teaches you. But God *the Most High* did not say 'Do you not know...'; He rather, said, 'have you not seen....'

We say that this is a matter of faith. Whatever God *the Most High* says is to be treated like a true sighting for the believer. The Quran is speech whose recitation is an act of worship until the end of time. God's words 'Have you not seen...' means that this vision is continual for all believers who read this verse. As long as God says, 'Have you not seen...', you see with your faith what you cannot see with your eye. This is the vision of faith which is truer than the vision of the eyes because the eye might deceive its owner, whilst the believing heart will never do this.

In Arabic grammar, the third person is called the 'absent pronoun'. If you say, 'Zayd is here,' this means he is right before you. But if you say 'I met Zayd,' this means that Zayd is absent when you make this statement; you met him, but he is not with you when you talk about him.

So in speech, we have someone present, someone absent, and a speaker. The 'absent' is the person who is not present, or, in other words, the one who we do not see when we are speaking, whilst the 'present' is with us when we speak, and the 'speaker' is the one who does the speaking. All matters of doctrine do not involve direct witnessing or physical seeing; faith in what is unseen gives us the vision of faith, which as we said, is stronger than the vision of the eyes.

In the verses of *al-Fatiha* we read: 'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,' and God is unseen, and 'Lord of the worlds' is unseen, and 'the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' is unseen, and 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' is unseen. Judging by the linguistic context, it might seem to be more appropriate

to use the discourse of the absent (third) person, and say ‘Him alone do we worship,’ but God *the Most High* altered the context, and changed it from third person to second person, saying, ‘You alone do we worship’. The third absent person has become the second person, directly addressed. Instead of ‘Him alone do we worship,’ we say, ‘You alone do we worship’, and so it became a vision of faithful certainty.

So you are in the presence of God *the Most High*, who showered you with blessings that you see, and that surround you because He is ‘Lord of the worlds;’ and He reassured you of His merciful ordainment, for He is ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy;’ so if you do not praise and worship Him because of His blessings which you feel and live in, then be forewarned of going against His guidance, for He is ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement’.

When the True Lord *the Most High* describes Himself with all these attributes which include the bounties of divinity and the blessings of lordliness, and the mercy that erases sins, and the awe of meeting Him on the Day of Resurrection, we have moved from attributes of the unseen to the station of witnessing. We evoke the majesty of God’s Divinity and the bounties of His Mercy, and His unending blessings, and His all-encompassing command on the Day of Resurrection.

When you read God Almighty’s words ‘You alone do we worship,’ the expression indicates exclusivity, meaning that if I say to a person, ‘I will meet you,’ I might meet him alone, or I might meet him with a group of people. But, if I say ‘You alone will I meet,’ this means it will be an exclusive private meeting.

When we read the verse ‘You alone do we worship,’ we know that God *the Glorious and Exalted* restricts worship to His own blessed Self. If the verse said, ‘We worship You alone,’ this does not give the same meaning because one might say, ‘We worship You alone, and such-and-such alongside you.’ But when you say ‘You alone do we worship,’ using grammatical inversion and placing the grammatical object ‘You alone’ first, you have decisively made it known that worship is for God alone because you cannot use a conjunction and add anything to it. Worship is submission to God *the Most High*

under His guidance of commands and prohibitions. Because of this, prayer is the foundation of worship, and prostration is the ultimate act of submission to God because you take your face, the noblest part of you, and place it on the ground where the feet are usually placed. This is the ultimate act of submission to God, and this is done in prayer in public in front of everybody, to announce your submission to God in front of all humanity.

In worship, rich and poor, and old and young, are equal so that all of us cast arrogance and haughtiness from our hearts in front of everyone. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* makes all His servants equal in submission to him, and in announcing this submission.

Thus the verse 'You alone do we worship' invalidates worship to other than God and affirms worship to Him alone. That is, we do not worship anyone but God, and no one can ever be joined with Him. So 'You alone do we worship' gives exclusivity to the worship of God alone: there is no god but He; and no deity other than He deserves to be worshipped. Let us consider the verse that affirms that had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than God, both (those realms) would surely have fallen into ruin. But glory be to God, Lord of the Throne, above what they utter (*al-Anbiya'*: 22).

In this way, when we say 'Praise be to God,' we evoke the things that necessitate praise: God's blessings, both apparent and hidden. And when we say 'Lord of the worlds,' we evoke the blessings of lordliness in His creation, and the subjection of His universe. And when we evoke 'the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy,' we evoke mercy and forgiveness, and the repayment of ill with good, and the opening of the door of repentance. And when we evoke the 'Owner of the Day of Judgement,' we evoke the Day of Reckoning, and how God *the Most High* will reward us for our deeds. And when we evoke all of this, we say 'You alone do we worship,' i.e. we worship God alone; so recognising what is required of us: worship.

Let us pause here for a moment, and discuss what in linguistics they call 'cause and effect'. If your son wants to pass his exam, he must study. The cause of this act of study is success; it is as though success was born in my mind first, along with everything that it would bring, such as distinction, a certain future, and everything else for which I desire and work.

So the motive comes before action. You evoke success in your mind, and then afterwards you study so that you can achieve success. If you want to travel somewhere, for example, a car is a means by which you can achieve your end; and following the road is another means. The motive that made me leave the house and get in the car and follow the road, however, is that I want to go somewhere, Alexandria for example. The motive here is to arrive in Alexandria: this is what was in my mind first, and then I did what I had to do to achieve it.

God *the Exalted* created us and gave us life in order that we would worship Him, and this is the sole purpose of our existence as God tells us that He has not created the jinns and men but that they should worship Him (*adh-Dhariyat*: 56). So the cause of creation was worship, and creation was carried out in order for worship to become a reality. However, the principle of (cause and effect) does not apply to God's actions: we say that there is no cause that will bring benefit to God *the Exalted* because God has no need for the worlds. However, the cause brings benefit to the creation. God *the Most High* created us to worship Him, but not because this worship would bring Him benefit in any sense, or increase His dominion in the slightest. Our worship only brings us good, in this life and the next.

We should not try to find causes behind God's actions; in fact, those who are commanded to worship are the ones who will benefit from it.

But does 'worship' mean sitting in the mosque and chanting the glorification of God, or is it a system of guidance that applies to all life – in the home, at work, in all earthly endeavours? If God *the Most High* only wanted His servants to pray and chant terms of glorification to Him, He would not have created them with free will; rather, He would have created them compelled to worship Him, like everything else He created except humans and jinn's. God *the Most High* possesses the ability of compulsion, and so He has the ability to compel anything to worship Him, as He *the Exalted* comforts His Messenger saying that perhaps he was wearing himself away with grief because they (the Prophet's people) would not believe; God *the Most High* further states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down unto the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara*': 3-4).

If God *the Most High* wanted to make us submissive to His Guidance by coercion, no one would be able to disobey Him. God *the Exalted* gave us signs to this reality by placing in our own bodies, and in the events of this world, many phenomena in which we are compelled. The body is under God's compulsion in many regards. The heart beats and stops according to God's will, not ours. The stomach digests, and we know nothing about it. And we have no say in the circulation of blood around our bodies. Many things in the human body are under God's compulsion, and we have no say in their actions. And in those events that befall me in this worldly life, I am under compulsion, and I cannot prevent them from happening. For example, I cannot prevent a car from hitting me, or a plane from burning with me on-board it, or any other of the mishaps that happen by God's ordainment in this world.

So the sphere of free will in my life is limited. I cannot choose the day on which I am born, or who my parents will be, or whether I will be tall or short, or handsome or ugly, and so on. The sphere of free will in my life applies only to matters related to God's Guidance (commands and prohibitions) and whether I will follow it or not. God *the Most High* has the ability, if He so willed, to coerce all His creatures to worship Him; but He wants loving worship from mankind and the jinn, and so He created us with free will and the choice of whether to come to Him or not, and whether to obey Him or not, and whether to believe in Him or not.

So, if you love God, you go to Him freely. You leave that which incurs His wrath out of love for Him, and you do what He requires from you out of love for Him, not compulsion. If your free will leads you to follow God's guidance, you have achieved the level of worship based on love for God, and you have become one of God's free-choosing servants (*'ibad*), not only one of His servants/slaves (*'abid*). In one way or another, we are all God's servants, and servants are equal in what they are compelled to do; but free-choosing servants are those who voluntarily give up their own free will and accept the responsibilities with which God (their Maker) charged them. For this reason, the True Lord *the Exalted*, in the Noble Quran, distinguishes between slaves and free-choosing servants. He addresses His Messenger saying that if His servants ask him (the Prophet) about Him (God); let them know that He is



near; He responds to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls to Him; let them, then, respond to Him, and believe in Him so that they might be following the right way (*al-Baqara*: 186).

And God also describes His loving servants as those who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the ignorant address them, reply with (words of) peace, and who pass the night in the worship of their lord prostrate and standing, and who pray to their Lord to turn away from them the suffering of hell – for its torment is endless: it is indeed an ill abode and resting place (*al-Furqan*: 63-65).

So we see that God *the Most High* gave certain attributes to the believers, calling them ‘servants’ (*‘ibad*), but when He speaks about mankind as a whole, He says ‘slaves’ (*‘abid*); and this is the implied meaning of the term as we find it in the verse that asserts that God never does the least injustice to His creatures (*Al-‘Imran*: 182). (The word used for ‘creatures’ is *‘abid*, literally ‘slaves’).

But someone might argue that we find in the Quran the word *‘ibad* (ordinarily used for loving servants of God) sometimes used to speak of people who strayed from God’s guidance, like in the verse that describes the day when God will gather the heathens and the idols that they worshipped, and He will ask those who were worshipped if they were the ones who led those His servants (using the term *‘ibad*) astray, or did they by themselves stray from the right path (*al-Furqan*: 17).

This statement is about the sinners and the people who strayed, but God calls them *‘ibad* (loving servants). In answer to this, we say that the verse refers to an incident that is going to happen in the Hereafter; and in the Hereafter, we will have lost our free will and we will all be God’s servants because we will be compelled to obey God, the Sole Deity. Human free will comes to an end at the moment of death, and everyone becomes a servant to God, compelled to obey Him, having no choice in the matter.

God *the Most High* gave mankind freedom of choice in matters related to worship in this worldly life, and did not compel or coerce them to do anything, and He did not impose any moral responsibilities on those who do not believe in Him. In fact, it is the believer who imposes these responsibilities on himself,

and commits himself voluntarily to God's system of guidance, thereby entering into a pact of faith with God *the Most High*. And so we find that when God delineates moral duties, He does not address all people; He addresses only those who believe in Him. In prescribing fasting, for example, God commands those who believe to perform fasting since it is ordained for them as it was ordained for those before them so that they may attain piety (*al-Baqara*: 183).

And again concerning prayer, God addresses believers instructing them to seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer; for God is with those who are patient in adversity (*al-Baqara*: 153). So God *the Most High* holds no one morally responsible but the believer who enters into a pact of faith with him.



When we place the Master of the Messengers, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the scale of worship, we find that he is at the very peak because He *peace and blessings be upon him* attained the quality of worship that God required from His creation, just as God *the Most High* wanted it. So, to those who say that the goal of all creation was Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, we say that this is correct, but in the sense that he *peace and blessings be upon him* realised the ideal of worship required by God *the Exalted*, the worship for which mankind was created. In this way, we recognise the lofty status and rank accorded to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by his Creator.

God *the Most High* joined together the concept of worshipping Him alone and the concept of seeking help from Him alone, in the fifth verse of *al-Fatiha*: 'You alone do we worship; and to You alone do we turn for aid'. That is, we worship no one but You, and we seek aid from no one but You. Seeking aid from God *the Exalted* spares you the degradation of this world because when you seek aid from other than God, you are only seeking the aid of a human being, who, no matter what his influence and power might be, is limited by his human nature.

As we live in a changing world, a strong person might become weak, and an influential person might become, in a single moment, an outcast with no influence. Even if this does not occur, the one you seek the aid of might die, and you might not find anyone else to help you.

God *the Most High* wants to spare the believer this worldly degradation, and so He tells him to seek the aid of the Ever Living, who never dies, and the

Strong, who never becomes weak, and the All-Powerful, from whose control no one can escape. If you seek the aid of God *the Most High*, God will be on your side; and only He can turn your weakness into strength, and your humiliation into honour. The believer will always be facing a greater power than himself because those who wage war against God's guidance are people of power and influence, who love to enslave others. The believer will engage in a struggle with them, and so the True Lord assures His believing servants that He is with them in the struggle between truth and falsehood. And the supplication 'and to You alone do we turn for aid' is akin to the proclamation 'You alone do we worship,' i.e. 'we seek Your aid alone,' and this is a basic principle for life's actions; this is because seeking help from others means that one has made use of and exhausted the means available to him, and failed, and at this moment he must remember that he has a Lord, whom he worships exclusively, and who will not abandon him, and whose aid he must seek. When the personal means run out, there is still the Lord of the means, and He is always there. He never fails to notice anything, and never misses a single whisper in the universe. And so the believer must always turn to heaven, and God *the Most High* will be with him.


 اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ  
 صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ
 

**Guide us to the straight path [6] the path of those  
You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who  
have not gone astray [7] (The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 6 - 7)**

After you attain faith in God *the Most High* as God and Lord, and after you have evoked His divine bestowal and His lordly blessings and the overwhelming mercy God shows to His creatures, and after you have declared that there is no deity but God, and after proclaiming 'You alone do we worship,' confirming that worship is for God alone, to whom we ascribe no partner, and aside from whom we worship no other, and after you have declared that you seek God's aid alone: 'and to You alone do we turn for aid;' and having done all this, you have become one of God's servants. God then, teaches you the

supplication that all believers hope to achieve. As long as you are one of God's good servants, God *the Glorified* will answer your prayer as He promised: He told His Messenger that when His servants ask him about God, God is close, He answers the prayer of anyone who calls upon Him whenever He calls; so let them respond to Him and believe in Him, that they may be guided to the right way (*al-Baqara*: 186).

The perfect believer should never seek things of this world. Why should he not? It is because true life for man is in the Hereafter; therein is everlasting life, and delight that never leaves you, nor do you leave it. The believer does not ask God to give him a lot of wealth, for example, or that he own a building, for he knows that all of this is temporal, and will end one way or another. Rather, he asks for what saves him from Hell, and takes him to Paradise.

Out of His mercy upon us, God *the Most High* taught us what to ask for, and for this we really need to praise God. The first thing the believer asks for is guidance to the straight path: 'Guide us to the straight way.' Guidance is two kinds: guidance of direction, and guidance of aid. The first kind has been offered to all people; and the guidance of aid is given solely to the believers who accept God's religion. God *the Glorified* has provided the guidance of direction to all His creatures by showing them the way of goodness, and making it clear to them. Now, whoever wants to follow the way of goodness may do so; and whoever does not want to follow it, God will leave them to do as they like.

This general guidance is the basis of God's message. In his system of religious guidance, God *the Glorified* made clear for us, with His commands and prohibitions, what pleases Him and what displeases Him; and He showed us the way to follow if we wished to be guided, and the way that if we followed would make God angry with us and incur His wrath. But did everyone to whom God *the Most High* showed the way of guidance actually follow it? God tells us the story of the tribe of Thamud, to whom He offered guidance, but they preferred blindness to guidance: and so a thunderbolt of shameful suffering fell upon them by their doings (*Fussilat*: 17).

So, there are some people who do not choose the way of guidance, and they do this thanks to the free will that God has given them. If God *the Glorified*

had wanted all of us to be guided, none of His creatures would have been able to go against His will. However, He created us with free will so that we would come to Him out of love and desire; He did not coerce us to obey Him. What happens to those who follow the way of guidance, and to those who do not follow it, those who go against God's rule in His universe?

God *the Most High* helps those who follow the way of guidance, makes faith and piety beloved to them and makes obedience to Him beloved to them. He tells us that as for those who have guidance, He will increase their guidance and will cause them to grow in God-consciousness (*Muhammad*: 17).

That is, if anyone chooses the way of guidance, God helps them to follow it and increases their piety and love for the religion. As for those who, when guidance is offered to them, they avoid God's guidance and go against it, God *the Glorified* lets them be, and leaves them to their misguidance: As for anyone who chooses to remain blind to the remembrance of God the Most Merciful, to him God will assign a devil to become his fast companion (*az-Zukhruf*: 36).

God *the Most High* made clear to us the kinds of people who are deprived of the guidance of aid in faith. As mentioned in the Quran, they are of three kinds: The Quran speaks about those who open their hearts to disbelief and who prefer the worldly life to the Hereafter; God does not guide the unbelievers (*an-Nahl*: 107). In another verse we read that people should be pious and God-fearing, for God does not bestow His guidance upon the impious (*al-Ma'ida*: 108).

Also, God *the Most High* relates to us in the Noble Quran the incident of the arrogant infidel who, proud of the kingship that God had granted him, argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord. Abraham said, 'My Lord is the One Who grants life and deals death,' and he replied, 'I too grant life and deal death.' Abraham then said, 'God causes the sun to rise in the east, so you bring it up, then, in the west!' Thereupon the infidel was dumbfounded; God does not guide the evildoers and the unjust (*al-Baqara*: 258). So those who are denied the guidance of aid in faith are the unbelievers, the impious, and the unjust.

Returning to the sixth verse of *al-Fatiha*: 'Guide us to the straight way,' what is a 'way'? It is a road that leads to a destination. Why does the text say

that it is a 'straight way'? Because God *the Glorified* has indicated for us, within His system of guidance, the straight path which is the shortest way to reaching the destination. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and so if you want to go somewhere, the shortest route you can take is the one that has no bends but is rather perfectly straight. Do not think that distancing oneself from the straight path occurs only with a large diversion; rather, the smallest of diversions can lead eventually to a great distance of separation.

It suffices to consider the case of railway tracks. When a train begins to take a course other than its current one, to begin with, it only changes direction by a few millimetres, i.e. the initial change is only very slight. As it goes further, the difference widens more and more, until by the end, the final course is tens or hundreds of kilometres away from the initial one. So any divergence, even if it is very slight, will take you very far from the straight path. For this reason, the supplication 'Guide us to the straightway' means to the way that has not even the slightest divergence, even a few millimetres – the path that has no incongruity that might lead us away from God's straight path.

So the believer asks God *the Glorified* to guide him to the shortest path leading to the goal. And what is the goal? It is paradise, and delight in the Hereafter. And so we say, 'O Lord, guide us and help us to follow the straight path, the path of Your guidance which will take us to paradise without any deviation to distance us from it.' In a Qudsi Hadith, God *the Most High* says, 'When the servant says "Guide us the straightway", God *the Glorified* says, "This is for My servant; and My servant shall have what he asks for."'

The verse then explains the straightway. It is 'The way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings.' What does the expression 'those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings' mean? We get the answer in the noble verse that states that those who obey God and the Messenger shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the Prophets, and those who never deviated from the truth, and those who (with their lives) bore witness to the truth, and the righteous ones: and how goodly a company these are! (*an-Nisa'*: 69)

When you read this noble verse, you ask God *the Most High* that you will be with the Prophets, and those who never deviated from the truth, and those

who (with their lives) bore witness to the truth, and the righteous ones. That is, you ask God *the Glorified* to make you follow the same path that they followed so that you will be with them in the Hereafter. It is as though you are asking for the highest level of paradise because all of those we have mentioned, have a high station in paradise, and so you ask God *the Most High* to allow you to follow the path in which there is no deviation, which will take you to the highest level of paradise in the quickest possible time.

When we see that God *the Most High* has said, ‘This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asked for,’ we realise that this answer gives you hope in the high life in the Hereafter, and offers you the delights promised by God – not according to human capabilities, as is the case in this world; but according to the omnipotent power of God *the Most High*. If the blessings of this world cannot be enumerated or measured, can the blessings of the Hereafter be enumerated and measured? God *the Most High* asserts that in that (paradise) they shall have whatever they may desire – and there is yet more with God (*Qaf*: 35). That is, you will find everything you ask for in front of you simply by you having desired it and thought of it; and whatever you ask for and whatever you hope for, God *the Glorious and Exalted* has more for you. And so He not only gives you everything you ask for, but also adds to this more of His blessings, blessings that you neither asked for nor even knew of. This is only an analogy to bring the image of these blessings closer to our minds; for within paradise, there are things no eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard, and which have never occurred to any human heart.

Meanings must first exist in the mind before a word is found to express them. This is why there is no word in our languages for those things we are unaware of. For example, we did not have the word ‘television’ until the device was invented and given a fixed definition. The same is true of the airplane. Things come into existence first, and then they are given names. For this reason, the linguistic councils and authorities on language meet from time to time to come up with names for new things that have been invented, and whose purpose is well known.

This being the linguistic rule, there are no words in human language that can express the delights that the denizens of paradise will experience because

no eye has seen them, and no ear has heard them, and they have never occurred to any human heart. And so everything we read in the Noble Quran only brings the image of blessings in paradise closer to our minds; it does not give us the reality of what exists therein. So we find that the Noble Quran gives only the 'likeness' of the paradise which the God-fearing are promised – a paradise wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, and rivers of milk whose taste never alters, and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, and rivers of honey cleansed of all impurity; in addition to that, they will have fruits of all kinds, and, on top of all, they will have forgiveness from their Lord. This image, moreover, is brought into contrast with the image of the inmates of hellfire wherein they will live for ever and where they will be given to drink boiling water which will tear their bowels asunder (*Muhammad*: 15).

The verse does not give the reality of paradise; it only gives an example that helps the intellect have a closer image of it; for there are no words in human language that can give us the reality of what paradise contains.

Returning now to the seventh verse of *al-Fatiha*, we have further explanation of the 'straight way.' It is 'not of those with whom you are angry,' that is not of 'Those who have incurred Your wrath, O Lord, by their disobedience, and from whom You withheld the guidance of aid' – those who knew what the religion required, but went against it, and did everything that God forbade, and so incurred His wrath.

The implication of the expression 'not of those with whom you are angry' is the supplication 'O Lord, do not facilitate for us the route that incurs Your wrath,' as it was incurred by those people who disobeyed and flouted God's system of guidance in order to attain temporal power in this worldly life, and to consume the wealth of others wrongfully.

The phrase 'not of those with whom you are angry' is mentioned elsewhere in the Noble Quran, where God *the Most High* speaks about those who deserve a yet worse retribution. They are those whom God has cursed and with whom He has been angry, and whom He has turned into apes and swine because they worshipped the powers of evil: these are yet worse in station and farther



astray from the right path (*al-Ma'ida*: 60). This verse was revealed to speak about the condition of the Israelites.

The seventh verse of *al-Fatiha* gives further delineation of the 'straight way': 'nor of those who go astray.' Now, there are those who go astray, and there are those who lead others astray. Those who go astray are those who follow other than God's way, and walk in error, far from guidance and from God's religion. We say 'he has strayed from the path,' meaning that he is drifting aimlessly without knowing the way to get where he wants to go – that is, he has lost his way in the world, and become a follower of Satan, and has strayed far from God's straight path. These are 'those who go astray'. As for those who lead others astray, they are those who are not satisfied merely with straying from God's way and having no guidance in life; rather, they also try to drag other people into error. They tempt people to disbelieve, and to stop following God's Guidance, and to stray far from God's path. Every sinner will bear his sins on the Day of Resurrection, but those who take people astray will carry their own sins and, in addition, the sins of those they misguided. God *the Glorified* describes their case on Resurrection Day: they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray: theirs will be a heavy evil load indeed (*an-Nahl*: 25).

So when you read *al-Fatiha*, you seek refuge with God from being among those who go astray; but God *the Most High* did not mention here those who lead others astray. In explanation to this point, we say that in order to be one who takes others astray, you must first be astray yourself, and so taking refuge from misguidance includes both these conditions. As long as you seek refuge from being astray, you will never be one of those who lead others astray.

We still have to discuss the way we end the Opening of the Book, namely by our saying 'Amen,' following the example of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who was taught by Gabriel *peace be upon him* to say 'Amen' after reciting *al-Fatiha*. So, it is of the speech of Gabriel *peace be upon him* to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is not part of the Quran.

The word 'Amen' means 'answer our prayer, o Lord,' and we say it after we have prayed 'Guide us to the straight way, the way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings.'

The supplication here is for something hoped to be attained, and 'Amen' is a prayer for something hoped to be attained. The scholars have differed concerning the word 'Amen' as to whether it is Arabic or not.

Here a question is raised: How could a non-Arabic word enter a Quran that God pronounced to be Arabic? We say that the presence of words whose origin is not Arabic in the Noble Quran does not mean that the Quran is not all Arabic; it means that if the Arabs were to be addressed with it, they would understand it. There were words that had entered the Arabic language before the Quran was revealed which came into general use and gained currency, and so became Arabic (arabised) to which Arab ears grew accustomed.

The statement that the Quran is 'Arabic' does not mean that it is restricted to those words that are by origin in the Arabic language. Rather, the meaning is that the Quran was revealed in the language that was current and widely used by the Arabs. As long as a word is current for the tongues to utter and for the ears to hear, the generations that encounter it, do not differentiate between it and any other word of a purely Arabic origin. The new words had become Arabic by frequent usage, and when the Quran was sent down, the word was just as often used as any other Arabic word.

Language consists of words used for particular meanings by general agreement so that when the word is used, its meaning comes to mind. The language that we (Arabs) speak is composed solely of nouns, verbs, and particles; nouns are words, verbs are words, and particles are words. Each word has a meaning in itself; but the question is whether this meaning is independently understood or not. For example, if you say 'Muhammad,' we understand this to mean the person with this name, and so it has an independent meaning. If you say *kataba* (wrote), we understand this to mean that he gathered some letters together to be read as a form of writing. But if you say 'what,' which is a particle, there is no independent meaning; and if you say 'in,' this has a prepositional sense, but it does not give us an independent meaning – rather, we must say 'the water is in the glass,' or 'so-and-so is on the horse'. We call those things that have no independent meaning 'particles,' which do not have a clear meaning until something is added to them. Verbs need a particular time, but nouns do not.

Therefore, a noun is something that denotes an independent meaning, and is not contextualised by time, whilst a verb is something that denotes an independent meaning and is contextualised by time; and a particle denotes a non-independent meaning. The sign of an Arabic verb is that it can have the letter *ta* annexed to it to indicate the doer of the action (subject; like in *katabtu*, I wrote), and this is not possible for a noun (you cannot say *Muhammadtu* for instance). If you see something that indicates a specific action in a specific time, but you cannot add this (*ta*) letter to it; this means it is a noun with a verbal meaning (*ism fi 'l*).

'*Amen*' is an example of this. It is not a verb, but is rather a noun that has a verbal meaning, which is 'Answer our prayer.' When you hear the word oh, this is also a noun with a verbal meaning, in this case 'I feel pain/sorrow'. When you say (*ouff*), this is a noun with the verbal meaning 'I am displeased.' '*Amen*' is a noun with the verbal meaning 'Answer our prayer.' Sometimes you say it when you are the reader, and sometimes you say it when you are the listener. When you read *al-Fatiha*, you say '*Amen*,' i.e. you call on the Lord to answer your prayer because, due to your strong attachment to the guidance you have prayed for, you are not satisfied by simply praying 'guide us;' you emphasise your prayer by also asking God to answer it. If, on the other hand, you are praying in a group, and you hear the *Imam* (prayer leader) recite *al-Fatiha*, you also say '*Amen*' because the one being led in prayer is a partner in the prayer and is also supplicating. The *Imam* makes the supplication, and when you say '*Amen*,' you share in it. For this reason, when Moses *peace be upon him* prayed to God to wipe out the wealth of Pharaoh's people, and destroy them, God *the Glorified* told Moses that their (using the dual pronoun in Arabic) prayer is accepted. Following this, God commanded the twain (referred to in the previous part of the verse) to continue, then both of them, steadfastly on the right way, and not to follow the path of those who have no knowledge (*Yunus*: 89).

The address here is from God *the Most High* to both Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them*; but Moses *peace be upon him* was the one who made the supplication. Aaron *peace be upon him* just said '*Amen*' to Moses' prayer, and so he was a partner and he shared in it.



**The Chapter of**

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***al-Baqara***

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

**A**fter the chapter of *al-Fatiha* comes the chapter of *al-Baqara* (the Cow) which follows the chapter of *al-Fatiha* in the Quranic text. If we look at the name of this chapter, we find that it certainly captures our attention. This is because the Quran was revealed to an Arab society, and at the time the Quran was revealed, cows were not very familiar to the Arabs, not being amongst the kinds of animals that they knew well at the time.

The name of this chapter is derived from an essential doctrine of this religion, namely the doctrine of resurrection. Belief in resurrection is the basis of this religion, and those who do not believe in the Hereafter, or the resurrection, or the reckoning, will do as they please in this world without fearing any account. As long as there is no resurrection, the world becomes like a jungle, and religion will have no meaning. The essence of worship is the affirmation that the true life is the life of the Hereafter, and that the life of this world is a test and a temporary abode, whilst the Hereafter is the abode of everlasting delight. In this world, delights will leave you or you will leave them; you leave them by dying, or they leave you by being taken from you. As for the life where delights do not leave you and you do not leave them, it is the Hereafter; and so whatever a believer does in this world, he seeks thereby the reward of the Hereafter.

God's system of guidance on earth will take you to Paradise if you apply it, and to Hell (God forbid!) if you contravene it. So faith as a whole is based on belief in the resurrection. The chapter of *al-Baqara* tells us of an experience

of the Children of Israel and how they witnessed the resurrection whilst still in this world, when God raised a dead man to life so he could speak and give the name of his murderer, after which he died again.

The story goes that a man from the children of Israel was very wealthy, and had no male son to inherit him, and so his nephew lay in wait for him at night and killed him, and then dumped his body by a neighbouring village so that the inhabitants of this village would be suspected of the murder. In the morning, the body was found by their village, and his people accused them of the crime. They denied it, but the victim's relatives believed them to be guilty. The argument became fierce, and so they decided to take the matter to their prophet Moses *peace be upon him*. They told him of their argument, and asked him to ask God to reveal the murderer's identity. The story is told in the chapter of *al-Baqara*.

Moses said to his people that God bids them sacrifice a cow and they said, 'Are you making a jest of us?' He said, 'May God keep me from being one of the ignorant.' They said, 'Call on your Lord for us that He would make plain to us what she is.' He said, 'God says that she is a cow neither old nor young, but of the middle age between the two: so do therefore what you are bidden.' They said, 'Call on your Lord for us, that he would make plain to us what her colour is.' He said, 'God says that she is a fawn-coloured cow; her colour is very bright; she pleases the beholders.' They said, 'Call on thy Lord for us that He would make plain to us what cow it is – for to us all cows are alike – and verily, if God pleases, we shall be guided rightly.' He said, 'God says that she is a cow not worn by ploughing the earth or watering the field, sound, no blemish in her.' They said, 'Now you have come with the truth.' Then they sacrificed her; yet they had barely left it undone. And when they slew a man, and strove among themselves about him, God brought to light what they had hidden. For God ordered them to strike the corpse with part of it. So God gives life to the dead, and shows you his signs, that you may understand (*al-Baqara*: 67-73).

So we see that God commanded the children of Israel to slaughter a cow; and if only they had just taken any cow, and struck the dead man with it, he would have come back to life and given the name of his murderer. But instead of immediately obeying God's commandments, they first of all were



incredulous, saying, ‘Are you making a jest of us?’ And so they kept making things harder for themselves by asking for more and more details of the cow until the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* gave them specifications for its age, colour and other things.

God brought this about for a wise reason, which serves to highlight another doctrinal matter. There was once a pious man of the children of Israel who would try his utmost to ensure that all his money was lawfully and righteously earned, and who always sought God’s favour in everything he did. When his death approached, all he owned was a calf, and his son was still an infant. The man did not know in whose charge he should leave the calf, which was all he had to leave behind for his son and his wife, and so he sought aid from God, supplicating, ‘Lord, I leave this calf in your trust; keep it safe for my son until he grows up.’ He could not find anyone in whose trust he could leave his son except God. Then he said to his wife, ‘I find no one more trustworthy than my Lord, and so I have entrusted this calf to Him.’ His wife asked him where the calf was, and he replied, ‘I let it go free in the pasture,’ and then he passed away.

The son grew up, and his mother told him what his father had done. He replied, ‘And how shall I find this cow to bring it back?’ His mother said, ‘Your father left the cow in the care of the Creator of the universe; say: ‘I trust in God,’ and go search for it.’ The son prayed, ‘O God, Lord of Abraham and Jacob, return to me that which my father left in Your trust.’ Then he went out to the fields, and there he found the cow. And this cow proved to be the one which had been described to the children of Israel who went to buy it. The son told them he would only sell it for the amount of gold that would fill its skin, and so this is what they paid him.

And so we see that if a father is pious, God will protect his children, watch over them and make things easy for them. God affirmed this fact in the chapter of *al-Kahf* when the righteous man (*Al-Khidr peace be upon him*) came and rebuilt the wall which protected the treasure belonging to the two orphan boys whose father had been a pious man (*al-Kahf*: 82).

And so in accordance with the same Divine wisdom, the pious man left all he had in God’s care and so God blessed his son, and when he grew to manhood he found great wealth waiting for him.

When they had slaughtered the cow, they struck the dead man with a part of it as God had commanded them to do, and the man came to life and uttered the name of the one who had killed him, and then returned to death again. And so the chapter became known as the chapter of *al-Baqara* (the Cow) for its affirmation of an essential religious doctrine, namely the resurrection.

As for the fact that the Quran thus begins with a chapter revealed in Medina rather than in Mecca, this is out of the chronological order of the revelation, yet we say that we must first understand what it means for a chapter to be Meccan or Medinan. Mecca and Medina are two sacred places; the former bore witness to the beginning of the Message and the first revelations of the Quran to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the latter was the place to which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated. When we say that a chapter or a verse of the Noble Quran is Meccan or Medinan, we must be aware of several things the first of which is the circumstances which immediately preceded its revelation, secondly the place where it happened, and thirdly the time when it was revealed. Every action has its time and its place, and it involves the doer and the receiver of the action and the cause and the ability to perform the action.

With respect to the revelation of the Noble Quran, the active agent (doer of the action) was God and its passive agent (receiver of the action) was the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the place was either Mecca or Medina; and so the Noble Quran was revealed at specific times and places, and for specific circumstances. The Quran is the means of man's guidance to God's way, and God has placed in the Quran a Divine embodiment of all the messages God had sent to humanity, and so the revelation of the Quran completed the Divine Revelation, and spelled out the coming of the final religion which would remain as the complete guide for the whole world until the Day of Resurrection. The Noble Quran included the story of the creation of the heavens and of earth, the creation of mankind and the stories of the Prophets and Messengers who had come before the Noble Quran was revealed restoring what had been lost from their accounts and correcting what had been corrupted so that they again would be true to what the Messengers brought from God, abrogate everything in the previous messages that the hands of

men had corrupted and correct all the human words that had been added to God's guidance, and the falsifications and lies that had been ascribed to it, and restore all that had been concealed from people by the religious men of old, Jewish rabbis and Christian monks.

It exposed every corruption, concealment, alteration or addition made by human hands to God's religion as revealed in the previous messages, and then added to this God's system of guidance; so the Noble Quran became the complete source of guidance for the worship of God on earth including within it all the Divine Guidance from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Resurrection.

Scholars differed over some verses as to whether they are Meccan or Medinan. Those who consider time as the essential criterion consider that all the chapters of the Quran that were revealed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* after the emigration to Medina are Medinan even if they were revealed in Mecca. Those who consider place to be the essential criterion, however, consider that every chapter revealed in Mecca is Meccan, and every chapter revealed in Medina is Medinan, irrespective of whether the revelation took place before the emigration or after it. The cause for this difference is that some chapters were revealed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was in Mecca after the emigration.

We say that this does not constitute a serious rift between the Muslim scholars as some would like to imply; rather, each side has considered the matter in a different way, some of them considering it from the point of view of place and others from the point of view of time. The scholars have not differed over the actual chapters or verses of the Quran.

If we look at the chapter of *al-Baqara*, we find that it was one of the first chapters to be revealed in Medina, and that it has some characteristics of both the Meccan and Medinan Revelations. The main characteristic of the Meccan chapters of the Noble Quran is that they focus on matters of doctrine. This is because the Meccan chapters and verses were revealed, whilst the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was confronting idol-worshippers and pagans- people who did not believe in any kind of religion- and a number of

the people of the Book whose link with their religion had become weak because they had neglected and altered what their messengers had said. The Quran had to address all of those people, and tell them that they were upon falsehood, and that they worshipped gods that could offer neither help nor harm, gods fashioned from the lowest level of existence on earth, that is from mere stones, when God had singled out mankind and made them His vicegerents on earth.

The Quran also had to tell those people that there was a life after death, and that Paradise and Hell existed and that true life is not that of this world but rather of the Hereafter. The Quran also had to warn them about God's punishment, and about the day they would meet Him, an awesome day from which none of them could hope to escape. It also had to alert them to the signs of God inherent in the universe which proved that He was the Maker and Creator. Also, it had to answer the questions posed by the Jewish scholars, which were posed as legitimate questions when in reality they were attempts to attack Islam.

Those Jews imagined that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might invent something on his own accord and so make a mistake and slip; and the Quran came to make all men equal so that rich men are neither better for their wealth, nor poor men will get a lesser reward because of their poverty, and that all would be equal before God like the teeth of a comb.

This was the essence of the Message in Mecca: Belief that there is no god but God *the Glorified* and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and strengthening the resolve of the believers at a time when they were few in numbers, weak and oppressed.

In order to make their faith firm, it was necessary to constantly remind them that God was with them, and that if they were destined to martyrdom, they would enter paradise without any reckoning, and that if they died as Muslims they would enter paradise, and that those who remained disbelievers would be punished in hell, and that every hardship undergone in God's cause will be rewarded in the afterlife so that they could bear the hardships and persecution with patience.

If we now consider the Medinan society, we see another situation with which Islam was confronted by disbelievers and idolaters, and by the Jews who had falsified the Torah; and by a new adversary in the form of the hypocrites. In Mecca the enemy had been uninformed; but in Medina, Islam faced an informed enemy, the hypocrites. There were no hypocrites in Mecca because no one would try to flatter the weak and downtrodden hoping to gain some advantage with them; and who in Mecca would have bothered to claim to be a believer whilst secretly remaining a disbeliever, thereby exposing himself to the persecution and abuse the believers had to face? Yet in Medina, when Islam became strong and had its own state, hypocrisy began to appear in the community. God tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that among the Arab Bedouins around them there are hypocrites; and that some of the people of Medina have become staunch in hypocrisy; the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* does not know them, but God knows them, and He will chastise them twice, and then they will be given over to great chastisement (*al-Tawba*: 101).

So, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* encountered a new kind of adversary in Medina when he entered into a struggle with the Jews and the hypocrites. Apart from the issues of the Oneness of God and the retort to the hypocrites and Jews, there was also the matter of the new Islamic society, and the need to educate this society so that it could pass on the Message. There was now a state, and there would be military campaigns, and there was a law composed of commandments and prohibitions.

None of this had existed in Mecca, and so the revelation in Mecca was mostly confined to matters of doctrine and eschatology, the reward awaiting the believers in the Hereafter and the punishments awaiting the disbelievers.

The verses revealed in Medina were thus concerned with laws, the affairs of the Muslim society, human interaction and how to handle the hypocrites; yet the Medinan revelation did not neglect doctrine, but rather emphasised it. And so when Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to review the Quranic text with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and arrange it in the order we know today, Islam had spread, and many people had embraced it, and so the first thing those Muslims needed to know was the rules of their religion and what they had to do and not to do.

God wanted to teach the Muslims who had accepted that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the rules of their religion. The doctrine had been established; what was left was for us to practice the religion, and keep to its guidance of commandments and prohibitions.

The chapter of *al-Baqara* included an expression of the strength of Islam, and the wisdom of the Quran and the teachings God imparted to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; it included the story of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*, the first man, the story of Abraham *peace be upon him* and his search for true faith, and the story of how he built the Holy Ka'ba, and it focused on the Jews in view of their being the fiercest opponents of Islam, as God tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will find out that the people most hostile to those who believe are the Jews and those who join other gods with God (*al-Ma'ida*: 82).

The chapter of *al-Baqara* also imparted many sacred laws, mentioning the rules on fasting, pilgrimage, wine, usury, embezzlement, marriage, divorce and child-suckling. It also defined the proper form of financial transactions in Islam. Islam did not need to present these rules in Mecca because there was not yet a Muslim society that was in need of them.



### ***Alif. Lam. Mim* [1] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 1)**

The chapter of *al-Baqara* begins with these three separately pronounced Arabic letters: '*Alif. Lam. Mim.*' These Arabic letters all stand alone, which mean they are all pronounced individually with their names, not sounds. Every letter has both a name and a sound, and when people speak they use the sounds of the letters, not their names. If you say 'write', you are pronouncing the sounds of the letters, whilst if you want to spell it out you say W-R-I-T-E. Only people who have learned to read and write can say the names of the letters, whilst those who have never studied will only be able to say the sounds of the letters, not their names. Perhaps this is the first thing that catches our attention here, since the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate,

unable to read and write, and so he could not have had any knowledge of the names of the letters. And so for him to come and speak the names of the letters is a miracle from God, and a sign that this Quran was Divinely revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had learned to read and write, it would have been a simple matter for him to utter the names of the letters; but go to any illiterate person who has never been educated; he will be able to utter the sounds of the letters, and say, 'book', and 'cup', and so on, but if you ask him to spell these words he will not be able to say that the word 'book' is made of the letters B, O, O, and K. These letters are therefore, proof that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was truly given a Message by his Lord, and that this Quran was a Divine Revelation from God.

We find that some of the cryptic letters which begin certain chapters of the Quran are read with their names and the very same letters form words in other chapters when they are read with their sounds. For example, if we read the letters '*Alif. Lam. Mim*' which are at the start of the chapter of *al-Baqara* according to their sounds, we get the Arabic word *alam* (did/have... not?) which is the first word of the chapter of *ash-Sharh*, where God comforts His Messenger by saying, 'Have we not opened up your heart for you'.

And again at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Fil*: 'Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?'

What would have made the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* say the names of the letters *Alif. Lam. Mim* at the beginning of the Chapter of *al-Baqara*, and yet pronounce them with their sounds to make a word at the beginning of the chapters of *ash-Sharh* and *al-Fil*? The only explanation is that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* heard them from God in this way just as Gabriel *peace be upon him* conveyed them to him. So the basis of learning the Quran is that it must be heard from another; you cannot recite it until you have heard it, in order that you know to read these three letters by their names and so say *Alif. Lam. Mim*, and not by their sounds and so say *alam* even though they are written in Arabic in exactly the same way. And so you must receive the Quran by oral transmission from a scholar before you can recite it yourself. The thing that makes it difficult for people is

that they did not bother to sit with a scholar or listen to a reciter, and then they want to read the Quran as though it is like any other book. We say no; the Quran is special, and is not like any other book you read; for sometimes a letter should be read by its name, and sometimes by its sound, and you cannot know which is which without listening to someone recite the Quran.

The foundation for reciting the Quran is that, in recitation, it is connected, not broken by intervals, and so when, for instance, you read the end of the chapter of *Yunus*, which reads *wa huwa khayr ul-hakimin* (for He is the best of all judges) (*Yunus*: 109), the word (*hakimin*) (judges) is not written with a sign for a pause, but rather, you read its full Arabic vowel ending which is connected in recitation to the beginning of the next chapter: *bismillahi 'r-rahmani 'r-rahim* (In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy). If it was to be read with a pause, there would be a *sukoon* (sign for a pause) on the last letter of the word *hakimin*.

So every verse in the Noble Quran is connected to the next- all except the chapter openings composed of individual letters which are supposed to be recited with pauses. At the start of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, you do not read *Alif. Lam. Mim*, with a *damma* vowel point on it (as a full word), but rather, you read it '*Alif*' with no vowel but with a pause sign, then '*Lam*' with no vowel but with a pause sign, then '*Mim*' with no vowel but with a pause sign so that every letter stands separate from the other, even though pauses are not found anywhere else in the whole Noble Quran, even at the ends of the chapters.

There are chapters in the Noble Quran which begin with a single letter such as: *Sad; Wal Qur'an dhil-dhikr* (*Sad*; by the Quran full of remembrance) (*Sad*: 1); and *Nun; wal qalami wa ma yasturoun* (*Nun*; by the pen, and all that they write with it) (*al-Qalam*: 1).

We notice that in these cases, the letter is not considered a separate verse in its own right, whilst '*Alif, Lam, Mim*,' in the chapter of *al-Baqara* is a verse in itself, as are '*Ha, Mim*,' '*Ain, Sin, Qaf*,' (*ash-Shura*: 1-2) although they are all cryptic letters. There are chapters which begin with five letters, like '*Kaf, Ha, Ya, Ain, Sad*,' (*Maryam*: 1), and chapters which begin with four, like '*Alif, Lam, Mim, Sad*' (*al-A'raf*: 1) and chapters that begin with four letters which



do not constitute a separate verse, like '*Alif, Lam, Mim, Ra*' (*ar-Ra'd*: 1) which are part of the same verse as the words which follow it, and are connected to them when recited. Yet there are also chapters that begin with only two letters which do constitute a separate verse, like '*Ya, Sin*' (*Ya Sin*: 1), and '*Ha, Mim*' at the beginning of the chapters of (*Ghafir*: 1) and (*Fussilat*: 1), and '*Ta, Sin*' (*an-Naml*: 1), all of which are individual verses in their own right, and are not recited connected to the verses that come after them. This shows that the cryptic letters which begin some chapters of the Quran are not all governed by a single rule.

'*Alif, Lam, Mim*' is a verse composed of three letters which is found at the beginnings of six chapters, namely *al-Baqara*, *Al-Imran*, *al-Ankabut*, *ar-Rum*, *as-Sajda* and *Luqman*. However, '*Alif, Lam, Ra*' are also three letters, but in none of their occurrences do they form a separate verse, but rather, they all are parts of the opening verses of four chapters, namely *Yunus*, *Yusuf*, *Hud* and *Ibrahim*. '*Alif, Lam, Mim, Sad*' are four letters, and they occur as a separate verse in the opening verse of the chapter of *al-A'raf*. On the other hand, '*Alif, Lam, Mim, Ra*' are also four letters, but they constitute a part- not all- of the first verse of the chapter of *ar-Ra'd*. So there is no general rule here, but rather, each instance of these letters has its own unique occurrence.

If you ask what these letters mean, we say that the question itself is not correct because the meaning of individual letters is only sought in Arabic linguistics if the letter is also a preposition or particle (together known as (*huruf al-ma'ani*) meaning 'the letters which have meanings'). Letters in Arabic are of two kinds: alphabetical letters and particle letters. Alphabetical letters have no function except to indicate a sound, whilst particle letters have meanings such as *fi* (in), indicating spatiality; *min* (from), indicating start/origin, *ila* (to) indicating end/destination; and '*ala* (on) indicating above-ness; these are all letters which have meanings.

If the letters that begin some chapters of the Quran are not governed by the general principle of connection, each one being pronounced by itself and followed by a pause, there must be a reason for this. First of all, let us consider the statement of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Whoever reads a single letter of the Quran earns a credit for a good deed; and

good deeds are rewarded tenfold. I do not say that '*Alif, Lam, Mim*' is a letter; but rather, '*Alif*' is a letter, '*Lam*' is a letter, and '*Mim*' is a letter.'<sup>(1)</sup>

And so they are given in the Quran as separate letters so that we know when we worship God by reciting the Noble Quran, that we have a reward for every single letter. When we recite *bismillahi 'r-rahmani' r-rahim* (In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy), we have a reward for the b and for the s and for the m in the first word alone which makes three good deed credits for a single word from the Noble Quran – and good deeds are rewarded tenfold. And so when we recite '*Alif, Lam, Mim*', though we do not know their meaning, we know that the Quran gives us a reward for every letter we recite whether we know its meaning or not; and God may have placed in these letters which we do not understand, a great reward which is unknown to us, and He wants us to gain this great reward by reciting them.

The Noble Quran is not only miraculous and inimitable in its rhetorical style, but it also presents miracles in every sphere the human mind can envisage. Anyone who reflects and thinks deeply on God's Words will find miracles in the Noble Quran; those who study rhetoric will find rhetorical miracles; those who study medicine will find medical miracles; botanists will find miracles in the Noble Quran, and so will astronomers, and so on.

If any of us wishes to know the meaning of these letters, we should not consider them according to our own human nature, but rather should seek out what God intended by them. Our own abilities are disparate, and our understandings are limited. We all possess keys to understanding which function according to the breadth of our knowledge; some of us have a simple key which work with a single turn, while others may turn twice, and others three times; but the one who has knowledge possesses all the keys, or possesses a master key which unlocks every door.

It is not proper for us that we exhaust our minds to come to an understanding of what these letters mean. In our own human condition, we sometimes need to use letters which have no meaning at all for other people, although they represent essential things to us. This is exactly the case; for example, the secret

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(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in (*Fada'il Al-Quran*)

codes the military use which to us are meaningless, whilst for those who use them they are a matter of life and death. So accept the words of God as you understand them, and accept the cryptic letters that you do not understand according to what God intends by them, for God decreed that their ultimate meaning remains with Him in the realm of the Unseen.

The Noble Quran is not completely uniform and monotonous, and this is in order for us to be alerted to things as we recite it, or write it down. For example, the phrase *bismaillahi 'r-rahmani 'r-rahim* (In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy) is written without the letter *alif* (ordinarily the first letter of the word *ism*, (name)) between the particle *bi* (in) and the of the word *ism* (name). Yet elsewhere, we find the word is written with the *alif*, as is the case in the verse: *Iqra' bismi rabbika lladhi khalaq* (Read in the Name of your Lord, Who has created) (*al-'Alaq*: 1).

And sometimes the word *tabarak* (blessed) is written with a plain *alif*, whilst other times it is not (although the pronunciation is the same). If the script of the Quran was supposed to be monotonous by nature, they would all be written in the same way; but they are written in this way in order that the Quran would be miraculous in both its written words and in its utterances.

To those who wonder about the wisdom of beginning certain chapters with these letters, we say that God has a wise reason for this whether we understand it or not. The Quran was revealed to an Arab people, amongst whom were both believers and disbelievers; yet we have never heard that any of them criticised the separate letters that begin certain chapters. This shows that they must have understood them with their pure Arabic sensibilities; if they had not understood them, they would have criticised them.

I advise those who recite the Noble Quran as an act of worship not to spend a lot of effort thinking about the meaning; as for those who read the Quran to reflect on it, they should stop and consider the meaning of each word. If you recite the Quran as an act of worship, read it by the secret God has placed therein. If you sit down and search for the meaning, you will end up restricting the meaning of the Noble Quran to your own limited knowledge, and you will take the meaning imperfectly because of the human imperfect nature. Rather, recite the Quran by the secret God has placed in it.

If we had to search for the true meaning of every word in the Noble Quran, we would thereby exclude the illiterate, and those who have not studied Arabic in depth, from reading it. Yet you can find illiterate people who cannot read a single word but have memorised the entire Quran. If you ask how this is possible, we say it is possible because of the secret God has placed therein.

Speech is a medium of conveying understanding between the speaker and the listener. The speaker is the one who begins, whilst the listener may be surprised by the speech because he did not know what the other would say. The listener might be preoccupied with something else, and so miss the first thing the speaker says. And so we use certain expressions to capture the listener's attention, expressions which serve no purpose other than to alert him that we will say something.

Since we do not understand the meaning of these cryptic letters, this shows that the meanings and miracles of the Noble Quran are unlimited. This is because the Quran is God's speech, and speech is an attribute of the speaker; therefore, no human understanding can reach the limits of the meanings of the Noble Quran, but can only come closer to them to a certain degree. God's speech is one of His attributes, an attribute whose perfection knows no bounds.

So if you claim that you understand everything in the Noble Quran, you will surely be restricting the meaning of God's speech to the limits of your own knowledge. And so these letters would come to astonish you, so that you know you can never limit the meanings of the Quran to the bounds of your own knowledge.

Just because a person does not understand something does not mean he cannot benefit from it. An unsophisticated country person can benefit from electricity and television and satellite broadcasts, though he knows nothing about how any of them works. Could it not be, then, that God has given us these letters in order that we benefit from their secrets, and gain the blessings that God has placed within them whether the believer knows what these letters mean or not?

The bestowal and wisdom of God are beyond the understanding of any human being. If one wanted to use his intellect to delve into the meaning of

these letters, he would find something new every day. Scholars have spent a lot of time and effort investigating this matter, and every scholar has gained from these letters according to the purity of his soul. None of the scholars has ever claimed to have found the true meaning of these letters, but rather, each of them says, 'God knows best what He meant.' And so one scholar, for example, said that if you take the letters (from different chapters) *Alif, Lam, Ra, and Ha, Mim, Nuun*, you will find that they spell out the word *ar-Rahman* (The All-Merciful), one of the Names of God. To this, we say that this cannot possibly give us a general understanding of the letters that begin some Quranic chapters; but what makes you tire yourself in searching for the meaning of these letters in the first place?

If God, who revealed the Quran, wanted us to understand what these letters meant, He would have simply worded them in a way which gave a direct meaning, or would have explained their meaning to us elsewhere. For example, one of the scholars once said that '*Alif, Lam, Mim*' means 'I am God, I hear and see.' To this scholar, we say: If God wanted to say this; there was nothing to stop Him simply saying it directly with these words so that everyone would understand it. There must be a secret behind these letters, one of the secrets that God wants us to benefit from by reading them, without necessarily understanding their meaning.

We must be aware that just as sight has its limit, and hearing has its limit, and touch, taste and smell have their limits, so too the human mind has limits of how much knowledge it can attain, and that there are realms beyond the human mind, which it cannot attain.

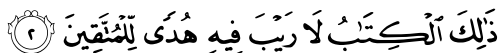
When one reads the Quran and comes to the cryptic letters at the start of some chapters, one should say, 'This is beyond the limits of my mind.' This does not mean that the door to any further investigation has been closed; for if we ourselves do not know something, we must recognise the limits of our capabilities in the presence of the capabilities of our Creator which have no limits.

Some matters of faith can be understood, whilst others cannot. The prohibition of pork or alcohol is not something we postpone obeying until we understand the wisdom behind it; rather, we obey because of our belief that as long as God has forbidden them, they are forbidden to us. And so the

Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If you understand something, act upon it; if you cannot comprehend it, have faith in it.'<sup>(1)</sup>

And God tells His Messenger that it was He Who has sent down to him 'The Book.' Some of its signs/verses are of themselves perspicuous; these are the basis of the Book, and others are allegorical. But they, in whose hearts is illness, follow its figures, craving discord, craving an interpretation; yet none knows its interpretation but God. And those stable in knowledge say, 'We believe in it: It is all from our Lord.' But none will bear this in mind, save men endowed with insight (*Al-Imran: 7*).

So our lack of understanding of allegorical verses does not preclude our benefiting from the secrets God placed in His Book; for we benefit from the secrets of God's Book whether we understand them or not.



**This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt,  
containing guidance for those who are mindful of God [2]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara: 2*)**

In the second verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, God describes the Noble Quran as *al-kitab* (literally 'the book'). The word 'Quran' means something which is read or recited, whilst *kitab* (from an Arabic root meaning writing) implies something which is not only memorised by heart but also written down on paper, and which will be preserved until the Day of Resurrection. Referring to the Quran as 'the Book' (*al-kitab*) with the definite article distinguishing it from all the books of this world, and from all the other Divine scriptures that were revealed before it. The Quran is the Book that encompasses all the laws of Heaven from the first Revelation until the Day of Resurrection, and this affirms the exalted status of the Quran, its uniqueness and its Divine nature, and it affirms the Oneness of the Creator, for since the dawn of history scriptures were revealed to the previous nations bearing guidance from above, yet each scripture and each message came for a particular time

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(1) Narrated by Ibn Sa'd in his (*AT-Tabaqat Al-Kubra*)

and place, and fulfilled its purpose for a limited period of time and a specific group of people.

The Message of Noah *peace be upon him* was for his people, as were those of Abraham, Lot, Jethro (Shu'aib) and Saleh *peace be upon them*. Each of these messages had its own specific time in which to fulfil its purpose in life, up to the time of the coming of the Book, the Noble Quran, which embodied God's guidance in its entirety. And so in the Divine scriptures that came before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it was foretold that a messenger would come bearing the final message for the world as a whole, and that all who believed in Divine guidance must follow him. God describes them as those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah and in the Gospel that are with them (*al-A'raf*: 7).

The Quran is known as the 'Book' because it cannot be altered or corrupted. God entrusted the previous scriptures to mankind, but they forgot parts of them, and corrupted what they did not forget and added human speech to them and falsely ascribed it to God. The Noble Quran, however, is protected from alteration by Creator Himself Who asserts that it was He Who sent the 'Warning' and that He is its Guardian (*al-Hijr*: 9).

This means that no one should have any doubt in this Book because the guidance God placed in it has been protected from the moment it was revealed, and will be preserved until the coming of the Hour (the end of time) by the Power of God. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says that '...there is no doubt about it; it is guidance to the God-fearing' (*al-Baqara*: 2).

The miraculous and inimitable nature of the Noble Quran lies in its rhetorical style, its facts, its signs/verses, the stories it tells of the prophets of old, the corrections it makes to the corrupted Torah and Gospel, and the knowledge it brings of things which mankind had no knowledge of then, and things mankind still has no knowledge of now. All of this makes the Quran something which cannot be doubted, for if the jinn and men worked together, they would not be able to reproduce a single verse of the Quran. And so when we contemplate the Quran's style, we will find that it truly cannot be doubted, because no one could reproduce even a single verse, let alone the entire Quran.

So this 'Book' is exalted above all other books, and beyond the comprehension of mankind. It sheds light on the signs of the universe, and the signs of Divine Guidance; and in every age more of its miracles come to light. The word 'Book' with which God describes the Quran marks it out as distinct from all the other Divine scriptures, and alerts us to many notions which serve to outline for us some of the foundational principles of the Divine Guidance which this Book came to convey unto us. The first of these foundational principles is that the revelation of this Book necessitates that we praise God for it. We find in the chapter of *al-Kahf* that all praise is due to God Who has sent down this Book to His servant, and has not made it tortuous: a Book that is unerringly straight, meant to warn of a severe punishment from Him, and to give to the believers who do good works the glad tidings that they shall have a goodly reward (*al-Kahf*: 1-2).

God alerts His servants to the fact that the revelation of the Quran to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* merits praise from all mankind because it contains Divine guidance and mercy from God to His servants, glad tidings of paradise and the way to reach it, and warnings of hell and what leads to it. These warnings in themselves are a mercy from God to His creatures because if He does not forewarn His servants, they are likely to fall into things deserving chastisement, and so may end up being cast into endless torment. And so the Book that came to tell them what causes God's displeasure – thus enabling them to avoid it – was a great mercy that merits praise because it showed us all the way to salvation and avoiding hell. If God *the Glorious and Exalted* had not revealed this Book containing Divine guidance, people would not have known the way to reach paradise, and none of them would have been deserving God's favour and delight in the Hereafter.

We also find another affirmation in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, namely that it is not possible for anyone to make any alteration in God's Book, as God *the Glorious and Exalted* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to convey whatever has been revealed to him of his Lord's Book; there is nothing that could alter His words; and he can find no refuge other than with Him (*al-Kahf*: 27).



God also tells us that this Book came for the good of the people, and the good of His servants, and that God has no need for His creatures; He can force whomever He wills to obey Him, and none of His creatures can go against His Will in His universe. He *the Exalted* comforts His Messenger saying that the verses revealed to him are signs of the lucid Book; perhaps he was wearing himself away with grief because they (the Prophet's people) would not believe; God further states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down unto the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara*: 2-4).

And God says that He does not need to take an oath to prove to us that every word of the Quran is from Him, exactly as Gabriel *peace be upon him* conveyed it to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: He does not need to swear by the positions of the stars, which is indeed a most solemn oath if people only knew it, that this is a truly Noble Quran, written in a well-guarded Book which none but the pure can/should touch: a revelation from the Lord of all the worlds (*al-Waqi'a*: 75-80).

The True Lord then affirms to us another truth about this Book that came as a guide for mankind on earth. He made it clear to us that there is no doubt that this Book was sent down from Him, and that it came to correct the previous scriptures, the Torah and the Gospel, which He had left in the care of mankind, but they changed and corrupted them, and in doing so they nullified their use as Divine guides, and so the Book, which could not be altered or corrupted, came to be a constant guide from God to man until the end of time. The first thing that all these scriptures contained was the pinnacle of faith, which is that there is no god but God, the One, and the Only. God affirms that there is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsistent, Sustainer of all beings. In truth has He sent down to His Messenger 'the Book,' which confirms those scriptures which preceded it: For He had sent down the Torah and the Gospel before that, as guidance to man; and now He has sent down the '*Furqan*' (the Book that divides between truth and falsehood) (*Al-Imran*: 2-3).

And so we know that the Book came to affirm for us that God is One, and has no partner, and that the Quran encompasses everything that the previous sacred laws of the Torah and Gospel contained, as well as all the other Divine Scriptures.

The Quran came to differentiate between the truth that these previous scriptures brought, and the falsehood that was added to them by those entrusted to keep them.

Then the True Lord tells us that our duty is to convey the Message of this Book to all people, as He addresses His Messenger saying that He has sent down the Book to him – and let there be no difficulty about it in his heart – in order that he may warn people thereby, and that it may be a monition to the faithful (*al-A'raf*: 2).

This is addressed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; and it should be understood that every time the Noble Quran addresses the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, it is also an address to his followers and entire community. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was charged to relay the Message of the Book to the people, and we are charged with following the same path, and conveying the Quran to the people so that the reckoning of the disbelievers will be just and justified: the Message of God had reached them, but then they disbelieved or ignored it. And so conveying the Book to all nations is one of the essential missions prescribed by God in the Quran.

The Book also contains responses to all the arguments and falsehoods of the disbelievers. God describes His verses as signs of the Wise Book and puts forth to the people the rhetorical question on whether it was a matter of wonderment that He sent the Revelation to a man from among them to carry warning to the people and to give those who believe the glad tidings that in their Lord's sight they have precedence merited by their sincerity, while the unbelievers say that he is but a manifest sorcerer (*Yunus*: 2). In this noble verse, God alerts us to two things: Firstly, the disbelievers took the human nature of the Messenger as an indication that this Book was not from God. The response to this is that all the other messengers who came before were human beings, so why should it be strange if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* too was a human messenger? Secondly, the Quran was written down with the very same letters God created for us to write with, and the Noble Quran was revealed using these letters, which all people know, in such an inimitable way that all of mankind and the jinn could not, even if they come together, to imitate a single chapter of it.

The True Lord then alerts us to something else, which is that the verses of the Book were established in wisdom, and were then set forth with clearness from God, the All-Wise, All-Informed to His servants so that they may worship none but God. Then God commands the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim that he has come to them from Him as a warner and a bearer of glad tidings (*Hud*: 1-2).

These are some of the verses in the Noble Quran in which God draws our attention to the meaning of the term ‘Book’: every single verse of it is from God, the Wise and Knowing; and every verse is inimitable and has a miraculous nature which challenges the nations of jinn and men; and the Message of the Book is to be conveyed to all people, warning them not to worship any partner with God, in order that the final reckoning in the Hereafter will be just; those who are warned and obey will enter paradise, and those who are warned and disobey will enter hell (with God we seek refuge from it).

Then God alerts us to the fact that this Book contains stories of the prophets of old starting with Adam *peace be upon him*. Speaking of the signs of the lucid Book, God makes it clear that He has sent down the Book as an Arabic Quran so that people will comprehend. Then God addresses His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that in revealing the Quran to him, He will be narrating to him the best stories, even though, prior to that, he has been unaware (*Yusuf*: 1-3).

And so we see that the Noble Quran relates to us the best stories of the prophets of old times, and the events of the past; and the Quran does not mention these stories for entertainment, but rather to impart wisdom and admonition; this is because we notice that the characters and events of the stories of the Quran are always being re-enacted in every age and in every place: Pharaoh is every ruler who rules with tyranny, and calls himself a god; and Korah (Qarun) is every person whom God blesses with wealth, who then claims these blessings were his own doing, and haughtily disobeys God; and the story of Joseph *peace be upon him* is the story of any brothers who are resentful of their brother, and plot against him; and the People of the Cave are all young people who have faith in God, and so He gives them His mercy in this world and the next. This is true for all except one story, that of Mary and Jesus *peace be upon them*,

which was a miracle that will never be repeated, which is why God named the characters of the story by saying 'Jesus, Son of Mary *peace be upon them,*' and 'Mary, Daughter of 'Al-'Imran *peace be upon her.*'

The Book that God sent down is also full of indications of the signs of God in creation. God addresses His Messenger mentioning the signs of the Book saying that that which has been sent down to him from his Lord is the very truth, but the greater part of people will not believe. It is God who has raised the heavens without pillars that you can see, then established His throne, and made the sun and the moon subservient to His laws, each running its course for a set term. He orders all things; He makes His signs clear, that people may have firm faith in a meeting with their Lord (*ar-Ra'd: 1-2*).

And so in the Book, He showed us His signs in the universe, and alerted us to them. The sky is held up without any visible means of support, and the sun and moon are bound in the service of man, and these are all signs that none of God's creatures can claim for themselves or for anyone else, and so until the Day of Resurrection, no one can claim that he raised the sky with no means of support, or that he created the sun and moon and then subdued them to serve man. If people reflected on the signs of the universe, they would come to believe; but they are heedless of these signs. Then, the True Lord defines the purpose of this Book, and how it is a mercy to all people. He addresses His Messenger saying that He has sent down the Revelation to him in order that he might bring forth all mankind, by their Lord's leave, out of the depths of darkness into the light: onto the way that leads to the Almighty, the One to whom all praise is due, to God, unto whom all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, belongs. But woe unto those who deny the truth: they will suffer severe punishment (*Ibrahim: 1-2*).

That is, the purpose of this Book is to take people out of the darkness of ignorance, disbelief and idolatry into the light of faith; for every disbelieving idolater is surrounded by darkness, seeing the signs of God but not perceiving them, knowing that there will be a reckoning and a Hereafter but denying them, only seeing the short life of this world which bears no guarantees of life, or provisions, or pleasure. If he were to ascend to the light of faith, he would see the Hereafter and the everlasting delights therein, and so would do

his utmost to attain it, but while he is surrounded by darkness, he will not see. The way for him to see is to follow the guidance of this Book, the Noble Quran because it takes those who read it out of the darkness of ignorance and disbelief into the light of certitude and conviction. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* also affirms that those who consider the life of this world alone are like cattle, which simply eat and drink; and more, the cattle are better than them because cattle fulfil their purpose in life, whilst the disbelievers do not fulfil their purpose of worship, as the True Lord explains to us that the signs of revelation are verses of a Book, the Noble Quran, lucid in itself and clearly showing the truth. And it will come to pass that those who are bent on denying this truth will wish that they had surrendered themselves to God. Leave them alone; let them eat and enjoy themselves while the hope beguiles them: for in time they will come to know (*al-Hijr*: 1-3).

Here the True Lord informs us that knowledge and appreciation of the signs of His Book and His guidance cannot be attained simply by wishing, but that rather, they should be implemented in life. In their enjoyment of this world, the disbelievers do not rise above the level of cattle, and they cling on to the false hope that the enjoyment of this world is all that there is, whilst this is not the case, as they shall come to know.

And so after briefly examining some of the verses where the word ‘Book’ is mentioned, we see that it is a Book that makes us bear witness to the pinnacle of faith, which is that there is no god but God, that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God, that it takes people from the darkness into the light, alerts them to the signs of God in the universe, lets them know there is an afterlife of endless delight or endless torment, answers the arguments of the disbelievers and proves them wrong, that God’s word ‘Book’ implies the complete supersession of the previous Divine Scriptures, and that it will remain until the end of time, and so the True Lord called it ‘that Book’ (*al-Baqara*: 2) as an indication of its perfection.

We must be aware that the word ‘That’ (*al-Baqara*: 2) in Arabic (*dhalika*, which literally means ‘that’, not ‘this’) is not actually one word, but rather is composed of three words, namely *dha*, which is a demonstrative pronoun, and *li*, which indicates distance and hence the exalted status of the Noble Quran, and *ka*, which shows that the word is addressed to the second person, meaning here

that all mankind are being addressed and informed that the Noble Quran contains a comprehensive message that will last until the Day of Resurrection.

When we read the chapter of *al-Baqara* in Arabic, it is possible to read its second verse in two different ways which give slightly different meanings by our pausing in different places. The first way is to say: '*dhalika l-Kitabu la rayba fihi*' ('This is the Book in which there is no doubt'), and then pause, and then say (...*hudan lilmuttaqin*) ('...a guidance for all the God-fearing'). The second way is to say, (*dhalika l-Kitabu la rayba...*) ('This is the Book – let there be no doubt about it...'), and then pause, and then say, (...*fihi hudan lilmuttaqin*) ('...in it is guidance for all the God-fearing'). Both of these readings explain to us the meaning of the words 'no doubt,' which is a negation of all doubt about its being a Wise Book revealed by Creator. In order to understand the basis from which we take our religious affairs, and the central constitution of our lives, we need to define what 'guidance' is, and who the 'God-fearing' are. Guidance means that which shows you the way to go where you need to go, so the road signs that show the traveller where to go are guidance for him, because they show him how to get where he wants to go. Guidance requires 1) a guide, and 2) the one guided, and 3) the intended destination. If there is no goal or final destination in mind, there can be no guidance since there is nothing to aim for, and you would not even seek anyone to guide you. So you must first have a goal before you search for someone to guide you to it.

Consider this: who is it that gives you your goal, and shows you the way to get to it? If we consider this according to human experience, if someone gives you a goal you must be sure that he is wise, and if someone shows you the way he must be knowledgeable enough to show you the shortest way to get to your destination.

If we look at people in this worldly life, we find that they set the goals of their lives, and set the ways they will attain them. If someone wants to build a house, for example, he brings in an architect to make a plan; but if the plan does not achieve what he wants, he will keep making adjustments, and then bring in another architect who has a higher level of skill to make him a new plan. So the goal is constantly changing, not fixed.

Then when construction starts, he may find that the material he needs is not available, and so he adjusts and uses a different one; and beyond this, a higher power might come and postpone the construction or prevent it from taking place. So people's goals change as the circumstances of their lives and their capabilities influence them, and the goals they seek are not realised because of the limited knowledge and potentials of man. So we all need someone with perfect knowledge and wisdom to plan for our lives, and someone who is capable of doing anything, and who is in possession of everything, and to whose will the entire universe is subservient so that we know for certain that he can fulfil our aims for us, and that the road we will follow will take us to our destination. God alerts us to this fact when He commands His Messenger to proclaim that God's guidance is the only true guidance (*al-Baqara*: 120).

God wants to tell His creatures that if they want to arrive at a firm goal that never changes, they should take it from Him; and if they want to follow the way that has no twists or turns, they should take their way from God *the Glorious and Exalted*. If you want something eternal, take it from the One Who is Eternal; and if you want something constant, take it from the One Who is Constant. And so the laws by which people in this world seek to define their goals and find the quickest way to realising them are imperfect, and based on some pieces of knowledge but not all, and so they keep changing from one age to the next.

This is because the ones who make these laws are human beings with their own goals to attain; but God *the Glorious and Exalted* has no caprice, and so if you want to attain happiness in your life, and live in peace and security, take your goals from God, and take the way to attain them from God. This will spare you the worries of a life that is constantly changing and being altered. God has ordained for His creatures and for everything in His universe, the shortest way to attain universal happiness; and those who do not follow this way make things hard for themselves, and for their whole communities, and so nothing gets done.

So God gives you your goal, and God shows you the way, and all you have to do is bring your life in line with what He wants for you.

Then, God describes His Book as ‘...guidance for all the God-fearing...,’ but who are the God-fearing?<sup>(1)</sup> To be ‘fearful’ in Arabic (*ittaqa*) is derived from the word (*wiqaya*) which means a shield or barrier to keep one from harm. And in another verse, the True Lord forewarns those who have faith in Him to ward off from themselves and their families the Fire whose fuel is human beings and stones (*at-Tahrim*: 6).

That is, place a barrier between yourselves and the fire of hell, and take the utmost care not to fall into it. One of the curious things about this ‘fear/shielding’ is that you find that the True Lord in the Noble Quran – which is all the Word of God – sometimes warns the believers to ‘fear God’ and sometimes to ‘fear the Fire.’ But how can we behave the same way towards the True Lord as we do towards the fire in which the disbelievers will be tormented?

God *the Glorious and Exalted* orders us to ‘fear the Fire,’ that is, do not do those things which incur God’s wrath lest you be tormented in the fire. And so you place a barrier between yourself and the fire by avoiding sin and by doing good deeds. And God *the Glorious and Exalted* also orders us to ‘fear God,’ but how can we try to protect ourselves from him and at the same time seek from Him all manners of blessings and goodness? How can this be? How can we seek to protect ourselves from the One we love?

We say that God has attributes of majesty and attributes of beauty; the attributes of majesty are manifested in the names the All-Dominant, and the All-Compelling, and the One Who Humiliates, and the Lord of Retribution, and the Inflictor of Harm. All these are manifestations of the attributes of majesty; even hell itself is a manifestation of this majesty.

As for the attributes of beauty, they are those such as the All-Forgiving and the Dispenser of Mercy, and all the attributes which imply the mercy and beneficence of God to His creatures. If you wish to protect yourself from hell, which is one of the manifestations of God’s majesty, you must also protect yourself from all the other attributes of majesty, for amongst them might be

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(1) The Arabic word *al-muttaqin*, used in the verse, derives from the verb *ittaqa*, which means to have fear of something and to take precautions to shield oneself against harm that might come from it.



those whose severity is greater even than the torment of hell. It is as though when the True Lord warns us to ‘fear God’ or to ‘fear the Fire,’ He means to warn us to ‘fear God’s wrath,’ which in turn means that we should fear all of God’s attributes of majesty, and place a barrier between us and them. And whoever is conscious and have fear of God’s attributes of majesty will benefit from His attributes of beauty, and so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘On the last night of *Ramadan*, the All-Compelling manifests Himself through forgiveness.’<sup>(1)</sup>

Logically, it might have seemed more appropriate for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to have said ‘The All-Merciful manifests Himself through forgiveness,’ but as long as there are sins, this necessitates the presence of the attribute of the All-Compelling, who chastises His creatures for their sins. So it is as though the attribute of the All-Forgiving intercedes with the attribute of the All-Compelling. The attribute of the All-Compelling is manifested in the case of sinners, and so the attribute of the All-Forgiving comes to intercede with it on their behalf, and so God forgives them their sins. There is beauty in the contrast here when the All-Compelling, despite His immense power, is manifested through forgiveness. When you hear the word ‘The All-Compelling’, you are stricken by awe, dread, and terror, but then when you hear that ‘The All-Compelling manifests Himself through forgiveness,’ joy enters your heart because you know that the One Who could have punished you if He chose, has instead forgiven you. The fire of hell gives no commands, and has no independent action, but rather obeys the command of its Lord; therefore seek refuge from it with the One who commands, or with His attributes of beauty.

The True Lord says that the Book is ‘...a guidance for all the God-fearing.’ We have already said that all guidance is God’s guidance because He is the One Who has defined the purpose of creation, and has informed us of the way to reach it. The fact that God has told us what we must do, and how to do it, is

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(1) Narrated in *Kanz Al-‘Ummal*. In another Hadith he says, ‘On the last night of *Ramadan*, God forgives them all.’ A man said, ‘Is that the Night of Power?’ He replied, ‘No; do you not see that when labourers finish their work, they are given their wages?’ Narrated by *Al-Bayhaqi*.

the utmost blessing; for He did not leave us to define our own goals and the ways to achieve them, and so showed us mercy by saving us from the wretched situation of our success or failure being dependent on our own limited knowledge so that we have to go through constant trial and error, following roads and then finding that we have lost the way, and becoming more and more lost and wretched in each road we take.

In this way, we would surely stumble around blindly without ever getting to our goal. But God wanted to spare us all this trouble, and so He sent down the Noble Quran, a Book wherein there is guidance for man, and directions to the quickest route to escaping God's punishment and wrath.

When God describes His Book as 'a guidance for all the God-fearing,' this means that this Quran is a guidance for all, and so those who wish to be protected from God's punishment and wrath will find within it the way to achieve this. So the guidance came from the True Lord to all people, and then He gave those who believed in it a second guidance, namely assistance in doing good works.

So there is one kind of guidance which comes from God to all His creatures, which is that He shows them the straight path; this is the guidance of direction, by which God guides all His creatures to His obedience and His Paradise, as He tells that He offered the tribe of Thamud guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance.

So the True Lord directed them to the way of guidance, but they preferred the way of falsehood and sin and so followed it. This is the guidance of direction; as for the guidance of assistance, we find allusion to it in the statement that as to those who have the guidance, God will increase their guidance, and He will teach them what to fear (*Muhammad: 17*).

This is the guidance of assistance, which is only granted to those who believe in God and follow His way, and accept the guidance of direction and act in accordance with it. God does not give aid to those who reject the guidance of direction, but rather leaves them to their means where they will stray and meet wretchedness. When we read the Noble Quran, we find that God tells His Prophet and Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he

will not be able to guide aright everyone whom he loves; but it is God who guides him that has the will to be guided (*al-Qasas*: 56).


And so God negates that His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* could guide those whom he loved; yet the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* also tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in another verse that verily he guides to the straight way (*ash-Shura*: 52).

How could this difference occur when it was God who said both? We say: when you hear these two verses, know that the perspectives are different; that is, what is negated in the first is not the same thing that is affirmed in the second. To illustrate this let us consider statements in the Quran concerning a similar situation. At the battle of Badr, for example, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* took a handful of pebbles and threw them at the army of Quraysh, and when the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* mentioned this in the Noble Quran, He told His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that it was not he who cast when he did cast, but it was God who cast (*al-Anfal*: 17).

So there is a negation of an action and an affirmation of the same action in this one single verse. How could the Messenger of God have thrown when God says that it was not he who cast? The answer is that in this verse, the perspective differs. The one who actually threw was the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but the thing that made the pebbles reach the army of Quraysh and hit every last one of them in the face was God's omnipotent power. And so it was not possible that a single handful of pebbles thrown by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* could have struck every member of the idolaters' army, but the omnipotent power of God made it so.

And so when the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* said to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that verily He guides to the straight way (*ash-Shura*: 52), this was a reference to the guidance of direction, that is, that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, by delivering the Noble Quran and explaining God's guidance, directs all mankind to the straight path and shows them clearly what it was. And when He says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will not be able to guide aright everyone whom he loves; but it is God who guides him that has the will to be guided

(*al-Qasas*: 56), this meant that he cannot make guidance enter their hearts because God is the One who guides hearts, and increases their guidance and faith. And so God affirms this as a basic principle of faith in stating that God's guidance is the only true guidance (*Al- 'Imran*: 73). So the Noble Quran conveys the guidance of direction to those who desire to place a barrier between themselves and God's wrath and punishment.


 الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

**Who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer, and  
 give out of what We have provided for them [3]  
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 3)**

After telling us that that this Book –the Noble Quran– is ‘guidance for all the God-fearing’ (*al-Baqara*: 2), i.e. it gives directions for those who wish to place a barrier between themselves and God's wrath, God teaches us the attributes of these God-fearing people, and let us know who they are. The first attribute He mentions was: ‘(those) who believe in the Unseen’ (*al-Baqara*: 3).

What is this Unseen, with the belief in which God has attached the first position of guidance, and by means of which one is protected from hell and God's wrath? The unperceived or unseen refers to all that which cannot be perceived by the senses. Perceived things, which we see and touch, are not disputed by anyone, which is why they say, ‘There is no need to ask ‘where’ when the eye beholds’, i.e. you do not need evidence for the things you can see for yourself. But the unseen realm cannot be perceived by the senses, but must rather be perceived by other faculties.

An example of the precision needed to define things is that they say there are five main senses, namely hearing, sight, smell, touch and taste, but there are things which are perceived by other than these five senses.

Suppose we have before us two bags of equal size and design. Using your five main senses, could you determine which bag is heavier? Could the five senses tell you this? No, rather, you must pick them up to determine which is heavier. How did you perceive this weight? You did so by means of your muscles, since they were forced to work harder to lift one of the bags than they were for the other. And so you knew which one was heavier not by the

sense of touch since if you had simply touched them both, you would not know which was heavier. So there is also the sense of muscles, by which things are weighed.

Suppose you go to a material shop, and see two kinds of the same cloth, one of which is thinner than the other. Simply by placing the cloths between your fingertips, you can determine which is thinner and which is thicker. Which sense allowed you to perceive this? Not touch, but rather the faculty of reason, which does not make mistakes.

When you feel hungry, what sense tells you that you are hungry? Not any of the five main senses. The same is true for the case of thirst: which sense tells you that you need water? And when you sleep, what sense is it that wakes you up? No one knows. So the person has certain faculties known as the five senses, and there are also other faculties representing senses unknown to all but their Creator. And so when the scientists try to give a definition for the human soul, we say to them: What do you know of this soul? You know nothing but the outer manifestations of this worldly life, but there are other things within the soul that you know nothing about. There are senses that no one knows anything about, and they are numerous and varied. And so it is a mistake to say that everything which cannot be sensed by the five human senses is part of the unseen realm since there are other faculties and means of perception which work without our knowledge.

If I give a student a geometry exercise and he solves it and gives me the answer, do we say that he has knowledge of the unseen because he solved an exercise which initially was unknown to him? No, because there were formulas and rules which led him to the answer. When the weather forecast tells us that tomorrow there will be a violent rainstorm, does this mean they knew the unseen? No, because they utilised their prior knowledge to arrive at a conclusion, and this is not part of the unseen.

If a deceptive fortune-teller comes and tells you that the thing that was stolen from you is in the possession of so-and-so, does this mean they know the unseen? No, because for something to be truly unseen it must be unknown to all your equals, yet the thing stolen from you is known to your equal, since the thief and the one who buys the stolen goods know exactly what happened;

and the police, by following the clues, and forensic evidence, and investigating the matter, can find the thief and the one who bought the stolen wares. And so if there comes to you a fortune-teller who has jinn to serve him – and it is well-known that jinn are concealed from us, and can move at great speed, as God says about Satan that he and his tribe are lying in wait for you where you cannot perceive them (*al-A'raf*: 27) – it might be that this jinn helper of theirs saw something, or went from one place to another, and so knew what you do not know. This is not knowledge of the Unseen because although you did not know it, others knew it by the natural means that God created in them. And as for the scientists who discover the secrets of the universe, can we say that they have gained knowledge of the Unseen? No, because these scientists only discovered something that already existed by using their prior knowledge to arrive at this conclusion and this is not knowledge of the Unseen.

In that case, what is the Unseen? The true Unseen is something which has no clues to lead to it, and which no created being, not even angels, can arrive to by means of their knowledge. We have a good example of this kind of situation in the story of Adam *peace be upon him* when God taught him the names of all things and then displayed them to the angels and told them to say the names of these things, if they had the knowledge. They replied praising Him and admitted that they had no knowledge except that which He has given them to know, and admitted that He alone is the all-Knowing, the Wise. He then told Adam to tell them the names of these things. And when Adam told them their names, God reiterated to the angels that He alone has knowledge of the hidden things of the heavens and the earth, and has knowledge of all that they bring into the open and all that they conceal (*al-Baqara*: 31-33).

The jinn too do not know the Unseen, and so when Solomon *peace be upon him* died, after God had placed the jinn under his control, the jinn only became aware of his death when the earthworm ate his staff, as God says that when He decreed the death of Solomon, nothing showed the jinn that he was dead except the earthworm that gnawed the staff which supported his corpse. And when it fell, the jinn perceived that if they had known the things unseen, they would not have continued in their disgraceful affliction in servitude (*Saba'*: 14).

So the true Unseen is that which is known to none but God. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* asserts that He alone knows the Unseen, and to none does He disclose the mysteries of His knowledge except to an apostle whom He has been pleased to elect; and then He sends forth guards before him and behind him to watch over him (*al-Jinn*: 26-27). So the Messengers do not know the Unseen, but rather, God informs them of that part of it which He wills, and this becomes a miracle for them and for their followers.

The pinnacle of the Unseen is faith in God, in His angels, in His scriptures, in His messengers and the Last Day. All of these are unseen matters; when God informs us of His angels, though we cannot see them, we say that as long as God has told us about them, we believe in their existence. And when He tells us of the Last Day, as long as it was God who told us of it, we believe in the Last Day. For the One who has told us of these things is God *the Glorious and Exalted*. We believe that He is the One God. We arrived at this belief using the rational proofs that convince us that this universe has a God and a Creator; and so whatever comes to us from God, we believe in it because it was God who said it.

We must be aware that the reality of the existence of something is completely different from the question of our perceiving it. You have a spirit in your body which gives you life, but have you seen this spirit? Have you heard it? Or tasted it? Or smelled it? Or touched it? No for sure. So, what faculty of perception is it which tells you that you have a spirit in your body? It is the effect it has on your body by giving it life.

Therefore, you know of the spirit's existence because of its effects and the spirit is one of God's creations. So if you cannot perceive the created being in your own body and your own being, the spirit except by its effects, then how can you hope to perceive God with your senses?

If we believe in the pinnacle of unseen matters, namely the existence of God *the Glorious and Exalted*, we must also believe in everything He tells us about, even if we have not seen it for ourselves. Out of His mercy, God wanted to make the matter of the unseen easier for us to understand, and so He gave us in this material world signs which indicate that the existence of a thing and a thing's being perceived by us are two completely separate and distinct things.

For example, germs have existed in the universe, fulfilling their purpose, since the beginning of time. People used to see the symptoms of illness in their bodies, like increased temperature, fever, and so on, without knowing how they were caused. Then, when science developed, and God allowed His creatures to witness the existence of germs, He made minds capable of inventing the microscope, which enlarged images for them, since the eye was not able to perceive these tiny creatures. Once microscopes had been invented, we were able to see germs, and observe their life cycle and the way they multiply, and all the other things that God revealed to us as time progressed.

Our inability to see something does not mean that it does not exist, but only that the tool of perception – in this case the eye – is unable to see it because it is too small. When you use a microscope, it enlarges these microbes for you so that you eye can detect them. When we first saw germs and microbes, this did not mean that they were first created the moment we saw them; rather, they existed, and fulfilled their purpose, whether we could see them or not.

If we had told anyone about the germ and the microbe before we had seen them with our own eyes, would he have believed us? God makes it in a way so that some of His creatures are unable to see certain natural phenomena in their time, leaving mankind to progress to their discovery later. When these new things were discovered, mankind should have increased in faith, and they should have known, based on this clear material evidence, that there are unseen things that exist, even if we cannot see them.

God has given us signs in the universe that allow us to perceive that this universe has a Creator. The sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, man, animals, and minerals no one can claim to have created any one of them, and no one can claim that he created himself or anyone else, and this well-ordered universe cannot simply have sprung into existence accidentally because accidents are random and disorganised, and if this universe had come into existence accidentally, the sun, the moon, stars and earth would have collided, and night would have merged with day. But all the signs in the universe make us aware that there is a higher power which creates, innovates, and organises; and so if a messenger comes to us and tells us that God is the One Who created this universe, we need surely to believe him.



The True Lord then gives us further description of the believers as those ‘who observe prayer.’ Prayer is the constant sign of fealty to the worship of the True Lord, and a person is never exempted from performing it. A person should pray standing, and if he is unable to stand, he can pray seated, and if he is unable, he can pray lying down. No one is ever exempted from prayer the moment they become morally responsible until they die, and it is to be performed five times every day.

The True Lord then describes the believers as those ‘who out of what we have bestowed on them, expend for God.’ When we speak about Divine provision, many people think this means only money; but no, provision means everything you benefit from. Strength is provision, and knowledge is provision, and wisdom is provision, and humility is provision, and everything that helps one to live is a kind of provision. So if you do not have money to spend in charity, you have physical health by means of which you can work and earn money, and you can give from it as charity to those who are ill and infirm. And if you have patience, you can give it as charity by restraining the foolish person whose behaviour might harm the society around him, or harm you. If you have knowledge, you can give from it as charity by teaching the ignorant. And so we see that expending from what God has bestowed on one for God’s sake covers all the different aspects of life.

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾

**Those who believe in the revelation sent down to you [Muhammad], and in what was sent before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter [4] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 4)**

In this noble verse, the True Lord gives us more of the believers’ attributes. After telling us that their attributes include belief in the Unseen, and constancy in prayer, and spending in charity from God’s provision, more of the attributes of the believers follow.

So these believers are those who ‘believe in what has been sent down to...’ the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* i.e. the Noble Quran which God revealed, and ‘what has been sent down before you.’ Such a thing is only attributed to the believers in the Noble Quran; for when Islam came, it had to address two

kinds of people: firstly the disbelievers, who believed neither in God nor in any messenger sent by Him, and secondly the people of the Book who believed in God, and His messengers, and His Scriptures.

Islam addressed both these groups, since the people of the Book perhaps believed they have a connection to God, believing in Him and receiving His scripture and following His Messengers, and saw this as enough. But we say no, Islam came to be accepted by everybody, the disbelievers and the People of the Book so that God's religion would be one.

In the scriptures He sent before, God foretold the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and mentioned his name and his description, and instructed those people of the Book who would live to see Him coming to believe in him.

God *the Glorious and Exalted* gave the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to the people of the Book so that they knew him even as they knew their own children, and so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his time and his attributes were known to them with absolute certainty. The Jews of Medina used to say to the idolaters, 'The time is come for a messenger to appear, in whom we shall believe, and with whom we shall slay you all like (the tribes of) Ad and Iram were slain.' But once the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they were the first to fight him and deny his prophethood. The description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is present in the Torah and the Gospel, and so the people of the Book would warn the idolaters that they would believe in the new messenger and with him they would subjugate the Arabs. The True Lord tells us that when a Book had come to them from God, confirming that which they had received already –although they had before prayed for victory over those who disbelieved – yet when a message came to them, of which they had knowledge, they denied it. The curse of God falls on the infidels (*al-Baqara*: 89).

That is, the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not unexpected to the people of the Book, but rather, they had been expecting it and they had affirmed that they would believe in it as their own scriptures had instructed them. Yet when the time of the message came, they denied it and rejected it.

Then God gives further description of the believers: ‘... and who have full faith in the life to come.’ Notice that the phrase ‘the life to come’ is used here. If you look at the Torah that the Jews have now, and read the Talmud, you will not find anything at all about the Last Day, for they only retained the material concerns of their scriptures. And so God stresses faith in the Hereafter here so that those who claim to be believers in God and His books and His messengers but are not concerned with the Last Day will know that they are not believers. If this attribute of the believers had not been mentioned in the Noble Quran, they might have said, ‘Islam is in line with our own beliefs’, but God *the Glorious and Exalted* wants to give us a picture of faith in its totality, in the belief in God as the starting point of faith, and belief in the Last Day as the ultimate end of faith. Those who do not believe in the Hereafter, or that they will meet God and be held to account, or that there exists a Paradise wherein the believers will delight, or a hell wherein the disbelievers will be punished, have incomplete faith, and they are close to the disbelievers who see this worldly life as their only goal.

The believer follows God’s guidance in this world so as to earn God’s Grace in the Hereafter. If there were no Hereafter, the disbeliever would have a better life than the believer, since he takes everything he wants from this world without restricting himself to any moral guidance, giving himself full rein to fulfil his desires; yet the believer restricts his actions to conform to God’s guidance, and troubles himself in doing so. Then they both die, and there is nothing else. In that case, the disbeliever would gain the passionate delights of this world, and the believer would gain nothing. Such a thing is incompatible with faith, and so belief in God is the ultimate starting point of faith, and belief in the Hereafter is the ultimate end of faith.

أُولَئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

**Such people are following their Lord’s guidance and it is  
they who will prosper [5] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 5)**

The phrase ‘They are the ones’ is a reference to the ones who are endowed with all the attributes that God has defined in the two previous verses. So those

who are endowed with all these attributes have attained guidance, i.e. the road that leads to faith, and they have attained success, which is the goal of faith.

And the verse 'They are the ones who are guided by their Lord, and they are the ones who...' will attain success applies to all of them. But why does God *the Glorious and Exalted* use the phrase 'They are the ones' twice? This is part of the rhetorical style of the Noble Quran. But why does it join the two predicates to each other in this way? It is so used to know that there are not two kinds of faith in Islam, but rather, one single faith which has one single reward; the means to it is faith, and its goal is success and happiness. If we consider the moral responsibilities that constitute the guidance that leads to the ultimate goal, we find that God has raised the guided above guidance so that we know that this guidance has not come simply to restrict our actions and humble us, but rather to raise us and ennoble us.

Superficial people think that guidance merely restricts one's actions in life and prevents one from attaining instant gratification. In reality, guidance raises a person and keeps him safe from harm and from God's wrath, and from the corruption of society which would otherwise cause him suffering; and so God says, 'They are the ones who are guided,' using the Arabic prepositional phrase 'ala huda', which means literally 'on guidance.'

The preposition 'on' implies that something is above something else. If you say someone is on their horse, this means that they are above the horse. So it is as though the one who follows guidance is not humbled by this, but rather he is raised by it, and the guidance carries him from one good thing to the next. This is the opposite of misguidance, which takes one lower and lower.

And so we find that God in another verse in the Noble Quran commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim to the unbelievers that either we (the believers) or you (the infidels) have (literally: are on) guidance, or are in clear error (*Saba'*: 24).

Notice that the preposition used in the case of guidance implies the notion of being raised and lifted (in Arabic literally: 'on guidance'), while the preposition used in the case of misguidance implies abasement and degradation (in Arabic: literally 'in misguidance'). The idea of being raised applies to guidance because

religion restricts your sphere of activity in order to give you honour and raise your status, since you do not take your law from a human being, or from your own self, but rather, you are raised to the station where you take your orders from God, and this is a great elevation. When God mentioned misguidance, however, He said literally ‘in misguidance’ (*fī ḍalāl*), and the preposition ‘in’ implies complete immersion, as God describes it in another verse saying that those who earn evil and are engulfed by their sinfulness are destined for the fire, therein to abide forever (*al-Baqara*: 81).

Sin engulfs him, that is, he cannot escape from it because he is immersed in misguidance. As long as he is engulfed by sin, he can find no way out because it controls him, and as long as it controls him he will never attain guidance. So when the True Lord says, ‘They are the ones who are guided by their Lord, and they are the ones...’ who will attain success, He uses an expression which has an ordinary and familiar worldly meaning in order to better illustrate the meaning to the listener.

What is ‘success’ (*falah*)? The usual meaning of this word in Arabic is success, and so the verse means ‘it is they who shall be the successful.’ The word ‘*muflihun*’ (derived from *falah*) is used here because it is derived from and has a common root with the Arabic word meaning to till the earth to plant seeds, and this is where we get the word *fallah* (farmer), whose practice is to till the earth and plant seeds in it. The True Lord uses this word to refer to the Hereafter because He wants to show us something by allusion. There is a difference between something unknown to us that we cannot know and something unknown to us which we can deduce from what we can see.

So the religion restricts your actions in life by its commandments and prohibitions, and God’s guidance came to tell you to do some things and not to do others. Many people think that this restricts the life of the believer, and bears heavily upon him, because it takes away his freedom.

When God tells you not to do something, superficial people see this as a way of constricting you from doing what you want to do; and when He tells you to do something, they think He has made it difficult for you by making you do something you do not want to do. For example, when He requires you

to pay the poor-due, on face value this seems to mean you will lose money even though in reality it is a source of blessed increase and growth. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Charity decreases nothing from wealth, and God increases the honour of a forgiving servant, and no one humbles himself before God but that He raises them.'<sup>(1)</sup>

So when the True Lord restricts your actions in life, do not think that this oppresses you; rather, it is for your own good because He did not command you alone, but rather commanded all the people. So when He *the Glorious and Exalted* says, 'Do not steal', He said it to everyone, and so you are the one that benefits from this, because He restrained you as a single person from stealing from others, and restrained millions of people from stealing from you. So God does not oppress you, but rather protects your wealth from all people. He restrains you as a single person from stealing the wealth of others, and restrains millions of people from stealing your wealth. So who benefits? It is you of course. So God affirms that the believers are the ones 'who will attain success,' and the word *muflihin* ('those who shall attain success') is derived from the root *f-l-h*. If the land is hard, when you dig it and plant seeds in it, it will give a great yield; this has been passed down to us from our forefathers. When the earth is dug and planted, it gives a good yield; and if we took this knowledge from our forefathers, the inevitable question is who had taught our ultimate forefather Adam *peace be upon him* how to till the earth and plant and sow? We say that God taught him this, just as He taught him all the names, and taught him all he needed to know to fulfil his purpose on earth.

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* would not have left Adam *peace be upon him* to live on earth without teaching him what he needed to preserve his life and the lives of his offspring. At least, He taught him the essentials, and then these essentials were developed by means of the knowledge God revealed to His creatures, then centuries of advancement followed and we were able to use modern advanced machinery to plough and sow.

But the firm truth that has not changed since the beginning of time, and will never change until its end, is that the job of man is to plough the earth,

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra

and plant the seed, and water it. As for the growth of the seed itself, man has nothing to do with this, and the same is the case for the yield that it will produce. God made us aware of this truth, so that we would not be deluded by our actions and believe that we are the ones who make things grow. In the chapter of *al-Waqi'a*, God *the Glorious and Exalted* urges people to think of that which they sow and consider whether it is they who cause its upgrowth, or God Who causes it to spring forth. If He so pleases, He could make their harvest dry and brittle that they would ever marvel and lament that they have been ruined and deprived (*al-Waqi'a*: 63-67).

And so the duties of farming remain confined to ploughing, sowing and irrigating, and when the seed is cast into the soil God creates within it the nutrients it needs until it becomes able to take its sustenance from the soil. And so if you take a seed and soak it in water, you will find that it will grow the beginnings of a stem and roots. Where did this growth come from? It came from the seed's own components. God places in every seed enough nutrients to suffice it until it is able to derive sustenance from the soil, and the size of the seed varies in accordance with the amount of nutrients it requires. When you plant it in the earth, first it feeds itself, until the stem, root, and two leaves emerge with which it can breathe. All of these things take place without any input from us. Then, the seed begins to take its sustenance from the soil and the air, and grows into a full-grown tree, which produces fruit containing the very same kind of seeds.

And so the word *muflihun* is used so that the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* may give us an example based on material things in order to help our limited minds understand the Unseen. He, so, compares responsibility and its reward in the Hereafter to sowing seeds and farming because when you cast a single seed into the earth, it will in turn give you many more seeds.

God gives the likeness of those who spend from their possessions for the sake of God as that of a grain out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains: for God grants manifold increase to whom He wills; and God is Infinite, All Knowing (*al-Baqara*: 261).

If the earth, one of God's creations, gives you many multiples of what you give to it, so what is it about the Creator? How much will He multiply the

reward of your obedience? This is why the True Lord says, '... they are the ones who will attain success,' using a word derived from the Arabic root word for 'farming', which is something that we can see and bear witness to every day.

Just as moral responsibility demands certain things from you so it can multiply them for you, likewise the earth takes from you a single seed and does not simply give you back what she took, but rather gives you back seven hundred seeds. And so we can use something familiar to us to explain something unknown to us.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أُنذِرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾

**As for those who disbelieve, it makes no difference whether  
you warn them or not: they will not believe [6]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 6)**

After speaking of the believers and their attributes, and their reward in the Hereafter and the great goodness that awaits them, the True Lord wanted to give us the contrasting image which is that of the disbelievers. He told us that faith came to govern all, and ensure for them goodness in this life and the next; and so there must exist some evil which faith has come to fight, for were it not for this evil, would there be a need for faith? The believer must defend himself, his family, his community and his whole world from the evils that disbelief entails.

Disbelievers are of two kinds. Some disbelieve in God initially, and then they hear God's word, accept it with their natural disposition, and so become believers. Others benefit from their disbelief, their tyranny, their wrongdoing, and from usurping the rights of others, and so on. These people know that faith will deprive them from their worldly power and prevent them from collecting the earnings they make from dishonesty and tyranny.

So those who stand in the way of faith are the ones who benefit from disbelief, but what about those who used to be disbelievers and later accepted God's religion in the right way?

These people's hearts may open, and so they embrace faith. The word for disbelief in Arabic is *kufur*, which is derived from a root meaning 'to cover' or



‘to conceal’. Therefore, to disbelieve in God means to attempt to cover over His existence. Yet if you want to cover something, the thing you cover must exist because only an existing thing can be covered. The natural state of all in the universe is to possess faith in God, yet the disbelievers came to try to cover up God’s existence. So it is as though the origin was faith, but then heedlessness and oblivion overcame people, and so they covered up God’s Existence in order to preserve their power, their authority or their exploitation and oppression of their fellow men.

So the very word ‘disbelief’ carries the implication that belief existed first, and then afterwards disbelief came. But how was that? God created the first man, Adam *peace be upon him*, with His own hands, and then breathed His Spirit into him; and bade the angels prostrate themselves before him and taught him the names of all things.

The prostration of the angels and the imparting of the names to Adam *peace be upon him* were matters which Adam *peace be upon him* witnessed for himself, and disbelief did not exist at that time. After descending to earth and settling there, Adam *peace be upon him* was supposed to teach his children how to worship God because he descended bearing the Sacred Law; and then Adam’s children were supposed to convey these teachings to their own children, and so on.

But with the passage of time, heedlessness came and people began to think that faith merely restricted their freedom to act, and everyone who wanted to run their lives according to their base desires began to follow the way of disbelief. When the intelligent person hears the word *kufir* (disbelief), he should be aware at once that the word means to cover the existence of the Necessary Being. How can a person disbelieve and participate in covering up something that exists? And so we find that the True Lord reproaches the disbelievers putting forth the rhetorical question as to how they can disbelieve in God, seeing that they were lifeless and He gave them life, and that He will cause them to die and then will bring them again to life, whereupon to Him they will be brought back. He it is who has created for them all that is on earth, and has applied His design to the heavens and fashioned them into seven heavens; and He alone has full knowledge of everything (*al-Baqara*: 28-29).

And so this question comes up, but the disbeliever cannot answer it! It is God Who created him and brought him into being, and none of us can claim to have created himself or anyone else. Existence itself is a proof of faith, and so the True Lord asks them, how could you disbelieve in God and cover up the existence of the One Who created you?

Creation is undisputedly the work of God, and no one can claim it for himself. No one can claim to have created himself. The very fact that you exist entails that you believe in God, who brought you into being. It is a direct proof of God. If one looks around him, he will find that everything in the universe is at his service, and that everything obeys his will. And so with the passing of time, man came to imagine that he was in control of this universe, and so he lived with his mind fixed on the power of causality, making use of the means at his disposal and seeing how they obeyed him, never considering the Creator of the means, who gave them their rules and made them obey mankind. The True Lord indicated this in stating emphatically that man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient (*al- 'Alaq*: 6-7).

This is because a man farms the earth and it gives him fruits, and so he believes that he is the one who controlled the earth and made for it its laws so that it would give him whatever he wanted. He presses the light-switch and light fills the room and so he imagines he is the one who made this electricity! He boards a plane which takes him into the sky, and believes he is the one who made it fly, forgetting the special attributes God placed in the air to allow it to carry the plane. He turns on the television and sees events from around the world and so believes that this happened through his own power forgetting that God placed certain qualities in the air waves that make it carry sounds and pictures across the world in mere seconds. Man thinks he has intrinsic control over everything around him, whilst in reality it is God who subjected it for the service of mankind, and it was God who created the laws that govern it all. We say that if you knew the meaning of an intrinsic quality, you would not think in this way. An intrinsic quality is something that is yours alone, and cannot change or ever come to an end. Only those things which are not intrinsic are subject to change.

So if you consider these things which you suppose to be intrinsically yours, and which have deluded you and sent you astray, you would realise

that the meaning of ‘intrinsic’ is that you do not need anyone else, but that you are completely self-sufficient. However, in your life, nothing is intrinsically yours, since everything around you changes without your will. At the beginning of your life you were an infant that needed its father, and then you grew up and became strong, and things began to go as you desired; yet you cannot make this period of your youth last forever, for time can only be held onto for a moment. Then, if you make it to old age, where you will need someone to help you and hold your hand, probably even for the most basic of your needs such as eating and drinking.

So you begin in infancy in need of others and you end up in old age in need of others. Even in your youth, you might fall ill and so be unable to go on with your normal life; yet if you truly possessed any intrinsic quality, you would be able to prevent this illness, and say ‘I will not fall ill.’ Yet you cannot.


God created these vicissitudes of time in order to end man’s self-delusion so that he would know he is only strong and capable because of the physical laws God has made for him, and that we are all in need of the All-Powerful, God, and that God is intrinsically free of need of any of His creatures. He causes change, but never changes; He brings death, but He is always living; He brings weakness after strength, but He is always strong. What people have is depleted, but what He has is never depleted. He is God, in the heavens and the earth.

You have no intrinsic quality that would allow you to claim to have subdued the universe by your own power because you do not have the ability to remain in the same state without ever changing; so how could you disbelieve in God, and cover up His existence, when everything in the universe and within your own self is a proof that He exists?

We said that the disbelievers are of two kinds. Some initially disbelieve in God, but then when guidance comes, they use their minds and recognise the truth and believe; and others who derive worldly benefits from disbelief, and so cling to it when the true faith is presented to them with its proofs, resisting it and sticking to disbelief. They do this because they want to maintain their worldly power and influence, which is based on their transgression and injustice, and they will not accept to have it taken from them, even by Him-the Truth. These are the ones about whom God says, ‘As to the infidels, alike is it to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not

believe.' They do not disbelieve because they have not heard the Message from God, and are in need of a messenger or prophet to guide them to God's way; rather, these people have taken disbelief as a vocation and a way of life, and they benefit from disbelief because it has made them leaders, and they are singled out from others because of the falsehood they follow, and because if religion came to make all men equal, and fight injustice, they would become ordinary people like anybody else.

So this disbeliever who has taken disbelief as a means to attain the vainglory and delights of this world, will not believe whether you warn him or not, for he only craves the worldly life in which he lives. And these are the ones who resist religion and fight those who embrace it because they know that this faith will take from them many of their distinctions. And so they do not lack faith because the message has not reached them, or because they have never noticed the signs of God in the world, but rather because their errant lives are completely founded and built on disbelief.


خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَى سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَى أَبْصَارِهِمْ غَشَاةٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

**God has sealed their hearts and their ears, and  
their eyes are covered. They will have great  
torment [7] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 7)**

Just as the True Lord gave us the attributes of the believers, so too, He gives us the attributes of the disbelievers. Some people might wonder: if this is God's judgement of the disbelievers, then why did the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* call them to faith, if God had sealed their hearts? The meaning of (their hearts being sealed) is that disbelief cannot leave their hearts, and faith cannot enter them.

We say that God is free of need for the entire universe, and so if some of His creatures reject faith and prefer disbelief, God will let them do so, and will not help them return to faith since the True Lord says in a Qudsi Hadith: I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself; if he remembers Me in a group, I remember him in a better group; if he draws nearer to Me by a

hand-span, I draw nearer to him by an arm-span; if he draws nearer to Me by an arm-span, I draw nearer to him by a fathom; if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.<sup>(1)</sup>

This Qudsi Hadith explains that God helps the believers to believe; and that just as He *the Glorious and Exalted* helps the believers to believe, it does not grieve Him whether His servant comes to faith or not. And so we find that the Quran affirms very clearly that those who disbelieve do so of their own free will, and that their choice of disbelief came first before God sealed their hearts. The sealing of their hearts came as a result of their disbelief, and not the other way round. The Creator *the Exalted* is most self-sufficient, and free of need of any partners, and so if anyone associates partners with Him, He has no need of them.

Those who disbelieve, i.e. cover up faith in God and His Messenger, have all their means of perception sealed by God: the heart, hearing and sight. The heart is an intangible means of perception, and God mentioned the heart before hearing and sight in this verse because He wants to teach us something about the means of perception.

Elsewhere in the Noble Quran, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* informs mankind that He has brought them out of their mothers' wombs devoid of all knowledge; but has given them hearing, and sight, and heart, that they might be grateful (*an-Nahl*: 78).

And so God teaches us that the human means of attaining knowledge are hearing, sight, and the heart. But in the noble verse we are currently examining, God mentions the heart first means before hearing and sight. God knows that they have chosen disbelief, and this choice was made before He sealed their hearts; and 'sealing their hearts' means preventing any new perception from entering, or any old perception from exiting. And so whatever the eye sees or the ear hears, it will do no good to them because the heart was sealed with God's seal, after its owner chose disbelief and insisted upon it. In light of this, the True Lord *the Exalted* describes them as being deaf, dumb and blind. Therefore, they shall not retrace their steps from error (*al-Baqara*: 18).

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(1) Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Sahih*, section of '*Kitab Adh-dhikr Wad-do'a*'

But how did they lose all these means of perception? It is because a veil fell over their hearts, and made their eyes unable to discern God's signs, and their ears unable to hear anything from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.


So what does He do with those who choose disbelief and insist on it, and deny God's guidance despite His messages, His messengers and His Quran? He leaves them because He has no need for anything in the worlds, and so He makes the way they have chosen easy for them to follow, and helps them to follow it. God *the Glorious and Exalted* states that to anyone who chooses to remain blind to the remembrance of the Most Merciful, He assigns a devil who becomes his fast companion (*az-Zukhruf*: 36).

And He *the Glorious and Exalted* also says that devils descend upon every lying sinful person (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 221-222). One aspect of the might of God's knowledge is that He knows the believer from the disbeliever without having interfered in their decision. When God sent Noah *peace be upon him* to his people, and he spent nine hundred and fifty years calling to God's way, and before the flood, God knew that no more people would believe in Noah *peace be upon him* other than those who had already believed in him, and He *the Exalted* told Noah *peace be upon him* to build the Ark to save the believers from the flood. God *the Glorious and Exalted* tells us that it was revealed to Noah that none of his people will believe except those who have already believed, and let him not, then, be distressed by anything that they may do; rather, he was commanded to build the ark under God's Eye and according to His inspiration; and not to appeal to God on behalf of the evildoers, as they are destined to be drowned (*Hud*: 36-37).

And so we see that in His all-encompassing Knowledge, God knows who will insist on disbelief, and who will die a disbeliever. Yet if this is the case, why then did God require His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver to them the Message and the Quran? It was so that they would bear witness against themselves on the Day of Resurrection so that they could not come on that awesome day and falsely argue that if only guidance had reached them, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had called them, they would have believed. But why did God *the Glorious and Exalted* seal their hearts? It was because the heart is the seat of all beliefs; a matter is

at first considered by the mind, then if the person is convinced with it when consideration is done, it settles in the heart and never again returns to the mind, and hence becomes a firm belief. The True Lord explains to us that it is not the eyes that become blind; rather, it is the hearts that are in the breasts that become blind (*al-Hajj*: 46).

And if the heart is blind to faith, the eye will not see God's signs, and the ear will not hear God's word. And those who choose disbelief over faith will receive great suffering in the Hereafter. God sometimes describes this suffering as painful, sometimes as degrading, and sometimes as great. Painful suffering means that which gives great pain. As for degrading suffering, this is for those whom God raised in this world. Sometimes degradation can be more painful to the ego than physical pain; and so on the Day of Resurrection, God will bring those people who were the leaders of disbelief in this world in front of those who followed them, and then degrade them. As for the great suffering, it is that which is ascribed to the omnipotent power of God. The power of human beings is limited, whereas the power of God *the Glorious and Exalted* has no limits; for every action is commensurate with the power of its doer, and God's power is great in everything He does, and since this suffering comes from God *the Glorious and Exalted*, it will surely be great.

 وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ ءَامَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَيَأْتِيَوْمَ الْآخِرِ وَمَا هُم بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

**Some people say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day,'  
when really they do not believe [8] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 8)**

People in this world are in one of three states: believers, outright disbelievers and hypocrites. At the beginning of the Noble Quran, in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, God wanted to give us a description of all humanity in respect to their relationship with His Divine guidance. According to this criterion, people are of three kinds. First the believers whose attributes were delineated to us by God in three verses: They are the ones who believe in the Unseen, who observe prayer, and out of what We have bestowed on them, expend for God (3) And who believe in what has been sent down to you, and in what has been sent down before you, and who have full faith in the life to come (4) They are the ones

who are guided by their Lord, and they are the ones who will attain success (5) Secondly there are the disbelievers, whose attributes were explained to us by God in two verses: As to the infidels, alike is it to them whether you warn them or do not warn them – they will not believe (6) God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil; and for them a severe suffering (7).

Then there are the hypocrites, whose attributes God gives us in thirteen consecutive verses. Why is this? This is because of the danger they pose to the religion as they are the ones with the potential to destroy the religion; as for the disbelievers, we are well aware of them, and are cautious of them because they announce their disbelief. Yet the hypocrite acts like a believer in front of you whilst concealing disbelief and idolatry within his heart. You might think him to be a believer and so tell him your secrets, which he then uses as a weapon to extend harm to the religion. God created many faculties within the human being, and if one is to live in a state of inner peace, his faculties must all be in harmony, not in discord. The believer's faculties are in harmony because faith is firm in his heart, and he speaks what he believes; so there is no discord between his faculties.

It could also be said that the disbeliever lives with a kind of balance because he rejects faith with his heart and announces this with his tongue. But the one whose faculties are in imbalance is the hypocrite who has lost harmony with both his community and his inner self. He speaks what his heart does not agree with, projects an outward state that is contrary to his inner state, and says what he does not believe and worries that people will discover him and so lives in a state of profound fear and imagines that this is only a temporary state that will come to an end.

But this discord will remain with him until the last day of his life, and then will go with him to the Hereafter where it will be his undoing and lead him to hell. God tells us how when the disbelievers, on the Day of Judgement, come close to the fire, their hearing and their sight and their skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing on earth. And they will ask their skins why they bore witness against them, and these will reply that God, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to them as well, for it is He Who has created them in the first instance – and to Him they are now brought back (*Fussilat*: 20-21).



All their faculties will revolt against them in the Hereafter, and so the peace they had been hoping for will not be realised for them, neither in their worldly life nor in their afterlife. The hypocrite's tongue will testify against him, as will his hands, his feet and his skin; so what will remain for him?

There is discord between him and his Lord, between him and his soul, between him and his society, between him and his afterlife, and between him and the disbelievers. His tongue speaks what is not in his heart. How does the True Lord describe the hypocrites? He says, 'And there are some people who say, 'We do believe in God and the Last Day,' while they do not believe' (*al-Baqara*: 8).

This is the first attribute of the hypocrites mentioned in the Noble Quran: that they profess faith whilst disbelief is in their hearts. And so their faith is all a show: if they attend the prayer, they are not credited for it because they are only doing it as a show, not out of faith; and if they pay the poor-due, it is a loss for them because they pay it whilst hating to do so; as far as they are concerned, it is only a loss of money, and they will receive no reward for it in the Hereafter. And if any of them is killed in battle, they will find nothing but grief and sorrow because they have thrown away their lives having not gone out to fight for the sake of God. And so everything they do is a cause of misery for them.

When the believer prays, or pays the poor-due, or is martyred in God's Cause, he hopes for paradise; yet the hypocrites might do all of these things, but they hope for nothing. It is as though because of their hypocrisy God has made misery their lot in this world and the next; in this world they do not taste the joy of the believer in those things he does for God's sake, and in the Hereafter they do not share the reward the believer hopes for from God.

يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ

**They seek to deceive God and the believers but  
they only deceive themselves, though they do not  
realize it [9] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 9)**

Here comes the second attribute of the hypocrites, which is their heedlessness and the foolishness of their reasoning; they believe that by their hypocrisy, they are fooling God; yet can any human being hope to fool the Lord of the Worlds?

God *the Glorious and Exalted* knows everything. He knows what we conceal, and what we reveal; He knows all secrets, and that which is more hidden even than secrets. Is there anything more hidden than secrets? Indeed there is, for a secret is something that you divulge to someone else. So there are two people who know it: you and the one to whom you divulge it. But the thing which is even more hidden than a secret is that which you keep to yourself without telling anyone at all; it remains in your heart without you divulging it to anyone else. God tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that (he does not need to raise his voice), and that if he says anything aloud, He hears it, as He knows the secret and what is yet more hidden (*Ta Ha: 7*).

So no created thing can have the ability to deceive its creator; yet in their heedlessness, they believed they can deceive God *the Glorious and Exalted*, and because of this attitude of theirs, there can be no peace between them and God, but rather only revulsion and wrath.

They also imagine that they are deceiving the believers by saying in their presence words which do not reflect their inner states. This deception brings them nothing but misery because they live in constant fear, and always worried and fearful that the believers will find them out, or hear what they say in their private meetings when they speak words of disbelief, and mock faith. And so when they speak, they must first make sure that none of the true believers can hear them, and then make sure that no believer comes upon them while they are speaking. Their hearts are also filled with fear when they are with the believers, constantly filled with fear lest they will let slip a word which would expose their hypocrisy and disbelief. And so they have no peace whilst they are amongst the believers, and in truth they are only deceiving themselves. God knows all about their hypocrisy; and there is a possibility that the believers also be aware of it. And even if they are not, God *the Exalted* could inform them of it, as He told His Messenger that if He had so willed, He could have shown them clearly to him so that he would know them for sure as by a visible mark, but he will most certainly recognize them by the strange tone of their voice. And God knows all that people do (*Muhammad: 30*).

It so happened that hypocrites did come to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to declare to him that he was God's Messenger, but

God exposed them to him, and asserted that when the hypocrites come to him, they say that they bear witness that he is indeed God's Messenger. God knows that he is truly His Messenger; and God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed false in their declaration of faith (*Al-Munafiqun*: 1).

The hypocrites came to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to testify to the truth of his Message, and God knew that this testimony was true and right because He *the Glorious and Exalted* knew the truthfulness of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; but at the same time we see that He asserts that the hypocrites were liars. How can this be? How could God's words be in agreement with what the hypocrites said, and then call them liars? We say: It is because the hypocrites uttered with their tongues that which was not in their hearts. They testified with their tongues alone that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Messenger of God, whilst their hearts denied that and gave the lie to it. And so even though what the hypocrites said was true, they were liars when they said it because they did not believe it in their hearts, and they said with their tongues that which was not in their hearts. Truthfulness is for speech to match what is in the heart, and so they lied because when they testified to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, they did not express what lay in their hearts, but rather their hearts denied what they said.

There are numerous verses in the Noble Quran in which God exposes the hypocrites and alerts His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to what they have stored in their hearts. So even though their deception of the believers was from one human being to another, they were sometimes exposed by the slips of their own tongues, and if not, God Himself would expose them. The upshot of all this is that they deceived no one; for God knew their secret and open affairs, and so sometimes He would aid the believers by exposing them, and sometimes the hypocrites' tongues would slip so they would expose themselves.

So the hypocrite fools no one but himself by his actions, and he loses out in this world and the next. When he performs a religious action, God knows it is hypocritical; and when he tries to deceive the believers, he is exposed. So the fact of the matter is that they believe they have gained some benefit for themselves, whilst in reality they have gained nothing but manifest failure.

فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

**There is a disease in their hearts, to which God has added more: agonizing torment awaits them for their persistent lying [10] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 10)**

So God compares that which lies within the hearts of the hypocrites to a disease. Disease first causes weakness; so it is as though their hearts do not possess the soundness of faith which gives life to the heart and makes it strong and vigorous. Rather, their hearts are sick; but why are they sick? They have been weakened by hypocrisy and the constant contradictions by which they are surrounded, and they are aware that they are leading lives filled with lies. This disturbance of their hearts has made them ill, and they can only be cured by God's leave. The cure is real, true faith and this is what brings relief, as God says that He sends down the Quran which as a healing and mercy to the faithful: But it shall only add to the ruin of the wicked (*al-Isra'*: 82).

So faith and the Quran are a source of health for the heart, yet both are absent from the hearts of the hypocrites, and so it is as though the sickness increases in their hearts as time passes, and because of their hypocrisy and disbelief, God increases this sickness. This is the third attribute of the hypocrites, namely that they possess diseased, sick hearts, which the light of faith cannot enter, and so their hearts are weak and do not possess the necessary strength to recognise the truth. Their hearts are fearful of all around them, and constantly in a state of worry, caught up in the conflict between what lies in the heart and what is spoken on the tongue. A diseased person is not strong enough to do anything, and likewise these sick hearts are not strong enough to speak the truth, or to be honest, and they cannot see what goes on around them in a way that is consistent with the natural disposition of faith which God placed in every heart. And so if the hypocrites ever entered a battle in the ranks of the Muslims, the first thing they would look for is the chance to flee the battlefield and seek out a place to hide themselves, or a place where no one could see them; and God says that if they find a place of refuge, or caves, or a hiding place, they assuredly turn towards it and haste thereto (*at-Tawba*: 57). Why? It is because they have diseased hearts, too weak to do anything, and their disease makes them run from everything and hide if only things went no

further than this; but in the Hereafter, a grievous punishment awaits them in addition to the suffering they endured because of their diseased hearts in this worldly life. Since they lied to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, a grievous suffering awaits them in the Hereafter, even worse than that which awaits the disbelievers, God *the Exalted* has ruled that verily the hypocrites shall be in the lowest abyss of the fire (*an-Nisa*: 145).

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ ﴿١١﴾

**When it is said to them, ‘Do not cause corruption in the land,’ they say, ‘We are only putting things right’ [11]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 11)**

Corruption on earth means to deliberately spoil something that is sound. The least that is expected from you in this world is that you leave sound things alone and that you not interfere with them and so spoil them; and if you want to move up a level in your faith, you take something which is sound and make it even better. Yet if you spoil something sound, you have committed two acts of corruption; for God has made sound for you all your worldly life’s needs, yet you have not left them in the sound state in which they were created, which itself would have been a means of avoiding corruption, but rather you found it in the sound state in which God created it and then corrupted it yourself. You did not accept the blessing God gave you by leaving it to fulfil its purpose of existence, and you did not attempt to assist it to serve its purpose even better; but rather you corrupted its purpose. For example, if there is a well from which people drink, this is a blessing to provide them with one of life’s essentials. By the means which God has placed in His universe, you can make this well even better by building a wall around it so that sand cannot crumble into it, or you can bring a rope and bucket to help the people reach its water; but if you come along and block it up, you corrupt something which was previously sound.

Such is the case with the hypocrites: God revealed guidance to allow people to live good lives on earth, yet the hypocrites try their utmost to corrupt this guidance by plotting against it and then claiming to believe in it, in order that they can stab Islam and destroy it from within.

The enemies of Islam realised that this strong, true religion could not be harmed by the attacks of disbelief, but would rather confront them and defeat them; for there can be no battle between truth and falsehood except that truth will come out a winner. The enemies of Islam have spent so many years trying to wage war against it, but they were unable to harm it. Then they realised that this religion can only be attacked from within, and that the way of corruption followed by the hypocrites is the most useful way to divide the Muslims. And so they concentrated their efforts on those in the Muslim communities who were Muslims by name only, so that they could find ways of attacking Islam, and so groups and sects emerged such as what they call 'secularism' and 'socialism' and so on; the hypocrites did all of this to Islam, and then cloaked their doings with an Islamic appearance so that they could spread corruption in the land in the name of Islam and wage war against God's guidance.

And if the believers chided these people for spreading corruption in the land, and demanded that they cease doing so, they would claim that they were not corrupters but rather reformers; yet what kind of 'reform' is there in the refusal to follow God's guidance, and in leaving aside this guidance for any reason whatsoever?

﴿ ١٢ ﴾ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِنْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

**But really they are causing corruption,  
though they do not realize it [12]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 12)**

So God gives us His judgement over them, which is that just as they deceive themselves unknowingly thinking that they are deceiving God, they also corrupt the land and claim to be reformers whilst in reality they are corrupters. Why is this? It is because their hearts are filled with disbelief and enmity towards God's guidance, and so if they do anything that seems outwardly to be righteous, in actuality it is corruption, just in the same way as their tongues utter that which is not in their hearts.

The world cannot be put right by anything except God's guidance, for God is the One Who created, and the One Who brought everything into existence, and He knows best what corrupts and what rectifies His creation because He

is the One who created it, and no one knows better how to rectify something than the one who made it.

In our worldly affairs, if we want to fix something we take it to its manufacturers, because they are the ones who can show us the best way to fix it; and if the manufacturer is not in our home town, we take it to whoever the manufacturer has trained to repair their products, or we refer to the printed instructions which show us the way to repair it, and without this we cannot repair it but only make it worse. It is strange that we all follow this procedure in our worldly lives, yet when we consider man and the universe instead of turning to their Creator and Maker, He who knows best, to find out how to rectify them, we instead turn to God's creatures, who give us a way of acting which corrupts, whilst appearing outwardly to rectify, and which actually makes things worse. And it is strange that we call this 'success' and 'progress'. Yet why do we not turn to the Maker, or the Creator Who made everything in creation? He knows best what corrupts His creation, and what rectifies them.

As the True Lord has judged that the hypocrites are corrupters, this is a judgement of absolute certainty, and anyone who tries to change God's guidance or prevent its implementation on the grounds of supposed 'reform' is nothing more than a spreader of corruption, whether he perceives this or not. If they truly wanted to rectify things, they would turn to that which rectifies the world in its entirety, which is the Divine guidance which the Creator of this world revealed; and this guidance exists, and it has been passed on to mankind, and no one can claim that he is unaware of it.

وَإِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا كَمَا ءَامَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا ءَامَنَ  
السُّفَهَاءُ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ وَلَكِن لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

**When it is said to them, 'Believe, as the others believe,' they say, 'Should we believe as the fools do?' but they are the fools, though they do not know it [13] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 13)**

By 'weak-minded,' the hypocrites meant the poor and disadvantaged people. The meaning of *safah* (from which comes *sufaha* 'weak-minded')

is recklessness, foolishness and slow-wittedness. But could the attribute of weak-mindedness be ascribed to the believers, who had embraced faith in God, or would it be more properly ascribed to those who do not believe in God? If you think that the believers are weak-minded, then why do you falsely claim to be believers yourselves, so that you too will be counted amongst the weak-minded?! There is no doubt that there was a great contradiction apparent in the behaviour of the hypocrites. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* called them to embrace faith, as did the Muslims; but they described those who believed as being *sufaha'* (weak-minded,) which, in their understanding meant underprivileged people, who possessed nothing. This was because the leaders of Quraysh did not believe. They also claimed that those who believed were foolish and reckless; but heedlessness was the disease which filled their hearts and prevented them from realising a crucial fact, that they were outwardly manifesting faith, and claiming to have faith, and then calling the believers 'weak-minded.' Yet if these people are weak-minded, as you claim, then why are you outwardly making a show of faith; so that you can be weak-minded like them?!

There is no logic in this, and this shows the feeble-mindedness of the hypocrites, in that they did not notice that when they called the believers weak-minded they also ascribed the same to themselves because the hypocrites claimed to be believers. And so every action of the hypocrites was characterised by contradiction, a contradiction of the intellect, and logic; and this contradiction sprang from the contradiction present in the faculties of the soul, each with the other. The tongue denied, but the heart believed, action gave the lie to beliefs and the outward manifestation of faith meant that they had to bear the hardships of faith without gaining any reward thereby. If they had possessed any straight mind, they would have been aware of all this; but as they were following this way, the way of hypocrisy, they were unaware, that they were the very embodiment of weak-mindedness and all that it implies of foolishness, contempt and lack of awareness of the truth and the thoughtlessness of their actions. When God described them as weak-minded, it was an accurate description of their state and their way of life.



وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شَيَاطِينِهِمْ  
قَالُوا إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزَءُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

**When they meet the believers, they say, ‘We believe,’  
but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say,  
‘We’re really with you; we were only mocking’ [14]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 14)**

And so the True Lord *the Exalted* shows us that the hypocrite has more than one life which he must take care of. In order for life to proceed properly and naturally, it must be one single harmonious life; but look at these people: with the believers they say, ‘We believe,’ and they follow a life of faith in appearance; that is, they act out a faithful life just like an actor on a stage plays a character completely unlike himself. Their lives are made up of affectation and contradiction. This is until they are apart from the believers, as the True Lord *the Exalted* says of them: ‘but when they find themselves alone with their devils...’

Consider now the accuracy of the Quranic expression. The Quran uses the word *shayatin* (plural of *shaitan*, which means ‘satan/devil’), implying a secret insinuator, as opposed to the truth, which is plain, evident and in the light. The ways of Satan and his plots and machinations take place in secret because they are based on falsehood, and the soul is never ashamed of revealing righteous truth, but it is always very fearful and careful to hide falsehood.

Let us give a simple example to illustrate this. A man sits with his wife in their house, when the doorbell rings. What happens? The man gets up calmly and opens the door to see who is there. If it is a friend or relative, he welcomes him and invites him in, and his wife gets up to prepare food or drinks for the guest. Yet what if the same thing were to happen if the man was with someone else’s wife and someone knocked on the door? There would be embarrassment and a confused scene, and the man would frantically search for a place to hide the woman, or look for a secret door to send her out of, or try turning off all the lights and stay quiet so that the person would think that no one was at home and leave. And then, before the woman with whom he had committed this unlawful act left, he would open the door carefully and look left and right to make sure no one could see him, and when he has seen that there was no

one he would quickly herd the woman out because she represented a sin from which he wanted to be rid, and when he walked her to the car he would walk far from her, and look around the street to make sure no one could see, and once they were in the car, they would drive off as fast as they could.

This is the difference between the way of faith and the way of Satan. The situation is the same, but what makes the difference is the matter of lawfulness or unlawfulness. Look at how people behave with lawful matters, with complete transparency and security, and then look how they behave with unlawful matters, in darkness and secrecy, careful that no one sees them. By considering this, we can see the accuracy of the language of the Quran when it says, 'but when they find themselves alone with their devils...'

The way of Satan necessitates privacy, seclusion and a place where no one can see you, and no one can hear you because openly following the way of Satan would bring scandal. And so you see that iniquitous people try their best to cover up their iniquitous actions which is a clear testimony on their part to the vile and unlawful nature of these actions, and that no one should witness them. As long as they do not want anyone to see these actions means that they are aware that what they are doing is a satanic act, which God does not sanction or approve of.

We should be aware that moral values are fixed values, even for corrupt people. And when we consider God's words: And when they meet the faithful they say, 'We believe,' it means that when they make a show of faith, they do so openly, even contriving ways to do so; and so it might be expected that on the contrary, when they were alone with their devils, they should say, 'We do not believe.'

In Arabic there are verbal sentences and nominal sentences. Verbal sentences indicate movement and renewal, whereas nominal sentences indicate constancy. With the believers, the hypocrites would say 'We believe' (using a verbal clause) because their faith was not firm but was rather fickle; and when they met with the disbelievers and said, 'We do not believe,' this would suggest firmness; yet between their meeting with the believers and their meeting with the disbelievers, their disbelief was renewed, and so they said, 'Verily we hold with you, and we are only mocking.'

اللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

**God is mocking them, and allowing them more  
slack to wander blindly in their insolence [15]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 15)**

The hypocrites are people who have no power or strength, but God is All-Powerful and Almighty, and so when He punishes them in kind for their mockery it will be a devastating requital. If the hypocrite displays with his speech that which is not in his heart, God will requite him with the same. And so since the hypocrite has two sides, an inner nature and an outer facet, God will treat him as a Muslim in this worldly life, and then in the Hereafter when all secrets are revealed, He will cast him into the lowest level of hell, even lower than that of the disbeliever, as the sin of the hypocrite is even graver.

‘God shall mock at them.’ Mockery (*istihza*) means disparagement; so, on the Day of Resurrection, they will try and lay claim to their outward appearances as Muslims, but God will reveal their true inner states. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* promises woe to every slanderer, fault-finder (*al-Humaza*: 1). This means those who mock others even with gestures.

They, for example, see a person with a club foot walking with a limp, and so they imitate his gait in order to mock and deride him, either by gesture or by word. There is slander (*hamz*) and there is slanderer (*humaza*) meaning to mock someone in gestures. This is the meaning of (*hamz*): to deride and mock people, and it is a sign of the absence of faith because we are all creatures of God, and so if you mock a person’s disability, you should be aware that this person is not the cause of his disability and he has no power over it. People do not create themselves, and so the truth is that you are mocking God’s creation; and only a fool could mock God’s creation because he is thereby mocking what he perceives as a flaw in one of God’s creatures, whilst forgetting the blessings that God has given him in not also giving him this flaw; and also he is mocking a flaw whilst forgetting that the True Lord *the Exalted* might have given that person other attributes and qualities which he himself lacks, and God commands

the believers to refrain from deriding others; it may well be that those whom they deride are better than themselves (*al-Hujurat*: 11).

The sum total of any one person is equal to the sum total of any other person, and this is of the justice of God. If you are better than someone in one aspect, search for your own defects. If you mock a believer because of something, this mockery is not disassociated from God's creation; and so it makes complete sense that when they said '...we were only mocking', God would answer them by saying 'God shall mock at them, and shall keep them in their overweening arrogance, blindly wandering in perplexity' (*al-Baqara*: 15), that is, He will increase this arrogance of theirs because the word (*madda*) means to extend something. But sometimes you increase a thing in itself, and sometimes you increase it by adding something else to it. You might take a piece of thread and stretch it out as far as it will go, or you might tie it to another piece of thread. In this case you have lengthened it with something else outside of it, and likewise God increases their arrogance.

Coming now to the word *ya'mahun* in the verse (rendered as 'blindly wandering in perplexity'), the word '*amah* is distinct from the word '*ama* (blindness) in that the final letter of the word is different. '*Ama* is the physical blindness of the eye, whilst '*amah* is the blindness of the insight. And so they stumble about, because blindness leads to stumbling in movement, whether literally as with physical blindness, or metaphorically as with the stumbling in morality and way of life caused by blindness of the insight. God explains to us that it is not the eyes that become blind; rather, it is the hearts that are in the breasts that become blind (*al-Hajj*: 46). So, although they might not be physically blind, their insights are blind, and God tells us that on the Day of Judgement, the sinner will ask his Lord why He has assembled him blind whereas he was endowed with sight in worldly life. God will answer him that it is because God's signs came to him, but he was oblivious of them, and thus he will be forgotten on that day (*Ta Ha*: 125-126). So blindness of the insight in this world makes a person blind to the signs of God in His creation, and blinds him to faith in God's guidance:

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالَةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ فَمَا رَبِحَتْ تِجَارَتُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

**They have bought error in exchange for guidance, so their trade reaps no profit, and they are not rightly guided [16]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 16)**

Here the True Lord gives us another attribute of the hypocrites, namely that they have purchased error with guidance. As long as there is an exchange here, there must be a deal, which requires a buyer and a seller. In the past, goods would be purchased with other goods (i.e. bartered), whilst today we use money. But what did they purchase?

These hypocrites purchased error; and with what did they pay for it? They paid for it with guidance! The word ‘for’ here (in Arabic the particle *bi*) refers to the price paid when you buy something. And so all of these people forsook guidance and bought error; but did they even possess guidance when the transaction was being conducted? It would seem that they must have possessed guidance, as though they had followed guidance and then found that it did not give them all the worldly benefits they wanted, and so they forsook it and purchased error with it so that they could get what they wanted. The guidance they possessed might have been the guidance of natural disposition, as though they could have chosen guidance but instead opted for error.

God guides all mankind with the guidance of direction, and then increases the guidance of all those who follow it. He *the Exalted* tells us the story of the tribe of Thamud, to whom He offered guidance, but they preferred blindness to guidance (*Fussilat*: 17).

God affirms that ‘their bargain has not brought them gain.’ The word ‘bargain’ implies buying and selling, the buyer being the consumer and the seller being either the producer or an intermediary between the producer and the consumer. What does the seller get from the deal? He gets a profit, and if he makes a profit, it is said that his bargain has brought him gain; and if he makes neither profit nor loss, or if he makes a loss, this means his bargain has brought him no gain.

So God’s words that their bargain has not brought them gain, and that they are not guided at all indicate that they have lost everything, for they have

found no gain, and so they have earned no benefit from their action, and have squandered guidance, and lost their profit and their capital. It might have been that they neither gained nor lost; but since they gave guidance as the price for error, they gained nothing and also lost guidance, which was their capital.

If you want to define the character of the hypocrite, you can say that he is a man without any dignity or any manliness with which to confront, and without any strength, and that is why he tries to plot in secret. So his character is contemptible in his own eyes; for even if he is able to hide his defects from others, it is enough to make him contemptible in his own eyes to know that he lies to himself, as the poet said:

If I stay clear of shameful deeds through fear

Of people, the people are more honourable than I am

It is shame enough for a person to see his own faults,

Even if he is hidden from all men and jinn.

So what is important is that you can see yourself, and the root of the inner conflict in the soul of the hypocrite is that he wants to conceal his faults from people.

مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ

ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

**They are like people who [labour to] kindle a fire: when it lights up everything around them, God takes away all their light, leaving them in utter darkness, unable to see [17]**

**(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 17)**

The True Lord wants to make the inner conflict and the divided nature of the hypocrites easier for us to understand, and so He gives us parables, that are similes which impart to us meanings and sayings of wisdom; and the parable is one of the time-honoured and age-old means of expression in Arabic literature.

A parable/proverb normally originates when an event happens during the course of which an expression is used which is concise and expressive, after which people begin to use it to describe any similar situation.

Let us take an illustrative example. Once a king wanted to ask for the hand of a young Arab lady in marriage, and so he sent a lady named 'Isam to carry his proposal. When she returned, he said to her, 'What is behind you, 'Isam'? She replied, 'The churning has brought forth butter.' To churn is to put milk into a vessel and shake it until butter separates from the milk. After this, both the question and the answer became idiomatic expressions, so that if someone comes to you from whom you wish to hear news, you say, ('What is behind you, 'Isam'?) even though their name is not Isam, and you did not send them as an envoy, but rather, you simply want to hear any news they might have.

And so if you want to use a parable or idiom to express the notion of hearts which are at odds with one another, and how once they become rivals they can never be reconciled, you might say as the poet said:

Hearts, when they are divided, are like glass:

Once broken in pieces, they cannot be mended.

When a glass smashes it cannot be mended; and so this is used to illustrate the idea to you because you cannot easily picture the battle that wages between hearts since this is a matter of the unseen, and so we use something tangible to illustrate the concept. The notion is made clearer by its being compared to something tangible which you can easily understand and observe.

God uses parables in the Noble Quran on numerous occasions in order to explain for us the unseen things of which we have neither knowledge nor direct experience. And so He gives us parables to illustrate the pinnacle of doctrines, namely the Oneness of God; and He gives us examples of His Light which we cannot see directly; and He gives us parables of the states of the disbelievers and hypocrites in order that we can understand their corrupt beliefs and be aware of them; and He gives us examples of what can be the result of ingratitude and the wicked transgression of rights among many other parables. God explains to us that He has indeed set out to people every kind of parable in this Quran, but most of them have refused everything except unbelief (*al-Isra*: 89).

God *the Glorious and Exalted* has given us parables to illustrate this world and the next, the wonders of creation and the matters of faith; yet despite this

many people are blind to the wisdom of these parables, and do not believe in what they reveal. The True Lord has given us these parables to help us understand, and has based them on the ordinary familiar things we see in our everyday lives; and these parables should have helped increase people's faith because they clarify to them those things which are unknown to them – yet instead, they persisted in disbelief !

Before we start discussing the noble verse: 'They are like one who kindles a fire, and when it has thrown its light on all around him, God takes away their light and leaves them in utter darkness, where they cannot see' (*al-Baqara*: 17), we must first discuss some of the parables which are given in the Noble Quran, in order to observe how God has spoken to us about unseen matters by use of the tangible things of this world.

God has given us a parable to illustrate the summit of faith, that there is no god but God, and how this is a mercy from God for which we should bow down and thank Him because it contains a protection for us from all misery. God wants mercy for His servants, yet some people want to make things hard for themselves by associating partners with God *the Glorious and Exalted*, and by taking, instead of the easy way of faith, the way of disbelief, hypocrisy and setting up partners with God Who possesses everything in this world and the next. To illustrate this specific point, God *the Glorious and Exalted* sets forth a parable: a man who has for his masters several partners, all of whom at variance with one another, and a man devoted wholly to one man: can these two be deemed equal as regards their condition? No, all praise is due to God, but most of them do not understand this (*az-Zumar*: 29).

By using this clear image which we can all envisage, and upon which there can be no disagreement, God wants to give us a clearer image of the one who serves God Alone and the one who associates other partners with God. He gives us the example of a slave owned by several masters – let us say a slave with ten masters – who are not in agreement with one another, but rather in constant disputation amongst one another, and another slave who has only one master. Which of them will be living in peace and grace? Of course the one with only one master will live with blessings and grace because he only has



to obey a single command and a single prohibition, and he answers to a single lord, and seeks to please a single master. As for the one owned by partners and even if they were in agreement, each of them would have his own commands and prohibitions, and each of them would have his own demands; so what about if they disputed? One of the partners may say to the slave ‘come here,’ and the other says ‘do not go;’ one orders one thing, another orders the opposite; so which one of them should he please, and which should he anger? His life will be plagued by misery and contradiction.

God wants to make this image clearer to us- the image of the summit of doctrines which affirms that God is One. He wants us to understand this image by means of something tangible that we observe and witness, and to see God’s abundant blessings and mercy to His servants.

In another parable, the True Lord urges us to reflect on another issue; take the example of two men, one of whom is dumb, unable to do anything, and is a sheer burden on his master: to whichever task the latter directs him, he comes back with no success. Can such a man be considered the equal of the one who enjoins what is just and himself follows a straight way? (*an-Nahl*: 76)

In this noble verse, the True Lord wants us to reflect on a parable which is clearly tangible to us. Which of them is better? Consider, first, the worship of the idol which the idolaters worship, and which never brings them any good, because it cannot even benefit itself, never mind anyone else, and indeed is a burden on those who worship it because they have to carry it from place to place if they want to change the place of worship or travel, and if it falls, it will break and need to be repaired. So apart from the fact that it brings them no good, it is also a source of hardship for them, and is also in need of constant care and protection from them.

Is it better to worship such an idol, or to worship God *the Exalted* from Whom comes all goodness and all blessings, and Who commands justice, favouring none of His servants over the other, and Who shows His servants the straight path to follow, a path with no twists or turns which leads to paradise in the Hereafter. By this parable, God illustrates the foolishness of the ideas of the idolaters who worship idols instead of God.

Therefore, these two parables give us an elucidation of the issue of Divinity and the Oneness of God. Then God gives us another parable to illustrate His Light, the Divine Light which illuminates this world and the Hereafter and illuminates the hearts of the believers. God gives us an example of this Light using something tangible to us: God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp encased in glass – the glass, as it were, a radiant star. From a blessed tree is it lighted, the olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire had not touched it! It is a light upon light. God guides whom He wills to His light, and God sets forth parables to men, for God knows all things (*an-Nur*: 35).

It is as though God wants us to know, by means of a tangible example, that His Light is like that of a niche, meaning the opening in the wall like we have in our country houses in which we place lamps so that the lamp does not light the whole room, but rather, its light is focused on the niche so that it is stronger in this concentrated area. But then the lamp is enclosed in glass which protects it from wind and makes its light stronger and purer without any smoke; and the glass also serves to reflect the light and make it brighter. It is no ordinary glass, but rather, it is like a radiant star, i.e. it produces its own light like a star. And its fuel is from a blessed tree full of light, neither of the east nor of the west, i.e. light fills it from the centre and shines forth pure. And the oil itself gives off light almost without being touched by a flame, and so it is light upon light. Is there any part of this lamp that could be in darkness? Or will it all be full of bright light? And this is not the Light of God Who is beyond any comparison, but rather, it is a parable to bring it nearer to the mind. So it is as though God's Light illuminates every spot and every space, and leaves nothing in darkness; it is light upon light.

A poet<sup>(1)</sup> wanted to praise a caliph,<sup>(2)</sup> and it was usual to compare caliphs to people renowned for possessing fine attributes, so he said,

‘Amr’s bravery with Hatim’s largess,

And Ahnaf’s magnanimity with Iyas’ cunning

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(1) It was Abu Tammam, a well-known poet from the Abbasid era.

(2) It was Ahmad ibn Al-Mu'tasim.

All of the people mentioned here were used by the poet as paradigms of these virtues: 'Amr was known for his bravery, Hatim for his generosity, Ahnaf for his forbearance, and Iyas for his intelligence. Upon this, one of those present<sup>(1)</sup> stood up and said, 'The caliph is greater than all of those whom you just mentioned!' And so Abu Tammam extemporaneously replied:

Censure me not for comparing him to his lessers,  
 In such roving examples of valour and bounty;  
 For God used a lesser thing to symbolise His light:  
 A niche, wherein a lamp is shining.<sup>(2)</sup>

So Ahmad ibn Al-Mu'tasim and the others present were amazed by his brilliance and quick wit, and he ordered his prize to be doubled.

God also gives us parables to illustrate what the believers will see in paradise, the paradise which the God-fearing are promised – a paradise wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, and rivers of milk whose taste never alters, and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, and rivers of honey cleansed of all impurity (*Muhammad*: 15).

This is not paradise; it is rather the likeness of it, a parable by which God helps us to picture it by use of things we see in our lives, for human minds cannot imagine anything above that. Paradise contains what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, or any human heart has conceived, and so there are no words in this life to express what paradise contains. In another verse God explains that no soul knows what joy of the eyes is reserved for the good in recompense of their works (*as-Sajda*: 17).

If the soul does not know of these things, then it will have no words with which to express what paradise contains. Once a parable becomes widely known, it becomes known as a maxim. If you see someone who is deluded by his strength, and you want to make him see that you are even stronger than him, you say, 'If you are a wind, you are now face to face with a hurricane.' Yet in reality there is neither a wind nor a hurricane, but what is intended is the deep-meaning, not the actual literal import of the words.

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(1) It was Ya'qub ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi.

(2) From (Diwan Abu Tammam) with the commentary of (Khatib Tabrizi)

Coming back to the discussion of the verse at hand, the True Lord wants to give us an image of what lies in the hearts of the hypocrites of nervousness, disturbance, and hesitation regarding the attitude to God's guidance.

Since what goes on in people's hearts is unknown to us, God wanted to help us understand this matter. He says, 'They are like one who kindles a fire..., ' i.e. he tries to light a fire; and if someone wants to light a fire, he must have some purpose for doing it which might be to gain warmth, to cook, to produce light, or to do something else. What matters is that there must be some reason for lighting the fire.

Then the True Lord says: '...and when it has thrown its light on all around him, God takes away their light and leaves them in utter darkness, where they cannot see.' This is because of the bewilderment that fills their hearts. They (the tribesmen of ancient Arabia) had heard from the Jews that the time had come for a new prophet to emerge, and so they resolved to believe in him; but their faith was not based on a true desire to believe, but rather was a mere attempt to obtain worldly security because the Jews used to threaten them and say, 'The time has come for a prophet to come, in whom we shall believe, and with whom we shall slay you as 'Ad and Iram were slain.' So the hypocrites wanted to escape this fate with which the Jews threatened them, and they imagined that if they falsely announced their faith in this prophet, they would be saved.

The True Lord gives us this image of them as having kindled this fire to give them light to show them the way of faith; but when this light came, and instead of following the light of faith, they rejected it, and when this happened, God took away their light, so nothing of the light of faith remained in their hearts. So they first asked for the light of faith, and when God granted it to them they turned away from it, as though corruption is their natural state, and they were the ones to begin the corruption; and once they did, God took the light of faith from their hearts.

Notice the exactness of the Quranic style here in the expression '...God takes away their light...' using the Arabic word *noor* for light, not *daw'* (both words mean 'light'), although it says that they kindled the fire to obtain *daw'*. But what is the difference between *daw'* and *nur*? To understand the difference, let us look at the verse where the True Lord says that it is He Who

has made the sun a *dia*’ (a derivative of *daw*’), source of radiant light, and the moon a noor (reflected light) (*Yunus*: 5). So we see that *daw*’ is stronger than noor, and *daw*’ only comes from a light-producing body; thus the sun creates its own *daw*’ (light), whilst the moon receives the *daw*’ of the sun and reflects it back as noor.

Before the sun rises there is noor, but the *daw*’ only comes after the sun has risen. If the True Lord used *daw*’, it would mean that He takes away the light which reflects itself as noor, but left them the noor itself. However, using the term noor means that no light of any kind was left for them, as though their hearts were completely filled with darkness, and so immediately after this God says, ‘...and leaves them in utter darkness, where they cannot see’ so that we know that there is no trace of the light of faith of any kind in their hearts; and this was all a natural consequence to their wrongdoing and their rejection of God’s light. We notice also that the True Lord did not say, ‘and leaves them in darkness,’ but rather said, ‘...and leaves them in utter darkness...,’ i.e. in darkness upon darkness, from which there can never be any escape.

From where did this utter darkness come? It came because they sought this worldly life instead of the Hereafter, and when the light of faith came to them, they turned away from it, and so God turned their hearts away as well.

If we take for example the story of the leader of the hypocrites in Medina, Abdullah ibn Ubay, we see that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* entered Medina at a time when the Medinans were preparing to crown ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay as their king. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* arrived, the people turned away from ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay to welcome the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and so the arrival of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* cost ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay the crown. It was possible for him to accept faith, and seek light from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; and if he had believed then, he might have been given an everlasting kingdom in the Hereafter greater than any kingdom he could have expected in this world. But because his heart was fixed on worldly matters, not on religion, and because he wanted an elevated status in this life, not paradise in the Hereafter, hateful spite filled his heart and cast darkness into it, and envy filled his heart and cast darkness

into it, and woe filled his heart and cast darkness into it, and hatred and malice filled his heart and cast darkness into it; and so darkness was manifold.

And so in the heart of every hypocrite lies manifold darkness: the darkness of spite for the believers, the darkness of hatred for them, the darkness of hoping to see the defeat of faith, the darkness of hoping to see the believers afflicted with evil, and the darkness of confusion and pain caused by the constant attempt to display faith outwardly, whilst having hearts filled with disbelief; all of these are kinds of darkness.

But do not try to understand this literally as your mind may first suggest; for the parable here is only to illustrate the true meaning. For example, consider the statement of the True Lord to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and to any believer that whenever they recite the Quran, God places an invisible (concealed) veil between them and those who do not believe in the Hereafter (*al-Isra'*: 45).

But how could the veil be invisible, since it is a cover, and something which hides one thing from another? The True Lord wants us to understand that although a veil conceals one thing from another, it is itself also concealed, and it cannot be seen. Some scholars say that 'concealed' here is a passive participle being used in the sense of an active one, so it means here 'concealing;' but we say no. An expression about a similar situation in another verse can throw some light on the point. God affirms that for the believers there will be gardens of perpetual bliss which God the Most Merciful has promised to His servants in a realm which is beyond the reach of human perception; surely, His promise shall come to pass (literally: to be met) (*Maryam*: 61).

The word *ma'tiyya* (rendered here as 'shall come to pass') is the passive participle of the verb 'to come', and so some of them say that the passive participle is being used in place of the active. To this we say: No, you have misunderstood it: does God's promise seek out the servant, or does the servant seek it out with his actions, as though he is going to it? The one who receives the promise is the one who benefits, not the promise itself.

Therefore, in its precise expression, the Noble Quran tells us that the one who receives the promise is the one who strives to attain it; it is not the

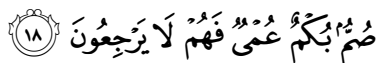
promise that seeks to meet the person promised – which would be the case if the active participle were used here.

So when the True Lord says, ‘...and leaves them in utter darkness, wherein they cannot see,’ He negates their possessing any light; and light is not connected with hearing, touch, or smell, but is rather related to sight.

Look at the precision of the Quranic expression here. If there is no light, there can be no sight; that is, the eye does not see by itself, but rather sees by means of light rays reflected from the object to the eye.

God states that He has established the night and the day as two signs; and then He effaced the sign of night and set up the light-giving sign of day (*al-Isra*: 12).

So it is as though the eye does not see by its own capability; rather, the thing which allows the eye to see is light, and if light is lost, vision is lost, so you cannot see things in the dark – and this is a Quranic miracle which science discovered long after the revelation of the Quran.



**Deaf, dumb, and blind: they will never return [18]**

**(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 18)**

After informing us that because of the wrongdoing of these hypocrites, He took the light of faith from their hearts so that they were unable to see God’s signs, the True Lord tells us that it was not only their sight which was taken, but that all of their senses were disabled. Their hearing was disabled and so they were deaf, their speech was disabled and so they were dumb, and their sight was disabled and so they were blind. These are the human being’s senses of perception. God informs us that He has brought us forth from our mothers’ wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed us with hearing, and sight, and minds so that we may have cause to be grateful’ (*an-Nahl*: 78).

So their being in utter darkness, unable to see, means that their other tools of perception are also disabled; so their ears are deaf to the guidance of the True Lord, and their tongues are unable to express what is in their hearts, and their eyes cannot see God’s signs in the universe. And so, their means of perceiving God’s guidance are all disabled.

As for the expression ‘...and they cannot turn back,’ this means that these means of perception will not return to them to allow them to see God’s light in His creation. They have no perception, and so it cannot be hoped that they will ever return to the way of guidance. The doctrine has been corrupted in their hearts, and so they cannot distinguish between immediate temporary harm and the lasting goodness to come. The light of guidance would have caused them to see the way to God, so that they could follow a clear way with no confusion; but when the light came to them, they rejected it and turned away from it, turning away from all that would have led them to God’s way.

In this noble verse, God gives us another attribute of the hypocrites, which is that the means of perception that God created for them have been disabled, and so to insist on trying to guide them and expending much effort on them will have no result because God, as a result of their hypocrisy and wrongdoing, has disabled the means of perceiving guidance that might have otherwise led them back to the way of truth.

أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصْنَعَهُمْ  
فِي ءَآذَانِهِم مِّنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

**Or [like people who, under] a cloudburst from the sky, with its darkness, thunder, and lightning, put their fingers into their ears to keep out the thunder- claps for fear of death – God surrounds the disbelievers [19] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 19)**

The True Lord speaks of ‘a violent cloudburst in the sky....’ ‘Cloudburst’ means heavy rain. God sends down rain, by which life is sustained, as He *the Exalted* explains that He has made out of water every living thing (*al-Anbiya*: 30).

Of course we know that the sending down of rain is done by the power of God alone since the process of rain is a delicately precise creation, and every day it takes place by means of many delicate and subtle processes, involving many factors which none but God could bring into being. The earth was prepared for rain from the moment it was created. Three-fourths of the surface of the earth is water, and one-fourth is dry land. Why is this? It is God’s wisdom that makes it this way, in order that the evaporation process would be



able to occur with ease, since the greater the surface level of water, the faster it evaporates; and if the surface area is small, evaporation is more difficult. If we take a cup of water and place it in a closed room for a day, we will find that the amount of water will have decreased by one centimetre or less. Yet if we take the water in this cup and pour it onto the floor of the room, it will disappear in a short time. Why? That is because the surface area of the water is wider, and so evaporation occurs swiftly.

When God created the earth, out of His wisdom He decreed that the process of rain should take place by means of the fact that the surface area of water would be large in order that evaporation could take place easily; and He decreed that the rays of the sun would be the cause of this evaporation from the surface of the water. All of this took place with great precision so that the rain would neither drown the earth, nor leave it too dry. Then God subdued the wind to make the clouds go where He decreed rain should fall, and He made the peaks of mountains cold so that when clouds contacted them, they would release rain. All of this took place with great precision, as did all the other stages of the process of rain.

As long as water is the source of life on earth, God has given us a parable by its means, just as He did with fire and the light it brings. They are all parables based on physical, tangible things in order to help us understand what we cannot see. So water brings life.

But the hypocrites did not consider this blessing, which gave them water from the sky without any work or effort on their part; they rather busied themselves with secondary matters. They should have welcomed this blessing, for it was a source of great good for them. Before rain falls from the sky, there must be some darkness caused by the clouds which bear the rain, and block the rays of the sun by day and the light of the moon by night. This darkness is the precursor of the goodness of rain.

They did not consider the goodness with which God filled the earth, but rather considered only the darkness, and so fled from goodness. The same is the case for the sound of thunder and the brilliance of lightning. People receive thunder by means of the ear- the organ of hearing, whilst lighting is received by the eye. The sound of thunder is powerful, more powerful than the ear can bear,

and so when a person hears it, he is startled, and tries to prevent his ears from hearing it by putting his fingertips in his ears.

These hypocrites did not just put their fingertips in their ears, but as God says, ‘...they thrust their fingers into their ears...’ He did not say ‘their fingertips,’ and this is a kind of exaggeration to show the effect that the thunder had on them. It is as though out of their fear and terror, they all tried to put their whole fingers in their ears to protect them from this terrifying sound, as though they went to extremes in their fear of the thunder. Notice that the discourse here does not refer to a single individual, but rather to many, as God says, ‘...they thrust their fingers....’ We say that a command issued to a group is really a command issued to every individual amongst this group. If the teacher says to the students, ‘Get out your pens,’ this means that every individual student should get out his/her pen. If the leader of a group says, ‘Get in your cars,’ this means that every individual in the group should get in his car. Similarly, the meaning of ‘they thrust their fingers into their ears’ is that every one of them puts his fingers in his ears. Why do they do this? They do it out of fear of death because thunder and lighting are sometimes accompanied by loud blasts, and so out of their extreme fear, each one of them imagines that one of these blasts will kill him.

So, it is as though they are receiving God’s blessing in a way contrary to its true reality. They do not see the true blessing of the rain that comes to sustain life, but rather, they only consider the superficiality of the thunder and lightning. In the same way, not one of the hypocrites could restrain himself from indulging the passions of his lower self, wanting only immediate gratification instead of waiting for the true goodness that God has promised His servants in the Hereafter. He considers moral responsibilities as hardships and things which cause the soul difficulty, forgetting the true reward of these responsibilities in the Hereafter, and how they will give him everlasting delight, just as people look at rain and think it to be simply darkness, thunder, and lightning, forgetting that without this rain, it would be impossible for their lives to continue.

They think that these superficial things reflect the entirety of things, when really, they only come and go in a short period of time, short like the life of this world in chronological terms; but the way they view them is chronological

and materialistic because they believe in nothing more than this worldly life, and are ignorant of the Hereafter. They were ignorant of the fact that this water will remain for a long time, and were only aware of these superficial temporary phenomena which came with the rain, and feared them; and their fear made them unaware of the goodness that this rain brought them. The hypocrites wanted to benefit from the good things Islam brought them without also fulfilling the requirements of the religion!

Then the True Lord alerts us to another important matter, which is that their fear of the loss of the benefits of this world will not avail them aught because God encompasses the disbelievers; and to encompass means to have complete control over something so that it has no way of escaping; and God encompasses both the disbelievers and anyone else. So their lack of awareness of the true benefit, namely God's guidance, did not give them any means of escaping from God's power in this life or the next.

يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ أَبْصَرَهُمْ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ مَشَوْا فِيهِ وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا  
وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَرِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

**The lightning almost snatches away their sight: whenever it flashes on them they walk on and when darkness falls around them they stand still. If God so willed, He could take away their hearing and sight: God has power over everything [20] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 20)**

God wants to alert us here to the fact that the lightning, which is only temporary and short-lived, is what has attracted their attention. If they had faith, the light of faith and Islam would have lit up the way for them, but their hearts were filled with the utter darkness of disbelief and so, they could not see the way of light. The lightning almost snatched away their sight, i.e. took it against their will, because the one who snatches does not wait for permission to take, and the one from whom something is snatched does not have the means to prevent it. Snatching is not the same thing as usurping, which means to take something by overwhelming its owner.

But what is the difference between taking, snatching, and usurping? Taking means to ask for something from someone and have him give it to you, or to

ask his permission to take it, i.e. to take something with the permission of the owner. The word Snatching means to take something without the permission of the owner and without him being able to stop you. And the word Usurping means to take something against the will of the owner by using force or the like to make him unable to prevent you from taking the thing.

Let us give an example of this—and to God belongs the loftiest of similitudes. If a child goes and snatches a sweet from a sweet-shop, the owner cannot stop him because the action is beyond his power to prevent because he is far from the child and was not expecting it to happen; so he cannot prevent it. As for usurpation, it is when the shop keeper is alert, but does not have the power to stop what is happening, and even if he tries to resist, the one who is taking the thing is stronger than him; so the power of the usurper is more than that of the usurped.

So God says, 'The lightning well-nigh snatches away their sight.' We need to pay attention to the expression 'well-nigh', i.e. the lightning almost snatches away their sight. So the person does not have the power to prevent this lighting from arresting the attention of his sight. God then says, 'whenever it gives them light, they advance therein,' i.e. they walk in the worldly physical light which the lightning gives them, but there is no light in their hearts, and so when darkness falls around them, they stand still because they have no light.

God then says, 'And if God so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and their sight.' Some of the orientalist say that this contradicts the previous noble verse which said 'deaf, dumb, blind – and they cannot turn back' because how can they be deaf, dumb and blind, meaning that their senses of perception do not work – and we are speaking about spiritual blindness – and then He says, 'And if God so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and their sight,' even though they are already deaf, dumb, and blind? We say: The True Lord's words 'deaf, dumb, blind' mean that they cannot see God's signs and the certitude of faith, and they cannot hear the verses of the Quran and understand them; so their means of perception of spiritual realities are disabled. As for their means of perception of material things, they remain as they are. So the hypocrite who does not believe in the Day of Resurrection cannot see the suffering that awaits him in the Hereafter.

And so, if God wanted to take away their hearing and sight with respect to sensory matters, He could do so for He is able to do all things; yet He did not will this so that they would not come and argue in the Hereafter that if only they had possessed working vision, they would have seen God's signs, and that if they had been able to hear them they would have reflected on the Quran. And so God preserved for them their hearing and sight so that the argument would be against them that they possessed sight yet turned away from God's signs to those things which brought them immediate worldly gratification, even if it brought upon them the wrath of God; and they possessed hearing by which to hear all the plots against Islam and the attempts to discredit the faith; yet when God's verses were recited to them, they did not hear them. About this, God says that there are some people who would listen to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, but when they leave him, they will derisively ask those who have been granted knowledge about what he had said earlier (*Muhammad*: 16). That is, they listen but do not comprehend, and no light enters their hearts, as if they are deaf to God's verses and cannot hear them.

So the True Lord wants to give us a parable of the hypocrites to show us that they do not pay attention to the true values of life, but rather only consider superficial matters. They want immediate benefits, and the darkness in their hearts does not allow them to see the light of faith. They are dazzled by the lightning flash of this worldly life even though it is a passing thing, and so it snatches away their sight; and because there is no light in their hearts, once this worldly life leaves them they are surrounded by darkness on all sides because they do not believe in the Hereafter. And if God willed, He could take away their hearing and sight because they do not use them for the spiritual tasks required from them. Our means of perception should increase our faith, but these people see only the gratification of this worldly life, and listen only to the whispers of Satan, and so the spiritual purpose of their means of perception is neglected, as though they do not even exist.

يٰۤاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اَعْبُدُوْا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَاَلَّذِيْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ ﴿٢١﴾

**People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him] [21]**

**(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 21)**

After telling us about the attributes of the hypocrites in thirteen verses, giving us descriptions of their external characteristics and parables of the state of their hearts so that the believers would know them outwardly and inwardly and be cautious of them and not trust them, God then makes clear to us how the hypocrites not only rejected God as a deity and covered up His existence, but also denied Him as Lord. The Lord gives to all in abundance, whether believers or disbelievers, for it was He *the Exalted* who called them into existence and created them, and so He provides them with their sustenance and their livelihood.

God does not deny any of His creatures His Lordly bestowal in this world. The sun rises on the believer and the disbeliever, and rain falls on those who say ‘there is no god but God’ and those who deny His existence; those who pray regularly breathe the same air as those who never pray once in their whole life; those who love God eat, as do those who show ingratitude to God’s blessings. This is because God gives His Lordly bestowal to all His creatures in this world. But as for His Divine bestowal, it is exclusively for the believers in this life and the next. So, God is alerting His creatures to the fact that His Lordly bestowal is sufficient reason for them to believe in God and worship Him.

When the True Lord addresses people in the Noble Quran, the Book which cannot be approached by falsehood from any direction, this address must be applicable to every time and place from the moment the Quran was revealed until the Day of Resurrection. This address by God specifies a matter at the peak of all doctrinal issues, namely submission to the One God with no associates.

God’s words ‘...who has created you and those who lived before you...’ means that one of the things that necessitates worship is that God created all people; and as we said, there is no doubt about this creation since no one can

claim to have created himself, or to have created this universe. Rather, the True Lord wants us to respect even the direct cause of our existence – our parents, for the parents are the cause of a person's existence, and so we find that He has ordained that people should worship none but Him, and do good to their parents. Should one of the parents or both attain old age in one's care, he should never be disrespectful to them or scold them, but should always speak to them with reverence (*al-Isra'*: 23).

In this way we see that the True Lord shows respect to the causality of the direct maker, even though He is truly the Maker who created everything. Yet God respects the works of mankind although man is only a means. Wealth belongs to God, and He gives it to whom He pleases, yet we find that the True Lord encourages the giving of charity by making it a loan from the servant to the Lord by asking who would offer God a goodly loan? (*al-Baqara*: 245).

So it is as though God respects the work of man in earning money even though all wealth belongs to God, and so the Almighty Creator made charity a loan to him. So the mercy of the True Lord with His creation is manifested.

God then says, '...so that you might have fear...'; fear of what? It is fear of God's attributes of majesty for God has attributes of majesty and attributes of beauty: His names which manifest His attributes of majesty are the All-Compeller, the All-Dominant, the Sublime, the Powerful, the Fully Capable, the Omnipotent and the Inflictor of Harm; the others are attributes of mercy.

So God wants us to place a barrier between us and His attributes of majesty so that we do not incur God's wrath which would mean that He would treat us with His attributes of majesty; and He wants us to cling fast to His attributes of Divine beauty: the All-Merciful, the Loving, the All-Forgiving, the Most-Relenting; and if we do this successfully, we will find salvation from the Fire which is one of God's troops, and a manifestation of His majesty.

We must also be aware that when God says 'O mankind,' He is addressing all mankind. If the True Lord wishes to address the believers, He says 'O believers,' i.e. O you who have believed in God as your deity, and entered with him into a covenant of faith.

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

**Who spread out the earth for you and built the sky; who sent water down from it and with that water produced things for your sustenance. Do not, knowing this, set up rivals to God [22] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 22)**

After telling us that His Lordly bestowal, which He gives to all His creatures, believers and disbelievers alike, was sufficient reason for all people to believe, the True Lord then began to elucidate for us some of the signs of His Lordly bestowal, and alert us to them so that perhaps those who do not believe, upon reading these verses, might find faith entering their hearts. And so the True Lord alerts us to the creation of the earth, saying: ‘who has made the earth a bed for you.’

The earth is the place where people live, and no one can claim to have created the earth or brought it into existence. It is a sign of Lordship which does not require from us any great mental effort to recognise it, but rather, incontestably, it belongs to God. The term ‘bed’ here indicates that He prepared the earth in a form which is comfortable for mankind just as you spread something onto the ground to sit or sleep on, so that it is a resting-place for you. And we pass the earth on to one another, generation after generation, and it is suitable for all of us to live upon. And from the time the earth was created until the Day of Resurrection, the earth will remain a bed and a resting-place for mankind.

Some people might object that when you sleep directly on the earth it is not comfortable because there are stones and suchlike which cause you discomfort. We say that the first man could sleep on it comfortably, and so it is possible to take one’s necessary sleep on the earth. But when civilisations advanced, and standards of living increased, the earth remained a resting-place because of the soft things which could be upon it. So it is as though God is saying that He made the earth in such a way that it suited every generation of men so that as each generation found a more comfortable standard of living because of the advances of civilisation, God revealed the



knowledge that would allow man to gain mastery over the earth and make it a suitable resting-place for himself.

Notice that in another verse God likens the earth to a cradle for mankind (*az-Zukhruf*: 10). A cradle is an infant's bed, and it must be comfortable because if the baby finds anything in the bed which disturbs it, it is incapable of doing anything to remove the discomfort, and so the mother prepares the bed for her baby in a way that it can sleep with complete comfort. But the One Who prepares the earth for all of His creatures is God, who makes it a bed for His servants. In still another verse, God makes it clear to us that it is He Who has made the earth easy for us to live on so that we can go about in all its regions and eat of the sustenance which He provides (*al-Mulk*: 15). The meaning of this is that the True Lord *the Glorified* has made the earth compliant for mankind so that it gives him everything he needs.

Then the True Lord mentions the heaven: '...and the heaven a canopy.' The word used here, *bina*' (canopy, an ornamental roof-like structure) implies firmness and stability, i.e. we do not see that heaven, which lies above us, is held up by anything to prevent it from falling upon us, but rather, it is a firm, stable ceiling. This notion is emphasised in the statement that God holds the heaven so that it may not fall upon the earth unless by His leave (*al-Hajj*: 65). And in yet another verse God says that He has set up the sky as a canopy well-secured (*al-Anbiya*': 32).

The purpose of all these verses is to reassure us, as we live on the earth that the heaven will not fall down upon us because God preserves it. So one of the signs of the True Lord on earth is that He made it a bed and resting-place, i.e. a comfortable bed for mankind to live upon, and He preserved the heaven by His omnipotent power so that it remains firm in its place, and does not pose any threat or concern to the inhabitants of earth that it might fall upon them.

Then He mentions another of these signs: '... and has sent down water from heaven, and by it has brought forth fruits for your sustenance!' So the True Lord placed within the earth the means for the preservation of life, and did not leave mankind on earth without giving them the means to continue with their life. Rain falls from the heaven – and 'the heaven' means everything that is above you and hanging over you – and so plants and fruits

grow, and this is a source of sustenance for us. People differ as to the meaning of the word (provision) mentioned here. Provision is everything you benefit from not everything you gain. You might earn a lot of money, but if you do not spend it and benefit from it, it is not considered your Divinely-granted provision, but rather the provision of someone else. You remain eager to keep it, and you do not spend a single cent of it until you pass it on to its rightful owner. Most people think that provision means only wealth. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* explains the fine distinction between the two notions: The Son of Adam says, 'My wealth is my wealth,' but, Son of Adam, do you retain any of your wealth except that which you consume and so exhaust, or that which you wear (as clothes) and so wear out, or that which you give in charity and so preserve?<sup>(1)</sup>

This is the provision of wealth which is one part of provision; but there is also the provision of health, the provision of children, the provision of food, and the provision of blessings; and every blessing that God gives us is provision – not just wealth.

So the True Lord wants with this noble verse to urge us to reflect a little on who created this universe to recognise that before He created mankind, He created the means for the preservation of his life; this preparation did not end with the physical life, but rather just as God prepared for us the material constituents of our lives, He also prepared for us the constituents of our spiritual lives, or the moral values of existence. In the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, God *the Exalted* states that He, the God of Mercy has taught the Quran, and has created man, and has taught him articulate speech (*ar-Rahman*: 1-4).

So we find that the Quran gives us the moral values of life, without which the whole world would have no value because the life of this world is only a test for the coming life in the Hereafter and so if you do not take it according to its purpose as the road which leads you to Paradise, you completely strip it of any value. And in this case, the life of this world will give you nothing but suffering in the Hereafter.

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, at-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, and Ahmad; this is the narration of Muslim on the authority of MuTayrif, who heard it from his father.

In this verse, the True Lord links sustenance with the heaven: ‘and by it has brought forth fruits for your sustenance.’ He does this to show us that provision only comes from on high; and God uses the parable of water because it is a direct source of provision which is tangible to us, and because water comes to us from the heaven in its purest form in droplets. Everything which comes to us from the heaven is exalted, and it comes down to increase the value of life by means of a process which, if mankind were to try and duplicate it, they would not be able to do so because it would cost millions of pounds to produce enough water to satisfy even a single family. But God sends down water from the sky in its purest form to cause fruits to grow thereby; fruits which preserve the continuation of life in this world.

After we understand all these blessings, and the miracles they involve, and reflect on them, the True Lord *the Glorified* then commands: ‘Do not then set up peers to God while you know’.

The Arabic word *andad* (rendered here as ‘peers’) is the plural of *nidd*, which means a counterpart or equivalent. Any mind, with the slightest amount of reflection, would disassociate itself from ascribing such to God; so do not claim that God has any counterpart or equivalent since there is nothing like God. God is One in His power, One in His strength, One in His creation, One in His essence and One in His attributes.

There can be no comparison between the attributes of the True Lord and the attributes of His creatures. God created for each one of us a mind with which to think, and if this notion of comparison were presented to the mind it would reject it immediately because it agrees with neither intellect nor reason, which is why God then said: ‘while you know,’ i.e. you know this well with your intellects, for the natural inclination of the intellect rejects such a thing.

Who is there who could claim to have created you and those who came before you? Who could claim, even falsely, that he made the earth a bed and resting-place, and made the heaven a protected canopy, or sent down rain and caused plants to grow? No one could. So you know that the intellect belongs to God alone, and as long as there is no objection to this, and there can be no objection, then the verdict must go in the favour of the True Lord.

The True Lord says that there are people who take idols as rivals to God, loving them as only God should be loved; whereas those who have faith love God more than all else (*al-Baqara*: 165). Why did these people set up rivals to God? That is because they wanted a world with no religious guidance; they wanted to satisfy the instinctual tendency to believe that God created in them, whilst at the same time follow their base desires. When they thought about this, they saw that the best way to achieve this was to choose a god with no guidance, who would require nothing from them. And so you find that any corrupted claim attempts to make legal what God has forbidden, and free mankind from every religious responsibility, such as prayer, the poor-due, struggling in the way of God and so on.

As for those who believe, they know that God only gave them His guidance for the good of mankind for God does not gain any benefit whatsoever from our prayers, or our charity, or any aspect of our religion, but rather, we are the ones who benefit from God's mercy, and from God's blessings of paradise in the Hereafter.

And because the believers know this, they love God intensely; and those who disbelieve, despite all their claims, in moments of despair, they call out to God, knowing that He is the only one to call on and seek refuge in.

This is illustrated in God's statement that when affliction befalls man, he cries out to God, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing; but as soon as God has freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked God to save him from the affliction that befell him (*Yunus*: 12).

Why does he not call on those 'rivals'? It is because a man will not deceive himself at times of peril, and because these people know by their intellects that God could have no rivals. They use these rivals for worldly gains, but when danger comes they turn to God because they know that only He Alone can relieve their suffering. So the barber-surgeon treats people with false remedies, but when his own son falls ill he rushes to the doctor because although he might deceive the people, he cannot deceive himself.

Once, Al-Asma'i<sup>(1)</sup> was at the *Ka'ba* when he heard a Bedouin Arab pray saying, 'Lord, you know that I am disobedient to you, and it is your right to

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(1) Al-Asma'i was an Arab scholar and linguist of the Abbasid era.

deny my prayer since I am disobedient; but I know that there is no god but You, so to whom should I turn?’ Upon hearing this, Al-Asma‘i said to him, ‘May God forgive you by means of your beautiful supplication!’

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ  
وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

**If you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single sura like it – enlist whatever supporters you have other than God – if you truly [think you can] [23] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 23)**

After explaining to us that those people who set up rivals against God do not base their actions on any logic or reason, but rather only base their on their worldly desire for immediate gratification, the True Lord then wanted to issue a challenge related to the Noble Quran – the eternal miracle vouchsafed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* – to show them that just as God made the universe a tangible miracle, the Noble Quran is a miraculous guide whose inimitability and miraculous nature is plain. God *the Exalted* says, ‘And if you are in doubt...’, and this is addressed to every infidel and non-believing hypocrite because those who believe in God and His Messenger have no doubt in their hearts; rather, they believe that the Quran is a Revelation from God, sent down from heaven to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by Divine inspiration.

The Arabic word *rayb* (doubt) means uncertainty; so the phrase ‘And if you are in doubt...’ means ‘and if you have any uncertainty.’ But where does this doubt come from when the Quran and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* are steeped in a miraculous nature? What are the justifications of this doubt, when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* could not read or write, and did not know the rhetoric and poetry of his people which would have allowed him to compose such miraculous inimitable discourse himself, of which even the greatest poets of the Arabs, who were well versed in rhetoric and language, could not match a single verse? This is one point; a second is that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* never lied, and it is not known that he ever lied before being given the Message; rather,

they used to call Him *peace and blessings be upon him* 'the honest, truthful One'. And those who used to call Him *peace and blessings be upon him* these names were the very same ones who maintained that the Quran was not from God. But would the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* be truthful with the people and then lie against God? This is impossible.

The discourse that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* brought in the Quran could not be reproduced by any of the greatest rhetoricians of the Arabs, and the knowledge which the Noble Quran revealed was not known to anyone at that time. So how could the illiterate Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* bring forth this miraculous discourse and this knowledge which was not known to any human being? If he had sat with a teacher or read the books of the ancient civilisations, they would have said that he took it all from there; yet he never did that.

So where has doubt come to their hearts from? It obviously came through the door of falsehood; and falsehood has no valid argument. So they undoubtedly revealed their inner intentions when they declared that they did not really doubt the Quran, but rather they would have preferred it to have been sent to one of the nobles of Quraysh, as the True Lord states their complaining question as to why this Quran was not sent down on some great man of the two cities (*az-Zukhruf*: 31).

These doubters then found no argument to make against the Quran; so they said, 'He is a sorcerer!' Yet does the one who is bewitched have any power over the bewitcher? If he was a sorcerer, why did he not bewitch you also? And they said, 'He is mad.' Yet a madman acts with no logic, and laughs for no reason, and weeps for no reason, and strikes people for no reason, and so the True Lord answers them, swearing by the pen and all that they write, confirming that His Messenger was not, by his Lord's grace, a madman! And that he will have a never-ending reward, for he does indeed keep to a sublime way of life (*al-Qalam*: 1-4).

Could a madman have such an exalted character? So the causes or true justifications for doubt were non-existent, and there was not a single real reason to make them doubt that the Quran was from God; but rather, they themselves, as the Noble Quran tells us, made the stupid supplication to God: if this be

indeed the truth from Him, then let Him rain down upon them stones from the skies, or inflict some other grievous suffering on them (*al-Anfal*: 32). So none of the causes of doubt existed; there existed the causes of certainty, but they still doubted.

As for God's words: '... of what We have sent down to Our servant,' the Noble Quran existed on the Preserved Tablet before mankind was created, and when the time came for it to play its part in the universe, it was sent down from the Preserved Tablet to the lowest heaven, above the earth, all at once, and then God sent in down to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in parts or instalments that suited the situations and the occurrence of daily events.

So the Arabic word *nazzalna* 'We sent down' means that which was sent down from the Preserved Tablet to the lowest heaven above the earth altogether in one piece, whereas *anzalna* 'sent down in instalments' describes the verses God sent to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in piecemeal form as the situation demanded it.

The True Lord then says, 'to Our servant,' and this needs some reflection. God *the Glorified* has slaves ('*abid*') and has servants ('*ibad*'). Everyone in creation is a slave to God, and they cannot escape God's will and His power. These are the slaves; on the other hand, the servants are those whose wills came to be compatible with what God willed. They have set aside their worldly desires in order to become obedient to God by their free wills, i.e. they are equal to those beings that are under the complete control of God in that they have chosen God's Way, and rejected any alternatives to it.

These are the servants; and if you read the Noble Quran, you will find that God refers to the servants as being the righteous of humanity, and He *the Glorified* commands His Messenger to proclaim that if His servants ask him (the Messenger) about Him (God) – He is near; He responds to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls to Him: let them, then, respond to Him, and believe in Him so that they might be guided to the right way (*al-Baqara*: 186).

This does not apply to all of God's creatures, but rather solely to His servants who, when God tells them to do something they do it directly, and if God forbids them from doing something, they abstain from doing it. That is, by their own free will, they do not go against the guidance of God *the Glorious*

*and Exalted.* So with respect to struggling in God's cause, the True Lord does not call the holy warriors slaves, but rather, in warning the children of Israel against punishment for their crimes, He tells them that when the menace of the first of their two periods of corruption came, He sent against them His servants endued with terrible prowess in war, and they wrought havoc throughout the land: and so the menace was accomplished (*al-Isra'*: 5).

Some of the orientalist who tried to criticise the Noble Quran said that the term '*ibad* (servants) is also used to describe the non-believers in God's questioning of the leaders of disbelief who were worshipped and idolised in worldly life as to whether it was them who led His creatures (using the term '*ibad*') astray, or whether they by themselves strayed from the right path (*al-Furqan*: 17). To this, we say: You have failed to notice that this dialogue takes place at the time of Judgement in the Hereafter, and in the Hereafter we are all '*ibad* (servants) because we will all be completely controlled, and no one has free will in the Hereafter, but rather, human free will ends at the point of death, after which everyone becomes compelled.

So in the Hereafter we will all be servants, but the difference between slaves and servants only applies to the life of this world. Servanthood is the highest level of nearness to God, because you go to Him willingly, following His guidance by your own free will. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was given the choice between being a Prophet-King and a Prophet-Servant, and he chose to be a Prophet-Servant. If we want to know the meaning of servanthood, let us read the first verse of the chapter of *al-Isra'* where God asserts that limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship (in Mecca) to the Remote House of Worship (in Jerusalem) – the environs of which He had blessed (*al-Isra'*: 1).

So this was the highest level of blessing that God bestowed upon His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the greatest miracle which had never happened to any other human being before Him *peace and blessings be upon him*, messenger or otherwise, and which would never happen to anyone else ever again; for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* ascended through the seven heavens in both spirit and body, and then returned to earth; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* passed by



the station of Gabriel *peace be upon him*, and passed by the Lote-Tree of the Uttermost End, which marks the place where the knowledge of all God's creatures, both human and angel, comes to an end.

The human nature of the Messengers has given rise to great debate which started at the moment the Divine revelation first began and is still alive nowadays. God *the Glorified* gives us an example of this in the statement of the chiefs of the infidels in the time of Noah *peace be upon him* when they told him bluntly that they do not see in him anything but a mortal man just like themselves (*Hud*: 27). And we have another example in the attitude of the tribe of Thamud towards the call of their prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* when they wondered whether they were to follow one single mortal from among themselves. Then they would certainly be in error and folly (*al-Qamar*: 24).

The Quran also mentions that what prevented the infidels from accepting guidance whenever it comes to them from God through a prophet was but complaining, 'Has God sent a human being as His messenger?' (*al-Isra*': 94). And they would recommend one another that if they obeyed a mere human like themselves, they should surely be losers (*al-Mu'minun*: 34).

So the human nature of the Messengers has been used as an argument by those who do not wish to believe in messengers bringing revelation from God. Yet it is necessary that a messenger be of the same species as those to whom he is sent, and that he has lived among them for a time before the message came to him and has been known for his honesty and trustworthiness so that they do not give the lie to him. Moreover, he is a role-model, and so of course, he must be of the same species as those to whom he is sent because he will put the guidance he brings into practice for them to witness, and if he were from a different species they would say 'We cannot do what You have asked us, Lord, for this Messenger of God if created from a different substance than ours, and he is bound to obey You.'

So the human nature of the Messengers is absolutely necessary, and anyone who tries to give the Messengers nonhuman attributes is in reality only trying to decrease the perfection of God's messages for God is not incapable of turning human beings into angels; He reprimands the disbelievers saying that had He so willed, He could indeed have made them into angels succeeding

one another on earth (*az-Zukhruf*: 60). So the human nature of the Messengers is one of the perfections of the message.

Then comes the challenge from God *the Glorious and Exalted* to the infidels to produce a *sura* (chapter) like the Quran (*al-Baqara*: 23). So the Arabs were asked to produce a chapter the like of that which the Noble Quran contained. And the 'witnesses' whose testimony God requests here are weak witnesses, human beings who cannot offer testimony akin to that which God possesses in the realm of the Unseen.

In this verse, God presents the majority of their doubts for us to examine so that by means of this investigation, we can arrive to the essence of the miracle of the Quran.

The True Lord issued His challenge to the disbelievers in degrees. First He asked them to produce the like of the Quran; then he asked them to bring the like of ten chapters, and then to come up with the like of a single chapter. The lowering of the bar from the entire Quran to ten chapters and then to one single chapter is a proof against those to whom the challenge was issued. They could not produce the like of the whole Quran, so He challenged them then to produce the like of ten chapters; they could not do this, and their position became more and more ridiculous, and so He challenged them to produce a single chapter. This was the ultimate humiliation to those whom God *the Glorious and Exalted* has issued the challenge, and a confirmation of the fact that they were unable to do anything to meet it.

The phrase 'the like of it' means that the True Lord asked for a likeness from them, not the Quranic text itself; and this shows even more clearly the inability of those people who do not believe in God and try to cast doubts on the Quran.

As for God's challenge 'and call upon your witnesses, besides God, if what you say is true,' it means that God heightens the challenge by allowing them to bring their own witnesses to show them the verses they produced and have them judge whether it was akin to the Quran or not. This shows the absolute power of God *the Glorious and Exalted*; for He did not specify that the witnesses should be angels, or should be men known for their honesty and

truthful testimony; rather, He left it for them to bring their own witnesses; and even these witnesses would be unable to testify that the discourse produced by these doubters was in any way akin to any chapter of the Quran.

God invited them to bring any witnesses even if they were biased in their favour, and gave them the choice of bringing any earthly beings to serve this purpose, saying ‘besides God, if what you say is true.’ But you cannot say that God testifies that what you have brought is akin to the Quran because by this you will have lied against God and claimed that He has said something He never did.

But what is the meaning of ‘...if what you say is true’? What is it that which is true? And what does ‘true’ mean? Truth is the opposite of falsehood, and both truth and falsehood are relative. We all know that some speech has no useful meaning, so that if you say ‘Muhammad’ and then stop speaking, those who hear will ask you, ‘What do you mean by saying Muhammad?’ This question shows that they understood nothing from what you said. But what if he had asked you first, ‘Who is with you?’ In this case, your answer ‘Muhammad’ would serve to tell him that Muhammad is with you. The word used in both cases is exactly the same, but in the second case you understand it based on what the questioner had asked; so you have not only said a single isolated word, but rather have uttered a complete coherent statement. So coherent speech is that which causes no confusion for the listener.

Before anyone speaks, he has a mental attribution of what he will say, and he then expresses this with speech, but there is another aspect which is independent of his words, namely the true reality of the matter. That is, if you say ‘Muhammad is hard-working,’ there must be a person named Muhammad, and he must actually be hard-working in order for the speech to correspond to the actual reality. If there is no one named Muhammad, or if there is someone named Muhammad but he is not hard-working, the speech contradicts reality. Truthfulness means speech that corresponds to reality, and lying means speech that does not correspond to reality. This notion is essential to understanding the meaning of this noble verse. So God’s words ‘...if what you say is true’ means: if the speech you utter corresponds to reality, you will be able to prove it; if not, you are liars. So God wants you to give some proof of your truthfulness.

فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا

النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

**If you cannot do this – and you never will – then  
beware of the Fire prepared for the disbelievers,  
whose fuel is men and stones [24]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 24)**

After speaking about the proofs offered by those who doubt the Quran, proofs which are based on neither reason nor logic, God *the Glorious and Exalted* challenged them to produce a chapter like those of the Quran, and to seek the help of anyone they liked besides God; for the Quran is the Word of God, and God is the One who speaks therein. And since they were trying to cast doubt on the Quran being the Word of God, and that it was revealed by God, let them seek the aid of anyone they like to produce a verse like it; for such a challenge could not even come close to being met without their seeking the aid of all forces except God *the Glorious and Exalted*. After this, the True Lord states what the result will be even before the challenge has been undertaken, since God knows that they will not and cannot do it.

So God's words 'And if you cannot do it – and you shall not do it' means that He has judged that they would fail at the time the Quran was revealed and all times thereafter until the Day of Resurrection because nothing escapes God's knowledge, and His knowledge encompasses all things. The phrase 'if you cannot do it' implies uncertainty because conditional sentences suggest uncertainty since the matter is determined by a condition. When you say, 'If you study, you will succeed,' this means that there is uncertainty about the matter. However, for a phrase like the statement of the True Lord *the Glorified*: 'When there comes the help of God and the victory....' (*an-Nasr*: 1) it means that God's help will come without doubt.

'If' is a conditional particle and 'when' is an adverb of time; and every action requires a time and place. If you use a conditional particle, this means that you are associating it with the means by which the action will take place. If you want to speak about something that will definitely take

place, you say ‘when’, and if you want to express uncertainty about if you say ‘if’. Here, God says, ‘if you cannot do it;’ and since the action therefore might be deemed possible, He wanted to emphasise the impossibility of such a thing and so said ‘...and you shall not do it...;’ this is because it is a conceivable thing. If you speak about a conceivable matter and then immediately decide that it will not happen, this suggests that it is your power that will prevent the thing from happening. It cannot be said that you forced someone not to do it; rather, you knew he would not do it, and that all his efforts would not be enough to enable him doing it.

These matters are implicit in the Noble Quran when it conveys matters related to the Unseen, and so God tells us that when Moses *peace be upon him* came to the people of Pharaoh with God’s signs, they, in their souls, knew them to be true, but in their wickedness and self-exaltation, they rejected them (*an-Naml*: 14); this means that they believed, but their tongues would not admit as much. And when He says, ‘And if you cannot do it – and you shall not do it...’, this means that uncertainty is spurious and affected, in their souls; they do not want to believe, and so they come up with feigned reasons for not believing. Their minds are set on not believing; as long as this is your decision, you will have to keep looking for assumed reasons not to believe.

Then comes God’s admonition: ‘... then fear the fire whose fuel is human beings and stones, prepared for the infidels.’ The True Lord here wants to alert us to another image of the powerlessness of these disbelievers, who are searching for excuses to justify their lack of faith, and they claim to have doubts about the Noble Quran. We say to them: if you truly possess intrinsic power, then prevent yourselves from entering the fire on the Day of Resurrection, just as you prevented yourselves from believing in this life.

This is a warning from God. He gave them the power of free will in this world, and they were not forced to choose to scorn faith, but rather, they chose this freely with the free will God gave them. But there will come a time when there is no free will, namely the Hereafter: so they should try to avoid the torment of hell on the Day of Resurrection, but there will be no free will at

that time; with respect to that day, God poses the rhetorical question as to who will possess absolute sovereignty on that Day, and gives the answer that it is God, the One, the Almighty (*Ghafir*: 16). And God *the Exalted* describes that Day as a day when one soul shall be powerless for another soul: All sovereignty on that day shall be with God (*al-Infitar*: 19).

So the free will of yours that prevented you from believing will not save you on that day from the torment of the fire. God *the Exalted* addresses the polytheists saying that verily, they and all that they worship instead of God are but the fuel of hell: They shall go down into it (*al-Anbiya*: 98).

Why will it be both, them and the ones they worship? It is because the worshipper seeks the benefit of the one he worships; and so when each of them sees the other being punished, the sorrow will be more severe. And so the stones and idols they worship will be with them in the fire on the Day of Resurrection; and this is not a punishment for the stones and idols since they were created to be under God's complete control and to praise Him; so these stones and idols will be pleased to burn the ones who disbelieved in God, and they will say, 'They worshipped us, but we ourselves worship God even more than those who seek forgiveness in the watches of the night.'

As for God's words that the fire is 'prepared for the infidels,' God is telling them – whilst they are still alive in this world – that the fire awaits the disbelievers; and the fact that God says that Hell awaits the disbelievers is a great reassurance to the believer, and a great source of terror for the disbeliever. The word 'prepared' means that it exists even now, although we cannot see it, and that it is already created, but veiled from us.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, 'Paradise was shown to me, and had I wanted, I could have brought to you some of its fruit.' This shows that it indeed does exist right now. When the believer learns that paradise already exists, and that faith will lead him to it, he feels joy, and yearns for it. The True Lord reassures the believers that it is they who shall be the inheritors, who will inherit the paradise; and therein shall they abide forever (*al-Mu'minun*: 10-11).

When you read this noble verse, you know that God will give you, in Paradise, those things which others used to have, because ‘inheritance’ means something that is passed to you from someone else. God had knowledge of all His creatures from the beginning, and before He created them, He prepared for each one of them a place in Paradise and a place in Hell, and so those who enter Hell for eternity, will leave their places in Paradise empty, and God will give them to the believers so they will inherit them in addition to their own places in paradise. The True Lord *the Exalted* says ‘prepared,’ which means it already exists now.

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا  
الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِى رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ  
وَأَتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

**[Prophet], give those who believe and do good the news that they will have Gardens graced with flowing streams. Whenever they are given sustenance from the fruits of these Gardens, they will say, ‘We have been given this before,’ because they were provided with something like it. They will have pure spouses and there they will stay [25] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 25)**

After telling us what the end will be for the disbelievers who use doubt in the Quran as an excuse not to believe, it is as if God says to the disbelievers: If you have chosen not to believe by means of the free will I gave you in this life, then in the Hereafter you will not be able to avoid the Fire, and you will no longer have any free will.

Then the True Lord gives us the contrasting image. When the Noble Quran mentions paradise, God gives us after it the contrasting image, namely that of the suffering of Hell; and when hell and its suffering and its flames are mentioned, paradise is mentioned afterwards. This contrasting image serves to inspire faith in the soul. When someone reads a chapter which mentions the suffering of hell, and then directly after it comes mention of the delights of paradise, he knows that he has found triumph twice; for to be saved from

hell and drawn away from it is a triumph and a blessing, and then to enter Paradise is still another blessing. In this respect God has decided that whoever is drawn away from the fire and admitted into paradise will indeed have won (*Al- 'Imran*: 185).

He *the Exalted* did not simply say 'and he who enters paradise has won,' because simply to be saved from hell is a great triumph. In the Hereafter, after the reckoning, a bridge will be laid over hell which the believers and disbelievers will all have to cross. Each believer will cross the bridge according to his works; some will cross it as fast as lightning whilst others will cross it more slowly, and so on; but the disbelievers will fall into hell.

But why do the believers have to cross the bridge? God says that He has decreed that every one of us shall come within sight of hell; it is a decree that must be fulfilled. But He will save from it those who had in themselves the fear of God and will leave in it the evildoers on their knees (*Maryam*: 71-72).

For the believers to see hell is simply a great blessing because when they see the severe torment from which faith saved them, they will all feel the blessing God has given them by saving them from this suffering. The denizens of Hell and Paradise will see one another, and when the denizens of Paradise see the denizens of Hell, they will feel the great blessing God has granted them by saving them from it; and when the denizens of Hell see the denizens of Paradise, they will feel the great wrath of God towards them by withholding His blessings from them. This will serve to make the delight even greater for the denizens of Paradise, and the suffering even greater for the denizens of Hell.

God says, '...give the glad tidings...' Glad tidings is news of a pleasing thing which will occur but whose time has not yet come. If you give someone glad tidings, you tell him about a pleasing thing to come. Here, the glad tidings are mentioned after the warning issued to the disbelievers. On the other hand, a warning is news of something fearsome which will occur but whose time has not yet come.

However, the expression *bishara* ('glad tidings') is sometimes used in the Noble Quran, but it would be intended to be given to the disbelievers in an ironic manner, as when God announces woe unto every lying sinner, who



hears God's messages when they are conveyed to him, and yet, as though he had not heard them, persists in his haughty disdain. Hence, apprise (literally 'give glad tidings to') him of grievous suffering (*al-Jathiya*: 7-8).

Here, the word used for apprise is (*al-bishara*) which literally means 'give glad tidings;' the word is used ironically. The True Lord *the Exalted* wants to increase the suffering of the disbelievers, and so when they hear '...give them glad tidings...' they might think that they will hear some pleasing news, and then right after that He mentions grievous suffering, in order to increase their woe.

The True Lord says, 'But give the glad tidings to those who believe and do the things that are right'. The glad tidings here are news of goodness which will come to the believers; and faith determines one's action because if someone believes in something, he will work for it. The student studies because he believes that by studying he will succeed. Every action must spring from a basis of belief. Faith means that outward action reflects what is in the heart in a way which is in agreement with God's will. The system of life cannot function without faith, and so righteous action springs from faith. And so the Noble Quran asserts that man is bound to be a loser unless he is of those who believe and do good works (*al-Asr*: 1-3).

And in another verse we have the rhetorical question as to who would be better of speech than someone who calls to God, and does what is right, and proclaims that he is of those who have surrendered themselves to God (*Fussilat*: 33). But is it enough simply to state that I surrender myself to God? No. This statement must rather go hand in hand with action in accordance with God's will.

The True Lord wants to alert us to the fact that our saying 'There is no god but God and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God' must be accompanied by action according to the teachings of Islam; for our pronouncing the Testimony of Faith does not increase God's dominion in the slightest, and God *the Exalted* Himself has testified to His own Divine Oneness, and this is a testimony of one being to itself; then the angels gave an eye-witness testimony because they saw Him, and then the people of knowledge gave a testimony based on evidence by means of the knowledge God bestowed upon them, as the True Lord says that He Himself proffers evidence – and so

do the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him, the Upholder of Equity: there is no deity save Him, the Almighty, the Truly Wise (*Al- 'Imran*: 18).

But the True Lord wants the believers to follow His guidance. Why? So that people's movements in life will not be in conflict, but will rather be in harmony. As long as the motions of life are morally upright, life will become harmonious and strong. When Islam spread throughout the world, the goal was not simply for people to have faith for faith's sake, but rather for life to be in harmony with the teachings of Islam. If the motions of life stray far from these teachings, it will not serve the religion if people believe or do not believe. And so the religion had to determine faith and righteous action. 'But give the glad tidings to those who believe and do the things that are right...' A good work is something which is in line with God's teachings; the opposite of this is a corrupt act. When a person interacts with the world around him, the least good he can do is to leave good things as they are, or make them better.

The True Lord *the Exalted* gives to those who believe and do good works glad tidings of gardens through which running waters flow. The word 'gardens' in the plural is used because these gardens will be manifold and varied, and there are more degrees of difference between the gardens of paradise and those in this world, as God tells that He has bestowed in this worldly life more bounty on some of the people than on others, and the life to come will be far higher in degree and far greater in merit and bounty (*al-Isra'*: 21).

The gardens in themselves will be varied: There are the gardens of paradise (*firdaws*), the Garden of Eden ( *'adn*), and the Garden of Delight (*na'im*); and there is the Abode of Eternity, the Abode of Peace, and the Garden of Ultimate Refuge; and there is *'Illiyun* which is the highest and the finest of all the gardens of paradise, and the greatest delight within it is having sight of the True Lord *the Exalted* which is a blessing far greater than any blessing of food and drink in this world.

Food and drink for the denizens of paradise will not be taken out of hunger and thirst, but rather for simple enjoyment and pleasure. In this verse, God *the Exalted*

is promising an unseen matter; and so to make the meaning clearer for human minds, concrete and familiar terms have to be used, that is words which express something we are familiar with. God says that no human being can know what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await the believers in the life to come as a reward for all that they did (*as-Sajda*: 17).

So no human being in this world knows the things which paradise contains, and there are no words in language which can express them, and none of the known faculties such as hearing or seeing have ever beheld them. And so the True Lord used words which our minds and our faculties could cope with, and so said, ‘...gardens beneath which the rivers flow....’

There are other verses which say ‘*tajri tahtaha al-anhar*’ (under which the rivers flow’ (*at-Tawba*: 100), whilst this one says, ‘*tajri min tahtiha al-anhar*’ with the additional preposition *min* (literally ‘from’). What is the difference between the two? ‘*Tajri tahtaha al-anhar*’ means that the rivers come from afar and flow through the garden, whilst ‘*tajri min tahtiha al-anhar*’ means that water springs up from beneath the garden itself so that the person will not fear that this water which comes to him from afar will ever be cut off, or dry up. This is an additional reassurance to the believers that the delight of Paradise is eternal, without end.

As long as there is water, there is verdure and beautiful scenery, and there must also be fruits. God’s words ‘...Whenever they are fed therefrom with fruit for sustenance, they will say, “This same was our sustenance of old;” and they shall have its like given to them....’ is a reference to the fruits of paradise, which are different from the fruits of this world. In this world, you must go to the fruit and pick it, or have someone bring it for you, whilst in paradise the fruit will come to you, and simply by wanting it you will find it in your hand. You may think that there is a likeness between the fruits of this world and the fruits of paradise, but the fruits of heaven are not like the fruits of this world in their taste or their smell. The denizens of paradise will see its fruits, and say to one another, ‘Perhaps this fruit is a mango, or a fig, like those we ate on earth;’ but in reality they will be completely different. The form might be the same, but the taste and everything else are different.

In this world, every food produces waste which human beings must excrete, but in the Hereafter, food will produce no waste, but rather, everyone will eat what they like with no need to excrete any waste. This is because the fruits of this world have a different constituency from the fruits of the Hereafter. So in paradise the rivers are different, and the fruits are different; and in paradise the sustenance will come directly from God, who simply says 'Be!' and so it is; and no one will need to do any work. The True Lord then says, '...Therein shall they have mates of perfect purity, and therein shall they abide forever.'

Spouses are a source of delight in this world if they are righteous, and a source of distress if they are not. There are many hardships that a woman, for example, can bring to her husband's life that would make him miserable, such as her being sharp-tongued, or quarrelsome, or neglectful to him, or trying to provoke him into suspecting her. But in the Hereafter, all of these embittering attributes will disappear by God's decree. Spouses in the Hereafter will be purified from all those things which their husbands dislike in them, and all that they disliked in this world will vanish. In the Hereafter, the believers will be cleansed of their worldly flaws and woes, the foremost of which is envy and spite, as God *the Exalted* asserts that He will remove all rancour from the bosoms of the believers, and they shall rest as brethren facing one another in love upon couches (*al-Hijr*: 47).

So the standards of this world will disappear, and all that you dislike in this world will be absent from the Hereafter, and if anything made your life difficult in this world, it will vanish in the Hereafter. The True Lord based the parable on spouses because spouses are a source of joy in this world, and they are able to turn each other's life into either delight or misery.

And then He says, '...and therein shall they abide for ever;' which means that there is no death in the Hereafter, and there will never be any death in the Hereafter, but rather, life there is eternal, either in Paradise or in Hell.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

**God does not shy from drawing comparisons even with some- thing as small as a gnat, or larger: the believers know it is the truth from their Lord, but the disbelievers say, ‘What does God mean by such a comparison?’ Through it He makes many go astray and leads many to the right path. But it is only the rebels He makes go astray [26] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 26)**

After speaking about paradise, and giving us a parable to illustrate the immense delights which one shall be granted in paradise, the True Lord *the Exalted* wanted to clarify for us the spiritual teachings which every believer must follow; for God does not require disbelievers to worship Him, but rather, those who are pleased to believe in God *the Exalted* thereby enter into a covenant of faith with Him. As long as they have entered into this covenant, they must adhere to God’s teachings of commandments and prohibitions, and must implement these teachings without questioning the wisdom behind them. This is because faith means faith in the Unseen, and so if the thing itself is unseen to us, how can we hope to know the wisdom behind it?

The wisdom behind any religious responsibility is that it is from God, and as long as it is from God, it has not come from an equal of yours with whom you can argue about the matter, but has rather come from God whom you must obey because He is the God and you are His worshipper. It is enough that God has issued the command for us to act by it, and it is enough that God has issued the prohibition for us to avoid it.

The wisdom may be unknown to you, but the fact that the command came from God is wisdom itself, and is enough to require obedience. I pray because God made prayer obligatory; I do not pray as a kind of exercise. I perform the ablution (*wudu*’) because God commanded me to make ablutions before praying; I do not perform the ablution as a kind of hygienic action. I perform

fasting because God commanded me to fast, not just so I can feel the hunger of the pauper. If prayer were only exercise, we would replace it with sport on playing fields; and if ablutions were only for hygiene, we would take a shower before every prayer; and if fasting were only to feel the hunger of the poor person, it would not be obligatory for the poor person to fast, since he already knows what hunger feels like.

So we obey all of God's commandments because God has ordained them, not for any other reason. Everything that comes to us from God in the Quran we receive as God's word, and we do not receive it in any other way. This is the faith that God wants us to have, and to be the basis of our lives' actions.

This preamble is necessary if we are to know the meaning of this noble verse. 'Surely God is not ashamed to set forth the parable of a gnat or of anything above that...' When God gave a parable based on a gnat, the disbelievers took this according to its worldly significance without being aware of its true meaning. They said, how can God draw a parable from a gnat, that insignificant creature, which if you strike with any object, or with your hand, will die? Why did God *the Glorified* not draw a parable from an elephant which is huge and strong, or from a lion which is mightier than a man, but instead gave us a parable of a gnat? So they said, 'What is it that God means by this parable?' They did not realise that the creation of this tiny gnat is a miracle because in this delicate body, God placed all the parts and systems needed to sustain its life; it has two eyes, and a snout which is very delicate, but yet can break a person's skin, and can break through the blood vessels under the skin to suck their blood.

And gnats have feet, and wings, and reproductive systems, and everything that their life needs, all of this enclosed in this tiny body; and the smaller things get, the more precise their creation must be.

In our own lives, we can see this. For example, consider the way mankind invented the clock. First clocks were very big, and needed a large space, and as civilisation advanced and mankind further developed their technology and culture, the size of clocks became smaller and smaller, and the technology behind clock-making became more precise until they could make clocks the

size of rings or even smaller. And when radios were first invented, they were very large, yet now they are so small you can put them in your pocket, or even smaller than that. In all technologies, as they advance, the size of things becomes smaller because this requires skilful expertise and advanced science.

And so when God draws a parable from a gnat or something even smaller, He wants to alert us to the precision of His creation. As things become smaller, they require more precise creation; but the disbelievers did not understand this concept in this way, but rather only considered its simplistic worldly import which does not reflect reality.

When God draws this parable, the believers receive it as the Word of God, and receive it according to the principle of faith in God, and so they believe it whether they understand the wisdom behind it or not because the believer accepts everything that comes from God whether he knows the wisdom behind it or not. God says that He has brought people a Book which He has made clear with knowledge: guidance and mercy to people who believe. Then the Quran poses the question: What have they (the unbelievers) to wait for now but its interpretation (sequel, final meaning, the fulfilment of its promises and threats)? When its interpretation shall come, they, who were oblivious of it before, shall say, ‘The Prophets of our Lord did indeed bring the truth; shall we have any intercessor to intercede for us? Or could we not be sent back? Then would we act otherwise than we have acted?’ But they have lost their souls; and that which they forged has gone away from them (*al-A’raf*: 52-53).

Everyone who believes in the Quran does not seek out its interpretation or the wisdom behind its verses. And so the disbelievers said, ‘What is it that God means by this parable?’ and the answer comes from the True Lord: ‘Many will He mislead by such parables and many guide: but none will He mislead thereby except the wicked.’ But who are the wicked? They are those who break their covenant with God. The first step in wickedness is for the wicked one to break his covenant. The Arabic word *fisq*, meaning wickedness or iniquity, is derived from the verb used to describe a date breaking free of its shell. When the date is red, the shell sticks tightly to it so that you cannot break it off, and then when the date becomes soft the shell goes black and then slacks off the fruit so that you can remove it easily. This is like the

wicked one who strays from God's teachings: he can be peeled off easily because he does not hold firm to them. When you stray from God's teachings, you do not hold to His commandments and prohibitions, so you do not pray, and you indulge in those things God has forbidden because you have broken free of His religion. The cause of wickedness is that mankind was created with free will, able to act or not to act; and with this free will mankind corrupted the order of the universe. Everything which man has no influence over fulfils its role with high precision like the sun, the stars, the moon and the earth. They all follow a precise order and never go against it because they are under compulsion. If mankind had not been created with free will, it would have been impossible for them to be wicked and to stray from God's teachings and corrupt the earth; but this free will is the root of all corruption.

الَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ  
يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

**Those who break their covenant with God after it has been confirmed, who sever the bonds that God has commanded to be joined, who spread corruption on the earth – these are the losers [27] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 27)**

After explaining to us the meaning of faith which is that we receive what God commands and obey it even if we do not know the wisdom behind it; we accept everything that comes from God according to the principle of faith which is that it was God who said it not according to the principle of disbelief and doubt; so the wisdom of everything that comes from God is that it comes from the True Lord ; and after informing us that the wicked have strayed far from God's teachings, the True Lord wanted to tell us some of the attributes of these wicked ones. He specified three attributes: the first is that they '...break their covenant with God after it has been established...'; the second is that they '...cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined...', and the third is that they '...spread corruption on earth....' The True Lord then renders His verdict concerning them: '...These are they who are the losers.' The loss that they have arrived to is a result of their actions because they abandoned the teachings of God and made their own laws according to their caprice. And so



the True Lord *the Glorified* states that they are the ones who have purchased error at the price of guidance: but their bargain has not brought them gain, and they are not guided at all (*al-Baqara*: 16). So they are the ones, who chose, and they are the ones who purchased misguidance and paid for it with God's guidance; and so it is as if they made a losing deal because God's guidance leads us to eternal life and joy without end.

The True Lord gives us an image of this when He states that He has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in return so that they fight in God's cause, and kill, and are killed: a promise which in truth He has willed upon Himself in the Torah, and the Gospel, and the Quran. And who could be more faithful to his covenant than God? They should rejoice, then, in the bargain which they have made with Him: for this, this is the triumph supreme (*at-Tawba*: 111).

So the believers pledged to God their possessions and their lives, and they were true to their covenant. As for the disbelievers and the hypocrites, they sold God's guidance and exchanged it for the error of this worldly life. So the True Lord tells us that the first attribute of the wicked is that they have no covenant, not only between them and the people, but also between them and God. Every time they made a covenant with God they broke it; and God loves the keeping of covenants, as He *the Glorified* commands the believers not to touch the substance of an orphan, save to improve it, until he comes of age. And to be true to every covenant – for, they will be held accountable for every covenant (*al-Isra'*: 34). And God says that in most of the nonbelievers, He found no covenant and that He found most of them perverse indeed (*al-A'raf*: 102).

What covenant did God take from His servants which they then broke? It was the original pristine faith, the natural disposition of faith that lies within us all. God took a pledge from all humanity; some of them honoured it, and some broke it.

God mentioned to us in the Noble Quran that there is a firm covenant between Him and the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him*, reminding us of when He brought forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and called upon them to bear witness against themselves: 'Am I not your

Lord?’ to which they answered, ‘Yes, indeed, we do bear witness;’ lest, on the Day of Resurrection, they say ‘we were unaware of this’ (*al-A’raf*: 172).

And so God *the Glorified* took a pledge from the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him* that they would believe in him, and He bade them testify that He was their Lord. Yet with the passage of time, heedlessness entered hearts, and so they broke the covenant and set up gods besides God. So the first attribute of the wicked is that they have broken their covenant with God. The True Lord does not accept that people break covenants even with other people, not even with the infidels and non-believers, as He *the Exalted* commands the believers to honour their treaties with polytheists with whom they have made a covenant and who thereafter have in no way failed to fulfil their obligations towards the believers, and neither have aided anyone against them; the believers should observe, then, their covenant with them until the end of the term agreed with them. Verily, God loves those who fear Him (*at-Tawba*: 4).

So we see that when the True Lord announced His disavowal and that of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and that of the believers from every idolatrous disbeliever in the highest matters of faith, and forbade that the disbelievers and hypocrites could come near His Sacred House in Mecca, He *the Exalted* still respected their covenants even those of the idolaters, and commanded the believers to honour those covenants. If this is the true faithful way to behave with every disbeliever and idolater – that if you have made a treaty with them you must honour it to its completion – what about the idolaters, who made a treaty with the Almighty Creator, and then broke this treaty? They betrayed God’s teachings and broke His covenant; and if they have no covenant with God, could they have any covenant with His creatures?

So the first attribute of the wicked is that they have no covenant with their Creator, and with the people; and so we should never trust them.

Then the second attribute of the iniquitous is given, which is that they ‘...cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined....’ That which God has bidden to be joined means the ties of kinship. God commanded us to maintain our family ties. We are all the sons of Adam *peace be upon him*, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said in his sermon in his Farewell Pilgrimage, ‘You are all from Adam, and Adam is from dust.’

So we see that there are ties of humanity to which God is alerting us. These ties begin with the family, and then widen to include the village or the neighbourhood, and then widen to include the state and the society, and then widen to include the entirety of the believers, and then widen to include the entire population of the world. This is the brotherhood of man to which the True Lord wants to alert us.

But the concept here is not restricted to the level of human ties; it also affirms that what they have done is a sin, and an act of disobedience against God's command. God commanded us to maintain family ties, and then these people came and disobeyed what God had commanded, and broke these ties. So it is a matter of disobeying God's teachings, and sinning against God's commandments. Family ties engender a kind of social solidarity amongst people; and so if something bad happens to someone, his family will rush to assist him in his time of need, and each of them will try to make it easier for him. This tight family unity will give them strength to deal with whatever comes their way, and none of them will feel lost in this universe because he will hold firm to his family, and with his neighbourhood or village. In this way, malice and broken families will disappear from the society.

If we look at the Western societies which are plagued by broken families, we will find that each individual there has lost his way and gone astray because he feels lost. And so they turn to drugs, or alcohol, or adultery, or the other wicked things we see. A lost generation: but what has made them lost? It is failure to maintain family ties.

If we speak about the perversions that plague our youth today, we should not blame the youth, but rather, we should blame the parents who neglected their sons and daughters and ruined their family ties. A generation grew up plagued by psychological complexes without end. The child that loses its family atmosphere loses its life's balance. So God wants the believers to be close and compassionate, and free of the complexes which ruin life. And so the failure to maintain family ties causes whole generations to become lost.

After this comes the third attribute of the wicked, which is that, they '...spread corruption on earth....' We say that everything in the universe is created according to a certain order, since God *the Exalted* has determined the

nature of everything, and thereupon guides it towards its fulfilment (*al-A'la*: 3), i.e. everything has a path which it must follow. But mankind, with their free will, corrupted the soundness of the universe.

Out of God's mercy, He made some of His creatures completely subjugated in order that the grand order of the cosmos would be fixed. The sun, and the stars, and the earth, and the whole of creation, except for mankind and the jinn, all follow a precise order. Why is this? It is because they exist with no free will. The True Lord has informed us that in order for our lives to be balanced, we must follow God's guidance, just as the compelled beings are all governed by God's guidance. The purpose of human free will is not that we stray from God's guidance; for God possesses the attribute of compulsion, and had He wanted, He could have created us as compelled beings; but He gave us free will so that we would come to him out of love, not compulsion. You love your desires, but you love God more, and so you restrict yourself to His guidance. Free will was not given to us in order that we could spread corruption in the earth, but rather, it was given to us so that we could go to God willingly, not out of compulsion.

And so each of us has the freedom to believe or not to believe, and this choice confirms the love for God in our hearts. But instead of using their free will to go to God out of love and to gain the greatest reward, mankind used their free will to spread corruption on earth. Corruption means playing fast and loose with God's commands and prohibitions, changing them so that the balance is lost; that is, if God says do something, you do not do it; and if He says do not do it, then you do it.

And so you will have disturbed the balance of your life. Why? It is because we are no longer governed by a single law to organise people's lives, but rather, each person makes his own laws, and no one does what he is supposed to do, and so life becomes disturbed. Every instance of corruption is a blemish on existence. Imagine you are walking along and you see a new apartment block from whose pipes the water is leaking. When you see this, you will be pained by it because it is a blemish on existence caused by the untrustworthiness of the labourer. So when a single labourer causes corruption because of his lack of honesty in his work, the world loses a blessing which God loves which is to see beautiful things. And so you sigh and say, 'O God...'!

So every dishonest worker spreads corruption in the world; and every dishonest person spreads corruption in the world, and threatens the rights and property of others, and this makes the world ugly so that no one trusts anyone with his honour or his belongings. The one who behaved in this way wanted to gain immediate benefit for himself, but by so doing, he created corruption in the world. The same is the case when a tradesman cheats people, and when people gain money by stealing and robbing; God gives them the most evil money that exists on earth, but they find woe by spreading corruption on the earth.

Corruption on earth means taking something beyond its natural limit, and indulging your desires and wants excessively, and punishing people severely, and seeking out what rightfully belongs to others. Corruption on earth is following any guidance other than that of God.

The absence of God's guidance means that we all become slaves to our whims; and when things are governed by people's whims, life becomes filled with misery and evil instead of happiness and security. The complaints that people have today are symptoms of this corruption. This is because the meaning of these complaints is that people are suffering and no one is doing anything about it. And so the affairs of the world cannot run smoothly; corruption cannot be done away with unless we implement the guidance of one who has no personal whims or interests – and the only One Who has no personal interest is the Creator of man, and the Maker of the balance of the universe.

The first manifestation of corruption is that authority is given to people who do not deserve it because if authority is given to people who do not deserve it, you should expect the Hour (Doomsday, the end of time) to come soon after, as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If authority is given to those who do not deserve it, expect the Hour.'<sup>(1)</sup> Why is this? It is because in that case, society will be based on hypocrisy and contradiction, not on integrity and sincerity, and so the one who is good at being hypocritical will rise to high levels, and the one who does his work well with integrity, will get nowhere. The result will be that a group of ignorant hypocrites are the ones who control things without any proper knowledge. Corruption on earth

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayra.

is what squanders the truth and moral values, and so society becomes a jungle where everyone wants to achieve their own desires without giving any consideration to the rights of others, and the one who does his work well does not obtain his rights; and so he feels that there is no benefit in hard work, and the whole society becomes a community of unproductive people.

Corruption on earth is for us to make our own minds the source of law so that we do not give consideration to the natural balance that God created; we rather, plan everything with our minds. And so, we cut down trees, and dump industrial waste into rivers and so ruin them, and we spray poisonous chemicals on our crops or waterways and rivers as is happening now, filling them with poison and then eating them, and then we find that pollution has filled the world, and the ozone layer has been obviously harmed in a way which exposes human life on earth to many dangers, and we spoil river water so that it is fit for neither drinking nor irrigation, and subsequently all the goodness in our world gradually disappears. Corruption on earth is for injustice to spread, and for life to become an unending cycle of misery. Corruption on earth is for security to be lost, so that human interaction is ruined, and rights are squandered.

These are but some of the types of corruption on earth. God has established a comprehensive law, His guidance by which all men should conduct their lives; but people have neglected it, and gone wandering in the darkness of ignorance. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Whoever gives authority to a man from a group, whilst in that group there is another more pleasing to God, has betrayed God, and His Messenger, and the believers.'<sup>(1)</sup>

This is the extent to which Islam cares for the soundness of people's affairs. Then the True Lord gives His Judgement: '...these are they who are the losers.' What will they lose? They will lose their worldly lives and their Hereafter, and they will lose their own souls; for a person has two lives, a short life in this world filled with woes, and an eternal life in the Hereafter.

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(1) Narrated by Al-Hakim on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas God be pleased with him

Those who sell eternal life and its delights and its eternity in return for the life of this world in which nothing is certain, are the losers. A person's life might last a day, or a month, or a year; and however long it might last, the life of this world is short, and however much it gives, it gives only a little. Does the one who sells his Hereafter for the sake of this worldly life thereby win, or lose? Of course he loses because he has bought something which is definitely not equal to all of God's blessings.

If a person forgets God *the Glorified*, and forgets that he will meet Him soon, and on the Day of Resurrection he is brought forth to stand before Him, and receive from Him his account, will he be a winner, or a loser? Of course he will be a loser because he will have brought God's torment down upon himself, and will have brought God's punishment down upon himself.

God's words 'the losers' indicate that the deal will be over and everything will be lost because its end result was always bound to be loss, and this loss is not a temporary one which can be compensated for by another deal. Rather, it is an eternal loss, and the regret felt for it will be terrible as God tells us that He warns us of a chastisement close at hand, on a day when man shall see what his hands have sent ahead, and when the unbeliever shall say, 'Oh, would I were mere dust...' (*an-Naba'*: 40).

Why will the disbeliever wish he were dust? It is because of the horror of the suffering he will see before him, and the horror of the loss he will have incurred. This shows the severity of the regret on the day when regret will be of no use. In this verse, God speaks of the losers, but in another verse He *the Exalted* tells us of the greatest losers, who have lost their labour most, whose aim in the present life has been mistaken, and who deem that what they do is right; they are those who do not believe in the signs of the Lord, or that they shall ever meet Him. Vain, therefore, are their works; and no weight shall He allow them on the day of Resurrection (*al-Kahf*: 103-105).

So there are losers, yet there are those who are even greater losers; the greatest loser is the one who denies God *the Glorified*, and the Day of Resurrection, and thinks that the life of this world is all there is, and God was not in his mind when he did anything; this world is all that concerned him, and then he was

surprised by meeting the True Lord on the Day of Resurrection having not one single good deed in his account because all he intended by his good deeds was the life of this world, and so he will have no share in the Hereafter.

It is strange that you see people making all possible preparations for the life of this world, sending their children to language schools, and undertaking more than they can afford, and then sending them to universities, or to study abroad, preparing for a future which is only expected, not certain; for a person could die whilst in their youth, and so waste all that was spent on them, or they could squander their studies in the final stages and so end up with nothing; or all of these preparations could be completed, and then they commit a crime which means they will have to spend the rest of their lives in prison, and so waste their lives.

But what is certain and cannot be doubted is that we shall all meet God on the Day of Resurrection, and He will hold us to account for our deeds. Despite the fact that this is a certainty, many people are not heedful of it, and work for a doubtful future without even thinking of the certainty of the Hereafter. And so you find that few parents strive to make sure that their children perform prayers, and worship God, and are trustworthy people, and everything which brings them close to God. They forget the true blessing and focus all attention on that which will come to an end; and so the result for them is loss in the Hereafter.

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ  
ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

**How can you ignore God when you were lifeless and He gave you life, when He will cause you to die, then resurrect you to be returned to Him? [28] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 28)**

The word 'how' is a question about a state. The True Lord uses it in this verse rhetorically not in order to ask a question, but rather to seek an explanation for an abnormal thing, which should not have occurred. After everything that the True Lord has just mentioned in the foregoing verses by



way of decisive proofs, such as the creation of the heavens and the earth and mankind, proofs which no one can deny or question, how after all these clear proofs could you disbelieve in God? Your disbelief is without argument or logic. Sometimes questions are used to reprimand, as when you say to someone, 'How could you insult your own father?' Or they can be used to express wonder at something someone has done which they should not have; and the two are linked, whether the question expresses rebuke or wonder, the intention is the same: 'You should not have done that.' Then the True Lord brings more proofs which no one can deny or give the lie to, saying '... and you were lifeless and He gave you life, and then He will cause you to die....'

And so the discourse turns to the origin of life and death. After demonstrating what the disbelievers, the wicked, and the hypocrites are guilty of spreading corruption on earth, and cutting that which God commanded be joined, the discourse goes up to the mention of life and death. God's words '... and you were lifeless and He gave you life, and then He will cause you to die....' cannot be disputed. Perhaps it might be possible for them to argue about not following the religion, or cutting that which God commanded be joined. But the matter of life and death is something no one can dispute. God created us from nothing, and no one else has ever claimed to have created mankind, or created himself. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came and told the people that God created them, none of them could deny this because we were all absent from this world, and then it was God who brought us into existence and gave us life.

And as for God's words '...He will cause you to die....,' no one doubts that they will die, for death is destined for all people. So creation from nothing is certain by evidence, and death is certain by experience and witnessing.

The matter of death is our way to deal with any atheist for if they say that the intellect is enough to run life and that there is no such thing as the Unseen, we say: The One Who determines existence in the universe is the same One Who determines death. The life of this world is a stage between two points, the first of which is that God creates us and brings us into being, and then the journey of life comes between the two points; and the thing in which our humanity comes to a close, and our lives end, is death. That is, we are on a

journey of life from God and to Him. So, the life of this world begins with creation by God, and ends with death.

When they talk about test-tube babies which are a treatment for sterility more than anything else, they depict it in an ignorant way. All they do is taking an egg from the mother's ovary because the fallopian tube is closed, or is not able to be impregnated normally, and fertilise it with the sperm of the husband, and then plant it in the womb of the mother.

Therefore, they take what God has created, namely the mother's egg and the father's sperm, and all they do is fertilisation, yet they call this a test-tube baby, as though it is possible for a test-tube to create a baby! The truth is otherwise, for the mother's egg and the father's sperm are creations of God, and they have not created anything. We say to them: if you control life and death, then prevent a single person from dying. Rather than spending thousands of pounds treating infertility with a procedure which may or may not succeed, keep a single person alive; yet they cannot.

Death is a tangible phenomenon which can be witnessed; and out of His mercy for the human mind and its conception of unseen matters, God makes them easier to understand by means of something which is clear to see. How? When a person looks at himself and how he is alive, he does not know how God created him, or gave him life. God told us about the unseen matter of creation in the Noble Quran by saying that He *the Exalted* created man from soil, clay, and mud, and then breathed into him from His Spirit.

God addresses people saying that if they are in doubt of Resurrection, then they should remember that He has created them from dust (*al-Hajj*: 5). And He *the Exalted* states that He has created man out of an extract of clay (*al-Mu'minun*: 12). And He also tells us that He has created people from firm clay (*as Saffat*: 11). And He states that He has created man out of sounding clay, out of dark mud fashioned in shape (*al-Hijr*: 26). And then He *the Exalted* informs us that He commanded the angels when He has formed Adam fully and breathed into him of His spirit, to fall down before him in prostration (*Sad*: 72).

The True Lord tells us of stages of creation which we did not witness; but death is something we can all see and since we can see it, the True Lord uses it

as a proof of the stages of creation which we cannot see. Death means the undoing of life, and God has informed us all about the stages of the creation of life, though they are unseen to us. But the One Who created us tells us that He created us from dust, from mud and from clay like a potter's. When water is added to soil it becomes mud, and when we leave mud, its colour changes and it becomes clay, and then when it dries it becomes firm clay; and then God *the Glorified* fashioned it into human form and blew the Spirit into it, and so it became a human being. And then comes death, the undoing of life; and the undoing of everything occurs in an opposite order to how it was formed.

Buildings are built from bottom to top, and are destroyed from top to bottom. And so the final steps of any journey are the first steps of the journey back. If you travel to Alexandria, the first place you pass on the way back is the last place you passed on the way there.

The first thing to leave the body is the spirit which was the last thing to enter it. Then the body hardens and becomes like firm clay, and then rots and becomes like clay, and after that, all the water evaporates from it and it returns to dust. In this way, death is the opposite of the image of life, in agreement with the stages of which the True Lord has informed us.

God *the Glorified* then says, '...then you shall be brought back to Him...', i.e. God will resurrect you to render your account. The disbelievers, atheists and materialists try to deny the concept of the Resurrection; and in this respect they have brought nothing new. Rather, they say the same words as the people of the first era of ignorance of old did, as God *the Glorified* tells us that they used to say that there is only their present life in this world; they die as they come to life, and nothing but time destroys them (*al-Jathiya*: 24).

It is the hope of the disbeliever who sins against himself that there will be no resurrection or account; and to those who find such thing as resurrection far-fetched, we say: God, who created you from nothing, can easily bring you back as you were, as He *the Exalted* says that it is He Who originates the creation in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew: and most easy is this for Him, since His is the essence of all that is most sublime in the heavens and on earth, and He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise (*ar-Rum*: 27).

So bringing into existence that which has already existed before is easier than creating something non-existent from nothing; and God answers the disbelievers by reporting the argument of the disbeliever who, forgetting how he was created in the first place, wonders who will give life back to bones that have become dust. God commands His messenger to answer that He Who had brought them into being in the first instance, will give them life once again, for He has full knowledge of every act of creation (*Ya Sin*: 78-79).

And so the act of bringing back to life will be easier for God than the first creation was, and God has everything written in a plain account, and that of the human body which the earth consumed will be returned once more on the Day of Resurrection.

Moreover, the creation of the heavens and the earth is a greater feat than the creation of mankind, as God *the Exalted* says that the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of man; yet most people do not understand the significance of this (*Ghafir*: 57).

And God's statement '...you shall be brought back to Him' is also a reassurance to those who believe. As long as we have come from Him, and will return to Him, this means life's beginning is from God, and its end is to God; so let us make life itself for God also. We must be aware that God has made the time, place and means of our deaths unknown to us; and He did this not only to veil it, but also so that we would expect it to come at any moment. This is a plain announcement of death so that people will hasten to perform good deeds, and seek reward; for there is no guaranteed life in this world: The child is not certain of its life; the young man is not certain of his life; and the middle-aged man is not certain of his life. So we must all strive to do good in order that death does not surprise us and we die sinners.

Notice that God mentioned the story of life in a single verse, and the return to God- a certainty for the believers- makes them follow the religion and lead law-abiding lives; and keeping to this is what leads them to paradise and gives them peace of mind concerning their children once they have left this world.

This is because the deeds of a righteous man will be reflected in his children after him, as God forewarns those who fear for their weakly offspring after they have departed; let them fear God and say what is right (*an-Nisa*: 9).

So the one who keeps to the teachings of the religion is assured that he will meet his Lord, and is assured of his reward; and those who do not believe in the Hereafter takes life from God and wastes it in things which have no benefit, and then they find nothing but their reckoning, and Hell. God gives the parable of the deeds of those who disbelieve; they are like a mirage in a plain which the thirsty supposes to be water, but when he comes to it, he finds that it was nothing; instead, he finds God with him, and He will pay him his account in full, for God is swift in reckoning (*an-Nur*: 39).

That is, the disbeliever will be surprised in the Hereafter by the presence of God, having never considered that he would be held to account for his actions. God's statement '...then you shall be brought back to Him' can be read in Arabic in two different ways, either in the passive form '*turja'un*' ('you will be brought back') or the active form '*tarji'un*' ('you will return'). The first means that we will be compelled to return, and our return to God will not be of our own will; this applies to the disbelievers who will not wish to return to God. As for the second, active reading, this implies that there is an active will; this applies to the believers who will be willing to return to God.

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ أَسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى  
السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

**It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then turned to the sky and made the seven heavens; it is He who has knowledge of all things [29] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 29)**

In this verse, God reminds us that He is the One who created everything on earth. This verse comes immediately after God's statement '...He gave you life, and then He will cause you to die, and will again bring you to life, then you shall be brought back to Him' in order to alert us to the fact that everything on earth belongs to Him *the Exalted*, that our ownership of things is only temporary,

and that everything we own in this world will end up belonging to someone else, and so on.

When the True Lord created life, and said ‘...you were lifeless and He gave you life...,’ it is as though the statement was implying that life requires constant sustenance from the Creator to the created if it is to continue; this means that in order for life to continue, this sustenance of favours must also continue. But these favours continue for the period of life, and then when death comes man loses his connection with the favours of this world. So man must be alerted to the fact that that the things of this world are subdued for his service and that no one was responsible for this subdual save God. Man knows nothing of how he was created, and what stages he went through, except what God has told us about, and He *the Exalted* asserts that He did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, and their own creation; and He does not take as helpers those that lead people astray (*al-Kahf*: 51).

As long as they have witnessed neither the creation of the heavens and the earth nor their own creations, we must accept what God tells us about the creation of the heavens and the earth, and our own creation, as a fact; and anything that comes to us from other than God is false and fabricated.

Nowadays, we find that there are many studies of how the heavens and the earth and mankind were created. Yet none of them will arrive at the truth; rather, they will only propose theories which cannot be proven. This is why God says that He does not take as helpers those who lead people astray; there is a clear indication here that there will come people who would lead men astray by saying ‘this is how the heavens and earth were created, and this is how mankind was created,’ but these deluders, who claim things which are known only to God, are only helping to confirm the way of faith; for if these deluders had not come, and had not said that the earth was created in this way, and the heavens in this way, we would have wondered about that, ‘But God has informed us in His Glorious Book that someone would come and lead men astray about the creation of the heavens and the earth, so why did they not show up?’ However, the fact that they came is proof of the veracity of the Quran in predicting their coming centuries before they came.

Being able to benefit from something does not require that you know its secrets. For instance, we all use electricity although we do not know what it really is. Likewise, we live on the earth and benefit from all its phenomena and all that God has subdued for us. The fact that we do not know the secret of its creation does not prevent us from enjoying these benefits. It is a kind of knowledge which brings no good, and a kind of ignorance which brings no harm. The world is compelled to serve mankind, and this compulsion means it is subdued, so that the phenomena of the universe do not rebel against mankind. If there are phenomena in the universe which do rebel by God's decree like floods, volcanoes, and natural disasters, we say that this happens in order that the True Lord can alert us to the fact that everything in the universe does not serve us by our own intrinsic worth, or by our control over it, but rather, it serves us by God's command. If all creatures serve you by your own intrinsic worth, then control them when they rebel against your service. Everything in the universe is under God's Omnipotent control; even causes and effects are under the command of the Divine Omnipotence, and no cause or effect in the universe is outside God's will.

And so if the element of water rebels with a flood, and the wind rebels with a hurricane, and the earth rebels with earthquakes and volcanoes, this is only to show mankind that he has no power to control the world in which he lives. God draws people's attention to the fact that He has created for them, from among other things His Hands have wrought, the domestic animals of which they are now masters, and that He has subjected them to men's will so that some of them they may use for riding and some they may eat (*Ya Sin*: 71-72).

Man is unable to tame any animal unless God subdues it for him. It is amazing that animals are able to sense things in the universe which man cannot sense: they sense earthquakes before they happen, and flee from the place the earthquake will take place, whilst man, despite his intelligence, cannot understand what is happening.

With the words 'He it is who has created for you all that is on earth...', the True Lord includes every species on earth. And so man cannot produce anything except by using that which already exists. That is to say man can add nothing new to the universe. Take a seed of wheat as an example: where did you get it from? You got it from last year's harvest; and where did last year's harvest come from? It came from the harvest of the year before that. And so

the cycle continues until it arrives at the very first seed of wheat: where did it come from? It came as a direct creation of God. The same is true for every fruit on earth; if you trace it back to the first fruit, it was the result of direct creation by God. And so if you want to trace back the origin of mankind, you will find with use of logic and reason that creation began with a male and female who were created directly by God; for you came from your father who came from your grandfather who came from his father, and so on until we arrive at the creation of the first man. And so we find that there must have been a direct creation by God; and what applies to man applies to all animals, vegetables, and minerals. If you return anything to its origin, you will find that it must have begun with direct creation by God.

Some people may wonder about technological progress and these new inventions in the new civilisation: Did mankind not create them? We say that these things were created from components which already existed, and God revealed to mankind the knowledge of how to use the materials He created in the earth to develop and produce many new things; but we have never heard of any human being creating material out of nothing.

God is the One Who created everything in this universe from nothing, and then the living creatures reproduced according to the natural laws that God set for them; but all of this development goes back to the fact that God created all creatures, and endowed them with the characteristic of mating and reproduction so that life can continue generation after generation. In every creature of God that you see in the universe now, God placed laws of causality which allowed their lives to continue from one generation to another until the universe comes to an end. So if someone says, 'I farm by means of my intelligence and knowledge,' say to him: You take the seed that God created, and place it in the earth that God created, and then God sends down rain from the sky to water it, and then it takes root by the power of God, who placed within it its sustenance and method of growth. So all that you do is plough the earth and throw in the seed. The True Lord poses a question to mankind concerning the seed which they cast in the soil. Is it they who cause it to grow – or is God the cause of its growth (*al-Waqi'a*: 63-64).

It is true that people plough the earth and plant the seed, and perhaps assist the growth with care and irrigation; but there is no act of creation in anything



they do. Rather, God is the Creator of everything, and if you farm by your own power, then bring a seed which God did not create, and an earth that God did not create, and water that God did not send from the sky – and of course you cannot. But what is the origin of the new innovations?

We say there is a difference between potential existence and actual existence. For example, when a palm-tree is still a seed, we say it exists potentially. It is a nucleus; and then it grows and becomes existent actually. You have nothing to do with either stage: you neither created the nucleus in the form of the seed, and nor actively made the seed grow to become a palm-tree. There are some things buried in the universe which God created at the beginning of time and then left hidden until the time comes when He would reveal them to those who search for the secrets of His universe.

Every discovery has its time. If we take for example what lies beneath the soil, or the treasures buried underground, they remain buried until God guides man to them, and teaches him how to extract them. For example, man did not invent or create petroleum or metal, but rather, they were buried in the universe until the time came for them to play their roles in life, and so the True Lord showed them to us. Just because something was unknown to us does not mean it did not exist, or that it came into existence the moment we discovered it. The things that are happening now, and the things that will happen in the years to come God created all their constituent parts, and placed them in the earth the moment of their creation. By means of what God reveals to him, man is able to assemble these constituents, but he cannot create them or bring them into being.

The True Lord then says, ‘He it is Who has created for you all that is on earth, and has proceeded<sup>(1)</sup> to the heaven....’ When God *the Exalted* says ‘*istawa*’ (to rise, to move up, to settle above, direct oneself), we need to understand everything connected with God’s person according to the principle that there is nothing whatsoever like unto Him. So God settles above (*istawa*), and

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(1) The Arabic word *istawa* (rendered here as ‘proceeded’) has no direct English equivalent, and different translations of the Quran give different renderings of the term. In fact, having words that have no direct equivalent in other languages is one of the reasons that the translation of the Quran is considered as impossible and is judged as prohibited by many Muslim scholars. The discussion in the text above will tackle some of the problems involved in this instance - Ed.

kings settle onto their thrones, and you settle onto your chair; but because we are governed by the rule that there is nothing like unto Him (*ash-Shura*: 11), we must know that the 'settling' of God is not like any other settling. God is Alive, and you are alive; but is your life like His life? And God knows, and you know; but is your knowledge like His? And God has power, and you have power; but is your power like His? Of course, it is not. And so when we come to the word '*istawa*,' do not ever try to understand it according to the human understanding. God knows everything in the heavens and the earth, and He knows every atom of every place, and every atom of everything that exists in every place. You know only the outward of things, whilst God knows all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth until the Day of Resurrection, and after the Day of Resurrection. So there is nothing like unto Him *the Exalted*, and you cannot comprehend with your mind any action connected with the Being of God because your mind is too limited to conceive of it. So say, 'Glory be to God, there is nothing like unto Him in any action connected to His Being.' So, the phrase '...has proceeded to the heaven...' is from the Speech of God, and God is the Speaker here.

Some people say, 'We have received the Quran and kept it.' We say to them: the one who keeps the Quran is God, and as long as He is the Keeper and Guardian of His Word, He *the Exalted* knows that nothing in existence can contradict the Noble Quran. And God preserved the Quran so that it could be a proof and a plea for Him to the people. As long as God *the Exalted* is the Creator, and the Speaker, nothing in the entire universe can contradict the Noble Quran. God asserts that it is He Who has revealed the Reminder (The Quran) and that He shall certainly be its Guardian (*al-Hijr*: 9).

It is of God's Greatness that He has preserved His Word to be a plea for Him against the people. God's attributes existed before their manifestations came to be seen; so He *the Exalted* created because He is the Creator, and the attribute of being the Creator was already in existence; if not, how could He have created the first of His creations, if He *the Exalted* were not already a Creator? In other words, God did not become a Creator because He created; rather, He created as He was already a Creator.

And God was a Provider before there was anyone to provide for; if not, how could He have provided for His first creatures?

And God created this universe with the complete perfection of all His attributes, and He testified that there was no god but He before any of His creatures testified that there is no god but God, as He *the Exalted* says that He bears witness that there is no god but He, and so do the angels and those who have knowledge – the upholder of equity; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise (*Al-Imran*: 18).

So God testified that there was no god but He before there existed any of His creation to testify to the Divine Oneness. He testified that there was no god but He before He created the angels who testified to His Oneness with testimony of sight and before the creation of those endowed with knowledge, who gave the testimony of knowledge. So it is as though the testimony of the Self to the Self, in God's statement that He bears witness that there is no god but He, is the basis, and the strongest of all testimonies, for God has no need for His creatures to support His testimony.

So after mentioning the creation of the earth and the heavens and the settling of everything, God says that 'He has full knowledge of everything.' That is, not a single atom of His dominion escapes His knowledge, and He knows every atom on earth, and every atom of every person, and every atom in the universe, and nothing in creation does anything without His leave and His will, as He *the Exalted* states from Luqman's admonition to his son that *Luqman* advised his son that God will bring everything to light, though it were but the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, hidden in a rock or in the heavens or in the earth; for, God is Knower of subtleties, All-Aware (*Luqman*: 16).

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً قَالُوْۤا اَجْعَلْ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُّفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ اِنِّىْۤ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿٣٠﴾

**[Prophet], when your Lord told the angels, 'I am putting a successor on earth,' they said, 'How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?' but He said, 'I know things you do not' [30] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 30)**

After telling us that He created everything in the universe, the True Lord wanted to tell us about the ones He created to populate this universe. And so

the story which God chose to begin the stories of the Quran is the story of Adam *peace be upon him*, the first man. This story is mentioned several times in the Noble Quran to guide us to the reason why the True Lord wanted to inform us about it, and also to show us the truth of God's Message, as He tells His Messenger (and the believers) that He shall relate to him their story with truth (*al-Kahf*: 13).

The word 'truly' here indicates that there are some stories which are not true, and God wants to remove the stories He relates from those stories which people exchange, or the stories of history since they might not reflect the facts and hence not be true; and there are stories related throughout the world which have no basis in fact, but are rather legends.

The Arabic word *qissa* (story) is derived from the verb meaning to follow someone's tracks, i.e. to follow the tracks left in the desert sand until you find what you want when you get to the end of the tracks. Since we know that God tells true stories, we know that all the stories mentioned in the Noble Quran are true events that actually happened. Every story in the Quran imparts a lesson, or something important to which the True Lord wants to alert us. Sometimes the purpose of the story was to strengthen the resolve of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. God informs His Messenger that all He relates to him of the accounts of the messengers is to reinforce his heart (*Hud*: 120).

So every story was meant to fortify the hearts of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers at times when events worried them. The stories of the Quran are not just there to kill time, but rather, the lofty goal behind them is to strengthen and benefit the motions of the spiritual life. If we look at the stories of the Noble Quran, we find that they discuss things which happened in the past and became historical events; and history links events with the times in which they occurred. History might concern a person rather than an event; but a person himself is one of the world's events. If you read the chronicled history of any event, you will find that the account expresses the point of view of the narrator, and so every event in history was written according to the viewpoints of those who wrote it. Because of this, the narrations of a single event can differ according to the different narrators.

But the stories of the Noble Quran are the true stories. The lesson to be learned from the stories of the Noble Quran is that they convey to us historical events which repeated themselves as time went by. Pharaoh, for example, represents every ruler who wants people to worship him; and the People of the Cave, for example, is the story of every group of believers who ever fled from the tyranny of disbelief and withdrew to worship God; and the story of Joseph *peace be upon him* is the story of all brothers who were misled by Satan so that malice arises amongst them; and the story of Dhu Al-Qarnain is the story of every reforming ruler to whom God gives material means and support in this world, and so implements God's teachings and pleases Him; and the story of the tribe of Thamud and their prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* is the story of the people who seek a miracle from God and are granted it, but then still persist in disbelief; and the story of the people of Jethro (Shu'aib) *peace be upon him* is the story of the people who commit fraud in their trading.

And so all the stories in the Quran are stories which have been repeated throughout history; even in the time in which we now live, there is more than one Pharaoh, and more than one People of the Cave fleeing with their religion, and more than one Qarun (Korah) worshipping wealth and gold, and thinking that he has no need of God. And so the full names of the personalities of the stories in the Quran are not given, except in the case of one story, namely that of Jesus and his mother Mary daughter of 'Imran *peace be upon them*. Why is this? It is because this is a miracle which will never be repeated, and so God told us their names, 'Mary daughter of 'Imran' *peace be upon her* and 'Jesus son of Mary' *peace be upon him* so that things would not be ambiguous, and other women would not be able to claim to have conceived without a man as Mary *peace be upon her* did. We say: No, the story of Mary *peace be upon her* will not be repeated, and so God specified her by name, and said 'Jesus son of Mary' *peace be upon him*, and 'Mary daughter of 'Imran' *peace be upon her*. As for the rest of the stories in the Noble Quran, they are related without mentioning specific names; God did not tell us what the name of Moses' Pharaoh was, or who the People of the Cave were, or who Dhu Al-Qarnain was, or who the owner of the two gardens was, and so on because the point of these stories was not to highlight one particular person for whom this story was a unique event. Some people occupy themselves unnecessarily with trying to establish the identity of

Moses' Pharaoh, or Dhu Al-Qarnain, and so on. We say to them: You will not get anywhere because God related these stories to us without specifying these identities in order for us to know that it is not the specific person that matters, but rather, what matters is the wisdom of the story.

The stories of the Quran are not repeated in the same form; a part of a story might be related in some verses and another part in some other verses, but with a different aspect of the story. Each verse gives us new information, so that if you collect all the verses related to the story that are mentioned in the Noble Quran, you will find they make a complete story, with each verse adding something new.

The largest, most extensive, of the stories in the Noble Quran is that of Moses *peace be upon him*, and the Noble Quran often reminds us of it because its events include the story of the worst man group of people in history; and on different occasions, God reminds us of some aspect of the lives of these people. God relates that when Moses was born, He inspired his mother to suckle him for a time, and then, when she has cause to fear for him to cast him into the river and have no fear and no grief – for God shall restore him to her and shall make him one of the messengers (*al-Qasas*: 7).

And in another verse, the True Lord relates that He told Moses about when He inspired his mother with this inspiration: to put him in a chest and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore, and one who is an enemy to God and an enemy to Moses will take him up (*Ta Ha*: 38-39).

A superficial understanding of the verses would say that this is mere repetition, but we say this is not the case. Considering God's words in the first narrative: He inspired his mother to suckle him for a time, and then, when she has cause to fear for him to cast him into the river, we see that this part of the story shows that God was spiritually preparing Moses' mother for what would come to pass; but once it came to the event itself, the story changed to a quicker pace: to put him in a chest and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore; the discourse here is appropriate for the actual moment at which the event took place. So the former verse shows us that Moses' mother suckled him for a time before placing him in the chest, and that she was only to cast him into the river when danger came and she feared

he would be killed. This was an assurance to her that she need not fear or mourn, for God would save him; and it comprised two instances of glad tidings, namely that God would return him to his mother, and that God had chosen him to be a messenger.

And so we come to the latter verse which completes this part of the story for us i. e to put him in a chest...; here we discover that Moses' mother will put him in the chest, which was not mentioned in the other verse; and then after this, we discover that God had commanded the river to bring the chest safe to the shore, and this also was not mentioned in the other verse. We also learn that the one who would take him in was none other than Pharaoh, and that there would come to be mutual enmity between them. And so, we see that the two verses relating the story complement one another, and there is no repetition. In the second verse, God wanted to confirm that there would be mutual enmity between Moses *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh, and also to affirm the enmity Pharaoh showed to God and to Moses *peace be upon him* with His words: an enemy to God and an enemy to Moses... But enmity cannot become firm unless it is mutual, and so a third verse comes to complete the picture: And Pharaoh's household took him up and he would be to them a foe and a sorrow (*al-Qasas*: 8).

And so the noble verse shows us how the enmity between Moses *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh would become firm until Pharaoh was destroyed. For if someone shows enmity towards you, and you meet their enmity with goodwill, the enmity will fade after a short while. And so these verses do not constitute repetition, but rather, they each complete the story, and give us a complete integrated picture.

But why is the story not of Moses *peace be upon him* given in full in one place, like the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*? This is because God wanted to strengthen the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers with it, and give a part of it here and a part of it there in order to achieve this strengthening whilst leaving nothing out; for the verses together give us the full story. The same is the case with the story of Adam *peace be upon him*, which is told to us in several verses in separate instalments which together give us the complete story. At the same time, each individual verse has its own wisdom which was necessary for the time in which it was revealed. God

related to us the story of the beginning of man; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'You are all the sons of Adam, and Adam was created from dust.'<sup>(1)</sup>

The True Lord wants to tell us how He began the creation of man, and the story of the enmity between Satan and Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny, and so God *the Exalted* spoke about the first man, and told us his name; which was Adam *peace be upon him*, and spoke about the material from which He shaped him, and about the teachings He imparted to him, and about the discussion that took place between the angels, and told us that Adam would be His vicegerent on earth, and that He taught him the names of everything so that his life would have direction, and He taught us the logic behind knowing things and their names, and He spoke about the dialogue that took place between Satan and his Lord when he refused to bow down in prostration, and He showed us the argument Satan used for refusing to prostrate, and the plan of Satan and his method of assailing the hearts of the believers with insinuations and whispers and so on.

So there are many facets to the story of Adam *peace be upon him*; and if a human being wanted to tell the story of Adam, they would not be able to come up with all of these pieces; but the True Lord made them come piece by piece as a way to strengthen the believers.

The verse that we are currently examining is not found in the chapters of *al-A'raf*, *al-Hijr*, *al-Isra'*, *al-Kahf* or *Ta Ha*; and so we know there is no repetition. God told His angels that He would place on earth a vicegerent, and we must stop to consider this. Was Adam *peace be upon him* created as an individual alone, or did God create him with all of his progeny until the Day of Resurrection buried within him? If we read the Noble Quran, we find that God addresses mankind saying that He has created them, then fashioned them, and then He commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam (*al-A'raf*: 11).

This speech is addressed to a plurality, to Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny. So it is as though God is indicating that the primary origin of man

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bazzar on the authority of Hudhayfa with a sound chain of narration



is Adam *peace be upon him* within whom was concealed the attributes of all of mankind that would come from his loins until the coming of the Hour. That is, when Adam *peace be upon him* was created there were within him the atoms from which all mankind would grow, one from the other, until the coming of the Hour.

I said that every one of us has within him an atom or a particle from Adam *peace be upon him*; so the children of Adam took it from him, and the generation that came after them took the living microbe that Adam passed on to his sons, and the ones who came after them also took that living particle which was originally created in Adam *peace be upon him*. And so it went on to those after them; and life must be a connected chain, each of us taking from the one before him and passing on to the one after him. If a single link is missing, life ends; such is the case when a man dies without marrying and so he leaves no descendants, and so the chain of life stops. The fact that the chain of life continues proves that this life is connected, and has not stopped, and so from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until now, life has been connected; and so in each one of us there must be an atom from Adam, the beginning and origin of humanity, after whom life spread out in chains which connected up until the present day, and will remain until the Day of Resurrection.

I am alive now because I was formed from a living microbe from my father who took his life from a living microbe from his father, and so on all the way back to Adam *peace be upon him*. So you are created from a living particle in which there exists life which has not ceased from Adam until the present day; and had it ever stopped, you would not have been here. So the life of those living now is connected to Adam, and has not been interrupted by death; and the lives of those who will be living when the Hour comes will also be connected to Adam, the first man. When the True Lord commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam, they prostrated to Adam and to his descendants until the coming of the Hour; the descendants of Adam were buried in his loins, and they witnessed the first creation. So the words of the True Lord that He created mankind, and then formed them, constitute a new element of the story of man.

God *the Exalted* says, 'And when your Lord said to the angels...', i.e. God instructs our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say that when Adam *peace be upon him* was created, he was created as a vicegerent on earth. This (God speaking to the angels) does not mean that God was seeking the opinion of anyone about His creation, since He said, 'I am going to place...' meaning that the decision has already been made. Rather, it was an announcement to the angels; and the reason God told the angels about it is because they had a role to play with Adam *peace be upon him*; for some of them would undertake the arrangement of God's commands, and some of them would write the accounts and act as guardians, and there are other angels besides whom the True Lord would charge with many different tasks connected with the life of this new creature. So the reason for this announcement was that the angels would have work connected with this vicegerent.

Some people might say that the life of mankind on earth is subject to natural laws. To this we say: what makes you think that behind every natural law there is not an angel in charge of it? But whose place will this inheritor/vicegerent take? They might take one another's places, in which case the meaning of this announcement from God is that every man will die and be followed by someone else who inherits his position; for if they were all to continue to live, they would not inherit from one another, or, it might be that mankind are following on from another species – but God negated the possibility that mankind could be the inheritors of another species; and this can be gathered from the verse where He *the Exalted* addresses mankind saying that if He so wills, He will make them pass away and bring forth a new creation; and this is not difficult for God (*Ibrahim*: 19-20).

So this 'new creation' would be of the same species as the one which God destroyed before it. And God tells us that mankind will follow on from one another until the Day of Resurrection; this is what can be gathered from the verse rebuking those who wasted prayers, speaking about righteous people of the past who were succeeded by people who came after them and wasted prayer and followed lusts; and these will meet with utter disillusion (*Maryam*: 59).

But in this verse the word *khalf* ('people coming after') is used, and not *khalifa* ('inheritor'/'vicegerent') to speak about this kind of people. The meaning of the word can be gathered from the following lines of a poem:

Those in whose care one could live are gone,  
And I remained among *khalf* like mangy skin.

But God made the angels fall in prostration to Adam *peace be upon him* when He created him, and subdued the whole universe for him; and so it is as though he was God's vicegerent on His earth, whom He aided with material means so that the universe was subjugated to him by God's will, not by man's will. God said in a Qudsi Hadith: 'O Son of Adam, make time for My worship and I will fill your breast with riches, and relieve your poverty; and if you do not, I will fill your hand with toil, and not relieve your poverty.'<sup>(1)</sup> So the word vicegerent (*khalifa*) has several meanings.

What did the angels reply? '... They said, "Will You place on it one who will do ill therein and shed blood, and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness?" How did the angels know this? They must have had some prior knowledge on which to base this, or else they thought that Adam *peace be upon him* would be a tyrant on earth. But what about shedding blood – how could the angels know about that when it had not yet happened? It must be that they knew it from a previous life-form; and God informs us that He had created jinn before that from intensely hot fire (*al-Hijr*: 27).

So it is obvious that the jinns were created before mankind. And God's words 'Surely, I know what you do not know' mean: 'Your knowledge, O created beings, is commensurate with your created nature, whereas God's knowledge is timeless and unlimited.' But when God told them about the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*, did the angels say this out loud, or in private only to themselves? Whether they said it out loud or not, God knew it because He knows everything that is concealed and everything that is revealed and He knows what is secret and what is even more hidden. What is a secret, and what is more hidden than a secret? A secret is what you tell in confidence to someone. So what I tell to someone in confidence is a secret; whilst what I keep to myself, without anyone finding out about it, is even more hidden than a secret. So we do not say that we keep a secret unless we have divulged it to

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, Al-Hakim and Ibn Majah on the authority of Abu Hurayra

someone, whilst what we keep to ourselves is known to no one but God; and this is what is even more hidden than a secret.

And when the True Lord said 'Surely, I know what you do not know,' He wanted to state things as they are. The Noble Quran tells us that the angels said '...and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness.'

To celebrate God's praise means to declare God's transcendence above all that does not befit Him, and to extol is to purify, derived from the Arabic word *qadas*, meaning the pail of water they used for washing. And so we say God is glorified and extolled; glorified means that He is free of anything which does not befit Him *the Exalted*, and extolled means purified. To glorify requires a glorifier and a glorified; and the angels said: '...All Glory be to You! We have no knowledge but that which You have imparted to us...' (*al-Baqara*: 32).

This was a glorification and an extolling of God; and glorifying and extolling only befit a Being of absolute perfection, without any blemish; and absolute perfection belongs to God alone. And so God ruled out that the tongues of His creatures could ever say 'All Glory be to You' to none but Him, and so we never hear any human being saying this to another human being. Likewise, the tongues of men have been stopped from extolling the glory of any but God. The angels said 'and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness' as though this is a reference to our invocation 'Glory be to God, and praised is He!' This means that God is absolutely transcendent in His Self that there is nothing that resembles His Self, and in His Attributes that there is nothing that resembles His Attributes, and in His Actions, that there is nothing that resembles His actions. But what does 'and praised is He' mean? It means 'We glorify You and praise You,' i.e. 'O Lord, our very glorifying You is a blessing from You, and so we praise You for giving us the strength to glorify You.' To extol means to declare the purity of God from any change or defect; and because You, O Lord, are hallowed and pure, it is not fitting that anything should be offered to You which is not pure, and it is not fitting that he whom You have created with Your pure hands should do anything impure.

So He *the Exalted* made clear to us the meaning of '...we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness,' and then God, out of His wisdom, wanted to

respond to the angels, and so He said, ‘Surely, I know what you do not know.’ And He did not leave it at this, but rather brought forth an event which proved the truth of what He said.

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ  
فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

**He taught Adam all the names [of things], then He showed them to the angels and said, ‘Tell me the names of these if you truly’ [think you can] [31] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 31)**

So the True Lord responded to the angels in this noble verse by teaching Adam *peace be upon him* the names of everything; and the phrase ‘all things’ implies totality, i.e. knowledge of everything connected with these names.

A question arises here: Did God tell Adam *peace be upon him* the names of everything from the moment of creation until the coming of the Hour since He said ‘all things;’ and what about the names of the inventions which were to come many long centuries after the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*?

We say that when God taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names, and singled him out above the angels, He gave that creature, who was made from a lower element, something which distinguished him from creatures which were made from a higher substance. Adam *peace be upon him* was created from clay, whilst the angels were created from light. Human beings are not capable of giving the lower more than they give to the higher, yet God alone can do so in order to remind us that what we obtain is not a result of our own power, but rather is the result of His power. And so we find that Solomon *peace be upon him*, who was a king and a prophet, and to whom God gave a kingdom that would not be given to any other after him, and distinguished him, yet the hoopoe bird came and said to Solomon *peace be upon him* that he has gained knowledge which he (Solomon) does not have, and that he has come to him from Sheba with sure information (*an-Naml*: 22).

How could the hoopoe, a weak, little bird know that which Solomon *peace be upon him*, the Prophet-King who ruled over men and jinn, did not know? It is because God hates for His creatures to be deluded with false pride, and so

He brings signs to mark the low above the high so that they all know that their powers are not intrinsically theirs, but are rather from God. And so Moses *peace be upon him*, the prophet and messenger, learns that which he did not have knowledge of from Al-Khidr *peace be upon him*, the righteous servant.

God created all named things, although we may not know of all of them, and made the angels learn the names of these things from Adam *peace be upon him*. Some people might enquire about how the Mighty Creator taught these names to Adam *peace be upon him*. The Creator's way of teaching is not the same as the creature's way of teaching; for the Creator teaches by inspiration, and so He cast into the heart of Adam *peace be upon him* the names of every created being in the universe.

So at the first meeting between Adam *peace be upon him* and the angels, all of these things had been created and their names had been imparted only to Adam *peace be upon him*, which is proven by the fact that the angels did not know the names of these things, whilst Adam did. We must pause for a moment here to consider something. Speech, in our human experience, comes as a result of hearing, and language comes from the surroundings. God taught the names of all things to Adam *peace be upon him*, and this knowledge could not have come without Adam *peace be upon him* hearing something from God, and then uttering it. If you take an Arab child and leave it in London, for example, it will learn to speak English with fluency and will not know a single word of Arabic; and vice versa: if you take an English child and raise it in an Arab environment, it will speak Arabic and will not know a word of English. Language is not a matter of inheritance, or race, or environment, but it is rather a matter of imitation where a person hears and repeats. If a person does not hear anything, and is deaf, he will never speak a word. And so if Adam *peace be upon him* uttered these names, he must have heard them from God.

It is amazing that the way in which God taught Adam *peace be upon him* is the same way in which human beings teach each other, right up to our time. You do not teach a child by beginning with verbs, but rather, his teaching must begin with nouns and names. So you tell him, 'This is a glass,' and 'this is a mountain,' and 'this is the sea,' and 'this is the sun,' and 'this is the moon;' and then after learning the names of things, he can come to know verbs, and his education can proceed from there.

And so we see the first development of speech; the omnipotent power of God taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names of all things. Here we must stop to answer two questions. The first: When God taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names of all things, did this include the names of all the new inventions that would emerge throughout the world? To this we say: Even if Adam *peace be upon him* learned the names of everything, he needed to live and fulfil life's requirements. When something new emerged, the sons of Adam *peace be upon him* would use words from among those they already knew. This is because when new words are made and enter the language, they do not spring from vacuum, but are formed from the elements of the language in which they are spoken and written.

The same is true for all things in existence. If they were returned to their source, you would see that they are all from God. If mankind were to be returned to their primary source, we would arrive to the True Lord, knowing that the first human was created by God. If knowledge were to be returned to its origin – and all knowledge requires a teacher – we ask: Who taught the first teacher? Is it not obvious that knowledge began with a teacher who was taught by God, and that in reality He is the first teacher? And so God taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names of all things, and Adam taught his children, and they taught their children... and so on.

The second question is: If God taught speech, why do languages differ around the world, and why do we find many different languages and tongues? To this we say: the different stages of history and the spread of human beings throughout the world have made every group of human beings band together and communicate with one language. Every existing language is derived from an older language. For example, French and Italian are derived from Latin, and Hebrew and Syriac are related to Arabic. Even the dialects that are found in the Arab world today, though they come from one language, are different so that the dialect of Algeria or Morocco differs from that of Egypt and Sudan. But if we speak standard Arabic, we understand each other, and the origin of all these dialects is the language of the Quran- Arabic. However, during the periods of historical weakness that have afflicted the Arabs, each Arab land has become isolated from the other lands, and each separate society has used language as a social expression, and so the different dialects have become mutually unintelligible.

And so, God imparted the names of all things to Adam *peace be upon him* and then brought them within the ken of the angels and said, 'Tell me the names of these, if what you are saying is the truth.' That is, God honoured Adam *peace be upon him* with knowledge, and granted him knowledge that he did not grant to the angels, and then had Adam *peace be upon him* teach the angels the names of the things that they did not know. This is evidence of the totality of God's omnipotence; He does as He wills with His creation. As we said, the distinction that might be given to the lowly above the lofty cannot be given except by God's doing.

We will illustrate this with an example: If a weak person wishes to carry a heavy load, he will not be able to do so. If a strong person wishes to help him, he cannot give him some of his strength so that he can carry the load; rather, he must carry it for him. But the One Who can make this weak person strong so that he can carry the load himself, is only God. A human being cannot give another human being his strength; but God alone is able to make the weak person strong, and the strong person weak.

In addressing the angels, God says, '...If what you say is true;' but do the angels lie? Angels are beings of light, who praise God, and do His bidding. We say that the meaning of the term 'true' here should be understood with respect to what the angels based their analogy upon – whether that analogy is true or not; or it might mean that what they said was mere conjecture in attempting to have knowledge of the unseen.

In their suggestion, the angels might have been referring to another species that was on earth such as the jinns, who were created before the human beings, and drawing an analogy between that species and the new species. The True Lord tells the angels that they were incorrect in their analogy. Or (and this is another possible meaning of the verse), the angels might have been trying to foresee the future, reading into the Unseen and predicting that the new creature would spread corruption and shed blood on earth. But they may have forgotten that no one knows the Unseen except God, and God was making this point clear to them. So, in either case, their analogy was incorrect.

This is in no way a criticism of the angels; rather, it is a correction for them, and an indication for us that the angels do not know the Unseen. Therefore,



when they attempted to draw an analogy based on their prior knowledge, or attempted to read into the unseen future, they were unsuccessful. This is because God Alone is completely cognizant of the Unseen. The impetus that drove the angels to say what they said was their intense love of God, and their dislike of corruption in His creation.

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٢﴾

**They said, ‘May You be glorified! We have knowledge only of what You have taught us. You are the All Knowing and All Wise’ [32] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 32)**

This noble verse explains to us that God is the First Teacher in this universe; and if every field of knowledge has to have a teacher, the First Teacher must be God. If in our age we see many different sciences, these sciences are the product of the initiative of the intellectual process which God endowed mankind with, the materials which God placed in the universe, and the knowledge and logic which God taught to mankind.

Every invention and innovation came into being through premises and things which were already in existence before it. For example, water has always existed, as has the sun, which causes the water to evaporate and form clouds; and when mankind used heat to evaporate water and harness steam as a source of power, this spelled a leap in civilisation and science which we call the ‘steam age’, and was used to power trains, industrial machines, and other things.

This advance in science was a result of the presence of knowledge and power, added to the intellectual power the Creator gave to mankind and made him first think of using steam as a source of power. And when mankind noticed that fallen trees roll on the ground because they are cylindrical in shape, they used what they noticed in the way these trees moved to make the wheel, which was an important step forward in the history of science.

So the cylindrical tree-trunk is what gave mankind the idea for making the wheel; and when mankind developed the use of steam, and made trains which ran on steam power, this was a progression which was the child of the previous knowledge of the power created by evaporating water, and the means of

making wheels. So all knowledge springs from prior knowledge, and it is all linked to the abilities which God gave to mankind. And so the concern Islam has with empirical or material science is that it alerts us to the signs of the Creator in the universe, and asks us to ponder these signs, and apply to them our intelligence and perception. The True Lord informs us that many are the signs in the heavens and on earth which they pass by, and turn aside from them (*Yusuf*: 105).

And so God *the Exalted* alerts us to His signs in the heavens and the earth in order that we apply our intelligence and perception to them, to derive from them inventions which advance our civilisation. The Quran requires of us that we continue to build upon the knowledge which God imparted to Adam *peace be upon him*; and if the history of science tells us stories of people who were not believers and yet were more advanced than us in science and invention, we believers must reflect on the signs of God in the earth. Newton, who discovered the earth's gravitational pull, watched an apple fall from a tree onto the ground, and this led him to the law of gravity.

If we wish to get a glimpse of the knowledge of God which He has imparted to us, it is enough that we consider the example of plant seeds or stones. Within each tiny palm stone, for example, there is an entire palm tree; and when you put the seed in the ground, the tree develops and comes into existence.

In order to clarify all this, we say that every science is based on theories; the first theory leads to the second, and the second leads to the third, and so on. But the beginning of all of these sciences did not start out with a theory, but rather started with what they call axioms or self-evident facts, i.e. those things which require no evidence. These are the things which God created in the universe, and upon these principles all theories were built, one after the other. So if you wanted to follow them back to their origin, you would get in the end to the fact that the first knowledge came from God ; so the first teacher was taught by God, and the first fruit was created by God, and all the discoveries made by man from the beginning of time to the coming of the Hour were all present in the form of their potentiality, just like a tree is present in a seed just waiting for man to reflect and act in order that they could become actual discoveries. God was the First Teacher, Who placed all

this knowledge in the universe. I am reminded here of the lines from a poem by the poet Ahmad Shawqi:

All Glory be to You, God, the Best of Teachers!  
You taught the first generations with the pen;  
You sent Moses with the Torah as a guide,  
And the Son of the Virgin with the Gospel,  
And you unleashed the spring of teaching, Muhammad,  
Who gave man to drink of the Hadith and the Revelation

What Shawqi was saying in these lines is that all knowledge comes from God alone. And so it becomes clear to us that the words of the angels, ‘...All Glory be to You! We have no knowledge but that which You have imparted to us; You are the All Knowing, the All-Wise’ constituted an admission that all knowledge goes back to God, and that God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom. The angels said, ‘...All Knowing, All-Wise’; All Knowing means that He knows everything, both the concealed and the open, and that all knowledge is from Him. As for wisdom, the word *hikma* (wisdom) in Arabic is derived originally from the word for bridle, a piece of metal placed in a horse’s mouth to restrain it so that the rider can control it. This is because a horse is a stubborn wild animal which must be tamed, and the piece of metal in its mouth makes it more obedient to its rider. It is as though the attribute *Hakim* (‘All-Wise’) is ascribed to the Creator *the Exalted* because He controls all creatures so they cannot move without guidance or knowledge.

Wisdom means that there is a goal behind every action so that each is in harmony with the other actions, and so the universe is governed by the True Lord, Who cannot be assailed by falsehood from any direction. The All-Wise and All Knowing is He Who gives every creation its structure and limits. Wisdom is that everything does what it is supposed to do, and does it well. In jurisprudence, wisdom means that you arrive at a sound decision. In poetry, wisdom means that the words are in the proper meter. In medicine, wisdom means that you know the nature of the disease, and the medicine that will cure it. In architecture, wisdom means that you design a hospital to accommodate the needs of the patients and doctors, and the equipment, and the medicinal

supplies, and so on, or that you design a house in such a way that it will be comfortable to live in. The wisdom required to build a house, for example, is not the same as that required to build a palace, or a workplace.

The whole universe was created by an All Knowing, All-Wise Creator, and this Creator *the Exalted* placed everything within it in the proper place to fulfil its purpose. God's attribute of wisdom necessitates that He also be All Knowing since it is His knowledge that makes Him create everything with wisdom. God gave to each one of His creatures as much knowledge as they needed; and so the angels by their nature did not know what this man whom God intended to make His vicegerent on earth would do; but they existed for another purpose. God distinguished mankind by giving them intelligence by which they could discover as much of the signs of God in the universe as they needed to survive. The True Lord *the Exalted* commands His Messenger (and all believers) to extol the glory of the Name of their Lord Who creates things and makes them complete and balanced, and Who makes things according to a measure, and then guides them towards their goals (*al-A'la*: 1-3).

So everything was created according to a measure, and every creature has its course facilitated for them towards that which God guides them to.

قَالَ يٰٓأَدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ ۖ فَلَمَّ أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَّكُمْ إِنِّي  
أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

**Then He said, 'Adam, tell them the names of these.'  
When he told them their names, God said, 'Did I not  
tell you that I know what is hidden in the heavens and  
the earth, and that I know what you reveal and what  
you conceal?' [33] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 33)**

So the True Lord wanted to respond to the point the angels had made about the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* and his vicegerency on earth, and to affirm that some of the wisdom of God was too subtle for them, and so they were not aware of this wisdom. Before God created Adam *peace be upon him* and made him a vicegerent on earth, He was well aware of everything that Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny would do until the coming of the Hour, and after the coming of the Hour. As for the angels, they had no

knowledge of this because it was not their affair, and as we said, everything is enabled to do that for which it was created. And so the True Lord wanted to show the angels that they had passed judgement over Adam *peace be upon him*, either by analogy with another species which had lived on earth, or by trying to predict something that was in the Unseen. Both notions are incorrect; and so God gave distinction to Adam *peace be upon him* above the angels by teaching him the names of all things, and then asked the angels to tell Him these names, but they said: 'Knowledge comes from God Alone', and since God had not taught them these names, they did not know them. So God asked Adam *peace be upon him* to tell them these names, and so he did, but he did not tell them because of his own intrinsic power, or nature, or because of knowledge that he had learned by himself. Rather, he told them because God had taught them to him; and in this respect, God says that He raises the degrees of whomever He wills, but above everyone who is endowed with knowledge, there is one who knows all (*Yusuf*: 76).

So Adam's knowledge of the names was due to the will of God, and this will alone is what made Adam *peace be upon him* know them at that time, whilst the angels did not. And so the True Lord responded to what the angels said about Adam *peace be upon him* corrupting the earth, and said to them, 'Did I not say to you that I know the hidden things of the Heavens and of the Earth...?' That is, God alone knows the Unseen which here means the absolute Unseen; for there are things which are relatively unseen: My wallet might be stolen, for example, and I do not know who stole it; so he is unknown to me, but known to the one who stole it, and the one who helped him steal it by watching the street for him so he could steal it without anyone catching him. Or perhaps a very important decision concerning me might have been taken, like a promotion, or a dismissal, or an indictment, but news of it has not yet reached me, so I do not know of it, but the one who made the decision does know.

This unseen is not really unseen; the real unseen is that which has no clues to indicate what will happen; this is the unseen matter which takes you by surprise, and surprises everyone around you without warning. This is the unseen which is known to no one but God. God's words 'I know what you bring into the open, and what you hide' makes us pause to ponder: Did the angels say to God '...Will You place on it one who will do ill therein and shed

blood, and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness?’ (*al-Baqara*: 30), out loud, or did they only think it to themselves, and not utter it? God’s words ‘...and what you hide?’ might indicate that perhaps the angels said it to themselves, and not out loud. In any case, whether they said it out loud or concealed it, God knew it because God *the Exalted* encompasses all things. We do not want this point to cause debate because either way, whether it was loud or silent, it is the same as far as God’s knowledge is concerned; so there is no need to argue or debate the matter.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا  
 إِبْلِسَ أَبَىٰ وَأَسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

**When We told the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ they all bowed. But not Iblis, who refused and was arrogant: he was one of the disobedient [34] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 34)**

God gave a command to the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam *peace be upon him*, and this matter has given rise to much debate. Some people said, ‘How could the angels prostrate before anyone but God? Prostration is for God alone.’ Others said, ‘Does the fact that the angels prostrated before Adam *peace be upon him* mean that they worshipped him?’ Moreover, others said, ‘Prostration to any but God is not permissible under any circumstances.’ To these people, we say: You have not understood the meaning. After God singled out Adam *peace be upon him* above the angels by teaching him all the names, He instructed them to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*, and we must be aware that this prostration before Adam *peace be upon him* was an act of obedience to God, not an act of worship to Adam *peace be upon him*. God is the One Who commanded the angels to prostrate themselves to him; Adam *peace be upon him* did not command them to do this, and he had not the right to do so. The command (to prostrate) was given by God, and so anyone who obeyed Him thereby worshipped Him, and anyone who disobeyed Him was sinful, and anyone who rejected the command of the Commander became thereby a disbeliever.

In order to understand the meaning of worship, we say that worship means obeying God’s commandments and refraining from what He has prohibited, and so if God tells me to do something, I do it; and if He tells me not to do

something, I don't do it. Worship is for the creature to obey his Creator in all that He commands and prohibits. And so when we go to the pilgrimage, we kiss the Black Stone in the *Ka'ba*, and we pelt the stone that represents Satan at Mina. We kiss one stone and throw rocks at the other and this is what it means to worship God and follow His teachings just as He gave them. Nothing is sacred to us except God's commandments and teachings. The angels did not prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*; they rather, prostrated to God's commandment for them to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*. There is a great difference between prostrating to something and prostrating at God's command. To prostrate at God's command does not mean going against His teachings, since the basis of it all is obeying God. Did all the angels prostrate themselves before Adam *peace be upon him*? No; only the angels who had a role to play in relation to Adam *peace be upon him* prostrated to him, and God explained these roles to mankind saying that there are guardians over them, illustrious recorders and cognisant of their actions (*al-Infitar*: 10-12). In another verse we read that not even a word can man utter but there is a watcher with him, ever-present (*Qaf*: 18). In another verse also, we are informed that the angels conduct the affairs of the universe (*an-Nazi'at*: 5).

So there are angels who record the works of mankind and everything they say or do, and they make a written record of them; and there are those who protect them from demons; and there are those who carry out God's decrees on earth. These all have a role to play with mankind. But the command to prostrate did not include those angels on high, who bear the Throne, and guard the heavens, and the other angels who have no role connected with mankind. And so, when Satan refused to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*, God asked him what has kept him from prostrating before that whom God created with His hands; was he too proud or was he one of those on high? (*Sad*: 75).

So when God asked Satan whether he was one of those high, this meant whether Satan thought he was one of the angels on high, for whom the command to prostrate did not apply. So the command to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him* was akin to God's command to us to prostrate to the *Qibla* (prayer-direction) when we pray. We do not prostrate to the *Qibla* itself, but rather, we prostrate to the command of God that we prostrate to the *Qibla*. So the angels,

who were commanded to prostrate by God, prostrated themselves at God's command, but Satan refused to prostrate, and disobeyed his Lord's command.

Some people say that Satan was not one of those whom God commanded to prostrate because the commandment was issued to the angels alone, and Satan was not an angel, but rather was a jinn, as the Noble Quran tells us that the angels prostrated themselves except for Satan who was one of the jinns, and so he turned away from his Lord's command (*al-Kahf*: 50).

To this we say: It was the fact that Satan was a jinni which made him disobey God's command to prostrate. If Satan had been from amongst the angels who are compelled to obey God, he would have had no option but to obey God's command and prostrate himself to Adam peace and blessings be upon him. But since he was of the jinn, who have the free choice to obey or disobey, he was able to disobey the command to prostrate. And so to those who derive from the noble verse telling us that Satan was a jinn, the understanding that he was not included in the command to prostrate, we say: The True Lord told us of what species Satan was so that we would understand how he was able to disobey. He did so because of the free will that was given to jinn and mankind in the life of this world alone. If God had wanted to compel Satan to obey, he would not have been able to disobey. But his disobedience occurred because he was given free will, and this is something that we must understand. And so God answered anyone of those who might imagine that Satan was not included in the command to prostrate because he was a jinn by saying that He did ask Satan about what has kept him from prostrating himself when He commanded him (*al-A'raf*: 12).

So Satan's disbelief, and his being cast into Hell for all eternity, was caused by his rejecting the command of the Commander, by boasting that he would not prostrate himself before one whom God has created of clay (*al-Isra'*: 61).

The fact that Satan was in the company of those higher than him, namely the angels, made it even more right that he should have prostrated. If the command was given to the higher creatures to prostrate, it must also have applied to the lower. As has been narrated in traditions, Satan was known as the 'peacock' of the angels, and he had a proud position amongst them; and it was this pride and arrogance which led him to disobedience; because Satan



was created with free will, he was proud of his choice to obey God before his delusion led him to disbelief and disobedience. And so the command from God to Satan to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him* had hardly been issued before Satan proudly refused to obey. He could not bring himself to obey God, and so the disobedience of Satan was the gravest of sins because he rejected the command of the Commander, and imagined he was better than Adam *peace be upon him*, and did not adhere to the obedience of God; and his delusion led him from one sin to another, and therefore God expelled him from His mercy, and made him accursed; and when Satan saw that he had been expelled from God's mercy, he asked God to reprieve him until the Day of Judgement, and he swore by God's might that he would lead the sons of Adam *peace be upon him* astray; and he specified the ways in which he would come to misguide men, saying that he will surely come upon them from before, and from behind, and from their right hand, and from their left, and God will not find the greater part of them to be thankful (*al-A'raf*: 17).

Notice that the directions for a person are six: front, rear, left, right, above, and below; yet Satan here only mentioned four of these. As for the other two, namely above and below, Satan cannot approach them because below is the place where one prostrates and submits to God, and above is the place where prayers and supplications rise, and so Satan cannot approach these two directions.

And so we see that Satan did not only refuse to prostrate himself, but actually rejected the command entirely, which spelled the beginning of disbelief; and then after that, he sank deeper into his transgression and vowed to lead Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny away from the way of God.

وَقُلْنَا يَتَادِمُ أَسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ  
شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

**We said, 'Adam, live with your wife in this garden. Both of you eat freely there as you will, but do not go near this tree, or you will both become wrongdoers' [35] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 35)**

After God created Adam *peace be upon him* and commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before him, and the disbelief and disobedience of Satan

came out, God *the Exalted* wanted Adam *peace be upon him* to start practising his intended task on earth. But before he went about this task, God gave him a practical experience of the teachings mankind would follow on earth, and the tempting to which Satan would subject them. Out of His mercy, God did not want Adam *peace be upon him* to begin his mission on earth with a merely theoretical basis because there is a difference between theory and practice.

Something might be said to which you agree with in theory, but when the practice comes you do nothing. So the time Adam *peace be upon him* spent living in paradise was a practical exercise in the ways of worship so that when he went to do his mission, he would not go with a theoretical basis. But rather with a practical experience based on commandments and prohibitions, where he would be exposed to the lawful and the unlawful, and to the temptations of Satan and sin. Then after that, he would have to learn, after committing a wrong deed, how to repent and seek forgiveness of God, and return to Him so that the children of Adam *peace be upon him* would know that God never closes His door to the sinner, but rather, opens for him the door of repentance. Thus God made Adam *peace be upon him* dwell in the Garden. Some people think that this means the garden of paradise which the believers will enter in the Hereafter and some of them say that if Adam *peace be upon him* had not disobeyed; we would have been living in paradise. We say to them: No, Paradise of the Hereafter is for the Hereafter alone, and no one can live there for a time and then be cast out; rather, it is, as God has told us, the Eternal Paradise, and all who enter it live in eternal bliss.

So which garden did Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* live in? They lived in the garden of experience, or the place in which the implementation of God's teachings would be first experienced. When we read the Noble Quran, we find that the True Lord uses the word *janna* (which can mean both 'paradise' and 'garden') to describe the gardens of this earth. The Arabic word *janna* is derived from the word for a veil because it contains lush trees which cover those who live in them; so no one can see them, and they contain fruits which allow life to be preserved without one needing to leave them. We find that in the Noble Quran, the word *janna* is used in the narrative of the owners of a certain 'garden,' who were subjected to a test by God, when they vowed to

collect the fruits of their garden on the morning assuredly, making no exceptions (*al-Qalam*: 17-18). This is the story of the brothers who owned a garden but refused to honour the rights of the poor, the needy, and the orphans, and so God did away with all the fruit of the garden, and burned down its trees. And in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, we find the same word used in the story of the owner of two ‘gardens,’ as God gives the example of the two men, no one of whom God had bestowed two gardens of grape vines, and surrounded both with palm trees, and placed corn fields between them (*al-Kahf*: 32). This is the story of a man to whom God gave two gardens, but instead of offering thanks to God for His blessings, he disbelieved and doubted the reality of the Resurrection and the Reckoning.

And in the chapter of *Saba*’, we see that the same word is used in the verses where God mentions the people of Sheba whom God guided and showed the straight path, yet they preferred disbelief. He *the Exalted* says that certainly there was a sign for Sheba in their abode: two gardens on the right and the left; and that He called on them to eat of what their Lord has provided for them and give thanks to Him for a good land and a Forgiving Lord. However, they turned aside and so God sent upon them an overwhelming flood, and, in place of their two gardens, God gave them two gardens yielding bitter fruit and tamarisks, and some few jujube trees; thus God requited them for their disbelief; and He does not punish except the ungrateful (*Saba*’: 15-17).

And so we see that in the Noble Quran the True Lord uses the word *janna* to mean an earthly garden, not only the garden of paradise. And so when God said to Adam *peace be upon him*, ‘O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the Garden,’ this does not mean the garden of paradise, but rather, the garden in which the first practical experience of following God’s teachings would take place. And so we do not need to ask how Satan managed to enter paradise after he had disbelieved and disobeyed since it was not the garden of paradise at all. You must be well aware of this so that it cannot be said that it was Adam’s disobedience that got mankind expelled from paradise because before God created Adam *peace be upon him*, He declared what his role would be saying to the angels, ‘I am going to place on earth a *khalifa*.’

So Adam *peace be upon him* was created for vicegerency on earth, and those of his progeny who are upright will enter Eternal Paradise in the Hereafter; and those who enter Eternal Paradise will live forever in bliss.

The True Lord says, ‘...and eat plentifully therefrom wherever you may wish...;’ so God supplied the garden in which Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* were to live with everything they needed to live, just as He created all the blessings which would preserve the continuation of the life of Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny on earth before human life on earth began. God gives with Lordly provision, for He is the Creator, and He is the One who brings things into being from naught, and so He has provided for His creatures that which will allow their life on earth to continue, such as water, air, food, and blessings which cannot be enumerated. And so it is as though God supplied the garden in which Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife would live with everything needed to preserve their lives, before they began to live there, just as He supplied the earth with all the means for human life before Adam *peace be upon him* came down to it. And so God said, ‘O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the garden.’

This was a period of training for the implementation of God’s teachings. A dwelling is a place where one can relax, and always return to. You might travel for periods of time, but each place you pass through during your journey is not considered to be your dwelling until you return home; and this is the meaning of a dwelling. A man works and toils in this life, and wherever he goes, he returns once more to the place where he dwells so he can find repose.

And God’s instruction ‘...but do not come near this tree...’ was a complement to His teachings, which are comprised of commandments and prohibitions, ‘dos’ and ‘do nots’: ‘dwell you and your wife in the garden’ is a command, and ‘...eat plentifully therefrom wherever you may wish’ is a command, and ‘...but do not come near this tree’ is a prohibition. And so these were the first teachings which taught mankind to obey God and refrain from what He forbids; and every Divine Message and teaching of God in this world are composed of commands and prohibitions, of ‘dos’ and ‘do nots.’

And so the True Lord provided for Adam *peace be upon him* that which would sustain his life, and not only sustain his life, as He also said ‘plentifully,’

i.e. permissibly, with no effort required, and abundantly without any difficulty. We also notice that lawful things were many, and unlawful things few; all the food and drink in the garden were lawful for Adam *peace be upon him* with one exception: a single tree amongst the thousands of trees in the garden – only a single tree was forbidden.

If we consider the teachings sent from heaven to earth, we find that God made lawful innumerable blessings, and only prohibited very few things. In comparison with all the blessings on earth, the things which God has made unlawful for us are few indeed, just as in the garden where only a single tree was forbidden to Adam *peace be upon him*, whilst many things were allowed.

If we consider the specific wording of the verse, we find that when God said, ‘And We said, “O Adam...,”’ the pronoun ‘We’ is used here, which is a plural pronoun. Yet God is One and Unique; so this is called the ‘plural of majesty’ or the ‘plural of magnificence.’ And so the True Lord uses the plural of majesty and magnificence because a single action requires many different attributes to be completed. If you want to do something, it requires that you have power, knowledge, ability and wisdom; and many attributes are necessary to complete an action.

On the other hand, when the True Lord makes a declaration of His Oneness, He says, ‘I am One’, and not ‘We are God;’ this is because He *the Exalted* is speaking of His Oneness, and when the Oneness of God is invoked, the singular pronoun is used, for He is One and Unique. But where majestic actions are concerned, He uses the plural of majesty and magnificence. So when God speaks about the building and the expanding of the heaven, He uses the plural pronoun ‘We’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 47).

When God wanted to praise Abraham *peace be upon him*, He said that Abraham was a nation (*an-Nahl*: 120). What does ‘nation’ mean in this context? It means that he embodied all the attributes of goodness which ordinarily are not found in a single man, but only in a whole nation. All the attributes of goodness are found in a nation, so one man is especially honest, and another is especially brave, and another is especially forbearing. And so the True Lord wanted to say that Abraham *peace be upon him* was a nation, i.e. he embodied all the attributes of goodness that could be only in a nation or a large group of people.

Concerning God's words 'And We said: 'O Adam...', Adam is the name of the first man created by God; 'dwell,' and dwelling require two components: peace and tranquillity. This is the meaning of dwelling. It is to attain peace and tranquillity, and the word *sakan* meaning 'comfort,' derived from the word *maskan*, meaning 'dwelling-place,' was used to mean 'spouse.' If the place where you live is bereft of one of these two components, namely peace and tranquillity, then it cannot be termed a dwelling-place. So spouses are called *sakan* ('comfort'); and a derivative of this word is to be found in the verse where God states that it is among His signs that He has created for mankind mates out of their own kind so that they may dwell (find comfort) with them, and He has engendered love and tenderness between them...' (*ar-Rum*: 21). This is because peace, compassion, and goodness are all attributes of a good spouse.

We find the same word used in God's command to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray for the believers as his prayer is surely a *sakan* (relief and comfort) to them (*at-Tawba*: 103). It is a source of ease, tranquillity, and mercy. A person likes life in his house to be a source of relief for him from the hardships of work and the clamour of life. The True Lord commanded Adam: '...dwell you and your wife....' He could have simply said, 'dwell with your wife,' because the pronoun is always implicit in an imperative verb; but He *the Exalted* said, '...dwell you and your wife....' So do not think that the pronoun 'you' is the subject of the verb 'dwell;' rather, the pronoun comes to separate the word 'dwell' from the word 'your wife' so that the noun would not be conjoined to the verb.

We should keep in mind that the word *zawj* ('spouse') is used for an individual that is accompanied by his counterpart/equal, and so the word here in Arabic did not have a feminine ending (for 'wife'); this is because as far as commandments from God are concerned, men and women are equal in accountability: God describes the people who will enter paradise as whoever does good, whether male or female (*Ghafir*: 40). So they are equal in this respect.

What did God provide for Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife in this garden? He *the Exalted* guaranteed for Adam that in it, he shall not suffer from hunger or nakedness; he shall also neither suffer from thirst nor from the heat of the sun (*Ta Ha*: 118-119).

These are the elements of life which God provided for Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife in the garden of the first experience of practical religious life. And so we see, by the attributes of this garden that God conveys to us, that it was not the garden of paradise because first of all there were religious responsibilities and accountability in it, as God commanded Adam: ‘...do not come near this tree...,’ and there are no religious responsibilities or accountability in the garden of paradise. The True Lord allowed Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* to eat whatever they liked in the garden, and the garden contained many different kinds of food, and so He said, ‘...wherever you may wish....’

You cannot offer a person only one or two dishes and then say, ‘Eat whatever you like,’ because he only has a slender choice before him. Moreover, a limited number of choices in food makes the soul grow bored, and so there must have been many and varied choices in the garden.

Then came the prohibition with God’s words ‘...but do not come near this tree...,’ i.e. do not go near the place where it stands. But why did the True Lord not say, ‘Do not eat from this tree’? It is because God, out of mercy for Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife did not want them to come close to the lure of sin. If He had said, ‘Do not eat from this tree,’ it would have been permissible for them to go near it, and for it to attract them with its beautiful appearance, and for them to draw near to its fruits, the sweet scent and attractive colour which would attract them, and so they would be very likely to succumb to temptation and stretch their hands out to the tree and eat its fruit.

But God knew that if something is made unlawful to the human soul, it will be easier for humans to avoid it if they are not allowed to go anywhere near it, so as to avoid its attraction. In the same vein, when God made wine unlawful, He did not merely forbid us from drinking it – whilst making it permissible for us to sit with those who drink it, or to trade in it, since these things are a temptation to drinking it; rather, He commanded the believers to stay away from intoxicants, as well as games of chance, idolatrous practices, and the divining of the future by drawing arrows, which are all but an abomination of Satan's work; so they should avoid them, that they may attain success (*al-Ma’ida*: 90).

This noble text requires that we stay clear of all places where wine is kept; we do not sit with those who are drinking it, and we do not trade in it so that we can keep away from sin. If you see a place where there is wine, steer well clear of it immediately, as avoiding seeing wine and those who drink it will save you from being tempted into drinking it yourself. So when the True Lord prohibits things, He uses the terms 'do not come near,' and 'avoid', i.e. do not go anywhere near it because if it is nowhere near you, it will not cross your mind to commit it. And so the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said: The lawful is clear, and the unlawful is clear; and between them are doubtful matters, unknown to many people. And so those who stay clear of doubtful matters thereby free themselves of suspicion regarding their religion and their reputation; and those who fall into doubtful matters fall into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who tends his flock near the reserved pasture, and is on the brink of entering it. Every king has his reserved land, and the reserved land of God is all He has prohibited.<sup>(1)</sup>

Some people drink wine and say that there is no clear text which prohibits it because it is not found next to the term 'made unlawful.' To this, we say: The word 'avoid' is even stricter than a plain prohibition. When God commands us to avoid the uncleanness of idols and to avoid false words (*al-Hajj*: 30), this means 'Do not even look at idols,' and similarly the shunning of wine means that you should not even look at it.

People differ as to what kind of tree this was. Was it an apple tree, or a fig tree, or a grape vine, or something else? We say: This is not the point, but rather the point is that it was forbidden; for the teachings of God make some things lawful and other things unlawful.

Then, God says, '...lest you become of the wrongdoers.' *Zhulm* (Wrongdoing) means to infringe upon and threaten the rights of others. A wrongdoer is someone who takes more than he has a right to take. Wrongdoing requires a wrongdoer, a person who is wronged, and the thing which is the object of the wrongdoing. Any right – whether material or moral – which a person infringes without the right to do so is an instance of wrongdoing. A person can even wrong himself, as God

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(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim* on the authority of *An-Nu'man ibn Bashir*



praises those who, when they have committed a shameful deed or committed wrong against themselves, remember God... (*Al- 'Imran*: 135).

How can someone wrong himself? A person might wrong someone else, but he will never willingly wrong himself because he wants to give himself all he desires. Yet this is in fact the very essence of wrongdoing because he gives himself an immediate pleasure in this worldly life which might last a few hours; but he denies himself eternal bliss in the Hereafter. So he has wronged himself by earning a severe torment in the Hereafter instead of a bliss which never ends. There are those who exchange their religion for their worldly life, but the most unjust of people are those who exchange their religion for the worldly lives of others: they give false testimony to please a superior, or win themselves a position, or commit a crime. And so God's words '...lest you become of the wrongdoers' are addressed to those who wrong themselves by disobeying God.

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ  
لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٣٦﴾

**But Satan made them slip, and removed them from the state they were in. We said, 'Get out, all of you! You are each other's enemy. On earth you will have a place to stay and livelihood for a time' [36] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 36)**

After God made Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife to dwell in the garden, and told them what was lawful and what was unlawful, Satan began his own mission of intense hatred for Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny. The True Lord says: 'But Satan made them slip...', i.e. Satan went right about his mission and caused them to slip meaning to fall down. How could this have happened after God counselled Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife not to follow Satan, and told them that he was truly an enemy to them, so they should not let him drive them from the garden, and he (Adam) will become unhappy (*Ta Ha*: 117)?

This enmity had already been announced. Let us suppose that it had not been announced; did Adam *peace be upon him* not bear witness when Satan disobeyed God's commandment to prostrate himself? Did he not know how

Satan held himself above him when he said that he is better than Adam *peace be upon him* (*Sad*: 76), and he wondered whether he should prostrate himself before one whom God has created of clay (*al-Isra'*: 61)? All of this should have made it clear to Adam *peace be upon him* that Satan would never bring him any kind of good.

And the True Lord did not deem sufficient the natural evidence that arose when Satan refused to prostrate, but rather, He told Adam *peace be upon him* outright that Satan was an enemy to him and his wife. The True Lord said, 'But Satan made them slip from it, and caused their banishment from the place in which they were.' What state did he take them out of? It was a life spent freely choosing from the bounties of the garden, and from the peace and tranquillity of having their provision come to them without any effort on their part. That was why the True Lord counselled Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife not to let Satan drive them from the garden, and he (Adam) will become unhappy (*Ta Ha*: 117).

We might ask here why He did not say that they (Adam and his wife) will both (in the dual form, referring to two people) become unhappy. This is an allusion from the True Lord to the roles of men and women in life. The role of the woman is to be a source of comfort for her husband when he comes home, and take away his tiredness and unhappiness. As for the role of the man, it is to work in order to provide food and shelter for his wife and their children; and work is all toil and action. And so the True Lord indicates to us that the role of the man is to toil and strive, and then return to his family and find comfort, peace, and tranquillity.

If this is the reality of things, why have people tried to change this natural order? We say that people are only making problems for themselves and for all involved. A woman's work outside her home is an extra burden for her because her role is in the home, and she has no time for anything else. And so if she works, she does so at the expense of her children, her home, and her husband; and this is what brings unhappiness to society. Children are neglected, and the husband retreats to a place where he finds a woman to give him the comfort he needs, and society becomes chaotic.

Adam *peace be upon him* should have been aware that Satan considered him to be the reason for his being expelled from God's Mercy, and so he should not

have accepted any advice from him, or anything he said at all, and should have been careful. How did Satan cause Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife to slip? God has explained this to us, not here in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, but in another place of the Quran, where He tells that Satan whispered to them to show them their nakedness which had been hidden from them both. And he said to them that their Lord has forbidden them this tree merely to prevent them from becoming angels, or becoming immortals (*al-A'raf*: 20).

So Satan lied and said that anyone who ate from this tree would become an angel, and would live forever without dying. The whispers of Satan are only lies by which he makes sin seem alluring. Satan does not care what sin you commit; he only wants that you sin in any way. The soul, however, when it incites you to sin, wants something specific. This is the difference between the incitement of Satan and that of the soul. Satan wants you to sin no matter what kind of sin you commit, and so if you refuse to do one thing, he will try and make you do another. And so he proposed to Adam *peace be upon him* to lead him to the tree of eternal life, and to a kingdom that will never decay (*Ta Ha*: 120). When this trick did not work, he told Adam that that their Lord has forbidden them this tree merely to prevent them from becoming angels or becoming immortals (*al-A'raf*: 20). It escaped the attention of Adam *peace be upon him* that if this was indeed true, Satan himself would have eaten from the tree instead of asking the True Lord to give him reprieve until the Day of Judgement.

What was it that made Adam *peace be upon him* fall into disobedience? It was heedlessness or forgetfulness as the True Lord tells us that He gave Adam a commandment before, but he forgot; and God found no firmness of purpose in him (*Ta Ha*: 115). But is forgetfulness to be considered disobedience? This is what can be gathered from the statement of God that Adam disobeyed his Lord, and thus he went astray (*Ta Ha*: 121). Yes, forgetfulness indeed was considered an act of disobedience for the past nations. This is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My community are excused for their mistakes, and forgetfulness, and for what they are coerced to do.'<sup>(1)</sup> And 'forgot' and 'disobeyed' meant the same thing.

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(1) Narrated by At-Tabarani on the authority of Thawban

Considering God's order to Adam, his wife, and to Satan to go down to earth, where anyone of them will be an enemy to the other, and where they shall have their dwelling, and their provision for a time (*al-A'raf*: 24), we say that this going down was the beginning of mankind's descent to earth in order to fulfil their role in the world. Since God has specified that on earth they shall have their dwelling, and their provision for a time, this means that man's life would be limited in its time and its significance.

As for those who say there must be a 'Saviour' who sacrifices himself for the world by crucifixion or the like because of the sin Adam *peace be upon him* had committed, we say to them: You understand nothing of God because this story is about a mistake which was made and then atoned for, and there is a difference between a mistake and a sin. A mistake is corrected, whilst a sin is punished.

Adam *peace be upon him* made a mistake, and his Lord corrected it, and he received from his Lord words of guidance, and repented to Him. So there was no sin after God taught him to repent, and he repented to God; moreover, what did Adam *peace be upon him* do that would necessitate the whole world being redeemed from his sin? He ate from a tree. Do the sins of the whole world merely amount to eating? What about the one who first committed murder and spilt blood, and committed adultery, and rape, and backbiting, and tale-bearing?

If what they said were true, this would mean that there would be no more sins on earth after the Saviour had redeemed the world from its sin. But sin remains. And who said that sins are inherited, so that the whole world would inherit the sin of Adam *peace be upon him*? God affirms that no burdened soul should be made to bear the burden of another (*Fatir*: 18).

As for God's words: 'And we said, 'Get you down, the one of you an enemy to the other,' the enmity here is between Satan and mankind, and also between the human devils and the believers, an enmity which demands from us action and attention. The orientalist seek to attack Islam, but their attacks serve to spur us into research and study so that we can respond to them. And Satan's hosts from among mankind oppose the believers, and their opposition gives us cause to be careful so that we do not slip down or drop our guard. As long as you have an enemy, you will try and gain the upper hand over him in any way you can.

Perhaps it is the case that human civilisation advances at no quicker pace than when it is at war. At wartime, each side attempts to outdo the other, and to amass the power needed to outclass the other scientifically. These inventions and innovations may be designed for destruction and slaughter, but once the war is over these same inventions serve in leading to the progress of mankind on earth.

The splitting of the atom was done in times of war, and the rockets which carried man to the moon were developed as a consequence of war activity. And the many scientific advances made by the USA and the Soviet Union were based on the conflict between the two camps.

As to God's words 'Get you down, the one of you an enemy to the other...': To go down might mean to go from a high place to a low place, or it might be used in a metaphorical sense, as when you say that someone has 'gone down in my estimation' since he did such-and-such; in this case, he did not literally go down from a high place to a lower one. Rather, he went down morally. Distances do not always imply physical nearness or farness. A person might sit to your side, but you are far away from him emotionally that you do not even notice him. Or, a person might be hundreds of miles away from you, but might be closer to your heart than the one sitting next to you. So, whether this going down was physical or metaphorical, it took place in order that Adam *peace be upon him* could fulfil his purpose on earth; and the enmity between faith and disbelief would be continuous.

And so, after Adam's act of disobedience, he and Eve *peace be upon them* went down from the garden to go about their lives on earth; and God's words 'Get you down, ...' meant that Adam, Eve *peace be upon them*, and Satan went down to earth after the first experience of faith was completed.

God had given Adam *peace be upon him* a practical demonstration of how Satan was an enemy to him, and wanted no good to come to him, and that he lied in all that he promised to mankind. And God specified that the life of this world is a limited life: its possibilities are limited, and its delights are limited as He said that on earth, they shall have their dwelling and their provision for a time (*al-A'raf*: 24). That is, no one will remain on earth except for as long as God has destined him to live; and then he will die. In this way, God warned

Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny not to take life as their ultimate goal, since its delights are few and its time is short.

فَنَلَقَىٰ آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۖ كَلِمَتٍ فَنَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٣٧﴾

**Then Adam received some words from his Lord and He accepted his repentance: He is the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful [37] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 37)**

Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* went down to earth in order to fulfil their mission in the universe; and before this mission could begin, God made them go through a practical experience of the implementation of His teachings and the temptation of Satan, and warned them that Satan was an enemy to them. After this disobedience occurred, it was necessary that God establish repentance as a mercy to His servants. This is because the stipulation of repentance (in the Shari'a) is not only a mercy to the sinner, but is also a mercy for the whole society. If a person sinned, and then knew that there was no way for him to repent, and that he was certainly destined to spend eternity in Hell, he would continue with his sinful ways; as long as he has no hope of salvation from the suffering of the Hereafter, he will continue to sin because there is no hope of redemption or repentance.

Who will suffer from all this? It will be the community in which this sinner lives; and the believers will suffer the most because they are people of goodness and forbearance, and because God commanded them to be forgiving and relenting, as He admonishes those among the believers who have been graced with favour and abundance ever to vow against helping the erring ones amongst their kin, the needy, and those who have migrated in the Way of God; but let them pardon and forbear. Then God puts forth to them the question as to whether they do not desire that God should forgive them, and God is Forgiving, Merciful (*an-Nur*: 22).

And God also teaches the believers that to remit is closer to righteousness, and not to forget favours amongst themselves (*al-Baqara*: 237). There are many verses in the Noble Quran that exhort the believers to be forgiving; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My Lord counselled me with nine things with which I now counsel you: He counselled me with

sincerity in private and in public, and with thrift in richness and in poverty, and that I forgive those who wrong me, and give to those who deny me, and make up with those who break from me, and to fill my silence with meditation, and my speech with remembrance, and my observation with reflection.’<sup>(1)</sup>

If there were no possibility of repentance, the entire society would suffer, especially the believers, who have been commanded to repay enmity with pardon, and wrongdoing with forgiveness. And so God’s establishment of repentance was a mercy for all mankind.

And God established repentance first of all; following this, the sinner repents; and then God either accepts or rejects his repentance according to His will, as He says that He turned in mercy to those who have erred so that they may repent; for, surely, God is the One to accept repentance, the Merciful (*at-Tawba*: 118).

So Adam *peace be upon him* received some words from his Lord, who then accepted his repentance. Was there any sin left after Adam *peace be upon him* has repented and God accepted his repentance? Some people say, ‘Adam *peace be upon him* sinned, and God accepted his repentance; yet when Satan sinned, God put him in Hell forever. We say: You have not understood what Adam *peace be upon him* did. He ate from the forbidden tree, and when he realised his mistake, he did not persist in his disobedience, and he did not reject the command of The Commander, but rather, he said, ‘O Lord, Your commands and Your teachings are the truth; but I could not help myself, so forgive me!’

So Adam *peace be upon him* confessed his guilt, and admitted his weakness, and acknowledged that the teachings of God were right, and sought from God the chance to repent. Satan, on the other hand, arrogantly rejected the command of the Commander, and said, that he was better than Adam as he was created from fire whereas Adam was created from clay (*al-A‘raf*: 12), and boastfully announced that he would lie in ambush for them all along God’s straight Path (*al-A‘raf*: 16), and swore by God’s might that he will most certainly beguile the children of Adam all into grievous error (*Sad*: 82), and vowed that he will destroy Adam’s offspring except a few (*al-Isra’*: 62). So Satan rejected the command of the Commander, and refused to admit his guilt, or say, ‘Lord,

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(1) Narrated by Razin

my weakness overcame me, and You are the True Lord, and Your word is the Truth,' rather, he rejected the command of God, and stubbornly resisted, and said, 'I will do this, and I will do that;' and this amounts to disbelief in God.

Beware of rejecting the command of God. If you do not perform prayers, do not say, 'What is the use of praying?' And if you do not pay the poor-due, do not say, 'The poor-due is nothing but an oppressive burden on those who pay it;' and if you do not implement God's Law, do not say, 'This law is no longer suitable for these modern times.' If you do this, you will be falling into disbelief (God forbid). Rather, say: 'O Lord, the obligation of prayer is right, and the obligation of the poor-due is right, and to follow the Sacred Law is right; but I cannot help myself, so forgive my weakness, O Lord of the worlds!' If you do this, you are only a sinner.

The difference between the sin of Adam *peace be upon him* and the sin of Satan is that Adam *peace be upon him* admitted his sin and his guilt, whilst Satan rejected the command of the Commander; so Adam *peace be upon him* was guilty of disobedience, whilst Satan was guilty of disbelief (we seek refuge in God from this).

The True Lord says: 'Then Adam received words from his Lord, so He turned to him in forgiveness....' Scholars have tried to establish what exactly those words were. Were they the words Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife uttered in praying to their Lord that they have sinned against themselves – and unless He grants them forgiveness and bestow His mercy upon them, they shall most certainly be lost (*al-A'raf*: 23)? This noble verse shows us that the sin of Adam *peace be upon him* was not a sin of arrogance, but rather was a sin caused by heedlessness. The sin of Satan, however, was caused by his arrogance in holding himself above the command of God. But when Adam *peace be upon him* sinned, he was contrite afterwards.

And he said, 'Lord, the command You gave me not to go near the tree was right, but I could not help myself.' So Adam *peace be upon him* acknowledged God's right to legislate, whilst Satan rejected it outright by boasting that he would not prostrate himself before one whom God has created of clay (*al-Isra'*: 61).

The words which Adam *peace be upon him* received from his Lord might have been 'Our Lord! We have been unjust to ourselves, and if You do not



forgive us and have mercy upon us, we shall certainly be among the losers' (*al-A'raf*: 23); or it might have been, 'O God, there is no god but You! Glory be to You, and praise be to You! I have wronged myself greatly, so forgive me, O Best of Forgivers;' or it might have been, 'Accept my repentance O Best of those who forgive,' or it might have been, 'Glory be to God, praise be to God, there is no god but God.' The important thing is that God revealed some words to Adam *peace be upon him* by which he could draw near to Him, whether the words were those of this noble verse, or something else.

If we consider how God taught Adam *peace be upon him* these words with which to repent, we find a very important principle for the life of society. As we said, if God had not established repentance, and had not given us the glad tidings that He would accept it, everyone who committed a single sin would never stop sinning thereafter, and the whole world would suffer.

God created us with free will, and did not create us in a state of compulsion. Compulsion would have affirmed His attribute of omnipotence, but God wanted us to come to Him out of love, not under compulsion, and so He created us with free will, and gave us the power to either sin or obey. As long as there is free will, mankind has the choice to do either this, or that.

God did not create human beings who always choose what is good, and other human beings who always choose what is evil; there are good people who sometimes fall into evil, and there are evil people who sometimes do good. God's servants are not created in such a way that they will always choose what is good, or always choose what is evil. And so sometimes we forget ourselves, or slip up, or fall into sin; and since His servants are liable to falling into sin, God established repentance for them so that no one would despair of God's mercy, but rather, would repent and come back to God. There is an aphorism which goes: 'It may be that a sin which results in humility and contrition is better than a good deed which results in pride and arrogance.'

And so when Adam *peace be upon him* went down to begin his mission in life, he carried no sin on his shoulders; he made a mistake, and God taught him the words of repentance, and so he repented and God accepted his repentance.

As to God's words '...surely He is the One to forgive the repentant, the Merciful;' the word *Tawwab* ('Acceptor of Repentance') used in the verse

implies that God will not punish His servants for a single sin; for even if God relented for a single sin from every one of His servants, He would be called *Tawwab*. Intensive adjectives in Arabic are used for two reasons: firstly, if an action is repeated several times by a small number of people or by one person; secondly, if the action is performed a single time by a large number of people.

If you call someone '*akul*' (one who eats a lot), for example, he might deserve this adjective because he eats a large amount of food in his meal; he does not eat more frequently, or have more meals, than people normally do, but rather, he eats a large amount of food, and so we call him *akul*: perhaps he eats ten slices of bread for breakfast, and the same for lunch, and the same for dinner. A person also might be *akul* if he keeps repeating the action: so he eats a normal amount of food, but eats fifteen times a day, for example. So God is *Tawwab* because His creatures are many; so if all of them were to sin just once, the number of sins that God would forgive for them would be gargantuan. And also, if one person sins many times a day, God would be *Tawwab* for him as well, if he repents and turns to Him. So sometimes an intensive adjective refers to an action where the one who performs it is a single person; and sometimes it is used for an action performed by many people.

So since Adam *peace be upon him* sinned a single time, this might seem to suggest that God would be *Ta'ib* ('acceptor of repentance' but without the intensive adjective) to him; yet the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him* who would come after him would be great in number, and so the intensive adjective refers to this number.

God says: '...surely He is the One to forgive the repentant, the Merciful.' Once a woman came to our master 'Umar *God be pleased with him* screaming and crying because her son had been caught stealing. 'My son only stole this one time,' she said to 'Umar *God be pleased with him*. He replied, 'God is too Merciful with His servant to allow him to be punished for a first offence; he must have stolen before.' And I challenge anyone to find a criminal who is truly caught out in the first time.

So the word *Tawwab* indicates that he will only be caught the third or fourth time because God conceals His servants once or twice, but if they go

on, and increase or persist in their sins, God stops them at a certain point. This is the meaning of *Tawwab*.

So the True Lord is *Tawwab* out of His mercy because there are those who forgive you, and keep on reminding you of their forgiveness, until you say, ‘If only you would punish me, and stop reminding me of your forgiveness all the time!’ But the True Lord is the Acceptor of Repentance, and the Dispenser of Mercy; so He accepts the servant’s repentance, and has mercy on him, and erases his sin.

قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ  
تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

**We said, ‘Get out, all of you! But when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance nor will they grieve [38] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 38)**

In this verse, the True Lord says, ‘We said, ‘Get you down from it, all together...’ using the plural form, whilst in the chapter of *Ta Ha*, He *the Exalted* gives the command of going down to two parties, ordering them to go down altogether (*Ta Ha*: 123), using the dual form of the verb. When God addressed the plural, He was speaking to all the descendents of Adam *peace be upon him* who were concealed in his loins, and He commanded them all to go down, Adam, Eve *peace be upon them*, and their descendants. This is because all of us, until the end of time, have a part of Adam *peace be upon him* inside us, and so we must all heed the word of the True Lord when He told us that He had created us, then shaped us, and then commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam (*al-A’raf*: 11).

Notice here that God is addressing a plural; the True Lord did not address a single individual in this verse saying that He created him, and shaped him, and then commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam. It is as though the True Lord wanted to show us that at the moment of creation, all the descendants of Adam *peace be upon him* were stored in his loins, and that God created them all at once, and shaped them all at once, and then commanded

the angels to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*. Were we all present at this time? Yes, we were present within Adam *peace be upon him*; and so the True Lord said, '...Get you down from it, all together...', so that we would know that this was addressed to Adam *peace be upon him* and all his descendants until the Day of Resurrection.

When God addresses the command of going down to two, it is because this was the beginning of Adam's bearing responsibility; at this moment, the moment when Adam *peace be upon him* went down to earth, God's teachings would begin their function in life. As long as there are teachings, and an individual adherence to them, responsibility must also be individual, and so there is no place for plurality here.

When the True Lord issues the command of going down in the dual verb form, we know that it is addressed to two parties; however, the next word, *jami'an*, ('altogether'), refers to a number of more than two. We say that as long as this spelled the beginning of responsibility, there were two parties which would face one another, namely Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* on one side, and Satan on the other. So they were three in number, but in this battle of faith, they represented only two sides: Adam, Eve *peace be upon them* and their descendants on one side, and Satan on the other side. So it is as though God wanted to make us see that this descent was connected to the teachings of God and their implementation on earth; and in relation to these teachings, Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* were set on obedience whilst Satan was set on leading them into disobedience.

When God says, '...and surely there shall come to you guidance from me,...' we can observe that after Adam *peace be upon him* went through his initial experience and fell into sin, God taught him words of repentance, and instructed him that whenever he happens to be forgetful, he should afterwards repent, and God would accept his repentance.

So the True Lord wanted Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* to live on earth, and begin their mission in life; and God would guide them to what was good which is implicit in His words '...and surely there shall come to you guidance from me....' Guidance has two meanings: One kind of guidance is direction to what is good, or direction to the way that leads to goodness, and

the other kind of guidance is the granting of assistance in faith and helping it to grow. God says that as for those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and grants them their piety and guarding against evil (*Muhammad*: 17).

In the noble verse we are currently examining, ‘guidance’ comes in the sense of direction to the way of goodness, and the True Lord then says, ‘...whoever shall follow my guidance, on them shall come no fear, neither shall they be grieved.’ What is fear, and what is grief? Fear is to expect a coming evil which you have no way of repelling, and so you are frightened of it; grief is to lose something you love and yearn for. In this verse, the gist of what the True Lord is saying is: Whoever follows the way of faith I have guided them to and revealed in My teachings, need have no fear, and no good will be lost to them causing them to grieve. This is because all good is contained within God’s teachings, and the one who follows these teachings need not fear that anything bad will ever happen.

This shows an important fact related to society. If someone has committed no crime, will he have any reason to fear? No. But as for the one who has committed a crime, you will find him always fearful, and scared that he will be found out, and that something bad will happen to him which he cannot repel.

An upright person does not live in fear because fear is of two kinds: They are either fear caused by a sin which I have committed – and the upright person does not do anything which he fears being discovered, or fear of something which I have no power over which my Creator sends to me. This must be for a good and wise reason which I might know, or might not know; yet I accept it. The one who follows God’s guidance has no need to fear or grieve because he has not sinned, or broken the law, or cheated anyone, or concealed a crime, and so he fears nothing; and if an unexpected accident comes his way, his heart is in a tranquil state. Those who follow God do not fear, and they are not feared for.

And God’s statement ‘...and neither shall they be grieved’ signifies that the one who lives in obedience to God’s teachings has nothing to make him grieve because his will is in submission to the will of his Creator, and so everything that comes to him from God is good even if on the surface, it

appears not to be. His faculties are all in harmony, and he is at peace with the universe and with himself. All the universe hears from him is praise, obedience, and prayer; and all of this is mercy, and so he is at peace with himself, at peace with his Lord, and at peace with society.

Society is always pleased by the believer who spreads no corruption in the land, but rather, only does good. The believer is a breeze of beauty which blows through the world, and a blessing of goodness and contentment for all people. As long as a person is like this, he will never lack anything that makes him happy; and if God destines that accidents happen to him, he receives them with nothing but gratitude, even if he does not know the wisdom behind them; and be careful not to object to anything that God decrees. And so a believer says, 'I praise you, my Lord, for all your decrees, and all your predestinations, a praise of contentment with Your judgement, and belief in Your wisdom.'

A person reacts to the things that happen to him, but there is a difference between reacting to events alone, and reacting to events keeping in mind the wisdom of Him who caused them to happen. And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this reality with great precision when he said, 'The eye weeps, and the heart grieves; but we say nothing save that which pleases our Lord. For your loss, O Ibrahim, we are saddened!'<sup>(1)</sup>

Look at this faith when dealing with events: The eye weeps, and the heart is not hard like a stone, but is rather filled with compassion; and the heart is humble before God and is appreciative of His wisdom and will.

God does not want us to meet accidents with grief alone, but rather with grief and faith together. God does not forbid you from grieving, but you must not separate the event from the One Who brought it about, and His wisdom for doing so. And so when you go to the orthopedist and he breaks one of your bones in order to heal it, is he doing something good to you or something bad? Of course he is doing something good, even if it hurts you.

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad; this is the wording of A-Bukhari... (The Hadith narrates the supplication of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* upon the death of his baby son Ibrahim – Ed.)

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

**Those who disbelieve and deny Our messages shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain' [39]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 39)**

After telling us that when Adam *peace be upon him* went down to earth, he would find teachings from God to govern his life, and that whoever followed them, would free their lives from fear and grief and become secure in this world and the next; the True Lord *the Exalted* wanted to give us the opposite image. The previous verse gave the verdict for those who follow guidance, and this verse gives the verdict for those who disbelieve.

The True Lord says, 'But they who shall not believe, and treat Our signs as falsehoods...' As we have shown, disbelief is the attempt to cover the existence of God, the Necessary Being; yet the attempt to cover this existence is in itself a proof that God exists. You do not try to cover something up unless it exists in the first place.

Something which does not exist has no need to be covered up because it does not exist in our minds, and our minds cannot understand or conceive of something that does not exist. The mental image comes first, and then after this the name, or the vocal image, is made. And so if someone tells you about something which does not exist, you cannot understand him, and you cannot envisage it unless he compares it to something that does exist, by saying, 'Like this mountain,' or 'Like this lake,' or 'Like the disc of the sun,' or whatever until you can understand it. So you cannot understand a nonexistent being unless it is compared to an existent one.

Everything must first exist, and then after this, the lexicographers of the languages of the world look for a word to express this thing after portraying its mental image. For example, there was no name for a rocket before the rocket existed, or for a spaceship before it was invented, or for a laser-beam before it was discovered. So all of these things first existed, and then after that were given names. Those who disbelieve try to cover up God's existence; and the covering of the existence of God in itself proves that He exists because you do not cover up something that does not exist. And so, disbelief is itself, in an indirect way, a proof of faith.

Your mind cannot understand a name unless the meaning already exists in your mind. There is not a single language on earth which does not have a name for God *the Exalted*. Though we cannot see Him, if the Name of God is uttered, it is understood by the young and the old, and the schooled and the unschooled, and those who have travelled the earth and those who have never left their own home. They all understand God, by the natural disposition to faith which He placed in all their hearts.

So those who disbelieve try to cover up the existence of God. God says, '...and treat Our signs as falsehoods....' An *aya* (message, sign/wondrous thing, or verse) is something extraordinary which catches the attention. There are many signs in the universe such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the mountains, the seas, and many more besides. These are all called signs, namely things which are beyond the abilities of mankind, created by God to be signs for His Power in His universe, and to serve mankind.

There are also signs which are miracles. When God sends a messenger or a prophet to his people, He breaks for him the usual laws of the universe in order to prove to the people that he is a prophet sent by God. These signs are meant for those who witness them because they come to provide support to the messengers and the believers at times when they are going through crises that leave them in need of support, and to prove the truth of the prophet to his people. The word signs (in the sense of verses) also applies to the verses of the Noble Quran, the miraculous Word of God in which He *the Exalted* included that which proves the truth of the Message until the Day of Judgement.

God speaks to us through His signs about how He created mankind, and about the laws that govern the heavens and the earth, among many other things.

Those who deny God's signs are the disbelievers, and the idolaters, and those who refuse to surrender to God, and oppose the religion; and God has specified for us what the end will be for all of them. But is denial the inability to understand? We say that sometimes denial can be deliberate, as was the case with the people of Pharaoh when God sent upon them plague, pestilence, and worldly suffering so that they would believe; but despite their certainty that these were signs from God, they did not acknowledge them, as God says that



they, in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although in their souls they knew them to be true. (*an-Naml*: 14).

There are many signs in the universe, and if we only looked at them we would have faith. They do not require much thinking because out of His mercy, God has made them plain for everyone to see. But despite this, some people deny God's signs; they are the ones who want to follow the pervert inclinations of the self. The True Lord has decreed for the disbelievers and those who deny God's signs a common punishment: '...these shall be inmates of the fire....' The word *sahib* (rendered here 'inmates;' but literally meaning 'companion') means the one who keeps his friend company, and loves to sit with him and spend quality time with him. So it is as though the fact that God calls them 'the companions of the fire' indicates that the fire yearns for them, and will be happy to see them when they enter it, just as a person is happy to see his friend, and that he will not ever want to be parted from him. And so the True Lord says that on the Day of Judgement, He will ask hell if it is full, and it will answer with a question if there is more for it (*Qaf*: 30).

And so we see how the fire craves the company of the disbelievers. The fire will be their constant companion; and it is not an unpleasant company for the fire, but rather a company that it loves. When the fire burns every disbeliever, wrongdoer, and hypocrite, it will be happy because it is punishing those who disbelieved in God's teachings and denied His signs in their worldly lives. Similar to this is the case for paradise: it also loves the company of all those who believed in God and worshipped Him Alone and followed His teachings, as He *the Exalted* tells us that those who believed, and did the things that are right, and humbled them before their Lord, shall be the inmates of paradise; therein shall they abide forever (*Hud*: 23). That is, paradise will be the constant companion of the believers, and will love them, just as hell will be the constant companion of the disbelievers and deniers. And just as the fire will be happy as it burns the disbeliever, paradise will be happy as it pleases the believer. Then the True Lord says, '...in it shall they remain forever.' That is, the suffering therein will be constant without ever changing, or abating, or lightening, but rather, it will last forever. God says that those who have bought the life of this

world at the price of the life to come, their suffering shall not be lightened, and shall not be succoured (*al-Baqara*: 86).

And so we see that God sent His teachings to earth with Adam *peace be upon him*, and that Adam came to earth in possession of guidance so that the first teachings of Heaven could be implemented on earth. It is as though God *peace be upon him* did not leave mankind on earth for one moment without giving them the teachings that would show them the way of guidance and the way of error; and along with these teachings, repentance was established, as was its acceptance, so that no man would despair, or feel that if he made a mistake or forgot he would be destined to go to hell, but would rather feel that the doors of Heaven are always open, and that God, who created him, is merciful with him, so that if he made a mistake, He would open the door of repentance to him and forgive his sins. And so, every person would feel that they are in the care of God whilst they are on earth, from the very first moment of life. The teachings are there for those who want to believe, and repentance is there for all those who sin.

And God forewarned Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny that those who obey and have faith will live good lives in this world and the Hereafter, whilst those who disbelieve and deny are destined for eternal suffering.

God told Adam *peace be upon him* all about his enemy Satan, and told him to beware of him. But what did the Sons of Adam *peace be upon him* do? Did they obey God's guidance or disobey it? Did they hold fast to God's teachings, or leave them behind their backs?

يٰۤاَيُّهَا بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَوْفُوا  
بِعَهْدِي أَوْفِ بِعَهْدِكُمْ وَإِنِّي فَأَرْهَبُكُمْ

**Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you. Honour  
your pledge to Me and I will honour My pledge to you: I am  
the One you should fear [40] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 40)**

After telling us the story of creation, and how it began with Adam *peace be upon him*, and of Satan's enmity to Adam *peace be upon him* and its cause, God

then tells us about the first experience of mankind with the teachings of God in one of the gardens (of paradise), and how Adam *peace be upon him* underwent this experience and was tempted by Satan into disobedience, and then went down to earth armed with God's teachings and protected from transgressing by repentance; and so the mission of Adam *peace be upon him* on earth began.

The True Lord wanted to present to us the succession of Divine Messages and how the Sons of Adam *peace be upon him* met God's teachings with disbelief and disobedience, and so He *the Exalted* chose the story of the children of Israel because their story has the most miracles, and the prophets of the children of Israel were the greatest in number among the prophets ever sent to a single people. This does not mean that they were a 'chosen people,' but rather, they were the nation who sinned and transgressed the most, and so they were sent the most prophets. Every time a miracle sent to them was accomplished, they went astray again, and so another miracle came to them, and they strayed again after it. And so God passed judgement on them because of their transgression, that they should be dispersed throughout the land, and then be united again in one place so that they could taste suffering and torment as a requital for their disobedience and disbelief. And so the story of the children of Israel takes up such a large portion of the Book of God, and in strengthening the resolve of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. Moses *peace be upon him*, whom God sent to the children of Israel, was one of the Messengers who were characterised by strength of resolve,<sup>(1)</sup> and so you find that the aim of the stories of the children of Israel narrated in the Quran was about education first and foremost, and education all through.

We must notice that the True Lord says, 'O Children of Israel!' When the True Lord wants to address all mankind, He says, 'O Children of Adam!' like, for example, when God admonishes the 'children of Adam' to wear their beautiful apparel for every act of worship (*al-A'raf*: 31), and He *the Exalted* forewarns the 'children of Adam' against allowing Satan to seduce them (*al-A'raf*: 27).

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(1) *Islamic tradition has it that five of the prophets mentioned in the Quran were given the title of ulu al-'azm (literally 'those of strong resolve'); scholars maintain that they are: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad peace and blessings be upon them all.*

Why does God address us as the children of Adam *peace be upon him*? It is because He wants to remind us of the favours with which He has blessed us since the beginning of creation, since these blessings were for Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny. God created Adam *peace be upon him* with His hands, and commanded the angels to prostrate before him, and prepared for him a universe filled with everything he needed to sustain his life, not only in terms of necessities, but also of luxuries. Then the True Lord prepared him for all the temptation he would face from Satan, and let him know that Satan was an enemy to him, and then taught him how to repent so that He would forgive him, and showered him with blessings beyond any reckoning.

So God wants us to remember all this so that we will be ashamed of committing any sin after all that mankind has been honoured with. If we remember the blessings God has given us, we will be ashamed to repay these blessings with sin.

And God gave us knowledge which marked us out from His angels, and so we should have remained thankful and worshipful for all our lives in this world.

But we notice that God begins this noble verse by saying ‘O Children of Israel!...’ Why is this? Who was Israel *peace be upon him*? Israel is derived from two words, ‘*isr*’ and ‘*il*’. *Isr* means a chosen or elected person, and *il* is the Hebrew word for God. So the meaning of the word is ‘the Chosen of God;’ and the ‘chosen’ here refers to Jacob *peace be upon him*, not all his descendants.

If we consider Israel who was named Jacob *peace be upon him*, and how he got this name, we find that he was given the name because he was sorely tested by God, and this meant he deserved to be chosen by God. When God called on the people of Moses *peace be upon him* by saying ‘O Children of Israel,’ He wanted to remind them of the rank of Israel with God, and the trials he faced, and all he went through in his life; so they should remember what he counselled them with before he passed, as God tells us that when Jacob was at the point of death, he asked his sons whom they will worship when he is gone, and they said that they will worship his God and the God of his fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, the one God, and to Him they will surrender themselves (*al-Baqara*: 133).

The Quran also mentions that Jacob *peace be upon him* had counselled his children that God has chosen for them the religion; so they should not die except as Muslims –surrendering themselves to God (*al-Baqara*: 132). This was the legacy Jacob *peace be upon him* passed to his sons, a legacy containing knowledge and a reminder: the knowledge that God is One, and has no partner, and that the true religion is surrendering to God (Islam); and a reminder that God chose their religion for them, and so they should cling to it until death. They received this legacy when death was approaching Jacob *peace be upon him*; and at the moment of death, a person is always true to himself, and to his Lord, and to his children. And so it is as though when God called them, ‘O Children of Israel,’ He wanted to remind them of Israel, who was Jacob *peace be upon him*, and how he bore his trials and remained patient, and of the legacy he gave them before he passed away.

So God reminds the children of the blessings He bestowed on their forebears, so that they will take heed, or be ashamed of committing sin. This is like when the children of a pious man go astray, and so it is said to them, ‘Are you not ashamed? You are the sons of a righteous man, and it is not fitting that you do anything to incur God’s wrath,’ and so He says, ‘O Children of Israel!’ So Israel is Jacob, son of Isaac *peace be upon them*, and Isaac is the son of Abraham *peace be upon them*, and Abraham is father to Isaac and Ishmael *peace be upon them*. Our Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is descended from Ishmael *peace be upon him*.

God says, ‘O children of Israel! Remember My grace which I bestowed upon you...’; but when God addresses the Muslims, He does not say, ‘Remember the favours of God,’ but rather says, ‘Remember God.’ This is because the children of Israel are materialistic, worldly oriented people. So it is as though the True Lord is saying to them, ‘Since you are materialistic and worldly people, remember the material blessings God has given you.’ But we Muslims are not a materialistic nation.

There is a difference for a person between being attached to a blessing and being attached to the One Who blesses. Materialistic people love the blessing, whilst non-materialistic people love the One Who blesses, and live in His Company. And so God addresses the Muslims by saying, ‘Remember God,’ because we

love to be with the One Who blesses, whilst He *the Exalted* addresses the Children of Israel by saying 'Remember the blessings of God.'

God says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'I am Worthy to be feared so that no god be set up beside Me; and so, he who fears to set up any god beside Me is worthy of My forgiveness.'<sup>(1)</sup> So God must necessarily be worshipped even if He had never created Paradise or Hell. And so, the believers are the ones whom God most subjects to trials. Why? It is because from Him, trials are a form of blessings. God expresses His pride to His angels about His servants, saying: 'They worship Me for My own sake.' The angels would say, 'Rather they worship You because of the blessings You have granted them.' So He *the Exalted* says, 'Then I shall withhold them from them, and they will still love me. There are some servants of Mine whose supplications I love to hear, and so I test them so that they say, 'O Lord!' For God loves to hear their voices, and so when He tests a servant in his health, for example, and withholds from him the blessing of good health, you see that the ignorant person is discontented with this. Yet the deep-thinking person remembers what God said in the Qudsi Hadith: 'God will say on the Day of Resurrection, "O Son of Adam, I fell ill, but you did not visit Me." He will say, "Lord, how could I visit You when You are the Lord of the Worlds?" He will say, "Did you not know that my servant so-and-so was ill, yet you did not visit him? Did you not know that had you visited him, you would have found Me with him?"'<sup>(2)</sup>

So if the believer loses the blessing of good health, he does not despair, for God wants him to live with the One Who blesses, and throughout his illness he would be in the company of God. And so when the True Lord says: 'O children of Israel! Remember My grace which I bestowed upon you,...' this means that 'If you are not believers for My sake, at least be ashamed to sin because of the blessings I have granted you.' Blessings are mentioned here because the Children of Israel worshipped God because of His blessings.

'Remember My grace.' To remember is to preserve something from oblivion because life's quotidian routines make us likely to forget the Cause

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(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah on the authority of Al-Hubab; also narrated by An-Nasa'i.

(2) Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra.

of all our blessings. The sun rises every day, but how many of us remember that it only rises by God's leave, and so thank Him for it? Rain falls from time to time, but who of us remembers that God sends down rain, and so thanks Him? So remembrance is in the heart and also on the tongue. God is Unseen, and hidden from us, and it is part of His greatness that He is hidden; but the blessings of God guide us to Him, and if we remember them, He will be on our minds always, and His blessings mean that we should always remember Him and give thanks to Him.

The True Lord *the Exalted* asked the Children of Israel to remember the blessings that He granted them only, and so they should have obeyed God and remembered the One Who blesses; for remembrance of God puts you on a firm basis, so that no unpleasantness or evil can reach you.

Remembrance of God, the One Who blesses, gives us the key to the right movement in all aspects of life. Remembrance of God creates humility in the heart, and so sins decrease, and all people benefit, and life's actions are harmonised. When the True Lord says, '...Remember My grace...', it implicitly means 'Remember Me, even if only by the blessings I have granted you.' As for His words '...and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you...', the covenant here is a pledge. God says that He gave Adam a commandment (made a covenant with him) before, but he forgot; and God found no firmness of purpose in him (*Ta Ha*: 115).

So a covenant is a promise/pledge between a servant and his Lord; but which pledge is it that God wants the children of Israel to fulfil so that He will fulfil His promise to them? We say: It means the covenant of the instinctual nature of man which means, as we said before, that we should believe in God and thank Him for His blessings; and as we mentioned earlier, if a person were to go to a place where there was no one else around, and then fall asleep, and wake up to find a table laden with fine foods before him, would he not ask himself, 'Who did all this?' If he thought even for a moment, he would see that there must have been someone who did this, especially if the creation were something beyond the abilities of mankind. And so if God sent a messenger who said that God is the One Who created and made everything,

and there was no other claim to the contrary since these blessings are beyond human capability, the matter would be settled in God's favour.

So to remember God and give thanks to Him is a requirement of man's sound instinctual nature, and needs no complicated dogmatic discussion or philosophising. To fulfil our pledge to God by worshipping Him and giving Him thanks is the natural disposition of faith for the favours He has given us. We find that the True Lord says here, '...and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you;...' and in another verse, He commands the believers to remember Him, and He shall remember them (*al-Baqara*: 152). And in another verse, He makes it clear to the believers that if they support the Cause of God, He will support them and make firm their feet (*Muhammad*: 7).

What is this matter that the True Lord wants to convey to us with these noble verses? God wants us to know that He has placed the key to paradise in our hands, and so in the hand of every one of us is the key to the way which will lead him either to Paradise or to Hell. And so if you keep the pledge, God will keep the promise; and if you remember God, He will remember you; and if you succour God's cause, He will succour you. The Qudsi Hadith says, 'If (My servant) draws nearer to Me by a hand-span, I draw nearer to him by an arm-span; if he draws nearer to Me by an arm-span, I draw nearer to him by a fathom; if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.'<sup>(1)</sup> And so the True Lord wants to tell us that the keys are in our own hands, and that if we start by obeying Him, God's blessings are without limit, and if we draw nearer to God, He draws nearer to us, and if we stray away from Him, He calls to us: this is the faith of man's instinctual natural disposition.

Is this, the promise meant by God when He said, '...and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you;...' or did He mean the pledge made to God by the prophets that they would tell their people that if a messenger came with a confirmation of what they had, they must believe in him and aid him? The True Lord took a promise from all the prophets concerning the Messenger of Islam, our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Or was it the promise that God took through Moses

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Kitab At-Tawhid*, and by Muslim and At-Tirmidhi.



*peace be upon him* from the scholars of the Israelites who received the Torah, and taught it, wrote it, and memorised it, that they would not conceal any of it? God says that He took a solemn pledge from those to whom the Scriptures had been given, and commanded them that they shall surely make it known to mankind and not hide it, but they cast it behind their backs, and sold it for a trifling price, and how evil their bargain was (*Al- 'Imran*: 187).

The purpose of this pledge was that they would not conceal the foretelling of Islam in the Torah, and not hide the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* contained therein. God gave descriptions of His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Torah and Gospel. God says that the Children of Israel (in Arabia in pre-Islamic times) used to pray for victory over the infidels, but when a Book came to them from God, confirming that which they already knew, they disbelieved in it; so God's curse is on the unbelievers (*al-Baqara*: 89).

And the Noble Quran came as a confirmation of what was in the Torah, and the Children of Israel themselves recognised the truth of what was in the Quran, but they disbelieved because the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not from their people. The people who had been granted the Torah and the Gospel knew that the mission of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was the final Divine Message and that the followers of every prophet had to believe in it. So, does the covenant mentioned in the verse under discussion refer to this pledge which imposes all the nations to believe in the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and support him if they lived to see him, and if they did not live to see him, then the responsibility fell to their children and grand children to support him and believe in him whenever he came? Whether it was the pledge of man's primal instinctual nature of having faith, or the pledge to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, both senses can be supported by the context.

And God says, '...I will fulfil My covenant with you;...' that is by granting you blissful Paradise in the Hereafter. After the coming of Islam, God made His mercy exclusive to those who believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and those who do not believe in this religion will have no covenant with God.

God says that when the tremor overcame Moses *peace be upon him* and his chosen companions, Moses *peace be upon him* asked God for mercy and prayed that God ordain for them what is good in this world as well as in the life to come, as to Him they have turned. God answered that with His chastisement He afflicts whom He wills, but His Mercy encompasses everything; and so He shall confer it on those who fear Him and spend in charity, and who believe in His messages, those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel, the Prophet who will enjoin upon them the doing of what is right and forbid them the doing of what is wrong, and make lawful to them the good things of life and forbid them the bad things, and lift from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them. Those, therefore, who shall believe in him, honour him, succour him and follow the light that has been bestowed from on high through him, it is they that shall be successful (*al-A'raf*: 156-157).

So the True Lord is reminding the Children of Israel, in this noble verse, of the pledge He took from them, and warning them that His mercy is for those who believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when his Message came.

And God says, 'and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe,' i.e. there is no power that can be really effective in the universe except the power of God, and so they should fear the day when they will meet God, and be held to account by Him; and He is All-Conquering, and All-Compelling, and there is no rescue from His punishment for those who do not believe in Him.

وَأٰمِنُوْا بِمَاۤ اَنْزَلْتُ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَكُمْ وَلَا تَكُوْنُوْا اَوَّلَ  
 كٰفِرٍۭ بِهٖ وَلَا تَشْتَرُوْا بِآيٰتِيْ ثَمٰنًا قَلِيْلًا وَّ اِيْنِيْ فَاتَّقُوْنَ ﴿٤١﴾

**Believe in the message I have sent down confirming what you already possess. Do not be the first to disbelieve in it, and do not sell My messages for a small price: I am the One of whom you should be mindful [41] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 41)**

After reminding the Children of Israel of the promise they had made not to change the Torah by either hiding parts of it or by adding to it, and

reminding them of their pledge to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, whom God described for them in the Torah, so that the Jewish rabbi, Ibn Salam *God be pleased with him*, used to say to his people in Medina: ‘I recognised him when I saw him just as I recognise my own children; and indeed I recognise Muhammad even better,’ that is, he would remind his people that the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was present in the Torah, and it is impossible for them to miss; the True Lord then said, ‘And believe in what I have sent down confirming that which is with you,...’ For the Quran is a confirmation of the Torah; but it means here the real Torah before they altered it. The Quran did not condone the changes and alterations they had made to the Torah, but rather, it came confirming the uncorrupted Torah.

Then the True Lord says, ‘...and do not be the first to disbelieve it....’ We said that the Jews were not the first to disbelieve in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, but rather it was Quraysh who were the first to disbelieve in Mecca. The meaning of this verse is that the Jews were the first of the People of the Book to reject the Message. Why? It was because Quraysh had no connection with the teachings of Heaven, and they knew nothing about the previous scriptures; on the other hand, the Jewish rabbis knew the truth of the Message, and they used to anticipate the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to the people of Medina, and say, ‘The time has come for a new messenger, in whom we shall believe, and we shall slay you with him as ‘Ad and Iram were slain.’ But then, when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, instead of hastening to believe in him, they were the first to disbelieve.

God did not surprise the people of the Book with the sending of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, but rather informed them of it in the Torah and the Gospel, and so they should have been the first to believe in him, not the first to disbelieve because they knew well the one who came.

God then says, ‘...and do not “buy” a mean price in exchange for My signs....’ When the True Lord speaks about a bargain of faith, He uses the words ‘buy,’ ‘sell,’ and ‘trade.’ In a Quranic verse, He *the Exalted* says that He has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, that they have

Paradise in return (*at-Tawba*: 111). And in another verse, He addresses the believers proposing to them a bargain that will save them from grievous suffering provided that they believe in God and His Messenger, and to strive hard in God's Cause with their possessions and their lives (*as-Saff*: 10-11).

The True Lord also uses the language of buying and selling and trading when He admonishes the believers when the call for prayer is made on Friday- the day of congregation- to hasten to the remembrance of God, and leave off all worldly commerce (*al-Jumu'a*: 9),

We know that trade is a relationship between the producer and the consumer; the producer wants to sell his product, and the consumer needs this product. Profit is something that rises and falls for periods of time according to the rate of supply and demand of the product. God uses trade as a metaphor to show us that it is the shortest route to benefit. Trade is done by people who buy and sell products; but where God is concerned, He will take from you some of your personal freedom and give you something more lasting and greater than it.

As we said, if we consider this world and its limited life – the single life-span of one of us, we can ask: for how long does it last? Fifty, sixty, seventy years? We find that however long the life of this world lasts, it will surely end. The wise person is the one who sacrifices this limited, temporary life in order to gain a share in the eternal life. In this way, such a deal will be profitable.

The enjoyment of this worldly life is commensurate with human abilities, whilst the enjoyment of the Hereafter is commensurate with the power of God. But people come and say: 'Why should I make it uncomfortable for myself in this world? Why should I not have enjoyment?' We say that you should not because the suffering and punishment you will get in the Hereafter is not equal to what you have gained in this world; so the deal is a loss. You have purchased a fleeting thing, and have paid for it dearly with eternal bliss.

God then says to the Jews, '...and do not "buy" a mean price in exchange for My signs,...' i.e. do not give up the signs of faith I have given you so that you can take in exchange for them a mean price. When a person gains less than he gives, this reverses the deal, and this always means loss.

It is as though the verse is saying: You are giving away the messages of God, which constitute His complete teachings in order to gain a trifle of this worldly life whose value is slight and whose time is limited; and this is a reversed and losing deal.

And so the language of the Quran reflected this reversal: In deals, prices are always paid, and goods taken. But in the situation which the verse discusses when He says ‘...and do not “buy” a mean price in exchange for My signs,...’ it is the price (*thaman*, here meaning ‘gain’) which should ordinarily be paid, which is here purchased; and this is foolishness and error. God says, ‘...and do not take a mean price in exchange for My signs...’, i.e. do not turn the deal around. The thing that you should be sacrificing should not be made your gain because in this case you will have turned the price into the product. As long as these messages have been exchanged for this trifling gain, you have made the messages of God the price you have paid for worldly gains; and so you did not even sell them for a high price, but rather, you sold them cheaply.

You broke your promise to God simply in order to preserve your wealth or your status! But if a person sacrifices something of this world in order to gain the joy of the eternal Hereafter, this is a profitable trade; for in this world a person’s bliss is commensurate with his conception of bliss, whilst in the Hereafter he will find bliss commensurate with what God’s offering of bliss.

Some of those who do not want to bring themselves to follow God’s teachings try to hasten the gains of this deal foolishly. They want enjoyment, whether it is lawful or unlawful. To these people, we say: Whether you believe in the Hereafter or not, it is a losing deal because either way you will be punished in hell. It is as though you have exchanged your faith and your religion for a brief pleasure, and you have made disbelief and disobedience of God the price; and so you have turned the deal around, and sold the thing that you would have gained by following God’s teachings, namely the bliss of the Hereafter. And what have you sold it for? A passing pleasure! When a person takes less than he gives, this is a reversed and losing deal.

It is as though the verse is saying: ‘You have given the signs of God and the good they offer you in this life and the next as payment for a passing trifle of this world and a paltry gain. A profit is always a currency like gold or

silver, not a commodity. Suppose you have a treasure of gold like that which Qarun (Korah) possessed, and you are in a deserted place, and hungry. Would you not give all this treasure to someone for a piece of bread so that you would not die of hunger? And so money should not be a goal, or a commodity, and if you make it a goal and amass much wealth, but do not buy anything with it because money is your goal, society will be ruined. Money makes a faithful slave, but a cruel master. It is your slave when you spend it, but when you hoard it greedily it wears you out and makes you miserable because you have become its servant.

This noble verse gives us an idea about the Jews because their lives and actions all revolve around money and gold. God prohibited usury because usury turns money into a commodity, so one hundred is sold for one hundred and fifty, for example, and this corrupts society because wealth should increase by labour, and if wealth increases without any increase in labour, the motions of life are corrupted, and the poor get poorer and the rich richer – and this is what we see in the world today.

The poor countries get poorer because they borrow money and the interest mounts up until the interest is more than the original debt. As time passes the interest increases, and so the debt multiplies, and it becomes impossible to pay it back. And the rich countries get richer because they give loans and take them back multiplied many times over.

When God says, ‘...and do not “buy” a mean price in exchange for My signs...’, we should not understand from this that it is possible to barter God’s messages for a higher price; no, because however high the price gets, it will still be trifling, and trifling indeed because it cannot be equal to God’s messages. God’s messages are priceless, and so the deal will make a loss no matter how much is paid.

God says, ‘and Me, Me alone should you fear,’ and in the previous verse, He said, ‘...and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe,’ which constitutes a warning, whilst ‘...and Me, Me alone should you fear,’ concerns a reality. His words ‘...and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe,’ are a warning and a caution of what shall come in the Hereafter, whilst ‘...and Me, Me alone should you fear’ means fear God’s attributes of majesty, and the attributes of majesty are those which are related to

God's wrath and His punishment; these attributes include those such as the All-Compeller, the All-Dominant, the Sublime, the All-Powerful, the Lord of Retribution, the Humiliator, and the other attributes of majesty.

God commands us: 'fear God', and also 'fear the Fire'. What does this mean? We say that God wants us to place a barrier of protection between us and the Fire, which is one of the hosts of God's Wrath. He wants us to place a barrier between ourselves and the suffering of hell, and also a barrier between us and God's attributes of majesty. So when He says, '...and Me, Me alone should you fear,' this means place a barrier between yourselves and God's attributes of Majesty so that you are not afflicted with grievous suffering. And how do we place a barrier between ourselves and God's majesty? By making our actions in this world conform to the teachings of God. So God-fearing is required in this worldly life.

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكُنُوا لِلْحَقِّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

**Do not mix truth with falsehood, or hide the truth when you know it [42] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 42)**

After warning the Jews not to trade their religion for a trifling gain, namely money or worldly influence, the True Lord tells them, 'And do not clothe the truth with falsehood, and do not knowingly hide the truth.' The root of the word *talbisu* (clothe) is the word *libas*, which means the clothes we wear. To clothe here means to cover up, meaning that we conceal the truth instead of revealing it, just as clothing is a covering for the body that conceals it so its details are not revealed.

The truth is something firm and fixed which cannot change. Suppose that we witness something happen, and then we each relate what happened. If we are truthful, our statements will all conform to the reality of what happened, but if some of us try to change the reality, each one of us will have their own version. And so the truth is firm, and never changes.

In the Torah, there are verses which the Jews did not alter and verses which they did alter. All the verses related to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his description, and that he is the Final Prophet, were

all altered by the Jews, whilst the verses which were not connected with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were left unaltered. So it is as though they mixed truth with falsehood. What made them insert this falsehood and attempt to conceal the truth? The principle benefit of this was to barter away God's messages for a trifling gain. Falsehood means something which has no basis in reality, and so the ways to falsehood are many and varied. Yet the way to truth is one. So God wants to inform us that the Jews inserted into the Torah falsehoods which God did not sanction, and they concealed the truth of the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. But did they do this by mistake, or out of forgetfulness? No, they rather did it knowingly.

For example, consider when the True Lord commanded the Jews to enter the gate humbly and pray for forgiveness and He shall forgive them their sins, and shall amply reward the doers of good (*al-Baqara: 58*). He commanded them to say 'hitta' which means 'remove our sins from us, Lord,' but the Jews changed God's phrase, and instead of saying 'hitta', they said 'hinta'. One might hear this word and not notice it, and think that they did as God commanded them, yet in reality they changed it. And so when they came to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, they would say to him 'ra'ina' (a term related to frivolity and recklessness), twisting their tongues with their speech, instead of saying 'ra'ayna' (we have heard). God alerted those who believed in his Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* not to speak as the Jews spoke, and instead of saying 'ra'ina' which may also mean 'listen to us,' they should rather say, 'have patience with us' (*al-Baqara: 104*). That is, do not use this word at all, since it is a way to overlay the truth with falsehood. So the Jews clothed the truth with falsehood; and no one clothes the truth with falsehood unless he cannot face the truth. For the inability to face the truth is a weakness from which we flee to falsehood because the truth is difficult to follow, and some people cannot bring themselves to follow the truth.

And He says, '...and do not knowingly hide the truth,' and this implies that they did this deliberately, not inadvertently. Someone might conceal the truth without knowing that it is the truth; but if you do know it, this is the true calamity because you are concealing it deliberately and intentionally Or, alternatively, 'knowingly' might mean that the Jews – who are a people of the



Book – knew about the grievous suffering that would meet them in the Hereafter for their concealment of the truth, for they were not unaware of what will happen in the Hereafter. But they did what they did even knowing that it was wrong, and so this suffering will be deserved.

وَأَقِمْوُا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

**Keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and bow  
your heads [in worship] with those who bow theirs [43]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 43)**

Performing prayer is known to us as that devotion which begins with the words ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ (God is the Greatest) and ends with *taslim* (greeting of peace), and includes such essential actions as standing, bowing, and prostration. But the True Lord adds: ‘...and spend in charity, and bow down with those who bow.’ He wants for them to join the universal community of faith, for their prayer did not originally include any bowing. So He wanted them to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* (as Islamic prayer included bowing), and not to imagine that their faith in Moses *peace be upon him* would exempt them from having to submit to what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with, saying, ‘Our religion is enough, and Islam only came for those who have no religion of their own: the disbelievers and idolaters.’ And so He said to them, ‘...and bow down with those who bow.’

The True Lord wants to alert them to the fact that their prayer will not be accepted from them unless it includes bowing; and the prayer of the Jews did not have any bowing, although it included prostration. Either way, the True Lord wanted to alert them to the necessity of believing in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

When the True Lord said ‘...and do not “buy” a mean price in exchange for My signs...’, He wanted to tell them that the opposite of this is what was required from them, and that they should have acquired faith and chosen the profitable deal. This would not happen unless they believed in the Final Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and this is the sole way to earn the pleasure of God.

God wanted to put an end to their arrogant stance regarding the new religion, and so He commanded them to pray just as the Muslims prayed, and give the poor-due just as the Muslims did so that they would not think that their faith in Moses *peace be upon him* and the Torah would be accepted from them after the coming of the new Messenger in whom they were also commanded to believe. Rather, their faith in Moses *peace be upon him* and the Torah – if they truly believed in them – meant that they also had to have faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because the Torah commanded them to do so. And so their lack of faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* itself constituted disbelief in the Torah and a contravention of its teachings.

As we said, prayer is an occasion for the servant to imagine the moment when he will stand before his Lord. And when a servant stands before God, all of the pride in his soul will certainly fall away, and be replaced by humility, contrition, and lowliness. The proud person is one who fails to see that he is standing before his Lord. So their failure to believe in this Prophet, and to stand before God in prayer as they should do, and as God ordained they should from above the seven heavens, was a refusal to submit to God's Commandments.

And then comes the giving of the poor-due because the believing servant must direct his life to beneficial work which would be conducive to sufficiency for him and also for the needy in his community who are unable to earn their own living. When God tells us to work here on earth, He is not telling us only to do enough to suffice ourselves, but rather, He requires us to work for more than what we need in order that this work will be enough to provide for those who cannot work for themselves, so that the society as a whole has enough to suffice everyone, and is freed from jealousy and envy, and souls are purified.

﴿۝۴۴﴾ أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ نَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

**How can you tell people to do what is right and forget to do it yourselves, even though you recite the Scripture? Have you no sense? [44] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 44)**

After alerting the Jews to the fact that their failure to believe in Islam amounts to disbelief in the Torah because the teachings of the Torah commanded

them to believe in the new Messenger, and they were given the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his time of coming in the Torah, and were commanded to believe in him, God then puts the question to them: ‘Will you enjoin what is right upon others, and forget yourselves...?’ The Jews used to gladly predict the coming of a new messenger, and announce that they would believe in him, but when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, and was not of their people, they disbelieved in him because they wanted the power to be in their hands by the new Messenger being one of them. Instead when he came from the Arabs, they realised that their power would disappear, and that their economic leadership would end, and so they denied the Messenger and his Message.

We should point out that although these verses were revealed in connection with the Jews, this does not mean that they apply to them alone. Rather, they apply to all the people of the Book and to the non-believers as well; for the moral is not derived from the specific circumstance, but rather from the general principle.

These words apply even to the Muslims who barter away God’s verses for a trifling gain, namely the orators of discord whom the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* mentions having seen during his night journey to heaven with their lips being cut with scissors of fire; and so he asked Gabriel *peace be upon him* who they were, and he answered, ‘These are the orators of discord.’ They are the ones who make every tyrant’s tyranny seem fair to him, and put God’s religion to the service of human caprices, whilst it is human caprices which should be subservient to God’s religion. These are the ones who attempt – under the slogan of ‘renewal’ – to give the people excuses to disengage from God’s teachings; they provide justification for all this, and do not reflect on the reckoning of the Hereafter.

It is not the job of the religious scholars who carry God’s teachings to come up with excuses for the things that others do, and God’s religion can never be subservient to human caprices. Those who do such things must repent and return to God, and try to put right what they have done because returning to the truth is better than continuing with falsehood.

The words of the True Lord: 'Will you enjoin what is right upon others, and forget yourselves?... ' give us another lesson concerning preachers; this is because the one who commands good and forbids evil and carries God's teachings should aim to get the non-believer out of the falsehood to which he is accustomed; and taking the non-believer out of falsehood is difficult for him because it means to take him out of that to which he is accustomed and to remove him from his way of life, and for him to admit that he was following falsehood. And so he will fix his eyes closely on the one who shows him the way of faith to see whether he practises it himself or not. Does the one who is forbidding the evil practise what he preaches? If he does, he will know that he is true in what he preaches; and if he does not, this will be an excuse for him to return to the falsehood which had controlled his life.

Religion is composed of words which are spoken and actions which are performed; if the words are separated from the actions, preaching will have no effect. God admonishes the believers by putting forth to them the rhetorical question why they profess what they do not practise; it is extremely loathsome in the sight of God for someone to profess what he does not practise (*as-Saff*: 2-3). Why? That is because if someone sees you doing something which you forbid, he will know that you are a fake preacher and a fraud; and if you are not content to follow something yourself, you cannot preach it to others. And so we read in the Noble Quran that we surely have in the Messenger of God a good example for everyone who looks forward to God *the Exalted* and the Last Day, and remembers God unceasingly (*al-Ahzab*: 21).

The teachings of the religion alone are not enough without practice, and this was why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* never commanded his companions to do anything without being the first of them to do it, and so the Muslims take him as a model in their words and deeds. Whenever 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* wanted to issue a command connected with Islam, he would gather his family and relations and say to them, 'It occurred to me to command such-and-such, and by God in Whose Hand is my soul, if any of you contravene it, I will make of them an example for the Muslims!' In this way, 'Umar ibn Al- Khattab *God be pleased with him* would close the door to discord because he knew well from whence it comes.


Where Islamic preaching is concerned, the scholars must be a model for the rectitude of the people. None of the sciences of this world requires a role model, except where religion is concerned. If someone tells you that a great chemist drinks wine, or does this or that, you would say, 'I do not care about his lifestyle; I study his contribution to chemistry because he is a great chemist. I care nothing about his lifestyle.' The same is the case for all the scholars on earth, except for scholars of religion. If there is a scholar who directs you to the straight path, and you take your religious knowledge from him, and then afterwards you find out that he drinks wine or steals, will you listen to him anymore? Never. He immediately goes down in your estimation, and you do not want to listen to him or sit in his gatherings, however much knowledge he has, and you will say to him: 'What a fraud you are!'

And so, a religious scholar must be a role-model, and must not forbid evil and then commit it himself, or command the good and fail to do it himself, and everyone watches closely what he does. Before spreading through its intellectual system, Islam spread through proposing its conduct as a role model, and the largest number of people embraced Islam by means of role models of conduct who guided them to it. The people who spread Islam in China were mostly tradesmen who had good Islamic manners, and so attracted many people to them who then embraced Islam. And so the True Lord puts forth the rhetorical question of who could be better of speech than he who calls to God, and does what is just and right, and says that he is of the Muslims (those who have surrendered themselves to God) (*Fussilat*: 33).

So the first element is to call to God, and the second element is righteous action, and saying 'I am of the Muslims (those who have surrendered themselves to God)', thus not ascribing this good to his own self but rather ascribing it to Islam. But tell me: what is the good of saying we are Muslims when we behave as though we are not? And so when God says, 'Will you enjoin what is right upon others, and forget yourselves...', He *the Exalted* reminds us that the Jews said that which they did not do. If they truly believed in the Torah, they would have believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and Islam because this is what the Torah commanded them to do. Yet they forgot themselves, and were the first to disobey the Torah because they did

not follow it; and all the while, they were reciting their Book which commanded them to embrace the new faith.

And although they were sure of the truth of the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, they did not embrace the faith. If they had even an atom of reason, they would have believed in that which their own scripture, which they recited, commanded them to do, but they did not use their reason, but rather wanted only to have high positions on earth. And the verse, as we said, does not apply to the Jews alone; it rather, applies to all those who act in this way.


 وَأَسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ

**Seek help with steadfastness and prayer – though  
 this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble [45]  
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 45)**

After affirming that faith requires having and giving a role model, and after alerting us to the fact that the Torah required the Jews to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, God *the Glorious and Exalted* then gives an order to seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer. The implication of seeking aid in steadfast patience is that difficult things will come to pass, and things will not be easy, but will require effort. Steadfast patience means to bring oneself to bear difficult things. After having become accustomed to bargaining away God's signs for a trifling price, accepting this exchange and making God's signs a price for the comforts of this world, and exchanging them for comforts and pleasures; after they had become accustomed to usury and other unlawful means of earning, the Jews would have to seek aid in steadfast patience if they were to go back to the way of faith.

As we said, it is not the specific circumstance which is significant in appreciating the verse, but rather, the general principle. So this command is addressed to everyone; and every believer who follows God's teachings needs to seek aid in steadfast patience in order to bring himself to bear the difficult demands of these teachings, and to deny himself the fulfilment of desires which God *the Glorious and Exalted* has forbidden.

Some scholars say that the term ‘steadfast patience’ in this noble verse means fasting, as though God was commanding them to go hungry, and be steadfast in bearing the pains of hunger. And the difficulties of faith and prayer, as we said, and humility, contrition, and lowliness before God, would end their arrogant refusal to believe in a religion which was not revealed to a Jewish rabbi; and the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says, ‘...and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit.’

When the True Lord says, ‘And seek help in steadfast patience and prayer...,’ He teaches that help be sought in two things, steadfast patience and prayer. So the context of the verse might have caused us to expect that He would say ‘...and they, indeed...,’ using the plural, but the Quran uses a singular pronoun: ‘...and this, indeed...’ Does this mean that only one of the two things are intended, either prayer or patience?

We say: If there are two things which are so interrelated that something cannot exist without both of them being together, they are treated as one thing. We have another example of this linguistic practice in the noble verse where God says that the hypocrites swear to the believers by God in order to please them; while it is God and His Messenger whose pleasure they should seek above all else if indeed they are believers (*at-Tawba*: 62).

So, in spite of mentioning God and His Messenger in the verse, God uses the singular form of the verb *yurduhu* (‘seek his pleasure’), not the dual form *yurduhuma* (‘seek their pleasure’), and so the explanation of this is exactly the same: it is not that God has one due and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* has another, but rather God and His Messenger are owed the same due.

We have still another example in the verse where God speaks about some of those who used to attend the Prophet’s gatherings saying that when they see merchandise or a passing entertainment, they break up for it, and leave the prophet standing (*al-Jumu’a*: 11). It might be supposed that the verse should have said ‘to them,’ using the dual form of the pronoun, but trade and play are here considered a single matter, namely anything which distracts the believers from worship and remembrance.

The verse thus instructs: ‘And seek help in steadfast patience and prayer...’ because the help comes with patience and prayer together; and patience is

difficult for the soul to bear, as is prayer, because they both take something from one's movement in life. Patience here is required in order that they abstain from the forbidden delights and charms of this worldly life, and prayer fights the pride of the soul. And so it is as though this nature of faith is not susceptible of division, so there can be no patience without prayer, and no prayer without patience.

Then God *the Exalted* gives the exception: '...but the humble in spirit.' What does 'humbleness' mean? Humbleness means to be deferential to the one whom you see as being above you without any doubt. People have different levels of values and talents, and everyone tries to take pride in his superiority and his gifts, saying, 'I am better than so-and-so,' or 'you are better than so-and-so.' So it is possible that a person could be proud of what he has; but a person will always be deferential to someone whom he needs for something because if he acts with pride towards them, they will make their life difficult. And so God spread talents and humbleness amongst the people communally: everyone needs someone, and this is communal humbleness; and everyone has something which others do not have, and this is communal talent. This is as far as human beings as concerned; as for God, our humbleness is to He Who created, and gave, and made everything.

Humbleness makes a person recall the greatness of the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* and recognise his own scant value before the True Lord, and the extent of his helplessness before the Creator of the universe. He knows that God could take everything that he has in an instant; for we live in a world of constant change, and so we should submit to the One Who never changes because everything a person acquires is from God, not from his own self. As for those who are deluded by the means they possess, we say to them: Worship and be humble before the One Who gave you all these means and created them because the means do not work of their own accord. God sends vicissitudes upon man by turn: A person is proud of his strength, and then someone even stronger comes and defeats him; a person is proud of his wealth, and then he loses it all in an instant. After the defeat in the battle of Uhud, God addresses the believers saying that if an affliction has touched them, a similar affliction has touched other people as well; and God brings these days to men by turns, and that God may know those who believe, and choose from among



them such as bear witness to the truth with their lives; and God does not love the unjust (*Al-‘Imran*: 140).

And so we must understand that for the person who is proud of his means will come a time when no means will avail him. If a person reaches the point where he sees himself, and the people see him, as perfect, he will become deluded. To him, we say: Do not be deluded by your own perfections because although you might have them now, they can only change tomorrow. Humbleness should not be for anyone but God. The True Lord says, ‘...and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit.’ Who are the humble in spirit? They are those who obey God, and steer clear of what He forbids, and bear the turns of fate patiently, and know with absolute certainty of soul that everything belongs to God, and not to any other power; and so, they are humble before the One Who created them and created the universe for them.

الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلْقُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

**who know that they will meet their Lord and that it is to  
Him they will return [46] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 46)**

After affirming to us that patience and prayer are difficult for all except those whose hearts are humble before God and so embrace them with love, faith, and willingness, the True Lord wants to tell us who these humble people are, and so He *the Exalted* defines them as those who know that they shall meet their Lord.

The word rendered here as ‘know’ is *yazhunnoun* (usually translated into English as ‘think,’ ‘suppose,’ ‘conjecture’), with its noun form *zhann*. We need to pause here to reflect on the meaning and use of the word here.

What is *zhann*? We spoke before about intellectual proportions and relationships between notions, and said that there might be a notion which I am certain of and which is confirmed by reality. For example, if I say ‘Muhammad is hard-working,’ and if there is truly a person called Muhammad who is hard-working, I have affirmed the truth. So this is a given notion on condition that I can prove that what I say is true. If you are, in turn, certain that what I have said is true, this is called imitation. For example, your six-year-old son might say, ‘There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of

God,' and his mind is not sufficiently developed to prove this; rather, he has blind faith in his father or his teachers and is imitating them.

If you are sure of something, but it does not actually conform to reality, this is ignorance, and the ignorant is worse than the uninformed because the ignorant believes in something which is not true, and he will defend it; whilst the uninformed simply does not know, and once he knows, he will believe. And so the ignorant person must first have the falsehood removed from his heart before the truth can enter it. If there is no decisive judgement on a certain point – whether it is true or untrue with equal proportions for its truth or falsity, this is called doubt; when one side is more likely than the other, this is called *zhann* (supposition).

In the verse under discussion, the True Lord says 'who know...' (Using the word *zhann* which ordinarily means 'to suppose'), and did not use the word *tayaqqanu* which ordinarily means 'to know with certainty.' Why did God not use the word *yaqin* ('being certain') but rather used the word *zhann* ('to suppose')? It is because to merely suppose that you will meet God is enough to make you follow His teachings, let alone being certain? To merely suppose is enough.

If we want to give an example of this (and to God belongs the loftiest of similitudes), let us say: Suppose you are travelling down a road when a person comes and tells you that this road is plagued by thieves and highwaymen. These words will be enough to make you not go down this road unless you are armed and have one or two companions with you. You do this just as a precaution. And so, mere supposition leads us to be cautious. God says, 'Who know that they shall meet their Lord...', so the fact that this is likely, is enough to make them follow God's teachings; and this way one would save oneself from grave suffering. The poet Al-Ma'arri said towards the end of his life:

The soothsayer and the doctor both claim

That there is no Resurrection; to them I say:

If you are right, then I lose nothing;

If I am right, then you are the losers!

So everyone who denied the Hereafter is a loser, and the human soul must make precautions for the meeting with God, and acknowledge that there will be a Resurrection, and prepare for it.

The True Lord says, ‘Who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him.’ The return to God is a matter of certainty; as long as you came into this world as a creature of God, you will certainly return to Him. We must take precautions for this day- great precautions- and be well aware of it for it is a tremendous day as the True Lord addresses all mankind commanding them to fear their Lord; the earthquake of the Hour is surely a tremendous thing. On the Day when they behold it, every suckling woman shall forsake her sucking baby; and every woman that hath a burden in her womb shall cast her burden; and you will see people drunken, yet they are not drunken: But it is the mighty chastisement of God (*al-Hajj*: 1-2).

And He *the Exalted* puts forward to people the rhetorical question: How, if they do not believe, they will screen themselves from the day that shall turn children grey-haired (*al-Muzzammil*: 17).

If this will be our condition on the Day of Resurrection, should it not be enough to merely suppose it will come to happen, in order for us to adhere to God’s teachings? We take precautions for worldly matters which are nothing compared with the terrors of the Day of Resurrection. Merely supposing that we will meet God should be enough for us to think seriously of preparing for it.

يٰۤاَيُّهَاۤ اِسْرٰٓءِيْلَ اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِيۤ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاِنِّيۤ فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلٰى الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ﴿٤٧﴾

**Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you  
and favoured you over other people [47]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 47)**

Some people claim that there is repetition here of the seven previous verses which mentioned the children of Israel. We say: No, there is no repetition here of these verses, namely: ‘O children of Israel! Remember My grace which I bestowed upon you, and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you; and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe (*al-Baqara*: 40) And believe in what I have sent down confirming that which

is with you, and do not be the first to disbelieve it, and do not 'buy' a mean price in exchange for My signs; and Me, Me alone should you fear (*al-Baqara: 41*) And do not clothe the truth with falsehood, and do not knowingly hide the truth (*al-Baqara: 42*) And perform prayer and spend in charity, and bow down with those who bow (*al-Baqara: 43*) Will you: enjoin what is right upon others, and forget yourselves, and yet you read the Book? Do you have no sense? (*al-Baqara: 44*) And seek help in steadfast patience and prayer; and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit (*al-Baqara: 45*) Who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him' (*al-Baqara: 46*)

All these seven verses remind the children of Israel of the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, whose attributes and time were mentioned in the Torah, and remind them that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was a blessing for them and for all mankind. If God favoured the Children of Israel by sending messengers to them, this did not mean that they could deny God's blessing to them by sending them the Final Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

And since the attributes of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were mentioned in the Torah, and it commanded them to believe in him and give him succour, their lack of belief in him amounted to disbelief in the Torah. Likewise, the Gospel gave glad tidings of the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and required them to believe in him, and so their lack of belief in him constituted disbelief in the Gospel.

God says, '...Remember My favour with which I graced you,...' and this means: remember that I placed within your scripture that which confirmed the truth of Muhammad's prophethood, and remember how I blessed you by favouring you above all of your contemporaries at the time when the message of Moses *peace be upon him* was revealed, and how I raised prophets from amongst you.

Since the True Lord said, '...and that I favoured you above all other people,' why does He mention this favour to them? We say that the reason for this is to make their chastisement more severe: because of their disobedience and disbelief, He made them as apes, and pigs, and worshippers of the powers

of evil, as He *the Exalted* reminds them of those of them who transgressed on the Sabbath, and whom He changed into scornful apes (*al-Baqara*: 65).

And God also speaks about those who deserve a yet worse retribution. They are those whom God has cursed and with whom He has been angry, and whom He has turned into apes and swine because they worshipped the powers of evil: these are yet worse in station and farther astray from the right path (*al-Ma'ida*: 60). So God tells us of how the children of Israel disbelieved and slew their Prophets. Despite the immense good that God gave to them, they broke the covenant and therefore deserved suffering. They did not take the blessings God gave to them as a reason to be sincere and faithful to Him and His teachings and to trust in the Final Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* who was mentioned to them in the Torah. They should have believed in God and remembered the many blessings He granted to them.

The True Lord *the Exalted* wants to alert us to the fact that although He gave them these blessings, they should not think that they are not required to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They should have understood that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came to correct their scriptures for them, and show them the right path; and they should have given him succour. Favours cannot keep on coming whilst they are being met with ingratitude; and it should not be thought that God was hard on them when he made them a broken community dispersed throughout the whole world. After that they will be gathered together in a single place only to be killed; God *the Exalted* says that after rescuing them from Pharaoh and his hosts, he told the Israelites to dwell in the earth/land<sup>(1)</sup> (*al-Isra'*: 104).

Which earth was it that God told the children of Israel to dwell upon? Since the True Lord told them to dwell on the earth, this means the entire earth. Is the whole earth the homeland of the Jews? Of course not, but rather, the True Lord ordained for them that they should disperse throughout the earth; they could only have a state of their own when God decided to gather them together in a single place and then give His believing servants the upper hand on them. The True Lord tells that He has made it known to the Children

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(1) The Arabic word *ard* is used to mean both 'land' and 'earth.'

of Israel in the Book that twice, indeed, will they spread corruption on earth and will indeed become grossly overbearing. Hence, when the prediction of the first of those two periods of iniquity came to pass, He sent against them some of His servants of terrible prowess in war, and they wrought havoc throughout the land; and so the prediction was fulfilled. And after a time, He allowed them to prevail against them once again, and aided them with wealth and offspring, and made them more numerous (*al-Isra'*: 4-6)

This was the first time the Muslims triumphed over the Jews. The True Lord says that after a time He allowed them to prevail against them once again. When the True Lord said 'against them,' this meant against the Muslims because they were the ones who triumphed over the Jews in the first time. And the meaning of the statement that he aided them with wealth and offspring is that they were allowed to gain victory over the Muslims; and this is what is happening now, and what we are witnessing now and have been witnessing lately. That is, aid and power are coming to them from abroad, not from their own resources.

We now see that Israel subsists by bringing Jewish immigrants from other countries, and getting money and aid from other countries. That is, all the help they get is from the outside. Israel cannot exist without immigrants and foreign aid, and so all their help has to come from the outside. If a military leader seeks reinforcements in a battle, it means he wants additional men to come to him from outside the battlefield to add strength and support to his army. And God *the Exalted* tells them that he made them more numerous. The word *nafir* (rendered as 'numerous' in the cited verse) literally means a loud sound that attracts attention. We see now that Israel controls media and propaganda all over the world, and that her voice is loud, and is heard by all. The True Lord then explains that when the time of the second period of their iniquity comes to pass, God will raise an enemy against them, who would sadden their faces, and enter the Temple as they had entered it once before (*al-Isra'*: 7). This means that the Aqsa mosque will be lost to the Muslims and be under the control of the Jews, and then the Muslims will come and fight them and enter the mosque as they had done before under the rule of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him*. And God addresses the Israelites saying that when the time of the Last Day shall come to pass, He will bring them forth as a motley crowd (*al-Isra'*: 104). A motley crowd

means a group which is not uniform, and has conflicts within itself and with those outside of it. Since God has ordained that fighting will take place between the Jews and the Muslims, in which the Muslims will regain the Aqsa mosque, this means He had to gather them together in a single place; for if they had remained dispersed throughout the nations of the earth and ostracised from the communities within which they lived, this would have meant that the Muslims would have to fight the entire world. But God decreed that He would bring them from every country to the place where Jerusalem stood so that the war between them and the Muslims could take place, and the Muslims could enter the mosque once again as they did before.

So the True Lord reminds the children of Israel of the favours He granted them, and of their sins and disbelief so that no one could say that God was hard on them – for they were the ones who disbelieved, and they were the ones who disobeyed and spread corruption in the earth, and so they deserved this punishment from God.

وَأَنْقُضُوا يَوْمَ لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا  
شَفَعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

**Guard yourselves against a Day when no soul will  
stand in place of another, no intercession will be  
accepted for it, nor any ransom; nor will they be  
helped [48] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 48)**

God says ‘And be on your guard against a day...’ to remind them of this Day, the Day of Resurrection when nothing will benefit a person save his actions; and the True Lord asks them to place a barrier of protection between themselves and His attributes of majesty on that Day.

In another verse, God tells them to be on their guard against a day when one soul shall not avail for another at all, neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession be of use to it, nor shall they be helped (*al-Baqara*: 123).

So it seems that this verse is a repetition of the previously discussed verse in a slightly different form: the content is the same, but the first verse says, ‘...neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation

be taken from it, nor shall they be helped,' whilst the second says: '...neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession be of use to it, nor shall they be helped.' Is this repetition? We say that it is not, and this must be understood well. The two verses are alike in the way they begin, which is God's saying, 'And be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail for another at all....' In the first verse, however, intercession is mentioned first and it is said that it will not be accepted, and in the second verse intercession is mentioned second and it is said that it will not be of any use. In the first verse intercession comes first and then compensation, whilst in the second verse compensation comes first and then intercession. In the first verse it says that intercession will not be accepted, and in the second that it will not be of any use. The day warned against in the command 'And be on your guard against a day...' is the Day of Resurrection which God describes as a day when one soul shall be powerless for another soul: All sovereignty on that day shall be with God (*al-Infitar*: 19).

Then God says, '...when one soul shall not avail for another at all....' How many souls are being mentioned here? It is two, one availing the other. There is a first soul, and a second soul. What is the first soul? It is the one who will avail, and the second is the one who will be availed. Since they are two souls, and God then says, '...neither shall any intercession be accepted from it...' which one of them is intended by this, the first or the second?

Let us consider the meaning which is that a righteous person will come on the Day of Resurrection and say, 'Lord, I will avail so-and-so, or suffice so-and-so, or pay the due of so-and-so;' the first soul here is the one who will try to avail the second.

In order to illustrate this (and to God belongs the loftiest of similitudes), let us suppose that a ruler becomes angry with someone and decides to exact bitter revenge upon him, and this ruler's friend comes and tries to stand up for the one who has incurred this anger. Because this man has a high station with the ruler, he tries to intercede for the third party. In such a circumstance, the ruler will either accept the intercession or not. If he does not accept it, the friend will say to the ruler, 'I will pay a ransom for him;' it will only come to this (paying a ransom) if the intercession first fails.



And so if this takes place on the Day of Resurrection with God, and a righteous person comes to intercede with God on behalf of someone who has wronged themselves, the intercessor will have to be a righteous person in order that the True Lord *the Glorified* will accept his intercession, and He *the Exalted* asserts that no one would be able to intercede with Him except by His permission (*al-Baqara*: 255).

And God says that He knows what is before them and what is behind them; and no plea shall they offer except for whom He pleases; and they tremble for fear of Him (*al-Anbiya*: 28). So here, the righteous man tries to intercede for the one who wronged himself, and his intercession is not accepted, and then no ransom is taken from him, and no other bargain is allowed for him; so he does not speak about a ransom until the intercession has been denied.

The pronoun here refers to the one who is trying to avail the other, i.e. the one who is trying to intercede with God, and so the True Lord says, ‘...neither shall any intercession be accepted from it...’ and so no other bargain will be accepted either, and so He then says, ‘...nor shall any compensation be taken from it...’ which is the natural order of events.

In the second verse, God is speaking about the one who is trying to be availed by the other: before he seeks any intercession from another and tries to make them intercede for him, he must first have exhausted his other schemes and have no other option, and so be forced to turn to another. This is an admission of his own incapability, and so he says, ‘Lord, what can I do to erase my sins?’ but it is not accepted from him, and so he goes to someone whose intercession might be accepted and seeks it from them, but it is not accepted.

If we want to give an example of this from the Noble Quran, we can find it in the description the True Lord gives of the case of the guilty on the Day of Judgement, when those who are lost in sin shall droop their heads before their Lord and cry to Him that they have seen and heard, and beg to be returned to their earthly life that they may do good deeds as now they have firm belief (*as-Sajda*: 12).

These are the ones who seek to bargain with God, asking that He return them to the world so that they can make up for their sins and do good deeds to save them from suffering, since good deeds efface the bad. How

does the True Lord answer them? He *the Exalted* tells them to taste the recompense of their having neglected the meeting of this their Day; God has forsaken them; and they would taste, then, the abiding chastisement for what they did (*as-Sajda*: 14).

So they will offer to make up for their sins by returning to this world to do good deeds, but God will not accept this offer from them. He *the Exalted* puts forth the question on whether the unbelievers are waiting for anything, but the final interpretation of the Book that He had sent. He *the Exalted* asserts that on the day its final interpretation comes about, those who had neglected it before will concede that the Messengers of their Lord had come with the Truth, and they would wonder if there are any intercessors who would intercede on their behalf, or if they could be sent back so that they would do deeds different from those which they did. Then God gives the final judgement on them: they have lost their souls and that which they had forged has gone away from them (*al-A'raf*: 53).

They first asked for intercession and it was not accepted, and so they tried another approach which was to offer a ransom, but this too was not accepted, as God says, '...neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it....' So we see the difference between the two verses; and there is no repetition in the Noble Quran.

But the verse we are currently examining is concerned with the one who intercedes for the other, or seeks to intercede for the sinful one: '...neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it....' The other verse says that 'neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession be of use to it...' (*al-Baqara*: 123); the pronoun refers back to the one seeking to be availed, and so he offers a ransom first: they beg to be returned to their earthly life that they may do good deeds (*as-Sajda*: 32), and this will not be accepted; so he will seek out someone to intercede for him, but will not find anyone, and no intercession will be of any use to him.

These verses which we have quoted from the Noble Quran are all concerned with the Day of Resurrection, yet there is another example of this case (where we have two seemingly similar verses but having different imports) in the

Quran. God wanted to abolish a social practice that was known in pre-Islamic times, of parents killing off their newborn children due to poverty; so He *the Exalted* commands the believers not to kill their children because of poverty as it is God Who provides livelihood for them as well as for their children (*al-An'am*: 151). In another verse, however, God commands the believers not to kill their children because of fear of poverty as it is God Who provides livelihood for their children as well as for them (*al-Isra'*: 31).

Some people say that the fact that the first verse mentions the parents before the children whilst the second mentions the children first is merely a matter of stylistic concern. We say no; it has significance in terms of meaning. The first verse speaks of poverty that already exists; and when poverty already exists, people do not want more children which would make them even poorer. And so in this instance the True Lord mentioned the parents before the children, implying that the coming of more children will not make them poorer because they shall have their sustenance and the children shall have theirs, and the fact that the children will have sustenance will not mean that the parents' own sustenance will be decreased. The father shall have his sustenance, as will the child. The second verse, on the other hand, speaks not of existent poverty but of fear of poverty. So poverty is in this instance not yet present, but rather, the parent fears that if he is given children, they will make him poor. And so the True Lord mentions the children first in this case meaning that the children's own sustenance will come to them even before the parents' sustenance comes to them.

And so, when you see that the word of God '...be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail for another at all' is repeated in the two verses, do not think that this is repetitious because the first one goes on to say, 'neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it...' (*al-Baqara*: 48), whilst the second proceeds: 'neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession be of use to it...' (*al-Baqara*: 123). So the pronoun refers to different people in the two instances, one referring to the person who attempts to avail the other and so mentioning intercession before compensation, and the other referring to the one seeking to be availed and so mentioning compensation first and then intercession. The

True Lord commands all people to fear their Lord and dread the Day on which neither parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child will in the least avail his parent (*Luqman*: 33). That is, no person can avail any other no matter how close their relation: the child cannot avail his mother or father, and the parent cannot avail his children. God describes the Day of Judgement as a day when a person will fly from his brother, his mother, his father, and from his spouse and children; for every one of them on that day, his own concerns shall be enough (*Abasa*: 34-37).

The True Lord says, 'nor shall any compensation be taken from it...' (*al-Baqara*: 48) and 'neither shall any compensation be accepted from it,...' (*al-Baqara*: 123). The Arabic word '*adl*' (rendered as 'compensation' here) means a repayment, as in the case of one who has wronged himself saying, 'Lord, I did such-and-such, and wronged myself, so return me to the world so that I might do good deeds.' Different vowels in the word change its meaning: '*idl*' means a repayment for something of the same type such as material for material or gold for gold, whilst '*adl*' means a repayment for something of a different kind. The word '*adl*' also means truth and justice, and justice is only required when there are two rival parties; it also means equity and truth which is something that is firm and never changes, and that you do not have any bias towards one party at the expense of another. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, for example, sat with his Companions, he would look to each of them for the same duration of time so that it would not be said that he cared about any one of them more than another.

We must also know what the word *nafs* (here rendered as 'soul') means. When the word *nafs* is mentioned in the Noble Quran, know that it has a connection to the spirit. When the spirit comes into contact with the material body and gives it life, this gives existence to the *nafs* (soul). Before the spirit comes to it, the body is completely compelled and devoid of free will, and it glorifies God. So do not speak about the spiritual life and the material life, for both, the spirit and the material body glorify God. But when the spirit comes to the body and life begins, and desires are set in motion, this is when problems begin. Death is defined as the exit of the spirit from the body, and the spirit goes on to the world in which it is compelled, as does the body. This makes us understand the word of the True Lord when He mentions the Day

when people's own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by recalling what they did (*an-Nur*: 24). Why do they testify? That is because they are no longer under the control of the person, following his orders in doing good or bad deeds. Your senses are under your control in this worldly life by God's leave, and they glorify and worship God. If they obey you in the performance of a sin, therefore, they curse you because you have made them sin, and on the Day of Resurrection, they will come and bear witness against you. God makes an oath by the human soul, and how it is made perfect and balanced, and how it is inspired to know its wickedness from its piety (*ash-Shams*: 7-8).

People commonly speak of the material life and the spiritual life because the spiritual life differs from the spirit which dwells within your body. The word *ruh* ('spirit') is also used for the angels, as God mentions that the trustworthy spirit has descended with it (the Quran) from on high (*ash-Shu'ara*: 193). Also He *the Exalted* addresses His Messenger saying that He has revealed to him a ruh, a life-giving message, coming at God's behest... (*ash-Shura*: 52). This is a spirit of purity and innocence.

As for God's words '...nor shall they be helped' (*al-Baqara*: 123), it means that if God decrees that they should suffer His chastisement, no one can succour them or stop their suffering; and this cannot happen because God has control over everything.

وَإِذْ بَخَّيْنَاكُمْ مِّنْ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُم سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ  
وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذَٰلِكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

**Remember when We saved you from Pharaoh's people, who subjected you to terrible torment, slaughtering your sons and sparing only your women – this was a great trial from your Lord [49] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 49)**

After warning the children of Israel of a day in which no intercession shall be of any use, God wanted to remind them of the favour and blessing He extended to them. God's word 'when' here is an adverb of time (Arabic *zharf*) referring to the time of an action. We have already said that Arabic adverbs are of two kinds because every event needs a time and a place in which to occur. If I say to you 'Sit down where you are,' the adverbial phrase 'where

you are' refers to place. When God addresses His servants by saying 'Remember when I did such-and-such,' this means 'Remember the time I did it,' and so this is an adverb of time. So the True Lord says, 'And when We rescued you...', i.e. remember the time when He rescued you from Pharaoh.

The incident mentioned in the verse which we are currently examining is related three times in the Noble Quran. God says, 'And when We rescued you from the people of Pharaoh, who had afflicted you with a cruel chastisement: slaughtering your sons and letting only your women live; and in this was a great trial from your Lord.' (*al-Baqara*: 49). In the second verse, God reminds the Children of Israel of the time He saved them from the people of Pharaoh who had laid on them a cruel chastisement, killing their sons and letting their women live (*al-A'raf*: 141). In the third verse, God relates the admonition of Moses *peace be upon him* to his people to remember God's favour on them when He rescued them from the people of Pharaoh, who were inflicting severe suffering on them, and slaughtering their sons, and letting their women live (*Ibrahim*: 6).

There are delicate differences in expression between the first verse and the second: in the first, God says 'slaughtering your sons,' whilst in the second He says 'killing your sons,' and in the first He uses the term *najjayna*, whilst in the second, He uses the form *anjayna*. We need to pause and consider the difference between *najjayna* and *anjayna*. Also, in the verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, where the term used is *najjayna*, the one speaking is God. But in the verse in the chapter of *Ibrahim*, it was Moses *peace be upon him* speaking. What is the difference between the speech of God and the speech of Moses *peace be upon him*?

The statement of Moses *peace be upon him* here quotes the words of God. When God reminds His servants of His blessings to them, He does so by mentioning the greatest of these blessings, not the smallest. When God reminded the children of Israel of His blessings, He said, '...We rescued you from the people of Pharaoh, who had afflicted you with a cruel chastisement: slaughtering your sons and letting only your women live....' He did not mention the petty torments that the people of Moses *peace be upon him* had suffered at the hands of Pharaoh's people, and how they forced them to work in tilling the land, hewing rocks from the mountains, and serving in their households,

and how they would force those who did not work to pay taxes. And so the Jews would be crafty and wear threadbare clothes so that Pharaoh would not bother collecting taxes from them, which is the meaning of the word of the True Lord when He said that ignominy and humiliation overshadowed them (*al-Baqara*: 61). That is, they made a display of penury so as to avoid paying any tax.

But the True Lord did not mention to them here how He blessed them by delivering them from all that suffering, but rather, He mentioned the greatest blessing, which is that He saved their sons from being slaughtered and their women from being left alone because this would humiliate both their women and their men, and leave their women without any men to look after them, and they would go astray as a result of this.

There is a big difference between the word *najja* (rescue) and the word *anja* (spare). The word *najja* means to save / rescue someone whilst they are in the midst of their suffering, while the word *anja* means to save/spare someone before their suffering commences. The first means they were rescued from the midst of suffering, whilst the second means they were spared / delivered from Pharaoh's torment altogether. So the blessing God bestowed on them took place in two stages: the first stage was that He saved them from a torment which was being inflicted on them, and the second stage was that He took them far away from Pharaoh's people so that this torment could not continue.

God says, '...who had afflicted you with a cruel chastisement....' What is cruelty? It means here that their suffering was of many kinds, such as flogging, enslavement, and forced labour. What does the verb *yasum* ('afflict') mean? If someone afflicts their enemy, it means they humiliate and degrade them. The word is derived from the verb *sam* (meaning to leave cattle to graze, from which came the word for the 'abandoned' cattle). So if it is said that Pharaoh afflicted (*yasum*) the Israelites with cruel suffering, this means that their entire lives were filled with degradation and torment. And so, when God speaks about the Pharaonic rulers of Ancient Egypt, He mentions the Pharaohs who lived in the time of the tribes of 'Ad and Thamud. He *the Exalted* takes an oath by the daybreak and the ten nights, by the even and the odd, and the night as it runs its course. Truly in all that there is an oath for someone endowed with reason. Then the True Lord puts forth a rhetorical question on how He dealt

with the tribe of 'Ad, the people of Iram of the many-pillared lofty buildings, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land, and with the tribe of Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley, and with Pharaoh of the many poles, who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein (*al-Fajr*: 1-12). That is, God mentioned the Pharaonic civilisation and the Ancient Egyptians after 'Ad and Thamud, which is evidence that the civilisations of 'Ad and Thamud were older. God described 'Ad by saying that none like them were ever created in the land, i.e. that they had a more advanced civilisation than that of Ancient Egypt. Some people might ask how it could be that God would describe 'Ad by saying that none like them were ever created in the land, even though today there are very advanced civilisations.

We say that God has exposed to us the Pharaonic civilisation and its vestiges, but has hidden from us the civilisation of 'Ad; and we have found in the Pharaonic civilisation things that even until now we have not matched, such as their expertise in embalming and mummifying bodies, and their construction of the pyramids, among other things. And since the civilisation of 'Ad was even more advanced than that of the Pharaohs, it must have attained to secrets which even now are hidden in this world, yet we know nothing about this because God has not shown us any of their traces.

The True Lord spoke about the Pharaonic civilisation as a whole using the name Pharaoh, and referred to those living in the time of Moses *peace be upon him* as Pharaoh's people; but concerning the time between Joseph and Moses *peace be upon them* He did not refer to any of the rulers of Egypt as Pharaoh, but rather used the term 'the king' to refer to them and used the term 'Al-'Aziz' to refer to the chief minister, who answered only to the king. In narrating the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*, the True Lord says that the King commanded that Joseph be brought before him (*Yusuf*: 50).

So the ruler at the time of Joseph *peace be upon him* was called king, not pharaoh, even though the rulers of Egypt before and after Joseph *peace be upon him* were called pharaohs. This is because before the time of Joseph *peace be upon him* Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos, a Semitic people who invaded Egypt and



defeated the Pharaohs, and ruled Egypt for years before the Pharaohs rose up and expelled them.

It is amazing that this story was unknown until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone by the French and the subsequent deciphering of Hieroglyphic writing. The kings of the Hyksos were originally shepherds who came to rule Egypt for a time; and so we see that in the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*, God says that the King ordered Joseph to be brought before him, and so we see that the Noble Quran tells with precision the story of every ruler of his era, and calls the Pharaohs by their name of Pharaoh, and then when the Hyksos came there, was no pharaoh, but rather, there were kings, and then when Moses *peace be upon him* came, the Pharaohs had returned to power in Egypt. And so, although we knew nothing of this until the Rosetta Stone was found at the end of the eighteenth century, the Quran chronicled it correctly fourteen centuries ago, and this is a miracle which can be added to the manifold miracles of the Noble Quran where it mentioned something which was unknown at the time of its Revelation and which has become known to us now so that we find that the Quran chronicled it with complete accuracy.

After speaking of the difference between *najjayna* and *anjayna*, let us move on to the difference between ‘slaughtering your sons’ and ‘killing your sons’. Slaughtering is not the same as killing, as slaughtering involves the spilling of blood, and is usually performed by cutting the arteries in the neck. Slaying, on the other hand, might be achieved by slaughtering in this manner or by any other means, such as strangling or drowning. This is all considered killing, and it does not necessarily involve spilling of blood.

The True Lord wants to alert us to the fact that when Pharaoh wanted to take revenge on the Israelites, there were two things for which he wanted vengeance. The first was that they were the allies of the Hyksos, and they aided them in their occupation of Egypt. The king of the Hyksos took Joseph *peace be upon him* as his minister, and so it seems that the Hyksos were allies of the Israelites. So when the Pharaohs defeated them, they exacted revenge upon the Israelites in any way they could, killing them and burning down their houses.

As for the slaughtering mentioned in God’s words ‘slaughtering your sons,’ Pharaoh had a vision of fire rising from the direction of Jerusalem and

burning all the Egyptians with only the Israelites surviving. When Pharaoh asked for an interpretation of the dream, the soothsayers told him that a boy from the descendants of Israel would come, at whose hands would be the end of his reign. And so Pharaoh commanded the midwives to slaughter every male child born to the Israelites. But the people of power among Pharaoh's subjects said, 'The Israelites are almost extinct, and we need them to serve us.' He therefore decreed that one year there would be a slaughter, and the next year the male children would be left to live. Aaron *peace be upon him* was born in the year of amnesty and so was safe, whilst Moses *peace be upon him* was born in the year of slaughter, and there followed what followed.

So the reason for slaughtering was Pharaoh's fear of losing his kingdom; that was why he commanded that the method used to be slaughtering in order to ensure the death of the boys. If they had used another way, like throwing them from a mountain or striking them with a heavy stone, or stabbing them with a sword or a spear, some boys might have survived; but by using slaughtering as the method of execution they could be sure that death would be instantaneous and that none would survive.

The True Lord says, '...who had afflicted you with a cruel chastisement: slaughtering your sons and letting only your women live....' The word 'son' means males, whilst the word 'child' means both males and females. So the slaughtering was for the boys only, whilst they left the females to live.

But why did the True Lord not say 'slaughtering your boys and sparing your girls,' instead of 'slaughtering your sons and letting only your women live...'? The True Lord wants to draw our attention to the fact that the purpose of this was to keep the females alive so that Pharaoh's people could have enjoyment of them, and so He did not use the word 'girls,' but rather 'women', i.e. they wanted them for their own pleasure, and the purpose of this was to torment the Israelites; for nothing kills a man's manliness like seeing his women subjected to vile acts.

The True Lord then says, '...and in this was a great trial from your Lord.' What is a trial (*bala'*)? Some people think that a trial means an ordeal or an evil thing, yet God, in another verse, addresses people saying that He tests

them through the bad and the good things of life by way of trial; and to Him they all must return (*al-Anbiya'*: 35).

So there are trials of good and trials of evil, and 'trial' in itself is not something that should be feared. What is to be feared, however, is the result of this trial because a trial is a test and an assessment: If you pass it and succeed in it, it is good for you; if you do not pass it, it is bad for you. The True Lord says that He subjected His 'Friend' Abraham *peace be upon him* to trial by His commands, and when Abraham fulfilled them, God said that He shall make him an Imam (a leader) of men (*al-Baqara*: 124).

So Abraham *peace be upon him* passed the test. Trials came to the Israelites from two directions: trials of evil in the form of their suffering and the slaughter of their sons, and trials of good in the form of their being saved from Pharaoh's people. The Israelites passed the first test, and bore their suffering and subjugation with steadfast patience though it was an awesome trial; but as for the second trial, they did things which we will mention presently.

وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمْ الْبَحْرَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَأَنْتُمْ نَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

**And when We parted the sea for you, so saving  
you and drowning Pharaoh's people right before  
your eyes [50] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 50)**

Here again we have the word 'when,' and the verse makes mention of their being saved and the means and manner of this salvation. Moses *peace be upon him* and his people made their escape, and they were six hundred thousand strong, as the narrations relate. Pharaoh learned of their departure and so followed them with an army numbering one million men. When Moses' people saw them, as the Noble Quran tells us, they complained to Moses that they had suffered hurt before he came to them and since he had come to them (*al-A'raf*: 129). And Moses *peace be upon him*, as the Quran tells us, replied that it may well be that their Lord will destroy their foe and make them inherit the earth, and then He will see how they will act (*al-A'raf*: 129).

When Pharaoh and his men, with their great strength and numbers, came to face Moses' people, and the two sides saw one another, the people of Moses *peace be upon him* cried out that they shall certainly be overtaken (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 61).

This is a logical concern, seeing that the sea was in front of them and Pharaoh and his forces were behind them; but when things are removed from the ordinary chain of causality and placed within the power of the Causer of all things, they do not come under natural causality, and so Moses *peace be upon him* said to them with confidence that indeed this is not the case: his Lord is with Him, and He will guide him (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62).

And with this, the matter departed from the chain of causality to be under the control of the Causer *the Exalted*. Ordinarily, of course, Pharaoh and his hordes would have overrun them; but God would intervene and make for them a way to be saved.

So God inspired Moses *peace be upon him* to strike the sea with his staff, and so it parted; thus were the laws of water, namely free flow and liquidity, contravened. The sea parted, each side rising like a mountain, the atoms of water clinging to one another to make two great mountains between which lay a dry strip for the Israelites to pass through. This is the meaning of God's words: 'And when we parted the sea for you,' for a parting means a separation between two things. If the sea did part, then where did the soft wet sands of the sea bed go? It is said that God sent a wind to dry it, which is the import of the statement of the True Lord about making out for them a dry path through the sea (*Ta Ha*: 77).

It is said that when Moses *peace be upon him* and his people were traversing the path through the sea, they asked about the rest of their people. Moses *peace be upon him* told them that they were passing through another path running parallel to their own. They said, 'We want to be sure about them.' So Moses *peace be upon him* raised his hand to the heaven and said, 'O God, help me deal with their rudeness!' So God inspired Moses *peace be upon him* to strike the walls with his staff, and so a gap opened between each passage so that they could all see each other.

When Moses *peace be upon him* saw Pharaoh and his army coming to the sea to chase them through it, he wanted to strike the water to make it flow again so that Pharaoh's people would not catch them. But God inspired him to leave the sea as it was since, verily, they are a host destined to be drowned (*ad-Dukhan*: 24). That is, leave the sea as it is so that Pharaoh's people will follow you, thinking that they too can pass through the dry strip

safely. And then, when the first of them comes close to where you are at the far shore and the last of them had just left the other, I shall return the water to its liquid state, and will thereby have saved you and destroyed them by the same means. So the True Lord wants here to remind the Israelites of the fact that He saved them from suffering and destroyed their enemy; so the one blessing was in fact two blessings: a positive blessing in that He saved them and a negative blessing in that He destroyed their enemy.

God says, ‘...while you were looking on.’ In this verse, the True Lord does not mention Pharaoh, but rather only mentions the drowning of Pharaoh’s people. Why is this? It is because it was Pharaoh’s people who aided him in his tyranny and his oppressive ways, and they were the tool by which he inflicted suffering upon the Israelites. God wanted the Israelites to see Pharaoh’s people being drowned, and so they stopped to witness this. If you see your enemy meet his end, you feel the bitterness in your heart fade away. The words ‘...while you were looking on’ could also have another meaning, which is that you looked at one another in amazement that you had been saved from this awesome trial, and yet at the same time you were relieved because you were witnessing it for yourselves; and they all drowned without any of them being spared so that no doubt would enter your hearts that perhaps some of them had survived and would return with another army to follow you.

وَإِذْ وَعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ثُمَّ اتَّخَذْتُمُ الْعِجْلَ مِن بَعْدِهِ وَأَنتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

**We appointed forty nights for Moses [on Mount Sinai]  
and then, while he was away, you took to worshipping  
the calf – a terrible wrong [51] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 51)**

The True Lord says ‘And when We appointed for Moses a time of forty nights....’ The purpose of this appointment was to reveal to Moses *peace be upon him* the teachings of the religion. When God spoke directly to Moses *peace be upon him* on the mountainside of at-Tur, this was in order to tell Moses that he was one of the Messengers of the Lord of the worlds, and that He had sent him to save the Israelites from the tyranny and torment of Pharaoh, and that He would aid him with signs and miracles so that Pharaoh and his people would be convinced that Moses *peace be upon him* was a Messenger of God. Moses *peace be upon him*

was given this mission and sent to Pharaoh, and the incident with the sorcerers took place, and Moses and his people were saved by God parting the sea for them. All this took place at a time before the teachings of the religion were revealed; and so after saving Moses *peace be upon him* and his people and drowning Pharaoh, it was now time for God to complete the imparting of His teachings to Moses. The appointment took place over forty nights, which at first were set to be thirty, before the True Lord completed them with an additional ten nights, as explained by the statement of God that He appointed for Moses thirty nights and then He added to them ten, whereby the term of forty nights set by his Lord was fulfilled (*al-A'raf*: 142).

When time is mentioned in a religious context, it is always mentioned in terms of nights. This is because you cannot ascertain the date during the day; the sun rises, then sets, and then rises again. If you look at the disc of the sun, you cannot ascertain what time of the month we are in, whether the beginning, middle, or end. But when night falls, simply by glancing at the moon you can ascertain what date it is. If the moon is a crescent this means we are in the first days of the month and if it is full we are in the middle, and so on.

There are very specific phases of the moon which people use to measure time; any regular person is able to approximate the date for you by night, and a Bedouin in the desert can tell you the exact day of the month using the moon. So when a religious matter is concerned, we measure everything by night: on the first evening of *Ramadan* we perform the *Tarawih* prayers (special night prayers in *Ramadan*), whilst on the night before the feast (*Eid Al-fitr*) we do not pray it; and we speak of the middle night of the month of *Sha'ban*, and the night of the Night of Ascension (*Laylat al-Mi'raj*).

So, night is not considered an auxiliary to the day in any of our religious dates except for the Day of '*Arafa*'; we do not say 'the night of '*Arafa*', but rather, we call it the Day of '*Arafa*'. So night is considered the beginning of a date in our religion, and God decreed that time would be measured by twelve lunar months which make up a full year. So the Christian year is different from the *Hijra* year, and the reason for this is that God has distributed His mercy throughout His creation. If our religious occasions were determined by the solar calendar, *Ramadan*, for example, would always come in the same

solar month, never changing, and so people would have to fast every year in summer in certain places and in winter in other places, and this would never change. So *Ramadan* would always fall in the heat of summer for some people and in the cold of winter for others.

But as the *Hijra* year is determined by the movement of the moon, this means that all of God's times of blessing in His creation come at all the different times of year; *Ramadan* falls in both summer and winter, as does the Standing at '*Arafa*', as do all the other blessed religious occasions because the *Hijra* year is twelve days shorter than the Christian year, and there occurs a full year's difference every thirty-three years.

The True Lord says, '...then you took the calf [for a god] after him and you were unjust.' God wants to test the Israelites and to show us how they showed ingratitude for the blessings of God. God saved them from Pharaoh's hordes; and they had scarcely crossed the sea when they saw a people who worshipped idols, and, as the Noble Quran tells us, asked Moses to set up for them a god as they have gods (*al-A'raf*: 138). This happened right after they emerged from the sea unharmed. Moses *peace be upon him* took his chiefs and went to meet his Lord, leaving his brother Aaron *peace be upon him* with the Israelites. When the Israelites had been in Egypt in the service of the women of the Pharaoh and his people, some of them had stolen their jewellery and gold. Now, despite the fact that Pharaoh and his people were rebels against God, this does not mean that it is was correct to steal their women's jewellery; we do not repay those who sin against God in their dealings with us by sinning against God in our dealings with them, thereby becoming sinners like them. Rather, we repay those who sin against God in their dealings with us by obeying God in our dealings with them.

When Abu Ad-Darda' (a Companion of the Prophet) God *be pleased with him* heard that someone had spoken ill of him, he sent them a note saying, 'O brother, do not go on reviling us, and give reconciliation a chance; for we do not repay those who sin against God in their dealings with us with anything more than by obeying God in our dealings with them.' The Israelites stole some jewellery from the women of Pharaoh's people, and so God made this jewellery a means of their temptation, and Satan made it seem alluring to them to fashion a calf

from this jewellery and then to worship it. Moses the Samaritan, who was raised by the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him*, made the calf for them, taking the golden jewellery and melting it to make it into the shape of a calf which made a lowing sound, and said to them, 'This is your God and the God of Moses.'

Do you know why God subjected them to the trial of the calf? It is because the gold from which the calf was made was unlawfully earned, and nothing good can ever come from the unlawful. We must learn a lesson from this event, which is that ill-gotten earnings turn against the perpetrators and bring them evil and wickedness. If your food is unlawful it will enter into the fabric of your cells, and so your body will contain that which is unlawful; and once the unlawful enters your body, your actions will incline towards that which is unlawful. So the unlawful influences the body and leads it further towards the unlawful. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'God is good, and does not accept but what is good. And God has ordered the believers to do that which He had ordered the messengers to do. God the Exalted has ordered the Messengers to eat from that which is good and to do that which is good (*al-Mu'minun*: 51); and, likewise, He ordered the believers to eat from that which is good, which He has provided' (*al-Baqara*: 172). [The Prophet then proceeded] to mention that a man, long travelled, dishevelled, and covered with dust, stretching his two hands to Heaven [praying and saying], 'O Lord ... o Lord,' and his food [comes from what] is prohibited, and his drink [comes from what] is prohibited, and his clothing [comes from what] is prohibited, and he is nourished by what is prohibited; how is he to be granted his prayer?!<sup>(1)</sup>

The very same thing happened with the Israelites. They stole gold from Pharaoh's people and so it was a source of evil for them, and God said of them, '...then you took the calf [for a god] after him and you were unjust.'

As scholars say, God's appointment with Moses *peace be upon him* was for thirty nights, and after the thirty nights have been completed, He would give him what He promised; the word *wa'd* ('promise') means to tell someone of a coming good, whilst the word *wa'id* ('threat') means to tell someone of a coming evil. If you hear the word 'promise', you know that what comes next will be

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi



good, whereas if you hear the word ‘threat’ you know that what comes next will be bad; except for one verse in the Quran where God says that He has promised the fire to those who were unbelievers (*al-Hajj*: 72).

Is the promise here of a good thing, or is the meaning different? We say: if the fire is what is being promised, then it is bad; but if the fire is receiving the promise and it is the disbelievers who are being promised to it, then the disbelievers are good for the fire because the fire will rejoice in punishing the disbelievers of God’s servants, and we know about this from God’s words telling us that on the Day of judgement, He will ask hell if it has had its fill, and it will answer with a question asking if there is still more (*Qaf*: 30).

No one asks for more of something unless they like it. The fire, like all subjugated creations in the universe, praises God and hates the sinners. But it is not commanded to burn them in this world, and so in the Hereafter it will rejoice while it burns the disbelievers and sinners.

ثُمَّ عَفَوْنَا عَنْكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

**Even then We forgave you, so that  
you might be thankful [52]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 52)**

God *the Most High* once again reminds the Israelites of His blessings upon them: although they committed the absolute peak of sin in worshipping other than God, still God pardoned them because He wanted the element of good to remain in His creation, and He wanted them to know that He is a Merciful Lord, who opens the door to repentance for one person after another in order to efface the traces of evil from the human soul.

When a person sins, he strays from the purpose of faith. If there were no establishment of repentance and forgiveness from God, people would sin more and more until they are submerged in sin because if there were no way to repent, and a single sin would lead to hell, people would feel certain of being punished, and so would continue in their sinfulness. God *the Most High* does not want this for His servants; and the Noble Hadith says, ‘Verily, God is more pleased with His servant’s repentance than one of you who has found

his camel after he had lost it in wilderness.'<sup>(1)</sup> The meaning of this is that if a man has a camel which carries his possessions and his food and drink and all that he has, and then, he loses it in the middle of the barren desert and so searches for it, but he does not find it; he has lost it, and lost with it everything he needs to live; then he looks and sees it before him. How great will his joy be? Of course his joy will be limitless. This is the joy of God for the repentance of His believing servant; indeed His joy is even greater.

When God *the Most High* opens the door to repentance, He wants the movement of the world to proceed. Imagine if a person was heedless just once, or was tempted by his desires to sin just once, or Satan whispered to him as he whispered to Adam and Eve God *be pleased with them*; if there were no possibility of repentance and forgiveness, every one of these people would turn into a demon.

Moreover, great good deeds can come from those who wrong themselves because, pushed by their feelings of guilt, they go on to do many good deeds to make up for their mistakes, as God *the Most High* has decreed that good deeds take away evil deeds; this is a reminder to the mindful (*Hud*: 114).

And He *the Exalted* commands His Messenger to take alms from the properties of the believers that would cleanse them and purify them (*at-Tawba*: 103).

So God pardoned the Israelites after they committed the ultimate disbelief by worshipping the calf because He wanted the force of good to remain in His creation. The Israelites worshipped the calf before the teachings of the religion, namely the Torah, had been revealed to them. But after the Torah was revealed to them, did they repent and reform themselves, or did they persist in their disobedience and stubbornness?

وَإِذْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَالْفُرْقَانَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

**Remember when We gave Moses the Scripture, and the means to distinguish [right and wrong], so that you might be guided [53] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 53)**

Here, the True Lord *the Most High* reminds the children of Israel that after He showed them so many miracles, and saved them from Pharaoh's people,

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

and parted the sea for them, they should have had true faith which would not be caused to waver by anything; for they had seen and witnessed for themselves, and had witnessed with their own eyes, with complete certainty. But was this witnessing enough to remove the hypocrisy and disbelief from their hearts? No. They continued to be obstinate throughout their entire history, never accepting anything easily.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* warned his community not to be like the children of Israel, and not to be hard in accepting God's commands, which would entail rigour of God on them. This was the case with the story of the cow which they were commanded to slaughter in order to establish who had committed a murder which almost caused a civil war between them. They began to ask about the correct colour for the cow, and so on; we will get to this when we reach the noble verses concerning this story. Had they simply slaughtered any cow it, would have sufficed them because it would have been enough that when God *the Most High* said to them 'Slaughter a cow' that they simply slaughter any cow. The fact that this cow was not specified in detail made things easy for them, but they asked for specifics and kept asking, and so things became harder for them by specifying a certain cow. That is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Leave me (do not ask me questions) as long as I leave out (omit) giving you instructions. Those who came before you have but perished due to their excessive questioning and their differences with their prophets. When I instruct you to do something, do of it what you can; and when I forbid you something, keep away from it.'<sup>(1)</sup>

God *the Most High* says, 'And when We gave Moses the Book and the standard of distinction [between right and wrong]...' meaning that the fact that Moses *peace be upon him* was given the scripture and the standard, was a blessing which his people should remember, and that they should receive God's teachings as a blessing.

A person should not take the Divine commandments thinking that they are just something which restricts his freedom and does not give him anything in return. When God forbids you from stealing, for example, He forbids

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(1) Narrated by Muslim

everyone else from stealing from you as well; so if your freedom to steal has been taken from you, the freedom for all others to steal from you has also been taken from them – and this is a great source of protection for you.

What is the ‘Book’ and what is ‘the standard of distinction [between right and wrong]’? The Book is the Torah which delineated God’s teachings; and the standard is everything by which God clarifies the difference between truth and falsehood. So the phrase ‘the standard of distinction [between right and wrong]’ is used to mean the Torah because it distinguished between truth and falsehood, and also to mean everything by which truth can be distinguished from falsehood. And so the day of the Battle of Badr is called ‘the Day of the Standard of Distinction’ because on that day truth was distinguished from falsehood. So God’s teachings and His Book show us where the truth is and where falsehood is, and show us the difference between them.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يَنْقُورِ إِنَّكُمْ ظَلَمْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ بِاتِّخَاذِكُمُ  
الْعِجْلَ فَتُوبُوا إِلَىٰ بَارِيكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ عِنْدَ  
بَارِيكُمْ فَنَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنَّهُ هُوَ النَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

**Moses said to his people, ‘My people, you have wronged yourselves by worshipping the calf, so repent to your Maker and kill [the guilty among] you. That is the best you can do in the eyes of your Maker.’ He accepted your repentance: He is the Ever Relenting and the Most Merciful [54] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 54)**

God *the Most High* reminds the Israelites here of the story of their worship of the calf, the story of a serious violation of God’s teachings and a violation of the pinnacle of faith, namely the worship of God Alone. What happened is that Moses *peace be upon him* went to his appointment with God, taking with him the chiefs of his people in order to receive the teachings and the Torah. God *the Most High* informed him that his people had gone astray and begun to worship other than God, and so Moses *peace be upon him* returned in a state of severe anger, and took hold of his brother Aaron *peace be upon him* and pulled him by the head and beard, saying to him ‘I left you in charge of them so that they would not go astray,’ and Aaron *peace be upon him* asked Moses (his half-brother, his mother’s

son) not to seize him by his beard or by his head, and protested that he was afraid lest (on his return) Moses would accuse him of causing a split among the Children of Israel, and of not heeding his bidding (*Ta Ha*: 94).

The error of the worship of the calf was initiated by the Samaritan. His name was Musa (Moses) the Samaritan, and his mother gave birth to him in the desert and then died. So Gabriel *peace be upon him* adopted him and raised him. Gabriel *peace be upon him* would come to him on horseback bearing for him the food and drink he needed. Moses the Samaritan would see that whenever Gabriel's horse passed over the ground, soil would be thrown up by it, and the earth would give forth verdure after this soil had fallen onto it. He realised that there was some kind of secret in the horse's hoof, and so he took a handful of the soil left by the horse's trail and placed it into the golden calf, which then began to low as though it were alive.

Do not be surprised that a person who seeks to spread mischief might find aid from the means around him whereby he can beguile the people; for God *the Most High* tests His creatures, and He *the Exalted* provides special preparation to those who carry His message. Before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* moved to Medina, he and the Muslims were subjected to many trials. The event of the Night Ascension (*Laylat al-Mi'raj*) happened to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* after all his worldly means had been exhausted in Mecca and he had gone to At-Ta'if to call its people, and the slaves and imbeciles there met him with violence and pelted him with stones until his noble feet bled, and he raised his hands to the heaven and made the famous prayer: 'O God, to You I complain of my weakness, and my helplessness, and my lowliness before men...'

And not only the Messenger suffered this, but so too did all the believers. Mus'ab ibn 'Umar God *be pleased with him*, a pampered lad of Quraysh, who had such wealth, clothes and slaves as cannot be counted, ended up after his conversion to Islam having only a donkey's hide to wear. Such was the case so that the True Lord *the Most High* could test the love of faith in Mus'ab ibn 'Umar's heart: Did he love the things of this world more, or did he love God and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* more? And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would say to the Companions, 'Look at what faith has done to your friend.'

Those who would carry God's message to the world have to be tested and examined; they have to be able to meet trials with steadfast patience and be strong before the enemies of this message, and be ready to bear struggle and pain; for this is the sign of true faith.

This is why you find that every false call brings benefit to the inner circle of those who make it: the call of communism, for instance, benefits the members of the central committee, whilst the large population wear cheap clothing and live in cramped houses. On the other hand, the leaders, who spend money beyond counting, are all members of the central committee. This is a false call. The opposite of this is the call to truth, wherein the one who delivers the message is the first to pay and the first to sacrifice, and he does not get any personal benefit from what he calls to, but rather on the contrary, he must sacrifice for the cause he is calling to. So falsehood brings benefit to those who call to it; and if you see any call bringing great benefit to those who make it, then know that it is a false calling. If it were not for the benefits it brings, no one would ever dream of following it.

The noble verse we are currently examining chronicles a reproach given by Moses *peace be upon him* to his people, whom God saved from Pharaoh's people, and whose enemies He destroyed, and who then began worshipping the calf as a god. When did all this happen? It happened at the time when Moses *peace be upon him* had gone to his appointment with his Lord to receive His instructions. Those who took the calf as a god, did they wrong God *the Most High*, or did they wrong their own selves? They wronged themselves because they led themselves into ruin without benefitting anything. Wrongdoing is of different kinds. One person does wrong concerning the pinnacle of matters, whilst others do wrong concerning matters that are of auxiliary significance to this pinnacle. The one who does wrong concerning the pinnacle is the one who associates partners with God, as the noble verse asserts that setting up partners with God is a great injustice (*Luqman*: 13).

The connection between idolatry and injustice in this case is that you try and make one, who has neither created nor provided, and make it an associate with Him who did create and provide. And consider this thing which you have made into a god: How is it to be worshipped? Worship means for the worshipper

to obey the worshipped, but what did this calf, which you worship instead of God, tell you to do? So you are wrongdoers against the pinnacle of all matters. The other kind of injustice is the wrong done against the commandments of this pinnacle, namely that you have taken the rights of others and allowed yourselves to steal them. In either case, it was not God *the Most High* who was wronged, but rather, you wronged yourself. Why? It is because whether you believe in God or not, God will remain the All-Powerful, the All-Capable, the Mighty. Your faith or lack of faith will not take anything from God's dominion, and then on the Day of Resurrection He will cause you to suffer. And so it is as though the wrongdoing or injustice you are committing is against yourself. And if you take the rights of other people, you might enjoy them for a few days, months, or years, and then you will die and leave them, and then endure your suffering. So it is as though you have wronged yourself, and not gained anything, and so the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* explains that the wrongdoers did no harm to Him; rather, they brought harm upon themselves (*al-Baqara*: 57).

So the wrongdoing of the unjust brings harm only to them because none of God's creatures can possibly wrong God *the Most High*. God *the Exalted* says: '...turn, then, in repentance to your Maker....' In a preceding verse, the True Lord *the Most High* tells the Children of Israel that He forgave them their sin (*al-Baqara*: 52), and in this verse He says '...turn, then, in repentance to your Maker.' This is because repentance is the basis of forgiveness: You repent from your sin and make a firm resolution never to do it again, and then God accepts your repentance and forgives you.

It is conceivable that God could have punished them for this sin and destroyed them as happened with previous nations. Yet for God to allow them to repent was a great blessing and act of forgiveness on His part. Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and mortify yourselves...' (Literally 'kill yourselves'.) Look at the precision of this command and the precision of its connection to its preamble: '...turn, then, in repentance to your Maker and mortify yourselves...' God *the Most High* was essentially saying to them: 'I did not vanquish a creator who created you, or take you from him; rather it was I who created you.' But the creator of something and the maker of it are two different things: To create means to bring something into existence out of

nothing, whilst the maker is the one who shapes it into a sound form in the best way possible, and this is the import of the True Lord *the Most High* describing Himself as the One Who creates things and makes them complete and balanced, and Who makes things according to a measure, and then guides them towards their goals (*al-A'la*: 2-3). From this we know that creating is one thing and shaping the creation is another. The word 'maker' (*bari*) is derived from the word for carving an arrow, which is a task that requires great delicacy and skill.

God *the Glorious and Exalted* said '...and mortify yourselves...' because you disbelieved in the One Who created you and formed you and worshipped something else, and so it is as though because of this you must return to Him the life He gave you. When this judgement of God *the Most High* was given, Moses *peace be upon him* made the Israelites stand in rows and said, 'Those who did not worship the calf must slay those who did.' But when they began to implement this command, they found their cousins and brothers and kinsfolk before them and so found it too difficult to go ahead with it. And so God had mercy on them and sent a mist to cover them so that they would not find any difficulty in obeying the command; and it is said that they executed seventy thousand of their own people. When this happened, Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* called upon their Lord and said to the people 'Weep!' so that perhaps God would pardon them. And so they stayed and wept by the Wailing Wall and so God had mercy on them. And He said to them '...mortify yourselves...' because it was these selves, with their desire and their disobedient nature, which had made them rebel against the religion.

The commandment of mortification here was an expiation for their sin, for those who worshipped the calf and set up a god besides God and then offered themselves up to be killed thereby, confessed that the calf they had worshipped was false, and so they thereby returned their souls, which had rebelled against God's teachings, to true worship. This is the harshest form of expiation, namely to kill oneself to prove one's belief that there is no god but God, and out of regret for what one has done, and to announce this openly. So it is as though this killing was proof that they had truly returned to faith.



God *the Most High* then says. ‘...this will be the best for you in your Maker’s sight....’ That is, this form of repentance is the most sincere form, and it is best because it will save you from the suffering of the Hereafter. And God *the Most High* says, ‘...And thereupon He accepted your repentance; for, He alone is the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Mercy.’ The first evidence for His acceptance of your repentance is that He instituted expiation for your sin, and the second is that He accepted your repentance, and gave you an eternal pardon.

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَمُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَىٰ اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً  
فَأَخَذَتْكُمْ الصَّاعِقَةُ وَأَنْتُمْ نُنْظَرُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

**Remember when you said, ‘Moses, we will not believe you until we see God face to face.’ At that, thunderbolts struck you as you looked on [55] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 55)**

After God pardoned Moses’ people for worshipping the calf, they once again returned to their rebelliousness and their materialism. They wanted a material god, a god which they could see; but in His glory, God *the Most High* is Unseen and cannot be encompassed by vision, as He states that no human vision can encompass Him, and He encompasses all human vision, and He is the Knower of subtleties, the All-Aware (*al-An’am*: 103).

So the fact that God *the Most High* is beyond human perception is an aspect of His glory; but the Jews, who only believed in tangible, material things, could not comprehend with their minds or their hearts that God *the Most High* is beyond the material realm, and beyond human vision. This materialistic outlook is a foolish one. God *the Most High* has drawn our attention to the issue of seeing Him manifestly in this world when He addresses us saying that the signs for His existence are in our own selves, and urges us to reflect on them (*adh-Dhariyat*: 21). That is, God *the Glorious and Exalted* has placed the ultimate evidence of the existence of God, who cannot be encompassed by human vision, in the soul of every one of us, namely the spirit which resides in the body. Man was created from materials into which the spirit was breathed, whereupon he was quickened with life, movement and sensations. So the life in your body does not come

from the materials which you can see, but rather from the spirit which you cannot perceive except by its effects – and once the spirit leaves, the life ends and the body becomes a corpse.

If you cannot perceive the spirit which dwells in your body and gives you life, even though it is there inside you, then how can you hope to perceive God *the Most High*? You should first ask God to allow you to see the spirit in your body; but God *the Most High* says that this spirit is one of His commands; when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the nature of the spirit, God commanded him to proclaim that the spirit is one of the commands of his Lord and that people were given but a little knowledge (*al-Isra'*: 85).

If you cannot perceive the spirit-this creation of God-then how can you hope to perceive its Creator? Look at the precision of the Quranic discourse when God *the Glorious and Exalted* says, '...until we see God manifestly....' The word 'see' can be used to mean 'know,' and this usage is not uncommon in the Quran as in the question about having seen (known of) the one who has taken his desires as a god (*al-Furqan*: 43). In this verse, the verb 'see' means 'know.'

But in the verse we are discussing, the term 'manifestly' is added to show that the verb 'see' does not mean only knowledge here, but rather is a request for a clear vision which they could perceive with their physical senses. This is evidence that they are concerned with the material things upon which their lives were based. We say to such as them: Your request is marred by foolishness, for when you ask to see God face to face, this indicates that you already have some reason to believe in God's existence. And so you are asking to see Him in order to prove that which you already know to exist; but this would only be the case if you already knew whether God existed or not. The thing which encouraged them to say what they said is that Moses *peace be upon him* himself asked to see God *the Most High*, as we read in the Quran that Moses asked his Lord to show Himself to him, and God *the Most High* answered that he can never see Him. God, then, instructed him to watch the mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then Moses can see Him. And as soon as his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Moses fell down in a swoon... (*al-A'raf*: 143).

We must be aware that to see God *the Most High* in this world is not possible, and that there is no way for this to happen, whilst the spirit of a person still dwells in his body, because this body has certain laws concerning that which it can perceive. On the Day of Resurrection, however, we will be created with different constitutions: in this world the waste materials from our food must be expelled from our bodies, whilst in the Hereafter there will be no waste. This world is governed by time, whilst in the Hereafter there will be no time, and a person will remain young forever. So there will be a change.

The standards here are not the same as the standards of the Day of Resurrection. In this world, with your power and your body, you cannot see God; but in the Hereafter your power and your body will be sufficient that God *the Most High* will reveal Himself to you; and this is the ultimate blessing of the Hereafter. You live now under the effects of God's power, whilst in the Hereafter you will live as one who looks upon God *the Most High*; and the True Lord *the Most High* says that some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, looking up to their Lord (*al-Qiyama*: 22-23).

In this world, mankind has invented means of viewing objects which he cannot see with his naked eye. He can see minute things with a microscope, and distant things with a telescope. If the actions of mankind in this world have allowed him to see what he could not see before, what about the power of God in the Hereafter? If a person's eyesight fails, his doctor instructs him to wear glasses; whilst if he goes to a more skilled doctor, he will perform surgery on his eyes which will mean he can do without glasses and see well without them. So what about the preparations God has in store for His creatures by His omnipotent power, such that He can remake the eye so that it can enjoy the vision of His Noble Countenance?

God *the Most High* settled the matter with Moses *peace be upon him* by showing him human weakness; for the mountain, despite its enormity, could not bear the Light of God and so crumbled into dust. It is as though God wanted to make Moses *peace be upon him* understand that He *the Exalted* shielded him from His vision out of mercy for him because if this happened to

the mountain then what might have happened to Moses *peace be upon him*? If Moses swooned just from seeing that to which God revealed Himself, what would have happened to him if he had seen God Himself?

If man is unable to perceive something in this world because he is created with certain limited capabilities, this inability to perceive is in itself a kind of awareness because the cause of this inability to perceive is part of God's glory. When the people of Moses *peace be upon him* asked him that they be allowed to see God face to face, they were struck by a thunderbolt as they looked on. When they dared to speak of God, a thunderbolt struck them. Thunderbolt here means either fire or some other kind of punishment from God; what matters is that it was a calamity which blinded them – and it affected Moses *peace be upon him* too.

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاكَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِكَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

**Then We revived you after your death,  
so that you might be thankful [56]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 56)**

So the True Lord *the Most High* here gives the next episode in the story of those who said 'Show us God manifestly,' and so the thunderbolt of punishment overtook them. Moses *peace be upon him* was also affected by the thunderbolt when he asked to see God, but there was a difference between the two situations. God *the Most High* tells us that Moses fell down in a swoon, but when he came to, he said, 'Glory be to You, I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first of the believers' (*al-A'raf*: 143). But this was not the case with Moses' people. In the case of Moses *peace be upon him*, he came to after falling in a swoon, and this implies that the thunderbolt made him unconscious in some way; however, as for Moses' people, God *the Most High* says, 'Then we raised you up after your death...' implying that Moses' people actually died from the thunderbolt. Moses *peace be upon him* woke up by himself, whilst those of his people who were affected by the thunderbolt died, and then God raised them up that they might give thanks.

وَوَضَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْغَمَامَ وَأَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّاءَ وَالسَّلَوى كُلُوا مِن  
طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَكِن كَانُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

**We made the clouds cover you with shade, and sent manna and quails down to you, saying, ‘Eat the good things We have provided for you.’ It was not Us they wronged; they wronged themselves [57] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 57)**

God *the Most High* wants to remind the children of Israel of His blessings and His miracles, and to show us that despite all these blessings the children of Israel continued to live in their obstinacy and their stubbornness. After the children of Israel asked to see God manifestly and the thunderbolt killed them all and then God *the Most High* brought them back to life so that they would give thanks, the True Lord *the Exalted* then tells us of another blessing which He gave to the Children of Israel, saying: Remember when you were in the desert and there was no shade under which you could shelter from the harsh rays of the sun, and there was no place to seek shade because there was no water or plants in the desert; and so God *the Most High* sent you clouds to shade you, i.e. clouds came to you as a mercy from God *the Most High* and then came the manna and the quails.

Manna is red lichen which gathers on the leaves of trees between dawn and sunrise, and it can still be found even now in Iraq. Early in the morning, people come with white sheets and lay them under the trees, and then shake them forcefully so that the buds on the leaves fall onto the sheets. They then gather them up, and use them to make one the most delicious sweets, with the taste of cream and the sweetness of honey. It is a tasty and nourishing dessert which is digested easily and quickly absorbed by the body. God *the Most High* made this manna the basic fuel for the lives of the children of Israel and a source of strength for them when they were in the desert. As for quails, it is a kind of bird which came to them in large numbers from an unidentified place, and stayed on the ground so that they could take them and slaughter them for food.

God *the Most High* gave them clouds to protect them from the sun’s heat, and gave them these provisions of manna to give them strength to live, and

quails to nourish them, and all of this came to them from the sky without any effort on their part. But because of their lack of faith in the Unseen, they wanted something material, and feared that the manna and quails would cease coming to them one day; and then what would they do? If they were true believers, they would have said, 'He who provided us with the manna and quails would not abandon us;' but the True Lord *the Exalted* sent them food daily from the heavens, and instead of meeting this blessing with gratitude, they met it with denial.

God *the Exalted* says, '...they did not do Us any harm; rather, they were harming themselves.' For the third time, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks here of the sinfulness and *injustice* (*zhulm*) of the people of Moses *peace be upon him*. The first time, He said, '...and you were unjust' (*al-Baqara*: 51), and the second time He said, '...Verily, you have sinned against yourselves...' (*al-Baqara*: 54), and in this verse He says, '...they did not do Us any harm; rather, they were harming themselves' (*al-Baqara*: 57).

I said before that no one can wrong God because God *the Most High* is eternally Powerful, Omnipotent, and Glorious, and it would not take anything away from Him if everyone in the world were to disbelieve in Him, and it would not add anything to Him if everyone in the world were to believe. God's power is eternal, and His decree is unassailable. Rather, when we disbelieve, we are the ones who wrong ourselves by leading ourselves into ruin and suffering from which there is no escape, without benefitting ourselves anything at all.

As we have said before, this world is a world of constant change, and the bounties you now enjoy are certain to leave you, either by you parting from them by dying or by them parting from you by ending. When you leave this world, you will carry with you nothing but your deeds alone. Everything will end, but your sins will remain for you to carry to the Hereafter. And so everyone who disobeys God and rebels against His religion thereby wrong themselves because they lead themselves into eternal suffering out of desire for influence or wealth which ceases to exist after a brief time and does not last long. And so it is as though they wrong their own selves by denying them eternal bliss and giving them a brief and temporary pleasure instead.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا ادْخُلُوا هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ رَغَدًا وَاَدْخُلُوا الْبَابَ  
سُجَّدًا وَقُولُوا حِطَّةٌ نَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ خَطَايَكُمْ وَسَنَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

**Remember when We said, ‘Enter this town and eat freely there as you will, but enter its gate humbly and say, “Relieve us!” Then We shall forgive you your sins and increase the rewards of those who do good’ [58] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 58)**

From this noble verse we see that the children of Israel refused their divinely-ordained provisions of manna and quails even though it was an exalted provision: exalted in its goodness, for it was a sweet, clean, delicious food which came to them directly from the heavens; and exalted in its abundance, for it came to them in great quantities which met their needs without any effort on their part, and indeed exceeded them. But they asked Moses *peace be upon him* for the food of the land which they farmed with their own hands and saw in front of them every day because they were afraid that they would wake up one day and find no manna or quails. The True Lord *the Most High* provides the missing part of the story in a coming verse where He reminds the Israelites of when they told Moses *peace be upon him* that they would not endure just one kind of food and asked him to pray to his Lord that He would bring forth for them of what the earth grows: of its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils, its onions. Moses asked them if they would exchange that which is worse for what is better; then they should go down to Egypt, and in it they can have what they are asking for (*al-Baqara*: 61).

God *the Most High* is still reminding the children of Israel of the blessings He granted them and how they met them with ingratitude. He reminded them of how He saved them from the torment of Pharaoh’s people; and He reminded them of how the sea parted in two for them so they could pass through it, and then the waters closed over Pharaoh’s people and drowned them; and He reminded them of how they then took to worshipping the calf after this. It was possible that God would have utterly destroyed them on account of their sins, just as He destroyed the previous nations; but He pardoned them. Then He reminded them of the grace He extended to them by giving them the scripture which distinguished between truth and falsehood; and He reminded them of

how they asked to see God manifestly and so were struck down and died, and then He raised them back to life; and He reminded them of how He shaded them with clouds from the heat of the burning sun, and provided them with manna and quails; and then He reminded them that they sought the foods of the land and so He answered their request.

In the verse we are discussing presently, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and eat therefrom wherever you may wish plentifully...', whilst in a previously discussed verse, in addressing Adam and his wife, He *the Exalted* says, '...and eat therefrom plentifully wherever you may wish...' (*al-Baqara*: 35). The difference is that the expression 'therefrom wherever you may wish plentifully' suggests that there were many different kinds of food. In the case of 'therefrom plentifully wherever you may wish' the implication is that the people were hungry and so they were willing and prepared to eat only one kind of food. When the True Lord *the Most High* says 'eat plentifully', He is addressing one of two different kinds of people: For those who are not hungry, many different kinds of food are prepared for them to tempt them to eat, and so in this case the expression 'wherever you may wish' comes first, and so He says, '...and eat therefrom wherever you may wish plentifully' (*al-Baqara*: 58); whilst if a person is hungry he will accept any kind of food, and so it is said, '...and eat therefrom plentifully wherever you may wish' (*al-Baqara*: 35).

And so in the Noble Quran, it is not simply a matter of linguistic fronting and postponing (placing some words first and others second), but rather, the meaning is only properly expressed with this particular order.

God *the Most High* says, 'Enter this city,' and the city mentioned here is Jerusalem, or Palestine, or Jordan. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '...and enter the gate with prostrations, and say, "Forgiveness", and We will pardon you your sins, and give an increase to the doers of good.'

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* shows us here that when He addressed them they were not in a state of severe hunger such that they would have been prepared to eat anything. He *the Exalted* said, '...and eat therefrom wherever you may wish plentifully...', i.e. you shall find there many different kinds of food which shall tempt you to eat, even if you are not hungry. And God *the Most High* says, '...enter the gate with prostrations...', i.e. enter it in



the state of utmost humility, ‘...and enter the gate with prostrations, and say, “Forgiveness ...”, i.e. ‘o Lord, forgive us our sins.’ But they even contravened this commandment, and covered the truth with falsehood, which is one of their distinctive traits. And so, when they entered the gate, they did not prostrate themselves in humbleness, but rather crawled in on their backs, even though what God had commanded them to do was less difficult than what they actually did. So it seems that they did not disobey because God’s commandments were difficult, but rather because of their desire to disobey the commandments of the Creator. And instead of saying *hitta* which means ‘forgiveness of sins,’ they said *hinta*, which means ‘wheat,’ solely in order that they could say the word the way they wanted to. It was not that they were unable to obey, but rather, they desired to disobey.

And although the True Lord *the Most High* had promised them forgiveness, mercy, and amplified reward for the doers of good, they still disobeyed. God *the Most High* says that He will ‘...give an increase to the doers of good,’ and we find this meaning in another noble verse where He *the Exalted* says that for those who do good, there is goodness and more in reward (*Yunus*: 26).

That is, they will have a reward akin to what they have done, and more besides. And what is this amplified reward? It is that they will see God on the Day of Resurrection which is a reward that has no equivalent in this life.

فَبَدَّلَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا قَوْلًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَى

الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا رِجْزًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

**But the wrongdoers substituted a different word from the one they had been given. So, because they persistently disobeyed, We sent a plague down from the heavens upon the wrongdoers [59] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 59)**

In this noble verse, God *the Most High* explains to us that the Jews were a people prone to disobedience despite the favours God has granted them. If God *the Most High* had commanded them with something they were unable to fulfil because it was too difficult for them; then perhaps they might have had an excuse; but God *the Most High* does not command anything unless it is within

man's capabilities, as He *the Exalted* says that He does not burden any soul with more than it is within its ability; in its favour shall be whatever good it acquires, and against it whatever evil it acquires (*al-Baqara*: 286).

God *the Most High* only commanded the children of Israel to enter this land which is said to be Jerusalem, or a village in Palestine or Jordan because they themselves had asked for this. They were the ones who asked Moses *peace be upon him* to beseech God to send them to a valley wherein there was arable land so that they could eat the produce of the soil and be secure that they had a source of food; for they feared that a day would come when no manna or quails would be sent to them from above. And when God *the Most High* answered their prayer and told them to enter the gate humbly and seek forgiveness for their sins, the children of Israel changed the saying, and said (*hintā*) instead of (*hittā*); and they changed their way of entering the land, and so instead of entering it whilst prostrating themselves in humility, they entered it crawling on their backs; and this was nothing but wilful disobedience. And so God afflicted them with suffering from above because of all their iniquity, that is, their straying from His instructions and failing to implement them out of wilful disobedience and stubbornness.

وَإِذِ اسْتَسْقَىٰ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ  
فَانْفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ مَّشْرِبَهُمْ  
كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعَثُّوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

**Remember when Moses prayed for water for his people and  
We said to him, ‘Strike the rock with your staff’. Twelve  
springs gushed out, and each group knew its drinking place.  
‘Eat and drink the sustenance God has provided and do not  
cause corruption in the land’ [60] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 60)**

The first part of this verse means: ‘Remember the time when Moses *peace be upon him* prayed for water for his people.’ We find this kind of phrase used in several verses as we have explained, such as when God *the Most High* reminds the children of Israel of the time He saved them from the people of Pharaoh who had laid on them a cruel chastisement (*al-A’raf*: 141). And

when He *the Exalted* reminds the Israelites of when He appointed for Moses a time of forty nights (*al-Baqara*: 51). And when He *the Exalted* reminds them of when they told Moses that they would not believe him until they see God manifestly (*al-Baqara*: 55).

We said that these are all favours which God bestowed upon the Children of Israel, and of which He *the Exalted* is here reminding them, either directly or on the lips of Moses *peace be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to remind the Children of Israel that when they were wandering in the desert, He shaded them with clouds, and gave them water when they asked for it.

The water shortage of which the children of Israel suffered had reached the point where they lacked even water to drink. The first stage of drought is that a person does not find enough water to irrigate his crops, and then he does not find enough to give to his livestock to drink, and then he does not find enough to drink himself, and this is the peak of the drought.

Moses *peace be upon him* asked God *the Most High* for water; and we do not ask God for water unless our means are entirely exhausted, and the final drop of water has been used up. Water is a source of life which God sends down from the sky, and He sends it down clean and pure and safe to drink and to use for irrigating crops and watering livestock.

God *the Most High* made three quarters of the earth water, and one quarter dry land so that the surface area of the water would be wide enough to facilitate evaporation by the rays of the sun easily. If you leave a cup of water in a closed room for two or three days you will find that no more than a few centilitres of the water will have evaporated, whilst if you pour the water on the floor of the room it will dry almost immediately. Why is this? It is because the surface area of the water is large, and so it evaporates quickly.

This is the same principle which applies to the macrocosm of this world. God *the Most High* made the surface area of the water cover three quarters of the earth so that it would evaporate quickly and easily, and so that the clouds would send down rain from which we could take what we need, and the rest would form springs within the earth as God *the Most High* draws our attention to the fact that it is He Who sends down water from the sky and then causes it to travel through the earth in springs (*az-Zumar*: 21).

These springs which we call 'wells' or 'groundwater' flow to places where no rain falls so that the people there can drink it and give it to their livestock. If a drought occurs, all the people go out, men and women, young and old, and pray to God with humility so that He will send them rain. If we seek God's aid by the intermediary of the suckling infants and the weaklings among us, He sends us rain.

Some people say that rain falls according to fixed natural laws: Vapour rises from the seas to form clouds in the high levels of the atmosphere, and then rain falls, and this is the fixed natural law which determines rainfall. And they say that a cloud must be at a certain height in order for rain to fall from it, a height of so many metres so that it will be at the right temperature for the rain to fall, and that the cloud must be seeded in order for the rain to fall from it. We say that this is all linked to changing variables: The wind blows or does not blow, and it carries the clouds to high, cold areas, or it does not, and so on.

So every fixed thing is based on changing variables. You might know what a fixed natural law states, but you cannot predict what those variable things subject to laws of change will do. And God *the Most High* says that if people keep firmly to the path, He shall certainly give them water abundantly (*al-Jinn*: 16).

The means by which rain falls are not subject to fixed laws, but rather, the variable is the decisive factor which lifts the clouds to the required cold and high areas. We must be aware that the universe runs according to both fixed laws and changeable laws, and that the changeable laws are the ones which effect change.

God's words 'And when Moses prayed for water for his people...' indicate that there was someone prayed to, and someone who prayed for rain. The One prayed to was God *the Most High*, who sends down rain. This role is exclusively God's, for in this situation there are no stores of water, and there is no water under the ground in the form of springs, rivers, or wells, and there is no one to turn to but God, and so the people have no choice but to seek a means to God *the Most High*.

Anas *God be pleased with him* relates that at times of drought, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him*, after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, would seek an intermediary to God through Al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib *God be pleased with him* saying: 'O Allah, we used to seek an

intermediary to You through our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and You would give us rain; so (now) we seek an intermediary to You through the uncle of our Prophet, so send us rain!’ And they would be sent rain.<sup>(1)</sup>

Some people say that this is evidence that it is not allowed to seek intercession from a dead person because ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* did not seek the intercession of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as an intermediary after his passing away, but rather used his uncle as an intermediary. To this we say: Who did ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* take as an intermediary? Did he take Al-Abbas as a person in himself, or did he take him as the uncle of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*? He definitely took the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as an intermediary, and so this is a proof for us that it is not only the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* who can be taken as an intermediary, but also his relatives.

The question arises here as to why there was a shift from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to his uncle. We say that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had passed away and so he no longer benefitted from water, whilst his uncle Al-‘Abbas *God be pleased with him* was still alive, and would benefit from water, and so intercession was sought through the uncle of the Messenger of God *God be pleased with him*. It would not have made sense to seek the intercession of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was deceased and did not require water. So to those who say that it is not right to seek those of high spiritual rank as intermediaries, we say: The Hadith is against you, not for you because it confirms that it is permissible to seek the intercession as intermediaries of those who are related to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We must consider this: After the children of Israel received all these blessings with ingratitude and thanklessness, why would the True Lord *the Most High* have sent them water? We say that it was because of the Prophetic Mercy which was the means of grace after grace being sent to the children of Israel. Moses’ desire for God’s mercy was limitless, and so he would pray time and time again for his people, and God would answer his prayers.

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari

It might have been expected that to give the full meaning, the verse should have given a detailed account: 'And when Moses prayed to his Lord for water for his people and said, "O Lord, give them water"....' But this was not mentioned and was rather left unsaid, and the answer to the prayer came right after it: 'And when Moses prayed for water for his people, We said, "Strike the rock with your staff"....' So his words 'O Lord, give my people water' and the fact that God answered his prayer is left unsaid because it can be clearly inferred from the context. The Quran only mentions the essential points, and leaves the things which can be inferred to the intelligence of the reader. We have another example of this kind of omission – where things are left to be inferred by the reader – in the chapter of *an-Naml*. The hoopoe travelled and saw Queen Bilqis and her throne, and then went back to Solomon *peace be upon him* to tell him about it, and Solomon *peace be upon him* ordered the hoopoe to carry a letter to the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) and her people, to throw the letter to them and then withdraw from them and see what answer they would return. She said, 'O you nobles! A truly distinguished letter has been thrown to me' (*an-Naml*: 28-29).

So Solomon *peace be upon him* commanded the hoopoe to deliver the letter to Bilqis and her people, and the very next verse reports her speech to her nobles. All of the details have been left unsaid (the hoopoe taking the letter and flying to the palace of the Queen of Sheba and throwing the letter down before her throne, and Bilqis noticing the letter and reading it, and calling her people to assemble and beginning to tell them the story of the letter). All of this has been left unsaid because it is understood from the context.

So Moses *peace be upon him* said 'O Lord, send my people water', and God *the Most High* must have said to him something like: 'If you want water for your people....' All of this is left unsaid, and the noble verse proceeds with: 'We said, "Strike the rock with your staff"....'

'...Strike the rock with thy staff ....'. We need to pause to reflect on this. When a person prays to God for water, he asks Him to send down rain from the sky. The True Lord *the Most High* was perfectly able to send down rain from the sky upon the children of Israel, but God *the Most High* wanted to send

a miracle, and so it is as if He was saying, 'I will give you water, but from something which ordinarily gives you no water, namely the stones beneath your feet; I shall not give you water from the sky.' God *the Most High* wanted to show the children of Israel the extent of His miracles, and so He gave them water from the stones beneath their feet.

But let us think about this further: What would ordinarily be harmed by this blow? Would it be the rock or the staff? The staff would be the one to be damaged, and would break, whilst the rock would be left unharmed. But God *the Most High* wanted the rock to be cleaved with a single blow from the staff. A poet said:

O you who mocks the turns of fate,  
It is yourself, not fortune, which you berate:  
O you who strikes a rock with a staff,  
Is it the rock or the staff you strike?

The fact that water sprang forth when the staff struck the rock indicates that the staff only had to point to the rock and the water would flow. Even if the staff had been made of iron, would it ordinarily have been able to make water flow from the rock? So the True Lord *the Most High* wants to show us that it was possible for Him to send down rain from the sky, but He wanted to send a composite blessing so that they would see that He was able to draw water from a hard rock, and that the flowing of water is governed by His word 'Be!'

We must look again here at the obstinacy of the children of Israel. They said to Moses *peace be upon him*, 'Suppose we are in a place where there are no stones: where will the water spring from? We must take the stone with us so that if we become thirsty, we can strike it with the staff.' They forgot that some things are obtained by observable means, whilst others are obtained merely by God's word 'Be!' So you might find, for example, that experienced doctors are unable to cure a patient, and then a newly qualified young doctor comes along and cures him. Did this young doctor know more than the ones who taught him? Of course, he did not not.

The pupil is not more knowledgeable than the one who teaches him, and so the cure did not come because of the material means alone, but rather came by the decree of the Creator of all means. And so the decreed cure came at the

hands of a newly qualified doctor; God *the Most High* revealed to him the illness, and inspired him with the proper treatment.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and from it there gushed twelve fountains....' Why were there twelve springs? It was because the Jews were living in self-contained groups, each group from amongst them called a 'tribe,' and each with its own leader. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...all people knew their drinking place,' that is, each tribe went to their own fountain to drink. The fountains gushed forth from the rock and reached out to each tribe in their own places, and once they had taken what they needed, Moses *peace be upon him* struck the rock again and it stopped flowing. And so we know that the rock gave them as much water as they needed. No water came from the top of the rock where the staff struck, or from the bottom of the rock where it touched the earth, but from each of the other four sides of it came three springs.

There is a phenomenon in language known as homograph, which means a single word which has several different meanings. Let us take the Arabic word '*ain*' as an example. If you say 'the people watered their livestock at the '*ain*,' the word '*ain*' here means spring or fountain. But if you say 'The King sent his '*uyoun* (plural of '*ain*') to the city,' the word '*ain*' is used here to mean 'agent.' The word '*ain*' can also mean 'gold,' and it also means 'eye,' so if you say 'he looked with his '*ain*,' it means with his sight. So the one Arabic word '*ain*' means many different things; in this verse, it means a spring of running water.

God's saying '...all people knew their drinking place' means that every tribe knew its place so that none of them would lose out on any water. But when a person is in need, he does everything that God commands him to do properly; but when God relieves his distress and he becomes comfortable again, he goes back to his wickedness. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* commanded them: '...Eat and drink of what God has supplied, and do not behave wickedly in the land by corrupt deeds.' That is, do not give thanks for this blessing perversely by spreading corruption on the earth. We have another example of this kind of situation (receiving God's bounties with ingratitude and pervert behaviour) in the case of the people of Sheba. Indeed, in the luxuriant beauty of their homeland, the people of Sheba had an evidence of God's grace – two vast expanses of gardens, to the right and to the left; they were encouraged to eat of what their



Lord has provided for them and render thanks to Him: a land most goodly, and a Lord much-forgiving. But they turned away, and so God *the Most High* let loose upon them a flood that overwhelmed the dams, and changed their two expanses of luxuriant gardens into a couple of gardens yielding bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few wild lote-trees (*Saba'*: 15-16).

So we see that God *the Most High* provided for the people of Sheba, but they refused to give thanks to Him. They were very proud of the dam which preserved rain water for them, and gave them all the water they needed all year round, and they began to boast of their scientific prowess, forgetting that it was God Who taught them. And so this dam was the cause of the catastrophe that destroyed their crops. Likewise was the case with the children of Israel: It was said to them, 'Eat and drink of what God has supplied, and do not behave wickedly in the land by corrupt deeds,' but they spread corruption on the earth and forgot the blessing of God, and they deservedly brought suffering on themselves.

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَمُوسَىٰ لَنْ نَّصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامٍ وَاحِدٍ فَادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ لَنَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ  
مِنْ بَقْلِهَا وَقِثَّائِهَا وَفُومَهَا وَعَدْسَهَا وَبَصِلَهَا ۖ قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ  
بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ أَهَيِّطُوا مِصْرًا فَإِنَّ لَكُمْ مَآسًا أَنْتُمْ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ  
وَالْمَسْكَنَةُ وَبَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ  
وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

**Remember when you said, 'Moses, we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us some of the earth's produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions.' He said, 'Would you exchange better for worse? Go to Egypt and there you will find what you have asked for.' They were struck with humiliation and wretchedness, and they incurred the wrath of God because they persistently rejected His messages and killed prophets contrary to all that is right. All this was because they disobeyed and were lawbreakers [61] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 61)**

This noble verse is also one of the verses which mention how God *the Most High* gave favours to Moses *peace be upon him* and the children of Israel.

We spoke about the meaning of the phrase 'one sort of food' when we spoke of the manna and quails, and how the sending down of the manna and quails every day meant that they ate only one kind of food.

The word 'one' represents the first number, and if we add one of its kind to it, we get two, and if we add one more again, we get three. So the origin of all numbers is the number one. The concept of 'one' indicates singularity, but not indivisibility. When we say that God is One, this means that there is nothing like Him, but it does not mean that He is not made up of parts. You are not one; nor are you indivisible because you are made up of parts and there are also others like you. In our solar system the sun is one, but it is not indivisible because it is made up of parts which interact with one another. God is One (*Wahid*), for there is nothing like Him; and He is also Indivisible (*Ahad*), for He is not made up of parts. And so two of His Beautiful Names are the *Wahid* ('One') and the *Ahad* ('Indivisible'); and there is no repetition in these names because one means He is unique, whilst the other means He is not made up of parts.

God *the Most High* relates what the Israelites said: '...We will not put up with one sort of food....' Notice that the food here is called 'one' although it was made up of two constituents, namely manna and quails; but it was considered as one food because of its monotony. Food came to them from the sky, but their obstinacy with God meant that they could not endure this, and they said, 'Perhaps one day it will not come, we want food that we can farm with our own hands so that it is always before our eyes.' It was as though all of these miracles were not enough to make them trust in God's continuing provision. They wanted to see for themselves; after all, did they not say to Moses *peace be upon him*, 'Show us manifestly'? What did they ask for? They said, And when you said, '...pray, therefore, your Lord for us, that He would bring forth for us of that which the earth grows...' i.e. ask of God. Since prayer is a kind of request, when you turn to God and ask Him to give to you, you pray with the humbleness of a beggar before the might of Him Who is asked. If a request is made from an inferior to a superior this is called a prayer; and if it is made from one equal to another it is called a request; and if it is made from a superior to an inferior it is called a command.

The children of Israel asked Moses *peace be upon him* to pray to God *the Most High* that He bring forth for them foods that grow from the earth, and they even specified the foods they wanted, saying, ‘...its herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions.’ But all of these foods are of kinds which are eaten by slaves. It is known that Pharaoh’s people enslaved the children of Israel; so it seems that the children of Israel loved to live as slaves, and enjoyed this.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to raise their rank and so He sent them the manna and quails, but they preferred the food of slaves. The word *baql* (‘herbs’) means not only a specific kind of herb, but rather any plant with no stem, such as lettuce, radishes, leeks, watercress; and the word *qitha*’ means a kind of cucumber, and *foam* means either wheat or garlic; and ‘*adas* (‘lentils’) and *basal* (‘onions’) are well-known. Before answering them, God *the Most High* wanted to rebuke them, and so He said, ‘Will you exchange that which is better for what is worse?’

When you hear the word ‘exchange,’ know that the word ‘for’ generally applies to the thing which is being given away. When you say, ‘I bought the fabric for one *dirham*,’ this means that you took the fabric and gave the *dirham* away.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...that which is better for what is worse...,’ i.e. they gave away what was better, namely the manna and quails, and took what was lesser. ‘Lesser’ here does not mean ‘worthless,’ since the blessings of God which the earth produces could never be called worthless. Rather, God *the Most High* creates certain things by the use of conventional means, and He creates other things directly without any means; and that which God creates with a direct command by saying ‘Be!’ is better than that which He creates through means because you make no contribution to direct creations, but rather, they are pure gifts from God. As for creation by means, you might play some role in it, by ploughing the land or sowing the seeds.

That which comes straight from God without your means is closer to the provisions of the Hereafter which God will give without any means, but rather simply by saying ‘Be!’

And so the True Lord *the Most High* orders us not to stretch our eyes after that which He has provided many others of them of the splendour of this

world's life, that He may try them with it; and the sustenance given by the Lord is better and more enduring (*Ta Ha*: 131).

So God *the Most High* describes the provisions of this world as a test, and describes the provisions of the Hereafter as being better than it. All the provisions of this world, even the unlawful, come from God *the Most High*, for there is no Provider other than God; but the thing that makes some provision unlawful is that people hasten too quickly to get it and so get it in unlawful ways, whilst if they had just been patient it would have come to them in a lawful fashion. We say that God *the Most High* is the One Who provides, but He determined that some provision is a test whilst other provision is better than it; for provision that comes from God without any intermediary means is of a higher and better kind than provision that comes by means.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Will you exchange that which is better for what is worse?' This means: 'Would you take direct provision from God *the Most High*, the manna and quails – which come by God's command 'Be!' almost as the provisions of the Hereafter will come – and exchange it for that which is of a lower grade, namely provision that comes by the means of this world?' But the Israelites did not have any answer to this rebuke, and so the True Lord *the Most High* then said to them, '...Get you down into Egypt; for you shall have what you have asked...'; and this was only said to them because they insisted on their demand despite the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* had shown them that what He was sending down to them was better than that which they sought.

Notice here that the word *misran* (rendered in the translation as 'Egypt') carries the Arabic grammatical marking of *tanwin*,<sup>(1)</sup> despite the fact that generally when the word *misr* is mentioned in the Noble Quran it does not take this marking. The word *misr* has been honoured with several mentions in the Noble Quran, and whenever it meant the Nile Valley, it does not carry the grammatical mark of *tanwin*.

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(1) The Arabic word *misr* originally means city or country; when it is used in this sense, it carries *tanwin* (an /n/ sound at the end of the word) in certain grammatical cases. However, the word is also used as the proper noun used in Arabic for the country known as Egypt; when it is used in this sense, it cannot carry *tanwin* as Arabic grammatical rules normally prevent proper nouns from carrying *tanwin* – Ed.

We find an example of this in God's order to Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* to provide houses for their people in *Misr* (Egypt) (*Yunus*: 87). We find the same form of the word used in the proclamation made by Pharaoh to his people claiming that he is the one who possesses the kingdom of *Misr* (Egypt) with the rivers flowing under his feet (*az-Zukhruf*: 51). And in relating the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*, God *the Most High* says that the man from *Misr* (Egypt) who bought Joseph told his wife to treat him hospitably (*Yusuf*: 21). Also, when Joseph was reunited with his family after the long separation, he invited them to enter *Misr* (Egypt), if God wills, secure (*Yusuf*: 99).

In all of these four verses, the word *Misr* ('Egypt') has no marking of *tanwin*, whilst in the verse we are currently examining it says, '...Get you down into *misran*...' with *tanwin* attached to the word *misran*. So does the word *misran* here mean the same place as the word *Misr* in the verses mentioned above? We say that it does not since it carries *tanwin* and must thus be a common masculine noun signifying an unspecified place. On the other hand, when a word does not accept *tanwin*, it must be a feminine proper noun referring to a specific place name. However, there are exceptions in the Quran to this general rule when the noun is proper and carries importance; in such a case, we find the *tanwin* suffix added to it as we see in such names as *Nuhan* (Noah), *Lutan* (Lot), *Shu'aiban* (Shu'aib/Jethro), *Muhammadan* (Muhammad) and *Hudan* (Hood) *peace be upon them*.

All of these names might have been supposed to not accept *tanwin*, yet in the Noble Quran every one of them is mentioned with the *tanwin* suffix. So is it possible that the word *misran* in the verse 'Get you down into *misran* (Egypt); for you shall have what you have asked' is the same Egypt where they lived under the rule of Pharaoh? It could be that the word *misran* means just any city, since *misr* can mean 'city' in Arabic, and it is also possible that it means the Egypt of Pharaoh. The word *misr* can mean any place where there is a jurist, a ruler, and a judge, and is derived from a word meaning 'to interrupt' because a city interrupts the expanse of the countryside. But it is consistent in the Noble Quran that when the word *misr* has no *tanwin* suffix it refers to the country of Egypt in which we live, and when it does have the *tanwin* suffix it means any place where there is a permanent agricultural settlement.

God *the Most High* then says, '...Ignominy and humiliation were stamped upon them....' Ignominy here means hardships which lead to a broken spirit which you can remove from yourself by entering the protection of another who can give you dignity by telling you that you are under his protection. God *the Most High* describes the Israelites as being overshadowed by ignominy wherever they may be found except when they bind themselves again in a bond with God and a bond with men (*Al- 'Imran*: 112).

A bond with God *the Most High* is like that which they made when they entered into a covenant with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina and lived under the protection of this covenant. So 'a bond with God' means a bond with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* or the believers, and 'a bond with men' means the protection of a powerful state like the United States of America; if it protects them, they are strong, and if it deserts them, they are humiliated.

As for the term 'stamped upon them,' the Arabic word here is *duribat*, a term usually used in minting coins which means to be branded and struck with a hard blow as when inscription is stamped onto a coin. And so it is said that they were branded in Egypt, i.e. they were struck with a powerful blow which humbled them and marked them in such a way that they could not remove its traces. As for humiliation, it means dishevelled mien.

The people of the Book used to be required to pay tax which was taken only from the wealthy, and so they would wear the clothes of paupers and occupy positions of degradation and filth so that they would not have to pay the tax.

God *the Most High* then says, 'and they returned with wrath from God', i.e. God was angry with them because of their sins and disobedience until His wrath at their continual disobedience became like one of their inherent characteristics. Why was this? 'This, for that they disbelieved the signs of God, and killed the prophets unjustly....' That is, they would show ingratitude to God's blessings and not give thanks, and they would disbelieve in His signs and exchange them for a paltry gain; and they did not stop there, but would actually kill the prophets of God without any right.

Prophets are not the same as messengers: prophets are role models of good conduct, but they do not bring new religious teachings, whilst messengers

are also prophets inasmuch as they are role models of good conduct; they are messengers in addition because they bring new religious teachings. And so every messenger is a prophet, but not every prophet is a messenger. God *the Most High* protects His prophets and His messengers from falling into sin; He as well also protects His messengers from being killed, and prevents their enemies from reaching them. The coming of prophets is essential because they provide a model for the people to follow the teachings of the religion more easily. God sent many prophets for the Israelites to follow, but they killed them. Why did they do this? This was because the prophets exposed their deceit and their wrongdoing and their failure to follow the religion. It is observed that the disbeliever and the sinner and the non-religious harbour feelings of jealousy and hatred towards those who keep to God's teachings, and try to make them stray from this path, even by killing them. And so God's wrath came upon the Israelites due to their disobedience and how they harmed His prophets and committed so many sins.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّٰبِئِينَ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ  
وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

**The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good – will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve [62] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 62)**

After speaking about the Israelites and how they denied His blessings, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to show us the reckoning of the nations that came before the nation of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* on the Day of Resurrection. A similar verse to this one is found in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* although with a slight change in word order; in the verse of *al-Ma'ida*, God *the Most High* mentions the believers (in Islam) first, then those who follow the Jewish faith, then the Sabians, then the Christians (*al-Ma'ida*: 69).

So, the Sabians are mentioned before the Christians in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, and the Arabic grammatical case of the nouns is also different, as in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, the word 'Sabians' is in the accusative case, whilst in the

chapter of *al-Mai'da*, it is in the nominative case. There is also a similar verse in the chapter of *al-Hajj* which states that the believers, and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians, and those who worship partners with God, surely God shall decide between them on the day of Resurrection for God is witness of all things (*al-Hajj*: 17).

These three verses seem similar, but actually there are many differences between them. What is the reason for those parts of the verses that are repeated, and for the Sabians being mentioned in a different position, and for their changed grammatical case when they are mentioned first, and for the addition in the chapters of *al-Baqara* and *al-Ma'ida* of the phrase '...those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and fear shall not come upon them, nor shall they be grieved;' whilst in the chapter of *al-Hajj*, we have the addition of the Magians, and those who worship partners with God; and the predicate is also different, with God *the Most High* there saying that He will decide between them on Resurrection Day?

When God *the Most High* created Adam *peace be upon him* and sent him to live on earth, He sent guidance with him, as He stated that there shall come to man guidance from God; and he who follows God's guidance, will not go astray, and neither will he be unhappy (*Ta Ha*: 123).

So it seems that Adam *peace be upon him* delivered the message to his children, and they delivered it to theirs, and so on, but life distracted people and they were afflicted with heedlessness and worldly greed and avarice, and they followed their desires; out of God's mercy for His creation, He sent messengers to remind them, warn them, and give them glad tidings.

The noble verse says, 'Surely, those who believe...', and the belief mentioned here is the primordial faith which was sent to earth along with Adam *peace be upon him*. Later, there came religions and messages which people denied, and so these people were annihilated from the earth, like the peoples of Noah and Lot *peace be upon them*, and of Pharaoh, among others. And then, there came religions which still today have followers such as Judaism, Christianity and Sabianism; and God wanted to gather all the previous religions in the message of Muhammad



*peace and blessings be upon him*, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came to purify and unify the religious message of the world.

So, those who believed first, whether with Adam *peace be upon him*, or with any of the other messengers who came after him to cure the diseases which had arisen, and were then given names such as Jews, Christians, and Sabians – God *the Most High* wants to tell them that this is all over, and that those who believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are the ones who are safe from fear or grief. It is as though his message came to purify all the previous religions, and so everyone in the world is required to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Everyone has been called to believe in his message, and if anyone remains who held to the covenant of Adam, or Idris (Enoch), or Noah, or Abraham, or Hood *peace be upon them*, and those who are aligned to Judaism, and Christianity, and Sabianism are all now required to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and accept the religion of Islam. Islam abrogated all the other faiths in the world, and made them all concentrated in a single religion, and for all those who believe in this religion: ‘...fear shall not come upon them, nor shall they be grieved’ (*al-Baqara*: 62). On the other hand, all those who do not believe in it will experience fear and grief. This is a proclamation of the unity of the new religion which embraces all those on earth until the end of time. As for those who remain attached to their old religions, and refuse to accept the new religion, God will not judge between them until the Day of Resurrection. And so the verse which includes mention of the account and the reckoning of the Day of Resurrection mentioned all those who do not believe in the religion of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, including the Magians and idolaters.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to discredit the false notion that might be held by followers of a pre-Islamic religion and persist in holding to it after the coming of Islam, that such a religion will benefit them. To such a person we say that the True Lord *the Most High* completely removed this notion when He *the Exalted* stated categorically that anyone who seeks a religion other than Islam (total submission to God), it will never be accepted from him (*Al-‘Imran*: 85). And He *the Exalted* said that the only true religion in the sight of God is Islam (surrendering oneself to God) (*Al-‘Imran*: 19).

So the final purification of the succession of faith and Divine messages in this world has come, and those who believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be safe from fear or grief on the Day of Resurrection, whilst of those who do not believe, God *the Most High* says that He will decide between them on the Day of Resurrection (*al-Hajj*: 17). Coming back to the verse at hand, '...those who believe...' means those who inherited their faith from the time of Adam *peace be upon him*; and '...those who are Jews...' means those who follow Moses *peace be upon him*, and their name Yahood comes from their saying *hudna ilayk* ('We return to You'); and 'the Christians,' and the name given to them in the verse *nasara* means the Nazarenes, the followers of Jesus *peace be upon him*, named after his birthplace – or it might be derived from the saying of the disciples of Jesus, '*nahnu ansar Allah*' ('We are helpers in the Way of God') as the Quran relates that when Jesus became aware of the unbelief on the part of the Israelites, he asked his disciples who will be his helpers in God's cause and they replied that they shall be his helpers in the Way of God. They proclaimed that they believed in God and asked Jesus to bear witness that they have surrendered themselves to Him (*Al- 'Imran*: 52).

As for the 'Sabians,' scholars differ as to their identity. Some say they were the followers of Noah *peace be upon him*, but that after him, they went astray and worshipped certain natural phenomena such as the sun, the moon, and the stars instead of God. Or, the Sabians might mean all those who converted from the religion of their time to the new religion. Or it might mean a group of intellectuals who said 'The religion of our people is not logical: how can we worship these idols which we make and fix with our own hands?' And so they refused to worship the idols of the Arabs, and so it was said that they had left (*saba'u*) the religion of their forebears and followed the new religion instead. Whatever is meant by 'the Sabians,' they represent all those who leave one religion for another.

We notice here that in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, God *the Most High* mentions the Sabians after the Christians, and that the word 'Sabians' is in the accusative case, whereas in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, He mentions them first and in the nominative case. This is a matter of the rules of Arabic grammar. The verse says, 'Surely, those who believe....' In Arabic, the word *inna* (rendered here as 'Surely') causes the noun that comes after it to be in the accusative case and the predicate

to be in the nominative. So the word 'those' is in the accusative case here although it has no case ending because it is a pronoun, and '...those who are Jews...' is also in the accusative case because it is coupled in conjunction to 'those who believe' by the coordinating conjunction 'and,' and the word 'the Christians' is also coupled to this, and the word 'the Sabians' (*as-sabi'in*) is also coupled to this and so is in the accusative case, and has the ending (*in*) which all regular plural forms take in the accusative case.

Then we come to God's words '...whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good....' So the verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* is regular in its order and in its grammar. The Sabians come after the Christians because they are a smaller group, not a huge multitude like the Christians. But in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, the verse mentions the Sabians first and in the nominative case, saying *as-sabi'un* rather than *as-sabi'un*. God *the Most High* says, 'Surely, those who believe, and those who are Jews....' The phrase 'those who believe' is made accusative by the presence of the emphasising article 'surely' before it; and 'those who are Jews' is coupled with it. Following that we have 'and the Sabians' (*wa as-sabi'un*) in the nominative case. We would have expected it to be *as-sabi'in* in the accusative case as it is coupled to the previous two phrases; and then for 'the Christians' to be added on in the same way. But the word 'the Sabians' comes between the Jews and the Christians, and has an unexpected grammatical case ending. The Arabs had a sharp ear for language, and so when they heard the word 'Sabians' coming coupled to a word made accusative by the particle 'Surely' being given in the nominative form, they would immediately take note of this and wonder why it was so.

When Abu Ja'far Al-Mansour was made Caliph, he stood on the pulpit and spoke, and made a grammatical mistake. There was a Bedouin sitting in the crowd, and this mistake offended his ear. Then Al-Mansur made a second mistake, and the Bedouin shook his head in amazement. When he made a mistake for the third time, the Bedouin stood up and said, 'I testify that you only managed to get this office by sheer fate', i.e. you do not deserve it. (For the Bedouin, making mistakes in speech is enough to disqualify even a ruler and make him undeserving of his office.) This is a grammatical mistake. If the Arab hears it, his ear will be disturbed. And so if a word is nominative when

it would usually be accusative, this will let him know that God has wisdom and a reason for making it this way. So what is the reason? <sup>(1)</sup>

As for those who believe, the matter is clear, as is the case with the Jews and the Christians. However, concerning the Sabians, they did not follow a specific religion, but rather followed a different way. And so this verse came to alert us to the fact that this purification included the Sabians, too, and so it mentions them early and in the nominative case so that it will strike our ears powerfully and draw our attention to a point that we may easily overlook.

God *the Most High* then connects faith with works, always saying 'believe' and 'do good works' together because if faith is not accompanied by action, then it is of no use. God wants faith to fill all our life's actions with good deeds, and so He commands every believer to do good works; and these are the ones who need not fear in this world, or grieve in the Hereafter.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا  
ءَاتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

**Remember when We took your pledge, and made the  
mountain tower high above you, and said, 'Hold fast to what  
We have given you and bear its contents in mind, so that you  
may be conscious of God' [63] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 63)**

Once again, God *the Most High* reminds the Israelites of the blessings He granted them, and reminds them of their ingratitude. But we notice here that when the Noble Quran speaks about the Jews, it addresses them directly. Were those living at the time of the Revelation of the Quran the same as those from whom God *the Most High* took this pledge? Rather, they are addressed here as the descendants of those who lived at the time of Moses *peace be upon him*.

We say that it was the responsibility of every grandfather or father to pass on to their offspring the latest religious teachings that were passed on to them.

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(1) The underlying argument here – which the author and his audience take for granted, but which may seem strange for someone unfamiliar with Islamic/Arabic culture – is that, since the Quran is God's word, written in the most sublime of styles, and is preserved from any distortion, it is inconceivable to have grammatical mistakes in it – Ed.

And so when God reminds them of how He blessed them by saving them and destroying the people of Pharaoh, He is telling them how He saved their forefathers from slaughter. If He had not saved them, the Jews of the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would not have existed because they were destined to be the descendents of their forefathers, and God saving them meant that the chain of life would continue. If a man dies before he has married and had children, the life of his potential progeny ends at the moment of his death. The same thing is the case when the True Lord *the Most High* reminds them of when Moses prayed for water for his people. This was a blessing for the Jews who lived at the time the Quran was revealed because if He *the Exalted* had not saved their forefathers from dying of thirst, they would have died, and left no progeny.

So every favour that was granted to the Jews of the time of Moses *peace be upon him* was also a favour for their descendents who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* took the ancient pledge from the Jews, and if it were not for this pledge, they would not have believed, nor would their progeny.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...and lifted the mountain over you...’, that is, God *the Most High* reminds them that after they were saved and God drowned Pharaoh and his people, Moses *peace be upon him* went to meet his Lord and receive the Torah from Him, and the Israelites worshipped the calf in his absence. When Moses *peace be upon him* returned with the Torah and the Tablets, they found that its teachings were too difficult for them, and said, ‘We cannot meet these demands,’ and they considered refusing to follow them and rejecting them.

Commandments come from a commander, namely God *the Most High*. They claimed that God *the Most High* had commanded them with more than they could bear, even though God *the Exalted* does not burden a soul with more than it can bear, and this is a principle of faith which the True Lord *the Exalted* has established. He *the Exalted* states that He does not burden a soul with more than it can bear (*al-Baqara*: 286). However, some people think that this verse means that we can make our own judgements about God’s commandments, and that if we think we are able to obey this commandment, we say ‘it is from God,’ but

if we think we cannot obey it by our own judgement, we would say 'God does not require us to do this because it is beyond our capability.' But the true criterion is: Did God command you to do this, or not? If God has commanded you to do it, then He knows it is within your capabilities because God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear. Nowadays, we hear a lot of cries that the times are not the same, and that the circumstances of the modern world and the speed of movements and events is such that it is no longer possible for us to fulfil some of our religious responsibilities. They argue that perhaps it was possible to fulfil this responsibility in the past when life was simple and moved slowly and had limited problems.

We say to those who repeat this kind of statements: The One Who issued the commandment to you from eternity is God *the Most High*, and He knew that it was possible for you to fulfil the commandment when He issued it, and for thousands of years after He sent it, until the end of time. The proof of this is that there are people who fulfil all these commandments and offer more supererogatory acts besides them in order to reach true excellence in their faith. There are those who pray all the prescribed prayers which they are commanded to do, and there are those who pray the additional non-obligatory prayers which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to pray as well, and there are those who pray in the watches of the night, and keep on drawing closer to God *the Most High* with additional devotions of the same kind as those which He has commanded. There are those who fast the month of *Ramadan*, and those who perform additional fasts at the start of every Arabic month, or fast every Monday and Thursday all year round, or fast the whole of the months of *Rajab* and *Sha'ban*. There are those who make the pilgrimage once in their lives, and those who make it several times. There are those who keep to the limits of the poor-due, and those who give extra charity as well.

So every commandment which God *the Most High* has given us is not only within the limits of our capabilities, but is decidedly below the limits of our capabilities. It cannot be said that times have changed because here we are living in these times, and despite all the changes that have taken place we are still able to fulfil all our responsibilities and to increase upon them without any difficulty.

God *the Most High* raised Mount Sinai above the Israelites as a mercy for them, just as a doctor uses a scalpel to remove pus that has developed in the body because the body cannot be healed in any other way.

And so when God *the Most High* wanted to grace the Israelites with His mercy and blessing despite themselves, He raised Mount Sinai above them and said, 'Accept the Commandments or I shall bring the mountain down upon you,' just as God *the Most High* had destroyed those before them who disbelieved and refused to have faith and opposed the messengers. Some might say that God *the Most High* in so doing, has forced the Israelites to obey, and this is contrary to His statement that there shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from the way of error (*al-Baqara*: 256). Also, He has given man free will and the option, saying that let, then, him who wills, believe, and let him who wills, disbelieve (*al-Kahf*: 29).

We say that God *the Most High* did not force anyone to obey His commandments, but rather out of His mercy, He gave them the choice between obeying and meeting with a chastisement that would have destroyed them, which was for the mountain to collapse upon them. So it was not a matter of compulsion, but rather one of choice. The people before them were given the choice between faith and ruin, but they did not believe until they were destroyed. When the Israelites saw the mountain above them, they were fearful and fell to the ground in prostration, and this prostration was a sign that they had accepted the commandments. But whilst they prostrated, they looked at the mountain above them, afraid it would fall upon them. And so we find that the prostration of the Jews, even until today, is still made on one side of the face, whilst the other side looks up. This was because they were afraid the mountain would fall on them. If you ask a Jew why he prostrates in this way, he will tell you that he is trembling because he carries the Torah, but we say that they trembled when God raised Mount Sinai above them, and so in every prayer they would do the same thing, and when their children and descendents saw this, they thought that it was a vital part of their way of prostrating. So their prostration became always performed on one side of the face, looking at something above which they fear. That is, they remain until this day in the same position they took when Mount Sinai was raised above them.

In this noble verse the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and lifted the mountain over you....’ In another verse, the Lord *the Most High* reminds them of the same event when He shook the mountain over them as if it were a covering overhead, and they thought that it was going to fall down upon them; He commanded them to take hold of what He has given them with firmness, and to be mindful of what is in it so that they may protect themselves (*al-A’raf*: 171).

In this verse God says that He shook the mountain over them, as though the mountain were a peg in the ground which God wanted to remove, moving it left and right so it would come out of the earth. This moving, shaking and pulling is the meaning of *natq* (to cause to quake). A mountain is just like a peg, and requires pulling and shaking back and forth so that it will come out of the ground. When this scene took place, they became fearful and fell down in prostration and accepted the commandments.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...hold fast what We have given you with firmness....’ The word *akhadha* (rendered here as ‘hold fast’) literally means ‘to take,’ i.e. the opposite of ‘to give.’ You take something from the one who gives it. We take commandments from God in order to be given along with them that which makes the workings of our world straight. So every act of taking must come from an act of giving. You take from the generation that came before you and give to the generation that comes after you, but you do not give it just as it is; rather, you add to it, and this addition is what builds civilisations.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...with firmness...,’ i.e. do not take the commandments with feebleness. People normally take things with all their strength if they give them benefit. And so the nature of God’s teachings is that they should be taken with strength and conviction in order that they will give great good with strength and conviction. If you accept God’s teachings with strength, you have peace of mind concerning them, and your heart expands with contentment, and you will want to take even more. And so we find that in the Noble Quran, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is often addressed: ‘they ask you about such-and-such,’ which shows that his companions cherished God’s commandments and knew that they were good for them and so wanted even more.



And since the True Lord *the Exalted* says, ‘...hold fast what We have given you with firmness...’ this shows that they yearned for His commandments and no longer found them difficult to obey.

And He *the Exalted* says, ‘...and keep in mind what is in it so that you may shield yourselves.’ That is, bear in mind all that is in God’s teachings, and that it will solve all of life’s problems, and recognise the import of this ‘...so that you may shield yourselves,’ that is so that you will obey God and shield yourselves against His wrath and chastisement on the Day of Resurrection.

ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَكُنْتُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

**Even after that you turned away. Had it not been for  
God’s favour and mercy on you, you would certainly  
have been lost [64] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 64)**

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us how He commanded the Jews to remember His teachings and not to forget them; and their mere remembrance of His teachings should have been enough to make them believe in Islam and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* since he was mentioned in their Torah and his attributes were accounted there. But what did the Jews do?

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And you turned away after that....’ That is, you rejected God’s teachings and forgot about them and paid no heed to them, ‘...And had it not been for God’s favour upon you and His mercy, you would surely have been among the lost.’ What is favour, and what is mercy? Favour means to be given more than you deserve. For example, someone may say to you, ‘This is your due, and this is an extra favour from me,’ i.e. an increase on your due.

‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* relates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Aim well and go straight and have hope; and know that no one will enter paradise by own deeds.’ He was asked, ‘Not even you, o Messenger of God?’ He answered, ‘Not even me, unless God covers me with His Forgiveness and Mercy.’<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad, Ibn Majah, and Ad-Darimi*

If you wonder how this could be, and how no one could enter paradise by their works, we say yes, this is so because all the good deeds you can do in this world cannot compare to a single one of the blessings *God the Most High* has given His creatures. You remembered your good deeds, but not His favour. Everyone who enters paradise does so by the favour of *God the Most High*, even the martyrs who give away their lives and everything they have in the world in the way of God. The True Lord *the Most High* says that they rejoice in what God has bestowed upon them out of His bounty; and they rejoice in hope for those of their brethren who were left behind and have not yet joined them, that no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve (*Al- 'Imran*: 170).

So if the martyrs who dwell in the highest ranks of paradise, entered paradise solely by God's favour, then what about those who have a lesser reward than them? God's favours cover all of His servants, as He says that He is indeed limitless in His bounties to people, but most people are ungrateful (*al-Baqara*: 243).

As for mercy, it is the thing which opens the door to repentance and the forgiveness of sins. *God the Most High* wants to make it clear that had it not been for the favour He extended to the Israelites, and the fact that He opened the door of repentance and forgiveness for them so that they could return once again to their covenant and their religion, they would have been amongst the losers afflicted with a clear loss in this world and the next. But out of His mercy and favour to them, *God the Most High* guided them to the religion which He *the Exalted* protected with His omnipotent power from any corruption. He lifted from them the burden of having to preserve the Book, and all the hardship that would mean in this world, and He bestowed His grace upon them by sending them the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, whom He sent as a grace to all the worlds, as He *the Exalted* addresses His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* telling him that He has not sent him but as a mercy to the worlds (*al-Anbiya*': 107).

And so He gave them the favour of this final religion which was the last word on all religious matters in this world. And alongside all this favour and all this grace, He sent them in the Torah descriptions of the Messenger of God

peace and blessings be upon him and the time of his coming, opening for them a door to avoid being amongst the losers, yet they forsook this door just as they had turned their backs on their own religion before.

وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ الَّذِينَ اعْتَدَوْا مِنْكُمْ فِي السَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا خِمْصِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

**You know about those of you who broke the Sabbath,  
and so We said to them, ‘Be like apes! Be outcasts!’ [65]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 65)**

After explaining how He opened the door of favour and grace to the Jews, and how they forsook it, God *the Most High* then shows us some of the ways in which they disobeyed God’s commandments and profaned them. Some of the commandments God *the Most High* issues are related to pure religion, while others are related to worldly affairs; and He does not want us to take lightly any of His commandments, whether religious or worldly in nature, or to prefer one commandment over another. And so we find in the chapter of *al-Jumu’a*, for example, that the True Lord *the Most High* urges the believers to hasten to the remembrance of God when the call to prayer is sounded on Friday (the day of congregation) and to leave off trading; this, if they knew it, is best for them. And when the prayer is ended, they can disperse freely in the land and go in quest of the bounties of God (*al-Jumu’a*: 9-10).

These are two commandments, one religious and the other worldly in import. They are both part of God’s teachings. God *the Most High* does not want you to engage in trade or work at the time of the Friday prayer, and nor does He want you to leave your work for no reason and remain in the mosque after the prayer. When the call to prayer is made, go to the mosque; and once the prayer is ended, continue to earn your livelihood. There are two days in the Quran which God mentions by name, Friday and Saturday, although there are seven days in the week. Five of these days are not mentioned in the Quran by name, i.e. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Friday is the weekly feast day of the Muslims in which they are commanded to gather in the mosques to perform the communal prayer. Notice that the Arabic word for Friday (*jumu’a*) is not derived from a number.

The Arabic names for the days of the week are all derived from numbers except for Friday and Saturday. *Ahad* (Sunday) comes from the number one (*wahid*), *Ithnayn* (Monday) comes from the number two (*ithnayn*), *Thulatha'* (Tuesday) comes from the number three (*thalatha*), *Arbi'a'* (Wednesday) comes from the number four (*arba'a*) and *Khamis* (Thursday) comes from the number five (*khamisa*). It would make sense for the name for Friday to be derived from the number six, but this was not the case. Why was it not the case? Because it was the day when the order of the entire universe was gathered (Arabic: *jumi'a*), and so God *the Most High* named it *Jumu'a*, and made it a feast day for us. A feast day is one in which people come together, gathering to celebrate God's blessing of creating the universe and completing it on that day. Those who believe in God gather to celebrate God's creating the world for them. As for Saturday or the Sabbath (Arabic: *Sabt*), the letters 'b' and 't' give the meaning 'to cut,' and we have the word (*sabata*) which means to stop work. Notice that the creation of the heavens and the earth was completed in six days, as God *the Most High* states that He is the One Who created the heavens and the earth in six days (periods) (*al-Hadid*: 4).

The day when creation was completed was Friday, and so on the seventh day, Saturday, everything had been settled and the process of the creation of the universe had come to an end. And so it was as though the universe was resting/sleeping (*subat*), and so this day was called *Sabt* because it was completely still after having just been created. And so when the Jews wanted to take a day of rest, God gave them the Sabbath. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to test them with this day. They were living by the sea, and their main work was fishing, and so the test for this day was for God to forbid them from working so that the fishes they used to catch would be abundant on that day so that their fins would be visible. The fishermen might have looked for the fish all week and not found any, whilst on the Sabbath they would come and be clearly visible in the water, coming to them to tempt them. God *the Most High* relates the story of this town that stood by the sea, when its inhabitants broke the Sabbath; when their fish came to them on their Sabbath day appearing openly, but did not come to them on the day when they kept no Sabbath. Thus He tried them, for their evil deeds (*al-A'raf*: 163).

And so the surface of the sea would teem with fish on the Sabbath, but once Sunday morning came, they would disappear out of reach. They wanted to make the Sabbath a special day for them when they would do no work of any kind, but at the same time they wanted to get those fish. And so, they made something called a ‘deep basin’ so that they could find a way around God’s Commandment to refrain from work on that day, and at the same time get the fish. The fish would enter the basin easily, but because it was deep they could not get out of it. And so they would leave it there at night and gather the fish the next morning. This was a way for them to get around God’s Commandment; and God *the Most High* does not love those who resort to tricks in getting around His Commandments.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And certainly you have known those among you who transgressed on the Sabbath, so We said to them, ‘Be (as) apes despicable.’ This story is famous amongst the Jews and widely known to them; grandparents teach it to their sons, who teach it to the grandchildren. It was not new to them even though the Jews being addressed were those who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. And so when we hear, ‘you have known,’ this means ‘you know,’ and this means that the story was already known to them, and it must have been one of the traditional stories they passed down.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...those among you who transgressed on the Sabbath...’ The action here was one and the same: by their trickery, they got around God’s Commandment to rest on the Sabbath. Truly they did not go fishing on the Sabbath, but rather they got around the prohibition by leaving traps for the fish. They were foolish to do so, for the prohibition was against them catching the fish in their nets on the Sabbath; so instead, they caught them in their nets by using tricks and traps. God *the Most High* says, ‘transgressed,’ and this means that they went beyond the limits God had set for them. Usually when God forbids something, He then warns after the prohibition that these are the bounds set by God; and we should not, then, come near them (*al-Baqara*: 187). This is because He wants to protect you from being tempted so that you do not fall into sin, and so He tells you not to even go near it. But the Israelites profaned God’s commandment, acting as though they were obeying when really they were disobeying. They thought that they could fool God into thinking they were

obedient when really they were disobedient, and so God's judgement fell upon them: '...so We said to them, "Be (as) apes despicable."'

You do not normally command someone to do something unless he is able to do it. The command here was that they should become apes, but could they obey such an order and turn themselves into apes? This is something within the capabilities of God Alone, so how could He tell them to become apes? We say that the command alone was capable of turning them into apes, and this kind of command is called a 'command of subjugation.' He did not say to them 'Be (as) apes' so that they by their own power could become apes, but rather, simply by His saying 'Be as apes' they became such. This shows us how someone can yield to a command against their will, even if they do not want to do so. It was not necessary that they heard God's command, or even for Him to say it to them; if the intention was for them to undertake what they heard, they would have to have heard it; but simply by the command being issued before they even were aware of anything happening, they were apes.

Scholars differ as to how these Jews turned into apes, and how their metamorphosis took place. Some of them say that the transformation took place without their knowing, and when they found that they had been turned into creatures lower than men, they refused to eat or drink until they died. Some of the scholars say that if a human is transformed, he cannot reproduce, and so when they were transformed, they could not breed and so died out. Why could they not breed? It is because God *the Most High* has decided that no burdened soul shall bear another's burden (*al-An'am*: 164).

Had they bred, their children would have been forced to bear the sin of their parents, and God does not allow this. So out of God's mercy, they neither ate and drank, nor bred, and so they stayed alive for a while and then were wiped out by illness and disease; and that is what happened to them.

Some people wonder: 'If they were all turned into apes, where did the Jews living today come from?' We say to them that not all of the Jews were disobedient, but rather, it was only a minority who disobeyed and so they were turned into apes, and the majority remained human beings and their descendents are with us now.

Other scholars point to a verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* which commands the Messenger to proclaim who, in the sight of God, deserves a yet worse

retribution than these. They are those whom God has rejected and whom He has condemned, and whom He has turned into apes and swine because they worshipped the powers of evil; these are yet worse in station, and farther astray from the right path (*al-Ma'ida*: 60).

So this is the account of a people who incurred God's wrath and so were turned into apes, swine, and idol worshippers. God *the Most High* tells us that some Jews were turned into apes, but He did not say that they were turned into swine. Were they turned into apes, and then God's wrath increased and so He turned them into swine? Did God turn their nature from that of humans into that of beasts with respect to their morals, wills, and characters?

We say that we must first consider the beastly nature to which God transferred them. We find that apes are the only animals which always expose their private parts, and whose private parts have a colour which marks them out from the rest of the body. And they cannot be tamed except by force. The Jews also refused to accept the religion until Mount Sinai was raised above them, so the state they are in then is not the result of a physical transformation, but rather, a behavioural one. Pigs do not jealously protect their females, and this is another characteristic of the Jews. As for the worshippers of evil forces, 'evil forces' mean all those people who transgress with tyranny and wantonness, and the worshippers of evil forces mean those who obey every tyrant and aid him in his tyranny; and this is what they do as well.

So this transformation, irrespective of how often it occurred and in what manner, is just a matter of formality; but God *the Most High* has given us, in the verse of the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* mentioned above, the moral attributes of the Jews; and so it is as though they were transformed in their physical forms, as well as in their moral values.

﴿۞﴾ فَجَعَلْنَاهَا نَكَالًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا وَمَا خَلْفَهَا وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

**We made this an example to those people who were there at the time and to those who came after them, and a lesson to all who are mindful of God [66] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 66)**

God *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that after He made the physical and moral transformation of the Jews, He '...made them a warning

to those of their day...' i.e. to their contemporaries, '...and to those who came after them...' i.e. to those who came after them. A 'warning' means a severe chastisement and a chastisement can only come after a crime has first been committed. This is an Islamic principle and also a general judicial principle; lawmakers say that there can be no punishment without a crime, and there can be no crime without legislation. Before you punish, you must announce that this action is criminal, and its punishment is such-and-such. At this point, if anyone does this action, they deserve to be punished; and as long as this is the case, there must be legislation.

Legislation does not simply mean that God has ordained the punishment, but rather, it is an attempt to prevent the crime occurring by means of a deterrent so that no one will do it. If the crime has been committed, the punishment must be carried out because this is a warning to others and a deterrent against them repeating the crime. This is called a 'warning' (*nakal* or *nukul*), and from the word for revoking an oath is derived.

So when God *the Most High* says that He '...made them a warning...' this means that he made them a lesson so that none of the Israelites would repeat this kind of sin; '...a warning to those of their day,...' means a punishment that, whenever it was remembered by those who lived at that time, it would be enough to prevent them from going near such a sin ever again, and would be an admonition for them that they would not forget; '...and to those who came after them,...' that is: we made it so that the successive generations of the Israelites would pass it down to one another. As we said, every father told his son so that no one in the future would ever repeat such a thing because of the severity of the punishment; '...and a caution to the God-fearing,...' i.e. an admonition to all the people whom God *the Most High* would tell of what the Israelites did and how He punished them for it so that they would save themselves from the evil punishment of the Day of Resurrection which is much worse than this. And we must make it clear that there can be no punishment without a crime, and there can be no crime without legislation, and this is a Divine principle, as God *the Most High* asserts that He would never punish before He has sent a messenger (*al-Isra'*: 15).



That is, first God's messenger comes to prohibit these actions, and then if any person commits them, he would be deserving of punishment. And so all this talk of laws with retroactive force is contrary to the law and justice of God *the Most High*, and there is nothing in the Divine Law that can be called 'retroactive force.'

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً قَالُوا أَنُتَّخِذُنَا هُزُوًا قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

**Remember when Moses said to his people, 'God commands you to sacrifice a cow.' They said, 'Are you making fun of us?' He answered, 'God forbid that I should be so ignorant' [67] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 67)**

We alluded to this verse at the beginning of our reflections of the chapter of *al-Baqara* because the chapter was named after this passage. Notice that God *the Most High* uses the expression 'And when' which means here 'remember when....' 'And when Moses said to his people, "Surely, God bids you sacrifice a cow"....' He does not say here why He commanded them to slaughter the cow, and so we must read the verses until the end of the story to establish what the reason was: A man was found murdered and groups of Israelites started casting the blame for the crime upon one another; and God will bring to light what they have been concealing. He ordered them to strike the deceased with a part of the cow. This would show them how God brings the dead back to life as a sign from God so that they would learn to use their minds (*al-Baqara*: 72-73).

The case with most commands is that the reason is mentioned first, and then comes the command. But this is the might of the Noble Quran because to ask for the reason to come first means that the command is coming from someone who is equal to you. If someone says to you, 'Do this,' you may ask him why before you obey him and do it. So if the order is from an equal, we question it; whilst if it is not from an equal, such as the command of a father to his son, or a doctor to his patient, or a general to his troops, you do not ask for a reason before obeying it because the one who gives the order is wiser than the one who takes it. If everyone whom God commands were to ask

about the reason for the command before obeying it, he would only be obeying on account of this reason, not because of faith. And so it would be as though he obeyed solely because of the reason for the command – and at this point, there is no faith involved, and it makes no difference if a person is a believer or not, and the obedience will not be rewarded by God.

Faith makes the believer receive God's commands with obedience whether he knows the reason for them or not. He obeys them because they come from God, and so every command of faith should be obeyed simply because they come from God. The sufficient reason for obeying any religious command is having faith in God, and so the True Lord *the Most High* begins every command by saying, 'O you who believe,' that is: 'O you who believe in God as your Lord, God, and Creator, take His commands and obey them because you believe in the One who commanded you.'

In the verses we are now examining, God wants to explain this notion to us, and so He mentioned the command to sacrifice the cow first, and then mentions the reason in the subsequent verses. When you worship God, everything you do is in obedience to Him *the Exalted*, whether you know the reason for it or not. You pray because God *the Most High* told you to pray; and if you pray because it is exercise, or a way to wake up early, or as movements to keep limber, then your prayer has no value or reward. If you want to exercise, then go to the gym and let one of the trainers train you properly. If you want to have a limber body, there are a thousand ways to attain this. And if you want to worship God as He has commanded you, then pray because He has told you to pray. The same is true for all the other acts of worship.

Fasting is not merely a way to feel how a hungry person feels, or a way to diet, but rather, it is an act of worship. If you do not fast as a way of fulfilling God's command for you to fast, then your fast will go unrewarded. If you fast for any reason other than worship, then God will not accept your fast. Indeed God is far more exalted than that anything should be associated with him, and whoever associates a partner with Him, God will leave all his actions to the one with whom he associated Him. This is true of all acts of worship.

This is the understanding of faith to which God *the Most High* wants to draw our attention to through the story of the Israelites and the cow. And so

He did not mention the reason at the outset, but rather told the story first, and then told us the reason right at the end. Whether God had told us the reason or not changes neither our belief in the Truth of what happened, nor that the story has wisdom behind it, even if it is too subtle for us to grasp.

The verse we are examining now says, ‘...Surely, God bids you sacrifice a cow....’ God *the Most High* gave the command first to test the strength of the Israelites’ faith, and the extent to which they were prepared to obey His commands without any hesitancy or procrastination. But instead of doing this, they began to negotiate and defer.

‘And when Moses said to his people....’: The word ‘people’ (Arabic: *qawm*) literally means a group composed only of men, which is why the Noble Quran uses it to mean ‘men’ when it enjoins on the believers that no *qawm* (men) should ridicule other men; it may well be that those they deride are better than themselves; and no women should deride other women: it may well be that those they deride are better than themselves (*al-Hujurat*: 11). The distinction in the verse between ‘*qawm*’ and ‘women’ makes it clear that the term *qawm* refers to men. So *qawm* means ‘men,’ derived from the word *qiyam*, meaning ‘attend to’ because they attend to the affairs of their families and womenfolk.

An Arab poet said:

I do not know, indeed I am not even close to knowing

If the family of Hosn are *qawm* (men) or women.

Thus, attending to the affairs of life is the job of men, whilst a woman’s life is based on her staying protected in her house, while men attend to her needs. A woman is a source of tranquillity for her husband, household, and children, and because of this her role is more important than that of men.

The verse we are examining now says, ‘...Surely, God bids you sacrifice a cow....’ A bid is a request to do something; if the bidder is of a higher rank than the one bidden, it is called a command, whilst if they are equal it is a request, whilst if the bidder is of a lower rank, it is a supplication or an entreaty. So let us pause to have a closer look at the instance mentioned in the Noble

Quran about Zechariah. The Quran tells us that Zechariah prayed to his Lord, saying, 'O my Lord! Bestow upon me out of Your grace, the gift of goodly offspring' (*Al-Imran*: 38).

Was this a command from Zechariah *peace be upon him*? Of course it was not; it was a supplication, and a supplication is an entreaty from a lower suppliant to a higher source of favour. The verse we are examining now says, '...Surely, God bids you sacrifice a cow....' When a person with even the slightest intellectual means is asked to sacrifice a cow, he would know what to do and would not need any clarification? If they had simply sacrificed a cow everything would have been sorted out without any effort. As long as God told them to sacrifice a cow, all they had to do was obey.

But look at the foolishness even of their questioning. They wanted to find anything that could relieve them of this responsibility; and so they said to Moses *peace be upon him*, their own Prophet, 'You are mocking us.' In other words they thought it far-fetched for God *the Most High* to command them to sacrifice just any cow without further specifications, and so they accused Moses *peace be upon him* of mocking them. It was as though they thought the problem was difficult for God *the Most High* to solve simply by the sacrificing of a cow. When Moses *peace be upon him* heard their words he was astounded. Could any Prophet play around with the commands of God *the Most High*? Would God's Prophet convey unto them a command from God *the Exalted* as a joke?

Moses *peace be upon him* then realised that these Jews were an ignorant people, ignorant about their Lord, and their messenger, and ignorant about their Hereafter. They tried to judge everything according to their own standards, and not the standards of God *the Most High*, and so he turned to the heavens and sought refuge with God from those ignorant people who took an easy thing and made it difficult, and took a simple thing and made it complicated, and who were actually asking God to make things hard for them and to be hard on them, and to make everything in their lives a source of hardship and difficulty.

قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا هِيَ ۚ قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ لَا فَارِضٌ  
وَلَا بِكِرٌّ عَوَانٌ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ فَأَفْعَلُوا مَا تَأْمُرُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

**They said, ‘Call on your Lord for us, to show us what sort of cow it should be.’ He answered, ‘God says it should be neither too old nor too young, but in between, so do as you are commanded’ [68] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 68)**

Their question revealed the weakness of their faith. They did not say ‘Call on our Lord for us,’ but rather, ‘...Call on your Lord for us...,’ as though God were the Lord of Moses *peace be upon him* alone. The Israelites used this manner of speech several times, and, as the Noble Quran tells us, they even said to Moses to go forth, he and his Lord, both of them, and fight, while they remained in their place (*al-Ma’ida*: 24).

The dialogue between them and Moses *peace be upon him* went on for a long time; they kept putting questions to Moses *peace be upon him*, and then he would ask God, and then the answer would come from God *the Most High*, and instead of obeying and ending the matter, they would ask another question. And so Moses *peace be upon him* would ask his Lord again and the answer would come, and the answer would lead to another inappropriate question from them. And then God *the Most High* gave them no more room to argue by giving them a description of a cow that could apply to one cow in particular. And so it is as though they made things hard for themselves, and so God made things hard for them.

So now, we come to the questions of the Israelites. The verse we are examining reports their first question: ‘...Call on your Lord for us that He would make plain to us what she is.’ This question is meaningless and inappropriate because God *the Most High* had already told them it was a cow, and had not said, for example, just ‘an animal’ without specifying it is kind; so there was no need for this question. And so the True Lord *the Most High* said to them, ‘...She is a cow neither old nor young...’ The word *farid* means ‘wide,’ and here it signifies ‘old’, but what is the relationship between the age and width of a cow? Cows bear a lot of offspring, and they are principally used for milk and breeding. Since they bear offspring often, the place where milk is produced

is always getting larger. That is, their bellies get larger every time they breed, and so when their bellies are very wide, this is a sign that they are old, and have borne many offspring, and have become wide.

The word *bikr*, on the other hand, may have several meanings, including that the cow has not been mated with a stud, or that it has only bred once, or that it has bred many times, but this does not show on it because it is still young.

Then God *the Most High* says, ‘...but of the middle age between the two....,’ that is, between these two descriptions. The True Lord *the Most High* then urges them on, saying, ‘...do therefore what you are bidden.’ That is, enough of your arguing; obey God’s command and sacrifice the cow. But they were not yet satisfied because they wanted to continue the dialogue, and so they changed to another question.

قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا لَوْنُهَا قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا  
بَقَرَةٌ صَفْرَاءٌ فَاقِعٌ لَوْنُهَا تَسُرُّ النَّاظِرِينَ

**They said, ‘Call on your Lord for us, to show us what colour it should be.’ He answered, ‘God says it should be a bright yellow cow, pleasing to the eye’ [69] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 69)**

They searched for another question: What colour should it be? It is as though when God *the Most High* mentioned its age to them, the door was opened for them to ask about its colour, even though God *the Most High* had said to them, ‘...do therefore what you are bidden’ (*al-Baqara*: 68). But they did not do this, but rather asked about its colour. ‘...She is a fawn-coloured cow....’ Yellow is just one of many colours. Then He *the Exalted* added: ‘...her colour is very bright....’ That is, everyone who looks at it will be pleased by how bright, clean, beautiful and well-proportioned it is.

He described the cow as being yellow which is a common colour. A colour cannot be specified without being seen, and so colours can only be understood if they are already known, and only then can the desired colour be found. And so to say simply ‘yellow’ is not enough because you cannot specify it exactly as there are endless shades of yellow. Mixing colours gives you an infinite

number of shades, and so those who work in painting and decorating cannot paint an apartment a certain colour without first mixing the paint properly so that the colour will be the same shade all over. But if you ask one of them to paint the apartment the same colour on condition that he does every room on separate days, he will not be able to do it. If you hear the word ‘yellow,’ the colour yellow comes to your mind; and if you hear ‘bright,’ every colour has a particularly appropriate description which gives us the exact colour required, and so ‘bright yellow’ means intense yellow.

I think that things should be clear now. It is a yellow cow whose colour is bright and pleases those who behold it. The Israelites should have been content with that, but they asked yet another question.

قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا هِيَ إِنَّ الْبَقَرَ تَشَبَهَ  
عَلَيْنَا وَإِنَّا إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

**They said, ‘Call on your Lord for us, to show us  
[exactly] what it is: all cows are more or less alike  
to us. With God’s will, we shall be guided’ [70]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 70)**

Despite the fact that all that had been said to the Israelites about the cow was completely clear- its age, its shape, its colour, and its appearance, God *the Most High* wanted to teach them a lesson, and so He made them all look for the cow, each one saying ‘this is it’, whilst the other said ‘no, this one here,’ and a third said ‘no, that one there,’ ...and so they went back to Moses *peace be upon him* to ask him to go back to his Lord so that He would make it clear because cows were all the same to them. Upon this, they remembered God after having forgotten Him, and having failed to obey His command from the moment He told them to sacrifice the cow, and then said to them, ‘...do therefore what you are bidden’ (*al-Baqara*: 68). And so they asked Him for guidance after they had gone astray and become lost because of their stubbornness and rebelliousness, and the answer came from God *the Most High*.

قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ لَا ذَلُولٌ تُثِيرُ الْأَرْضَ وَلَا تَسْقِي الْحَرْثَ مُسَلَّمَةٌ لَا شِئَةَ  
 فِيهَا فَالَوْ أَنَّنِي جِئْتُ بِالْحَقِّ فَدَبَّحُوهَا وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

**He replied, 'It is a perfect and unblemished cow, not trained to till the earth or water the fields.' They said, 'Now you have brought the truth,' and so they slaughtered it, though they almost failed to do so [71] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 71)**

'...A cow not worn....' A worn cow means a broken-in cow, a cow which has been tamed and trained to do its jobs without any resistance, just like a broken-in horse which does not resist its rider because it has been trained. Our master Ishmael *peace be upon him* was the first person ever to break-in horses and train them. So the first attribute God *the Most High* gave them for this cow is that it should be untrained so that no one has ever led it or put it to work. It should have been set free to roam where it pleases in the fields without anyone to herd it. The phrase '...by ploughing the earth...' means it should not have been used for ploughing and farming; and '...or watering the field...' means it should not have been used to manage irrigation tracks to water crops; and '...sound, no blemish in her...' means it should have no defects: its ears should not be clipped, and it should not have any kind of the marks or brands by which people mark their cattle, and its legs should not be crooked, and it should have no colour on it except bright yellow.

If one reflects on the descriptions of the cow given in these verses one will see the difficulty and severity of its specified attributes. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to requite them for what they did. The Israelites found only one cow which fitted these specifications, and so they said, '...Now you have brought the truth,' as though what Moses *peace be upon him* had said to them before was not the truth. Then they sacrificed the cow, but did so reluctantly, for they had not at all wanted to sacrifice it because of their tendency to disobey God's teachings. They wanted to tarry with God *the Most High*; but God *the Most High* tells us that the mark of the believers is that they hasten to obey His commands, as He urges the believers to vie in haste for pardon from their Lord, and a Paradise, vast as the Heavens and the Earth, prepared for the God-fearing (*Al-Imran*: 133).



This haste of the believers to obey God's commands is proof of their love for these commands because you make haste to obey the request of the one you love. God *the Most High* then says, '...yet nearly had they done it not;' which shows us that they tried to procrastinate and put off obeying God's commands.

We should be aware that the procrastination of the Israelites in obeying the command itself served to highlight another matter of faith: the cow which God told them to sacrifice as a result of their failing to obey the command immediately was a rare and unique cow. The specifications which were finally given to them only applied to one single cow, which meant that its owner was able to charge the price he liked, and make a handsome sum.

The story is that there was a pious man amongst the Israelites who would always make sure that his income was lawful, and that his speech was honest, and that his faith in God was genuine. When he was about to die, he owned a female calf and had a wife and young son. What could he do when he owned nothing but this calf? He turned to God, and said: 'O God, I leave this calf in your care for my son,' and then he let the calf go free in the pastures. He did not will the calf to anyone, but rather left it in the care of God. He left it in the safe hand of God which can keep anything safe, and then said to his wife, 'I own nothing but this calf, and I trust no one with it but God, and I have set it free to roam in the pasture.'

When the son grew up, his mother said to him, 'Your father left you a trust with God, a calf.' He said, 'Mother, where can I find it?' she replied, 'Be like your father; he trusted in God and sent it out; so you trust in God and seek it out.' So the son said, 'O God, Lord of Abraham and Moses, return to me that which my father left with You.' Thereupon, the calf came back to him having grown into an adult cow, and so he took it to show his mother. Whilst he was going, the Israelites saw him and said, 'This is the cow which the Lord requires,' and so they went to him and offered to buy the cow for three dinars. He went to ask his mother her opinion, and they feared that she would refuse and so offered him six dinars. His mother said no; it was not for sale, and so the son said that he would not sell it for less than the amount of gold which would fill the cow's hide, and so they paid him what he asked. In this way we

see that the piety of a father made God watch over his children and take care of them and make things easy for them.

وإِذْ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا فَادَرَأْتُمْ فِيهَا وَاللَّهُ مُخْرِجٌ مَّا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

**Then, when you [Israelites] killed someone and started to blame one another – although God was to bring what you had concealed to light [72] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 72)**

The murdered victim referred to in the verse was a wealthy man from the Israelites who had no son to inherit him, and had several relatives, each of which wanted to get hold of the man's wealth; and wealth and gold were the life of the Israelites. So the nephew of this wealthy man plotted against him, and murdered him and took his wealth. But he wanted to clear himself of suspicion and so he took the body and placed it near the gate of a neighbouring village so that its inhabitants would be accused of the crime. In the morning, the villagers awoke to find the rich man's body in front of their village, and saw that he was not from the village and so asked around as to who he was. They eventually came to the man's nephew, whereupon the dead man's family gathered and accused them of the murder; and the one who was strongest in his accusation was the killer nephew himself.

God *the Most High* says, '...and strove among yourselves, each denying being the perpetrator....' The root word (*dar*') means everyone comes and declares their innocence, and so each one of them wanted to cast the blame for the crime from himself and say that it was not him. It was not necessary that each of them had to accuse someone else; it was enough to declare his own innocence.

So the inhabitants of the two villages, that of the victim and that where the body was found, attempted to remove suspicion from themselves and perhaps place it on someone else, but there was no clear evidence to support any accusation. Rather, there was no evidence at all, and so it was impossible to accuse any particular person from either village.

The law at the time was that if a murdered body was found next to the gate of a village, and there was no evidence to point out the killer, the village and family of the victim could take fifty men from the leaders of the village

where the body was found, who would have to swear that they had not killed him, and that they did not know who had. If the leaders numbered less than fifty, they would have to repeat the oath until it had been said fifty times. So they would swear that they had not killed him and did not know who had, and then the treasury would have to pay the blood indemnity for the victim.

But God *the Most High* willed something else to happen: He wanted this crime to show the doubters amongst the Israelites how the Day of Resurrection would be, and make the dead man rise and tell the name of his killer, and make them see the Resurrection whilst they still lived. And so He said, ‘...and God was to bring to light what you were hiding,’ i.e. the Israelites, or those who committed the crime, had planned that it would remain concealed and that no one would know anything about it, and so the man came and killed his uncle without anyone seeing him and then took the body out secretly by night so that no one saw him, and then went to a nearby village and dumped the body there by the village gate, whilst the villagers slept, and then crept away.

He thought that all of this planning would make the crime impossible to solve, and that no one would learn the secret of it; but God *the Most High* had willed otherwise. He wanted to reveal the crime in a way that could not be argued with, and at the same time answer the Israelites’ doubts about the Resurrection by showing them the Resurrection whilst they still lived.

فَقُلْنَا أَضْرِبُوهُ بِبَعْضِهَا كَذَلِكَ يُخَيِّ اللَّهُ الْمَوْتَى  
وَيُرِيكُمْ ءَايَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

**We said, ‘Strike the [body] with a part of  
[the cow]’: thus God brings the dead to life and  
shows His signs so that you may understand [73]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 73)**

The quarrel raged among the Israelites, and almost led to huge strife; and so they decided to turn to Moses *peace be upon him* so that he could ask God *the Most High* to reveal to them the mystery of this crime and show them who the killer was. Thereupon, the command came from God *the Most High* that they should sacrifice a cow, and if they had simply sacrificed any cow the problem would have ended there, but they kept on asking about its colour, and shape, and so on as we have

seen until they arrived to the point where the only cow that would do was the one which the pious man had left for his son in the care of God *the Most High* until his son grew. So they bought the cow and sacrificed it, and then God commanded them to ‘...Strike him with part of it...,’ i.e. strike the dead man with a piece of the sacrificed cow after its blood had flowed and it died.

Look at the amazing nature of this story: A piece of a dead body struck another dead body and made it come back to life. So the True Lord *the Most High* made things happen in a way in which they could never have any doubt. If God had brought him to life without first having him struck by a piece of the cow, they might have said, ‘He was not really dead; he was still alive and then he woke from his coma.’ But God told them to sacrifice a cow so that it would die to give them a lesson about faith in the power of God, whilst they were materialistic people who believed in nothing but the material world, and so that they would take a piece of it, or some pieces from it and strike the dead man, who would then rise and speak the name of his killer before being returned once more to death by God.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...thus God brings the dead to life, and He shows you His signs so that you may understand,’ so that the Israelites, whilst still alive, could see how God will raise the dead, and know that people do not stay alive simply because of the means of life, but rather because of the will of God who created the means of life by saying ‘Be!’ and it was.

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسَوَةً وَإِنَّ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشْقَقُ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

**Even after that, your hearts became as hard as rocks, or even harder, for there are rocks from which streams spring out, and some from which water comes when they split open, and others which fall down in awe of God: He is not unaware of what you do [74] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 74)**

Why did the True Lord *the Most High* mention the heart here – rather than the soul – and why did He describe the heart as being capable of hardening? It is because the heart is the seat of kindness, mercy, and emotion, and if we

expose the heart to the mention of God it becomes filled with mercy and love. The heart is the organ which solves the problems of life; if the heart is filled with certitude and faith, all the rest of the body will be filled with the essence of this faith.

In order for us to know the power, ability, and breadth of the heart for faith and all that comes with it, God *the Most High* explains this to us in His Noble Book by saying that God has sent from on high the best of all announcements, a Book fully consistent within itself, with repetitions; a Book whereat shiver the skins of all who stand in awe of their Lord; then their skins and their hearts soften at the remembrance of God. Such is God's guidance: He guides with it him whom He pleases – whereas he whom God lets go astray, no guide shall there be for him (*az-Zumar*: 23).

So, we see that the skin shivers with terror at the threat of hell, and the mere reading of what the Quran says about it; and then comes mercy, and at this time, not only the skin softens, but the heart must also soften because it is what gives the brightness of faith to the rest of the body.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Indeed, there lies in the body a morsel which, if it is sound, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Indeed, it is the heart.'<sup>(1)</sup>

So the heart is the source of certitude and the seat of faith, and just as faith lies in the heart, so too does hardness and disbelief. When the heart forgets to remember God, it hardens. Why is this? It is because it imagines that there is nothing but this worldly life and matter, and so it tries to gain as much of this as it can, and in any way it can; and so it ends up bringing nothing but injustice, wickedness, and the usurping of the rights of the weak, and then it will never desist because it will become the purpose of its life, with nothing else besides.

A person with such a hardened heart would find a person dying of hunger and not give him even a piece of bread; and when faith leaves the heart, mercy leaves with it, and the faith of all the body leaves too. The portion of

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

faith that resides in the hand leaves so that the hand reaches out to steal and take what is unlawful; the portion of faith that resides in the eye leaves so that the eye looks to that which God has forbidden for it to see; the portion of faith that resides in the foot leaves so that the foot never walks to the mosque, but rather walks to the bar, or to steal. For, as we have said, the heart is where the faith of the whole body is stored.

The True Lord *the Most High* gives a simile for the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites, saying, ‘...your hearts hardened so that they were like rocks, or harder still....’ A rock is a hard thing we can sense for ourselves, and which is very familiar to us, and of course was familiar to the Israelites as well because they had a long experience with rocks when they wandered in the desert, and when they were thirsty Moses *peace be upon him* would strike the rock with his staff for them to get water.

God *the Most High* is telling them that their hearts are supposed to be soft and gentle, even if they were only as hard as rocks; but their hearts were even harder than this, not only as hard and rigid as rocks, but even harder. How could their hearts be harder than rocks? Do not think of the material softness of the heart, but rather think of how it fulfils its function.

A mountain should be hard because this is its function, to be a firm and immovable peg for the earth. But this hardness is not wanted from the heart, and is not its function. Yet the hearts of the Israelites were even harder than mountains. A heart should be soft, whilst a rock should be hard.

Every attribute is created for a certain being, and designed for a purpose. A hook, for example, is crooked, and this crookedness makes it perform its function correctly. So the crookedness of a hook means that it is properly fulfilling its function. When the heart is corrupted and fails to perform its function it becomes harder than a rock, and does the opposite of its proper function.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...for surely, from some rocks streams burst forth; others, surely, split asunder, and water issues from them....’

Here, God *the Most High* reminds them of the grace they saw lodged in a rock, when Moses *peace be upon him* struck the rock with his staff and the fountains flowed from it. This was a tangible example which they witnessed

themselves. The True Lord *the Most High* is practically saying to them: Grace touches rocks and makes streams gush from them, and water issues from them. And then He *the Exalted* says, '...and others, surely, fall down in awe of God....'

So rocks are touched with softness and mercy so that water flows from them, but when your hearts hardened, they were never again touched with mercy and softness, and so they never softened or felt awe. God revealed to you the Torah, and gave to you much of His grace, and mercy, shelter, and forgiveness; and so your hearts should have softened with the remembrance of God.

But what is the difference between streams bursting forth from rocks and rocks splitting asunder so that water gushes forth from them? When a rock gushes forth, water bursts out of it. We go to places, where there is water, to take what we need, but if streams burst forth, this means that the water comes to us and we stay where we are. There is a difference between a blessing which you should go to, and a blessing which comes to you. As for the rocks falling down for awe of God *the Most High*, this happened when God *the Most High* revealed Himself to the mountain and so it crumbled, as He *the Exalted* says that when Moses' Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Moses fell down in a swoon (*al-A'raf*: 143).

The True Lord *the Most High* reminds them of how when He revealed Himself to the mountain, it fell down and crumbled for awe of God *the Most High*. And so He does not give them examples of what happened to other people, but rather He gives them examples of what happened to them.

God *the Most High* then says, '...And God is not unmindful of what you do' (*al-Baqara*: 74). That is, remember that nothing escapes God's notice, and that He knows everything that you know, and that you shall all meet Him on the Day of Resurrection, and that you all need His mercy and forgiveness; so do not let your hearts harden lest God *the Glorious* cast you out of His mercy, just as your hearts are empty of His remembrance.

أَفَنظَمُونَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِالْكِتَابِ وَقَدْ كَانَفَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلَامَ  
 اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

**So can you [believers] hope that such people will believe you, when some of them used to hear the words of God and then deliberately twist them, even when they understood them? [75] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 75)**

The True Lord *the Most High* gives us a piece of wisdom here related to what He has told us about the Israelites and their story, for they would come to play a role in the life of the Muslims in Medina, and then in Jerusalem, and then in the Aqsa Mosque. So He tells us how they made their prophet weary, and disobeyed their Lord, and how they met blessings with ingratitude, and mercy with denial. If this is how they were, O Muhammad, with God *the Glorious* and with their prophet, do not expect that they will believe in you, or that they will enter Islam, even though they have with them the Torah which calls them to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

These verses were a source of supreme solace to the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, telling him not to grieve over the Jews' failure to believe in him; for all he had to do was deliver the Message. But the fact that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was eager that everyone in the world might believe, whether Jews, Christians or non-believers, does not mean that he did not understand his task, but rather that he was conscious of the blissfulness of following his Lord's commands, and so he wanted all of God's creatures on earth to be guided. And so God comforted him effectively saying: Do not expect them to believe in you; and the fact that they do not believe in you does not mean that you are not truthful. Their denial of you should not affect you; so do not crave, o Muhammad that they will believe in you.

What is *tama* (rendered in this translation as craving)? It is when the soul has a strong desire for something which is not its right (this element in its meaning is not clear in the English word craving), although it loves it. And so an intelligent person should only hope for those things which are within his right. Sometimes people want to make their lives more comfortable and live in luxury, but without changing the way they seek their living. We say to



them: If you want to improve your living standards, you must also increase your work because if you seek comfort by relying on the work of others, the balance of life on earth will be upset. That is, if you want to live a balanced life, you must live according to your work because if you do otherwise, you steal and commit bribery and corruption. So if you have a craving, it should be for something within your capabilities.

So the question ‘Do you crave then...’ here indicates that we should not have desire for anything unless it is within our capabilities. Are we capable of turning these Jews into believers? God *the Most High* effectively says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: This is something beyond that which I have commanded you with, because you only have to deliver the Message, even though it is something beloved to you. Their prior experiences with God would give you no hope that you will reach the result you desire.

Therefore, this verse was a consolation for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about that which he would find from the Jews, and it gave him the immunisation of faith that would help him meet their lack of faith with strength and resolve, for he would already expect it, and so he would not grieve or waste himself in sorrow because God *the Most High* had already shown him the likelihood of what they would do. And so when they indeed behaved as had been predicted, this would be something that his soul could bear.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And a party from among them used to hear the word of God...’ Look at the honesty and precision of the expression here: ‘a party from among them,’ not all of them. This is the basis of what we know as a ‘conservative statement,’ which means to avoid generalisation of saying, ‘they are all such-and-such.’ We must allow for the possibility that at least one of them might believe, or go against the stream. There were a good many of the people of the Book who knew the attributes of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* from the Torah and the Gospel, and when he was sent, they believed in him; and these people did not pervert the word of God. If the Quran had generalised here, the disbelievers’ view of Islam would have changed, and they would have said: ‘This religion says that we have perverted the word of God, but we have not perverted it at all, and we are awaiting His Messenger.’ So this verdict would not have been precise, and

would have inevitably been wrong in some way because God, who revealed the Quran, misses nothing, and knows what is in all our hearts. But the noble verse said that ‘...a party from among them used to hear the word of God, and then, after they had understood it, knowingly perverted it.’ This statement is not a generalisation, and is phrased in a precise way such that it can be applied to any situation. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and then, after they had understood it, knowingly perverted it.’

This is a composite sin; they heard the word of God, and understood it, and recognised the penalty for sinning, and then they perverted it. They read the Torah, and read the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* so that they knew him as well as they knew their own children; and then they knowingly perverted the word of God. The meaning of this perversion is that they changed the meaning of the words; they would say (*as-sam* ‘*alaykum*) (‘death upon you’) instead of (*as-salam* ‘*alaykum*) (‘peace be upon you’), and they did not stop at perversion only, but rather, they went as far as to make speech of their own and then say that it was from the Torah.

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَا بِعَضُّهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضِ قَالُوا  
أَتُحَدِّثُوهُمْ بِمَا فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُم لِيُحَاجُّوكُم بِهِ عِندَ رَبِّكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

**When they meet the believers, they say, ‘We too believe.’ But when they are alone with each other they say, ‘How could you tell them about God’s revelation [to us]? They will be able to use it to argue against you before your Lord! Have you no sense?’ [76] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 76)**

This is an example of the hypocrisy of the Jews. There are three kinds of people: believers, disbelievers, and hypocrites. The believer is in harmony with himself, and with the world in which he lives; the disbeliever is in harmony with himself but not with the world, and the world curses him; the hypocrite is in harmony neither with himself nor with the world. This verse gives us an example of hypocrisy, and how the hypocrite is neither in harmony with himself nor with the world. He says what he does not believe, and in his inner soul, he believes what he does not say. And so the entire world curses him, and in the Hereafter, he will be in the lowest level of hell.

This verse is similar to another verse which we discussed earlier, namely God's words: When they meet the faithful they say, 'We believe;' but when they find themselves alone with their devils, they say, 'Verily we hold with you, and we are only mocking' (*al-Baqara*: 14).

In the first verse, the Jews had a role; for there were some non-Jewish hypocrites whose evil leaders were Jews. In this verse, however, the players are the Jews and the hypocrites from amongst themselves. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And when they meet with those who believe, they say "We believe,"....' Is faith a matter of mere speech? Faith is the certitude of the heart, not the speech of the tongue, and the proof of belief is action. There is no one who actually follows the ways of the believers in hypocrisy or ostentation; one might say 'I believe' in hypocrisy, but then his actions will not be those of the believers. And so it was their actions that exposed them, as God *the Most High* says, '...and when they are alone with one another, they say, 'Do you tell them of what God has disclosed to you...'

In a verse in another chapter, the True Lord *the Most High* tells the believers that when the hypocrites meet them, they say that they believe, but when they are alone they bite their fingers' ends in their rage against the believers (*Al-'Imran*: 119).

And in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, He *the Exalted* tells the believers that when the hypocrites come to them, they claim that they believe, whereas, in fact, they come in with unbelief and go forth with it (*al-Ma'ida*: 61).

These are four images of the hypocrites. Each one of them contains the false profession of faith. In the first verse, God *the Most High* says, '...but when they find themselves alone with their devils, they say, 'Verily we hold with you....' And in the second verse, God *the Most High* tells us of how when the hypocrites meet with one another, they exchange blames for telling the believers of what God has disclosed to them. And in the third verse, He *the Exalted* describes to the believers how the hypocrites bite their finger ends in their anger against the believers. And in the fourth verse, He explains how the hypocrites harbour disbelief deep in their hearts when they come to meet the believers and the resolve to go forth with it.

Around the time of the start of the mission of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the Jews would say to the believers, 'This Prophet of yours is mentioned in our Torah; his attributes are such-and-such.' But then the Jewish rabbis stopped them from doing this, saying, 'Do you tell them of what God has disclosed to you so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?' So, it is as though they knew the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but they wanted to conceal it. It is strange that they would say 'what God has disclosed to you'. If it were really a disclosure from God, there would be no special distinction for them in it; and if God had wished them to find true disclosure, their hearts would have believed.

The words '...so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?...' show that the Jewish hypocrites, the disbelievers, and all mankind know that they are the creatures of God, and that it was God who created them. Since they know this, why do they disbelieve in their Creator? The phrase '...so that they can dispute with you about it...' means so that their argument against you, will be strong in God's sight. But they did not say 'God;' rather, they said 'your Lord'. To argue means that two sides have different points of view, and so they engage in a discussion in which each side gives their argument.

This is a debate much like the one that God *the Most High* described between Abraham and the king; the king argued with Abraham about his Lord simply because God had granted him kingship (*al-Baqara*: 258).

This was the debate that took place between Abraham *peace be upon him* and Nimrod, to whom God *the Most High* had given kingship. What did Abraham *peace be upon him* say? He said that it is his Lord Who grants life and deals death. This was Abraham's argument in his call to God, and so Nimrod answered him with a spurious argument, saying that he too grants life and deals death. Then he brought forth one of his soldiers and ordered his guards to kill him, and then when they went to kill him, he said, 'let him live,' and then said to Abraham *peace be upon him* that he too grants life and deals death.

This was a weak argument because the one whose death Nimrod ordered was already alive with the life God gave him, and when Nimrod said 'kill him' he did not die, but rather Nimrod ordered him killed. There is a difference between someone dying and being killed: killing means to destroy the construction

of the body so that the spirit exits from it because it can no longer remain there; on the other hand, death is for the spirit to exit the body whilst it is still sound and has not been destroyed. The one who deals death is God Alone, and so the True Lord *the Most High* asserts that Muhammad is only a messenger; all the other messengers have passed away before him. Then God puts forth to the believers the question that if, then, he dies or is killed, will they turn about on their heels (*Al- 'Imran*: 144).

And if Nimrod had killed the man, he would not have been able to restore him to life. But Abraham *peace be upon him* did not want to go along with such hollow argumentation, where any argument can be answered with other arguments, even if they are feeble; and so he came up with an undefeatable argument which Nimrod could not possibly match: He challenged Nimrod saying that God causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west. Thereupon the infidel remained dumbfounded' for God does not guide people who are unjust (*al-Baqara*: 258).

This is the meaning of a debate; each side makes its point. As long as they are arguing with you in the presence of your Lord, believing that it would not simply pass without consequence, for God is Lord of all, and will judge fairly between the oppressed and the oppressor; if this is so, are you doing what is best for yourselves? The answer is no. If you knew better, you would not have made this mistake; so it was not a special disclosure. God *the Most High* then says, '...Do you not understand?' This is a logical ending to the verse because those who act as they acted and speak as they spoke cannot be in possession of any reason. When someone says, '...so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?...', he must believe that he has a Lord, and if he then does not acknowledge this God, and does not fear Him, he cannot be described as possessing reason.

أَوَلَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسْرُونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

**Do they not know that God is well aware of what  
they conceal and what they reveal? [77]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 77)**

God *the Most High* tells us here that He knows all about them and what they do. They thought that God *the Most High* was unaware when they found

themselves alone in private and said to one another, ‘...Do you tell them of what God has disclosed to you so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?’ (*al-Baqara*: 76). But God *the Most High* knew, and heard; and when the hypocrites used to meet the believers, they would say ‘We believe,’ but when they are alone they bite their fingers’ ends in their rage against the believers (*Al-‘Imran*: 119). This was a physical reaction which involved no speech, but was rather an event, yet it was no secret.

What does ‘conceal’ mean, and what does ‘open’ mean? An open matter is something that you do in front of someone who has ears to hear you, or eyes to see you; if it has no sound, the eye will see it, and if it has a sound, the ear will hear it; and these are the principle means of perception. God *the Most High* says that He knows all that they conceal and all that they bring into the open? Would it not make more sense for Him to have said that He knows all that they bring into the open and all that they conceal? If He knows what we conceal, isn’t it clear that He knows what we bring into the open? Indeed He does know, but this is part of the precise rhetoric of the Quran, since the One speaking is God *the Most High*.

We know that God is Unseen, and the unseen means all that is not directly perceived by our senses. Since God is Unseen, He obviously knows all that is unseen and concealed; yet perhaps the realm of open matters operates according to different laws. For example, if there is someone in a house, and he says, ‘I know everything that is in this house and everything that is outside it;’ when he says ‘I know everything that is in this house’ we will say, ‘You are in the house, so there is nothing strange in this; but you are hidden from what is outside the house, so how do you know of it?’

Since God *the Most High* is Unseen, His words ‘...all that they conceal...’ are closer to His Unseen reality, whilst ‘...all that they bring into the open’ is the part that gives us pause. Do not think that since God *the Most High* is Unseen, He only knows what is secret and concealed; no; He knows both the open and the hidden. So it makes sense since God is Unseen to our eyes, and we cannot directly perceive Him, that He would say ‘...all that they conceal...’ first. What does ‘...all that they conceal...’ mean? A secret is something that you do not divulge to someone else, since if you divulged it to someone else, it

would no longer be secret. A secret is something you keep to yourself, and do not tell it to anyone. If a secret is something you keep to yourself, an open matter is something you say aloud to others and it is considered open as long as two people know it. So an open matter is known to others, whilst a secret is concealed. When God *the Most High* informs us that He is Unseen, this does not mean that He only knows what is unseen. He knows the hidden and the open, and indeed God *the Most High* says in the Noble Quran that He knows what is secret and even what is yet more hidden (*Ta Ha*: 7). If a ‘secret’ is what you keep to yourself, and what exists only inside you, ‘what is yet more hidden’ means that God knows what you will do before you even do it, and He knows what will happen to you before it happens.

وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِي وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ

**Some of them are uneducated, and know the Scripture only through wish ful thinking. They rely on guesswork [78]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 78)**

God *the Most High* is still speaking about the people of the Book. After telling us about those who said to their coreligionists, ‘Do you tell them of what God has disclosed to you so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?’ (*al-Baqara*: 76), He *the Exalted* mentions another group, whom He calls here the ‘illiterates.’ The soundest opinion concerning the origin of the Arabic word *ummi* (‘unlettered’) is that it means one who is just as he was when his mother (*umm*) gave birth to him. That is, he knows nothing more of culture and education than he did the moment he was born. So the basic meaning of the illiterate person is the one who has gained nothing from the culture of the world around him; without it, it is necessarily being said that he is like he was when his mother bore him, since the norm in most societies is that the people of knowledge are the elite, not the commoners. In any case, all the definitions of the word *ummi* are close in meaning.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And there are among them illiterates....’ Notice that there were several camps from amongst the illiterate people who opposed Islam: the first camp were the idolaters of Mecca, and the second were the people of the Book in Medina. The name ‘People of the Book’ refers to the followers

of Moses *peace be upon him* and the followers of Christ *peace be upon him*. But in the Arabian Peninsula, there were small scattered numbers of Christians, while the Jews were living in a community. The reference in God's statement 'And there are among them illiterates who do not know the Book...' is to the Jews who had their community in Medina. Since the True Lord *the Most High* says that 'there are among them illiterates...', this means that there must have been among them people who were lettered; and it is they who will shortly be referred to in the coming verse when God *the Most High* says, 'Woe, then, to those who write down the Book with their own hands...' (*al-Baqara*: 79).

So God *the Most High* here divides the Jews into sections: one section of them were unlettered, not knowing anything about the Scripture, and all they knew was whatever their rabbis said to them; had they known about the descriptions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Torah, they might have believed in him. The 'Book' referred to here is the Torah. God *the Most High* did not deny that they had any kind of knowledge, but rather, He denied their possessing a particular kind of knowledge because He said that they knew nothing but 'wild wishes.' So it is as though those wishes were the extent of their knowledge of the Scripture. But what are wild wishes (*amaniyy*)? Sometimes the word is given as *amani*, and other times as *amaniyy* with a doubled letter (y). The word *amani* is the plural of *umniya* ('wish / desire'), whilst the word *amaniyy* is the plural of the word *umniyya* with a doubled letter (y). The word *umniyya* is found in the Noble Quran in both the singular and in the plural forms. God *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that it is not in accordance with their wishes or the wishes of the people of the Book; anyone who does evil will be requited for it (*an-Nisa*': 123). Here it is in the plural.

It also occurs in the singular when God *the Most High* addresses the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that he had not sent a messenger or a prophet before him but when he desired or wished, Satan injected some wrong desire in his wish (*al-Hajj*: 52).

What does *umniyya* (wild wish) mean? It means something which a person wants to happen, but whose occurrence is impossible. So it will not



happen, and it will never be; and so they say that one way of wishing is to imagine fanciful things. A poet once said:

If only my youth would return one day,

So that I could tell him what old age has done.

Could youth ever return? Of course, they could not. This is something that could never happen. Another poet said:

If only the stars would come down to me, that I could arrange them

As pearls of praise for you, as words are not enough!

Will the stars really fall from the sky and come to this poet so that he can weave them into lines of poetry for his beloved? So, one of the meanings of wild wishing (wishful thinking, daydreaming) is falsehood and fabrication. Some of the orientalist have a different interpretation of the above quoted verse saying that God had not sent a messenger or a prophet before Muhammad but when he desired or wished, Satan injected some wrong desire in his wish (*al-Hajj*: 52). They argue that the word *tamanna* (wished) here means ‘reciting’ and *umniya* (wish / desire) here means ‘recitation;’ and of course Satan would not cast anything into the recitation of the Messenger except lies, fabrications, and unbelief.

God *the Most High* made mention of the idols worshipped by the Arabs in pre-Islamic times when He addressed the idolaters urging them to think of their idols: al-Lat, al-‘Uzza, and Manat, the third and other one. He then puts forth to them the question as to why they would attach male progeny to themselves while they attribute females to God; that is indeed an unfair division (*an-Najm*: 19-22).

Enemies of Islam argue that since the Quran mentioned the names of the *gharaniq*, the idols which the idolaters used to worship, among which were al-lat, al-‘Uzza and Manat, this means that the intercession of these idols is to be hoped for in the Hereafter. This concept does not make any sense in the light of the monotheistic religion which calls to the worship of God Alone. The orientalist evaded this by saying that the religion truly does call to the worship of God Alone, and that therefore when Satan cast something into the words which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* recited, God *the Most High*

then nullified this by replacing it with His own firm verses, saying that those were nothing but names which the idolaters and their forefathers had coined, for which God had sent down no warranty (*an-Najm*: 23).

By this, they mean to suggest that it is possible for Satan to cast some of his own notions into the words of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, only for God *the Most High* to then abrogate what Satan cast and replace it with his own verses.

God *the Most High* did not leave His Revelation for Satan to play with; and so we must consider this verse from a viewpoint completely different from all we have just related. We say that you should consider God's words that he had not sent a messenger or a prophet before Muhammad but when he desired or wished, Satan injected some wrong desire in his wish (*al-Hajj*: 52). Even if we allow that *tamanna* is used to mean 'reciting,' and then God *the Most High* abrogated what Satan cast and then replaced it with His own verses, this would mean that He *the Exalted* did not leave His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to err, and so we would still be assured that everything the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said was correct, and that everything that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered to us was finally approved by God; and so we could rest assured that there could be nothing that Satan could cast into the Messenger's recitation which could reach us without being abrogated first.

So if we say that God abrogates what Satan casts, then how could you possibly know what Satan has cast since the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* only delivers to us what has been approved by God? And what is a messenger? He is a man who has had revealed to him divine teachings, and has been commanded to convey them to others. And what is a prophet? He is a man who has had revealed to him divine teachings which he has not been commanded to convey to others. Since he has not been commanded to convey them to others, they are specifically addressed to him; and the prophet is a behavioural role-model because he implements the law revealed to the messenger who came before him, and brings nothing new.

The noble verse says '...a messenger or a prophet...' (*al-Hajj*: 52), and so if this meaning of *tamanna* as 'recitation' can apply to the case of a messenger,

it cannot apply to the case of a prophet because prophets do not recite anything. So since prophets are also mentioned in this noble verse, it must be that *tamanna* here means something else other than 'recitation' because prophets do not bring new teachings which they recite to the people so that they would recite something approved by God with nothing cast into it by Satan.

The word *tamanna* does not mean the recitation of Satan. The ardent wish of every messenger and prophet is for their mission to succeed, the messenger as a conveyor of God's teachings and the Prophet as a behavioural role-model. The true meaning here is something different: the wish of the Messenger is to convey God's teachings, and Satan tries to prevent God's teachings from entering people's hearts. This is what it means. When God makes His verses clear, He succours the faith so that God's teachings come to govern the earth and regulate people's lives. This is what it means.

The word 'wish' in this noble verse means that the messenger or prophet hopes that his teachings will come to prevail in the earth, and then Satan casts obstacles in his path, and then God makes His verses clear and succours the truth. We must understand the verse in this way; and this completely negates what the orientlists say about how when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* recited what was revealed to him, Satan was able to interfere and place his own words into the Revelation; this is impossible.

God *the Most High* says, 'And there are among them illiterates who do not know the Book but wish....' This means that people will come who know nothing about the Book except conjecture, and the unlettered people will believe them out of ignorance. It is as though God *the Most High* wants to warn us that many of the religious schools of thought on earth are the creations of those who call to them. There are people who trust others to tell them what the laws of the religion say; an unlettered or uneducated man asks a scholar about a ruling of the Sacred Law and then takes his answer and applies it unquestioningly because his knowledge only goes as far as asking for a ruling. The True Lord *the Most High* has decreed that no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear the burden of another (*al-An'am*: 164).

That is, no one will bear the sin of any other on the Day of Resurrection. And He *the Most High* says that on the day of resurrection, they shall bear their

own burden entirely and some of the burdens of those whom they, in their ignorance, misled (*an-Nahl*: 25).

Some people imagine that there is a contradiction between these two verses, but we say no; whoever commits a sin will be held accountable for it, and whoever misguides someone else with an incorrect ruling which allows him to do what God has forbidden, will carry his own sins and also the sins of the one he misguided; he will have one sin for being astray himself, and another sin for leading others astray. Indeed more than that, for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whoever calls to guidance will have reward equivalent to the reward of all who follow him without this decreasing anything from their rewards; and whoever calls to misguidance will bear sin equivalent to the sins of all who follow him without this decreasing anything from their sins.'<sup>(1)</sup>

We must stress the danger of giving religious verdicts or legal opinions without having proper knowledge. The worst an opinion on worldly affairs can do is causing you to lose out in a deal, whilst a religious opinion lasts a long, long time.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and they do nothing but conjecture....' As we said, conjecture means to hold something as likely but not certain. If the term 'wild wishes' (*amaniyy*) here means 'reciting,' as it sometimes can, it would mean that these unlettered people know nothing of the Book except the recitation of the tongue with no understanding. And so God *the Most High* says that the parable of the Jews who were given the burden of the Torah, and thereafter failed to bear it, is that of an ass that carries a load of books (*al-Jumu'a*: 5).

And so we see that there are people who carry the Torah whilst knowing nothing about it, and God *the Most High* says that such are like donkeys; but they are lower than donkeys because it is the donkey's job to carry heavy weights, whilst it is not the job of the human being to carry something which he knows nothing about. And so he must read the Book and know what it requires from him.

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا  
بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

**So woe to those who write something down with their own hands and then claim, ‘This is from God,’ in order to make some small gain. Woe to them for what their hands have written! Woe to them for all that they have earned! [79]**  
**(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 79)**

This noble verse refers to the second section of the Jews, namely those who are in contrast to the unlettered ones. They are either unlettered, having no knowledge of the Book, or they do know, but change it and write it with their own hands and say it is from God. So God *the Most High* warns them, with ‘Woe.’ The verse begins directly with a warning of punishment. The Arabic word *wayl* (‘woe’), along with other similar words like *wayh* and *ways*, mean perdition and suffering, and are also used to express regret for man’s heedlessness of the punishment of the next life. We find an example of this in the exclamation of the losers on the Day of Judgement when they cry, ‘Oh, woe to us!’ upon finding that the record of their deeds leaves nothing out, be it small or great (*al-Kahf*: 49).

And we have another example in the cry of the wicked ones when they come face to face with the punishment of the Hereafter: ‘Oh, woe to us! We were indeed heedless of this!’ (*al-Anbiya*: 97).

These cries of woe express the distress felt upon seeing the suffering of the Hereafter. It is said that *wayl* is also the name of a valley in hell in which wicked people will languish for forty years (we seek God’s protection). The True Lord *the Most High* warns those who write the Book down falsely with their own hands that their punishment on the Day of Resurrection will be manifold because they will share in the sins of all who committed sins because of their corruption of the scripture, and will bear their punishments, on the Day of Resurrection, and so their suffering will be multiplied many times over.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Woe, then, to those who write the Book with their own hands....’ Would it not have been enough that the True Lord *the Most High* simply says, ‘Woe unto those who write down the divine writ,’ for the meaning to have been clear? What else would they write with

but their hands? We say no, because an action can be achieved either by the issue of an order or by a direct action. A country's president, for example, calls one of his ministers and says, 'Did I not write you a message telling you to do this? So why did you not do it?' He did not write this message with his own hand, but rather someone wrote it under his instruction; it is rare for a head of state to write a letter with his own hand. God *the Most High* wants to show us here the extent of their deliberation in committing this sin. They were not satisfied by instructing someone else to write for them, but rather out of their concern to carry out the distortion and perversion of the Word of God *the Most High*, they did it with their own hands to make sure it was done exactly as they wanted it to be. So it was not a passing whim, but was rather something premeditated and calculated. Their aim was to acquire a trifling gain thereby, which was either wealth or what is called 'temporal power'; they would rule, and have influence and authority.

In the past, when the people of the Book differed about something, they would go to the priests and monks and others to have them judge between them. Why was this? It was because when people differ, they would like to have a cover that can preserve their dignity if they were proven to be wrong. That is: 'I will not be defeated in front of him, and he will not be defeated in front of me. Rather, we are both content to accept the judgement of so-and-so (a neutral judge).' If we take recourse in the judgement of the religion to decide between us, there will be no winners or losers; for when both you and I submit to God's judgement, we will both be content by the outcome of this judgement.

But the clergy amongst the Jews and Christians began to issue contradictory opinions, each of them ruling according to their benefit and caprices. And so rulings on similar matters were different because verdicts were no longer based on justice, but rather, each verdict was subject to caprice, benefit and human interest. And so when they wrote books with their own hands and said 'This is from God,' it was because they wanted to make what they wrote appear sacred so that people would accept it unquestioningly, and so they would be able to make laws in God's name and write whatever they wanted and record it in books of scripture. And when the commoners from among the people of the Book perceived the contradictions in the religious rulings because of the

additions made by their priests and monks, they began to seek a way to free the Sacred Law from the power of the church.

But why would these people write things with their own hands and then say it was from God? The True Lord *the Most High* says it is ‘...that they may sell it for some mean price!’ We said before that a person does not seek to buy a price, but rather, he pays a price to buy a product. But here, you are paying to acquire a *thaman*, (‘price’). You pay with God’s teachings and His rulings by altering them and exchanging them for a temporal gain. God *the Most High* would give you in abundance in the Hereafter, but you sell it for a little price; and whatever gain, no matter how big, which you take in exchange for God’s teachings, can only be a trifling gain.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...Woe, then, to them for what their hands have written....’ The noble verse began with God’s words: ‘Woe, then, to those who write the Book with their own hands...’ and then God *the Most High* says, ‘...Woe, then, to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn.’ So, at the moment of writing, there is woe and suffering, and at the moment the deal takes place, there is woe and suffering, and all that they gain from this is woe and suffering.

This matter became widespread in the form of the ‘indulgences’ for forgiveness of sins which were sold in churches to the highest bidders. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...woe to them for what they earn.’ The word *kasb* (rendered here as ‘earn’) means that a bodily action of yours results in some kind of profit or benefit coming your way. The form of the verb *kasaba* normally means to earn something beneficial, and the form *iktasaba* to earn something harmful. But in this verse the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...woe to them for what they earn,’ using the verb form *kasaba*; and also in another verse He uses the same form to speak about whosoever earns an evil deed (*al-Baqara*: 81).

So why is this form of the verb used here? We say that this is not a natural gain, but rather, it involves some kind of affectation in the deed, and so really it is *iktisab*, earning something harmful. We must understand that with respect to a person’s organs, there is speech, action, and deed. Some people think there is only speech and deed, but we say no; speech is the work of the tongue whereas action is the work of the other limbs apart from the tongue, and deed

is when speech and action correlate. And this is what we understand from God's admonition to the believers as to why they say one thing and do another. Most loathsome is it in the sight of God for one to say what one does not do (*as-Saff*: 2-3). So we have speech, action, and deed. If a person uses his body in a sound way, he does what is good for him; and if he changes and does something which is not good for him and which incurs God's wrath, his limbs do not act willingly, but rather, they react unnaturally with affectation, and their natural dispositions are in conflict. When a person opens his safe to take his own money, he feels calm and has no fear; but when he opens someone else's safe, he feels nervous and all his actions are perturbed. When a man is with his wife, he is relaxed in a natural state; and this is in contrast with how he is when he is in an unnatural situation. It is a state of agitation. When someone gains something unlawful he is perturbed by this, and so in Arabic, it is said that he earned it with the verb *iktasaba*, the reflexive form of *kasaba*. The increase in the structure of the Arabic verb indicates abnormality in action, an action going against the pristine nature of man. However, when one becomes used to the unlawful so that the unlawful no longer bothers him, or becomes one of those we call 'habitual criminals,' he will do things without any agitation at all because such things become the norm for him (and his actions are expressed by the original verb *kasaba*, as they involve no affectation or psychological stress any more). These are the ones who have reached the point where they write down things with their own hands and then say it is from God. Sin no longer affects them, and so God warns them of His punishment twice in a single verse.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ تَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا مَعْدُودَةً قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ  
عَهْدًا فَلَنْ يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ عَهْدَهُ ۖ أَمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

**They say, 'The Fire will only touch us for a few days.' Say to them, 'Have you received a promise from God – for God never breaks His promise – or are you saying things about Him of which you have no real knowledge?' [80] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 80)**

Here, God *the Most High* reveals the way these people think. Satan made falsehood alluring to them, and made them think that they had truly gained



and that they had taken wealth and worldly status and succeeded because of it, because they would only be punished very lightly in the Hereafter. And so God *the Most High* exposed what they would say to one another: ‘And they say, “Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days.”...’

The Arabic word *mass* (‘touch’) here means a light touch, or simply two things coming close to each other, whilst only feeling each other very slightly and inconsequentially. If you touch a person’s hand with your fingertips, this is *mass*. But with this touch, you cannot feel the heat of his hand or the softness of his skin; to feel what we touch, we must touch it more firmly than this. ‘And they say, “Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days.”...’ This means that they would receive only the tiniest amount of suffering for the shortest duration of time. The term ‘few’ signifies a limited number, something that can be counted easily. On the other hand, if something is unlimited, this means there is a great deal of it. And so when God *the Most High* speaks of His blessings, for example, He says that we cannot possibly enumerate them, even if we try (*an-Nahl*: 18).

So, to even begin to count something, indicates that it is countable, and if it is uncountable, then no one will even attempt to count it. No one has ever tried to count all the grains of sand or all the drops of water in the sea. God’s manifest and hidden blessings cannot be counted, and so no one has ever tried to count them. So if you hear the phrase ‘a few days,’ this means that they are only a few days. And so we see that in the chapter of *Yusuf*, the True Lord *the Most High* says that the caravan people sold Joseph for a paltry price, a mere few coins (*Yusuf*: 20).

Their words ‘Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days’ show their foolishness because a touch like this only lasts for a moment. Rather, this was a wishful belief which Satan put in their heads, and to which God *the Most High* swiftly retorts: ‘Say, “Have you received such a promise from God; for God will not break his promise”...’ That is, if this is a promise from God, God will not break His promise. God *the Most High* commanded His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to them: You are not the ones who judge or decide what God *the Most High* will do with you, but rather, He *the Exalted* will decide. If He has made you a promise, then God will not break His promise.

Then God *the Most High* says, ‘...or, do you speak of God that which you do not know?’ This is the great manners of prophethood and the magnificent character of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. Rather than saying to them, ‘Are you fabricating lies against God?’, or ‘Are you ascribing things to God which He did not say?’, he says, ‘...or, do you speak of God that which you do not know?’ The one who fabricates something knows that he has made it up; he is the first one who knows that he is lying. He might have an argument by which he convinces those before him so they believe him, but he will still know that what he says is a lie even if they believe it. This is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* once said, ‘I am but a human being. You come to me with arguments, and perhaps some of you present their side better than others do, and that I judge in their favour according to the story I hear; and so if I allot to someone the right of another Muslim, it is but a piece of fire: He may take it or leave it.’<sup>(1)</sup>

So the one who tells a lie, knows that it is a falsehood, and so these Jews were the first to know that their words ‘...Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days...’ was a mere fabrication. But to whom did they tell this lie against God? They told it to the unlettered ones amongst them who had no knowledge of scripture.

بِكُلِّ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ  
 أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

**Truly those who do evil and are surrounded by their sins  
 will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain [81]  
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 81)**

God *the Most High* wanted to expose their falsehood, and so the Quran says *bala* (‘Yea’), which is a particle used to answer, just like the word ‘yes,’ except that ‘yea’ is a negative answer, meaning that it negates that which came before it. They said, ‘...Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days...’, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them whether they had a promise from God saying this, or were they attributing to

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(1) Narrated by Malik, Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, and Muslim

God something which they did not know. Then, the Quran came and said, 'Yea! Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed, these are the inmates of the Fire, therein to abide for ever.' Beginning the answer with 'Yea' negates what was said before it because the Arabic word *bala* comes after a negative statement, whilst the word *na'am* ('yes') is used after a positive statement, so if someone says to you 'I do not owe you anything' and you answer '*na'am*,' this means you are saying 'That is right, you do not owe me anything,' whilst if you say '*bala*,' this means 'No, you do owe me something.' And so when they said, '...Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days...', if the response had been *na'am*, this would have meant that what they said was true; but the word *bala* ('Yea') negated what they said, and then there followed a further affirmation of this negation: '...Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed, these are the inmates of the Fire, therein to abide for ever.' They said, '...Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days...', and He said, it will not only touch you, but you will abide therein for all eternity. His words *ashab an-nar* ('inmates of the fire') literally means 'the companions of the fire.' Companionship suggests a kind of mutual attraction between the two companions which means that there will be an attraction between them and the fire.

We notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Yea! Whoever earns evil...', using the verb form *kasaba* (normally meaning 'to earn something beneficial,') whilst it might seem more appropriate to use the verb form *iktasaba* ('to earn something harmful'). But they believe that they have earned something beneficial, as we explained in the previous verse. God's words '...and by his sin is engulfed...' means that they are engulfed so that there is no exit from which to escape from their sinfulness because it is all around them.

The most appropriate interpretation of the sin referred to in God's statement '...Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed...' is that it means worshipping partners with God because idolatry is the sin which engulfs a person so that there is no forgiveness for it. As God *the Most High* says that surely He does not forgive the worship of partners besides Him, although He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills (*an-Nisa*: 48).

And so the people meant here are not only simple sinners, but rather are disbelievers and idolaters. The proof of this is that God *the Most High* says,

‘...therein to abide for ever,’ whilst the people who commit venial and mortal sins and then repent, will not remain in hell forever, but rather, those who associate partners with God and disbelieve in Him, are the ones who will remain in hell forever. Everyone who does not believe in our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a disbeliever because God *the Most High* says that whoever seeks a religion other than Islam (submitting to God), it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come he shall be among the lost (*Al-‘Imran*: 85).

And so I said there is a difference between a person who commits a sin because he cannot help himself, and then regrets it and repents, and a person who is glad to commit sin. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says that surely repentance with God is only for those who do evil in ignorance, then repent soon (*an-Nisa*’: 17).

There are some who regret their sins, and so repent; and there are some who are glad to sin, and so their sinfulness increases.

وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ  
 أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

**while those who believe and do good deeds will be  
 the inhabitants of the Garden, there to remain [82]  
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 82)**

As is the usual case in the Quran, when God *the Most High* mentions punishment and the fire of hell in the Noble Quran, He then mentions the opposite state, paradise and its delights. This is because this contrast shows us the difference between the two states, and makes the believer feel joy because not only has he been drawn away from the suffering of the Hereafter, but has also been granted to enter paradise where he will live forever in its delights. And so He *the Exalted* says that whoever is drawn away from the Fire and is admitted into Paradise will have attained success (*Al-‘Imran*: 185).

So, success in the Hereafter is not of just one level, but rather of two; the first level of success is for a person to be spared the fire of hell, even only as

far as the *A'raf*,<sup>(1)</sup> and this is a great success. It is enough to pass over the bridge above hell, and see all the kinds of suffering that exist therein, and then to be saved from all this horror; and this is enough of a great triumph because at that moment, the disbeliever will wish that he were dust rather than enter hell. The passing of the believer across the bridge and his vision of hell is a blessing because he senses how he has been saved from all this. And so once he passes over Hell and enters Paradise to dwell in its delights forever, this is a second triumph. And so God *the Most High* meant to show us both these stages; he did not say simply that whoever is drawn away from the fire will have attained success, but rather said that whoever is drawn away from the Fire and is admitted into Paradise will have attained success (*Al-Imran*: 185). This noble verse is mentioned directly after verses describing the suffering of Hell in order to give us the contrasting state.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَيَالِ الَّذِينَ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ  
وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا  
الزَّكَاةَ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

**Remember when We took a pledge from the Children of Israel: ‘Worship none but God; be good to your parents and kinsfolk, to orphans and the poor; speak good words to all people; keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms.’ Then all but a few of you turned away and paid no heed [83] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 83)**

God *the Most High* took a promise from the Israelites concerning eight things. The promise is the firm, trusted pledge of the pristine nature that was taken at the time of creation, as God *the Most High* says He brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their offspring and made them bear witness

(1) In Islamic terminology, *al-A'raf* (akin to the concept of purgatory in Christian theology, and sometimes translated into English as ‘Heights’) is a place in an elevated location between paradise and hell where people who had equally mixed deeds (good and bad) and who are not qualified to be admitted to paradise and, at the same time, not deserving to be severely punished in hell, would be taken on the Day of Judgement, where they will stay until God judges that they had been purged of their sins, and they will be admitted to paradise – ED.

against themselves, asking them, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they answered that they do bear witness to that (*al-A'raf*: 172).

And there was another pledge which God took from all His messengers which is that that they would convey the glad tidings of the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and instruct their followers to believe in him upon his coming, or not to conceal or change what was in their scriptures. A pledge is everything which implies a command from God, meaning that you enter into a contract of faith with God *the Most High* stipulating that you will do what He commands you to do and refrain from what He forbids you. This is a *mithaq* (pledge/covenant). The same word (*mithaq*) is used in the Noble Quran in connection with the relationship between men and women and is described as *ghalizh* (strong, solemn, and strict) (*an-Nisa'*: 21).

We say yes it is a most solemn bond because this pledge will make lawful for the woman things that are unlawful to her without it, things that are unlawful with respect to her father, her brother, or any man except her husband. If a man sees his daughter with her leg uncovered, she will hasten to cover it, whilst if it was her husband who came in, she will do nothing of the sort. And so it is a solemn pledge because it concerns the private parts, and makes them lawful to the husband and wife; and so the True Lord *the Most High* says that a man and his wife are very much like a garment for each other (*al-Baqara*: 187).

They each cover and conceal the nakedness of the other. A father is not happy to see the protection of his daughter pass on to anyone, except that it passes to her husband, and so he feels worried if his daughter grows up without getting married.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And when We made a covenant with the children of Israel: 'You shall not worship but God....' This pledge comprises three conditions: '...You shall not worship but God....' And this implies: a) You shall worship God Alone, and b) You shall believe in the Torah, and c) Believe in Moses *peace be upon him* as your prophet. Why is this so? It is so because the worship of God Alone is the pinnacle of faith, but you cannot decide for yourself the way in which you will worship God *the Glorified*, but rather, the One Who is worshipped will decide how He is to be worshipped, not

the worshipper. So you must take the way which God has revealed, the Torah, and believe in it. And then, you must believe in Moses *peace be upon him* as your prophet because it was to him that the Torah was revealed, and he is the one who will show you the right way to worship. Without these three conditions, the worship of the Israelites could not be correct.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...and you shall do good to your parents;’ and this is because they are the direct cause of your existence, and they raised you when you were young, and looked after you. The meaning of God’s word ‘good’ here is to do more than what is conventionally required. You might do something as much as it is required of you, such as the one who prays as much as is obligatory for him to pray; but the one who performs supererogatory prayers and observes the night prayers, has entered into the realm of excellence, i.e. offering more than what is required. God *the Most High* describes the state of the God-fearing in the Hereafter saying that they will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them, that is because they were doers of good in their worldly life; they would not sleep but a small part of the night, and would pray for forgiveness for their misdeeds; and would assign in all their possessions a due share for the needy and the deprived (*adh-Dhariyat*: 15-19).

So, we see that excellence (*ihsan*) means to offer more than what is required of prayer, glorification, and charity. God *the Most High* wants you to give your parents more than what is required from you or is obligatory upon you.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...and kindred....’ Here, God tells us the second degree of excellence. God *the Glorified* tells us that we should be good to our parents and take care of our relatives; and if we all took care of this responsibility there would be no poor or needy people in society. God wants society to be free of poverty and jealousy, and this will only come from compassion and goodness to one’s parents and relatives so that every needy person in society has someone to provide for them.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...and to orphans....’ An orphan is someone who has lost his father when still a child not yet reaching manhood. This is the case with human beings; as for animals, an orphan is one that has lost its mother because it is mothers who provide for their offspring where animals

are concerned, and fathers are unknown in the animal world, whilst mothers are known. An orphan, who loses his father, loses the one who provides for him, and works for his sake, and defends him. God *the Most High* has made the mother the one who raises children and takes care of them, whilst the father works to provide for the needs of the family. But things have changed now, and so the poet Ahmad Shawqi *God rest his soul* says,

The orphan is not the one whose parents have been relieved

From the woes of this world, and left him weak and humble;

Rather, the orphan is the one who suffers from a mother who neglects him, or a father who is always busy. An orphan is in a terrible situation because he has lost his father and so has no one to protect him. And so when we see that in the Islamic society every orphan is treated with care, like every man is his father, this makes a father not fear that he will leave his son alone if he dies. And so the care of society first preserves the rights of the orphan because if he is orphaned but has money, everyone will want to get hold of it because he cannot safeguard his possessions; this is one thing, the second is that this care will remove jealous hatred from society and make every man reassured about his children.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...and the needy....’ In the past, people used to say that a needy person is one who owns nothing at all with which he can preserve his life, until the noble verse in the chapter of *al-Kahf* was revealed, in which we learn of the boat that was the property of some needy people who toiled upon the sea (*al-Kahf*: 79).

So, from this we know that needy people can have possessions, but they do not have enough to meet their needs. This is one kind of communal care which must exist in society so that everyone can be taken care of. If you are needy or poor, and a rich man gives you something to help you in your life, you will wish the best for him because of the good he has done you. But if this rich man gives you nothing, and gets richer while you get poorer, the result will be that you will hate him more and more.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...and you shall speak to people in a kindly way....’ The word *husn* (‘kindly’) can mean the same as *hasan* (‘good’). Good things are those which the Sacred Law declares to be good, and so the



scholars differ as to whether goodness is only those things which the Sacred Law declares to be good, or whether it is those things which human reasoning deems good. We say: It is those things which the intellect deems good as long as there is no text of the Sacred Law which declares otherwise, since intellects might differ over a single matter, one thinking it to be good while the other deems it bad. God *the Most High* command His Messenger to invite to the way of his Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and to argue with people in a way that is best. Indeed, the Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is rightly guided (*an-Nahl*: 125).

This is the meaning of God's words '...and you shall speak to people in a kindly way....' And then He *the Exalted* says, '...and you shall perform prayer....' We spoke about the meaning of being constant in prayer, and about that which makes it acceptable to God. There is a difference between saying 'pray' and saying 'perform prayer.' To perform prayer means to pray, but to pray in the way that is required of you; and constancy in prayer, as we said, is an essential pillar of excellence which can never be left out.

Then the True Lord *the Glorified* says, '...and pay the poor due....' With respect to the poor-due; when God *the Most High* says, '...and kindred, and to orphans and the needy...' we notice that relatives, orphans and the needy have a right to the poor-due as long as they are poor so that we can all feel that we live in a balanced, mutually complementary environment of faith, in which each of us tries to help the other. In principle, the poor-due is given to the needy, whether they are orphans and relatives or not, and so every needy person has a right and must be taken care of. And so if there are poor people who are orphans, or our relatives, this means they have two rights, the right of a relative and the right of a needy person. And if they are orphans, they have the right of orphans and the right of the needy.

After mentioning these eight components of the pledge, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...Then you turned away....' That is, you rejected, or disobeyed, or refused to listen. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...except a few of you, and you backslide....' This is a historical fact about the Israelites; some of them turned away and refused to obey the pledge, whilst others did obey.

The Quran is not waging some kind of campaign against the Jews in general, but rather is waging a campaign against those of them who rebelled. And so it respects the truth, and says 'except for a few.' In human terms, this is called a 'conservative statement.'

The True Lord *the Most High* speaks with the fairness of the Creator speaking to His creatures, and so He did not say, 'And then you all turned away,' but rather said, '...Then you turned away, except a few of you, and you backslide.' We need to have a closer look at the wording of the verse to appreciate the precision of the expression. If we want to explain what the term *tawallaitum* ('turn away,' turn one's back') means, we would say it means to shun/avoid and refuse a command. But to be more precise, we find that the same term is used when the Quran speaks of the meeting of the believers and the disbelievers in battle: God *the Most High* says that whoever during fighting turns his back to the enemy – unless it be in a battle manoeuvre or in an endeavour to join another troop of the believers – shall indeed have incurred God's wrath (*al-Anfal*: 16).

So, to turn away is to shun and avoid, but in this noble verse, the True Lord *the Most High* shows us that turning away can be done with a different intention in mind. In a battle, a warrior might turn away not intending to flee the battlefield, but rather to go and fight somewhere else or to aid his comrades if the enemy has fallen upon them. This turning around is not done with the intention of fleeing, but rather with the intention of fighting in a way which is more likely to bring victory.

Suppose that you see a person who owes you money coming in your direction in the road, and you turn away from him. You do not do this because you dislike him or because you want to humiliate him, but rather out of compassion for him because you do not want to embarrass him and hurt his feelings. So there are ways of turning away, but without the intention of disobedience or rejection. God *the Most High* wants to make it clear to us that those Jews turned away with the intention of being obstinate, not with any other intention. That is, they turned away intending to reject the pledge, not for any other reason.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ لَا تَسْفِكُونَ دِمَاءَكُمْ وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ  
 أَنْفُسَكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ ثُمَّ أَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ

**We took a pledge from you, ‘Do not shed one another’s blood or drive one another from your homelands.’ You acknowledged it at the time, and you can testify to this [84] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 84)**

We have already explained that when you hear the particle *idh*, it means ‘remember when.’ We also said that a covenant is a firm pledge. God *the Most High* says, ‘...that you should not shed your own blood....’ Before this, God *the Most High* told us that the pledge included promises to worship God Alone, and to be good to one’s parents, relatives, the orphans and the poor, and to speak to all people in a kindly way, and to be constant in prayer, and so on to the end of the noble verse. These are all commandments, i.e. they all say ‘do this;’ and to complete the pledge, here in this noble verse God tells us what they were forbidden to do. As we said, worship is to obey commandments and prohibitions. So what did the pledge forbid? ‘...You should not shed your own blood....’ This means that none of you would shed his brother’s blood, and you should not shed the blood of one another. But why did God *the Most High* say *dima’ukum* (literally ‘your own blood’)? It is because He then goes on to say, ‘...nor evict *anfusakum* (literally ‘yourselves,’ one another) from your homes....’ When a religious command is given to a religious community, it addresses them as though they are one entity, one body; which is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The likeness of the believers in their mutual love, care, and compassion is that of a single body: if one part of it ails, the rest of it shares in the sleeplessness and fever.’<sup>(1)</sup>

So it is as though the believing community is a single body; this is why we find God *the Most High* commanding the believers that when they enter any of their houses, they should offer greetings to themselves (to one another) with a blessed, goodly greeting, as enjoined by God (*an-Nur*: 61). But if I am the one who enters the house, how can I greet myself?

(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari*

In fact God addresses the believers as though they are a single entity, and on this basis He *the Exalted* ordered the Israelites saying, ‘...you should not shed your own blood...’ that is, do not kill one another. ‘Shed’ means to spill blood, and the ‘blood’ is the liquid which flows in the body to preserve life. God’s words ‘...nor evict one another from your homes...’ mean you should not throw one another out of their homes. God then ties the believers from amongst the Israelites to this by saying, ‘...then you acknowledged this and you were witnesses to it.’ ‘...You acknowledged...’ means you accepted; and then He says, ‘...you were witnesses to it.’ To bear witness is to testify about something you have seen. The judge questions witnesses because they witnessed the event and can tell what they saw. When you tell what you have witnessed, it is as though the event becomes for those who hear you, something which they too witnessed, and which happened before their eyes. On the other hand, a false witness or a perjurer alters the facts.

The True Lord *the Most High* here was addressing the Jews who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and reminding them of what their forefathers witnessed, and how they accepted the pledge when He raised Mount Sinai above them as is well-known. The Quran wants to say to them, ‘You have changed, and broken the pledge, as you well know; if something agreed with your caprice you applied it, and if it did not, you rejected it.’

ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِنْكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ تَظَاهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِآلَاتِهِمِ وَالْعُدُونِ وَإِنْ يَأْتُوكُمْ أَكْثَرُ مُتَغَدِّدِينَ فِيكُمْ وَهُمْ مُحَرَّمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَى أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

**Yet here you are, killing one another and driving some of your own people from their homes, helping one another in sin and aggression against them. If they come to you as captives, you still pay to set them free, although you had no right to drive them out.**

**So do you believe in some parts of the Scripture and not in others? The punishment for those of you who do this will be**

**nothing but disgrace in this life, and on the Day of Resurrection  
they will be condemned to the harshest torment: God is not  
unaware of what you do [85] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 85)**

Here the True Lord *the Exalted* addresses the Jews to expose them for implementing only those parts of the Torah which suited their caprices, and not implementing what did not please them. He says to them, ‘...Do you, then, believe in part of the Book, and deny part?’ He reminds them that they had agreed to the pledge and acknowledged it.

This verse was revealed when a Jewish woman committed adultery and the Jews did not want to subject her to their legal punishment of stoning, and so they thought of raising the issue to Muhammad, as the chief of state in Medina, thinking that he would exempt them from carrying out the punishment specified in their own scripture, or that he would not know what was in their scripture. But when they went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, he told them, ‘You have this ruling in the Torah.’ They said, ‘The Torah tells us that we should pelt the face of the adulterer or adulteress with refuse, and expose them to all the people.’ The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘No, you have the verse of stoning in the Torah.’ So they went away. It seems that when they expected the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would lighten one of God’s ordained punishments, they would go to him to seek his verdict.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Then you were the very persons who killed one another....’ That is, after the pledge was taken from you that you would not do it, you slew one another, or the one who slew another would be executed; so it is as though he killed himself. Why did He use emphasis in saying ‘you were the very persons...’ in this way? It is to draw our attention so that we take good notice of this matter.

He then says, ‘...and you drove out a part of your own people from their homes...,’ after having warned them by saying, ‘...nor evict one another from your homes...’ (*al-Baqara*: 84), and this was part of their pledge.

What is it that the True Lord *the Most High* wants to draw our attention to here? We say that when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* migrated to Medina, he went from a place of idolatry to a place of faith,

meaning that there were already believers there; some of the inhabitants of Medina were believers. Muslims had migrated to Abyssinia before this, but this was a migration to a place of security, not a place of faith. But when the Pledge of 'Aqaba was stuck, and a group from Medina came and swore allegiance to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and believed in him, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* sent Mus'ab ibn 'Umair *God be pleased with him* back with them to teach them their religion. And so the migration of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was to a place where faith had already taken root. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, he spoiled the plan of the Jews there, who were represented by the tribes of Qainuqa', Nadir and Quraiza. The other two tribes in Medina were Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, who, even before the coming of Islam, had been engaged in a perpetual war. The Jews had divided themselves into two factions, one with the Aws and the other with the Khazraj so that they could perpetuate the conflict, and every time things died down, they would stir up one side against the other so that the fighting would begin again.

The tribes of Nadir and Qaynuqa' were allied with Al-Khazraj, and the tribe of Qurayza were allied with the Aws. And so when Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj came to blows, there would be Jews on both sides. And when the battle ended, what would happen? Qurayza would assist Nadir and Qaynuqa' in freeing those of them who had been captured, even though they were the ones who had caused them to be taken in the first place. And if Al-Aws won the battle and took prisoners from the Al-Khazraj and their Jewish allies, the Jews would come and free the Jewish prisoners because they had a text of scripture saying that if any Israelite is captured, he must be freed.

The True Lord *the Most High* is saying to them here that their actions in fighting one another and spilling one another's blood are not consistent with the pledge which God took from them, but rather are merely being undertaken for worldly benefit. '...You were the very persons who killed one another...', whilst God forbade you from doing so; '...and you drove out a part of your own people from their homes...', whilst God *the Most High* forbade you from doing so; '...you collaborated against them in sin and aggression; but if they come captives to you, you redeem them; yet it was forbidden you to drive

them out, in the first place.’ This was what happened in the wars between the Aws and Khazraj which took place in Medina, as we have explained. The word *usara* (‘captives’) is the plural of (*asir*), but not in the ordinary form for a plural of this kind, which would be *asra*, as is the case in another verse when God *the Most High* says that it is not proper for a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on earth (*al-Anfal*: 67).

But here the Quran uses the plural form *usara*. Sometimes an unusual linguistic form is used to alert us to a certain concept. The plural of *kaslan* (‘lazy’) is *kusala*, and *kaslan* means someone who does not move actively. This is also the case for a prisoner of war, since you have chained him and prevented him from moving. It is as though the plural of *asir* being given as *usara* is an indication of restricted movement. The Quran uses both plural forms *usara* and *asra*, but when it uses *usara* it wants to make us envisage restricted movement, just like the word *kusala*. The presence of captives means that there has been, and war implies battles and fighting, each side trying to slay its enemies.

The idea of taking prisoners is to calm down the heat of the battle. It is as though God wanted to protect people from their own ferocity at wartime and so told them, ‘Take them prisoners, and do not kill them unless you are forced to do so. Rather, take them prisoners so that you will gain benefit from them by holding them for ransom.’ This is a ruling of mercy because if taking prisoners was forbidden, then whenever two enemies met one would have to kill the other. And so it is said that you should take them prisoners unless their existence poses a danger to your own life.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...But if they come captives to you, you redeem them; yet it was forbidden you to drive them out, in the first place....’ Each faction of the Jews fought with their allies from either Al-Aws or Al-Khazraj, and the vanquished would be expelled from their homes, which would then be taken, and then after the war was ended, they would be ransomed, i.e. they would take ransoms from them in exchange for returning to them their homes and children. But why did the Jews divide themselves like this? It was not a religious division, but rather a worldly division; so why? It did not make sense for people of the Book to divide themselves between Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj so that there was enmity and hatred between them.

God *the Most High* says, '...You collaborated against them in sin and aggression....' That is, helping one another against them, whilst you are all members of a single religion, you are 'in sin', a sin is something vile which people are ashamed of; 'and aggression,' i.e. ferocious enmity. God *the Most High* then says, '...But if they come captives to you, you redeem them; yet it was forbidden you to drive them out, in the first place...', i.e. you expel them from their homes and then take ransoms from them in order to allow them to return.

Then God *the Most High* says, '...Do you, then, believe in part of the Book, and deny part?...' That is, you consider everything according to worldly benefit, and divide yourselves amongst Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj despite the fact that you believe in a common God, and prophet, and scripture. It is inconceivable that your religion or your prophet could have commanded you to do this.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '...But what shall be the recompense of him among you who does this, but disgrace in this life?...' That is, you did this and went astray solely to gain worldly esteem, but you did not achieve this, but rather, God will afflict you with disgrace in this world. So the punishment will not be left until the Hereafter, and disgrace, i.e. shame and ignominy, will afflict you in this world. So what of the Hereafter? God *the Most High* says, '...And on the day of the Resurrection they shall be sent to the severest of punishment....' Ignominy in this world came to them at the hand of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers, who expelled the tribe of Qainuqa 'from their homes; and then the tribe of Quraiza were executed after they betrayed the pledge they had struck with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims. So God *the Most High* does not delay the punishment for some sins until the Hereafter, and the reward of tyranny in this world is not left until the Hereafter because the oppressed person must see the fall of his oppressors so that the justice of the universe is maintained, and so that people know that God exists and that He *the Exalted* awaits all oppressors. So these Jews were met with ignominy in this world swiftly, '...And on the day of the Resurrection they shall be sent to the severest of punishment....'

Someone might ask: Is the ignominy of this world not sufficient to exempt them from the suffering of the Hereafter? We say no, because the ignominy



which met them in this world was not a religiously ordained punishment and was not a result of the legal punishments of God being implemented upon them. If a person meets with ignominy in the form of a legal punishment of God being carried out on him, this might exempt him from being punished in the Hereafter. If someone steals and has his hand amputated, or commits adultery and is stoned, they receive their divinely-ordained punishment and so they are not requited for it again in the Hereafter. As for tyrants, their case is different. And so we find that some of those people who commit sins in this world are eager for the punishment to be implemented on them so that they can escape from the suffering of the Hereafter, even though no one saw them, or knew what they did, or witnessed their action.

No one needs to come and say, ‘Why are the tyrants who are stricken with ignominy in this world not exempted from the suffering of the Hereafter?’ We say that though they are in a state of ignominy in this world, they have still not been requited for their crimes. Harm and suffering befalls them, but the greater suffering awaits them in the Hereafter. The suffering of this world, resting as it does on the power of human beings, is nothing compared to the suffering of the Hereafter which is by the power of God *the Most High*; moreover, in this world a person’s life ends with death, whilst in the Hereafter there is no death, but rather an eternity of suffering.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...For God is not unaware of what you do.’ That is, do not imagine that God *the Most High* is unaware of anything in His creation; for neither sleep nor slumber overtakes him, and He encompasses everything.

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْحَيٰوةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآٰخِرَةِ ۖ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾

**These are the people who buy the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter: their torment will not be lightened, nor will they be helped [86] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 86)**

God *the Most High* now tells us of the cause for these people’s loss, and their misguidance: They bought the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter. They made the Hereafter the price for their caprices and their worldly influence. They only considered this worldly life; yet when you compare the life

of this world to the Hereafter, you begin to seek the reward of the Hereafter in everything you do. Your life in this world is limited; do not say that this world lasts a million years, or two million, or three million, for the life of this world as far as you are concerned is only as long as you stay in it, and once you leave the world, it is over for you. You leave this world by dying, and death has no fixed causes. And so Islam does not make this world a goal, because our continued life in it is only a point of conjecture. There are those who die whilst they are still in their mother's womb, and those who only live for an hour or a few hours, and those who live very long lives. So direct yourself to the Hereafter, for therein lies endless bliss, and life without death, and joy commensurate with God's powers. But the failure of these people is that they bought the life of this world for the price of the Hereafter, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says of them, '...the punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be aided.' Their punishment shall not be lightened, that is, they should not believe that the suffering of the Hereafter will be made lighter for them, or that its level will decrease, or that its time will shorten, or that it will come some days and not others. And He says, '...nor will they be aided.' Succour (*nusra*) can have two different meanings: it can mean that one is undefeatable, or it can mean that a power comes and gives one victory, i.e. succours one. As for their being undefeatable, God *the Most High* is in control of His affairs, and no one can bring himself any benefit or harm, but rather, it is God who possesses and dispenses all benefit and harm for all His creatures. He *the Exalted* has the ability to give some of His creatures power over whatever He pleases. God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim that it is not within his power to bring benefit to, or avert harm from, himself, except as God may please (*al-A'raf*: 188).

As for someone giving succour to them: Who could give anyone victory over God? God *the Most High* tells us that Noah *peace be upon him* proclaimed to his people: Who would help me against God? (*Hud*: 30).

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...The punishment will not be lightened for them;...' and this is something which has not yet happened, but which will happen in the future; yet in Arabic, God *the Most High* speaks about this matter using the verb in the present tense. We say that all the events of the

universe and what will happen therein have already happened in God's sight, and He has already passed judgement upon them, and so we find that He says in the Noble Quran: God's Command came (is bound to come); do not, therefore, seek to hasten it (*an-Nahl*: 1).

The noble verse uses a verb in the past tense, and then it says, 'do not, therefore, seek to hasten it', indicating that it is yet to come. Why is it that God *the Most High* says that His command came, and then says, 'do not, therefore, seek to hasten it?' It is a future event as far as we are concerned, yet in the sight of God *the Most High*, when He says that it 'came,' this means that it has already happened as no one can prevent the occurrence of anything that God has decreed. So the suffering will certainly befall them, and will not be lightened for them because there is no one who can lighten it.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَفَقَيْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ بِالرُّسُلِ وَآتَيْنَا  
عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ أَفَكُلَّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ  
بِمَا لَا تُهَوِّىْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ اسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ فَفَرِيقًا كَذَّبْتُمْ وَفَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

**We gave Moses the Scripture and We sent messengers after him in succession. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. So how is it that, whenever a messenger brings you something you do not like, you become arrogant, calling some impostors and killing others? [87] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 87)**

After telling us what the Jews did with their prophet Moses *peace be upon him*, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to tell us what the Israelites did after the time of their prophet Moses *peace be upon him*, and He wanted to show us their behaviour with a messenger who came to them from amongst themselves. Many messengers came to the Israelites because they contravened the teachings of God repeatedly. But the noble verse mentions Jesus *peace be upon him* because the two great religions which preceded Islam were Judaism and Christianity. However, we must know that before Jesus *peace be upon him* came, and between the time of Moses and Jesus *peace be upon them*, there were many other messengers, including David, Solomon, Zecharyah and John *peace be upon them*.

It is as though from time to time the Israelites would stray from the religion and contravene it, and disobedience would spread amongst them, and so God would send a messenger to straighten the balance of their lives. Yet after this, they would again return to their disobedience and iniquity, and so God would send a new messenger to remove falsehood and caprice from society and to implement God's Law. But after each new messenger they would return once more to disobedience and disbelief.

God *the Most High* says, 'And We gave Moses the Book....' The speaker here is God *the Most High*, and the Book is the Torah; God the Glorious says, '...and sent messengers after him.' God *the Most High* shows us how the Israelites behaved with Moses *peace be upon him*, and how they behaved with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers; but He does not show us how they behaved with The Messengers who came between Moses *peace be upon him* and Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon them*.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that He did not leave the Israelites after Moses *peace be upon him* to act by the Book he was sent with only, but rather He sent other messengers after this, the word used here being (*qaffaina*), i.e. we sent one after another, each one following the one who came before him. The verb (*qaffaina*) is derived from the word (*qafa*), which means 'to follow,' and you can use this verb to mean 'I walked right behind him.'

The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to be aware that the message of Moses *peace be upon him* did not end with Moses and his Book, but rather, He *the Exalted* sent other messengers and prophets to remind and alert. We have already mentioned that the fact that the Israelites were sent many prophets does not say something good about them, but rather says something bad about them. They are proud because they are the nation to whom were sent the most prophets, thinking that this is a special distinction for them, but they do not understand. The fact that many prophets were sent to them, shows that their nation was very corrupt because prophets are only sent to purify mankind from corruption and spiritual diseases, and save them from wretchedness. As more and more messengers and prophets were sent, this shows that the people went astray as soon as one messenger left them, and so they had to be sent a new messenger. This is just like when a person is extremely ill and so many

doctors treat him without giving any benefit. And so God *the Most High* was not giving them the chance to argue on the Day of Resurrection, and He did not leave them unattended for a moment, but rather messengers would come to them one after another within a very short time.

If we consider Joshua, Samuel, Simon, David, Solomon, Jethro, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Zechariah, and John *peace be upon them*, we see a long succession which came after Moses *peace be upon him* so that at no time were they left without a prophet or messenger. In order to distinguish messengers from prophets, we say that both prophets and messengers are sent by God, but prophets do not come with a new Sacred Law, but rather are sent to follow the law of the Messenger who came before them. We find this distinction in the verse where God *the Most High* addresses the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that He had not sent a messenger or a prophet before him... (*al-Hajj*: 52). So Prophets are also sent, but they are role-models of good conduct who implement the law of the Messenger who came before them.

Did God *the Most High* tell us the stories of all the messengers and prophets He sent? We have the answer to this question in the noble verse where God *the Most High* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he had sent before him messengers whose stories He had related to him and other messengers whose stories He did not relate to him, and that God had spoken to Moses with direct speech (*an-Nisa'*: 164).

So there were messengers and prophets sent to the Israelites whose names we do not know because God did not tell us their stories; but the noble verse we are currently examining mentions only Jesus *peace be upon him*, as he has the most followers of almost any prophet. When God *the Most High* sent Jesus *peace be upon him*, He supported him with signs and wonders which proved that he was truly sent by God, and so He *the Exalted* says, '...And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Holy Spirit....' Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon them* came to respond to the materialism which had conquered the Israelites, and made them give importance to nothing but material, tangible things so that their hearts and minds were closed to the Unseen, and they even said to Moses *peace be upon him* 'Show us God manifestly,' and when the manna and quails came to them as provision from God they feared

that it would be cut off from them because it was provision from the Unseen, and so they asked for the produce of the earth. And so a messenger must come, whose entire life and teachings were drawn from the Unseen: his birth was mysterious, and his death was mysterious, and his being raised up was mysterious, and his miracles were mysterious; and this was in order to take them from the tyranny of materialism into the purity of spirituality.

The very first thing about him was that his coming into existence was contrary to the usual way people are born, i.e. by means of a male and a female and fertilisation by sperm. God *the Most High* wanted to remove from the minds of the Israelites the notion that material means govern God, when rather, it is God who governs the means, and it was He Who created the means, and when He says 'Be!' to a thing, it is; and this is true despite the usual material ways of the universe. With regard to creation, God *the Most High* wanted minds to understand that His Will is the cause and the means, as He *the Exalted* says that that His is the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills: He grants female offspring to whomever He wills, and male offspring to whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female to whomever He wills, and causes to be barren whomever He wills: for, verily, He is All Knowing, infinite in His power (*ash-Shura*: 49-50).

So it is as though God *the Most High* made male and female the two principle means for reproduction, but He gave His own omnipotent Power control over these means; and so sometimes men and women marry but do not produce children, and so it is as though the means in themselves cannot do anything without the will of He Who created them.

God *the Most High* says, '...And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Holy Spirit....' Why did the True Lord *the Most High* say '...and supported him with the Holy Spirit'? Were the other prophets and messengers not also supported with the Holy Spirit?

We say that supporting Jesus *peace be upon him* with the Holy Spirit is mentioned here because the Holy Spirit was infused in all of his affairs, in his birth, his miracles, and his death. The 'Holy Spirit,' meaning Gabriel *peace be upon him*, never left him. Jesus *peace be upon him* came into being in a way which was contrary to ordinary human experience, which meant that he was

always open to attack; and so it was necessary that Divine inspiration be with him always and never leave him, in order that he struck enough awe into the people that they could not respond to him. Scholars differed on the meaning of the statement of the Quran that Jesus *peace be upon him* was raised into the heavens: some said that he was alive when he was raised; others said that he had died and was then raised. We say: If we found out that he was raised whilst alive, or whilst dead, what would it change in our religion? It would change nothing. If it is said that it is an amazing thing for a person to be raised into the heavens and to remain there for a time before dying, we say that Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon him* did not escape death, and he will die just as all people die. But was his birth normal? No, and so why should you be surprised if his death was also not normal? He was created from a mother with no father, and so if it happened that he was taken up into the heavens whilst alive, and will one day return to earth, what is strange about this? Did our Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* not ascend into the heavens whilst alive, and then come back down to us on earth, while still alive? This happened to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and so the principle is there. So why should you find it far-fetched that Jesus *peace be upon him* went up and will return at the end of time? The difference between Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Jesus *peace be upon him* is that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not stay in the heavens for long, whilst Jesus *peace be upon him* remained there; and the difference in time spent does not alter the basic principle.

Ibn Al-Musayyabb *God be pleased with him* relates that he heard Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* say that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘By Him in whose hand is my soul, it is almost time for the son of Mary to descend amongst you as a just arbitrator, whereupon he will break the cross, slay the swine, and abolish the tax on non-Muslim citizens; and there will be so much money that no one will accept it.’<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith can be found in the Sahih collection of Al-Bukhari.

And God *the Most High* made Jesus an example for the Israelites, as He says that Jesus was nothing but a servant whom God has favoured and whom

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari in *Al-Mazhalim*, and by Muslim in *Al-Iman*, and by Abu Dawud in *Al-Malahim*, and by At-Tirmidhi in *Al-Fitan*, and by Ibn Majah in *Al-Fitan*, and by Ahmad in *Al-Musnad*

He made an example to the children of Israel (*az-Zukhruf*: 59). God *the Most High* says, ‘...And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs....’ Clear proofs here means miracles, such as the healing of the purblind and the leprous, and the raising of the dead by God’s leave, and other miracles, namely things which clearly showed the truth of his message.

But if we reflect on these miracles, we find that some of them are ascribed to the Power of God, such as the raising of the dead, which was followed with the words ‘by God’s leave,’ whilst others were ascribed to his miracles as a messenger. It is clear that, as a messenger, he was aided by God with miracles which broke the ordinary laws of creation; but there is a difference between a miracle which gives a revelation to a messenger, and a miracle which must be directly performed by God every time. The Noble Quran says that Jesus was a messenger to the children of Israel coming to them with a sign from their Lord: Out of clay, he would create for them the shape of a bird, and then breathe into it, whereupon it will become a bird, by God’s leave; and he will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life by God’s leave; and he will inform them of what they eat and what they store up in their houses. Truly in all this there is a sign for them, if they are truly believers (*Al-‘Imran*: 49).

So we see in this noble verse that whilst Jesus’ declaration to the people about the secrets of what they ate and what they stored up in their houses was a revelation to him from God, whilst the raising of the dead was by God’s leave every time, and was not a revelation or an intrinsic miracle on the part of Jesus *peace be upon him*. Every messenger was supported with the Holy Spirit, namely Gabriel *peace be upon him*, but God aided Jesus *peace be upon him* by keeping the Holy Spirit with him at all times, and this is the meaning of His words ‘...and supported him with the Holy Spirit,...’ that is, We gave him the strength of holy inspiration at all times. The word *rouh* (‘spirit’ or ‘inspiration’) has two meanings: the first meaning is that which enters the body and so gives it life and movement; and there is another spirit, namely the spirit of values which render life’s works beneficial and rightly-guided. And so the True Lord *the Most High* called the Quran *rouh* when He said to His Messenger that He has revealed to him a *rouh* (a life-giving message) by His command (*ash-Shura*: 52).



So the Quran is a spirit, and those who do not act in accordance with it thereby make their lives devoid of value. And so everything connected with the teachings of the religion is a spirit. As for the word *qudus* (holy), sometimes this word is in the form *quds* and other times it is in the form *qudus*. Both of these forms are correct, and give the meaning of purity and absolution from any flaw or blemish; something ‘holy’ is something which is free of all impurities.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...Is it, then, so that whenever a messenger came to you with what your souls do not like, you grew arrogant...’ In this we have a conjunction and a question, and the meaning is: ‘Yet did you not disbelieve, and every time a messenger came to you with something that was not to your liking, did you not glory in your arrogance?’ That is, the Jews made themselves lawgivers besides God, wanting to lay down the law to their own messengers, and so when the messenger brought something which contradicted their caprices, they denied him or killed him.

As to God’s words ‘...with what your souls do not like,...’ the word used for ‘like’ in Arabic is *tahwa*, of which there are two forms, *hawa* and *hawiya*: *hawa* means ‘to fall down,’ whilst *hawiya* means ‘to like’ and ‘to desire.’ The two words are related, as the first verb means to fall, whilst the second means to indulge in vain desires which lead to a fall. And so when God *the Most High* ordains a law, He sometimes says ‘Come!’ using the word *ta‘alaw*, which is derived from a word meaning ‘to rise,’ and so it means ‘rise up from your fallen state!’ So God’s teachings are here to prevent us from falling; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to us this notion of how the religion prevents us from slipping and falling into hell by saying, ‘The likeness of me and my community (followers) is that of a man who lights a fire, and creatures and moths begin to fall into it; I am grasping onto your belts whilst you hurl yourselves into it.’<sup>(1)</sup>

The meaning of ‘grasping onto your belts’ is grasping on to you, as though we are approaching the fire wanting to go into it because we follow our vain desires, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* tries to save us from it by means of God’s teachings. Many a soul yearns for that which

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(1) Narrated by Muslim in (*Az-Zuhd*), and by Ibn Majah in (*Az-Zuhd*), and by Ahmad

will destroy it. The True Lord *the Most High* then says ‘...You grew arrogant, and you disbelieved some of them and killed some others?’

The meaning of ‘...you grew arrogant...’ is: You ascribed to yourselves glory which you did not deserve, and you claimed to be great, whilst you were not great; but, was the Lawgiver an equal to you, that you could hold yourselves above His teachings? Of course, He was not. God *the Most High* says, ‘...and you disbelieved some of them....’ A lie is a statement which contradicts reality; this means: You accused the Messengers of saying things which were contrary to reality because it was contrary to your own vain desires. He then says, ‘...and killed some others.’ To give the lie to them was an evil thing, but to kill them was absolutely despicable. If you see a person ridding himself of his enemies by killing them, know that this action bears witness to his weakness before his enemies, and that his capability and his life cannot bear the existence of his rivals. If he were truly a man, he would not be disturbed by the existence of his rivals, but because he is weak in their presence, he kills them.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...and killed some others;’ examples of this are God’s prophet John and His Prophet Zechariah *peace be upon them*; and there are also narrations telling the story of Salome, who was a beautiful dancer who wanted to tempt John *peace be upon him*, but he refused to give in to her temptation, and so she announced that she would wed any who brought his head to her; and so they killed him, and brought his head to her on a silver platter.

وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ ۚ بَلْ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

**They say, ‘Our hearts are impenetrably wrapped [against whatever you say],’ but God has rejected them for their disbelief: they have little faith [88]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 88)**

God *the Most High* here tells us how the Israelites attempted to justify their lack of faith and their killing of the Prophets, and all the other wicked things they did. What did they say? They said, ‘...Our hearts are wrapped....’ The word *ghulf* (‘wrapped’) is related to the words *ghilaf* and *taghlif* (‘to cover’ or ‘wrap’). We have the words *ghulf* and *ghuluf*, following the same morphological

pattern as the word *kutub* ('books'). '...Our hearts are wrapped...' i.e. they are closed, having enough knowledge already to suffice them, and more besides, as though they are saying, 'We do not need to listen to what the messengers have to say,' Or, 'Our hearts are wrapped' which means they are closed and sealed, that is, God has sealed their hearts so that no ray of guidance can penetrate them, and no trace of disbelief can exit from them.

If indeed God has done this, do you not see fit to ask yourselves why? What is the reason for this? The True Lord *the Most High* then answers them, saying, '...But God has cursed them for their disbelief, so little is it that they believe.'

The word 'But' emphasises to us that what they have said is not true. They do not have enough knowledge that they do not need the teachings of the Messengers, but rather, they have been rejected and cast out of God's mercy so that the rays of light and guidance do not penetrate their hearts. But this is not because God has sealed their hearts for no reason, but rather, it is a requital for them because light and guidance came to them, and they responded with disbelief, and so they became cast out of God's mercy; for those who meet guidance with disbelief, are cast out of God's mercy, and no light of faith can penetrate their hearts.

We must notice here that it was not God Who rejected them first. Some people who want to escape responsibility for their disbelief, hoping that it will save them from suffering on the Day of Resurrection, justify their disbelief by saying that God *the Most High* has said that He misleads whomever He wills and guides whomever He wills (*Fatir*: 8).

This is the argument of the disbelievers which they imagine will save them from suffering on the Day of Resurrection. They want to say: 'God sends astray whomever He wills, and as long as God has willed to send me astray, what is my sin? Can I repel God's will?' We say to them: If God modifies a general statement; we must pay attention to the modification.

God *the Most High* says that He does not guide those who refuse to believe in Him (*at-Tawba*: 37). And He *the Exalted* says that He does not guide those who are unjust (*at-Tawba*: 19). And He *the Exalted* says that He does not guide those who are impious (*at-Tawba*: 24).

So the True Lord *the Most High* informs us here that He withholds his aiding guidance to three kinds of people: the disbelievers, the wrongdoers, and the impious. But did He *the Exalted* withhold this aiding guidance from the start? Or were they the ones who committed such evil as made them unworthy of God's guidance? A person responds to God with disbelief, and denies God, and refuses to pay heed to God's signs and messengers, and refuses to reflect on God's creation, and refuses to reflect on his own creation and the One who created him, and refuses to reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. He rejects all of this, and continues to fashion for himself a way of misguidance, choosing disbelief for himself because he did this first; he is the one who began with disbelief, even after God *the Most High* gave him enough signs in the universe and in his own self to make him believe in God, and yet, he refused to do so. He is the one who began with disbelief, and only after his persistence in disbelief did God seal his heart upon it.

A wicked person treats people with tyranny and has no fear of God. They remind him of God's power and God's omnipotence, but he is unmoved; and so God seals his heart. Likewise, the impious who leaves no wicked act without indulging in it, and no sin without committing it, and no act of disobedience without embracing it, God *the Glorious and Exalted* will not guide him. Would you prefer for such people to begin with disbelief, injustice, and impiety, and insist upon it, and then for God to guide them, to guide them with force and subdual, although God created us with free will? Of course, I would not; for this would mean the end of human free will, and mankind's right to either obey or disobey.

The True Lord *the Most High* shows us how His omnipotent power acts in those matters over which we have no control, such as the organs of our bodies which perform their function by God's control, not by our will, such as the heart, the lungs, the flow of blood, the stomach, the intestines, and the liver. All of these and more besides are controlled directly by God *the Most High* and we cannot tell them what to do and have them obey, or tell them to stop and have them stop. God *the Most High* also employs His omnipotent power in those external events which happen to us like falling ill, getting hit by a car, a stray rock falling on someone, falling over and being attacked by someone; all those things happen

to you and are out of your control, and you have no power to repel. What remains are those things which you do intentionally, the most important of which is the implementation of God's teachings in the form of commandments and prohibitions – this is where you have freedom to choose.

God *the Most High* gave you this free will so that the Reckoning of the Hereafter would be just; and so if you choose disbelief, God will not force you to believe; and if you choose wickedness, God will not force you to be just; and if you choose impiety, God will not force you to be righteous. He respects your choice because it was He Who gave it to you in order that He could call you to account on the Day of Resurrection.

God *the Most High* also reserved for Himself the absolute power to guide whom He willed and send astray whom He willed, but He *the Exalted* stated that He does not guide the disbelievers, or the evildoers, or the impious. And so if anyone wishes to remove himself from God's guidance, let him disbelieve, or do evil, or act with iniquity; and so in this case, it will be he who has chosen this, and so will deserve God's requital. And so the disbelievers from amongst the Israelites stated themselves that God had sealed their hearts so that they would not believe, but they were the ones who chose this path and walked it; and so they chose not to be guided. This matter has sparked a great deal of debate amongst scholars, but in reality, this debate is redundant and does not deserve all that attention. God *the Most High* says, '...But, God has cursed them for their disbelief....' Cursing here means that they were cast out of God's Mercy, and this casting is done by God's Omnipotent Power because the extent to which someone is cast out depends on the power of the one who casts them.

For example, if your young son throws a stone in front of him, the strength of the throw will be commensurate with his age and strength, and as he gets older his throw will be stronger. So if the one who throws is God *the Most High*, there is no way for the human mind to envisage the strength of this throw and this rejection.

God *the Most High* says, '...But, God has cursed them for their disbelief....' This means that God cast them out because of their disbelief. God *the Most High* does not try to curry people's favour in order that they believe, and He does not want the messengers to wear themselves out trying to make people believe;

the job of the messenger is to deliver the message so that the Reckoning will be true and just. God *the Most High* comforts His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that perhaps he torments himself with grief because his people do not believe. God tells him that had He so willed, He could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain bowed in humility (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 3-4).

That is, they would not be able to stop themselves from believing if We desired to force them to believe; but We want them to believe of their own free will. When a servant believes, it is he who reaps the benefits of his faith; our faith adds nothing to God's dominion. Our saying 'there is no god but God' does not support God's throne; whether we say it or not, there is still no god but God. Rather, we say it so it will testify for us on the Day of Resurrection, and we say it so that it will save us from the horrors of the Day of Resurrection and the wrath of God.

God's words '...for their disbelief...' convey to us an important principle which is that God *the Most High* has no need whatsoever of partners, and so if anyone associates anything with Him in any act, that act goes to the one whom they associate. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'I am so self-sufficient that I am in no need of having an associate. Thus if someone does an action for someone else's sake as well as Mine, I will leave it to his associate.'<sup>(1)</sup> God's testimony to His own Divinity is a testimony of a being to its own self, for He has said that He is the Witness that there is no god except Him (*Al- 'Imran*: 18).

So before He created anything which could testify that there is no god but God, God *the Most High* testified to Himself of His own Divinity. The noble verse cited above gives more details on this matter: God bears witness – and so do the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity except Him, the Upholder of Justice (*Al- 'Imran*: 18). So God *the Most High* testified to Himself, a testimony of an entity to itself; and then the angels made their own testimony of eye-witnesses, and then those endowed with knowledge testified based on evidence.

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(1) Narrated by Muslim

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘...so little is it that they believe.’ If you say ‘this happens but rarely,’ you intend thereby to make a conservative statement which covers all the bases; for it is possible that one of them might return to his senses and believe, and so God *the Most High* keeps the door open for such as those who might come back to faith. And so we find that those who wronged themselves in their youth might come back towards the end of their lives and repent. On the outside, it seems that they have squandered their lives, but when they repent and confess their sins and return to the way of truth, God *the Glorious* accepts their faith. And so God *the Most High* says, ‘...so little is it that they believe’ meaning that the majority remain in disbelief, whilst there are a minority who return to faith.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ كِتَابٌ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ وَكَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ يَسْتَفْتِحُونَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ مَا عَرَفُوا كَفَرُوا بِهِ فَلَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

**When a Scripture came to them from God confirming what they already had, and when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it: God rejects those who disbelieve [89] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 89)**

After telling us that the Israelites said that their hearts were wrapped so that no ray of guidance or faith could penetrate them, God *the Most High* wanted to give us another image of their disbelief in that He sent down a revelation which confirmed the truth already in their possession, and yet they disbelieved in it. If this revelation had been in conflict with that which they had in their possession, we could have said that things were different; but before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, and the Quran was revealed to him, they used to believe in the Messenger and the Revelation which were mentioned to them in the Torah, and they would say to the people of Medina: ‘The time is nigh for the coming of a messenger in whom we will believe, and whom we will follow, and with him will slay you as ‘Ad and Thamud were slain.’

The Jews lived in Medina alongside the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, and when conflicts erupted between them, they would threaten them with the

coming Messenger; and then when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they disbelieved in him and in the Quran which was revealed to him.

Despite their disbelief, the Jews were one of the means through which victory was given to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* because when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, the Aws and Khazraj said, 'This is the Prophet with whom the Jews used to threaten us,' and so they rushed to pledge allegiance to him. It is as though God used the Jews to give victory to Islam without their even knowing it.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* would go to the people of Ta'if and wait for the tribes as they came to Mecca in the pilgrimage season, in order to present the message to them, and they would reject him and harass him. And when, by God's Will, the time for the spread of the call of Islam came, a group of people came to Mecca, including tribesmen from the Aws and Khazraj, and it was they who went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, not he to them.

They announced that they would pledge allegiance to him and declared their faith in him, and vowed to spread his call, without Him having asked them to do so. And then they invited him to come and live with them in an abode of faith. All of this happened when God willed to support Islam by means of the migration to Medina, and to give it victory by means of those who followed it.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...although they had before prayed for victory over those who disbelieved....' That is, before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they would pray for victory based on the fact that it was time for a messenger to come in whom they would believe, and whom they would follow; and then when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they disbelieved in him and in his message.

God *the Most High* says, '...over those who disbelieved...' meaning the idolaters of Medina, the Aws and Khazraj, who had not yet embraced Islam because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had not come yet. The True Lord *the Exalted* then gives us the complete picture with His words:



‘...yet when there came to them that which they knew, they disbelieved in it. The curse of God will be on the infidels.’

And so we see that the Israelites have in their nature a kind of compound obstinacy: The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* whom they had been waiting for, and of whom they had been given glad tidings, came to them – but they were overcome by arrogance even though they were sure that the new Messenger was coming, and his attributes were given to them in the Torah, and so they refused to believe in him and so by this, they earned God’s curse, which as we said, means to be cast from God’s mercy.

بِسْمَا أَشْتَرَوْا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أَنْ يَكْفُرُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بَغْيًا  
أَنْ يُنَزِّلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ فَبَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ عَلَى  
غَضَبٍ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿٩٠﴾

**Low indeed is the price for which they have sold their souls by denying the God sent truth, out of envy that God should send His bounty to any of His servants He pleases. The disbelievers have ended up with wrath upon wrath, and a humiliating torment awaits them [90] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 90)**

When the Jews refused to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and God *the Most High* cast them out of His mercy, He explains to us that ‘...vile the price is for which they sold their souls....’ We have spoken before about the word *ishtara* (‘to buy’ or ‘to trade’), and said that usually we pay the price and take the commodity we want; but the disbelievers have turned this upside down, and have made the price into a commodity. We must also first speak about the difference between the Arabic verbs *shara* and *ishtara*. *Shara* means ‘to sell,’ and this is the word used in the noble verse relating the incident when the caravan people *sharaw* (‘sold’) Joseph in Egypt for a paltry price, a mere few coins; they did not value him highly (*Yusuf*: 20).

On the other hand, *ishtara* means ‘to buy,’ but it can also be used to mean ‘to sell’ because sometimes you might need a commodity and have some money with you, and so you go and buy the commodity with your money, and this is the usual way these things are done; but suppose you are in need of an essential

commodity such as medicine, and you have no money, but you have another commodity such as a watch or a nice pen, and so you go to the pharmacy and give the man what you have, trading one commodity for another. In this case, the price you pay is also being bought; and so sometimes a product is bought, whilst at other times it is sold. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'How vile the price is for which they sold their souls....' It is as though He is rebuking them because they claim to be intelligent and sagacious, and they believe in materialism, at the root of which is buying and selling. If they were truly experts in this field, they would know that they had agreed to a losing deal.

The winning deal would have been for them to sell their souls in exchange for belief in what God *the Most High* has revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; but they sold themselves and bought disbelief, and so they lost out in the deal because they took nothing but ignominy in this world and suffering in the Hereafter. God *the Most High* placed part of their suffering in this world in order that the balance of things be maintained even for those who do not believe in the Hereafter, and so when those who do not believe in the Hereafter see worldly suffering afflict the tyrant, they too will fear to behave tyrannically and will shy from it so that they are not afflicted with suffering in this world on account of it, and they will know that in this world there are equalizers of reward and punishment. In order that the world is not overrun with the corruption of those who do not believe in God and the Hereafter, the True Lord *the Most High* has ordained in this world the laws of retribution, as He *the Exalted* addresses people of sound reasoning saying that in the law of just punishment there is security in life so that people will protect themselves from harm (*al-Baqara*: 179).

By His laws of retribution, God *the Most High* alerts both believers and non-believers to the punishments of this worldly life, and so He afflicts the one who deals in usury, sucking the blood of the people, with a disaster which leaves him with no money to spend. And so we pray, O Lord, some people have been deluded by Your forbearance, and have seen Your Hereafter as far-off, so take them for some of their sins as only the Almighty, Who determines all things, can so that the balance is restored in this life.

God *the Most High* has made the deaths of sinners, oppressors, and despots in this world an admonition to those who are not concerned with following His teachings. You might find a man who abandoned virtue and religious principles and immersed in the delights and pleasures of this worldly life, only to end up living out his days surviving on the charity of the righteous. And you might find a woman who is deluded by wealth and so gathers it from here and there, lawfully and unlawfully, and this world gives her much; yet in her final days, the world withdraws from her so that she cannot even afford the medicines she needs, and so she dies, and people come together to collect money to pay for her funeral. Stories such as these are admonitions to people, and they happen in full view of everyone, and many people know about them, either because they are published in newspapers, or because they are told around the neighbourhood. What is important is that they are well-known.

We find, for example, that the leaders of the Jews in Medina made a good trade out of war and weapons, yet in the end, they were expelled from their houses, and their wealth was plundered, and their women were taken captive. Was this not ignominy?

God *the Most High* says, ‘...by not believing what God has sent down, out of grudge....’ The word *baghy* (rendered here as ‘grudge’) literally means to overstep the limit; God has placed limits for everything, and those who go beyond these limits are transgressors. The limits which God *the Most High* has established are His laws which constitute commandments and prohibitions. And so the True Lord *the Most High* describes His commandments as the bounds set by God and enjoins on people not to transgress them (*al-Baqara*: 229).

And about His prohibitions, He *the Exalted* says these are the bounds set by God and enjoins on people not to come near them (*al-Baqara*: 187). But why did the Jews overstep the limit? They transgressed out of grudge that the message should have been sent to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and that the Messenger should be of the Arabs, whilst they believed that because of all their many prophets, they were the sole claimants to God’s messages on earth. When the Torah and the Gospel gave tidings of a coming messenger, they said ‘He will be from amongst us, and revelation and prophethood shall never come to other than us, for we are God’s chosen people.’ And so they would announce

that they would follow the coming prophet and give him aid, but they were astonished when he did not come from their own people. Upon this, they were filled with arrogance and envy, and they said, 'Since he is not from amongst us, we shall not follow him, but rather, we shall fight him.' The divine message was taken from them because they were not worthy of it, and God willed to requite them for their disbelief and disobedience, and to give His message to another nation, as God *the Most High* addresses all mankind saying that if He so wills, He can do away with them and bring forth a new creation in their stead; nor is this difficult for God (*Fatir*: 16-17).

God *the Most High* has tested the Israelites with numerous messages, but as we have read in the previous verses, they denied some of the Prophets, and those whom they did not deny, they killed, and so God willed to take these messages from them and give them to another nation, and make the Arab nation the bearers of the final message sent from Heaven to earth, and so they were filled with envy.

God *the Most High* then says, '...out of grudge that God should send down His grace upon whom He wills from among His servants....' From this, we see that divine messages and the election of messengers is a favour from God which He bestows on whomever He wills. When God *the Most High* set us free and gave us mastery over the means, this did not mean that we are not out of the control of His Will, but rather, we remain subservient to it, and we know that there is nothing intrinsic in us in this universe. This is so that man should not become deluded about himself. The world champion in a certain sport has attained the peak of human perfection in this sport, but these perfections are not intrinsically his because it is possible that someone else could defeat him, and because he could be afflicted by an injury which prevents him from playing in the championship. In any case, his ascendancy will not last forever because it is not intrinsically his, and the One Who gave it to him, God, will give it to someone else whenever He chooses. And so mankind must be aware that human perfection changes, and does not stay with anyone forever, and that everyone who reaches the top will come down again because we are in a world of changes, and what goes up, must come down. Perfection is for God Alone, and God *the Most High* keeps His perfection to Himself.

So the Jews were envious of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and envious that the Quran should be revealed to the Arabs; and the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And they have brought on themselves wrath upon wrath. And for the unbelievers is a disgraceful chastisement.’ God *the Most High* informs us here that He condemned them twice over.

The first condemnation was because they did not implement what the Torah instructed them to do, and so God condemned them for this. The second condemnation was because when the Messenger, mentioned in the Torah in whom they were supposed to believe, came to them, they disbelieved in him, whilst they should have believed in him so that God would *be pleased with them*. And so God condemned them a second time when they disbelieved in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...And for the unbelievers is a disgraceful chastisement.’ In the Noble Quran, chastisement is sometimes described as ‘painful,’ and sometimes as ‘great’ and sometimes as ‘disgraceful.’ ‘Painful’ means extremely grievous, inflicting severe pain on those who are chastised with it. But supposing that the person undergoing this suffering were to show endurance, trying not to display his pain so that the people would not think ill of him, then in this case, God brings forth a great suffering which no one can bear, and the awful nature of this suffering would be too much for him to tolerate. And if the person was one of those who proudly disbelieved in this world, and waged war on God’s religion and commanded their people to do the same, God *the Most High* will send upon such as these a disgraceful suffering; and this is more painful to the soul than mere physical pain. It is as if you take the strongest man in the neighbourhood, whom everyone fears, and then beat him so he falls to the ground. At this moment you have shamed him in front of people, and after that, he will not be able to tyrannise or abuse anyone. This is more painful to the soul than the pain of the suffering itself. This is the kind of situation that the True Lord *the Most High* describes when He will take forth from each band of the disbelievers those of them who had been stoutest in rebellion against the God of Mercy; then He shall know who of them is most deserving of being burnt in hellfire (*Maryam*: 69-70).

God *the Exalted* tells of how the wicked will be dealt with in the Hereafter: while being subjected to the most severe torture, he will be derided by telling him to taste the suffering; on earth, he had considered himself so mighty, so noble (*ad-Dukhan*: 49). This is indeed disgraceful suffering.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا تَنُومُونَ بِمَا أَنزَلَ عَلَيْنَا  
وَيَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا وَرَاءَهُ. وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ ۗ قُلْ فَلِمَ  
تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْبِيَاءَ اللَّهِ مِن قَبْلُ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

**When it is said to them, ‘Believe in God’s revelations,’ they reply, ‘We believe in what was revealed to us,’ but they do not believe in what came afterwards, though it is the truth confirming what they already have. Say [Muhammad], ‘Why did you kill God’s prophets in the past if you were true believers?’ [91] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 91)**

The True Lord *the Most High* shows us the attitude of the Jews and their refusal to believe in the message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, even though they were commanded to do so in the Torah. He *the Exalted* says, ‘Believe in what God has sent down,...’ that is, when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* invited them to believe in Islam and in the Quran, they refused, and ‘...they say, “We believe in what was sent down to us,...”’ that is, we believe in the Torah, and deny everything else that was revealed after it.

We know that the Arabic word *kufr* (rendered here as ‘disbelief’) originally means ‘covering.’ If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought something completely different from what they had in their possession, they might have been entitled to say, ‘He has come to destroy our religion, and so we disbelieve in him,’ but he, rather, brought the truth confirming what they had in their possession.

So when they disbelieve in the Quran, they disbelieve in the Torah at the same time because the Quran confirms what the Torah says. Here God *the Most High* establishes the plea against them in an unassailable argument: This

disbelief of yours, and this way of behaving, is an act against every prophet who ever came to you. If you truly accept faith with open hearts, tell us: Why did you kill the prophets of God? And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...Then why did you kill the prophets of God before....’ Is it in your Book, the Torah, to kill the righteous servants of God? It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* has drawn an argument from their own words: ‘’... We believe in what was sent down to us.’’ And they disbelieve in what came after it,...’’ If this is true, and you believe in what has been revealed to you, then show us where it says in that which was revealed to you, the Torah, that it is lawful for you to slay the Prophets – if you truly believe in the Torah. Of course they could not respond to this because, in truth, they disbelieved in that which was revealed to them, and they lied when they said, ‘...We believe in what was sent down to us’ because what was revealed to them did not tell them to kill the Prophets, and so it is as though they disbelieved in that which was revealed to them, just as they disbelieved in that which was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Quran gives us the unassailable argument which stays the mouths of the infidels, and confirms that they are unable to provide any sound argument of their own. Here, we must consider God’s words ‘...Then why did you kill the prophets of God before, if you are [indeed] believers?’ His saying ‘before’ was a reassurance to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that their killing of the prophets had come to an end, and at the same time, it put paid to the hopes of the Jews that they might be able to kill Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. God wanted to remove the fear from the hearts of the believers for the safety of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by making it clear that what happened to the previous Prophets of the Israelites would not happen to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. And so the Quran frustrated the hopes of all those who wanted to bring harm to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* because this era had come to an end. Even if they conspired to kill Him *peace and blessings be upon him*, they would not be successful, and they would not attain their goal.

After this noble verse was revealed, the Jews did not abandon their plots. They tried to kill the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* more

than once; one of these times was while he was walking through their neighbourhood and they dropped a stone onto him, but the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* warned him and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* moved out of the way before the stone fell; and another time they put poison in his food; and they tried several other times and always failed.

So the word 'before' implies that if you were thinking of getting rid of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by killing him as you killed your own prophets, we say to you: You shall not be able to kill him.

This verse should have been sufficient in itself to place despair in their souls so that they would stop their practice of killing prophets, but they continued in their efforts. At the same time, the verse was a source of strength for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers, and a reassurance that however much the Jews plotted, God would thwart their plots. God's questioning words '...if you are [indeed] believers?' mean that if you were truly believers in that which was revealed to you.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مُوسَىٰ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ اتَّخَذْتُمُ الْعِجْلَ  
مِّنْ بَعْدِهِ ۚ وَأَنْتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

**Moses brought you clear signs, but then, while he was  
away, you chose to worship the calf – you did wrong' [92]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 92)**

After showing us how they refused to believe in what He sent to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, under the pretence that they believed only in what was revealed to them, God *the Most High* then explains to us that this argument is false, and that it is their nature to disbelieve and deny God. He *the Exalted* says, 'And Moses had certainly brought you clear proofs....' That is, God supported Moses *peace be upon him* with many proofs and miracles which should have been enough to fill your hearts with faith and make you worship none but God; He caused the sea to part for you so that you could pass through it as you looked on, i.e. the miracle was not hidden from you, but rather took place before you so you could witness it. But the moment you crossed the sea and Moses *peace be upon him* went to meet his Lord, you took the calf as a god besides God, and worshipped it. How then



can you claim that you believe in what was revealed to you. If you believed, you would not have taken the calf as a god.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to refute their argument in that they believed in what was revealed to them, and show us that they did not even believe in what was revealed to them. And so He tells us of how they killed prophets; if they truly believe in what was revealed to them, let them bring forth the text which makes it lawful for them to kill prophets; yet they were false in what they said. As for the second argument, it runs thus: If you believe in what was revealed to you, tell us how it could have been that- when Moses *peace be upon him* came to you with clear signs like his staff which turned into a serpent, and his hand which glowed pure and white, and the sea which was parted for you to escape from Pharaoh's people, and the dead man whom God restored to life before you when you struck him with part of the cow you sacrificed, i.e. so many signs, but- when Moses *peace be upon him* simply left you to go and meet his Lord, you worshipped the calf in his absence. So your claim to believe in what was revealed to you is false; you do not believe in what was revealed to you just as you do not believe in what was revealed after you; and the purpose of all these arguments is showing a complete absence of faith.

God *the Most High* says, '...Then you took the calf [in worship] after that, and you were wrongdoers.' The utilisation of a calf itself is not a sin, if you use it for ploughing or slaughter it to eat its meat; rather, the sin was to take the calf as an object of worship. God's words '...Then you took the calf [in worship]...' mean that it was a public display; you did not worship the calf secretly, but rather did so openly, and so it is not something which requires witnesses or testimony because it was something which happened in the open for everyone to see. The incident of the calf is mentioned here so that they can be aware of how they sinned against God; for a person can commit a sin, and then time goes by, and whenever we want him to feel the responsibility of what he committed, we would mention what he did. God *the Most High* then says, '...and you were wrongdoers,' i.e. your faith was tainted with wickedness, and you wickedly transgressed against God by disbelieving in Him.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ  
وَأَسْمِعُوا قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَأَشْرَبُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْعِجْلَ  
بِكُفْرِهِمْ قُلْ يَنْسَا يَا أَمْرُكُمْ بِهِ إِيمَانُكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

**Remember when We took your pledge, making the mountain tower above you, and said, ‘Hold on firmly to what We have given you, and listen to [what We say].’ They said, ‘We hear and we disobey,’ and through their disbelief they were made to drink. Say, ‘How evil are the things your belief commands you to do, if you really are believers!’ [the love of] the calf deep into their hearts [93] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 93)**

After reminding them of their act of disbelief in worshipping the calf which was a kind of severe reprimand reminding them of their sinfulness, God *the Most High* wanted to reproach them again and remind them that when they believed and obeyed, it was out of fear that Mount Sinai would collapse upon them. The mountain would not have fallen upon them because God does not compel anyone to believe; but merely by their seeing it above them, they believed and obeyed out of fear. They were like a child for whom the doctor prescribed a bitter medicine for a cure. And so when God *the Most High* raised the mount above them, it was to show them His Power so that they would accept the covenant and the commandments; and this does not mean that God forced them to believe. Rather, just like a parent or a doctor coercing a child to take bitter medicine, it was a coercion based on love: God does not want His creatures to live without Divine guidance. So when they saw God’s overwhelming power and what it could do to them, they believed. It is as though they believed when they became aware of God’s Power, just like the young child who opens his mouth to receive the bitter medicine, whilst he is reluctant to do so; but do you give him the medicine because you hate him or because you love him and care for him dearly?

God *the Most High* wanted to show them that He used all conceivable means with them to make them accept His teachings that would be their guidance in life. However, their deep-rooted pride and stubbornness prevented them from keeping their faith.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...your covenant....’ Was the covenant theirs, or was it God’s? Of course it was God’s covenant, but God *the Most High* says it was theirs because by agreeing to it, they became one of the parties in the agreement, and as long as they were party to it, it was their covenant, too.

We need to believe that the raising of the mount above the Jews was not to compel them to accept the covenant, so it will not be said that they were forced to do so. They followed Moses *peace be upon him* even before the mountain was raised above them, and so it must be the case that they accepted his teachings of their own free will, and implemented them of their own free will; and God *the Most High* did not keep The mount above their heads wherever they went for their whole lives so that it could be said they had been compelled. Even if they can be said to be compelled at the moment the mount was raised above their heads, yet after the miracle passed, there was nothing to force them to implement God’s teachings. Rather, the truth is that when God *the Most High* sees some inclination in His servants to stray, He might frighten them, and might send upon them a lesser punishment to bring them back to their faith; and God does this out of love for His servants, for He wants them to be believers for their own benefit.

But the Jews were a materialistic people, who only believed in concrete things, and so God *the Most High* wanted to show them a material sign so that their hearts would tremble and return to the remembrance of God. This was not a matter of compulsion because as we said, once the miracle was over, they could have returned to their sinful ways. Rather, it was a sign to push them towards faith. God *the Most High* then said, ‘...Take what We have given you with determination...’ because that which is taken with strength, will give with strength, and to take something with strength shows the desire of the taker for that which is taken; and as long as the believer is eager for God’s teachings, he will fulfil their requirements with strength. When a person takes something he dislikes, he always takes it with lassitude and petulance.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...and listen.’ The verse goes on to say that they said, ‘We heard,’ and ‘...disobeyed....’ To have a clear understanding of this part of the verse, we need to have a closer look at its wording. We have to keep in mind that speech is the work of the tongue, and action is the work of

all the other body organs other than the tongue. We need to distinguish between three things: speech, action, and work; speech is for you to pronounce with your tongue, action is for your limbs to move in response to your will, and work is for speech and action to be in accord. The verse mentions that they said, "...We heard..." and disobeyed....' They heard what God *the Most High* said to them, and disobeyed it. But we need to find out what the word 'disobeyed' is conjoined to and who its speaker is. In fact it is not conjoined to 'heard,' but rather to 'said.' They say 'we heard' with their speech, but their actions say 'we disobey.' This does not mean that they actually said 'we disobey' with their tongues. There might be confusion about this because 'we disobey' comes right after 'we have heard,' and so you might think that they actually said both these things. No, rather, they said 'we heard,' but they did not obey, and did not do as they were bid. God *the Most High* wants them to hear with obedience, not simply just to hear; but they heard and did nothing, and their inaction was an action of disobedience.

God *the Most High* says, '...And they were made to drink down the calf into their hearts...' The True Lord *the Most High* wants to illustrate their materialism for us. Love is an abstract thing, not a material thing: it is intangible. It might be expected that the phrase used would be '...And they were made to drink down the love of the calf into their hearts...' but the One speaking here is God, and He wants to give us the complete, clear image of how they were consumed by the calf itself, that is, the calf entered their hearts. But how could the calf enter into this small space, the heart. God *the Most High* wants to illustrate to us the concept of complete absorption by using the expression '...made to drink...' (*ushribu*), because it is derived from the verb *sharib* ('to drink'), just as water is absorbed by the whole body. This image expresses the way materialism completely penetrated and permeated the hearts of the Israelites; it was as though the calf entered their hearts and was absorbed there just as water enters the body, even though material things do not truly enter the heart.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And they were made to drink down the calf into their hearts by their disbelief.' It is as though it was disbelief which made them adopt the calf in the first place; they disbelieved and

because of their disbelief, the calf entered their hearts and their hearts were sealed thereafter.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...Say, “How wretched is that which your faith enjoins upon you, if you be indeed believers.”’ They had said, ‘We believe in that which was revealed to us, and we believe in nothing else besides.’ Say to them: ‘Does your belief command you to do this?’ This is a form of ironic expression used in the Noble Quran; and we have another example in God’s words reporting the decision of the people of Lot to expel Lot and his household from their town, for indeed they are people who purify and cleanse themselves (*an-Naml*: 56). Are purity and cleanliness a reason for expelling someone from their town? Of course, they are not. Rather, this was a form of irony and reproach.

The truth was that the faith of the Israelites did not command them to do this; it rather commanded them to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and this is what we find clearly stated in the supplication of Moses and his followers, and God’s answer to their prayers. They asked God to write down for them what is good in this world, as well as in the world to come, for to Him they were guided. And He answered them that He will afflict with His chastisement whom He wills, and His Mercy embraces all things, and that He writes it down for those who shall fear Him, and spend in charity, and believe in His signs; they are those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described with them in the Torah and the Gospel. He will enjoin on them what is right and forbid them what is wrong, and will make lawful for them the good things and prohibit for them the evil, and will relieve them of their burden and of the shackles which were upon them; and those who shall believe in him, and support him, and help him, and follow the light which was sent down with him – it is those who will be the successful (*al-A’raf*: 156-157).

This is what their faith truly commanded them to do: to believe in the unlettered Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and God *the Most High* knew what their belief commanded them to do, for it was from Him *the Exalted*. And so when they attempted to fool Him, God *the Most High* rebuked them with irony, saying, ‘How wretched is that which your faith enjoins upon you, if you be indeed believers.’

God's words 'if you be indeed believers' indicate that they were not truly believers, but rather that, their hearts were still attached to idolatry, or disbelief, or to the calf which they once worshipped.

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَالِصَةً مِّنْ  
 دُونِ النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوْا الْمَوْتَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾

**Say, 'If the last home with God is to be for you alone  
 and no one else, then you should long for death, if  
 your claim is true' [94] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 94)**

God *the Most High* wants to expose the Jews, and show how their faith is unsound, and how they went astray and sold God's signs for a paltry price. He *the Exalted* wants us to know that these Jews did not do this inadvertently or in ignorance, and they were not tricked; but rather, they knowingly and deliberately changed things. They were well aware that they had invented speech and then ascribed it to God *the Most High* falsely and deceitfully, and so He instructed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to expose them in front of all people and show their falsehood with a decisive proof. And so He *the Exalted* said, 'Say, "If the home of the Hereafter with God is yours exclusively...."' The word 'Say' here is addressed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, that is, 'Say, O Muhammad....' This issue could have been raised only because the Jews had claimed that theirs exclusively was '...the home of the Hereafter with God....' If something is for someone 'exclusively,' this means it is for him alone, and for no other party. That is, it is something which belongs to you alone, and no one else can share it with you or take it from you. God *the Most High* says here to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: If the Hereafter with God was for them alone, to be shared with no one else, they should wish for death so that they can go on to this eternal bliss. As long as the Hereafter is theirs alone, and they are sure that they alone will enter Paradise, why do they stay in this world? Do they not long for death as the Muslims long for martyrdom so that they may enter paradise? This claim of the Jews is not the only false claim to be made about God *the Most High*, for He *the Exalted* also states their claim that no one shall ever enter paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian (*al-Baqara*: 111).

Who said this? The Jews said about themselves that no one would enter Paradise save the Jews, and the Christians said about themselves that no one would enter paradise save the Christians. They each said that paradise was reserved exclusively for them, and these statements of theirs present a doctrinal problem for us. Who will enter paradise alone, the Jews or the Christians? We say: God *the Most High* has provided the answer to this question when He *the Exalted* said that the Jews stated that the Christians have no valid ground for their beliefs, while the Christians stated that the Jews have no valid ground for their beliefs (*al-Baqara*: 113).

This is the truest thing the Jews and the Christians said of one another. The Jews truly have no grounds for their beliefs, and nor do the Christians; and so they are both correct in what they say about each other. In the noble verse we are currently examining, the Jews claim that the Hereafter is for them alone. Let us, for argument's sake, believe them, and say to them: 'Why, then, do you not long for death?' They should long for the Hereafter as long as it is for them alone, and so God *the Most High* says, '...then wish for death, if you are really truthful in what you say.' But these are nothing but false hopes cherished by the Jews and the Christians. God *the Most High* says that the Jews and the Christians say that they are God's children and His beloved ones. He commands His Messenger to ask them why, then, He causes them to suffer for their sins. Nay, they are but human beings of His creating. He forgives whom He wills, and He chastises whom He wills; for with God is the sovereignty of the Heavens and of the Earth, and of all that is between them, and unto Him shall all things return (*al-Ma'ida*: 18).

So they imagine that whatever they may commit of sins, God will not punish them on the Day of Resurrection; but God's justice does not allow this; how could some people be punished for their sins, but the Jews not be punished for theirs; and moreover enter paradise? And how could God *the Most High* reserve paradise in the Hereafter for the Jews alone, when He has decreed that His mercy will be given to the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believe in the message of Islam, and has informed the Jews and Christians of this in their scriptures? We have seen how God *the Most High* was asked by Moses and his followers to write down for them what is good in this world, as well as in the world to come, for to

Him they were guided. And He answered them that He will afflict with His chastisement whom He wills, and His Mercy embraces all things, and that He writes it down for those who shall fear Him, and spend in charity, and believe in His signs; they are those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described with them in the Torah and the Gospel (*al-A'raf*: 156-157). In this is the fact of what their scriptures contain, and the True Lord *the Most High* says that if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender to God, it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come he shall be among the lost (*Al- 'Imran*: 85).

Then how can the Jews claim that the Hereafter will be granted to them alone on the Day of Resurrection? The True Lord *the Exalted* reveals their falsehood here and confirms to us that they are the first ones who know that what they say is false.

وَلَنْ يَتَمَنَّوْهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾

**But they will never long for death, because of what they have stored up with their own hands: God is fully aware of the evildoers [95] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 95)**

They will never wish for death, but rather, they fear it. When God *the Most High* sent down this verse, He placed the whole matter of faith in the hands of the Jews, so, if they wanted, they could have cast doubt on this religion. How? Was it not possible, when this verse was sent down, for some of the Jews to come forward and say, 'If only we could die; we long for death, O Muhammad, and so ask your Lord to make us die' – was it not possible for them to say this, even falsely or ostentatiously, in order to undermine this religion? But they did not even say this, and it never occurred to them to do so. Look at the miracle of the Quran inherent in God's words: '...they will never wish for it....' God *the Most High* pronounced a final judgement connected to a matter which was within the free will of those who showed enmity to Islam, and said that these enemies, the Jews, would never wish for death; and it was possible for them to wise up to this challenge, and say 'Indeed we do wish for death, and seek it from God;' but even this never occurred to them because when God *the Most High* pronounces judgement over a matter connected to free will,



He removes from the enemies of the religion the notions which they might utilise to attack the religion. And so it never occurred to them, just as when God *the Most High* challenged the infidels before when the direction of prayer was changed; He said that the weak-minded among people will say, 'What has turned them away from the direction of prayer which they have observed up to now? (*al-Baqara*: 142). This noble verse was sent down before they said it, which is indicated by the use of the future tense 'will say;' and God *the Most High* described these people as being 'weak-minded', yet despite this they indeed did say it. If they had used their minds, they would have remained silent and not said a word, and this would have been a serious challenge to the Noble Quran.

They would have said, 'God said "The weak-minded among people will say..." but no one said anything, so who are these weak-minded people, and why did they not say anything?' This would have been a challenge to the Noble Quran concerning something which they had the free choice to influence, but because it was God who was speaking, and it was God who was acting, this never occurred to them, and they indeed said what He predicted they would say.

In the noble verse we are currently examining, the Quran challenged them to wish for death, yet they did not wish for it. It was logical, as long as the Hereafter was for them alone, and God challenged them to wish for death, that they should have wished for death if they were truthful so that , they could go on to eternal bliss. But the True Lord *the Most High* had already decreed that this would not be the case; why? Because they were lying, and they knew they were lying, and so they fled from death instead of wishing for it.

Consider, for example, the behaviour of the ten Companions of the Prophet, who were given tidings of paradise. At death, another revered companion of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, Bilal ibn Rabah *God be pleased with him* said, 'Now I shall meet the beloved ones, Muhammad and his Companions.' He was glad to meet death as he knew he would go to paradise and join Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions. This is genuine trust in the reward and glad tidings of paradise. Also, 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha *God be pleased with him* recited as he was fighting:

How fine is paradise, and to draw near to it,

Sweet and cold is the draught therein!

And Imam 'Ali *God be pleased with him* entered the battle of Hunayn wearing a shirt without any chain-mail on it so that it would not repel arrows or the stab of a spear, and his son Al-Hasan *God be pleased with him* said to him, 'O father, this is not the attire of war!' 'Ali *God be pleased with him* replied, 'O son, your father cares not whether he comes to death or death comes to him!' Our master Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman recited as he lay dying: 'A beloved one has come on a she-camel, may the one who regrets have no profit!' And so those who are sure of their place in the Hereafter welcome death.

At the battle of Badr, one of the Companions said to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'O Messenger of God, is it true that nothing stands between me and Paradise except that I should fight these men and be killed by them?' The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* answered that this was indeed the case. This Companion had been carrying a handful of dates to eat, but he could not wait for paradise another moment, and so he flung the dates aside, entered the battle, and was martyred.

These are the ones who have faith and are sure of what God has in store for them in the Hereafter. But when the Noble Quran challenged the Jews by saying to them, '...then wish for death, if you are really truthful in what you say' (*al-Baqara*: 94), they were silent, and did not answer. If they had truly wished for death, each one of them would have stopped their breath whilst swallowing his saliva, and they would all have died at once. Someone might say, 'But is wishing only a matter of the speech of the tongue? They might have wished for it with their hearts.' To this, we say: What does it mean to wish? To wish for something is for you to say of something you love, 'If only it would happen.' So it is a matter of speech. And supposing it is a matter of the heart, if they had wished for it in their hearts, God would have read their hearts and caused them to die at once. But since the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'But they will never wish for it...' they will never wish for it whether with the tongue or the heart. This is because their claim that to dwell paradise in God's presence was for them alone, is similar to another claim of theirs,

which God *the Most High* relates to us in the Quran: ‘And they say, “Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days.” Say, “Have you received such a promise from God; for God will not break his promise; or, do you speak of God that which you do not know?”’ (*al-Baqara*: 80).

God *the Most High* says, ‘...because of what their hands have put forth,...’ that is, their evil deeds make them fear death, whilst those who have lived good lives are happy to die. And so we hear that when some people die, their faces are as bright as the full moon because they have done good deeds. At the moment of death, a person knows with certainty that he will die. If someone falls ill, he hopes for a cure and does not think of death; but when the final death-rattle comes a person, knows he will die, and so his whole life flashes before him; if his works were good, his face brightens and he rejoices because he will find endless bliss in the Hereafter, for at the moment when the spirit leaves the body, a person knows what his end will be, either in Paradise or in Hell, and either the angels of mercy or the angels of suffering come to take him, and those who have obeyed God are joyful at the coming of the angels of mercy. As for him who has sinned and incurred the wrath of God, his life passes before him and he sees that it was filled with evil, and that he is about to meet God, and there is no longer the opportunity for repentance or for changing his ways. When he sees he will go to hell, his face contracts and his spirit is taken in this state, and so they say that he died whilst his face was darkened with frowning.

So those who do evil in this world never wish for death, whilst those who do good rejoice in the meeting with God. But the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade us from wishing for death, saying, ‘None of you should wish for death or pray for it before it comes to him, unless he is certain about his deeds.’<sup>(1)</sup> We say that the kind of wishing for death which is prohibited is the wishing which comes from despair or from an inability to accept the difficult turns of fate, that is, to long for death because one is incapable of bearing God’s decree that a misfortune should befall him, or who wishes for it in objection to the road God has decreed his life should take.

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* on the authority of Abu Hurayra

This is the wishing for death which is prohibited; as for the one who does good deeds, it is acceptable for him to wish to meet God. God *the Most High*, at the end of the story of the prophet Joseph, reports Joseph's supplication: 'O my Lord! You have indeed bestowed upon me something of power, and have imparted to me some knowledge of the inner meaning of happenings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are near to me in this world and in the life to come: let me die as one who has surrendered himself to You, and make me join the righteous' (*Yusuf*: 101).

So the words of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* mean do not wish for death out of despair at what God has decreed should befall you, but rather bear the decrees of God patiently. God *the Most High* then says, '...And God is Knowing of the wrongdoers,' because God knows all about their sinfulness and evildoing, which has made them fear death and not wish for it.

وَلَنَجِدَنَّهُمْ أَحْرَصَ النَّاسِ عَلَى حَيَوَةٍ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا يَوَدُّ أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرَ  
أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِمُزَحَّزِّجٍ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ أَنْ يُعَمَّرَ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

**[Prophet], you are sure to find them clinging to life  
more eagerly than any other people, even the  
polytheists. Any of them would wish to be given a life of  
a thousand years, though even such a long life would not  
save them from the torment: God sees everything they  
do [96] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 96)**

The True Lord *the Most High* exposed their falseness in that they cannot wish for death because they are evildoers, and since they are evildoers, death must be fearsome to them. Rather, they cling to life more eagerly than any other people, even more eagerly than the idolaters. The idolater is eager to cling to life because he believes that this world is all there is, yet the Jews were even more eager to cling to life than the idolaters because they feared death as a result of the evil deeds they had done. And so the longer they lived, the further they thought themselves to be from the suffering of the Hereafter. Life meant that they did not have to face this suffering, and so they rejoiced in it.

The Jews did not care if they had to live in a state of ignominy or poverty, or any other kind of life; the important thing was that they lived. But why were they even more eager to cling to life than the idolaters? It is because the idolater thought there was no afterlife at all, and so the life of this world was all he cared about, and was his whole life. And so he hoped that his life would be long, no matter what kind of life it was because he thought that there would be nothing after it. But he did not have it in his mind that there might be suffering after this worldly life; that was why the Jews were even more eager to cling to life than the idolaters.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...One of them wishes that he could be granted life a thousand years....’ They would love to live a thousand years or more; but suppose one of them lived a thousand years, or even more: would this save him from the eventual suffering? No, for long life does not change the final ending. As long as the final end is death in all cases, the one who lives only a few short years is equal to the one who lives for thousands of years.

The word God *the Most High* uses for ‘to be granted a life’ is *yu‘ammar*, which in Arabic is a passive verb form (‘to be allowed to live’); and it could not be an active form, for life is not in the hands of anyone but God, and it is God who gives life and brings it to an end. So since life is not in the hands of man, the passive verb form is used.

Life is the time a person spends between his birth and his death. The Arabic word for life (*‘umr*) is derived from the word meaning ‘inhabit/populate/construct,’ because life resides in the body, and when it ends, the body becomes a deserted corpse. God *the Most High* says, ‘...a thousand years....’ Why is the number one thousand mentioned? It is mentioned because it is the highest number with which the Arabs were familiar. And so the fighter who took the Persian king Chosroes’ sister captive during the war asked for one thousand *dirhams* as her ransom. When his people asked him how much he got for her, he told them one thousand. ‘Had you asked for more,’ they said, ‘they would have given it to you.’ ‘By God,’ he replied, ‘if I knew there was something more than a thousand, I would have asked for it!’ So, one thousand was the limit to which the Arabs counted, and so they would say ‘a thousand thousand’ rather than ‘one million.’

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...but it would not remove him in the least from the [coming] punishment....’ This means that even if one of them were to live for a thousand years or more, he would not escape the suffering of the Hereafter. Then He *the Exalted* says, ‘...And God sees what they do.’ That means He knows what they do, and He will punish them for it whether they live for one thousand years, or more than this, or less.

قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِغَابِرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ، عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ  
مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

**Say [Prophet], ‘If anyone is an enemy of Gabriel – who by  
God’s leave brought down the Quran to your heart  
confirming previous scriptures as a guide and good news for  
the faithful [97] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 97)**

God *the Most High* wanted to alert us to the fact that the Jews not only killed the prophets, and distorted the Torah, and changed God’s signs in seeking the glory of this worldly life, but they also declared themselves enemies to the angels; and what is more, they declared their enmity towards the closet of the angels to God who brought the Revelation of the Quran, namely Gabriel *peace be upon him*, and they said, ‘Gabriel is an enemy to us.’

These words are addressed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is narrated that Ibn Jawriya, a Jewish rabbi, sat with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him, ‘Who is it who brings down this Revelation to you?’ The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* answered that it was Gabriel *peace be upon him*. And the Jew replied, ‘Had it been any other than him, we would have believed in you; Gabriel is our enemy, because he always comes bearing punishment and suffering, whilst Michael comes bearing mercy, aid, and abundance.’ He was also their enemy because they believed that Jerusalem would be destroyed by a man named Bukhtanasar (Nebuchadnezzar), and so the Jews sent a man to assassinate him. This man found a young boy who asked him what he wanted. He answered that he wanted to slay Bukhtanasar ‘because the scriptures tell us that he will destroy

Jerusalem.’ The boy answered, ‘If this man is destined to destroy Jerusalem, you shall not be able to prevent him, for what has been destined will come to pass whether we like it or not; and if he is not destined to do so, then why kill him?’ That is, the child told him that if God had decreed that Bukhtanasar would destroy Jerusalem, nobody can hold back God’s decree, and so he would not be able to kill him and thus prevent him from destroying Jerusalem. And if it was not truly decreed, then why kill a human being for committing no crime? So the Jew went back home without killing Bukhtanasar, and when he got back to his people, they said, ‘It was Gabriel, in the form of this young boy, who convinced you not to kill that man.’

It is narrated that our master ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* possessed a piece of land in upper Medina, and whenever he went to it, he would pass by the schools of the Jews, and sit with them for a while. The Jews thought that the reason ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* was sitting with them was because he loved them, and so they said to him, ‘We love you, and respect you, and have hope in you.’ ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* understood what they meant, and so he replied, ‘By God, I do not sit with you because I love you, but rather, I want to get a better image of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and learn what your scriptures say about him.’ They said to him, ‘And who is it who tells Muhammad our histories, and our secrets?’ ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* replied, ‘It is Gabriel *peace be upon him*, who comes to him from heaven bearing your histories.’ They replied, ‘He is our enemy.’ Omar *God be pleased with him* said, ‘What is his position with God?’ They replied, ‘He sits on the right side of God, and Michael sits on the left.’ ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* said, ‘Since this is the case, neither could be the enemy of the other because they have equal positions with God; and so whoever is an enemy to either one of them is an enemy to God; and your enmity to Gabriel will avail you nothing, nor will your love for Michael, for they both have a high standing in the sight of God.’

Their enmity to Gabriel *peace be upon him* confirms their materialism: they view the issue in human terms, since the ones who sit to the right and left side of the ruler compete with one another for his regard – but this is the case in the human realm, and the angels have nothing to do with this. God has

enough in His possession to grant high status to one without detracting from the status of the other. Moreover, God's name is the Truth, and what Gabriel *peace be upon him* brings down is the truth just as what Michael *peace be upon him* brings down is the truth, and truth does not compete with truth. 'Umar *God be pleased with him* then said to them, 'Your disbelief is stronger than that of donkeys!' Then he went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the moment the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him he said, 'Your Lord agrees with you, 'Umar!' God's words were then revealed: 'Say, "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel - for he it is who by God's leave has brought the Quran down on your heart, confirming previous revelations, and guidance, and good tidings to the faithful."' 'Umar *God be pleased with him* said, 'O Messenger of God, after this, my faith is firmer than the very mountains!'

So their saying 'Michael is our friend, and Gabriel is our foe' is pure materialism, and God *the Most High* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: They see Gabriel *peace be upon him* as an enemy because he has brought this down to your heart by God's leave, and as long as he has brought it from God to your heart, this means they have no part to play in it; and it confirms the truth of the Torah they possess, and it is a guidance and glad tidings for the believers. So what part of this makes you hate Gabriel? Your enmity to Gabriel *peace be upon him* is enmity to God Himself *the Most High*.

مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَجِبْرِيلَ

وَمِيكَائِيلَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

**if anyone is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, of Gabriel and Michael, then God is certainly the enemy of such disbelievers' [98]**  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 98)

And so God *the Most High* gave His judgement on the matter, and said that any enmity towards the messengers and the angels, especially Gabriel and Michael *peace be upon them*, is tantamount to enmity towards God Himself. The True Lord *the Most High* mentions the angels as a whole, and then mentions Gabriel and Michael *peace be upon them* specifically by name.



It is not a matter of picking and choosing, but rather, it is all or nothing. If someone declares himself to be an enemy to the angels, and Gabriel and Michael, *peace be upon them*, and the messengers of God, he is first and foremost an enemy of God since there is no dividing between them, and they all revolve around the truth, and the truth is one, and never divided against itself. Enmity only arises when caprices and desires clash, and this happens only in the affairs of this world.

This noble verse confirms the essential unity of truth between God, His angels, His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael *peace be upon them*. Whoever is an enemy to any one of these is an enemy to them all, and is an enemy to God *the Most High*. The Jews were enemies to God because they disbelieved in Him, and enemies to the messengers because they denied some and killed others.

And so the True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the unity of religious truth, the source of which is God *the Most High*; and His messenger from amongst the angels is Gabriel *peace be upon him*, and His message-bearers from amongst mankind are the messengers and prophets whom He sent, and Michael *peace be upon him* brings down abundance and fertility. Faith is the basis of life, and so whoever is an enemy to the angels and the messengers and Gabriel and Michael *peace be upon them* is a disbeliever. The verse does not say that enmity towards these beings is simple enmity, but rather, God declares that such people are disbelievers. God *the Most High* did not simply inform Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of this, but He also commanded him to proclaim this so that all people would know it, and know that the Jews were infidels.

وَلَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَمَا يَكْفُرُ بِهَا إِلَّا الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

**For We have sent down clear messages to you and only those who defy [God] would refuse to believe them [99]**  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 99)

God *the Most High* proceeds to affirm the truth of the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that its signs are clear so that any reasoning person who seeks faith, will believe in them, whilst those who desire wantonness and iniquity will not. What is the meaning of ‘clear signs’?

A sign is something amazing in its inimitability. Signs are miracles which come to a messenger to prove that he is truly sent by his Lord. The term is also used to refer to the verses of the Noble Quran. As for the attribute 'clear,' it means that they are plain things which cannot be a subject for disagreement, and which need no further clarification: '...and no one would deny them except the perverse.' Perverseness (*fisq*) is to stray from obedience; the Arabic word is derived from a word describing the development of dates; at first, a new date is not soft because it cannot rid itself of its shell; but when it becomes soft, you find that the shell falls away from the fruit, and this is termed in Arabic *fisq*. And so the one who falls away from God's teachings is called *fasiq* ('perverse'). The meaning of this is that the signs by which God *the Most High* supported Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were plain for the disbelievers to see, and needed no further evidence. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who never read a single word in his life, brought forth this Quran inimitable in its utterances and its meanings, and this was a plain miracle which required no further evidence. And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was never tempted by worldly things to abandon this religion, no matter what they offered him which is proof that he was a man of principles guided by a Divine message. And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned, as inspired in the Quran, the outcome of a war which would not take place for another nine years, and told the disbelievers and hypocrites what lay in their hearts, and exposed them, and predicted events which would happen in the natural world, and all the other miracles which the Quran contains of all kinds, whether scientific, astronomical, natural, or otherwise. The Quran challenges the disbelievers with all these clear signs, all these plain signs which cannot be denied, except by those who wish to ignore God's teachings and do whatever their souls desired.

The miracles of the universe, and the Quran, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, do not require anything but impartial reflection for us to realise that this Quran is from God, and is filled with miracles in its utterances and its content, and that it will remain a miracle for every successive generation, constantly yielding new wonders.

أَوْ كَلَّمَا عَاهَدُوا عَهْدًا نَبَذَهُ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ  
 بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

**How is it that whenever they make a covenant  
 or a pledge, some of them throw it away? In  
 fact, most of them do not believe [100]  
 (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 100)**

The True Lord *the Most High* affirmed before that the Islamic religion and its Book the Quran contain clear signs which mean that faith in them only requires a moment's thought which makes the enmity that the Jews showed to Islam contrary to all the pledges they made, and contrary to naturally disposed faith, and contrary to the fact that they promised God they would not conceal what the Torah said about the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and contrary to their pledge to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and contrary to the instruction Moses *peace be upon him* gave them to believe in Islam when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came. We find this fact made clear in God's reminding the people of the Book that He had taken the covenant of the previous prophets, after He had given them the revelation and the wisdom, that when a messenger comes, confirming what is with them, they should believe in him and support him. Then God asked them whether they have acknowledged the covenant and taken His bond on it, and they said that they have acknowledged it; then He told them to bear witness for that, and He will be a witness also (*Al- 'Imran*: 81).

And so we know that Moses *peace be upon him* from whom the pledge was taken, passed it on to the Israelites, and the Israelites knew all about this pledge when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, and they had in their possession a detailed description of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. But they broke this pledge just as they broke many other pledges, including their pledge about not working on the Sabbath, and how they tried to get around God's Commandment by making traps to catch the fish, trying to circumvent God's Commandment.

And they also pledged to believe in God as the One Deity, and then worshipped the calf.

And after God *the Most High* commanded them to enter a valley filled with crops because they wanted to eat the produce of the earth instead of the manna and quails that came to them from the sky, they said to Moses *peace be upon him* to go forth, he and his Lord, both of them, and fight, while they remained in their place (*al-Ma'ida*: 24). And there were many other pledges related to war, and captives, and worship so that even after God *the Most High* raised the mount above them, and terror entered their hearts because they thought it would fall upon them – and this was only their imagination, and did not reflect reality, for God *the Most High* made it clear that they thought that it would fall upon them (*al-A'raf*: 171) – yet as soon as they were far enough from the mountain, they broke their pledge.

Then they broke the pledge and the oath they had sworn to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when he migrated to Medina. This occurred at the battle of the Trench, when the Jews tried to open a path for the pagans to enter and attack the believers from the rear.

God *the Most High* says, '...some of them cast it away....' We said that this is called a 'conservative statement' because some of them did honour the pledge, and some of them were true to what they promised God, and there were some others who wanted to adopt the new religion and believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

It was not all of them, and so it cannot be said that this refers to all of the Jews because there were amongst them those who did not break the covenant. God *the Most High* wants to open the door for those of them who wish to have faith so that they will not say, 'God has judged us with an unreserved judgement, whilst we wish to have faith and preserve the covenant.' But those who did keep the covenant were few in number, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...Nay, indeed: most of them do not believe.' That is, those of them who broke the covenant, and broke their faith, represented the majority of the Israelites.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ بَدَّ فَرِيقٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ  
 أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

**When God sent them a messenger confirming the Scriptures  
 they already had, some of those who had received the  
 Scripture before threw the Book of God over their shoulders  
 as if they had no knowledge [101] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 101)**

After speaking of the Jews who broke their pledge to believe in the Messenger of God *the Most High*, and broke it knowingly, God *the Most High* says, ‘And when a messenger from God came to them confirming that which was with them....’ That is, what the Quran brought, was a confirmation of what the Torah brought because the Quran was from God and the Torah was from God. But they corrupted the Torah, concealing some parts of it and changing others, concealing what they wanted to conceal; and so the Noble Quran came to bring what they concealed into the open, and confirm the truth of those parts they left alone.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...some of those who had been given the Scripture threw the Book of God behind their backs...’ We said that the first scripture they corrupted was the Torah, and then when the Final Revelation, the Quran, came to them they cast it behind their backs. What does it mean to ‘throw’ something? It means to cast it far from one. So they threw the descriptions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in their books far from them, and the final thing they cast aside was the glad tidings of the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; for they used to predict their victory over the disbelievers, saying, ‘The time is nigh for the coming of a prophet, in whom we will believe, and with whom we will slay you as ‘Ad and Iram were slain.’

God *the Most High* says that ‘some’ of them threw it behind their backs, meaning that a group of them rejected the Revelation whilst another group did not; for Ibn Salam *God be pleased with him*, one of the Jewish rabbis, believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and followed him, and another one of the rabbis, Ka'b Al-Ahbar Mukhairiq *God be pleased with him*,

also embraced Islam. Had the Quran generalised here and not said 'some of those...' it would have been said that it was unfair to those of them who believed.

God *the Most High* says, '...behind their backs....' You might throw something in front of you, and if it is in front of you this means you can always see it, and this might tempt you to accept it. But they threw it behind their backs, that is, they placed it behind them so that they would completely forget it and never consider it again.

God *the Most High* then says, '...as if they did not know....' That is, they behaved as if they knew nothing of the glad tidings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his descriptions. God's words 'as if' indicate that they actually did know this perfectly well because if they actually had not known, God *the Most High* would have said '...some of those who had been given the Scripture threw the Book of God behind their backs unknowingly.' So they knew with certainty, but pretended not to know. We must be aware that if someone throws something aside, he may well accept to follow something else in its stead. They cast aside God's Book, so what did they follow instead of it?

وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَنَ ۖ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَنُ وَلَكِنَّ  
الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى الْمَلَكَيْنِ  
بَابِلَ هَارُوتَ وَمَارُوتَ وَمَا يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّى يَقُولَا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا  
تَكْفُرْ فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا يُفَرِّقُونَ بِهِ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَزَوْجِهِ وَمَا هُمْ  
بِضَاكِرِينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَيَنْتَعِلُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ  
وَلَقَدْ عَلِمُوا لَمَنِ اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلْقٍ وَلَبِئْسَ مَا  
شَكَرُوا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

And followed what the evil ones had fabricated about the Kingdom of Solomon instead. Not that Solomon himself was a disbeliever; it was the evil ones who were disbelievers. They taught people witchcraft and what was revealed in Babylon to the two angels Harut and Marut. Yet these two never taught anyone without first warning him, 'We are sent only to tempt –

**do not disbelieve.’ From these two, they learned what can cause discord between man and wife, although they harm no one with it except by God’s leave. They learned what harmed them, not what benefit them, knowing full well that whoever gained [this knowledge] would lose any share in the Hereafter. Evil indeed is the [price] for which they sold their souls, if only they knew [102] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 102)**

The True Lord *the Most High* informs us here that the Jews threw aside God’s Book and instead, they followed the practises of demons. Casting aside something is the opposite of following something else, and to follow something means to imitate its example. They chose to follow the guidance of what the demons practised at the time of Solomon’s reign. The Arabic verb for ‘recited’ (*tatlu*) is given in the present tense in the Arabic text, whilst it might have been expected for it to be in the past tense since the time referred to is that of the reign of Solomon *peace be upon him*. But God *the Most High* wants us to understand that this following continued until the present day, as though they did not restrict its practice to any particular time.

Until this very moment, there are amongst the Jews those who follow what the devils recited during the reign of Solomon *peace be upon him*; and seeing that the contemporary Jews were pleased and inspired by the way their ancestors followed the demons; it is as though they did it as well.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And they followed what the devils had recited during the reign of Solomon....’ But the devils practised it, and then they ceased to do so, whilst the way the Jews continued to evoke the practices of the evil ones, shows that they believed in it and accepted it. The word ‘devils’ means evil demons from amongst the jinn; amongst the jinn there are wicked ones as well as righteous believers, as God *the Most High* states the statement of a group of jinn that some from among them are righteous while others are below that, and that they have always followed widely divergent paths (*al-Jinn*: 11). They also make it clear that among them are those who have surrendered themselves to God, just as there are those who have taken to injustice and wrongdoing (*al-Jinn*: 14).

So the jinn are composed of both, believers and disbelievers, and amongst the believers of the jinn, there are the obedient and the disobedient. Demons or devils are the rebels from amongst the jinn who rebel against God's teachings; we term everyone who rebels against God's teachings a 'devil,' whether he is a jinn or a human being, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says that He has made for every prophet an enemy - devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring to one another decorative speech in delusion (*al-An'am*: 112).

So the devils are those who rebel against God's teachings. God *the Most High* says, 'And they followed what the devils had recited during the reign of Solomon....' This means what the devils used to do during the days when Solomon *peace be upon him* reigned as king.

But what is the story of the reign of Solomon and the devils? Before the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, God let the evil demons listen to the commands of Heaven as they descended to earth. They would listen as the commands were issued to the angels, and convey them to the leaders of the idolaters, adding to them lies and distortions so that some of them would remain on the side of truth whilst the majority would be false. This is why God *the Most High* tells the believers that the devils would whisper to their allies to aid them in arguing with them (*al-An'am*: 121).

Before the Revelation of the Quran, the evil demons were able to listen to this, but when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with his mission, they were barred from doing so so that these demons would not insert their distortions into the teachings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* or into the Quran.

And the True Lord *the Most High* mentions that the jinn admitted that they used to take positions for hearing the commands of Heaven, but after the start of the mission of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, anyone who tries to listen in to the commands of Heaven would find a flaming dart in ambush waiting for him (*al-Jinn*: 9).

That is, the demons used to have places in the sky where they would stay and listen to the commands which were sent down from Heaven to earth; but when the Quran began to be revealed, God *the Most High* sent down darting



flames, as shooting stars so that when the demons tried to listen to what was being sent down from above, burning flames were sent upon them to burn them. This is why when common folks see shooting stars burning in the sky, they are quick to say, ‘God has shot down an enemy of the faith!’ So it is as though this matter is part of the people’s collective consciousness so that they say ‘God has shot down an enemy of the faith,’ meaning a devil.

The True Lord *the Most High* also mentions the jinn’s statement that when they tried to reach out to Heaven, they found it filled with mighty guards and darting flames, and that they do not know whether evil fortune is intended for those who live on earth, or whether it is their Lord’s Will to endow them with consciousness of what is right (*al-Jinn*: 8, 10).

That is, things are now uncertain for the demons because they can no longer reach the heavens, and so they do not know whether that which is being sent down from above is good or bad for those below. Look at the precision of the Quran’s words when it mentions the jinn’s words that tried to reach out to Heaven. It is as though they went up until they reached the sky so that it was so close they could almost touch it. At this juncture – namely the mention of how the Jews followed the teachings of the devils during the reign of Solomon, of their sorcery, incantations, and other things which neither help nor harm – God *the Most High* wanted to emphasise that Solomon *peace be upon him* was innocent of all this, and so He *the Exalted* said, ‘...It was not Solomon who disbelieved....’ It might seem to be more logical for God *the Most High* to tell the story of the devils before declaring Solomon innocent of the unbelief they wanted to spread, but God wanted to remove any suspicion of disbelief from Solomon *peace be upon him*, and confirm it in the case of those who followed the devils, and so He *the Exalted* said, ‘...It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved....’

So, it was the devils who spread this unbelief, but how did these devils disbelieve, and how did they lure their followers to do so? God *the Most High* says, ‘...but the devils disbelieved, teaching people sorcery and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut. The two angels did not teach anyone until after they had said, “We are but a trial, so do not be a disbeliever.” And they learned from them that by which they caused

separation between a man and his wife. But they do not harm anyone through it except by permission of God. And they learnt what harms them and does not benefit them. But they certainly knew that whoever purchased the sorcery would not have in the Hereafter any share....'

What is the story behind all this? The Jews broke God's covenant and followed what the devils recited and practised at the time of Solomon *peace be upon him*, and they wanted to show everything that happened at the time of Solomon *peace be upon him* as being sorcery and the work of demons; and in this way the Jews wanted to make people think that the way of Solomon *peace be upon him* was all based on sorcery and the work of demons. But the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to declare Solomon *peace be upon him* innocent of these lies; when Solomon *peace be upon him* was granted prophethood, he asked God *the Most High* to grant him a kingdom which would never be given to anyone after him, as the Quran mentions that he prayed to his Lord to forgive him his sins and bestow upon him the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after him, as certainly God alone is the Giver of gifts. And so God made subservient to him the wind so that it gently sped at his command wherever he willed, as well as the demons that He made to work for him – every kind of builder and diver – and others linked together in fetters (*Sad*: 35-38).

And so Solomon *peace be upon him* was given sovereignty above men and jinns, and over other creatures of God such as the winds, and the birds, and more besides. At the time when Solomon *peace be upon him* took charge of this kingdom, the devils were filling the earth with unbelief in the form of sorcery and its writings, and so Solomon *peace be upon him* confiscated all the books of sorcery, and it is said that he buried them under his throne. When Solomon *peace be upon him* died, and the devils found the cache of books of magic, they took them out and showed them to the people, and their allies from amongst the Jewish clergy said that these books of magic were the means by which Solomon *peace be upon him* had controlled men and jinn, and that they represented his teachings, and so they spread them amongst the people.

God *the Most High* wanted to affirm that Solomon was innocent of this accusation, and he was innocent of ruling by sorcery and spreading unbelief.

He *the Exalted* said that ‘...It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved, teaching people sorcery....’

What is sorcery? The word in Arabic *sihr* is derived from the word *sahar* which means the latter hours of the night, just before daybreak, when light is mixed with darkness and things are difficult to see. Likewise, sorcery is something which seems to you to be real, whilst in fact it is not real. It is based on two things: the bewitching of the eye so that it sees something unreal which appears to be real; but it does not change the true nature of things, and so God *the Most High* says that Pharaoh’s sorcerers cast a spell upon the people’s eyes, and struck them with awe, and produced mighty sorcery (*al-A ‘raf*: 116).

So the sorcerer controls the eyes of his audience so that they see something that is not real, and not true, and so the eyes of the audience become subjugated to the sorcerer. So sorcery is all illusion, and it is not real; God *the Most High* relates what happened between Moses *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh’s sorcerers: Moses told the sorcerers to cast first, and by the effect of their sorcery, their magic ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly (*Ta Ha*: 66).

Since God *the Most High* said that it seemed to him, this means that they did not really move. So sorcery is illusion; and what is the proof that sorcery is illusion? The proof is the confrontation that took place between Moses *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh’s sorcerers. This is because the sorcerer might bewitch the eyes of the people, but no one can bewitch his (the sorcerer’s) eyes; yet when Moses *peace be upon him* and the sorcerers came forward to the confrontation, God *the Most High* tells us that the sorcerers gave to Moses the option whether he would throw his staff first, or they would be the first to throw. He answered that they throw first. And by virtue of their sorcery, their magic ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly (*Ta Ha*: 65-66).

When the sorcerers threw down their ropes and staffs, it seemed to the onlookers that they had become serpents, moving rapidly; but did the sorcerers also think that they had become serpents? Of course, they did not because no one can bewitch the eye of a magician. And so what they had thrown down remained in their eyes mere ropes and staffs until Moses *peace be upon him* threw down his own staff, and God *the Most High* tells us that He commanded Moses to throw that staff which was in his right hand, it shall swallow up all

that they have wrought for they have wrought only a sorcerer's artifice, and the sorcerer can never come to any good, whatever he may aim at. And so it happened, and down fell the sorcerers, prostrating themselves in adoration, and proclaimed that they have come to believe in the Lord of Moses and Aaron (*Ta Ha*: 69-70).

Here the truth about sorcery is revealed. Why did the sorcerers fall down in prostration? It is because their ropes and staffs remained to them mere ropes and staffs as no one had bewitched their eyes; but when Moses *peace be upon him* threw down his staff, and it truly became a serpent, they knew that this was not mere sorcery, but rather, it was a miracle from God *the Most High*. How did they know? Because sorcery does not change the true nature of anything, whilst they were certain that Moses' staff had really turned into a serpent, but their ropes and staffs remained as they were, even though it seemed to the people that they had turned into serpents.

So sorcery is illusion, and the sorcerer sees things as they really are, and so he does not fear them, whilst it seems to his audience of ordinary people that the thing has changed its nature. And so the sorcerers fell down in prostration because they recognised that the miracle Moses *peace be upon him* had performed was not mere sorcery, but was something beyond the power of any man.

Sorcery is illusion, and demons have the ability to take any form; we cannot envisage a demon in his true form, but if he takes a material form, we can see him. If he takes the form of a man, we see him as a man, and if he takes the form of a beast, we see him as a beast, and in this state, he is governed by his form; if he takes the form of a man and you shoot him with a bullet, he will die, and if he takes the form of a beast and you hit him with your car, he will die; this is because his form governs him. This is why demons never remain in their form except for a fleeting moment, and then disappear in a matter of seconds. Why? Because they fear that someone will see them in this form and then kill them, since this form governs them. And so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said of the time a demon took a human form before him: 'I thought of tying him to the pillar of the mosque so that the children of Medina could amuse themselves with him, but then I remembered what my brother Solomon supplicated to his Lord to forgive him his sins, and

bestow upon him the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after him [(*Sad*: 35)] and I let him go.’<sup>(1)</sup>

Out of God’s mercy for us, He made it so that any form a demon takes will govern him with the laws which apply to it; if not, they would have overcome us and made our lives hellish. God *the Most High* made the universe run in a balanced way so that no one can vanquish anyone else. This means that if we are all in a village and none of us possessed a weapon, there is balance; but if only one of us owns a weapon and claims that he has it to protect the inhabitants of the village, but then he uses his weapon to seize control of them and make them pay him racket (‘protection’) money and the like, the balance is disturbed – and this is what God does not accept.

Sorcery leads to an upsetting of the world’s balance because the sorcerer makes use of forces more powerful than mankind, namely demons that are created from fire, and move extremely quickly, and can take many forms, and so on. When a man seeks to learn how to subdue the jinn, he claims he is doing this to spread goodness in the world, but this is not the truth because he is inevitably tempted to oppress. The thing which disturbs the security of the world is the lack of equality between people. Some people are able to oppress others, and if the whole society does not come together to prevent them, balance will be disturbed in that society. God *the Most High* wants people to have equal opportunities so that the safety and security of the world will be maintained, and so He tells us not to oppress, and not to seek the aid of demons in our oppression so that we will not spoil the security of the world.

But God *the Most High* in His wisdom decreed to place within the world that which prevented creatures from being deluded by their own powers, so they would not believe they had gained loftiness in the world by themselves. The sin of Satan was refusing to prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him*, saying that he is better than Adam as God has created him of fire whereas he created Adam of clay (*al-A‘raf*: 12).

So the substance of his creation made him allow pride to enter his soul, and so he disobeyed. And so God *the Most High* wants to teach mankind certain

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(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad* – Tr

laws which would make these creatures of a higher substance, namely demons, submit to a creature of a lower substance, namely mankind so that every one of God's creatures would know that if God distinguished them by making them from a particular substance, this was not by their own will nor was it any mark of their distinction, but rather, it was by the will of God *the Most High*.

And so He sent to Babylon the two angels, Harut and Marut, to teach people the sorcery which would make the creature of a higher substance yield to that of a lower.

God *the Most High* says, '...It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved, teaching people sorcery and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut. But the two angels did not teach anyone until after they had said, "We are but a trial, so do not be a disbeliever..."'" So God *the Most High* sent the two angels Harut and Marut to teach people sorcery. Many stories have been related about these two angels, but as long as God *the Most High* sent two angels to teach people sorcery, this means that sorcery is a science with which man seeks the assistance of demons. There is a story concerning when the angels said about the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*, as the Noble Quran tells us, '...they said, "Will You place on it one who will do ill therein and shed blood, and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness?"' (*al-Baqara*: 30).

It is said that upon this, the True Lord *the Most High* instructed the angels to choose two angels to go down to earth so the rest could see what they would do, so, they chose Harut and Marut, and when they came to earth, a woman charmed them, and so they committed grave sins. Despite the presence of this story in certain books of exegesis, it is not true, for the angels by their very nature cannot disobey God, and because it is part of the completion of faith that a creature obeys everything that God *the Most High* commands it to do. These two angels were commanded to teach people sorcery, and at the same time to warn that sorcery is an evil temptation which leads to unbelief; and they did as they were bid. A temptation is a test, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...But the two angels did not teach anyone until after they had said, "We are but a trial, so do not be a disbeliever." And they learned from them that by which they caused separation between a man and his wife. But they do not

harm anyone through it except by permission of God....’ So, these two angels warned the people that the sorcery they taught them was but a temptation which would lead to unbelief, and that it brought nothing but evil, and separated men from their wives, and that it could have no harm except by God’s leave; for there is no power in this universe outside the will of God *the Most High*.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And they learnt what harms them and does not benefit them. But they certainly knew that whoever purchased the sorcery would not have in the Hereafter any share. And wretched is that for which they sold themselves, if they only knew.’

God *the Most High* tells us that learning sorcery harms and does not benefit; it never brings any good, even for those who perform it. You find the one who practises sorcery depends on other people to make his living, and so they are better than him; and he spends all day looking for someone to delude into thinking he can do things for them, just so he can take their money. You find that his appearance is not normal, and his life is not stable, and his children are depraved. Everyone who works as a sorcerer dies poor, possessing nothing, and is afflicted by debilitating diseases, and becomes, at the end of his life, an admonition for others.

So, sorcery brings nothing but harm, poverty, and then God’s curse at the end of the sorcerer’s life. Those who do sorcery die as disbelievers, and find nothing in the Hereafter but hell. And so they have acquired for themselves the worst of all things, if only they knew it, for they have gained nothing but harm, and have done nothing but cause discord between people; and they cannot harm anyone save by God’s leave.

If God *the Most High* has decreed in His wisdom that sorcery should be one of the temptations and trials of this worldly life, He *the Most High* has also decreed that all those who perform sorcery are disbelievers, and so no one should study sorcery or read into it because when they first begin to learn it, they will say, ‘I will use it to do good,’ and then they end by using it to do evil. Moreover, the demons upon whose aid the sorcerer calls usually turn against him to make him taste the fruits of his wicked actions, and so evil rebounds on him and on his children. God *the Most High* lets us know the statement of the jinns that men from among the humans sought the aid of men from the jinn, but

they only increased their folly (*al-Jinn*: 6). That is, when someone seeks the aid of jinn, they turn against him and subject him to all kinds of suffering.

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَمَثُوبَةٌ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

**If they had believed and been mindful of God, their reward from Him would have been far better, if only they knew [103]**  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 103)

God *the Most High* opens to His servants the doors to repentance and mercy. He told them that sorcery was unbelief, and that those who indulge in it, will be raised as disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection, and will spend eternity in hell. And He *the Exalted* told them that if they abstained from using sorcery as a way of distinguishing themselves from others in the evil and harm they therefore did, it would be better for them in the sight of God *the Most High*; for He *the Exalted* said about the two angels who came down to teach sorcery, but ‘...the two angels did not teach anyone until after they had said, “We are but a trial, so do not be a disbeliever”’ (*al-Baqara*: 102).

So the practice of sorcery amounts to unbelief, and so if they believed in this fact and recognised that they were indulging in unbelief, and were conscious of God, this would lead to a reward for them from God, and goodness in this life and the next. But what is ‘reward’? It is recompense for a good deed, as opposed to punishment, which is requital for an evil deed. The Arabic word for reward (*mathuba*) is derived from the verb (*thab*), which means ‘to return.’ And so the one who repeats the *Imam*’s (prayer leader) words in the prayer for the others to hear, is called the *muthawwib* because the *Imam* says ‘*Allahu akbar*’ (‘God is the Greatest’) and then this man repeats the *Imam*’s words with a loud voice so that the worshippers in the back rows who do not hear the *Imam*’s voice can hear it. This practice is called *tathwib*, i.e. the repetition of the *Imam*’s words so that those who did not hear him have another chance to hear. As we said, it is derived from the verb *thab* meaning ‘to return’ because when a person does a good deed, his good deed brings him a good return. Do not think that a good deed comes from you and then does not return; rather, it brings back goodness to you.



If we consider the precise words used by God in the Quran: ‘...the reward from God would have been far better...,’ we find that the word ‘reward’ (*mathuba*) is derived from the same root as the word *thawb* (plural *thiyab*) which means ‘garment’. In the past, people would use sheep’s wool to make their clothes, and so a man would take the sheep he possessed and shear their wool, and then give it to someone else to spin it and knit it into clothes, and then give it back to him. The wool he sent away would return to him as clothes, and so they were called *mathuba* because the goodness returns to you so that you can derive great benefit from it. Likewise, the reward (*‘thawab’*) for righteous deeds comes back to you with great benefit.

So, the word *thawab* (‘reward’) is derived from the word *thawb* (‘garment’). God *the Most High* taught us that the purpose of clothes is to cover one’s nakedness, and likewise righteous deeds cover the spiritual and psychological failures of a person, as the True Lord *the Most High* says that He has sent down to mankind raiment to hide their nakedness- and splendid garments; but the raiment of piety; this is the best (*al-A‘raf*: 26).

So, it is as though there are two kinds of clothes, those which cover the bodily nakedness and those which protect a person from suffering; and the raiment of piety is better than the clothes which cover bodily nakedness. God *the Most High* says, ‘...the reward from God would have been far better...’ Consider the reward which comes from God. If you get a garment from the one who made it, and find it to be beautiful and well-made, with attractive colours – if the one who made it for you is a human being, what about the reward given to you by God? It would be the pinnacle of beauty. God bestows rewards according to His own power, and so His rewards are the peak of magnificence so that the reward is multiplied again and again. We must also consider God’s words ‘And if they had believed and feared [God]...’ We said before that God-fearing means to place a barrier between oneself and the Divine Attributes of Majesty. We said that some people wonder how God *the Most High* says ‘fear God’ and then say ‘fear the Fire.’ We say that the meaning of God-fearing is to place a barrier between oneself and God’s Attributes of Majesty, and to fear the fire means to place a barrier between oneself and the fire of hell; for the fire of hell is one of the manifestations of God’s Attributes of

Majesty. And so the expression 'fear God' is equivalent to 'fear the Fire.' When the True Lord *the Most High* says here simply 'feared,' He used the word in its most general sense, and dropped the object of the verb in order to indicate this open meaning. God *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that if the sorcerers had believed that the learning of sorcery was nothing but a temptation which lead to unbelief, and had been conscious of God and feared His punishment in the Hereafter, it would have been better for them; and so He *the Glorious and Exalted* says, '...the reward from God would have been far better....'

When you hear the word 'good,' the word 'evil' also comes to your mind because good is the opposite of evil. But in Arabic, sometimes the word *khair* ('good') is not the direct opposite of the word 'evil,' but rather, it is the opposite of 'worse.' This is because the word '*khair*' is the only word in the Arabic language in which the noun/adjective form is the same as the comparative/superlative form. You say, 'This is better (*fadil*), and this is worse (*mafduul*),' whereas the word '*khair*' is both a noun and a superlative, so you say 'this is better (*khair*) than that,' that is, one of them gives you more than the other does. If no opposing word is mentioned in contrast to the word 'good', i.e. you do not say 'better than', this means that its opposite is 'bad/evil'. If you say 'So-and-so is better than so-and-so,' this means that they are both good, but one is better than the other. Goodness is what brings you benefit, but the definition of 'benefit' differs from one person to another. One person looks for the immediate, whilst others wait for the deferred benefit, whilst it appears that both of them desire what is good.

In order to illustrate this better, suppose there are two brothers, one of whom wakes up early to go to school, whilst the other sleeps until midmorning, and then goes out to sit in the café. The first loves what is good for him, as does the second; the difference lies in their definitions of what is good for them. The lazy person loves the immediate good, and so he gives himself all the sleep, comfort, and indolence he desires, whilst the hard-worker loves the deferred good for himself, and so he toils and strives all through his school year so that he can be comfortable after that, and gain for himself a notable future.

The farmer who goes out to his field to plant early in the morning, and irrigates his field and plants his seeds and toils, receives at the end of the year

a large harvest and abundant goodness. The farmer who sits in the café all day, however, gives himself the goodness of relaxation, but when the harvest time comes he reaps nothing but regret.

So everyone loves what is good, but their points of view about it differ. Some of them want to enjoy sleep; others want to work for the enjoyment of tomorrow. When God *the Glorious and Exalted* commands us to do what is good, this good might be uncomfortable for the body and the soul, but the end result is the eternal delights of paradise. So, true goodness is that which the Sacred Law teaches. Why? That is because goodness is that which nothing bad comes after it. You are born, then you grow up, go to university, get a good job and you die, then you are resurrected, then you enter paradise, and after that, there is nothing but an eternal life of bliss.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...if they only knew.’ Here, God denies that they have knowledge, whilst in the previous verse He has affirmed that they had knowledge: ‘...But they certainly knew that whoever purchased the sorcery would not have in the Hereafter any share....’ We say that if a person’s way of life does not go by what he knows, it is as though he knows nothing. This is because this knowledge will be a plea against its possessor on the Day of Resurrection, and it will be better if he did not know it at all. A poet said:

They were provided for, but not generosity,

It is as though they were provided for, and yet not provided for;

They were created, but not created for nobility:

It is as though they were created, and yet not created.

So, it is as though knowledge is not truly yours if you do not benefit from it; and God *the Most High* says that most people do not have knowledge (*ar-Rum*: 6). Then God *the Most High* makes this fine distinction saying that they know only the outer surface of this world’s life (*ar-Rum*: 7). And so God denies that they have true knowledge, and affirms that they possess only superficial worldly knowledge. He *the Exalted* also gives the parable of those who were given the burden of the Torah, and thereafter failed to bear this burden; their likeness is

that of an ass that carries a load of books [but cannot benefit from them]. Wretched is the parable of people who refuse God's messages – for God does not bestow His guidance upon such evildoing folk (*al-Jumu'a*: 5).

That is, they bore the knowledge of the Torah, but did not bear it by following its guidance and acting in accordance with it. These sorcerers knew that those who practised sorcery were guilty of unbelief, but they did not act in accordance with what they knew.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَقُولُوا رَاعِنَا وَقُولُوا انظُرْنَا  
وَأَسْمِعُوا وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

**Believers, do not say [to the Prophet], 'Ra'ina,' but say, 'Unzhurna,' and listen [to him]: an agonizing torment awaits those who ignore [God's words] [104] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 104)**

This is a call to the believers because the noble verse begins with the words 'O you who believe....' When the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* calls the believers by saying 'O you who believe,' we know that here faith is the reason for religious responsibility. God does not issue commands to disbelievers and non-believers, but He only issues commands to those who believe in Him. When the servant attains to faith, he becomes responsible to his Lord for his actions in life, and so the guidance for his life is revealed to him. As for the disbeliever, God does not command him to do anything.

God's call 'O you who believe...' is addressed to those who believe in God and accept Him as their Lord and Lawgiver. God *the Most High* says, 'O you who believe,' calling the believers, and then He says, '...do not say [to the Prophet], 'Ra'ina' (Look at us)...' which is a prohibition. It seems that 'Ra'ina' was a double-meaning word that the Jews used to say in addressing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, which God wished to forbid the believers from saying; and their faith compelled them to heed God's prohibition.

What does 'ra'ina' mean? In our own Egyptian dialect, we say 'ra'ina,' meaning 'look after us, and watch us, and take us by the hand,' and all these words are derived from the root word 'ri'aya' ('care'), and from the word *ra'i*

(‘shepherd’). The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Each of you is a *ra’i* (shepherd/carer) and each of you is responsible for his *ra’iyya* (flock/subjects/people under one’s care).’<sup>(1)</sup>

The origin of the word is derived from the shepherd who looks after sheep because the shepherd must take them to the places where there is grass and water, that is, the places of grazing; and he must guard them so that none of them stray or wander off for the desert wolves to eat; and he must keep them comfortable so that they do not become exhausted or perish in the road. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘I used to tend sheep for a small amount of money for the people of Mecca.’<sup>(2)</sup>

But why did the True Lord *the Most High* command the believers to say, ‘*Unzhurna*’ (‘Regard us’), rather than ‘*Ra’ina*’ (‘Look at us’)? The Jews had in Hebrew and Aramaic the word ‘*ra’ina*’, which meant ‘recklessness.’ And so when they heard the companions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* say ‘*ra’ina*’, they took it as a way to insult the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* without the Muslims realising it. So God *the Most High* commanded the believers to stop using this word so that the Jews would not have a pretext to conceal their insults, and commanded them to say ‘*Unzhurna*’ (‘Regard us’) instead.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...and listen [to him].’ Here, God alludes to the difference between the Jews and the believers. The Jews said ‘We hear and we disobey,’ whilst God tells the believers to listen with a mind to obeying and acting.

Sa’d ibn Mu’adh God *be pleased with him* heard one of the Jews say to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘*ra’ina*’ and Sa’d had been one of the Jewish rabbis and he knew their language, and so when he heard what the Jew said, he knew exactly what he meant. So he approached the Jew and said, ‘If I hear you say that again, I shall strike your neck.’ The Jew replied, ‘Do you not too say it to your Prophet? Is it unlawful for us and lawful for you?’ And so the noble verse was revealed, ‘...do not say [to the Prophet],

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, and At-Tirmidhi, on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar

(2) Narrated by Al-Bukhari

'*Ra'ina*' (Look at us); but say, '*Unzhurna*' (Regard us),...' If we reflect on the meaning of the word *ra'ina* and the word '*unzhurna*, we will find that they practically mean the same thing, but *unzhurna* gives this meaning without having the double entendre of a word in the language of the Jews, and which implies an insult to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. God *the Exalted* then says, '...and for the Infidels is a painful punishment.' That is, those who say *ra'ina* as a way to insult the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* will face a grievous suffering.

مَا يَوَدُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَلَا الْمُشْرِكِينَ  
 أَنْ يُنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَخْتَصُّ  
 بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿١٠٥﴾

**Neither those People of the Book who disbelieve nor the idolaters would like anything good to be sent down to you from your Lord, but God chooses for His grace whoever He will: His bounty has no limits [105] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 105)**

Then the True Lord *the Most High* reveals to the believers the enmity felt towards them by the people of the Book, namely the Jews and the idolaters, those who disbelieved because they refused to have faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He tells them that the Jews and idolaters hate that any good should come to the believers, so the believers should doubt everything that they say and do, and should know that they do not want anything good for them. God *the Most High* says: 'Neither... wish...' i.e. they do not love, for wishing means the inclination of the heart towards that which it loves. To have affection for someone is different from doing a kindness for them. You might be kind to those whom you love and those whom you do not love, but you only truly have affection for those whom you love. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says that you will not find people who believe in God and the Last Day having affection for those who oppose God and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred (*al-Mujadala*: 22). And in another verse, the True Lord *the Most High* instructs believers about their parents that even if the parents endeavour to make their

son associate with God that of which he has no knowledge, he should do not obey them but should accompany them in this world with appropriate kindness (*Luqman*: 15).

Some orientalist say that there is a contradiction between these two verses: How could God say ‘Do not love those who declare war on God and His Messenger’ and then say that if your parents try to make you associate partners with God, you should be kind to them in this life? Of course, any parents who try to force their child to associate partners with God, thereby declare war on God and His Messenger; so why is there such an assumed contradiction? We say to them: You have not understood the true meaning. A person can be kind to those he loves and those he does not love, as we said. You might find a person in dire straits and so give him some money to help him, without there being any connection at all between you and him. As for actually having affection for someone, this can only be with those whom you love.

So, the expression ‘Neither ... wish’ refers to the affection of the heart; that is, the hearts of the Jews and idolaters do not love that you should have any good. They hate it when your Lord sends goodness down to you; in fact, they do not want anything which could be called ‘good’ to be sent down to you from your Lord. The term ‘Good’ here refers to Revelation from God, and His teachings, and the Prophethood of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

God *the Glorified* says ‘any good,’ which means anything which could be described as ‘good.’ When you go to someone and ask him for money, he says, ‘I have no money,’ that is, I possess no money. But he might actually have just one or two pounds, but this is not considered ‘money’ since it cannot meet the need you have. You go to another man with the same request, asking him for money, and he says, ‘I do not have any money.’ This means he does not have even a single penny, and he does not have any amount of money, even the smallest amount. God *the Most High* wants us to understand that the people of the Book and the disbelievers and the idolaters all share their hatred of the believers, to the extent that they would not like to see anything at all which could be called ‘good’ being sent to them from their Lord.

God’s words ‘from your Lord’ indicate the source from which goodness comes. It is as though they do not like to see any kind of good come to the

believers from God, meaning here God's teachings and the Message. Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...but God selects for His mercy whom He wills....' That is, goodness does not yield to the desires and wishes of the disbelievers, and God sends goodness to whomever He wills. God has divided amongst people the matters of their worldly lives; and so how can the disbelievers seek that God should allow His teachings to yield to their desires? God *the Most High* Speaks the disbelievers' protest that the Quran should have been sent down to some great man from the two towns (Mecca and Medina). Then He *the Exalted* reprimands them for their arrogance putting forth the rhetorical question whether they are the distributors of the Lord's Mercy; it is God that distributes their livelihood among them in this worldly life, and He raises some of them by grades above others that one of them may take others to serve him – but better is the Mercy of the Lord than all they may amass (*az-Zukhruf*: 31-32).

The disbelievers objected to the Quran being revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and said that the Quran should have been sent down to some great man from the two towns. And God *the Most High* answered them: It is not for you to distribute God's grace, but rather, God distributes your means of livelihood among you in the life of this world.

In the verse we are currently examining, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...but God selects for His mercy whom He wills....' When you read the term 'selects,' you understand that something is being specially marked out for something, that is, I have singled someone out for this thing. Moreover, the expression '...but God selects for His mercy whom He wills...' means that He gives grace to whom He wills so that they can fulfil their purpose, or He sends down His grace to whom He wills. So these disbelievers do not have the right to interfere with God's will, and their hatred and jealousy of the believers does not give them the right to control God's grace. And so God wanted to respond to them by affirming that this religion would spread, and the believers in it would increase, and that God would cause it to enter many lands and nations, and that the people would embrace it in droves, and it would be ascendant over all religion.

If we consider the means by which any contender defeats their rivals, we find that they do so either by open, obvious means, or by cunning and deception,



by one side acting as though he is friendly to the other, whilst secretly plotting against him until he has the chance to vanquish him. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated to Medina secretly. Why? He did so because God wanted to say to Quraysh: You cannot get to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* even with all your trickery and plotting. They planned to send young men to kill him, each clan sending one man so that his blood would be on all the clans. But He *peace and blessings be upon him* came out and threw dust onto the heads of the men. God wanted them to know that they would never be able to get to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, neither by plotting and scheming nor by an open assault.

God *the Glorified* says, ‘...and God is the possessor of great bounty.’ Bounty (*fadl*) means that which is extraneous to your basic needs, and we find this meaning in the instruction of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to his companions during a journey: ‘Whosoever has a spare mount, let him lend it to one who has no mount at all; and whosoever has more than enough provisions (for his journey), let him give them to one who has no provisions at all.’<sup>(1)</sup>

Spare (*fadl*) money means that money which is additional to what is needed; this is the meaning of ‘bounty’ with respect to human beings. As for God *the Most High*, everything that exists in God’s creation now and in the Hereafter is bounty in God’s sight because it is extraneous to Him. God *the Glorified* has no need for His creation, nor for all of the blessings which have come from Him, nor those which are yet to come. And so He says, ‘...and God is the possessor of great bounty,’ that is, He is possessed of bounty over and above His needs. It may be that I have some bounty, but still I look after it because I may need it in the future. True bounty; however, is that which comes from God, for God *the Most High* is limitless in His great bounty because He has no need for any of His creatures or His creation. This is because God *the Most High* existed before there was anything, and He will still exist after there is nothing; and this can truly be called limitless bounty.

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(1) Narrated by Muslim in *Al-Luqata*, by Abu Dawud in *Az-Zakat*, and by Ahmad in *Al-Musnad*

مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْهَا أَوْ  
 مِثْلَهَا أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾

**Any revelation We cause to be superseded or forgotten, We replace with something better or similar. Do you [Prophet] not know that God has power over everything? [106] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 106)**

But what was the reason behind this? The reason was that the people of the Book and the idolaters did not want any good to come to the believers in the matter of their religion because they felt that what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought in his time was greater than that which Moses *peace be upon him* had brought and which had then remained until the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and greater than that which Jesus *peace be upon him* had brought in the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This does not mean that we are trying to detract from what the previous messengers brought, but rather, we are emphasising that the previous messengers brought to their own times the best thing that could possibly be at those times. Every Divine Message that came before the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came to a specific people at a specific time, and then a new prophet came after to abrogate what was in the previous Message for another people at another time. The Noble Quran tells us that when Jesus *peace be upon him* was sent to the Israelites, he told them that he had come to confirm the law that was before him, and to allow them some of the things that were forbidden them, and that he had come to them with a sign from their Lord – they should then fear God and obey him (*Al- 'Imran*: 50).

So, it seems that Jesus *peace be upon him* came to abrogate some of the rulings of the Torah, and make lawful to the Israelites some of the things which God had previously forbidden them. And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, as the Seal Messenger, was given all goodness, since his religion was for all the worlds, and would last until the Day of Resurrection.

And so we see that whenever a new messenger came, those who believed in the messengers would move from one good thing to another, and in those things which the messages agreed upon, they would move to an identical

good. This applies to the sphere of doctrine; and they were given a greater good as far as the teachings of how to live are concerned. There are matters which are shared by all the Divine Messages, wherein there is no difference between one messenger and the other, namely the matter of faith in One Unified God possessed of absolute perfection, extolled in His Self, in His Attributes, and in His Actions. In these matters, all the Divine Messages are identical. But as life develops, things are found in it which were not found or encountered in the past. If we have said that the doctrinal principles of a Divine Message remain unchanged, no message could deal with all the issues of life which would come after it- all except for Islam, because it came as the final religion which cannot be changed or replaced until the Day of Resurrection. Yet we find some people who would cast doubt on God's statement to the believers that He has prescribed to them the faith which He had enjoined upon Noah, and which He has revealed to Muhammad, and which He had enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus: Observe this faith, and be not divided into sects in it. Hard for the idolaters is what you call them to. God draws nearer to Himself everyone who is willing, and guides to Himself everyone who turns to Him (*ash-Shura*: 13).

We say that this refers to one thing alone; it refers to the thing which is consistent in all the Divine Messages, the very peak of doctrinal matters that is monotheism- the belief in One God. As for the matters of worldly life, we find that the laws pertaining to this sphere differ according to circumstances, and so when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came, he was given things which dealt with matters that did not exist at the time of the previous messengers.

God *the Glorified* says, 'Whatever verse we cancel, or cause to be forgotten;...' the word 'abrogate/cancel' (*naskh*) means that a verse which existed, is removed and replaced with a new verse, and the same verb in Arabic (*naskh*) can be used to describe how sunlight removes a shadow. That is, the shadow existed, and then the sun came and removed it and took its place. The word can also be used to mean 'copy,' as in copying a book to make several copies of it, or to describe how old age replaces youth when a person grows old.

As for the word '...cause to be forgotten...' (*nunsiha*), it has several meanings. It might mean that God makes mankind forget it so that it disappears from his

memory, or he leaves it for something else. The scholars differ about this matter, and this difference arose because one of them would make an observation, and another would make a different observation, whilst they would both have the truth in mind.

So now we come to the matter of cancellation/abrogation in the Noble Quran. There are some who say that there is no abrogation in the Quran at all. Why? This is because abrogation would mean that God *the Most High* was using 'trial and error' and that God would change His mind. What is trial and error? It is that we make a law, and then the implementation of this law shows that the law does not address the problem properly, and so we change the law; and such a thing is impossible to believe regarding God *the Most High*. To those who hold this opinion, we say: Of course this understanding is to be rejected, and it is impossible that it could apply to God *the Most High*; but we say that abrogation is not 'trial and error,' but rather, it is the removal of one law and replacing it with another; and we say to them that when God established the law the first time, He *the Exalted* knew that this law would have a limited time before it would end and be replaced with another law; but the circumstances required that things be dealt with in a gradual manner. This does not mean that God *the Most High* makes a law and then different circumstances show that this law is inadequate, and so God abandons it; this is incorrect.

Why? It is because when God *the Most High* decreed the law at first, He knew that the law had a limited time within which it would be applied, after which it would be annulled or replaced with another law. So the Lawgiver Who made this law, did so on the basis that it would end and be replaced with another law.

This is not like the case with human beings. Man-made laws and rules are subject to change because the reality of their application shows their inadequacy for solving the problems for which they were made. When men make these laws, they are aware of some things and ignorant of others, and so reality comes and highlights those things they were unaware of, and so the law has to be annulled or amended. But the case with the laws of God *the Most High* is not like this; God makes the law temporary when He establishes it to begin with.

For example, when the believers used to face Jerusalem as their direction (qibla) in prayer, did God think that the direction of prayer would remain

towards Jerusalem as long as Islam existed, until the Day of Resurrection? And then, did it suddenly occur to Him *the Exalted* to bid the Muslims to turn and face the *Ka'ba*? No, this was not how it was. Rather, it was God's decree that the Muslims would at first face Jerusalem for a time, and then turn to face the *Ka'ba* until the end of time.

So the Lawgiver was not forced by the situation to change the prayer direction from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba*, but rather, it was in His knowledge from the beginning and His decree, that He would change the prayer direction to the *Ka'ba* after a time. The purpose of this may have been to teach the faithful that the reason for obeying a command is simply that it is from God; to face Jerusalem or face the *Ka'ba* does not require the believers to make any additional effort of faith, nor does it place any extra responsibilities upon them; the effort required to face the east is the same as the effort required to face the west. Yet the test of faith is that the only reason needed to obey the command is that it is from God; if God tells us to face Jerusalem, we face it, and if He tells us to face the *Ka'ba*, we face it. Nothing is sacred in itself, but rather, it is sacred because God makes it that way.

When God *the Glorified* commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam *peace be upon him*, they did not prostrate because of Adam himself, but rather, they prostrated because God *the Most High* commanded to them to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*. God *the Glorified* chose the noble *Ka'ba* as a house and mosque for Him on earth, and the *Ka'ba* took its exalted place for the Muslims not because it was a site in a place where Abraham *peace be upon him* and the Prophets had been, and where the people made pilgrimage, but rather, its stature comes from the fact that it is God's House by God's own choice. All of the mosques of earth are God's houses by the choice of God's creatures, but the only mosque which is God's House by God's own choice is the *Ka'ba*. And so it was necessary that all the mosques which were chosen by God's creatures should turn to face the one mosque which God chose for Himself. But the greatest justification in faith is that we believe that the very fact that a command is issued from God is sufficient reason for us to obey it without searching for worldly justifications.

If God *the Most High* tells us, for example, to pray five times a day, we do it without searching for the reason for this, or saying 'Why five times? Or saying

‘Let us have less.’ Without doing all this, we pray five times a day; and the reason is that God has told us to. The same is true of alms, and fasting, and pilgrimage. They are all done in obedience to God. Likewise, the prayer direction was changed as a test of faithful obedience to God. God is present everywhere, so, no one needs to come along and say, ‘Why the *Ka’ba*? Is God only present in the *Ka’ba*?’ We say no; He is present everywhere, but He has commanded us to face the *Ka’ba*. We do not face it because we believe that God *the Most High* is present in that place alone, but rather, we do so as an act of obedience to the command of God that our direction in prayer be the *Ka’ba* .

Perhaps the change of the prayer direction explains to us the notion of the abrogation of certain verses. Why? That is because there were no circumstances, or new events, or the appearance of anything that had been unknown, which might have made facing Jerusalem difficult, or problematic, or anything else; rather, the change of prayer direction came here because God *the Most High* willed that the Muslims face Jerusalem for a time, and then turn to face the *Ka’ba* thenceforth and till the end of time.

So, in the case of every verse which was abrogated, God *the Exalted* knew that it would be applied for a period of time, and then would be replaced. Everything like the ruling which would be abrogated, the length of time it would be applied, and the ruling which would replace it, were known to God *the Most High* and decreed by Him from pre-eternity, before the universe was created. Moreover, God wanted to alert us, by having us face Jerusalem at first, to the fact that Islam (surrendering to God) is a religion which encompasses every religion, and that Jerusalem would become one of the holy cities of Islam, and that no one could claim that the Muslims had nothing to do with Jerusalem, which is why God *the Most High* took His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca to Jerusalem in order to affirm that Jerusalem is sacred in Islam, and is one of God’s holy places. So the Muslims prayed facing Jerusalem first, but later God replaced it with Muslims facing the *Ka’ba* while praying. The True Lord *the Glorified* says, ‘Whatever verse we cancel, or cause to be forgotten, We bring forth one better than it or similar to it....’ That is, abrogation is either for God *the Most High* to bring something better than this verse, or to bring a similar one. But the question arises: Was there something

better than the first verse, yet God did not reveal it? We say no; the meaning is that the annulled verse was better for the time in which it existed, whilst the second ruling was better for the subsequent times. They were both good for their own times and in their own associated rulings. God *the Most High* commands the believers to fear Him as He should be feared and not to die except as Muslims – having surrendered themselves to Him (*Al-‘Imran*: 102).

But who can fear God with all the consciousness that is due to Him? This was difficult for the believers, and so when this verse was revealed they said, ‘None of us can fear God with all the consciousness that is due to Him!’ and so the verse was revealed enjoining on the believers to fear God as best they can, and listen and obey, and spend in charity for the good of themselves; for those who are saved from their greed shall be successful (*at-Taghabun*: 16).

Is the one who fears God with all the consciousness that is due to Him better or the one who fears God as best he can? Of course God’s due is far above the limits of one’s ability, yet God *the Most High* said, ‘...We bring forth one better than it....’ We say that you have not understood God *the Glorified* correctly. Regarding the two states of Fearing God as He should be feared (*Al-‘Imran*: 102), and fearing God as best one can (*at-Taghabun*: 16) we can ask: Which of the two states is better? We say that the significance is in the outcome. If you want to value something, you must first look at what its result is.

In order to illustrate this better, we give this example (and God is beyond compare): Suppose there is a merchant who sells his wares for a fifty percent profit, and then another merchant comes along and sells the same goods for a profit of only fifteen percent. What will happen? Naturally, people will go to the one who sells his goods for the lower profit and buy everything they need from him. The one who sells his good with a profit of fifty percent, will get more profit from what he sells, but the one who sells his goods for a profit of fifteen percent will get less profit from each item, but will sell much more wares, and so in the end, he will make a bigger profit.

Those who apply the noble verse enjoining fear of God as He should be feared (*Al -‘Imran*: 102) will gain a greater good from their works, but they will not be able to keep up this practice always. So the good gained here is

greater in individual acts, but the works that will be done in accordance with the verse, will be fewer.

As for the verse enjoining fear of God to the extent of one's ability (*at-Taghabun*: 16), the fear specified here is within one's ability, and so the acceptable works will be plentiful, even if the reward for individual acts will be less.

When we consider the overall outcome, we find works to which the reward is greater individually although they are very few, and works to which the reward is individually lesser although they are abundant. Which of them is better? Of course the abundant works of lesser reward when taken collectively, they will outweigh the scant works of greater reward.

So, this verse was indeed abrogated by something better, although on the surface, this does not seem to be the case because to fear God with all the consciousness that is due to Him, is better than to fear God only as much as you can. But in the overall outcome, the greater good lies in the verse which specifies individual ability.

Now we come to God's words: '...or similar to it....' Here, some of the scholars have a problem; it might be understandable that God would replace a verse with one which is better than it, but what is the wisdom behind His replacing it with one which is equal to it? If the verse abrogated is equal to the one which replaces it, why is it abrogated?

We say that if we want to give an example of this, it is the example of the changing of the prayer direction. When God *the Most High* commanded the Muslims to face the *Ka'ba* instead of Jerusalem, He abrogated a verse with its equal because facing the *Ka'ba* did not make any additional demands on the believer, or increase his responsibility. One can face right, left, forwards or backwards, and the effort is the same for each, and as we said, God *the Most High* is present everywhere. Here emerges the obedience of faith which we discussed before, saying that there are some things we do simply because God told us to. This is the case with all acts of worship because worship is for the worshipper to obey the commands of the worshipped. God *the Most High* wants us to worship Him out of love and free choice, and that when He says 'Do this,' we do it, and when He says 'Do not do this,' we refrain from it, solely because



we freely choose to make our free will in life subject to God's will. And so the replacing of a message with a similar message is not without wisdom, but rather is based on a sublime wisdom.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...or cause to be forgotten....' What does 'cause to be forgotten' mean? Some scholars say that cancellation and causing to be forgotten are the same thing; but when God ordained the first law, it was part of His Will and His knowledge to subsequently replace it with a different law after a time. When the first law came, the second law was kept in His Will until the time came for it to be revealed.

So when the first law came, the final law was deferred, yet it existed in God's knowledge, waiting for the time when the first law's term came to an end: 'Whatever verse we cancel;...' this is the abrogated message, or the one which will soon cease to be applied; '...or cause to be forgotten;...' that is, which God does not pass on to the Messenger and the believers by revelation, although it exists in His knowledge. We must be aware that abrogation does not occur in two things:

Firstly, matters of doctrine: No verse can abrogate any other verse where matters of doctrine are concerned. Doctrine is constant and unchanged from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Resurrection. God *the Most High* is One and Unique, unchanging and unalterable; the Unseen exists, and the Hereafter is coming, and the angels go about their tasks. Everything connected with matters of doctrine can never be abrogated.

Secondly, the narrations given to us by God *the Most High*: When He gives us a verse including a narrative, it can never be abrogated by another verse since a narrative is a relation of an actual event. What the True Lord *the Most High* tells us about what has taken place cannot be abrogated because it is a true relation from God. And so the story of the Elephant could not be related to us and then abrogated later and told to us with different details because it was a relation of a true event.

So there is no abrogation in matters of doctrine or narrations from God, but rather abrogation is a matter related to the Sacred Law, such as the words of the True Lord *the Most High* in commanding His Prophet to urge the

believers to battle. If there are among them twenty who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among them one hundred who are steadfast, they will overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve because they are a people who do not understand (*al-Anfal*: 65).

When this verse was revealed, it seemed to mean that the standard was that a single believer could fight ten disbelievers in battle and defeat them all; but this was very difficult for the believers to manage, and so God *the Glorified* abrogated it to bring down the standard to the limits of our human abilities, and so the noble verse was revealed stating that God has lightened the hardship for the believers, and He knows that in them is weakness. So if there are from them one hundred who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among them a thousand, they will overcome two thousand by permission of God. And God is with the steadfast. (*al-Anfal*: 66).

The True Lord *the Most High* knew that there was weakness within the believers, and that some of them would not be able to fight ten men and defeat them, and so He changed it to a more manageable good, wherein one believer would be able to meet two disbelievers in battle and defeat them. This matter has nothing to do with doctrine, or historical narration.

Also, in the early stages of the revelation of the Quran, the law was that if a woman committed adultery and there were four witnesses to the fact, she was to be confined in her house and not allowed to leave until she died, we can, gather from God's ruling that those who commit unlawful sexual intercourse of your women - bring against them four witnesses from among you. And if they testify, confine the guilty women to houses until death takes them or God ordains for them another way (*an-Nisa*': 15).

After Islam had spread, and the souls of people were filled with faith, a new law was revealed, namely stoning or lashing. When the first law was revealed to confine them to their houses, the second law existed in God's knowledge. This is what we understand from God's words '...or God ordains for them another way.' God *the Exalted* also commands the believers to forgive and forbear, until God shall make manifest His will (*al-Baqara*: 109).

God's words 'until God shall make manifest His will' gives us a hint that there was a ruling or a commandment in God's knowledge which would one day come to replace this ruling. And so when God gave to us the first ruling, He also gave us an inkling that this ruling was not final, and that a new ruling would come, once people's souls had become adjusted to God's Will in the first ruling. Part of God's grandeur is that His Will decreed that inheritance should be given to parents who have reached great old age, as He *the Exalted* says that it is ordained for the believers, when death approaches any of them and he is leaving behind much wealth, to make bequests in favour of his parents and others near of kin in accordance with what is fair: this is binding on all who fear God (*al-Baqara*: 180).

So, at first, He made it a bequest, and not an inheritance; why? Because at the time of death, a person is the closest link to his father; as for his children, they are another link. Once these rulings had settled in people's souls, and they had accepted and implemented what God had commanded, He *the Exalted* made it an obligation so that the ruling was brought to its complete fruition. He *the Exalted* enjoins on the believers that concerning the inheritance of their children, God enjoins upon them: The male shall have the equal of two females' shares; but if there are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what their parents leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one-half thereof. And as for the parents of the deceased, each of them shall have one-sixth of what he leaves behind, in the event of his having left a child; but if he has left no child and his parents are his only heirs, then his mother shall have one-third; and if he has brothers and sisters, then his mother shall have one-sixth after the deduction of any bequest he may have made, or any debt he may have incurred. As for their parents and their children – they do not know which of them is more deserving of benefit from them: hence this ordinance from God. Surely, God is All-Knowing, Wise (*an-Nisa*': 11). And so after the portion left to one's parents had been a voluntary bequest, which he could either give or not, it became obligatory.

God *the Most High* then says, '...Do you not know that God has power over all things?' That is, everything is within His Will and Power. We said that if God decrees a law for a particular time, this is the absolute best thing

because once the first law has served the purpose for which it was ordained in its time, the new law which replaces it will also be the absolute best thing; for God has the power to do anything, and He gives every time that is best for those who live during it. And so it is out of God's grandeur that He did not simply make this statement as a pronouncement from Himself, but rather, He involved the addressee too: He *the Exalted* did not say 'Indeed, God has the power over everything;' but rather, He said, '...Do you not know that God has power over all things?' because He was sure that anyone who heard it, would say 'Indeed yes.' This is what is called a 'rhetorical question.'

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا  
لَكُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿١٠٧﴾

**Do you not know that control of the heavens and the earth belongs to Him? You [believers] have no protector or helper but God [107] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 107)**

After telling us that there are verses of the Quran which have been cancelled, God *the Most High* wants to tell us that He has the power to do whatever He wills with His creation, and so He begins the noble verse with the words 'Do you not know....' This expression is called a 'rhetorical question' because the one addressed will only find one answer, which is to confirm what God *the Most High* is saying, to which he says, 'Yes, Lord, You are the True Lord, and Your word is the truth.'

God *the Glorified* says, 'Do you not know that to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth....' Dominion requires a dominator and a dominated, and it requires the ability to retain this dominion and prevent its loss. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to show us that He has power, and He possesses this power exclusively; mankind has no power to dominate, nor the power to retain that which he possesses, and mankind has not the power to act in this universe: If he wants to build a building, for example, he might not find the land to build it on, and if he finds the land, he might not find the workers to build for him, and if he finds them, he might not find the materials to build with, and if he finds all this, the government or the state might prevent

him from building on this land, or the land might belong to someone else so that events conspire to prevent the building from going ahead.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Do you not know that to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth...’ that is, everything in existence is in God’s possession, and He has the power to do as He chooses with what He possesses. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated to Medina, the Jews possessed wealth and had some worldly knowledge, and so they controlled Medina, and they began to plot against the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. And so God *the Most High* reassured His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that power in the universe belongs to God Alone, and that although they had some dominion, it would never last because God takes dominion from whom He wills and gives it to whom He wills. And so when the Day of Resurrection comes, and God destroys the earth and everything upon it, He *the Exalted* will put forth the rhetorical question: With whom does sovereignty rest on this Day? (*Ghafir*: 16).

And He *the Exalted* will provide the answer Himself, a testimony of the Self to the Self, that Sovereignty rests with God, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists (*Ghafir*: 16).

As long as God Alone has dominion, He is well able to remove from the Jews and from anyone else in the world that which they had dominion over. The following story illustrates God’s Absolute power over things. Scholars tell us that the night guards in a certain city once found a man walking one night, and when they approached him, he fled, and so they ran after him until he came to a place filled with ruins where he could hide. The guards went forward and caught him; and then they found a dead body lying in the same place. ‘You are the murderer,’ they said to him, ‘for you ran away when you saw us, and now you are here in the same place as the corpse.’ So they took him away to charge him for the crime, and he said to them, ‘Let me first perform prayer to God.’ So they let him, and he prayed and then raised his hands to the sky and said, ‘O God, You know that there is no one to attest to my innocence save You, and You commanded us not to conceal our testimony; so I ask the same of You.’ So whilst this was going on, a man approached them and said, ‘I am the one who killed that man, and I wish to confess my crime.’ The people were amazed, and said, ‘Why do you confess your crime

when no one saw you and no one accused you?' He replied, 'By God, I did not confess; rather, a voice came and moved my lips and made me say what I said.' When the murderer confessed what he did, the next of kin of the deceased, his father, stood up and said, 'O God, I call You to bear witness that I forgive my son's killer, his debt and his penalty.'

Look at the extent of the power of the True Lord *the Most High*. The murderer wanted to hide, but look at the precision of the innocently accused man's petition; he performed prayer because the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that if a grave matter afflicts us, we should resort to prayer, for there is no door open to us save this one. After praying, he beseeched God, 'O God, You commanded us not to conceal our testimony, and there is no one to attest to my innocent save You, and so I ask You to do the same for me.' And then events unfolded as we have narrated.

This story shows us that we are all in the palm of God's hand, whether we want this or not, and whether by material means or without them. Why? Because God has dominion over the heavens and the earth, and He has the power to will anything. God *the Most High* then says, '...and that you do not have besides God any protector or any helper?' A protector is the one who watches over you and loves you, and the one who gives help, is the one who has the power to give you victory. The one who helps, might not necessarily be one who protects, but the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'I am for you all a protector and a means of help,' i.e. 'I love you, and I will give you victory over those who show you enmity.'

أَمْ تُرِيدُونَ أَنْ تَسْأَلُوا رَسُولَكُمْ كَمَا سُئِلَ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ  
وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعِ الْكُفْرَ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ ﴿١٠٨﴾

**Do you wish to demand of your messenger something similar to what was demanded of Moses? Whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has strayed far from the right path [108] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 108)**

After telling the believers that He is their protector and source of help, the True Lord *the Glorified* discusses the matter of how the people of the Book, specifically the Jews, behaved towards their messengers so that they could

avoid behaving in the same faulty way. He *the Exalted* puts forth to the believers the question: ‘Or do you intend to ask your Messenger as Moses was asked before?...’ The True Lord *the Most High* says to the believers, ‘Would you ask the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* what the Jews asked of Moses *peace be upon him*?’ The True Lord *the Most High* did not want to compare the believers to the Jews, and so He said, ‘...as Moses was asked before,...’ when He might have said, ‘Or do you intend to ask your Messenger what the Jews asked of Moses before?...’ But God did not want to liken the Jews to those who believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and this was an honour from God to the believers in that He saved them from being likened to the Jews. The Noble Quran addresses the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* telling him that the People of the Book will ask him to bring down to them a book from the heaven. But they had asked of Moses even greater than that and said, ‘Show us God manifestly,’ so the thunderbolt struck them for their wrongdoing. Then they took the calf for worship after clear evidences had come to them, and God pardoned that. And He gave Moses a clear authority (*an-Nisa*: 153).

Also, the Noble Quran tells us that the People of the Book and the disbelievers said to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that they would not believe him until he breaks open for them from the ground a spring, or until he has a garden of palm trees and vines and makes rivers gush forth within them in force and abundance, or he makes the heaven fall upon them in fragments as he has claimed or he brings God and the angels before them, or he has a house of gold, or he ascends into the sky; and even then, they will not believe in his ascension until he brings down to them a book they may read. God commands His Messenger to answer them: ‘Exalted is my Lord! Was I ever but a human messenger?’ (*al-Isra*: 90-93).

God *the Most High* is warning the believers not to ask the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as the people of the Book and the disbelievers did, and telling them that the Jews asked Moses *peace be upon him* for more even than that. After they saw so many miracles, and God cleaved the sea into two parts for them so that they crossed it, and the miracle was not hidden from them, but rather was plain for them to see, a plain and self-evident proof of the existence of God *the Glorified* and of His awesome Power. Yet

despite this, the Jews said to Moses *peace be upon him*, 'We will not believe in you until we see God face to face.' That is, these miracles were not enough for them; it was as though because of their materialism, they wanted to see in their worldly lives that which no eye can encompass. As soon as they had crossed the sea, they wanted Moses *peace be upon him* to make an idol for them to worship, and they worshipped the calf despite all the signs they had witnessed.

God *the Most High* says, '...And whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has certainly strayed from the right path.' We have already mentioned that the Arabic particle *bi* (rendered here as 'for') which is used with the word 'faith' here always refers to the thing which is discarded in a transaction. If you say, 'I bought this item for (*bi*) so many *dirhams*,' this means that you discarded the *dirhams* and took the item. So here, it means that disbelief was accepted and belief was discarded, and so the Jews accepted disbelief and discarded faith when they asked Moses *peace be upon him* to make them see God manifestly (*an-Nisa'*: 153).

God *the Exalted* says, '...has certainly strayed from the right path.' What does it mean to stray? It means to follow a path which will not take you to your destination. 'The right path': the word *sawa'* ('right') means 'middle', so 'the right path' means 'the middle path.' The same word *sawa'* is used in another verse, meaning middle/midst, where God *the Most High* mentions that in the Hereafter a believer would ask for a companion of his, who was an infidel, and then he looks and sees him in the midst of the blazing fire (*as-Saffat*: 55).

That is, in the middle (*sawa'*) of hell, i.e. equally far from both sides. So the path which is (*sawa'*) is the middle of the road. Before the appearance of modern technology, the sides of a road or path would be rugged like earth was before it was flattened, so they would not be fit to walk on, and so walking in the middle of the path would keep you far from difficulties and problems. God wants those who believe in Him to walk on the smooth road, i.e. in the centre of the road, because it is safer for them there, and they will not wander right or left, but will rather follow the way of God and faith in Him; and the way of faith is always smooth, and never leads you to unbelief.



وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُم مِّنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِكُمْ  
كُفَّارًا حَسَدًا مِّنْ عِندِ أَنفُسِهِمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا نَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْحَقُّ فَاعْفُوا  
وَاصْفَحُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٩﴾

**Even after the truth has become clear to them, many of the People of the Book wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed, out of their selfish envy. Forgive and forbear until God gives his command: He has power over all things [109] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 109)**

This noble verse refers to some events which occurred after the battle of Uhud. At the battle, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed the archers not to leave their positions at the foot of the mountain irrespective of whether the Muslims were winning or losing; but when victory seemed imminent, the archers lusted after the battle-spoils, and so disobeyed the command of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and so God made them taste defeat; but the idolaters did not gain victory because victory means that you take the battle field and remain there.

After the battle, the idolaters set out to return to Mecca so that when the Muslims went out to meet them the next day, they found no one at all. The Jews of Medina took advantage of this incident, and when they met Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman, Tariq, and some others, they said to them, ‘If you are truly believers, why were you defeated? Return to our religion and abandon the religion of Muhammad!’ Hudhayfa replied, ‘What does your religion say about the breaking of treaties?’ By this, he was referring to what the Torah says about how the Jews broke their covenant with God and with Moses *peace be upon him*? He then said, ‘I will not break my covenant with Muhammad as long as I live.’ As for ‘Ammar, he said, ‘I believe in God as my Lord, and Muhammad as my Messenger, and the Book as my leader, and the *Ka’ba* as my prayer direction, and the believers as my brethren; and I will remain this way as long as I live.’

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* heard about what Hudhayfa and Tariq ibn Yasir had said, and he was pleased with this. Yet the Jews exploited what happened at Uhud to pour scorn on the faithful conviction in

the hearts of the Muslims, just as they had exploited the changing of the prayer direction from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba* to pour scorn on the faith in their hearts, saying, 'If it was wrong to face Jerusalem, why did you face it? And if it was right to do so, why did you stop?' And so God *the Glorified* revealed His words: 'Many of the people of the Book desire to bring you back to unbelief after you have believed....'

Look at the precision of the words used by the Quran: 'Many of the people of the Book....' This implies that only a part of them were trying to turn the believers away from their religion; yet there were a few among them who considered believing in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and if God *the Most High* had passed judgement on all the people of the Book as a whole, this would have closed the way for these few to believe. So the meaning is that there are from amongst the people of the Book, specifically the Jews, some who would like to make you abandon your religion, and these are the majority, for God *the Glorified* says, 'Many of the people of the Book....'

God *the Glorified* says, '...bring you back to unbelief after you have believed....' In what exactly is unbelief? It was unbelief in what they had believed in, or what their religion had required of them. And they are not doing this for any principle, or for the sake of a belief, or for your own good, but rather 'Out of selfish envy....' Their religion commanded them to do the opposite; it commanded them to believe in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. And so they are not doing what the Torah commanded them to do when they refuse to believe in Islam, and the thing that drives them try to make you apostate from your religion is selfish envy. Envy is to wish for a blessing to be taken away from someone you hate. God *the Glorified* says, 'Out of selfish envy....' That is, this came from their own selves because they envied the Muslims for the blessing of faith, and hoped for an end to this blessing which had made the Muslims into brothers, bonded together, whilst they themselves were split into factions and sects. There can be praiseworthy envy which is centred on competing on religious matters, and this is permissible, which is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'There can be no envy, except in two things: a man to whom God gives wealth, and so he is

empowered to spend it in the way of truth; and a man to whom God gives wisdom, and so he judges with it, and teaches it to people.’<sup>(1)</sup>

So, it is as though envy is forbidden except in these two instances. It seems that the Jews envied the Muslims their religion, and this envy was of their own making, and was not inspired by the Torah or any of their other scriptures. God *the Most High* says, ‘...even after the truth has become clear to them...’, i.e. even after the Torah had given them conviction about the character of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that he was the Seal of the Prophets.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...But forgive them, and overlook them until God delivers His command.’ What is forgiveness, and what is overlooking? The word for forgiveness (*‘afw*) comes from the verb that describes how the wind blows a track in the dust away and blots it out.

When someone walks on the sand, his feet leave prints, and then the wind comes and blows the prints away. So forgiveness is to wipe away from your soul the print left by any wrong done to you so that it is as though it never happened. To overlook (*safh*) means to fold the pages (*safahat*) upon which this matter is ‘written’ so that they leave your mind and do not occupy you. God *the Glorified* says, ‘...until God delivers His command...’ This situation concerning the Jews and what they are doing to the believers will not last because God *the Exalted* has set His will against them; but the time for this will to be made manifest has not yet come, but when it does, everything will change. And so God seems to be saying to the believers, ‘You shall not remain in this state, but rather, there will be a day when you shall hold them to account for their crimes, and this day is not far off.’ When God *the Most High* says ‘...until God delivers His command...’, this means that God’s command shall soon be delivered because this issue is related to the very essence of faith. It could not be the case that God *the Most High* says, ‘...until God delivers His command...’ and then this would not take place; but rather, God’s command must certainly be delivered, and He will give you victory

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(1) Narrated by *Al-Bukhari* in *Al-‘Ilm*, and by *Muslim* in *Qasr As-salat*, and by *Ibn Majah* in *Az-zakat*, and by *Ahmad* in *Al-Musnad*

over them. God *the Most High* then says, '...Truly God has power over all things.' God has absolute power over His dominion, and so if He says He will do something, it will definitely happen without any doubt. There is no power in this universe except the power of God *the Most High*, and there is no strength except His strength, and nothing happens except by His will.

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ  
تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١٠﴾

**Keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms.  
Whatever good you store up for yourselves, you will  
find it with God: He sees everything you do [110]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 110)**

After telling us that the highest aspiration of the people of the Book is to turn us back into disbelievers, and that this is a result of their selfish envy, God *the Most High* wanted to show us what it is that the people of the Book hate, and tell us that what frustrates them is the balance of justice and truth that we follow: the teachings of God *the Most High*. And so God commands the believers to be firm and cling to their faith, and to embrace their responsibilities, for this is the best response to disbelievers. Of the responsibilities that Islam brought, some only require a little time and effort, such as the testimony that there is no god but God and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Messenger, and paying the alms (poor-due), and fasting *Ramadan*, and making the pilgrimage for those who are able to do it.

The testimony that there is no god but God is required to be made only once in one's lifetime, and the poor-due and fasting *Ramadan* are required once a year, and the pilgrimage is required once in the lifetime of those who are able to do it. But there are other acts of worship which are repeated every day to give the believer a recharge of certainty and faith, and take him away from his worldly concerns with the declaration of 'God is Great!' five times a day. This is the act of worship from which a believer is never exempted, whether a person is healthy or ill. The believer can pray standing, or sitting, or reclining, or simply perform the motions of prayer in his heart. And so this

was the first act of worship mentioned in God's words: 'And perform prayer...' that is, respond to your Lord's call to you to pray. When the *mue'dhdhin* (caller to prayer) raises his voice and calls Allahu Akbar ('God is the Greatest'), this is a call for the people to come to God, to come forward at a specific time and stand before Him *the Exalted*, and be in His Presence as He gives you aiding strength; and this is why 'when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* faced a difficulty, he would perform prayer.'<sup>(1)</sup>

This means that the means were exhausted, and there was no way out of the problem except to turn to God. When this happens, one should perform *wudu'* (ablutions) and pray two *rak'as* (units) of supererogatory prayer, and then supplicate for his need, and God will give him deliverance. So 'And perform prayer...' is the appropriate response to all their attempts to take you away from your religion because this is the action that announces one's commitment to faith in God five times every day. We leave everything in the world and turn to God in prayer. It is the pillar and the foundation of the religion.

God *the Most High* then says, '...and give *zakat* (alms)....' Paying the poor-due is only obligatory if one has more than he needs. It is as though God *the Most High* wants us to work on earth so that we can earn enough to meet our needs and the needs of those we support, and more besides this. In this way, the Muslims were able to break out of the economic control of the Jews, by means of which they attempted to humiliate the Muslims.

When the believer pays the poor-due, this means that his work is sufficient to meet both his needs and the needs of others, and so even the poor person finds in the surplus wealth of the Muslims enough to suffice him so that he does not have to go to the Jews and take a usurious loan. And so God *the Most High* wants the Muslims to be a self-sufficient body so that their wealth is enough for all of them, rich and poor, and those of them who can work and those who cannot. And God *the Most High* increases the wealth of the Muslims by more than the amount they give out in the poor-due; this is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Charity does not

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad and Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfa God be pleased with him; one narration has the wording: 'If a difficulty faced him, he would seek refuge in prayer.'

diminish wealth; and no servant forgives, but that God increases his honour; and no one humbles himself before God, but that God raises him.'<sup>(1)</sup>

It is called *zakat* (from an Arabic word meaning 'growth') because although it appears to diminish one's wealth, it is actually a growth; usury, on the other hand, seems to be a profit, but really it is a loss. God *the Most High* says that He destroys usurious money and causes charity to grow (*al-Baqara*: 276).

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and whatever good you put forward for yourselves, you shall find it with God....' So the believer must be content because his life's work will be rewarded by God *the Most High*. If he prays he has a reward, and if he gives the poor-due, he has a reward, and if he gives supererogatory charity, he has a reward, and if he fasts, he has a reward, and if he makes the pilgrimage, he has a reward. Everything he does according to God's teachings brings him a reward, and not only a reward equal to the action, but rather many times greater than the action, as God *the Most High* likens the action of those who spend their possessions for the sake of God to a grain out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains: for God grants manifold increase to whom He wills; and God is infinite, All Knowing (*al-Baqara*: 261).

And so we see that every action done in accordance with God's teachings has not just one single reward from God *the Most High*, but rather is rewarded many times over. And it is not a reward commensurate with human power, but rather commensurate with the power of God *the Most High*, and so it is not only multiplied in quantity, but also in quality. So it is as though all non-believing people have no reward in the Hereafter, and when they are rewarded in this world it is only a reward equal to the work they did. The believer alone, however, is given the multiplied rewards of the Hereafter, which is a reward that does not end like the rewards of this worldly life, but rather lasts for all eternity.

The good you do is not stored up by you or by someone who might deny it and say, 'You never did me any good,' it is rather stored up by God. Look at the contentment that comes from knowing that the work will be kept in

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him

God's secure hand, and in His will from which nothing escapes, and in His power which multiplies it over and over; and you will get it back at the time when you are most in need of it: at the Reckoning.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...God sees what you do.' That is, do not think that there is anything which escapes God's notice, or that anyone can fool God; for God *the Most High* sees everything. He sees not only what you reveal openly, but also what you conceal within yourself, not showing it to any of God's creatures. He knows everything. And we find this meaning in the supplication of Ibrahim *peace be upon him* to the Lord Who knows all that we may hide as well as all that we bring into the open, as nothing whatsoever remains hidden from God, be it on earth or in heaven (*Ibrahim*: 38).

And so we can rest assured that God sees everything; notice that God *the Most High* says, 'what you do,' so we can understand the importance of action.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصْرَىٰ تِلْكَ  
أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١١١﴾

**They also say, 'No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian.' This is their own wishful thinking.**

**[Prophet], say, 'Pro- duce your evidence, if you are telling the truth' [111] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 111)**

After showing us how every action done in accordance with His teachings has a reward, an eternal reward multiplied by God and preserved by His power; the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to answer the claims of the Jews and Christians who try to instil despair in the hearts of the believers by use of lies and frustration, hoping they will abandon Islam; and so God *the Most High* tells us what they have fabricated.

Read His words: 'And they say, "None will enter paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian."' In this noble verse, the contradiction between the statements of the Jews and Christians is made clear. We see how the Jews said, '...None will enter paradise except one who is a Jew...' and the Christians said, 'None will enter paradise except one who is a Christian.' God *the Most High* will further reveal this contradiction in a coming verse when He *the Most High*

says that 'The Jews say "the Christians have nothing to stand on," and the Christians say, "The Jews have nothing to stand on ..."' (*al-Baqara*: 113).

This means that their statements were contradictory; the Christians said that they alone would enter paradise, and the Jews said the same about themselves; and then they said, 'None will enter paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian.' Then the Jews said, 'The Christians have nothing to stand on,' and the Christians said, 'The Jews have nothing to stand on.'

The proverb says that if you are taken to lying, you should have a good memory; this is because the liar's statements contradict one another because he forgets what he has said since he is not telling the truth. And so you find that the investigator or the judge will keep asking the accused person different questions so that when his different statements contradict one another, it will be shown that he is lying. If you tell the truth just as it happened, even if you tell it one hundred times there will be no changes in the details, but if you lie, you will contradict yourself. God *the Most High* says, '...That is their wish...' What are wishes? They are for your soul to attach itself to a hope, whilst this hope has no basis in fact which could help you to realise it. If the hope is dependent on an action which could actually lead you to realising it, this is something else.

Some people say that even if hopes are not realised, they give peace to the soul; the soul might relax when it attaches itself to a false hope, and so lives for a time in a kind of happiness, even if it is delusional. We say that the shock which will afflict the person after this will destroy him, and so there is never any peace in falsehood. Daydreams cannot be realised because they are not based on any kind of reality, and they only take a person further from reality, and of hope, a poet said:

If a hope is real, it is the best of hopes;

But if not, then we enjoy our life while it lasts.

That is, if a hope is real, or is based on reality, it is the best of hopes because it lives with you; but if it is not real, the poet concludes:

But if not, then we enjoy our life while they last:

Dreams from Layla are sweet, as though by them

Layla has quenched our thirst with cool water.



God's words '...That is their wish...' show us that wishful beliefs are nothing but foolish dreams because they cannot be realised. God *the Most High* then commands His Messenger: '...say, "Produce your proof...."' What is proof? Proof is evidence; you only ask for evidence if someone gets into a dispute with you and your point of view is different from his. You do not ask for evidence unless you are sure that the one with whom you are speaking is lying, and that he has no proof for what he claims.

Imagine that a person claims you owe him money, and asks you to pay him back, yet you never took any money from him. In such a situation, you will ask him for evidence, such as the receipt you gave him or a check or an I.O.U; or at least, you would ask him if he has any witnesses who can verify that you took money from him. But before you ask for evidence, you must be sure of yourself that he is really lying, and that you did not borrow any money from him.

So, the call of the True Lord *the Most High*: '...say, "Produce your proof...."' is a statement from God that confirms that they were lying, and that if they wished to bring any proof, they would not find anything in the Books of God or the statements of His messengers to corroborate what they claimed; and if they were to insert it, this would constitute a lie against God, which would be the biggest proof that such a claim is not from God, but rather only of their own fabrication.

So, there is no evidence for what they say, and if there was any proof, and if there was even a shred of truth to their claim, God *the Most High* would not have asked them for evidence for it.

So you do not say 'produce your evidence' unless you are sure that there is no proof for what they say because you are giving them the chance to prove what they claim, and they would love to prove it, and will do all they can to produce evidence for it. It is not possible that God *the Most High* would say, 'Produce your proof....' unless He *the Exalted* knew that they were lying, and so He then said, '...if you speak the truth,' that is, if you are sure that what you say is true; for God asserts that you are lying.

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ  
عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

**In fact, any who direct themselves wholly to God  
and do good will have their reward with their  
Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve [112]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 112)**

After revealing the falsehood of the Jews, and demanding that they produce evidence for what they said about how none but the Jews and Christians will enter paradise, God *the Most High* then gives us the truth of the matter, informing us who will actually enter paradise. God says, ‘Yes, indeed....’ The term *bala* is used here, which is an Arabic particle of response, meaning ‘yes,’ but, at the same time, negating the previous statement, implying that it is incorrect. If someone says to you ‘I do not owe you any money,’ and you say ‘*na’am*’ (‘yes’), this means that you have confirmed that he is right and he does not owe you anything. But if you say ‘*bala*,’ this means that he does owe you something and he is not saying the truth when he says he does not. So ‘*bala*’ is an answer which confirms what has just been negated.

They said, ‘None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian’ (*al-Baqara*: 111). When God *the Most High* says to them, ‘Yes, indeed,’ this means that their statement is not correct, and that others besides these will enter Paradise. The fact that no other than the Jews and Christians will enter Paradise, does not mean that all the Jews and Christians will enter paradise because God *the Most High* has decreed, when Islam came, that those who do not accept Islam will not enter paradise, as He *the Exalted* stated categorically that anyone who seeks a religion other than Islam (total submission to God), it will never be accepted from him, and in the Afterlife, he will be among the lost (*Al-‘Imran*: 85).

Why did God *the Most High* not say that the Jews and Christians will not enter Paradise? It is because the Quran is timeless; and what does ‘timeless’ mean? It means that it refers to all that has taken place from the beginning of time up to the Day of Resurrection, for the Quran is the Word of God *the Most High*. If He had said that no one will enter paradise except those who believe in

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, this would be going into excess since there were those who believed in Moses *peace be upon him* at the time of his Message, and followed him and made good their religion, and then died before the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, will these people not enter paradise and be rewarded for their good deeds? And there were also Christians who believed in Jesus *peace be upon him* when he lived, and followed him and applied his teachings, and then died before the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Will these people be denied paradise? No, they will enter it, and be given a position therein according to their deeds, and they will be rewarded with the best reward. But after Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, and Islam came, and the Quran was revealed, all who did not believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and embrace Islam will not enter paradise, and will not see it. And so God's words here are precise, and do not wrong any of His creatures.

So God's words 'Yes, indeed, whoever submits his face in Islam to God, while being a doer of good...' mean that no one will enter paradise save those who surrender their faces to God and do good deeds; for a person could falsely surrender to God, displaying what their hearts do not truly contain, but such hypocrites are not doers of good, but rather doers of evil because they have two personalities: a believing personality which they show to the people, and a disbelieving personality which is the truth of what is in their hearts.

God's words '...whoever submits his face in Islam to God...' indicate to us that the entire being is surrendered to God since the face is the noblest part of a person which identifies him, and ennobles him, and gives him character, and is the most sublime part of the body. Man is usually defined as a 'talking animal,' i.e. a living being possessed with the capacity for abstract thought; some others say he is the 'upright animal,' i.e. the animal which stands upright, and the part of him which stands on the rest of the body is the face. Man is above all the other species on earth and his face is above the rest of his body, and so if he surrenders his face to God, he has surrendered the noblest part of

himself to God. And so it is said that the closest a person can be to God is when he prostrates himself; why? Because he takes the face which God raised and ennobled and places it next to his feet so that the most perfect part of himself is level with the lowest part, and so there is no way left for him to feel self-important before God.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...will have his reward with his Lord....' The words '...reward with his Lord...' indicate that God did not make us compelled, but rather He held us morally responsible and gave us free will and the choice whether to obey Him or not: if we obey, we are rewarded. And because these responsibilities come from God *the Most High*, it makes sense that their reward should also be from God, and that there should be neither fear nor grief; for fear is of something which will happen, and grief is over something which has already happened, and neither of these is a concern when our reward is from God.

If a person is owed something by his equal, he might fear that his equal will deny his right or seek to usurp it, or that he might need it and so pretend he does not have the right to it. But God *the Most High* is free of need of anything in the world, and so He does not covet the good we possess because it all comes from Him; and He does not covet the wealth we possess because He possesses the treasures of the heavens and the earth.

God *the Most High* does not deny any of our rights because He gives us from His bounty and gives us more and more, and so there is no reason to fear for what God possesses, but rather, it will increase and multiply; and there is no need to grieve for what God possesses, for a person only grieves if he loses something good, but what God possesses is everlasting, and will never be lost to you or be taken from you. There is nothing that God *the Most High* possesses for which you might grieve of its loss, and so the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* '...no fear will come on them, nor will they be grieved' is the most precise way the state of the believers in the Hereafter could be described. They will rejoice in what is with God, and they will neither fear nor grieve.

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصَارَىٰ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَىٰ لَيْسَتِ الْيَهُودُ  
عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ وَهُمْ يَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ  
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

**The Jews say, ‘The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ and the Christians say, ‘The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences [113] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 113)**

We say that the truest thing that the Jews and Christians ever said is that each one of them accused the other of having no valid ground for their beliefs. The Jews said that the Christians have no valid ground for their beliefs, and the Christians said that the Jews have no valid ground for their beliefs; and the strange thing is that both of them are People of the Book; the Jews have their Divine scripture, as do the Christians, yet they each accuse the other of having no faith, and by this they become equal to the idolaters, who said that the People of the Book had no basis for their beliefs. That is, the idolaters said that neither the Jews nor the Christians had any basis; and the Jews said that neither the idolaters nor the Christians had any basis. Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And those who have no knowledge say the same as their words....’ So we have three factions who all oppose the Islamic Message, one which believes in no Divine teaching or message, namely the idolaters, and two factions who have a religion, and messengers, and scriptures, namely the Jews and the Christians. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...And those who have no knowledge say the same as their words....’ That is, those who know no religion, nor any god, nor any Divine teaching say the very same thing as the Jews and Christians, and they are all united on a single statement.

The people of the Book, who had a connection with Heaven, and scriptures which descended to them from God, and messengers, who came to them with guidance, should have kept themselves distinct from the idolaters. Yet those with knowledge were equal to those with no knowledge at all, and this is the implication of God’s words: ‘...And those who have no knowledge say the

same as their words....' As long as the three groups all said the same thing about themselves, the size of the difference between them is great, not small because each of them accuse the other of having no religion whatsoever.

But who judges on this great difference? It is none other than God Who judges on it; for He knows everything, and He *the Exalted* is well able to judge between them with the truth. But when will this judgement and this final word come? Will they come in this world? No, they will not. This world is the world of trial, not the world of reckoning, or accounting, or pronouncing final judgement on matters of faith. And so the judgement between them will take place on the Day of Resurrection, in front of all God's creatures.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...But God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ.' The meaning of judgement here is not separating the right from the wrong, for all three factions are wrong; by denying Islam, all three factions have left the realm of faith, and so on the Day of Resurrection, the judgement will come to show this, and deal to the wrongdoers their requital.

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسْجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ، وَسَعَى فِي خَرَابِهَا أُولَئِكَ مَا كَانَ لَهُمْ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِفِينَ لَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

**Who could be more wicked than those who prohibit the mention of God's name in His places of worship and strive to have them deserted? Such people should not enter them without fear: there is disgrace for them in this world and painful punishment in the Hereafter [114] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 114)**

After presenting to us the position of the Jews, Christians, and idolaters concerning one another and Islam, and how each of these three factions showed enmity to Islam and also cast accusations against one another, each one accusing the other of having false beliefs, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to warn them against waging war on Islam and fighting this religion, and so He said, 'And who are more unjust than those who prevent the name of God from being mentioned in His mosques....' God's mosques (*masajid*) are the places

where people prostrate themselves (*sujud*) to God. Prostration is a sign of surrender and worship, as we said, because you place the noblest part of you, your face, onto the ground in surrender and humility before God.

Before Islam came, the followers of every religion could only pray in the places their religion set aside for worship, special places where prayer was exclusively permitted. Then God sent the Message of Islam, and made the entire earth a place of worship, and made it all pure. The meaning of the whole world being a place of worship is that it broadens for the servants of God the places where they can meet their Lord, and the places where they can worship Him so that you can come to God in any place and at any time; for He did not specify for you a special place where prayer is exclusively accepted. If you want to offer a supererogatory prayer to God, such as a prayer of thanks, or a prayer to seek aid in a time of doubt, or a prayer to seek solace in a time of peril, or any of the non-obligatory prayers taught to us by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, you can do so at any time; and so it is as though you can meet with God wherever and whenever you like.

So when God *the Most High* blessed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and his community by making the earth a purified place of worship for them, He wanted to broaden the prospects of His servants to meet with their Lord.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘I had been granted five things which no prophet before me was granted: I have been succoured with dread (over all who live within) a month’s journey (from me); and the earth has been made a purified place of worship for me so that if the time for prayer comes to any man of my community, let him pray wherever he is; and battle-spoils have been made lawful for me, whilst they were lawful for none before me; and I have been granted intercession; and before me prophets were sent to their own people alone, whilst I have been sent to all people.’<sup>(1)</sup>

But why did God single out the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with this blessing? God did so because Islam came at a time when science and worldly ambitions would begin to develop greatly; and every time worldly sciences were developed, and laws of nature were discovered and

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Jabir God be pleased with him.

boundaries surpassed, and innovations and inventions were made, the people's minds were dazzled by this, and drawn far away from religion so that they worshipped the means instead of the Creator of the means.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to make His servants' worship of Him always easy to protect them from this temptation. He *the Exalted* wants, for example, that when we see the television transmit news of an event from one side of the earth to the other and from the moon to the earth at the moment it happens, we prostrate ourselves before God to thank Him for His blessing in allowing us to discover this, no matter where we might be. The properties of the ozone layer have been with us ever since the time God *the Most High* created the earth; none of God's creatures placed it there in God's universe in recent times, but rather, it was created when the world was created. But God willed that we would not know of its existence while we benefitted from it until these times. And so we must prostrate ourselves before God in thanks for His blessings by which secrets of the universe which we knew not have been revealed to us; and these secrets show us the intricacy of creation, and take us closer to the matters of the unseen.

If it is said to us that on the Day of Resurrection, all of God's creatures will stand together and witness the Reckoning, and that every one of them will see the Reckoning the moment it happens, we should not be incredulous and say 'This is impossible' because we can witness the important events of the world the moment they happen even now, whilst we relax in our houses in front of our television sets; that is, we can all see them at the same time without any great effort. If this is possible for human beings to do with each other, then what do you think the Creator of mankind can do?

When we see the secrets of God's natural laws in His universe, we must prostrate ourselves before the grandeur of the Creator *the Most High*, who placed all of this knowledge and these miracles in the universe. This prostration requires that the whole earth be a place of prayer so that you can prostrate before God in thanks wherever you are, and not need to go to another place which might be far away or difficult to reach and so cause you to forget to thank God and prostrate to Him. Therefore, God *the Most High* willed to broaden for the believers in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the area



in which they can meet with their Lord because there were things which would be revealed to God's creatures soon after the Muhammadan Message came, and every time another secret of the universe was uncovered, mankind would be deluded by themselves; and as long as the human soul was prone to self-delusion, God willed to place in the world something which would counterbalance this delusion.

The situation was unlike this before the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Things used to go according to natural dispositions, so when the rains failed and the springs and wells dried up, there was nothing left for them to do but turn to the heavens and pray for rain, and the same was the case for every difficulty that faced them. But now, after God has revealed some of the secrets of His universe to His creatures, there are many methods for mankind to deal with many natural crises; and these methods have made mankind believe that they can solve all their problems themselves without the need for God *the Most High*. And so they have begun to rely on creation instead of relying on the Creator, True Lord, and so the True Lord *the Most High* revealed His words: God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp encased in glass – the glass, as it were, a radiant star. From a blessed tree is it lighted, the olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire had not touched it! It is light upon light. God guides whom He will to His light, and God sets forth parables to men, for God knows all things (*an-Nur*: 35). In houses of worship which God has allowed to be raised, people will remember His Name in them (*an-Nur*: 35-36).

What are these houses in which people can see the Light of God *the Most High*? They are the mosques. So those who maintain the mosques and always pray in them, are those who see God's Light; and if anyone comes to these houses and violates them and bars the mention of God's Name in them, this means that the believers who maintain these mosques have weak faith, and weak religious conviction so that their enemies can get to them; for if they were strong, their enemies would not dare to try and bar the mention of God's Name from His mosques, or try and destroy them so that they are demolished, and the Friday Prayer is not offered in them. But when someone tries to

destroy one of God's houses, and the people hasten to prevent him and strike his hand, this means that faith is strong, whilst if they leave him, this means the believers have capitulated to their enemy. Why? That is because the disbeliever who tries to extinguish the place where the rays of God's Light shine upon His creatures, lives in the midst of evil, which is strengthened every time the non-believers can prevent God's Name from being mentioned in His house, and destroy it.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...It is not for them to enter them except in fear....' That is, it was not right for those disbelievers to enter God's mosques without fearing that the believers who pray within them might overtake them; and if they entered without having any fear, this would mean that the faith in the souls of those believers was weak.

God's words '...who are more unjust...' mean that there is no one more unjust than those who prevent the Name of God from being mentioned in His mosques, i.e. this is the most grievous kind of injustice, the peak of wickedness. God *the Exalted* says, '...and strive towards their destruction....' i.e. for their obliteration, or their being rendered unsuitable for prayer; so to strive for the ruin of a mosque means to demolish it.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '...For them in this world is disgrace, and they will have in the Hereafter a great punishment.' That is, God will not leave them be in this world nor in the Hereafter, but rather, He will afflict them with ignominy in this world, i.e. something shameful which one does not like the people to see on him; so, God's words '...For them in this world is disgrace...' is a manifestation of God's great care for the protection of His houses. A clear example of what God inflicts upon such as these in this world is what happened to the Jews of Medina who strove to ruin God's mosques: their wealth was seized, and they were expelled from their houses. This happened, and this is the implication of God's words '...For them in this world is disgrace....' As for the Hereafter, the enemies of God will be held to severe account for daring to attack the mosques of God *the Most High*; but at the same time the believers who were silent in the face of this, and shied from supporting God's religion and defending God's houses will also have to face a painful torment.

I warn every believer not to capitulate or be weak before those who try to prevent the mention of God's name in His mosques because if he does, he will share in their crime, and perhaps he will be even more guilty than they are, and God will not leave him alone on the Day of Resurrection, but will drive him into Hell.

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُولُوْا فَشَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١١٥﴾

**The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn,  
there is His Face. God is all pervading and all knowing [115]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 115)**

After telling us about the punishment in store for those who damage and destroy God's mosques and prevent His Name from being mentioned there, and the suffering that awaits them in the Hereafter, God *the Most High* wanted to remind us that to implement this completely and perfectly is impossible, since the entire earth is a mosque, and so to destroy it, would mean to destroy the entire earth. And since God *the Most High* is present everywhere, wherever you go you will find God facing you in His manifestations.

God *the Most High* says '...there is the Face of God...' i.e. the countenance of God is present there. God *the Most High* then says, '...Indeed, God is All-Encompassing and Knowing' i.e. do not constrict the places where you meet your Lord because God is Infinite and ever-present, everywhere in this universe and everywhere outside this universe. But when God *the Most High* says, 'And to God belongs the east and the west...' this is not meant to specify the east or the west in particular, but rather the meaning extends to every direction, whether east, west, north, south, northeast, southwest, and every other direction you can imagine.

So why, then, does the verse mention only east and west? It is because beyond these, every direction is determined by the rising and setting of the sun: there is northeast, and southeast, and northwest, and southwest; furthermore, east and west are instinctively known to people because no one is unaware of where the sun rises and where it sets, as every day you see it rise and set.

When God *the Most High* says, 'And to God belongs the east and the west...' this does not mean that He only possesses these two directions, but

rather, this is an example of what is known as a 'specificity fronting,' just as you say 'With a pen I wrote' or 'by car I came,' where, by fronting (mentioning first) the pen and the car you specify that the writing was with the pen and not with any other instrument, and the coming was by the car and not by any other means of transport, and this is the meaning of 'specificity.' And so by fronting the expression 'to God,' the meaning of 'And to God belongs the east and the west...' is that the dominion belongs to God *the Most High Alone* specifically, and no one else shares it with Him.

The changing of the prayer-direction from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba* does not mean that God *the Most High* was in Jerusalem, and that then He *the Exalted* moved to the *Ka'ba*. The unification of the prayer-direction means nothing more than that the Muslims have a single direction when they pray which is a symbol of their united goal. We must be clear on the difference between direction in prayer and direction outside of prayer; direction in prayer means that we all face a single place chosen by God for us to face when we pray. People all over the world pray facing the *Ka'ba*, and the *Ka'ba* is in one place which never changes, but rather, it is our orientation when facing it all over the world which changes: one person faces north, another faces south, another faces east, another faces west. We all face different directions according to the point on the earth in which we find ourselves, but we all face the *Ka'ba*. Despite our different directions, we are all united in our facing towards a single place.

God *the Most High* wants us to know that when we say, '...to God belongs the east,...' we should not think that the east is a single direction, for east changes depending on our position. Every place on the earth has its own east and west, and when the sun rises in one place it is setting at the exact same time in another place. It rises for me, but sets for someone else, and after a minute, it will rise for someone else and set for someone else. If you consider east and west as being the places where the sun can be seen rising and setting, you will find that sunrise and sunset never end on the face of the earth, and that every minute, there is a sunrise and sunset.

God *the Most High* says, '...God is All-Encompassing and All Knowing.' That is, He encompasses all of His dominion, and one thing does not distract

Him from another; and so when Imam 'Ali God *be pleased with him* was asked how God will reckon all mankind at the same time, he said, 'The same way He provides for them all at the same time.' So God *the Exalted* is not distracted by anything from anything, and when He acts He has no need of anything, but rather His action is simply 'Be,' and it is.

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَنَهُ بَلْ لَّهُ مَا فِي  
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلُّ لَّهُ قَانُونٌ ﴿١١٦﴾

**They have asserted, 'God has a child.' May He be  
exalted! No! Everything in the heavens and earth  
belongs to Him, everything devoutly obeys His  
will [116] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 116)**

After affirming that He has dominion over everything in existence, and that nothing distracts Him from anything else, God *the Most High* wanted to respond to those who try to assign to God a helper in His dominion, and so said, '...God has taken a son....' God *the Most High* responds to them: Why would He take for Himself a son, when He possesses all that is in the heavens and the earth, and all things devoutly obey His Will? The response revolved on three points: God *the Exalted* says, '...Exalted is He!...' This implies that He is exalted above having a son; then He says, '...Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth....' And so if all this belongs to Him, and if all the universe is His creation, and under His control, why would He need a son?

Then He *the Exalted* says, '...All are devoutly obedient to Him.' That is everything in the heavens and the earth worship God *the Most High*, and affirm His Divinity.

The notion that God has a child is mentioned in the Quran nineteen times, each time with a rebuttal of it. Because it is a matter of doctrine of the highest importance, it is repeated, and the rebuttal of it is repeated, again and again. If you consider the statement of the people who hold this belief, you will see that there are various different versions of it. There is the belief of the idolaters, as the Noble Quran reports that they, out of their falsehood, say that God has begotten; and assuredly they are lying. Has He chosen daughters

over sons? (*as-Saffat*: 151-153). And the Jews believed, as the Quran states, that Ezra is God's son (*at-Tawba*: 30). And the Christians believed that the Messiah (Christ) is God's son (*at-Tawba*: 30). And concerning the story of the creation of Jesus *peace be upon him* from Mary *peace be upon her* without a father, God *the Most High* says that some people say, 'The Most Merciful has taken [for Himself] a son.' God *the Exalted* says that they have done an atrocious thing. The heavens almost rupture therefrom and the earth splits open and the mountains collapse in devastation that they attribute to the Most Merciful a son. And it is not appropriate for the Most Merciful that He should take a son. There is no one in the heavens and earth but that he comes to the Most Merciful as a servant (*Maryam*: 88-93).

God *the Most High* wants us to know that this is a dangerous, inappropriate, reprehensible claim. The chapter of Maryam deals with the matter extensively, such that it shows how the different forms of creation aside from mankind reacted to this claim: the reaction of the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, and the other creatures of God who curse all who make such a claim; indeed, because of the enormity of this crime, their reaction is such that the sky is almost rent asunder, shattering into pieces, and the earth almost splits apart, and the mountains almost crumble into dust. All of this is from the horror and falsehood of this claim because this claim is a lie against God. All of these verses are mentioned in the chapter of Maryam, the same chapter which tells us of the miracle of the creation of Jesus *peace be upon him*, which is also mentioned in several other chapters.

The question here is: What is the doubtful matter that has made them think that God had a son? What has made them resort to such falsehood? The Quran says that Jesus, son of Mary, *peace be upon them* is the Word of God which He cast into Mary *peace be upon her*; we say to them that we were all made by the word 'Be!'

Why have you becomes deluded by Jesus, son of Mary *peace be upon them*, in this way? God *the Most High* explains the matter, saying that surely, in the sight of God, the nature of Jesus is as the nature of Adam, whom He created out of dust and then said to him, 'Be' – and he is (*al- 'Imran*: 59).

His words ‘as the nature of Adam’ are simply to make the point; yet in fact the miracle of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* was greater than that of Jesus *peace be upon him*. You have become infatuated and intrigued with Jesus because he had no father; yet Adam had neither father nor mother, so the miracle is even more powerful. It would have made more sense for you to be infatuated with Adam *peace be upon him* rather than Jesus *peace be upon him*, and it is strange that you were not infatuated with Adam, but you were infatuated with Jesus, since he had neither father nor mother, whilst Jesus was only without father. It would have been more appropriate to ascribe this to Adam *peace be upon him*, yet you did not.

God *the Most High* told His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that this is not a matter of denial, but rather, it is simply that the claim is false; God *the Exalted* commands His Messenger to proclaim that if the God of Mercy truly had a son, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would be the first to worship him (*az-Zukhruf*: 81).

That is, it would not harm God *the Most High* to have a son, but He *the Exalted* did not have a son, and so people cannot worship something which God does not have. Rather, they invented and fabricated this themselves.

God *the Most High* says, ‘They say, ‘God has taken a son.’ *Exalted is He!* Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth....’ The words ‘Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth....’ ascribe to God *the Most High* complete dominion over everything in existence, and dominion negates fatherhood; why is this? It is because dominion means that everything in existence is a creation of God, and He is the Creator of everything without any doubt; and as long as He is its Creator and Maker, none of it can be a part of Him because the one who creates something is the subject, and every subject has its corresponding object, and the object cannot be part of the subject. Have you ever seen anyone make a part of himself? The one who makes a car, for example: Did he make it from his own flesh, or from human flesh? Likewise, cars, chairs, clocks, and televisions: Are these products of the same nature as their producers? Of course, they are not.

So as long as there is dominion, it cannot be said that it is of the same nature as its Maker, and it cannot be said that the Maker created something of

His own nature because no one can make something of his own nature, but rather, the maker always makes something which is less than he is. So God *the Most High* says, '...*Exalted is He!*...' that is, He *the Exalted* is completely exalted above this. Why? It is so, because a son is ordinarily begotten in our life in order to be a continuation of the life of his father which will not be preserved for him forever; so he takes over his father's name when he dies, and inherits his possessions. And so his purpose is to preserve his own species, and whoever wants to preserve his species, will not be content to have only one child.

If we accept, for argument's sake, that He had a single son, so this son is His, yet we see that the one they claim is the son of God, had no sons of his own; and before the son existed, what did God *the Most High* do when He had no son? And what was the new thing for God and His creation when He took a son, as they claim? Nothing at all changed in the universe; for the presence of a son for God, does not give Him any kind of extra power because even before the supposed 'son' came into existence, and after this, the universe did not change in the slightest.

So what is the purpose of His taking for Himself a son? Is it to get help? God's Power never decreases. Is it to preserve His Life? God's Life is eternal: He is the One Who created life, and He is the One Who gives it, and He is Alive, and does not die; so why would He need anything to preserve His Life? All things obey the True Lord *the Most High*, that is, He can make anything come into existence simply by His will; and He *the Exalted* possesses Attributes of Absolute Perfection, and always has, and by these Perfect Attributes, He created this universe and brought it into existence. And so He has no need for any of His creatures because when He created them, He had the Attributes of Absolute Power to create; and indeed even before He created anything, He possessed all the Attributes of a Creator, and it was with these Attributes that He created. God *the Most High* was Creator before He created any of His creatures, and He was Provider before there was anyone to provide for, and He was All-Dominant before there was anything to dominate, and He was Most-Forgiving before there was anyone to forgive; and with these Attributes, he made, and created, and provided, and dominated, and forgave His creatures.



So, this entire creation did not add any extra attribute to God's Attributes of Absolute Perfection, but rather, it was God by His Perfect Attributes who created everything. And so we read in a Qudsi Hadith: 'O My servants! Were the first of you and the last of you, and the human of you and the jinn of you, to rise up in one place and ask of Me, and were I to give everyone what he asked for, this would not decrease my dominion in the slightest, any more than a needle decreases the sea when it is dipped into it.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Moreover, if God *the Most High* had a spouse and a child, which one existed first? If God *the Most High* existed first, and then the spouse and son came into existence, this means that He is the Creator and they are His creations; and if each of them created themselves, this would mean there were three gods, yet there is only One God. So the son must be either a creation or a god. Absolute Perfection was God's from the first, and the son could not have increased Him in anything; and so this means the son's existence has no purpose. The True Lord *the Most High* throws light on this matter extensively in many chapters of the Noble Quran, principally in the chapter of Maryam, where God *the Most High* says that some people say, 'The Most Merciful has taken [for Himself] a son.' (*Maryam*: 88).

God *the Most High* is exalted above being identical to His creation, not in His Self, nor in His Attributes, nor in His Actions. God is exalted above everything that you see in existence; whatever enters your mind, God is different from it. God *the Most High* says, '...Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth....' This negates the possibility that He took for Himself a son because everything in the Heavens and the Earth is under God's control.

God *the Most High* says, '...All are devoutly obedient to Him.' That is, they all submit to Him; and this confirms for us that all of God's creation is in His grasp, and subject to His will, whether willingly or unwillingly.

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(1) Narrated by Muslim in *Al-Birr*, and by Ahmad

بَدِيعُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿١١٧﴾

**He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth,  
and when He decrees something, He says only,  
'Be,' and it is [117] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 117)**

After affirming that their claim that God took a son is a lie against God, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to alert us to an aspect of His Omnipotent Power, and so He *the Exalted* said that He is 'Originator of the heavens and the earth....' That is, He created the heavens and the earth and all within them in a completely unique manner, i.e. there was never before this any sky, nor any earth, nor any angels, nor any jinn, nor any men, which God *the Most High* then made similar creatures to them in their shape, size, and nature; in other words, He *the Exalted* did not make use of what we would call a 'template' (a mould or prototype).

The maker of a drinking glass first makes a mould into which he pours molten glass so that in the end the glasses are all the same. Every production, aside from that of God, is done by first making a template, after which production can begin. And so the real work is in the production of a good template, which will give us the form we require. The one who bakes bread, for example, might not use a mould, but he imitates what has come before, because the forming and assembling of the ingredients of bread have already been done before, and so he copies them every time; but he cannot be completely consistent in the form, or weight, or the shape of the bread, but rather, each time his copy of the traditional method will be slightly different, and his production will not be perfect.

From the moment God *the Most High* created man from Adam *peace be upon him* until the end of time, He has made mankind similar in every aspect: in the makeup of their bodies and their shape, each having one head, two hands, two eyes, and two feet, and so on for the rest of the body, with a precise uniformity in form and function so that every part performs its purpose in life. Yet this uniformity was not based on a template, but was rather achieved by the word 'Be!' Despite the similarity of mankind, we are all different from each other in a way that makes it possible for us to tell one another apart by science and by the

eye: by science in that we all have different fingerprints and voice prints which voice-recording experts can tell apart; and different scents which we cannot detect, but which trained dogs can so that it can smell an object and then take us to the owner of the object even if he is hidden in a group of one thousand people; and by our DNA, which makes the body recognise itself so that if you introduce a single cell from another body it will reject it, whilst if you introduce a cell from the body itself, it will unite with it and its wound will heal.

If this is part of what science has thus far discovered, there are many more things which we might discover which will confirm to us that despite the similarity of billions of people, everyone has something which makes them different and is not repeated in any other of God's creatures. This is the miracle of creation, and the proof of God's Omnipotent Power in His universe.

God *the Most High* gives us this broad concept in the Noble Quran that this is one of His signs, and that it was no accident, and was not unplanned, but rather, it was prepared by the Power of God *the Most High*. He *the Exalted* says that among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of our tongues and colours: for in this, there are signs indeed for all who have knowledge (*ar-Rum*: 22).

This diversity illustrates for us God's Omnipotent and absolute power to create without precedent. Every one of God's creatures is different from what came before it, and what will come after it and what is around it, although in their general form, they are the same. If you gathered together all mankind from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the end of time, you would find that they are all in the same image, and yet each of them is different from the other. There are no two human beings in God's creation who are exact copies of one another. This is the precision of creation, and this is what we understand from God's word *Badi'* 'Originator.' This precision shows God's Wisdom, and the existence of all these various images shows His Power. And so after we die and our bodies decay into the soil, God will gather us on the Day of Resurrection. The miracle of this gathering is that everyone will be resurrected with the same components, and the same image, and the same form as he had been in this world, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says that He knows what the earth diminishes of them, and with Him is a retaining record (*Qaf*: 4).

So God *the Exalted* created us by His Omnipotent Power, and He will bring us back to life after our death with His Omnipotent Power in the very same form, flesh, attributes, and every atom within us. Is there anything more precise than this?

If we come to the most skilled and gifted craftsman, and ask him to make us something skilfully, and then when he made it, we asked him to make another exactly like it, he would not be able to make another one exactly the same because he would lack the precise measurements with which to duplicate exactly the one he had made. He would be able to give us something similar, but not an exact replica of what he made. God *the Most High*, however, will cause His creatures to die and then at the Resurrection He will return them to the very same constitution they had before, without any addition or subtraction. This is because God *the Most High* does not create by the use of specific template, but rather, He merely says to a thing, 'Be!' and it is. The noble verse says, 'Originator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees a thing, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is.'

The word 'Be' is mentioned many times in the Noble Quran. In Arabic linguistics there is what we call (*mushtarak*), that is, a single word which has many different meanings according to the context in which it is used. For example, the word (*qada*) has many different meanings as well as a single meaning which links all the other meanings. Sometimes the True Lord *the Most High* uses it to mean 'complete' or 'finish with,' as when He commands the believers that after they *qadaitum* (have performed (completed)) their pilgrimage rites, they should continue to remember God as they would remember their own fathers – even, with a yet keener remembrance (*al-Baqara*: 200).

In another place, He *the Exalted* reports the magicians' defiant response to Pharaoh when he threatened them with torture to *iqdi* (decree), then, whatever he wanted to decree: he can decree only something related to this worldly life (*Ta Ha*: 72). Here it means 'do as you will.'

And in another verse, God *the Most High* decides that it is not for a believer, man or woman, to have any choice in their affairs, when God and His Messenger have *qada* (decree) a matter (*al-Ahzab*: 36). Here it means 'if God says something, He does not leave the believers the choice whether to obey or not.'

And when God *the Most High* gives us the image of how the disbelievers in the Hereafter in Hell will seek to be relieved from their suffering by death, He *the Exalted* says that they will cry out to Malek, the angel in charge of hellfire, to let his Lord *yaqdi* (put an end to) them, and he will reply that they would stay on (*az-Zukhruf*: 77). Here the same word is used to mean ‘kill.’

We find another meaning of the word in God’s words about the Final Judgement that when everything has been *qudiya* (decided), Satan will speak (*Ibrahim*: 22). That is, when everything is over and the requital has been handed out.

And in another verse, He *the Exalted* speaks about Moses *qada* (fulfilling) his term of residence with Shu’aib (identified with the biblical figure Jethro) in the city of Midyan, and leaving with his family (*al-Qasas*: 29). ‘Fulfilled his term’ here means ‘completed his term’.

And in another verse, we read that *qudiya bainahum* (a rightful judgment was passed) between rivals in all equity; and they will not be wronged (*Yunus*: 54). That is, a decisive judgement will be passed on their rivalries.

And He *the Exalted* says that He had *qada* (made it known) to the children of Israel through revelation that twice, indeed, will they spread corruption on earth (*al-Isra*’: 4). That is, He conveyed to the Israelites in their scripture.

So, the word *qada* has many different meanings which are determined by context, but there is one concept around which these meanings revolve, which is ‘to decree/judge,’ and this is the principal meaning.

So, the meaning of God’s words ‘...and when He decrees a thing,...’ (Where the word *qada* is used) means that when He decrees/wills something, it comes to pass. We must be aware that when God *the Most High* says, ‘...and when He decrees a thing, He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is’, the meaning of ‘He only says to it’ is that the thing exists for Him, and exists in His knowledge, but it has not yet reached our knowledge. That is, it is not a new thing; and since God *the Most High* says, ‘He only says to it’, this indicates that He *the Exalted* is addressing something which exists; but this thing is not known to us, and we know nothing about it, but rather, it only exists in God’s knowledge. And so it is said that God ‘reveals’ things, and does not ‘start’ them since

they already exist; for the pens have been lifted, and the pages have dried, but He reveals these things to us, who know them not so that we come to know them.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ لَوْلَا يُكَلِّمُنَا اللَّهُ أَوْ تَأْتِينَا آيَةٌ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ  
 قَبْلِهِمْ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ تَشَبَّهَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿١١٨﴾

**Those who have no knowledge also say, ‘If only God would speak to us!’ or ‘If only a miraculous sign would come to us!’ People before them said the same things: their hearts are all alike. We have made Our signs clear enough to those who have solid faith [118] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 118)**

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Those who do not know...,’ meaning those who know nothing about God’s Revelation are idolaters. Those were the ones who asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to have God address them directly, which means that they wanted to hear God speaking to them just as Moses *peace be upon him* did.

And what did they want with the speech of God *the Most High*? Did they want God to tell them that He had sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver to them His teachings? It is as though all the miracles by which God aided His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, at the summit of which is the Noble Quran, were not enough to convince them, even though the Quran was a miracle given to an unlettered Messenger. They asked him about things which had taken place in the past, and God revealed them to him in detail; and the Quran issued challenges concerning the future and the secrets of the human soul. This should have been enough for them, had they but used their reason, but they desired to be obstinate so that every time a sign came to them, they denied it and asked for another. God *the Most High* tells us that because of his nature, man cannot hear God’s speech directly, as He *the Exalted* says that it is not given to mortal man that God should speak to him other than through hidden inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills (*ash-Shura*: 51).

So human beings, even those who have been chosen by God as worthy to receive His Revelation, are not spoken to directly by God *the Most High* except

by means of revelation, or inspiration, or from behind a barrier as Moses *peace be upon him* was spoken to, or by means of a messenger who passes on to the people God's teachings. As for direct communication, it is simply impossible because of man's very nature.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...or there comes to us a sign....' The idolaters asked for signs and God *the Most High* sent signs to them but they did not believe in them, but rather persisted in their disbelief and obstinacy. God *the Most High* says that nothing has prevented Him from sending this message, like the earlier ones, with miraculous signs, but that the people of past times gave the lie to them: thus, He provided for the tribe of Thamud the sign of the she-camel before their very eyes, and they sinned against it (*al-Isra*: 59).

So, the signs for which the disbelievers ask in order for them to believe would not make them believe, but rather cause them to persist in disbelief, even if they knew fully well that these signs were from God *the Most High*, as was the case with Pharaoh's people, as the True Lord *the Most High* says that when His visible signs came to them, they said, 'This is clearly plain sorcery' and in their wickedness and self-exaltation, they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth: and look what happened in the end to those spreaders of corruption (*an-Naml*: 13-14).

And so their demand that God *the Most High* speak to them or send them a sign was nothing but an indication of their disbelief and obstinacy. The True Lord *the Exalted* says, '...Thus spoke those before them like their words....' The Israelites had said to Moses *peace be upon him*, 'Show us God manifestly,' and those who did not know said, 'If only God speaks to us...'; but the ones who said 'Show us God manifestly' were not devoid of knowledge because they had the Torah in their hands, and so those who knew were no different from those who knew not, and this is why God *the Most High* said, '...Their hearts resemble each other....' That is, the hearts of those who said they were following God's teachings and those who were not, were alike, and they used the same reasoning.

If it were that only those who were devoid of knowledge said this – and not also those who had knowledge – it would have been a lighter matter. We would say that it was their ignorance that inspired them to say what they said; but what

was the excuse of those who had knowledge, and possessed scripture, for saying 'Show us God manifestly'? So the matter was that they had something deep down in their hearts in common which made their hearts alike in their wantonness. The root of every behaviour and action is the heart, from which the motives of action come. As long as the heart is not faithful to God, those who have knowledge and those who are devoid of knowledge, are equal.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...We have shown clearly the signs to people who are firm in faith.' What is firmness in faith? It is that a matter be settled in the heart so that it bears no doubt, and never wavers, so, there is no need for the matter to return once more to the mind to be deliberated because it has become a matter of certainty. Certainty comes from being informed by one you trust so that what he tells you becomes certain for you; and so if God speaks, He says what is certain, and if the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* speaks, his speech is the truth. And so the trust of faith was manifested when the Meccan infidels sarcastically told the prophet's companion, our master Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him*, 'Your friend claims he was taken up to the seven heavens and then to Jerusalem in a single night,' and he replied, 'If he said it, he spoke the truth.' His firmness of faith was based on the fact that he was told by someone he trusted; and this is what we call 'the knowledge of certainty.' This might develop to become 'the vision of certainty' when you see the thing with your own eyes after having been informed of someone else having seen it. And then, when you enter into the reality of the thing itself, you have 'the certainty of truth.' So, 'certain knowledge' is based on the report of someone you trust, and 'certain vision' is when you see the thing with your own eyes, and 'certain truth' is when you enter the reality of the thing.

God *the Most High* explains this matter to us when He addresses mankind saying that they are obsessed and diverted by greed and competition for increase in worldly matters until they visit the graves. No, in time, they will come to know. And once again: No, they will come to know. No, if they only knew with knowledge of certainty, they would, most surely, see the Hellfire (*at-Takathur*: 1-6). This is the first stage, which is the certain knowledge coming from God *the Most High*. Then comes the second stage,



when God *the Most High* says that then they will surely see it with the eye of certainty (*at-Takathur*: 7).

That is, you will see hell with your own eyes on the Day of Resurrection. So we have certain knowledge and certain vision, and then after this comes the third stage, that of certain truth, of which God *the Most High*, in describing the status of the infidels on the Day of Judgement, says, that if one happens to be of the straying deniers, his accommodation will be one of scalding water and burning in Hellfire. Indeed, this is the true certainty (*al-Waqi'a*: 92-95).

God exempts the believer from having to experience hell as certain truth; he will see it as he passes over the bridge, but it will be the disbeliever who will be cast into it to experience it as certain truth.

The people of the Book made statements and put demands to their prophets which were akin to those of the disbelievers: the Jews told Moses *peace be upon him* that they would not believe him until they see God manifestly (*al-Baqara*: 55); and the Christians asked Jesus *peace be upon him* if his Lord could send them down from heaven a table furnished with food (*al-Ma'ida*: 112) to which he replied by commanding them to fear God if they are truly believers (*al-Ma'ida*: 112). And so, those who believed in the Scripture encouraged those who did not, to demand to see God, but rather demand material miracles.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَا تُسْأَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿١١٩﴾

**We have sent you [Prophet] with the truth, bearing good news and warning. You will not be responsible for the inhabitants of the Blaze [119] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 119)**

We must be aware here that when God *the Most High* tells us of something He has done, He uses the first person plural of majesty ('We'); and we can observe that this plural form is also used by heads of state and monarchs, so, they say 'We have decreed such-and-such.' It is as though the might of this person has control over all the different elements required to implement the decision of the head of state so that it involves the police, the judiciary, the state, and the armed forces (if it is a military matter); many different elements represented by different groups all share in the implementing of the decision.

God *the Most High* possesses Absolute Power, and everything that is necessary to manifest His will is found in His Attributes. And so when God *the Most High* speaks of an action which requires the Absolute Perfection of His Attributes to come to pass, He uses the 'We' of majesty. We have an example of this in God's statement: 'Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian' (*al-Hijr*: 9). But when God *the Glorified* speaks of His exclusive Divinity and His exclusive right to be worshipped, He uses the singular pronoun, as is the case when He *the Exalted* said, 'Indeed, I am God: There is no deity but Me; so worship Me, and perform prayer for My remembrance' (*Ta Ha*: 14). He did not say 'Worship Us'; so, with respect to His actions, God *the Most High* uses the plural of majesty, and with respect to His worship and Oneness, He uses the singular. This is so that we understand that God's actions are not the product of His power alone, nor His knowledge alone, nor His wisdom alone, nor His mercy alone, but rather all of God's actions are the product of the harmonisation of all of His Attributes of Perfection.

The plural of majesty comes to alert us to this fact in order that the mind can see clearly the harmonisation of all Perfection in God; for you might have power but not knowledge, or you might have knowledge but not power, or you might have knowledge but lack wisdom, and so all these attributes must be in harmony.

God *the Most High* says, Indeed, 'We have sent you with the truth...' i.e. We have sent you with the truth as a messenger. The truth is that which is firm, and can never be changed or contradicted. If you witness something happen and then you are asked to relate what you witnessed, you will do so; and if you are asked to relate it again after some time has passed, you will tell it with all the same details. Yet if you were lying, your statements will contradict one another; and so it is said, 'If you are taken to lying, you must have a good memory.'

The truth cannot be contradicted or changed, and as long as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with the truth, he had to convey it to the people, and then the truth would remain the same until the end of time.

God *the Most High* says, Indeed, '...as a bringer of good tidings and a warner....' 'Glad tidings' involve informing of something pleasing which will come, and a warning is informing of something miserable which will come,

but which you might be able to avoid. What were the glad tidings he *peace and blessings be upon him* bore? And what did he warn of? He gave the believer glad tidings of the delights of Paradise, and warned the disbeliever of the suffering of Hell. Glad tidings and warnings presuppose Divine guidance to be conveyed, which carry glad tidings to those who believe in it and a warning to those who do not.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, Indeed, ‘...and you will not be questioned about the people of hellfire.’ That is, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not responsible for those who would cause themselves to be cast into the fire and suffering of hell; he was not responsible for guiding them, but only for delivering to them the Message. God *the Most High* comforts His Messenger by saying that perhaps he would kill himself through grief over the infidels if they do not believe in the message out of sorrow (*al-Kahf*: 6). In another place, God tells His Messenger that he would wear himself with sorrow because they will not believe; God *the Most High* states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down to the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu‘ara*: 4).

Had God *the Most High* wanted to force us to believe against our will, none of His creatures would have been able to disbelieve; but He *the Most High* wanted us to come to Him with hearts that love Him, not with hearts forced to believe. God *the Most High* created mankind with the free choice whether to believe or not, and it is not the job of any messenger to force people to believe because had God wanted this, He would have compelled His creatures Himself to do so. As ‘...the people of Hellfire,’ they are the denizens of hell. The Arabic word (*jahim*) (‘hellfire’) is derived from the verb which means to rage, be wild and ungovernable. It describes the blazing and raging of a fire when its flames are multiplied so that everything that touches it is consumed, and it never dies down.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to reassure His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that his heart should not have been disturbed by those who disbelieved; for he had warned them, and this was all he had to do, and this was the mission with which God had charged him.

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ ۚ قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَىٰ اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ  
وَلَئِنْ أَتَبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِن وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿١٢٠﴾

**The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you unless you follow their ways. Say, ‘God’s guidance is the only true guidance.’ If you were to follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would find no one to protect you from God or help you [120]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 120)**

The Jews used to go to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to try to trick him, and say to him *hadina*. So, it would not be right to say that ‘The Jews and Christians will not be satisfied with you....’ Even if you were to please the Jews, you would not please the Christians; and were you to please the Christians; you would not please the Jews.

Then the True Lord *the Glorified* says, ‘...until you follow their religion....’ The word *milla* used in the verse means religion, and it is called *milla* because you incline (it is derived from the Arabic term *mayl* meaning inclination) to it even if it is false. God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim to the disbelievers that he will not worship that which they worship; and neither do they worship what he worships; and he will never worship what they worshipped; and neither will they ever worship what he worships. To them, their religion, and to him, his (*al-Kafirun*: 3-6).

So, He asserts that they have a religion even though they are disbelievers and idolaters. But what can protect us from falling into following the religion of the Jews or Christians? The True Lord *the Most High* commands His Messenger to proclaim that God’s guidance is the only true guidance (*Al-‘Imran*: 73).

The Jews corrupted their religion, as did the Christians, but the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had God’s guidance with him. Guidance is that which leads you to the shortest way to your destination; or it is the straight path since this is the shortest way to the destination. God’s guidance is a single road; as for human beings, each one of them has their own guidance which is based on their caprice.

Because of this, they are diverse and varied roads which lead you to error; but the guidance which leads you to the truth is a single guidance: the guidance of God *the Most High*.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...If you were to follow their desires....’ which is an indication from God *the Most High* that the creeds of the Jews and Christians are based on human caprices. Caprice (*hawa*) is when the soul desires that which is false and far from the truth; and so God *the Most High* says, ‘...If you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you would have against God no protector or helper.’

God *the Glorified* is saying to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: If you were to follow the crooked path which is filled with passions and bereft of truth, be it the path of the Jews or that of the Christians, after guidance has come to you from God, you would have no one to protect you and look after you, nor any helper to help you.

We must stop for a moment and consider this address to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*: Why would God address His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, whom He elected, in this way? When God *the Most High* addressed these words to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, they were really meant for the community of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and his followers coming after him, for they were the ones whose hearts might have inclined towards the Jews and Christians; as for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, God protected him from ever possibly following them.

God *the Most High* wants us to know with certainty that if there was something which He would not accept from His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, He would certainly not accept it from any of his community, however high their status might be. This is so that no one would come after the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* claiming to have knowledge and say, ‘Let us follow the creed of the Jews or the Christians in order to attract them to us.’ We say to such as this: That which God would not accept from His Beloved Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, He will certainly not accept from anyone else.

So, using the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as the example here is to illustrate that following the creed of the Jews or Christians

is completely unacceptable under any circumstance; God *the Most High* used the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as the example here to bar any capricious people from playing around with this religion under the excuse of improving relations with the Jews and Christians.

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ  
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۖ وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِهِ ۖ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿١٢١﴾

**Those to whom We have given the Scripture, who follow it as it deserves, are the ones who truly believe in it. Those who deny its truth will be the losers [121] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 121)**

After telling us that the Jews and Christians corrupted their own scriptures, God *the Most High* wanted to affirm that there are some Jews and Christians who did not corrupt their scriptures, and that they believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Message because they recognise him from the Torah and the Gospel.

If God *the Most High* had not revealed this verse, those who did indeed read the Torah and the Gospel in their true form, and considered believing in the Messenger of God's Message, would have said, 'How can these accusations be levelled at all the Jews and all the Christians when we have chosen to believe in Islam?' This is what is known as 'allowing for the possibility'. That is, there were bound to be a number, however small, of Jews and Christians who were considering embracing Islam as the true religion; and there were forty Jews who came from Sinai with Ja'far ibn Abu Taleb *God be pleased with him* to testify to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that they had read the Torah in its uncorrupted form and that they believed in his Message. God wanted to honour these people, and honour all those of the people of the Book who were to believe, and so He *the Glorified* said, 'Those to whom We have given the Book recite it as it should be recited....' That is, they read it just as it was revealed to them, without any corruption or alteration, and so they recognised the pure truth, untouched by human caprice, and free from the alterations that changed the truth to falsehood.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...They [are the ones who] believe in it. And whoever disbelieves in it - it is they who are the losers.’ Notice that the Noble Quran always uses contrasts in order to honour the believers and cast sorrow and regret into the hearts of the deniers; for contrast always shows the difference between two things.

God *the Most High* wants those to whom He gave the Scripture and who did not corrupt it and believed in it, to arrive at the grace which will lead them to eternal bliss, namely the blessing of Islam and faith; as opposed to those who corrupted the Torah and Gospel, whose end will be clear loss and an eternity in hell.

يٰۤاَيُّهَاۤ اِسْرَءٰىلَ اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِيۤ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاَنّٰى فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلٰى الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

**Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you  
and favoured you over other people [122]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 122)**

If we go back to what we said when we examined verse 40 from the chapter of *al-Baqara*, we see that God *the Most High* said, ‘O children of Israel! Remember My grace which I bestowed upon you, and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you; and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe’ (*al-Baqara*: 40). The True Lord *the Most High* did not conclude this treatment of the Israelites without first repeating to them the words with which He started it. He *the Exalted* would not end His address to them in this passage except after reminding them a final time of the blessings with which He graced them, and how He favoured them above many of His creatures; and one of the greatest aspects of this favour was there in the Torah, giving the glad tidings of the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, which is a great favour indeed.

The reminder here of this grace and favour is a rebuke to the Israelites for not believing in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* even though He was mentioned in their Torah. They should have been awakened by this reminder and hastened to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, because he was a great favour from God *the Most High* to them. God *the Most High* tells that when the tremor overcame Moses *peace be upon him* and his chosen companions, Moses *peace be upon him* asked God *the Most High* for

mercy and prayed that God ordain for them what is good in this world as well as in the life to come, as to Him they have turned. God answered that with His chastisement, He afflicts whom He wills, but His Mercy encompasses everything; and so He shall confer it on those who fear Him and spend in charity, and who believe in His messages, those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel- the Prophet who will enjoin upon them the doing of what is right and forbid them the doing of what is wrong, and make lawful to them the good things of life and forbid them the bad things, and lift from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them. Those, therefore, who shall believe in him, and honour him, and succour him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him, it is they that shall be successful (*al-A'raf*: 156-157).

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ  
مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا نَنْفَعُهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

**and beware of a Day when no soul can stand in for  
another. No compensation will be accepted from it,  
nor intercession be of use to it, nor will anyone be  
helped [123] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 123)**

This noble verse is similar to verse 48 from the chapter of *al-Baqara*, in which God *the Most High* says, ‘And be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail for another at all, neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped’ (*al-Baqara*: 48).

We say that this is only an outward similarity, but every verse has its own unique meaning. In verse 48, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it...’ while in the verse we are currently examining, He says, ‘...neither will any compensation be accepted from it, nor will intercession benefit it...’ The wording of the first verse will be more suitable if we are referring to the soul that is seeking to be availed; however, if we are referring to the second soul, the one offering avail, the wording of the second verse which we are currently



examining, is more fitting. It is as though we are dealing with two souls, one of whom attempts to avail, while the other seeks to be availed. The one who attempts to avail is the one who intercedes, and so the first thing that might be accepted from him is intercession; and if his intercession is not accepted, he says ‘I will pay a ransom,’ i.e. I will offer compensation or offer something to make up for the sin. On the other hand, the first thing that the one who seeks to be availed, will offer is a ransom, and if this is not accepted, he will seek someone to intercede for him. We spoke about this in detail when we discussed verse 48 of the chapter of *al-Baqara*.

وَإِذْ أَبْلَىٰ إِبرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا  
قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

**When Abraham’s Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, ‘I will make you a leader of people.’ Abraham asked, ‘And will You make leaders from my descendants too?’ God answered, ‘My pledge does not hold for those who do evil’ [124]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 124)**

Now the True Lord *the Most High* comes to the story of Abraham *peace be upon him* to settle the debate and doubt raised by the Jews about the changing of the prayer direction, when the Muslims began to face the blessed *Ka’ba* instead of Jerusalem, and also the debate caused by the claim of the Jews that they are Gods’ ‘chosen people’ and that no prophet could come from any people but them.

God *the Most High* wanted to make clear the Arabs’ connection to Abraham *peace be upon him* and their relationship with the temple he built; and so He *the Exalted* said, ‘And when Abraham was tried by his Lord...’ that is, remember when God *the Glorious and Exalted* tried Abraham *peace be upon him*. The word *idh* (‘when’) here is an adverb of time, and is distinct from the word *idha* (‘if’) which marks a conditional clause and is also used as an adverb of time, as in God’s statement: ‘When the victory of God comes and the conquest, and you see people enter God’s religion in hosts’ (*an-Nasr*: 1-2).

The word ‘*idha*’ here is also an adverb of time, but it indicates a conditional clause; as for ‘*idh*’, it is used only as an adverb of time. God’s words ‘And

when Abraham was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them...' mean 'Remember the time God *the Most High* tested Abraham *peace be upon him* with certain commandments.'

What does 'trial' mean? People think that it always means a bad thing or an ordeal, but this is not the case; for a trial is a test which, if we pass it, will be good for us; but if we fail it, will be bad for us. A trial is not a bad thing, but rather it is a means by which good or evil is tested. The one who tried was God *the Most High*; He is the Lord, and the Arabic word '*rabb*' ('lord') means an educator (*murabbi*) who uses certain methods to guide those whom he teaches to fulfil their purpose perfectly. One of the foundations of teaching is that the teacher tests those he teaches so that he can determine whether they have been successfully taught yet or not. The trial here was by 'commandments' (*kalimat*), which is the plural of *kalima* (literally 'word') which can be used to mean a saying/statement, as we see in the verse that warns those who say that God has taken for Himself a son; they have no knowledge whatsoever of this, neither do their fathers; that was a grievous word (saying) to come out of their mouths and they utter nothing but falsehood (*al-Kahf*: 4-5).

So the word *kalima* can mean a statement, and it can also mean a single word, such as if you say 'Muhammad', and then stop speaking; in such an instance, what you have said is not a meaningful sentence. In the verse we are examining now, the meaning of *kalima* is a command from God.

God *the Glorious and Exalted* says 'Do' and 'Do not'; it is as though God's commandments are in single words which you then, either obey, or do not. The scholars differ as to what exactly these commands were which Abraham *peace be upon him* received from his Lord; we say to them that these words must have reflected Abraham's status as the Father of the Prophets. It was a trial which made him worthy to bear the Message, and so it must have been a great trial. Some scholars say that the trials were ten in number, and others say they were forty, of which ten are mentioned in the chapter of *at-Tawba* where God *the Most High* describes the believers, the repentant, the worshippers, the praisers of God, the travelers for His cause, those who bow and prostrate in prayer, those who enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and those who observe the limits set by God (*at-Tawba*: 112). This was related by 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas God *be pleased with him*.

It is also said that another ten are mentioned in the chapter of *al-Mu'minun*, where God *the Most High* asserts that the believers will certainly have succeeded. They are those who are, during their prayer, humbly submissive, and who turn away from ill speech, and who are observant of *zakat* (alms), and who guard their private parts except from their spouses or those their right hands possess, for indeed, they will not be blamed – but whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors – and they who are to their trusts and their promises attentive, and who carefully maintain their prayers. And after enumerating their attributes, God *the Glorious and Exalted* asserts that those are the inheritors (*al-Mu'minun*: 1-10).

And in the chapter of *al-Ahzab*, some more of them are mentioned where God *the Exalted* says that truly the men who resign themselves to God (Muslims), and the women who resign themselves, and the believing men and the believing women, and the devout men and the devout women, and the men of truth, and the women of truth, and the patient men (in adversity) and the patient women, and the humble men (before God) and the humble women, and the men who give alms and the women who give alms, and the men who fast and the women who fast, and the chaste men and the chaste women, and the men and the women who unceasingly remember God: for them God has prepared forgiveness and a rich recompense (*al-Ahzab*: 35).

And in the chapter of *al-Ma'arij*, after mentioning the negative aspects of man like impatience in adversity, greed, and miserliness, God *the Most High* makes an exception for the believers and gives a list of their positive characteristics: They are those who observe and are constant in their prayer; and in whose wealth there is a due and known right for him who asks for charity, as well as for him who is deprived and is ashamed to ask, and who have belief in the Day of Judgement, and who are fearful of the punishment of their Lord- for, indeed, no one is safe from the punishment of their Lord- and those who guard their private parts except from their spouses or from those whom their right hands possess as those, indeed, are not to be blamed; but whoever seeks beyond that, these are transgressors, and those who are true to their trusts and pledges and who are in their testimonies upright and who strictly maintain their prayer (*al-Ma'arij*: 22-34).

We can remove ourselves from this argument by saying simply that God *the Most High* tried Abraham *peace be upon him* with certain commands and prohibitions; and He also tried him by subjecting him to being cast into fire alive and was found not having any fear or doubt in God's protection, and not turning to any but God; and the ultimate trial came when he was commanded to slaughter his own son.

And Abraham *peace be upon him* obeyed all these commandments eagerly and with love to God, and added to them even more supererogatory acts of their kind; and then he was cast into a fire and did not fret so that when Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to him and said 'Have you any need?', he replied, 'As for you I have no need; and as for God, He well knows of my condition, and has no need of me to ask Him,' and in his old age, he was tested by being commanded to slaughter his only son and he obeyed with a tranquil soul, content with God's decree; and the True Lord *the Exalted* honoured him by saying that he was faithful to his pledge (*an-Najm*: 37).

That is, he was true to all that was asked of him, and fulfilled it with love for God's teachings and trials. Abraham *peace be upon him* passed every test and trial to which he was subjected, and God was dearer to him than his family, and his own self, and his son. How did God *the Glorious and Exalted* reward him for this? He said '...I will make you a leader for the people.' That is, the True Lord *the Most High* trusted him to be a leader for mankind. God *the Most High* knew well that Abraham *peace be upon him* was faithful, but He tested him so that we humans would know how God chooses His closest servants, and how they become leaders who are given the reins of command. Abraham *peace be upon him* responded to the glad tidings from God *the Most High* by saying, as the Noble Quran tells us, '...And of my descendants?'

What does the word 'descendents' mean? It means the offspring and children to come; for he loved that goodness would reach to his children and grandchildren as well, and this is human nature. Men give the fruits of their life's work to their children and grandchildren, and are glad to do this. And so Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted leadership to be passed down to his children and grandchildren so that they would not be deprived from the values of faith that would govern their lives and lead them to eternal joy. But God *the Most High*

answered Abraham *peace be upon him* by stating a matter of doctrine which also served as a rebuke to the Jews who abandoned those values and worshipped matter; and so He *the Exalted* said, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers.'

It is as though Abraham *peace be upon him* had attained this leadership by virtue of his works, but this would only be passed along to those of God's servant who were righteous, and worshipped Him and praised His Name.

The words of the True Lord *the Exalted* 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers' refer to the Jews who exchanged their religious values for materialism, and it was a foretelling that in the future, there would emerge from Abraham's descendants those who would go astray and do evil.

It is amazing that Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* were messengers, and although the original messenger was Moses, and Aaron was only added to assist him because of his eloquence, and yet God's will was that prophethood would continue in the line of Aaron *peace be upon him*, not Moses *peace be upon him*; for prophethood is not a matter of blood inheritance.

God *the Most High* says, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers.' It is as though it is God's covenant which pulls its followers to it, that is, it is the covenant which acts. After this, we come to the matter of race, blood, and colour. The filial bond of prophets is not like the filial bond of ordinary people; the prophets have been distinguished by certain values, and their true children are those who inherit these values from them, not those who inherit their race, blood, and colour. Let us look back to the story of Noah *peace be upon him* when his son drowned: he raised his hands to the sky and prayed, protesting that his son is of his family (*Hud*: 45). And the True Lord *the Most High* replied that he was not of his family as he was unrighteous in his conduct (*Hud*: 46).

The true family of the prophets are those who inherit their values. If God *the Most High* had not said that the son was unrighteous in his conduct, we might have thought that he was not his son because he actually had a different father or something like this; but God *the Most High* wanted us to know that the reason he was not considered the true son of Noah *peace be upon him* is that he was unrighteous in his conduct.

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا الْكَيْتَ مَثَابَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَمْنًا وَاتَّخِذُوا مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَهِيمَ مُصَلًّى وَعَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ  
 إِبْرَهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ أَن طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ﴿١٢٥﴾

**We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for people, saying, ‘Take the spot where Abraham stood as your place of prayer.’ We commanded Abraham and Ishmael: ‘Purify My House for those who walk round it, those who stay there, and those who bow and prostrate themselves in worship’ [125]**  
**(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 125)**

The previous verse explained to us that the Jews annulled their link to Abraham *peace be upon him* when they abandoned his values and religion and turned to simple materialism. You claim that you are the best people on earth because you are descended from Isaac son of Abraham *peace be upon them*, yet the Arabs also have this honour because they are descended from Ishmael, son of Abraham *peace be upon them*, and so in this respect, you are no better than they are. And so now that we move on to the story of how the prayer direction was changed from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba*, we say that it was destined from the moment the world was created that the *Ka'ba* would become the prayer direction for all who wished to worship God.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And when We made the House a place of return for the people and a place of security....’ Consider the word *bayt* (‘house’) and the word *mathaba* (‘a place to which people might return again and again’). The word *bayt* is derived from the concept of *baytuta*, meaning the place where you go and rest, and where you find your spouse and your children. And so the *Ka'ba* was called a *bayt* because it is the place where all God’s creatures can go to find repose. The word *mathaba* means a place you go to again and again, and likewise those who go to God’s Sacred House once love to return to it time after time, so, it is a *mathaba* for them because they have tasted the sweetness of being in their Lord’s House. I challenge you to find anyone in God’s Sacred House whose mind is concerned with anything but the remembrance of God, His Word, His Quran and prayer to Him. The moment you look at the *Ka'ba*, all the anxiety, worry, and grief leave your heart, and you do not think of your family or your worldly affairs. If the attraction of the House of God remained in the hearts of the people, they would abandon all their worldly

affairs to remain within its precincts, and so ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab God *be pleased with him* would make it obligatory for people to return to their homes and families as soon as they had finished the rites of the pilgrimage.

Out of His mercy, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* makes this worldly life fade from the mind and the heart of the pilgrim, for the pilgrims are in the House of their Lord, and if any woe or worry comes to them and they turn to their Lord while they are in His House, this woe and worry will leave them immediately. And so the True Lord *the Most High* mentions Abraham’s supplication to God to make people’s hearts incline towards them (*Ibrahim: 37*).

Their hearts, not their bodies, incline, that is, they cast themselves towards the House. The pilgrimage is the one Pillar that everyone tries their utmost to perform; even those who cannot afford it, strive and struggle to perform the rite, and even those who have performed it once – having thus fulfilled their religious obligation – still try to do it again and again.

So, it is a good thing that people are left to return to the House of God again and again so that God *the Glorious and Exalted* would remove the anxiety and worries about life from their hearts.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...a place of return for the people and a place of security...’ and this means that people are safe within it. Even after they had abandoned the religion of Ishmael *peace be upon him* and took to idolatry, the Arabs still guaranteed the safety of the pilgrims who came to God’s Sacred House so that one of them would even find his own father’s murderer in the House of God and leave him alone until he went out.

God *the Most High* establishes laws which relieve people from their hostilities and keep for them their dignity, so He makes certain places into sanctuaries, and makes months inviolable where there can be no fighting therein so that when the people experience peace and purity, they might give up their warring ways altogether.

The discussion of this verse requires us to explain the difference between God informing us that the House is a sanctuary, and His commanding us to make it a sanctuary ourselves. He *the Exalted* is not telling us that the House is a sanctuary, but rather, He is commanding us to make it a sanctuary and

guarantee the safety of all who enter it; so, those who obey their Lord, will guarantee the safety of all who enter the House, and those who disobey their Lord, will not do so. When certain factions create disturbance in the House in order to use it as a cover to achieve their goals, does this contradict God's statement that He has made it '...a place of return for the people and a place of security...'? We say that it does not. In saying this, God is not informing us of a fact, but rather, He is giving us a command. If we obey God, we will fulfil this command, and if we do not obey Him, we will not fulfil it.

God *the Most High* says, '...And take from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer....' We must pause for a moment here to consider the meaning of the Arabic word *maqam* ('standing place'), and distinguish it from the other similar word *muqam* which we find in the verse where the Quran mentions the call of a party of the hypocrites to Muslim fighters during the battle of the Trench, that there is no *muqam* ('staying place') for them in the battlefield (*al-Ahzab*: 13). The word *maqam* means a place where someone has stood, while *muqam* means a place where someone stays/resides, and so if you mean residence, the word to use is *muqam*, and if you mean a place of standing, *maqam* is the word. God *the Most High* says, '...And take from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer....' using the word *maqam*; so, it means the place where Abraham *peace be upon him* stood when he raised the foundations of the House, where even now, there lies the stone upon which Abraham *peace be upon him* stood to raise the foundations.

But why did God *the Most High* command us to take the place where Abraham *peace be upon him* once stood as a place of prayer? It is because they used to avoid praying there because if you pray behind this place, the stone lies between you and the *Ka'ba*, and the Muslims would seek to avoid having anything between them and the *Ka'ba* when they prayed, and so they would not pray in the place where Abraham *peace be upon him* had stood. And so our master 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* said to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Should we not take the place where Abraham stood as a place of prayer?' 'Umar's question sprang from the concern not to have anything stand between him and the *Ka'ba* when he prayed which they did not want to have it occur; but when Omar *God be pleased with him* saw that there being a place in the House where no one prayer was creating a gap



between the people in the congregational prayer, he wanted the prayer to be offered in every space in the House. And so in response, the noble verse was revealed: ‘...And take from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer....’

If God *the Most High* commanded us to take the place where Abraham *peace be upon him* stood as a place of prayer, it is as though He *the Exalted* approved of the fact that the place of Abraham would cause something to be between the believers and the *Ka’ba* when they prayed. This is because the Station of Abraham *peace be upon him* has a story connected with the offering of worship in the best and most complete way, and the station itself gives us the key to this way of complete worship, for God *the Most High* describes the House as being full of clear signs, and He specifies the standing place of Abraham (*Al-‘Imran*: 97).

So, there are clear signs which God *the Most High* wants us to see and understand. The station of Abraham *peace be upon him* is the place where he stood when God commanded him to raise the foundations of the House. The order of events of this matter implies that the House existed first, and then after that, its foundations were raised and the Black Stone was put in its place by Abraham *peace be upon him*.

In this, God *the Most High* does not want to give us history so much as He wants to give us a lesson. The matter of the original building of the House is a matter of dispute amongst the scholars. When was the House built? Some scholars say that it was first built at the time of Abraham *peace be upon him*, while others say it was at the time of Adam *peace be upon him*, a third group say that it was built even before Adam *peace be upon him*. We should use logical reasoning and apply it to the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* that when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, they prayed: ‘O our Lord! Accept this from us: for, indeed, You alone are All-Hearing, All Knowing’ (*al-Baqara*: 127).

We ask: What does it mean to raise? It means to take up, and lift. Every building has its width, length, and height, and as long as Abraham’s mission was to raise the foundations, this suggests that there was already a length and width to the House, and that Abraham *peace be upon him* just added the third dimension, namely the height. So the House existed before Abraham *peace be upon him*, and then came the flood which covered the earth at the time of Noah

*peace be upon him* and so its traces were covered over; and so God *the Most High* wanted to uncover it once more, and show its location to the people.

The *Ka'ba* is not this House, but it is the object which shows us where the House is. And so to those who understand from God's words that when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, (*al-Baqara*: 127), that Abraham *peace be upon him* was the one who built the House, we say: The House had already existed before Abraham *peace be upon him*, and the mission of Abraham was merely to raise its foundations to show the people where the House was. Our evidence for this is that nowadays, since there are high buildings all around the *Ka'ba*, those who pray on their roofs do not prostrate towards the *Ka'ba* itself, but rather prostrate in the direction of the air above the *Ka'ba*, and those who pray on the lowest level also face the *Ka'ba* because the place is not restricted to the object alone.

Perhaps the biggest proof of this is to be found in the Noble Quran: When Abraham *peace be upon him* took Hajar *peace be upon her* and her son Ishmael *peace be upon him* and left them at God's Sacred House, at which time the *Ka'ba* had not yet been built, he mentioned the House. We find this in the words of the True Lord *the Most High* stating Abraham's supplication when he left Hajar *peace be upon her* and her baby: 'O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Your sanctified House so that, O our Lords, they might devote themselves to prayer...' (*Ibrahim*: 37).

This means that the House was already present when Ishmael *peace be upon him* was still a baby, but the foundations of the House were built after Ishmael *peace be upon him* had grown into a young man who could help his father build the *Ka'ba*. So the place where the House of God stands, existed before Abraham *peace be upon him* built the *Ka'ba*, but the position of the House was not clear for the people to see. And so God *the Most High* showed the position of the House to Abraham *peace be upon him* so that he could place there a sign for people to identify it. We find this in God's statement that when He designated to Abraham the site of the House, He enjoined on him to associate no divinity with Him (*al-Hajj*: 26).

Many exegetes do not grasp the truth of what the Quran says. If we want to consider the matter of the building of the House, we should look at all the

verses in the Noble Quran which are concerned with this story, among which is God's statement that the first House ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakka (Mecca): rich in blessing, and a source of guidance to all the worlds (*Al-Imran*: 96).

The discourse here concerns the House, and says that it was set up for mankind, meaning Adam *peace be upon him* and all his progeny until the Day of Resurrection. In light of this, we must understand that since the House was set up for man, this means that man did not set it up himself, but rather, it was God *the Most High* who set it up and ordained it; and God's justice necessitated that the House should exist before Adam *peace be upon him* was created. So it was the angels who set it up by God's command, in the place where God willed that His House should be built. And when Adam *peace be upon him* descended to earth, God established repentance and set up this House so that mankind could repent to their Lord therein, and pray and worship therein.

When Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted to raise the foundations of the House, it would have been enough for him to make them as tall as he stood, but he brought the stone and stood on it so that he could make the foundations as high as he could reach while standing on the stone. By drawing attention to the Station of Abraham *peace be upon him* and making it a place of prayer, God *the Most High* wanted to alert us to the fact that a believing person should deal with God's commandments with passion, and so he should not simply perform them superficially, but should rather go about them with love, and attempt to add extra supererogatory works over and above the limits of what God has obliged him to do.

The stone which stands at the station of Abraham is proof of his love for fulfilling his Lord's commands, and his attempt to go even further than them. The stone upon which Abraham *peace be upon him* stood has his footprints imprinted into it; there are those who say that the stone grew soft under the weight of Abraham's feet out of fear of God, and those who say that Abraham *peace be upon him* himself dug hollows into the stone in which to place his feet so that when he stood on it and raised his hands as high as he could build the foundations of the House, he would keep his balance.

God's words '...Purify My House...' indicate that the traces of the House were completely covered so that it was not distinct from the rest of the land around it so that animals were slaughtered there and refuse was thrown there, and so God *the Most High* commanded that Abraham and Ishmael *peace be upon him* purify the House from all the dirt, and make it a fitting place for three groups: 'those who perform circumambulation' (*ta'ifin*), derived from the word *tawaf*, which means to walk around something, which is why they call the police who patrol at night *tawwafa* because they walk around the streets at night. We find the word in another verse about the orchard which was destroyed by an encircling desolation (*ta'if*) sent by the Lord, while the owners were asleep so that in the morning it became barren and bleak (*al-Qalam*: 19-20).

This refers to the story of the orchard whose original owner had died, and then his sons denied the poor and the needy their right from it, and so God *the Most High* sent an affliction to encircle it burning the trees; so *ta'if* here means something which encircles or goes around. The second group mentioned in the verse are '...those who stay there for worship...', and the third group are those 'who bow down and prostrate themselves' i.e. those who will pray there. So the purification of the House was so that there could be circumambulation around it, and vigils kept in it, and prayers offered in it; and it was also purified because it would one day be the prayer direction for the Muslims, for all those who bow and prostrate all over the world, until the end of time.

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا وَارْزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ مَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ  
الْآخِرِ قَالَ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَأُمَتِّعُهُ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ أَضْطَرُّهُ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ النَّارِ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٢٦﴾

**Abraham said, 'My Lord, make this land secure and provide with produce those of its people who believe in God and the Last Day.' God said, 'As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while and then subject them to the torment of the Fire – an evil destination' [126]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 126)**

The True Lord *the Most High* said, 'And when We made the House a place of return for the people and a place of security...' (*al-Baqara*: 125), and as long as He made it a sanctuary, why did Abraham *peace be upon him* need to

ask that Mecca be a secure town? We say that when you hear a request for something that already exists, know that it is a request for the continuation of this thing. It is therefore as though Abraham *peace be upon him* was asking God *the Most High* to preserve the blessing of security for the House; for an illustration of this kind of situation, let us read how the True Lord *the Most High* addressed the believers: ‘O you who believe! Believe in God and his Messenger, and the Book which he has sent down to his Messenger, and the Book which he has sent down before. Whoever does not believe in God and his Angels and his Books and his messengers, and in the Last Day, he has surely gone far astray’ (*an-Nisa*: 136).

He addressed them with the title of believers, and then asked them to believe. How can this be? We say that God *the Most High* was commanding them to continue and preserve their faith. And so every request for something that already exists is a request for its continuation.

Abraham *peace be upon him* said, ‘...My Lord, make this a secure town...’ that is, ‘O Lord, as You made this House secure once, keep it secure until the end of time so that everyone who enters it will be safe; for he will be in a valley of barren land.’ In the past, people used to fear to go there because the roads leading there were unsafe. Or, ‘secure’ (*amin*) might mean it was a request for God to preserve for all who entered it the continued blessing of faith (*iman*).

Abraham’s supplication ‘...Make this a secure town...’ is repeated in a slightly different wording in another verse, where it says, ‘...Make this town secure...’ (*Ibrahim*: 35). So in one verse, the word ‘town’ is indefinite, while in the other it is definite. We say that when Abraham *peace be upon him* said ‘...O my Lord! Make this town secure...’ (*Ibrahim*: 35), he was asking for two things: to make the place a ‘town’, and to make it secure.

What does it mean to make the place a town? It is to be noted that some abstract words are derived from concrete meanings; for example, the Arabic word *ghashb*, which means to take forcibly, originally means to skin a sheep, and so it is as though when someone forcibly robs someone else, it is like he is ‘skinning’ his possession from him as he holds on to it.

When you hear the word *balad*, you automatically think of a town. The Arabic word *balad* means a mark on the skin which stands out from the rest

of the skin, such as a white mark on the face or the arms, where the skin affected is marked out by its whiteness. If a place has no permanent dwellings or buildings, it is just flat earth and you cannot easily tell it apart from the rest; but if you build structures there, you give it a mark which distinguishes it from the lands surrounding it.

He then says, ‘...and provide its people with fruits....’ This is one of the requirements of security, for as long as there is provision and fruit, the basic needs of life will be found and so people will stay in the land. But Abraham *peace be upon him* added a modifying phrase to his supplication, saying, ‘...and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes in God and the Last Day....’ It is as though he was praying for sustenance for the believers only – why? This is because when God said to him, ‘...‘Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people...’, Abraham asked, ‘And of my descendants?’ and God answered him, ‘My covenant does not include the wrongdoers’ (*al-Baqara*: 124). This is why Abraham *peace be upon him* feared, when praying for those who would dwell in Mecca, that God’s answer would be the same as the one He gave before, by perhaps saying to him, ‘The wrongdoers will not gain the sustenance of God.’ And so Abraham *peace be upon him* was careful, and said, ‘...and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes....’ (*al-Baqara*: 126). But God wanted to inform Abraham *peace be upon him* that Godly bestowal is not the same as Lordly bestowal: Spiritual leadership of the people is Godly bestowal which can embrace none but a believer; as for sustenance, it is a Lordly bestowal which comes to both the believer and the disbeliever because God is the One who called us all into existence and provided us all with our sustenance. It is as though when the True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘My covenant does not include the wrongdoers’ (*al-Baqara*: 124), He was speaking about the values of His teachings which are given to none but the believers; but sustenance is given to believers and nonbelievers alike, and so God *the Most High* said, ‘And whoever disbelieves....’ This was a correction of Abraham’s understanding so that he would see that everything which God has called into existence has its sustenance, whether believer or disbeliever, and the goodness of this world is apportioned universally. Since it was God who called you forth to existence, He undertakes to provide you with your sustenance.

God *the Most High* did not say to the sun, 'Rise upon My believing servants only,' and He did not say to the air 'Let no evildoer breathe you;' rather, He gave the blessing of the preservation and continuation of life to all whom He created, believer and disbeliever alike. But as for those who disbelieve, God *the Most High* says of them, 'And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little....' Enjoyable things are things which a person loves, and hopes that they will stay with him and be repeated for him.

God's statement '...I will grant him enjoyment...' indicates that this enjoyment will last, that is, he will have enjoyment in this world. Every blessing gives some enjoyment: food gives enjoyment, and drink gives enjoyment, and sexual relations give enjoyment; and so enjoyment in this world comes from many varied things. Yet God *the Most High* describes it as being '...a little...', because however great and varied are the enjoyments of this world, they only last a little while.

Consider what He then says, '...then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire....' The meaning of 'I will force him' is that he shall have no free will in the Hereafter. It is as though man has free will in this world, and can take this and leave that, but in the Hereafter he will have no free will; so as one of the denizens of hell, for example, he will not be able to choose paradise, but the limbs which were subjugated to his will in this worldly life, and which he commanded to do sin, will not be under his control in the Hereafter; and this is the meaning of God's words about the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by recalling all that they did (*an-Nur*: 24).

That is, the organs which obeyed the disbeliever in committing sin in this worldly life will not obey him on the Day of Resurrection: the tongue which used to speak words of disbelief (we seek refuge in God) will on the Day of Resurrection testify against its owner, and the feet which used to walk to places of alcohol, debauchery, and licentiousness will testify against their owner, and the hand which used to kill and steal will testify against its owner. So God's words 'I will force him' mean that he will lose his free will in the Hereafter, and will end up dwelling in Fire and severe suffering, as God *the Most High* says, '...then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and

wretched is the destination.' That is, God *the Most High* warns the disbelievers that they are headed for fire and suffering in the Hereafter, wherein they will have no free will, but rather will be compelled.

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا  
تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

**As Abraham and Ishmael built up the foundations of  
the House [they prayed], 'Our Lord, accept [this] from  
us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing [127]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 127)**

God *the Glorified* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: Remember when Abraham *peace be upon him* raised the foundations of the House; and the verb *yarfa'* ('were raising') used here in Arabic is the imperfect tense of the verb, which usually refers to events which are happening now and events which will happen in the future.

But is Abraham *peace be upon him* raising the foundations of the House now? Or has he already raised them, and finished with the task? Of course he has already raised them, but God *the Most High* wants to evoke an image of Abraham and Ishmael *peace be upon them* as they raised the foundations of the House, and He wants the believers to envisage the act of raising. Abraham *peace be upon him* had no ladder with which to stand above the House, and he had no scaffolding; but the absence of these useful tools, did not stop Abraham *peace be upon him* from trying, and so he went and got the stone.

God *the Most High* does not want us to forget this action, and how Abraham and his son Ishmael *peace be upon them* went to look for a stone – and the stone had to have been light enough for them to carry it to the construction site – and then Abraham *peace be upon him* stood upon it and Ishmael *peace be upon him* passed up to him the other stones they used to build the foundations of the House. Despite the toil that the pair of them underwent, they were happy, and all they asked from God was that He would accept their action. The Arabic word for 'accept' (*qabul*) and its cognates are all derived from a root which means 'to face' or 'to respond.' So, they asked God, upon the occasion of finishing



His work, seeking nothing but its reward: ‘...Accept this from us...’, i.e. reward us for what we have done for You, in obedience to Your command.

God *the Glorified* then mentions their supplication: ‘...for, indeed, You alone are All Hearing, All Knowing.’ That is, You O Lord are the ‘All Hearing,’ who hears our prayers, and hears all that we say; and ‘All Knowing,’ i.e. You know our intention and our sincerity to You, and that we do this work seeking Your Pleasure alone, and nothing else. This is because all actions are valued by the intentions behind them; and two men might both do the same work, but only one of them be rewarded because he did it to please God and draw nearer to Him, while the other will not be rewarded because he only did it for the sake of this worldly life.

God *the Most High* knows well our intentions; and so if the work is sincerely for God, He accepts it, but if it is not offered sincerely to Him, he does not accept it. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘Actions are but according to intentions, and for every man is that which he intends: and so he whose emigration was to God and His Messenger, his emigration is to God and His Messenger; and he, whose emigration was for a worldly desire, he might claim, or a woman he might marry, his emigration is to that which he emigrated to.’<sup>(1)</sup>

So, if an action is not sincerely offered to God, it deserves no reward from Him.

رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ  
وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

**Our Lord, make us devoted to You; make our descendants into a community devoted to You. Show us how to worship and accept our repentance, for You are the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful [128] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 128)**

There is a difference between being commanded to do something and so doing it with love, and merely offering the outer shell of the action, so, you perform

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nasa'i, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Abu Nu'aim in Al-Hilya, and Ad-Daraqutni, in different wordings

it like someone who is throwing from his back the burden of the commandment. In this noble verse, Abraham and his son Ishmael *peace be upon them* prayed, saying: O Lord, You commanded us to raise the foundations of the House, and we did as You commanded; but this does not mean that we are finished with Your commands, for we wish to further taste the sweetness of Your commands again and again: 'Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You...' so that we surrender all our affairs to You.

A person only finishes with one responsibility and then immediately seeks another if he yearns for the sweetness of obedience, and takes joy from it; and no one takes joy from obedience unless he envisages what the reward for it will be: Whenever he performs an action, he envisages the bliss that awaits him for doing it, and so he seeks to do more.

As soon as Abraham and Ishmael *peace be upon them* finished raising the foundations of the House, they said 'Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You...' And they did not stop there, but rather they desired that the sweetness of obedience be passed on to their descendants after them, and so said, '...and make from our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You...', in order that the support of God's teachings remain on earth, and obedience be passed down from one generation to the next until the Day of Resurrection. Then they said, '...And show us our rites of worship...', that is, show us, O Lord, what You want from us; show us how to worship You, and how to draw near to You. The rites of worship are the means by which God *the Most High* wants us to worship Him.

The supplication '...And show us our rites of worship...' shows us that Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted to open the door of obedience for himself because he only saw obedience as a means of self-purification, and goodness for his progeny, and bliss in the Hereafter. And so he said, as the True Lord *the Most High* tells us, '...and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Acceptor of repentance, the Merciful.' We should not necessarily understand 'accept our repentance' as repentance from sin, as though Abraham and Ishmael *peace be upon them* had fallen into sin and so wanted to repent to God; rather, it was because they knew that after them, would come those who would sin, and so they asked God to accept the repentance of their descendants. How did they

know this? They knew it because God *the Most High* had said to Abraham *peace be upon him*, ‘And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and wretched is the destination’ (*al-Baqara*: 126)

They asked God *the Most High* to forgive and have mercy on their descendants; and God loves that His servants repent to Him, and He *the Exalted* is more joyful when His believing servant repents than a man who finds his camel after losing it in the wilderness. For when sin draws a person away from God’s teachings to give him a brief advantage, the sweetness of faith – if he is a believer – will draw him back once more to faith, and far from sin. And so it is said that when you repent and regret what you have done, God does not only forgive your sins, but also changes your bad deeds into good ones. We said before that the establishment of repentance was a means for the protection of society from the harm of a great evil because if a single sin meant that you were bound to spend eternity in hell, and there was no possibility of repentance, everyone who sinned, would simply sin more and descend into greater evil, and all society would be afflicted by their evil, and people would despair about their Hereafter, for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Every son of Adam is a sinner, and the best of sinners are the repentant.’<sup>(1)</sup>

And so out of His mercy, God *the Glorified* established for us repentance, to relieve us from the evil of sin and wickedness.

رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ  
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١٢٩﴾

**Our Lord, make a messenger of their own rise up from among them, to recite Your revelations to them, teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them: You are the Mighty, the Wise’ [129] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 129)**

Abraham *peace be upon him* prayed to God *the Most High* to make complete His favour upon his offspring, and increase his mercy upon His servants, by sending them a Messenger to convey to them the teachings of Heaven so that

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(1) Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ad-Darimi in *As-Sunnan*, and Al-Hakim in *Al-Mustadrak*

there would be no time of darkness on earth in which sinfulness, corruption, disbelief, and idolatry would be rife as was the case in the time before Abraham *peace be upon him*.

The words '...a Messenger from themselves...' refutes the statement of the Jews who resented the fact that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was an Arab, when they assumed that prophethood was exclusive to them alone. We say to them: Our grandfather and your grandfather is Abraham *peace be upon him*, and you are the descendants of Jacob son of Isaac *peace be upon them* while Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the descendant of Ishmael, son of Abraham and brother of Isaac *peace be upon them* and there is no proof to your claim that God preferred you and chose you alone out of all the peoples of the earth. Rather, the True Lord *the Glorified* willed to take prophethood away from you since you did evil on earth, and God's covenant does not embrace the evildoers.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to say to them: This Prophet is from the line of Abraham, and he is descended from Ishmael, son of Abraham *peace be upon them*.

God *the Most High* then states Abraham's supplication: '...who will recite Your verses to them...' i.e. the verses of the Noble Quran. And Abraham's supplication goes on: '...and teach them the Book and Wisdom...' We should know that there is a difference between reciting and teaching. Reciting the Quran means to read it, while teaching it means that you teach what it means, and for what purpose it was sent, and from whence it came. If 'Book' here means the Noble Quran, then 'wisdom' means the sayings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* which the True Lord *the Most High* mentioned in commanding the wives of the Prophet to bear in mind all that is recited in their homes of God's verses and wisdom ...(*al-Ahzab*: 34).

Abraham's supplication continues: '...and purify them...' i.e. cleanse them and lead them to the way of goodness and wholeness of faith. The supplication concludes with: '...for indeed You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise.' That is, You are the Almighty, whose might cannot be assuaged, and whom no one can question; and You are the Wise, whose every action has behind it a wise purpose.

وَمَنْ يَرْغَبْ عَنْ مِلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَقَدْ  
 اصْطَفَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١٣٠﴾

**Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Abraham? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter [130] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 130)**

What is the religion of Abraham *peace be upon him*? It is the worship of God Alone without partner, and to yearn to obey His command. Abraham *peace be upon him* was true to everything that God commanded him, and added more devotional acts besides them, and he accepted his trials with obedience and patience: when God tried him by commanding him to sacrifice his only son, he did not hesitate; and he obeyed all God's commands with love, and tried to preserve the upright way for his progeny also.

God *the Most High* puts forth the rhetorical question: 'And who would be averse to...', that is, refuse and reject. The root of the Arabic word used here is *raghiba* which, when followed by the preposition *fi* (in), literally means to desire something, but when combined with the particle '*an*, means to avoid and reject something. Those who avoid and reject Abraham's religion are the ignorant and weak-minded, and so God *the Most High* describes such a person as '...one who makes a fool of himself...' indicating irrationality and an inability to distinguish what is beneficial from what is harmful. If wealth is inherited by someone who is mentally disadvantaged so that their intelligence is not in line with their age, they are termed 'weak-minded' (*sufaha*) and because their intelligence is not developed, their guardians or trustees take charge of their wealth as they themselves cannot manage it properly because of their weak-mindedness.

The Noble Quran addresses this matter thoroughly in commanding the guardians of the weak-minded not to entrust to those, who are weak of judgment, the possessions which God has placed in their charge for their support; but let them have their sustenance from it, and clothe them, and speak to them in a kindly way (*an-Nisa*: 5). Notice that the True Lord *the Most High* refers to the possessions of the weak-minded as being in the charge of the guardian, not in the charge of the weak-minded one since he is not able to manage them

properly, and so God places these possessions under the supervision of someone whose mind is properly developed.

And when God *the Most High* addresses the guardian about the possessions of the weak-minded, He uses the expression 'your possessions' so that the guardian or the trustee will be as careful with them as he would be with his own possessions, or even more so; but he is only supervising them, and so when the owner reaches the age of reason, or is cured from his mental illness, his possessions are given to him to use as he will.

We see many children bringing cases against their fathers or mothers, accusing them of weak-mindedness because they do not spend their wealth effectively, and then they take control of this wealth and squander it themselves. Everyone who does this should be aware that he has no right to take this money and spend it for their own interests; but rather, there are two possibilities: If the guardian is poor, he has the right to take from it fairly; and if he has sufficient wealth, he must be sincere to God in his supervision of this money, and must not lay claim to any of it. But if he takes the money and spends it on himself, and his passions, and his wife and children, this is forbidden, and he will be held to account for it. God *the Glorified* enjoins that he who is rich should abstain entirely from his ward's possessions and he who is poor can take from it in a fair manner (*an-Nisa'*: 6).

So, those who reject the creed of Abraham *peace be upon him* are weak-minded, and do not possess enough intelligence to judge between what is beneficial and what is harmful.

God *the Most High* says, '...And We had chosen him in this world, and indeed he, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous.' God raised him high in this world with His teachings, and by making him a spiritual leader, and by trying him. Many people think that their possessing a high rank in worldly affairs is a sign that God has raised them by giving them the ornaments of this worldly life, and that this justifies their belief that they will also have a high rank in the Hereafter; but we say no; the ranks of this world have no relationship with the ranks of the Hereafter. And so God *the Most High* says, '...And We had chosen him in this world,...' and then added, '...and indeed

he, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous' so that we would know that Abraham *peace be upon him* has a high rank in this world as well as bliss in the Hereafter; that is, he has both.

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٣١﴾

**His Lord said to him, 'Devote yourself to Me.' Abraham replied, 'I devote myself to the Lord of the Universe' [131]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 131)**

God *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that He said to Abraham *peace be upon him* '...Surrender yourself...', and so Abraham *peace be upon him* directly replied '...I surrender myself...' So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants from His servant to surrender himself to Him. The True Lord *the Glorified* did not say 'Surrender yourself to Me,' since this is implicitly understood, and He did not say 'Surrender yourself to your Lord,' since true surrender can only be to God, because He *the Exalted* is the only one in whom we can place our complete trust; although Abraham *peace be upon him* did say in reply, '...I surrender myself to the Lord of the worlds.' This meant that he was not alone in this world; for when he surrendered to God, who subjugated for him everything in the heavens and the earth, he thereby placed himself in harmony with the world which was created by God for mankind. And who can be more mature in their intelligence than the one who surrenders his being to God *the Most High*; for in doing this, he surrenders to the Almighty and Wise, the All-Powerful who cannot be defeated, the Fully Capable whose ability knows no limits, the Conqueror who cannot be conquered, the All-Provider from whom all provision comes; and so it is as though he has submitted his being to goodness in its entirety.

The true religion of God *the Most High* from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Resurrection is self-surrender to God (literally in Arabic to 'surrender the face (*wajh*)'). Why is it the face? It is because the face is the noblest part of a person, and the source of his dignity, and he considers it a mark of his nobility and dignity; and so when we want to show the utmost humility to God in our prayer, we place our foreheads and our faces on the ground, and it is the limit

of humility and surrender to place the noblest part of you, your face, on the ground to show your submission to God *the Most High*.

God *the Glorified* wants a person to surrender his reins to God, by making all of his choices in this worldly life in accordance with the will of God *the Most High*; and so when he speaks he does not lie, because God loves truthfulness; and when he is commanded to do something he does it, because obedience is for our own good, and God gets nothing from it. And when God *the Most High* says 'Give charity,' he hastens to give his money in charity so that it will come back to him many times over in the Hereafter, according to the power of God.

And so we see that the source of all goodness for man is to subjugate his will in this worldly life to the will of God, whereby he places himself in harmony with the entire world, and finds that the world serves him, and gives to him, and he finds happiness.

As for those who surrender themselves to other than God, they are relying on a power which might weaken, and on wealth which might turn to poverty, and on a being which might die and thereby cease to exist; and so he can rightly be described as weak-minded, since he is relying on what is harmful and ignoring what is beneficial.

وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ يٰبَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ  
لَكُمْ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

**and commanded his sons to do the same, as did Jacob:  
'My sons, God has chosen [your] religion for you, so  
make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying  
moment' [132] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 132)**

When you read the word 'bequeath', you should know that a bequest means for you to encourage someone to do something good during the last moments you have to live in this world; for even if a person has lived his life cheating people, he will not cheat himself during the last moments of his life, nor will he cheat anyone else. Why not? Because he feels that he will soon be meeting God *the Glorified*, and so he speaks the truth.

Counsel or bequest is advice which you hope that the one you give will take heed of, and which you impart to him sincerely at the last moments of



your life. And so God *the Most High* will explain this to us in the next verse in calling the Israelites to testify for Jacob's question to his children when death was approaching him; he put to his sons the question: 'Whom will you worship after me?' (*al-Baqara*: 133).

And so God *the Most High* wants to show us that a final bequest is always addressed to those whom you love, and that a person's love for his children is firm and steady, whether he is a believer or a disbeliever. We never like to see anyone in this world do better than us, except our children; and we do our best to ensure that this happens so that they will have all manners of goodness.

Abraham *peace be upon him* bequeathed advice to his children, as did Jacob *peace be upon him*; and the bequest was: 'O my children, God has chosen for you this religion.'

So the bequest was not something Abraham or Jacob *peace be upon them* thought up themselves, but rather was something God had chosen for all humanity; and so Abraham and Jacob *peace be upon them* did not seek to advise their children with anything more than what God had chosen for them. It is as though Abraham *peace be upon him* trusted God for himself, and so obeyed His commands, and trusted Him for his children and so wanted them to hold fast to what God had chosen for them.

God *the Most High* says, 'And this very thing did Abraham bequeath to his children, and [so did] Jacob....' Abraham *peace be upon him* was the patriarch, and his son was Isaac *peace be upon him*, and Isaac's son was Jacob *peace be upon him*; and Jacob *peace be upon him* was the immediate ancestor of the Jews, and he advised them, as the Noble Quran tells us: 'O my children, God has chosen for you this religion; so do not allow death to overtake you while not in submission to Him.'

You do not forbid a person from doing something unless it is possible for them to avoid it, and you do not command them to do something unless they are able to obey; and so did Jacob's *peace be upon him* children have the ability to allow death to overtake them while in surrender to God? No one has the ability to determine when death overtakes him, but rather, it can come at any time. But when Jacob *peace be upon him* counselled his children: '...do not

allow death to overtake you before you have surrendered yourselves to Him,' this means: do not spend even a single moment away from submission to God lest death surprises you while you are not in surrender to God.

God *the Most High* has made the time, place, and cause of our deaths unknown to us so that this be a sign to us of its imminence so that people expect it at any age, and in any place, and at any time. And so we might seek good health from things in which death lurks, as a poet said:

If death leaves you alone, all medicine is beneficial;

But if it leaves you not, the medicine itself will kill you.

That is, if your time of death is not yet nigh, medical treatment will help you and cause you to be cured; but if your time has come, the treatment itself will cause your death such as when you have a surgical operation and it causes your death. One must constantly hold fast to Islam and God's teachings, and never be heedless of them lest death come to him, while he is heedless so that he dies while not in surrender to God – and with God is our refuge.

أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا  
تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِي قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَاللَّهُ ءَابَاؤُكُمْ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ  
وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

**Were you [Jews] there to see when death came upon Jacob?**

**When he said to his sons, 'What will you worship after I am gone?' they replied, 'We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, one single God: we devote ourselves to Him' [133] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 133)**

This address from Jacob *peace be upon him* applied to and included the Jews living at the time when the Noble Quran was revealed. Jacob *peace be upon him* said to his sons, 'What will you worship after me?' and they replied, '...We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac – one God. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.'

This was an affirmation by the progeny of Jacob *peace be upon him* that they surrendered to God, and that their forefathers too surrendered to God.

Reflect on the precision of the Quranic discourse when God *the Most High* says, '...We will worship your God and the God of your fathers....' This indicates that from the death of Abraham *peace be upon him* to the last days of Jacob *peace be upon him*, there had been no change to the worshipped deity, the One God *the Most High*, and so they said, as the Noble Quran tells us, 'one God.' We can take a lesson from this verse which will benefit us greatly in many ways because the Quran will show us in the story of Abraham *peace be upon him* how he discussed issues of doctrine with his father, as the Noble Quran tells us that Abraham reprimanded his father Azar for taking idols as deities, and told him that he and his people were in manifest error in doing this (*al-An'am*: 74).

We know that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was from the line of Ishmael, son of Abraham *peace be upon them*, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am the master of the Sons of Adam.'<sup>(1)</sup>

If Azar, the father of Abraham *peace be upon him*, was a disbeliever and an idolater, how could the noble lineage of prophethood be pure? We say that if the Quran had only said that Abraham spoke with his father, without mentioning his name Azar (*al-An'am*: 74), it would have meant that the one being addressed was indeed Abraham's father; but God qualified the statement by stating that Abraham spoke to his father Azar, and this qualification came for a reason because when the name of the father is mentioned in this way in Arabic, it means not the literal (biological) father, but rather the paternal uncle. If you visit a house and a child comes and opens the door to you, you say to him 'Is your father there?' You do not say 'Is your father So-and-so there?' because it is clear what you mean, and the child will not make a mistake. But if you want his uncle, you say to the child 'Is your father So-and-so there?' In such a situation, you want the uncle, not the father, because the position of the uncle is like that of the father, especially if the father has passed away.

And so when the True Lord *the Exalted* specifies that Abraham spoke to his father Azar, it meant that he spoke with his uncle. If someone asks 'Is there any evidence of this?' we say: Yes, there is evidence in the Quran, in this noble verse: 'Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob, when he

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(1) Narrated by Imam Muslim

said to his sons, “What will you worship after me?” They said, “We will worship your God and the God of your fathers....” The word *aba'* ('fathers') is the plural of the word *ab* ('father'); and then God *the Most High* specifies who these fathers were: Abraham *peace be upon him*, who was the grandfather, is called here 'father'; and Ishmael *peace be upon him*, who was the paternal uncle, is also called here 'father'; and then there is mentioned Isaac *peace be upon him*, who was the actual father – and Ishmael *peace be upon him* was mentioned even before Isaac *peace be upon him*.

So, in this verse, we have a plurality of three fathers: Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac *peace be upon them*; and Jacob *peace be upon him*, who was about to die, was the son of Isaac *peace be upon him*, yet when the sons of Jacob *peace be upon him* addressed their father, they said 'your fathers' and then listed their names: Abraham *peace be upon him* the grandfather, Ishmael *peace be upon him* the paternal uncle, and Isaac *peace be upon him* the father of Jacob *peace be upon him*, and called each of them 'father' (*ab*). So it is as though Ishmael *peace be upon him* was called 'father' although he was the uncle, and Abraham *peace be upon him* was called 'father' although he was the grandfather, and Isaac *peace be upon him* was called 'father' and indeed he was the father. And so when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am the noblest of men in lineage, and I boast not,'<sup>(1)</sup> some people say, 'How could this be, when the father of Abraham *peace be upon him* was a disbeliever?' And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I am the master of the Sons of Adam.'<sup>(2)</sup> So, if someone says, 'How could this be when the father of Abraham *peace be upon him* was a polytheist and a worshipper of idols?', we say to him: Azar was not the father of Abraham *peace be upon him*, but was actually his paternal uncle, and so the Noble Quran said 'to his father Azar,' mentioning him by name because it meant a figurative paternity, not a literal one. The fatherhood of Abraham and Isaac to the sons of Jacob *peace be upon them* is clear enough, but Ishmael *peace be upon him* was living in Mecca, far away from them, and so why is his name mentioned alongside Abraham and Isaac *peace be upon them*? We

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(1) Narrated by Ad-Dailami in *Musnad Al-Firdaws*

(2) Narrated by Imam Muslim

say it is there to show chronological order, since Ishmael *peace be upon him* was fourteen years older than Isaac *peace be upon him*.

The fact that all three are called ‘fathers’ (*aba*) is a sign to us from God *the Most High* that the word ‘father’ (*ab*) can also mean ‘uncle’.

God *the Most High* wants us to be aware of the significance of the mention of the name ‘Azar’, and also to be aware that multiple messages from God do not mean that there are multiple gods: and so He *the Exalted* said, ‘one God.’

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

**That community passed away. What they earned  
belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you:  
you will not be answerable for their deeds [134]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 134)**

The word *khalat* (‘passed on’) means literally to be alone, as when a place is vacated by its occupant so that the place is alone, and the occupant is now alone, and there is no connection between them. We find this word also in another verse where God *the Most High* says about the hypocrites in the early Muslim community, ‘...but when they find themselves alone with their devils, they say, “Verily we hold with you, and we are only mocking”’ (*al-Baqara*: 14).

However, the word (*khalaw*) ‘find themselves alone’ means that they are alone with their devils, and no one else is present with them in the place they occupy. We said that every event must have a cause, and nothing happens of its own accord, and that every event must also have a time and place. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘That was a nation which has passed on...’, this means that their time has come to an end, and that they are separated from your time.

So, the meaning of God’s words ‘That was a nation which has passed on...’ is that their time has come to an end. The word ‘that’ (in Arabic *tilka*) which is a demonstrative pronoun in the feminine form, referring to ‘nation’, and the address is being made to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers in general. When God *the Most High* says ‘That was a nation...’ this suggests that they were marked out by their common beliefs and their

common religion to the point where they were considered a single entity, and so they had to be referred to as such. We find the same word *ummah* ('nation/community') in another verse where God *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that theirs is one single community, and He is their Lord, and they should worship Him Alone (*al-Anbiya*: 92).

'That' here refers to the communities of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob *peace be upon them*, who represented a great number of people who all held a single doctrine.

God *the Most High* says, '...It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned....' That is, those people who had a common religion, will be held accountable for their deeds, just as you will be held accountable for yours. But God *the Most High* says that Abraham indeed was an *umma* (literally 'nation/community') (*an-Nahl*: 120).

Yet was not Abraham *peace be upon him* an individual, and not a group? We say yes, he was an individual, but he embodied so many attributes of goodness and perfection as are normally only embodied by a nation *umma*.

God *the Most High* says, 'passed on' meaning thereby to make the Jews understand that they should not ascribe themselves falsely to Abraham *peace be upon him* because the kinship of the prophets is not a tie of blood, or race, or childbirth, but it is rather a kinship of allegiance to teachings and guidance. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying to the Jews: It does not benefit you that you are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *peace be upon them*, for the kinship of prophethood is a kinship of faith, based on way of life and doctrine; and this kinship of blood will not avail anything on the Day of Resurrection since everyone is judged according to their actions.

God *the Most High* says, '...It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned....' The word *kasaba* in Arabic is used for earning reward for good deeds, while its derivative the word *iktasaba* is used for chastisement for evil deeds; the increase in the structure of the word reflects the fact that evil implies affectation and artificiality in action.

We must pay close attention to the wording of the verses of the Noble Quran and study them carefully so that we can respond to those who attempt to

criticise the Quran. There is no concept implied by a verse which is contradicted by any other, but rather, there is only a lack of understanding on the part of the reader.

Some orientalist say that there is a verse in the Quran which affirms that God *the Most High* grants favours to people because of their lineage, namely when He *the Exalted* says that those who have believed and were followed in faith by their offspring, God will unite them with their offspring and will not deprive them of any of their deeds (*at-Tur*: 21).

Here the offspring are believers, and so God *the Most High* says that He will unite them with their offspring (*at-Tur*: 21); the word *alhaqa* ('unite') literally means to complement, to complete something which was incomplete. If both are believers, this seems to suggest that the status of the offspring is being raised as an honour to their faithful forefathers. We say that faith is one thing, and acting in accordance with faith is another. The ancestors and the offspring are both believers, but the forefathers did many good works while perhaps the descendants did less; but here, the raising of status is for those who are already believers: that is, the father and the progeny must be believers, while the non-believers will be far removed, and will have nothing to do with their believing forefathers, and the connection between them will be severed because of the division between faith and disbelief. So if the forefathers have in their credit many good deeds, while the descendants have fewer good deeds, God will unite the descendants with their forebears in Paradise because their faith is one.

God *the Most High* then says that He will unite them with their offspring (*at-Tur*: 21); that is, their good deeds will not be decreased; so, the forefathers and the descendants will be judged according to whether they have faith, and then out of His grace, God will unite the descendants with their forebears.

God *the Most High* says, '...It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned....' This refers to the influence of belief in doctrine. Some people might say that God *the Most High* says that every person will be held responsible for whatever he has earned (*at-Tur*: 21), and He *the Exalted* says that man will have nothing but what he had strived for (*an-Najm*: 39).

So, how can the descendants gain reward without striving for it? To this, we say: You need to understand the texts properly. God's words that man will have nothing but what he had strived for (*an-Najm*: 39) refer to God's justice, but they do not refer to the grace which God *the Most High* grants to those He wills from amongst His servants, and which is given without any account. Furthermore, who said that this was not due to their striving? The believing descendants are taken to the high position which their forefathers occupy as a way of honouring the forefathers' good deeds, not as an increase of the descendants' deeds.

The scholars tell us that there was a young man who was a devout and obedient believer, while his father was a sinner, and when the father died, the son grieved for him; and then he had a vision of his father sitting on high with a maiden of Paradise to comfort him. The son was amazed that his father could have been given this reward when he was a sinner, and so he asked him, 'How did you reach this station?' The father replied, 'What station?' The son said, 'That you have a maiden of paradise to keep you company.' The father said, 'And do you imagine that this is a reward for me?' 'Yes,' said the son. 'No,' said the father, 'but rather, I am a punishment for her!' God *the Most High* commands His Messenger to proclaim to believers that they rejoice in God's Grace and Mercy; that is better than what they may amass (*Yunus*: 58). In the Hereafter, you rejoice more in God's Grace and Mercy than in your own good deeds, as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Do what is right, and approach right as much as you can, and be of good cheer; your actions will not cause any of you to enter paradise.' They said, 'Even you, O Messenger of God?' He said, 'Even me, except that God enfolds me in His mercy.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Someone might come along and say, 'What is the purpose of performing the funeral prayer and praying for the deceased according to the Sacred Law? Were it to do him any good, this good would be above what he gained through his works; and if it will not give him any more than his works did, what is the point of it?' We say that as long as the Sacred Law commands us

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad in Al-Musnad



to do it, it must bring some benefit. Do you imagine that when we pray for the dead, this is not counted as one of his deeds? It is counted among his works because he was a believer, and his faith is what made you pray for him. If you pray for goodness, mercy, and forgiveness for someone, and God accepts this prayer, is it said that he has gained from other than his own works? No, because you only pray for him after some good comes to you from him; but you would not pray, for example, for someone who took you to a bar, or led you into depravity and sin. Rather, you pray for those who have given you something good, and so if God *the Most High* answers your prayer, it is counted as one of their own deeds.

God *the Most High* says: You will not be asked about what those who came before you did; and so if you claim that Abraham *peace be upon him* was a Jew or a Christian, we say to you that you will not be asked about what Abraham *peace be upon him* did, but rather, you will be asked about what you yourselves did. The question will concern your own deeds.

وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ  
حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٣٥﴾

**They say, ‘Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.’ Say [Prophet], ‘No, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God’ [135]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 135)**

When we hear ‘they say’ (with a plural subject), we know that we have a group speaking, and here the ones speaking are the Jews and Christians; but each of them say something different to the other: the Jews say ‘Be Jews,’ and the Christians say ‘Be Christians.’

In fact, we have three groups of people involved here: the Jews, the Christians, and the polythesists, and all of these are in contrast to the believers. ‘And they say, ‘Be....’ Who are they addressing? They are addressing the believers. Or, it might mean that the Jews said to the believers, the Christians, and the idolaters, ‘Be Jews,’ and the Christians said to the believers, Jews, and idolaters, ‘Be Christians;’ for none of them see any good except in

themselves. But Islam came and recovered Moses *peace be upon him* and his true Torah from the Jews, and reclaimed Jesus *peace be upon him* and his true Gospel from the Christians, as well as all that came through Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The meaning of this is that Islam laid claim to the covenant of faith between God *the Most High* and every believer, and so we find in the Noble Quran that God *the Most High* says that the believers make no distinction between any of His messengers (*al-Baqara*: 285).

And we notice that the idolaters are not included in this statement since they are not People of the Book.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...Rather, [we follow] the religion of Abraham, inclining towards truth....’ That is, [o Muhammad] answer them. The address here is made to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, affirming that he was following the religion of Abraham *peace be upon him*, that is, the religion of truth. They could not differ about Abraham *peace be upon him*, but rather, the Jews considered him to be one of their prophets, as did the Christians, and neither denied his prophethood, but rather tried to claim him for themselves.

What does the word hanif (inclining) mean? The root meaning of a word must have some relationship with its lexical meaning; the word hanaf describes the condition of legs which bend towards one another so that the right foot points towards the left or the left towards the right – this is called hanaf. But how could a word meaning bending/crookedness be used as a symbol of the straight path?

We have said that messengers only come forth when God’s teachings have been completely ignored because as long as there still remain those who follow the last messenger and call to his way, and enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, there is still goodness.

The human soul has many aspects; there is the self-reproaching soul, which commits evil and then is reproached from within for this evil, and so returns to good; but there is also the soul which commands evil, which only lives in evil and encourages others to do it too. A society may degenerate to the point where the

souls which command evil prevail and you do not find someone to interdict it. This kind of situation is described in the Noble Quran where the True Lord *the Most High* describes the disbelieving Israelites as accursed because they would not prevent one another from doing abominations (*al-Ma'ida*: 79)

At this point, God intervenes and sends a messenger to correct the corruption of society. But God *the Most High* has ensured that the constituents of goodness will remain within the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until the end of time, as He addresses the believers in the Muslim community saying that they are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for the good of mankind; they enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and they believe in God. Now if the followers of earlier revelations had faith, it would have been for their own good; but only few among them are believers, while most are iniquitous (*al-An'am*: 110).

So, God *the Most High* has trusted the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with following His way, and since there will always be those amongst them who will enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, there will be no messenger after Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Let us return to God's word *hanif*, '...inclining towards truth....' We said that (*hanaf*) was originally used to mean bending/crookedness; but to bend away from crookedness is in fact straightness. The Messengers only come when society is completely crooked, in order to take people away from this crookedness and cause them to incline to straightness; for the contrary of crookedness is straightness.

God's words '...inclining towards truth...' remind us of God's blessing upon all creation, in that He corrects man's heedlessness of His teachings and takes people from crookedness to straightness. The guidance offered by the Jews and Christians is nothing more than the pursuit of the cravings of their souls and God *the Most High* says to His Messenger that 'never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you until you follow their religion' (*al-Baqara*: 120).

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sought to live amicably with the Jews in Medina, but they fought him and refused to accept him. And Abraham *peace be upon him* was a true believer, and not an idolater.

قُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ  
وِإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ  
النَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

**So [you believers], say, ‘We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we devote ourselves to Him’ [136] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 136)**

This noble verse gives us an explanation of God’s words ‘...the religion of Abraham...’ (*al-Baqara*: 130) as belief in God Alone, without any associates, and belief in what had been sent down to us, namely the Quran, and that which was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants *peace be upon them*, and that which was given to Moses *peace and blessings be upon him*, namely the Torah, and that which was given to Jesus *peace and blessings be upon him*, namely the Gospel, and that which was vouchsafed to all the other prophets; for the true Message from God, from the time of Adam *peace and blessings be upon him* until now, has been the single doctrine that there is no god but God, Who has no associate, and that God is the sole Creator and Director of the universe; and everything which deviates from the ascription of Divinity to God, the One and Only, as a result of the deviations of previous religions, is a lie against God *the Most High* which we cannot accept.

God *the Most High* says, Say, [O believers], ‘We have believed in God and what has been revealed to us...’ namely the Noble Quran; and nothing could be added alongside this if it contradicted it, and so that which was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants *peace be upon them* represents the creed of Abraham; and this affirms for us that the creed of Abraham *peace be upon him* was revealed to him by God. And as we said, all the Divine Messages call to the worship of God, the One and Only, Who has no associate.

God *the Most High* says: ‘...and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him...’ which means that Abraham *peace be upon him* was one who surrendered

himself (Muslim), and likewise all the prophets were Muslims, and anything which contradicts this is nothing but the invention of human beings. The meaning of surrender (Islam) is that there is one who surrenders, and one who is surrendered to, namely God *the Exalted*. We surrender to Him *the Exalted* by worshipping Him and following His teachings. One should only surrender to someone who is more powerful than one, and more knowledgeable than one, and stronger than one, and to someone who has no caprice; and so if you are doubtful about any of these aspects, then your surrender is not real, but is only imagined. You only surrender yourself to God *the Most High* if you are convinced that His powers are beyond the powers of all created beings, and that He *the Exalted* has no need of anything in the world, and so He has no need of what you possess, but rather, He *the Exalted* gives you all aspects of goodness and blessing; and there is no being that you should surrender yourself to except the Higher Power of God.

فَإِنْ ءَامَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا ءَامَنَ بِهِ فَقَدْ أَهْتَدُوا وَإِنْ نَوَلُوا فَمَا لَهُمْ فِي شِقَاقٍ  
فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿١٣٧﴾

**So if they believe like you do, they will be rightly guided. But if they turn their backs, then they will be entrenched in opposition. God will protect you from them: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [137] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 137)**

We say that this verse provokes us to ask this question: Does that which we believe in have a 'like', in which they could believe? In order for you to be a believer, you must say 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God,' and if someone else says it after you, has he said the same thing as you, or the like of what you have said? He has said the like of what you have said. That is, when I announce my faith and make the testimony which you have made, I say the like of what you said because what you have said does not become separate from you; rather, if I make something and then say to someone else, 'Make the like of this,' he will make something new, and will not make the very object which I made.

It is the same thing when you say to me, 'Give in charity the like of which So-and-so has just given.' The charity will not be the very same money, but

rather, it will be the like of it. So we say to those who raise this question: You have not understood the meaning. Their belief was that they said, 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God,' and the belief of the others is that they utter the like of this statement, i.e. they announce that their belief in God and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is like ours. So the likeness here refers to the testimony of faith, and all who believe in Islam utter the two testimonies just like those who believed before them did. The likeness here refers to the statement, and their belief is that they say the same thing we said.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'So if they believe in the same as you believe in, then they have been [rightly] guided...' that is, they will be guided to the truth; '...but if they turn away, they are only in dissension,...' To 'turn away' means to reject, and 'in dissension' means that they will be in conflict with you, and in conflict with one another as well, since each of them will have their own point of view to which they lay claim, and their own path which they have invented; and so even though they are united in their disbelief, they will not be united in the causes of their disbelief, as each of them will have their own reasons, and so they will differ amongst themselves. The word *shiqaq* (rendered here as 'dissension') means difficulty, conflict, and quarrel, derived from the word *shaqq*, which means a fissure between two things.

God *the Most High* says, '...and God will be sufficient for you against them...' that is, do not be concerned by their enmity or by their words, for God will suffice you in every way from needing any other than Him. God *the Most High* puts forth the rhetorical question: 'Is not God all-sufficient for his servant?' And then He addresses His Messenger saying that the disbelievers would scare him by their idols. But the one whom God misleads shall find no guidance (*az-Zumar*: 36).

God *the Most High* is saying to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: If the Jews, the Christians, and the hypocrites try to plot against you, and hurt you and the believers, God *the Exalted* will protect you because He is All Knowing, All-Seeing, and All-Hearing, and nothing escapes His notice. The Jews tried to assassinate the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* more than once, and they tried to hurt him with sorcery; but God brought their

plots to nothing, and showed what they hid, and let His Messenger see it; and so whatever means they use, whether open or concealed, God will protect you from the evil of it. And so God *the Most High* said,

‘...and God will be sufficient for you against them. And He is the Hearing, the Knowing.’ That is, He hears all that is said, and knows all that they have planned, and He knows what is in their hearts even before they say it; so do not think that anything escapes the knowledge of God *the Most High*. God *the Most High* knows everything that will happen even before it happens, and He can bring an end to any plot even before it is devised. And if God *the Most High* is with you, what could you then fear? And whom could you fear? And who could possibly harm you? You have on your side the Creator and Director of this universe, whose knowledge does not miss anything in the heavens or the earth, and who knows everything that will happen until the Day of Resurrection and beyond it; and as long as you have on your side the All-Powerful who never weakens, and the Living who never dies, and the One Who knows everything, do not fear anyone, since you are in God’s care.

صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنْ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

**‘[Our life] takes its colour from God, and who gives a better colour than God? It is Him we worship’ [138] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 138)**

What is ‘dye’? To dye means to change the colour of something by introducing another colour to it. You might dye something red, or blue, or any colour you choose. Dye will take to an object especially if it is made of porous fabrics like cotton or wool, while synthetic fibres cannot be dyed so well. Why? This is because the strands of cotton and wool are like tubes in their shape.

If you take a jar of oil and place a strand of cotton in it so that the tip of the strand is in the oil, and then you set it on fire from the top, you will find that the oil runs down the tubes of the strand and it sets alight; but if you try this with a synthetic fibre, the oil will not penetrate it, but rather, the fire will just consume the fibre because it is not composed of tubes of fibre like cotton or wool is. Synthetic fibres are easy to wash because sweat does not enter

their weave, while cotton garments need a lot of work because their pores are full of sweat and dust. So, dye must enter the pores of the fabric, while painting is different, as it is an outer layer which can be removed; and so to those ladies who like to paint their fingernails, and say that it is like *henna*, we say: No, *henna* is like a dye, which mixes with the living tissue, and stays there until the skin comes off with it so that you cannot just wash it off when you like, while you can remove nail-paint at any time, even right after you have applied it. So fingernail paint is not a dye.

God *the Most High* says, 'dye of God.' It is as though belief in God and the religion of Abraham *peace be upon him*, and all that which God revealed to His messengers, is like the dye of faith which permeates the fabric of the human body. Why is the word 'dye' used? So that we know that faith enters into the fabric of the whole body; it is not a dye that comes from outside of your body, but rather, it is a dye which God has placed in the very cells of the heart which existed therein the moment it was created. And so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Every child is born with natural disposition, until his tongue expresses it; and then his parents turn him into a Jew, or into a Christian, or into a Zoroastrian.'<sup>(1)</sup>

So it is as though faith is a dye which is naturally present; it is the dye of God. If the child's parents are Muslims, he will remain in his natural state; and if his parents are Jews or Christians, they turn him into a Jew or a Christian, that is, they take him and place him in water, and say 'We have baptised him with holy water;' this is the meaning of the dye of God.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to illustrate this to us by making, as one of the signs of His power, our differing colours. This difference in colour is from the dye of God; the different colours of human beings is not a matter of paint, but rather, it is part of their constitution so that one is white, one brown, one yellow, and one red, and this is from the dye of God. So when they baptise children, this does not change their dye since faith and religion come from within a man, not from without. And so faith makes all the parts of the human body tremble,

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, At-Tirmidhi, At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, and Al-Bayhaqi in As-Sunan



as the True Lord *the Most High* says that He has sent down the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration. The skins shiver therefrom of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts relax at the remembrance of God. That is the guidance of God by which He guides whom He wills. And one whom God leaves astray - for him there is no guide (*az-Zumar*: 23).

This is the effect which God places in the heart; it is something intrinsic, not extrinsic. As for the faith of the non-Muslims, it is paint from the outside, not a dye because they have abandoned God's dye, and so we say to them: No, this paint is from yourselves, while our religion is from God's own dye.

God *the Most High* says, '...And who is better than God in giving a dye [ordaining religion]?' This is a question which cannot be answered falsely, but rather the answer will inevitably be what the Questioner *the Exalted* wants to imply, which is that there is no one who can give a better dye than God.

God *the Most High* then says, '...And we are worshippers of Him.' That is, we obey His commands; for the worshipper is the one who obeys God's commands and stays clear of what God forbids.

Commandments always entail something difficult which you are required to undertake, and prohibitions always involve something beloved to your soul so that it is difficult for you to forsake it. This is because mankind desires instantaneous benefit, superficial benefit, while God *the Most High* wants to direct us towards that which is truly beneficial. Instantaneous benefit gives you instantaneous pleasure, but bars you from the eternal delight of the Hereafter and enjoyment which is commensurate with the powers of God *the Most High*.

When you hear the *mue'dhdhin* (caller to prayer), but do not get up to pray because your lower self finds it a burden, you give yourself an instantaneous pleasure by chatting with someone, or playing backgammon, or whatever, but you are giving up the true benefit which will lead you to paradise. This is why God *the Most High* says that prayer 'indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him' (*al-Baqara*: 45-46).

So worship is about commandments and prohibitions: commandments which are difficult for your soul so that it finds them a burden and prohibitions

of things beloved to your soul, which give you instantaneous pleasure so that you desire to indulge in them.

[And say, 'Ours is] the dye/religion of God. And who is better than God in [ordaining] religion? 'And we are worshippers of Him' So, God *the Most High* says, '...And we are worshippers of Him,' that is, obey His commandments because we believe in Him Who commands as our Lord and God. And if you believe, God will make beloved to you the things which you used to find a burden, and make it easy for you to abstain from the things you used to love for their instantaneous pleasure. This is the dye of God which makes it easy for us to worship. God *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that they should know that God's Messenger is among them. Were he to comply with their inclinations, they are bound to get in difficulty. But God has endeared the faith to them, and has given it favour in their hearts, and has made unbelief, and wickedness, and disobedience hateful to them. Such indeed are they who pursue a right course (*al-Hujurat*: 49).

And so by the dye of faith, God *the Most High* makes goodness beloved to us, and makes us hate evil – not out of ostentation and hypocrisy on the surface of the soul, like paint, but rather like dye which infuses something and becomes a part of it so that they become a single entity which cannot be divided.

قُلْ أَتَحَاجُّونَنَا فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ وَلَنَا  
أَعْمَلُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَلُكُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُخْلِصُونَ ﴿١٣٩﴾

**Say [Prophet] [to the Jews and Christians], 'How can you argue with us about God when He is our Lord and your Lord? Our deeds belong to us, and yours to you. We devote ourselves entirely to Him' [139] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 139)**

When God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with the word 'Say,' before a statement, it is an indication of the importance of the charge given to the Messenger in making the proclamation. It would have been deemed enough if God simply stated what He wanted to say. If you say to your son, 'Go to your brother and say, 'Your father wants you to do such-and-such,' the boy goes and passes this on without using the word

‘Say,’ but when God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with the word ‘Say,’ we are alerted to the fact that this command is not from him, but is from God *the Most High*, and that the mission of the Messenger is only to pass it on.

The repeated use of the word ‘Say’ in the verses of the Quran is a way of ascribing the subsequent speech to the might of its original Speaker, God *the Most High*. The speech is not from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but rather is the speech of God *the Most High*.

God *the Exalted* says, ‘Say, “Do you argue with us about God while He is our Lord and your Lord ....”’ To argue means to discuss something with someone else using lines of reasoning so that each party comes up with an argument that supports his idea or his point of view. God *the Most High* tells about the king who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord, simply because God had granted him kingship (*al-Baqara*: 258).

That is, each one of them made his case. So there must be two rival parties whose opinions conflict with one another, each one trying to make an argument which will show the truth of his own position, after which his rival replies with an argument which refutes what he has said, and so on.

God *the Most High* says, ‘Say, “Do you argue with us about God while He is our Lord and your Lord? ...”’ Since God is the Lord of all, it makes sense that we should come together, since He is my Lord and your Lord, and we both have the same claim to Him. But since there is an argument between us, one of us must be in the wrong. God *the Most High* tells us that those who argue about God, after He has been responded to – their argument is invalid with their Lord, and upon them is wrath. And for them is a severe punishment (*ash-Shura*: 16)

An argument cannot take place between two truths, but rather, it is between truth and falsehood, or between two falsehoods because there is only one truth, and there are a hundred roads which lead to falsehood. So, as long as there is an argument between us and you, and we are in the right, this must mean that you are wrong. And to finish this matter decisively, and do away with any further debate, the True Lord *the Most High* commands the believers to say, ‘...For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. And we are sincere [in deed and intention] to Him.’ That is, we do not want an argument

because argumentation does not help anything. We have our deeds, and you have your deeds, and each will be requited for his deeds according to his level of devotion to God. We have devoted our worship to God Alone, while you have directed your worship to whatever your caprices desire.

God *the Most High*, our Lord and yours, does not prefer anyone to anyone else except on account of the good deeds they devote to God Alone. And so we put devotion first; for two deeds might seem equal in the eyes of the people, yet one is rewarded while the other is punished. What matters is whether or not the deed is sincerely devoted to God.

One might say, 'Devotion is a matter of the heart, and so as long as a person is not hurting anyone and not doing anything evil, it is not essential that he prays, as long as his intention is sincere.' We say that it is not about intentions only, but rather it is about intentions and actions together. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Actions are but according to intentions.'<sup>(1)</sup>

So there must be action after intention; for intention is something that you alone benefit from, while actions benefit others also. If it is your intention to give charity, and you do give it, then the poor benefit from your wealth; but if it is not your intention to do a good deed, but rather you do it just for the sake of your reputation, or to please someone, then the poor benefit from your money but you yourself do not gain any reward for it. God *the Most High* wants your action to be accompanied by a sincere intention of devotion to God. Action is the physical movement of this life, while intention is that which causes one to gain a reward or lose a reward; and on this God *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that if they give alms openly, it is well; and if they hide it and give it to the poor in secret, it will be better for them, and it will atone for some of their bad deeds. And God is aware of all that they do' (*al-Baqara*: 271).

God *the Most High* wants us to give charity, and the poor will benefit from your charity whether your intention is to be known as a good and charitable man, or whether you want to be known as a man of righteousness and piety, or whether you want to give charity secretly hoping for reward from God

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, An-Nasa'i, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Abu Na'im in Al-Hilya, and Ad-Daraqutni, with different wordings

only. People will benefit from the action irrespective of your intention. If you decide to build a building, your intention is to gain ownership of a property; but thousands of people will benefit from this, starting with the one who sells you the land, and the one who makes the plan for you, and the workmen who dig, and the ones who make the foundations, and the ones who do the building, and many others besides them. They all benefit from your action according to the provision destined for them; whether God is on your mind or not, they benefit.

So, every action benefits people whether you like it or not, but God does not reward actions according to their outward appearance, but according to the sincerity of the intentions behind them. If your action is sincerely devoted to God, God will reward you for it, while if your action is for some other purpose, you will have no reward from God since He *the Exalted* has no need of any associates.

Some people might wonder whether a disbeliever who makes an important and beneficial discovery for mankind, he will be punished in hell, despite his service to humanity. We say that indeed this is the case as he has nothing with God, because he did his action without having God in his mind and heart, though he was rewarded in this worldly life, and statues were made of him, and squares named after him, and his name will live forever in the world for which he worked. Since he did not have God in his intention, he will have no reward from God.

أَمْ نَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطَ  
كَانُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَىٰ قُلْ أَأَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ اللَّهُ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ كَتَمَ  
شَهَادَةً عِنْدَهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِيلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٠﴾

**Or are you saying that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?’ [Prophet], ask them, ‘Who knows better: you or God? Who could be more wicked than those who hide a testimony [they received] from God? God is not unmindful of what you do’ [140] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 140)**

The Jews and Christians claim that the prophets who came before Moses and Jesus *peace be upon them* were Jews or Christians, the Jews claiming them

as Jews and the Christians claiming them as Christians; and so God responds by saying, ‘...Are you more knowing or is God?...’

This question can only have one answer because they cannot say ‘We are more knowing than God is.’ We said before that if a question is posed in the Noble Quran, its answer will surely support the concept the True Lord *the Most High* wants to impart, and will only have one possible answer. And so God *the Most High* says, ‘...Are you more knowing or is God?’ And there is no doubt that it is God who knows more.

It is as though God has by posing a question, actually made a statement. But notice that this noble verse mentions Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants *peace be upon them*, and the constant mention of Ishmael alongside Isaac and Jacob *peace be upon them*; this indicates the oneness of the call to belief in God since Ishmael *peace be upon him* was part of the Arab nation while Isaac and Jacob *peace be upon them* were of the Israelite nation.

The True Lord *the Most High* is speaking of the oneness of the source of faith for His creatures because it does not make sense that Ishmael *peace be upon him* would be for the Arabs and Isaac *peace be upon them* for the non-Arabs when the Divine Message is one. And this is what we find in the answer of Jacob’s sons as reported in the Noble Quran: ‘They said, “We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac - one God. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him”’ (*al-Baqara*: 133).

The God who sent Ishmael *peace be upon him* is the same God *the Most High* Who sent Isaac *peace be upon him*. He is a One Unique God; and since God is One, the teachings of faith must also be one, and so if there is any dispute, it must have been caused by the human beings who corrupted these teachings in order to gain pleasure and profit for themselves. Every soul shall have what it has earned, and so your tie of lineage to them will not help you, or add anything to your prospects in the Hereafter. If you were disbelievers, it will not avail you in the Hereafter to say, ‘We are descended from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob *peace be upon them*’ and if this is not the case, it will not harm you in the least.

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤١﴾

**That community passed away: what they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you. You will not be answerable for their deeds [141] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 141)**

Some people say that this verse is the exact repetition of a previous verse (*al-Baqara*: 134), where God *the Most High* says, ‘Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob, when he said to his sons, “What will you worship after me?” They said, “We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac - one God. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.”’ (*al-Baqara*: 133) That was a nation which has passed on. It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned. And you will not be asked about what they used to do’ (*al-Baqara*: 134).

So, some people with superficial understanding say that this verse is a repetition of the previous one. We say to such people: You have missed the meaning in context. The first verse says to the Jews: Your descent from Abraham and Isaac *peace be upon them* will not avail you anything from God because of how you have corrupted and altered the Torah and because of your actions which contravene God’s Law, and so be aware that you will be held to account for your actions, not your lineage.

As for the verse we are currently examining, the context is that they said that Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac *peace be upon them* were Jews or Christians. God *the Most High* does not argue with them about this, but He simply says to them: Let us suppose – for argument’s sake – that Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac *peace be upon them* were indeed Jews or Christians, this is still no excuse for you because they have what they have earned and you have what you have earned, and so you cannot use this as an argument against God on the Day of Resurrection. You cannot say, ‘We thought that Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac were Jews or Christians’, i.e. we thought that they were not part of the Islamic religion because this argument will not be accepted. Do you know more than God *the Most High*, Who has declared that they were Muslims?

So, be careful of saying that this is mere repetition since the context of the first verse says, ‘No intercession will come to you on the Day of Resurrection

simply because you are descended from Abraham, or Ishmael, or Isaac *peace be upon them*,' while the context of the second verse says, 'You cannot argue on the Day of Resurrection that they were Jews or Christians, and your claim of association with them will not avail you anything, and God will not accept your argument.' And so the meaning is completely different because of how two different situations on the Day of Resurrection are being treated.

سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَّاهُمْ عَنْ قِبْلَتِهِمُ الَّتِي كَانُوا عَلَيْهَا قُلْ  
لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿١٤٢﴾

**The foolish people will say, 'What has turned them away from the prayer direction they used to face?' Say, 'East and West belong to God. He guides whoever He will to the right way' [142] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 142)**

This verse was revealed to clarify the matter of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers facing the *Ka'ba* instead of Jerusalem which was the first case of abrogation in the Noble Quran. God *the Most High* wanted to give this matter sufficient attention since it would cause doubts and heated arguments from all of those who opposed Islam; for the idolaters of Quraysh would take the opportunity to cast doubts, as would the hypocrites and the Jews. God *the Most High* wanted to clarify the matter before these doubts were even raised, and so He *the Exalted* said, 'The weak-minded among the people will say, 'What has turned them away from their *qibla*?...' (i.e. direction of prayer, which they used to face). The word 'will' here, indicating the future, implies that they had not yet said it, and thus He *the Exalted* said, 'The weak-minded among the people will say....' So, before the prayer-direction was changed, the True Lord *the Most High* said: This matter will cause a great upheaval which the doubters will take advantage of.

God *the Most High* says, 'The weak-minded among the people will say,...' which means that they had not yet said it at the time this verse was revealed, and this shows that they truly were weak-minded because God *the Most High* informed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of this in a Quran which was recited out loud, and used in the canonical prayer, and which



would never be changed or altered until the Day of Judgement, saying, ‘The weak-minded among the people will say....’ Had they then not said anything, and not commented on the changing of the prayer-direction, this would have been a cause to cast doubt on the Noble Quran because in such a situation, they would have been able to say, ‘The Quran, which God revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and which cannot be changed or altered until the Day of Resurrection, said, ‘The weak-minded among the people will say, ‘What has turned them away from their *qibla* (direction of prayer),...’ yet no one said anything of the kind.’

But because they truly were weak-minded, i.e. ignorant and foolish, they did say it; and so although they disbelieved in the Quran, and wanted to destroy this religion, they actually served to prove the truth of this faith and the veracity of the Quran by their actions; for God *the Most High* said, ‘The weak-minded among the people will say,...’ and indeed they did say it. The idolaters of Mecca used to say of the *Ka’ba*, ‘It is our House and the House of our fathers, not the House of God,’ and so God turned His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in the early days of Islam and directed him towards Jerusalem, upon which the Jews said, ‘He is mocking our religion and following our prayer-direction.’ God *the Most High* wanted Islam to incorporate every religion that came before it so that sanctity was preserved for all, and so He took His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem so that Jerusalem would become one of the sacred sites of Islam, and would become part of Islam.

God *the Most High* did not want to make the *Ka’ba* the prayer-direction from the beginning because they used to revere it as the ‘House of the Arabs’ and place their idols inside it; and the fact that the *Ka’ba* was chosen for the placing of the idols, shows that it had a sacred character in itself; the sanctity did not come from their idols, but rather, they wanted to protect these idols, and so they placed them in the *Ka’ba*. Why did they not place them somewhere else? That was because the *Ka’ba* was already sacred even without the idols.

God *the Most High* says, ‘The weak-minded among the people will say, ‘What has turned them away from their *qibla* (direction of prayer) which they used to face?...’ ‘Turned them’ here means moved them around and made

them return, and ‘...their *qibla* (direction of prayer), which they used to face...’ means Jerusalem. Then, the True Lord *the Most High* gives a comprehensive reply to this, which is that the sacred commands of God do not require explanations, but rather, it is sufficient reason for us to obey God’s commands that it was God *the Most High* who issued them. If the True Lord *the Most High* explained to us the reason for the change of the prayer-direction, the command would not represent any kind of test of the faith in our hearts because faith and worship mean to obey the One worshipped in everything that He commands and forbids. For example, God tells you to revere this stone, the Black Stone in the *Ka’ba*, and so you revere it with complete submission and acceptance; and He tells you to pelt this other stone, which represents Satan, and so you pelt it with pebbles; yet God *the Most High* does not tell you why because if He did, all faith would be lost and it would simply be a matter of being intellectually convinced.

If I say to you, ‘Do not eat that; it is bitter; eat this one instead; it is sweet,’ the reasoning is clear, but God *the Most High* tells you to eat this and not to eat that so that if you eat what He has forbidden, you are a sinner, while if you abstain from it, you are obedient and will be rewarded.

So the reasoning of faith is simply that the commandment is from God *the Most High*. If you abstain from drinking alcohol because it is bad for your health, or because it damages your liver, you will have no reward for this; and if you abstain from eating pork because it is high in cholesterol and is unwholesome for you, you will have no reward. But if you abstain from alcohol and pork because God has forbidden them, this is true worship, and this is what is rewarded.

God *the Most High* wanted to respond to those weak-minded people, and so He said, ‘Say, “To God belongs the east and the west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path.”’ That is, whether you face Jerusalem, or face the *Ka’ba*, or face any other place in this universe, God is present there. Jerusalem does not have any special distinction in itself, nor does the *Ka’ba*; but the commands of God *the Most High* is what gives them this distinction. When we faced Jerusalem, we faced it in obedience to God’s command; and when God *the Most High* told us to face the *Ka’ba*, we faced it in obedience to God’s command.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...He guides whom He wills to a straight path.’ This way is the straight path which has no turns in it so that it represents the shortest route to the final destination. God *the Most High* directed us to Jerusalem, and so that was the straight path that we followed; and then He directed us to the *Ka’ba*, and so this is the straight path that we follow; and all command belongs to God.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضَيِّعَ إِيْمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٤٣﴾

**We have made you [believers] into a just community, so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you. We only made the direction the one you used to face [Prophet] in order to distinguish those who follow the Messenger from those who turn on their heels: that test was hard, except for those God has guided. God would never let your faith go to waste [believers], for God is most compassionate and most merciful towards people [143] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 143)**

When you see the word ‘thus,’ know that it implies a similarity between things. The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to be aware of His blessing in making us a community of the middle way. Everything which God legislates is a blessing for the believers; and if this change of direction to the *Ka’ba* was a test of faith for the Muslims, then God *the Most High* made us a community of the middle way as a blessing from Him, and as long as we are on the middle way, there must be sides so that the middle can be defined: There is one side, then the middle, then the other side. The middle of something is its centre, or that which lies between its two sides.

But what does ‘...a just and central community...’ mean? A middle way of faith and doctrine; there are those who deny the existence of The True God, and there are those who go to the other extreme and believe in many gods. Each

extreme is in the wrong, while we Muslims say that there is no god but God, Alone and without partner, the One and Only. This is a basic principle of this universe because God *the Most High* created the universe and created everything in it; and He *the Exalted* declared that He created it and no one else has ever claimed to be the creator, and so the claim belongs to God *the Most High* Alone. If there were many gods in this universe, each of them would claim to be the creator, and God *the Most High* says that He has not taken any son, nor has there ever been with Him any deity. If there had been, then each deity would have taken what it created, and some of them would have sought to overcome others. Exalted is God above what they describe (*al- Mu'minun*: 91).

That is, they would have fought over the position of creator, and the universe would have been wrecked by this. So Islam is a middle religion between atheism and polytheism. Furthermore, there are those who go to extremes of materialism and so neglect spiritual values, and there are those who reject materialism and believe in spiritual values alone.

The fact of life is that materialistic people intrigue those who strictly adhere to spiritual values because they have wealth and power; and so Islam came as a middle way between the material and the spiritual. Do not say that the spiritual is better than the material, or that the material is better than the spiritual; the material is one thing, and the spiritual is another, and they are both subject to God, and both praise and glorify Him. But when the material and the spiritual come together, the soul is created; and the soul is that which has free will whether to obey or disobey, and whether to worship or to disbelieve (in God is our refuge).

God *the Most High* wants the believers to live in the material world according to heavenly values, and this is the middle way of Islam which does not consider the spiritual alone, or the material alone, but rather, guards the material life with heavenly values. When God *the Most High* informs us that He made us a community of the middle way which combines the good of both extremes, we recognise that this religion came to protect mankind from the caprices of mankind.

God *the Most High* wants us to seek out the material things of this world which lead to advances, comforts, and strength for mankind. People would

not differ regarding those things which are material and practical, but regarding those things where human caprice is involved; there, God establishes laws to govern them. If you live according to caprices, you will find turmoil; but if you live according to the laws of Heaven, you will find happiness.

Someone might ask: Has communism, which has been around for more than half a century now, made advances for those living under it, or not? We say Look at it now; it built all the advances it claimed on the back of lies and falsehoods, and then it declined, and then it utterly collapsed. And just as communism collapsed, capitalism too will collapse, for they are two opposite extremes; yet we are a community of the middle way, and so God has promised us the goodness of this life and of the Hereafter.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...that you may be witnesses over the people...’ That is, the plea will be yours in the future, and the world will be forced to return to what your religion teaches. To be noticed is that God *the Most High* said, ‘...a just and central...’; He did not say ‘the central...,’ with the definite article so that it would not be said that these communists and capitalists will have to completely turn around in order to reach the truth; rather, each of them will incline slightly one way or the other so that they will meet. And so when they say we should take all the wealth of the rich and distribute it amongst the poor, we say to them: And when there come other poor people in the future, how will we provide for them once we have got rid of all the rich?

I once heard a person with some experience in politics and governance say, ‘The one who used to work with me, and who squandered all his money on wine, gambling, and women fared better than I did because I saved up all my money and invested it, and so they said, ‘You are a capitalist and they seized all my money; while the one who squandered it all, was left alone.’ I said: God *the Most High* wants you to invest your money because if you do not invest it, and the poor-due of 2.5% is taken from it every year, it will all disappear in forty years; but if you invest your money, and so they come and seize the fruit of your labour under the pretence that you are a capitalist, they will bring an end to work itself in society because if you take away the fruit of a man’s labour for no lawful reason, why would

he work? Islam came to increase the field of work, and preserve the wealth of the worker so that it could then take the poor-due from his wealth to help those who cannot work themselves so that they do not come to hate society. This is the middle way.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...that you may be witnesses over the people....’ It is as though God *the Most High* were telling us that there will be a battle in this world which will only be resolved by the testimony of this community. The rightists, or the capitalists, are wrong, and the communists are wrong, while the way of God which balances the scales of justice for the universe and the life of man, is right and correct. Then the True Lord *the Exalted* tells us that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* will bear witness over us: have our actions and our works been in accordance with what God revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* passed on to us? Or have we followed our desires, and strayed from the right way?

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* will bear witness over us regarding this matter. Although this verse gives glad tidings to the community of the middle way that the world will return to its senses, this will never happen unless it is led by the testimony of truth and justice.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...And We did not make the *qibla* which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels....’ This is a return to the subject of the changing of the prayer-direction from Jerusalem to the *Ka’ba*. God *the Most High* does not prefer one direction to another, and those who face the *Ka’ba* will be facing different directions according to the position of their city with respect to the *Ka’ba*: one will face east, another northeast, and another southwest.

God *the Most High* does not favour one direction over another, but rather, He *the Exalted* made the change of the prayer-direction a test of faith, not in order to know for Himself, but rather to show to people; for God *the Most High* already knew, but He *the Exalted* wants that men be witnesses over their own selves until the Day of Resurrection. Rather, it was a test of faith so that God

could show the extent of your faith, and show who would obey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in what he passed on from God, and who would turn on his heels. It is as though the changing of the prayer-direction would cause a great challenge of faith for the Muslims themselves, and so God made a distinction between those who would remain true to their faith and follow the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and those who would reject it and turn away from the religion of Islam.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...And indeed, it is a difficult test except for those whom God has guided....’ God wanted to make a distinction which would be a testimony for the people on the Day of Resurrection. The test or trial of the changed prayer-direction was indeed a difficult thing, except for those believers who welcomed any command from God, knowing as they did that faith means obedience, and not needing to know the reason behind everything.

But the idolaters, hypocrites, and Jews did not let the matter of the changed prayer-direction pass, but rather, they said, ‘If the true prayer-direction is the *Ka’ba*, then all the prayers you offered towards Jerusalem were in vain; and if the true prayer-direction is Jerusalem, then all the prayers you offer towards the *Ka’ba* will be in vain.’ We say to them: Do not separate a ruling from its time. The prayer-direction of Jerusalem was appropriate for its time, and the *Ka’ba* then came in its own time. It is not that one of them came to oust the other, or that one violated the right of the other. Some of the believers died having only prayed to Jerusalem, and so the doubters said, ‘Their prayers were not valid,’ and so God *the Most High* refuted this by saying, ‘...And never would God have caused your faith to be wasted...’ for those who died having only prayed towards Jerusalem were obedient to God, and believers in Him, and so God would not ignore their faith.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...Indeed God is, to the people, Kind and Merciful.’ That is, remember that you believe in a Lord who is compassionate, and does not want you to undergo hardships, and who is merciful and will protect you from tribulation.

قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ  
 شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا  
 الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ

Many a time We have seen you [Prophet] turn your face towards Heaven, so We are turning you towards a prayer direction that pleases you. Turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque: wherever you [believers] may be, turn your faces to it. Those who were given the Scripture know with certainty that this is the Truth from their Lord: God is not unaware of what they do [144] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 144)

We know that the word *qad* ('surely') is used to give emphasis, and that the verb here *nara* ('see') is in the imperfect tense (literally 'we see') in Arabic, which indicates an ongoing action. The True Lord *the Most High* here gives us an image of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; he loved and yearned to face the *Ka'ba* rather than Jerusalem (in prayer), and usually the revelation would come to Him *peace and blessings be upon him* from above, and so he would look to the sky from whence revelation came; and this was solely because his heart yearned that a revelation would come to him telling him to change the prayer-direction. So it seems that this matter occupied his thoughts.

God *the Most High* here assures His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He had seen him turn his face to the sky, and that He has answered his prayer for the prayer-direction that fulfilled his desire. Does this mean that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not content to face the direction of Jerusalem in prayer as he had been doing? We say no, but rather contentment is always linked to emotion, and there is a difference between emotional love and intellectual love. And so no one should say that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not content with praying to Jerusalem. Rather, he faced Jerusalem even though his heart yearned to face the *Ka'ba*, and this is a clear sign of his obedience and steadfastness.



God *the Most High* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘...We will have you turn to a *qibla* [prayer direction] which will please you...’ that is, which you shall love with your emotion. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was awaiting this change, and so it is as though His *peace and blessings be upon him* emotion was the first step of the change.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...Turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque....’ The word ‘face’ here means the whole being, and the word ‘towards’ (*‘shatr*’) means ‘in the direction of;’ and literally *shatr* means ‘half’; and both of these meanings make sense here because wherever a person is, he is the centre of a circle which is bordered by what we call the horizon which is as far as the eye can see and where it appears to you as though the sky meets the land.

So we all have a circle according to our point of view, and when a person goes to higher altitudes, the circle becomes wider, and if his eyesight is weak the circle will be smaller. Thus, he is in the middle of a circle of which half is in front of him, and half behind him.

So to say that *shatr* here means ‘half’ is correct, and to say that it means ‘towards’ is also correct. God *the Most High* says, ‘...Turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque....’ That is, make your face point towards the Sacred Mosque, or make it so that the Sacred Mosque is in the half of the circle which is in front of you. In the past, acts of worship were offered only in specific places until the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came and God made the entire earth a place of prayer for him.

The mosque (*masjid*) is the place of prostration (*sujud*), and since prostration is the ultimate sign of humility before God, the place where we pray is called a ‘place of prostration’ (*masjid*). But there is a difference between a place where you prostrate yourself and a place you reserve solely for prayer and nothing else. Mosques are reserved solely for prayer and worship, while the place where you pray and also work is not considered a mosque except during the very time you prostrate in it. The *Ka’ba* is the House of God, by the choice of God Himself, while all the other mosques in the world are the houses of God by the choice of God’s creatures; and so the House of God, which God chose, is the prayer-direction for all the houses of God which God’s creatures chose.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...and wherever you [o believers] may be, turn your faces towards it [in prayer]...,’ that is, whatever place you might be in, ‘...turn your faces towards it...’ for the verse was revealed while they were in the mosque of Banu Salama in Medina, and so the Muslims turned towards the Sacred Mosque; and so that we do not think that the change was meant for this mosque alone, and for the time the verse was revealed alone, God *the Most High* said, ‘...and wherever you [o believers] may be, turn your faces towards it [in prayer]....’

God *the Exalted* then says, ‘...Surely, they to whom the Book has been given, know this to be the truth from their Lord: and God is not regardless of what they do.’ That is, those who had been given revelation before and who attempted to cast doubts on the followers of the Messengers of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, knew well that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Final Messenger, and they recognised his description from what the Torah and Gospel told them, and they knew that he was the Keeper of the Two Prayer-Directions. If the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had not turned from Jerusalem to the *Ka’ba*, they would have said, ‘The Torah and Gospel say that the Final Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, will pray to two directions; so, why has he not?’ And this would have been a pretext to sow doubts.

And so those who had been given revelation before, knew well that this came in truth from their Lord because the Torah stated that the Messenger would come and pray to Jerusalem and then change and pray to the Sacred Mosque; and so for the people of the Book, this change should have been a means of strengthening their faith in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, not a reason for their certainty to be shaken.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘...and God is not regardless of what they do.’ The True Lord *the Most High* wants to reassure the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that their attempts to sow doubts would not avail them anything, and their position was not for the lack of proof, but was simply a matter of obstinacy; they desired no evidence or proof of faith, but rather, they only wanted to be obstinate.

وَلَيْنَ آتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ مَا تَتَّبِعُوا فَبِلْتَكُمْ وَمَا أَنْتَ  
بِتَابِعٍ فَبِلَهُمْ وَمَا بَعْضُهُمْ بِتَابِعٍ قِبَلَهُ بَعْضٌ وَلَيْنَ أَتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ  
مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِنَّكَ إِذَا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

**Yet even if you brought every proof to those who were given the Scripture, they would not follow your prayer direction, nor will you follow theirs, nor indeed will any of them follow one another's direction. If you [Prophet] were to follow their desires, after the knowledge brought to you, you would be doing wrong [145] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 145)**

Following the prayer-direction is a sign of faith in your religion, and so as you believe in your religion, you will face your prayer-direction. If I do not believe in your religion, I will not follow your prayer-direction.

God *the Most High* says, 'And even if you brought....' When you hear the words 'and even if' (*wa-la'in*), this indicates an avowal, a solemn declaration, and so the True Lord *the Most High* is asserting that even if the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were to give the people of the Book every kind of sign, they would not believe in his religion or follow his prayer-direction. Why? Because they are not looking for evidence, or seeking to be convinced of the truth of the new religion, and if they really wanted evidence or wanted to be convinced, they would find this in their own scriptures, which told them of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and that he would be the Final Prophet, and described him for them. So it is as though they already had the proof, but they handled the matter foolishly and obstinately.

God *the Most High* then says, '...Nor will you be a follower of their *qibla*....' So, it is as though when the verse came to change the prayer-direction, God informed us that the Muslims would never again pray towards Jerusalem, nor would God turn them to a third direction. And in order to inform us that the Jews and Christians would be on one side and we would be in another, and that there would be no meeting between us and them, God *the Most High* then said, '...Nor would they be followers of one another's *qibla*....' So the difference on the prayer-direction will remain until the end of time.

God *the Most High* then says, '...So if you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, indeed, you would then be among the wrongdoers.' When God *the Most High* addressed His Messenger and His Beloved, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, with this verse, He knew full well that Muhammad, the Infallible Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, cannot possibly follow their errant views; and so we say that this verse is really directed to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So God *the Most High* addresses his community through him, saying, '...So if you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, indeed, you would then be among the wrongdoers.' What was the errant desire of the People of the Book? It was that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would indulge them, or say that the changes they had made to their scriptures were truly ordained by God; and so they made their own desires the object they followed. It is as though God *the Most High* wanted to alert the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the fact that everyone who follows the errant views of the people of the Book and their corruptions will become one of the wrongdoers, however great his faith might have been. And if God *the Most High* would not accept this from His own Messenger and His Beloved *peace and blessings be upon him*, how could he accept it from any member of the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?

This address concerns one of the primary matters of faith which has the potential to corrupt the entire doctrine. God *the Most High* wants us to know that He will not tolerate it, or allow it even if it were to be done by His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, although this could never happen; and this is in order for us to see how completely unacceptable it is to God, no matter what level of faith a person has, even if they have the very highest level of faith possible so that the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would steer well clear of this kind of action.

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ  
وَلِإِنْ فَرِيقًا مِنْهُمْ لَيَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

**Those We gave Scripture know it as well as they know  
their own sons, but some of them hide the truth that  
they know [146] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 146)**

God *the Most High* says here that those to whom revelation came before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* knew it – what did they know? Did they know about the changing of the prayer-direction? Or did they know about the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his coming, and his Message, about which they were trying to raise doubts? God *the Most High* explains this to us when He says, ‘And when a Book had come to them from God, confirming that which was already with them – although they had before prayed for victory over those who disbelieved – yet when there came to them that which they knew, they disbelieved in it. The curse of God will be on the infidels’ (*al-Baqara*: 89).

So, it is as though the Jews and Christians recognised the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, as it was written in the Torah and Gospel that it was the truth, and that they were required to believe in it. Ka‘b Al-Ahbar God *be pleased with him* was sitting one day, when ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab God *be pleased with him* asked him, ‘Did you all know about him, Ka‘b?’ That is, did you know about Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Message, and his description? Ka‘b, who was one of the rabbis of the Jews, replied, ‘I knew him as I knew my own son; indeed my knowledge of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was even stronger.’ When they asked him why this was, he replied, ‘Because it could be possible that my wife cheated me with regard to my son; but as for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, his description was given so precisely in the Torah that we could not mistake him.’

So, the people of the Book knew the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and knew his time, and his Message; and those of them who embraced Islam and believed in him did so because they were convinced; while those who did not believe, and denied what the Messenger of God *peace*

*and blessings be upon him* brought, also knew, but they concealed what they knew. And so God *the Most High* says, ‘...but truly a part of them do conceal the truth, though they know it.’ When you talk about something being concealed, this means that the thing should naturally have been evident and available for all to see. By its nature, the truth should be plain and open to all; but to deny the truth and suppress it, requires effort.

Those people, who investigate delicate matters, try to prevent a person from having the power to suppress the truth, and so they deprive the subject of their investigation of sleep until his strength crumbles and he tells the truth. This is because to tell the truth, does not require any effort, but rather, to suppress the truth, requires effort and strength, and to refrain from telling the truth is a difficult thing. But God *the Most High* says, ‘...but truly a part of them do conceal the truth, though they know it.’ That is, they were not ignorant of this but rather they knew the truth of the matter. The truth is from God, so could these people suppress it? Of course they could not, but rather, it had to come out. When lies and falsehoods spread, it is like pain which afflicts the body; people hate pain, but pain is one of the means of cure because it lets you know where the malady is so that you can set about treating it.

The most dangerous of illnesses are those which are not accompanied by pain and which you cannot feel until it is too late to treat them. The truth is always upmost, and so you never find conflict between two truths: as for falsehood, you can find falsehood in conflict with another falsehood, and falsehood in conflict with truth; for there is only one truth, while falsehood is legion.

Battles between truth and falsehood always end with a swift defeat of falsehood, while those conflicts which drag out are always between two falsehoods. And so the battles of these current times drag on, and make the world weary. The effects of the Second World War, for example, are still being felt in the Cold War and other smaller conflicts. The Messenger of God said, ‘None of you (truly) believes until his desire is in line with what I have brought.’<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Narrated by Ad-Dailami in *Musnad Al-Firdaws*

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

**The truth is from your Lord, so do not be one of those  
who doubt [147] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 147)**

The truth is from God *the Most High*, and since it is from God, do not be from those who doubt that the truth will win out. But the truth must be protected with strength, as a poet once said:

A sword might gleam and shine,  
But it does nothing without a warrior's hand.

What is the use of having a sharp sword if there is no strong hand to wield it? We usually squander the truth because we do not give it the strength it needs to be victorious.

God *the Most High* says, '...Be not then of those who doubt.' A doubter is someone who has reservations about whether something will happen, and doubt means that something is seen as being equally probable and improbable, that is, as likely to happen as not. But the truth is from God, and so there is no probability against it, and so we must not have any doubt, or enter into any fruitless debate, about whether the truth will win out.

وَلِكُلِّ وُجْهَةٍ هُوَ مَوْلِيهَا فَاسْتَيقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِنَّمَا تَكُونُونَ  
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَمِيعٌ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٤٨﴾

**Each community has its own direction to which it turns:  
race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring  
you together. God has power to do everything [148]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 148)**

It was God's Will to make man free, and so he has the free choice whether to believe or not, and whether to support truth or falsehood, and whether to do good or evil. All of these are tests which God willed to give to man in this world so that he could either respond to them or not; but this will not last forever, and this free will applies only to the life of this world.

But the human nature of man ends at the moment of death, and when a man faces death and the end of life, he becomes compelled and no longer

free; and so he cannot avail himself at this time, and cannot say 'I will not die now.' His human nature expires, and his whole person is compelled, and even his limbs will testify against him. In the life of this world, everyone faces the direction he chooses; this one chooses disbelief, that one chooses faith; this one chooses obedience and that one chooses disobedience. As long as man has free will, everyone has their own direction, distinct from everyone else. Those whom God guides turn towards good works as though they are racing towards them. Why? Because he does not know when he will die, and so every time he races to perform a good deed, it will be one more he can add to his credit.

What is required from the believers in this life is that they race to do good deeds before their time to die comes, and none of them should imagine that they will escape from God, for He *the Exalted* says, '...Wherever you may be, God will bring you forth [for judgement] all together....' That is, there is no place where you can hide from God's knowledge, for God *the Most High* knows where everyone is, each one individually, and He will gather everyone, as He wants us to keep in mind the day on which He will cause the mountains to move and we shall see the earth a levelled plain, and He will gather mankind together, and not leave any one of them (*al-Kahf*: 47).

And He commands His Messenger to give advice to people to flee to God, as he is from Him a plain warner (*adh-Dhariyat*: 50). That is, the True Lord *the Most High* wants us to know with certainty that we cannot flee from His knowledge, His decree, or from His chastisement, and that the only way open to us is that we flee to Him, and that there is no refuge from God except with Him. And so no disbeliever or sinner should imagine that he can flee from God, or that he will not be present on the Day of Resurrection, or that he will not be held to account, or that he will be able to hide.

The delusions of this worldly life might take hold of some people so that they imagine that they are immune from God, and that they will never meet Him. We say to them: You will be shocked in the Hereafter when you find that the Reckoning is real, and that Paradise is real, and Hell is real. You will be surprised at what happens to you. And those who did not believe and did not rush to do good deeds will find ignominy and grievous suffering. God advises us to believe and to vie with one another in good works so that we can be saved from His chastisement. He tells us that none of us will escape, nor will a single



atom from any of our bodies, from standing before God to be reckoned. God *the Most High* concludes this noble verse by saying, ‘...Indeed, God is over all things Powerful.’ That is, nothing is beyond God *the Most High*, and nothing is out of his control: He *the Exalted* has the power to will anything.

وَمَنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ  
وَإِنَّهُ لَلْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

**[Prophet], wherever you may have started out, turn your  
face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque – this is the truth  
from your Lord: He is not unaware of what you do [149]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 149)**

We need to reflect on how many times the Noble Quran refers to the matter of the changed prayer-direction. It refers to it three times in close proximity because the changing of the prayer-direction caused a great upheaval in the souls of the believers, and so the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to put an end to this reaction and to confirm the changing of the prayer-direction as a matter of faith.

So, the number of verses is three which is the smallest plurality: one verse refers to those who face the *Ka'ba*, while in the mosque, the second to those who face it outside the mosque, and the third to those who face it from wherever they might be.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And from whatever place you come forth, turn your face [in prayer] towards the Sacred Mosque; for indeed this is the truth from your Lord; and God is not unaware of what you do....’ This is in retort to the hypocrites, Jews, and Christians, who tried to raise doubts about Islam by confronting the Muslims about the issue of the changed prayer-direction on the basis that it did not need to happen because there is no extra responsibility or effort required that would give greater reward to the believer. The effort the believer needs to face the House in Jerusalem is the same as the effort needed to face the Sacred Mosque. Whether you face left or right when you pray, or east or west, it takes no extra effort; so why this change? We say to them that this is no kind of argument to use, to doubt the prayer-direction because to face the Sacred Mosque is an act of obedience to God. As long as God has commanded us, we must obey Him

out of faith. The Lord *the Exalted* says, ‘...for indeed this is the truth from your Lord; and God is not unaware of what you do.’ That is, the way you have changed your prayer-direction is a true command from God Who was not unaware of your action when you turned to face the Sacred Mosque, but rather, He knows all that you do openly and all you conceal. So rest assured that you are doing what is right, and turn your faces to the Sacred Mosque, and know that God has encompassing knowledge and power over you and all that you do.

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا  
وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَيْكُمْ حُجَّةٌ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ فَلَا  
تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِي وَلَئِنَّم نَعَمْتَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

**wherever you may have started out, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque; wherever any of you may be, turn your faces towards it, so that people may have no argument against you, except for the wrongdoers among them: do not fear them; fear Me, and so that I may perfect My favour on you and you may be guided [150] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 150)**

The True Lord *the Most High* emphasises here to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he and the Muslims should turn to face the Sacred Mosque, whether they are in Medina or outside it, or in any place on earth. This is their prayer-direction for every prayer, regardless of where they might be praying.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...lest people will have a chance of raising an argument against you....’ The people meant here are the hypocrites, Jews, and Christians. What kind of argument is meant? The answer is that the Muslims used to face Jerusalem in prayer, and then they changed to face the Sacred Mosque; and neither Jerusalem nor the Sacred Mosque has any sanctity in their own right, as we said, but rather, we obey the commands of the Highest Commander, God. God *the Most High* says of the hypocrites, Jews, and Christians that they were ‘...unjust...’, and describes them as being wrongdoers. What is an unjust person, a wrongdoer? (*al-Baqara*: 45-46).

So, the humble in spirit are those who link obedience to its reward and disobedience to its requital and chastisement; for those who avoid obedience

because of its difficulty, separate obedience from its reward and so make it seem a burden; and those who disobey, separate disobedience from its punishment and so make it seem easy. The fullness of blessing is that God makes the requirements of faith constant for us. So at the Farewell Pilgrimage, the verse was revealed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* carrying God's Message to him that on that day, God has perfected the religious law for the believers, and has bestowed upon them the full measure of His blessings, and that He was satisfied with Islam (submission to Him) as their religion (*al-Ma'ida*: 3).

This was an announcement of the completion of the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, in that the commandments of the faith had been completely delivered. But those who see responsibilities as a burden, will say to you, 'There is corruption everywhere, and God does not hold a soul responsible for more than it can bear,' as though they are deciding what is within their ability and what is not, and on this basis, they decide what their responsibilities are. We say to them: Has God ordained these responsibilities, or has He not? If He has, then they must be within your ability because when He *the Exalted* sees a difficulty He commands that it be lightened, such as the allowance for the traveller to shorten his prayers and the allowance for the ill person and the traveller to eat in *Ramadan*; and so He *the Exalted* has already made allowances for your abilities.

God *the Most High* says, '...and that you may be guided aright.' Guidance is the straight path which leads to the goal by the shortest possible route; and the goal of this life is to reach the bliss of the Hereafter. In this world, God has given you the material means to live your life, but this is not the goal of life. Rather, the goal is that we go on to a world without means; and this is the greatness of God's power. God *the Most High* teaches us that He has created us to live in this world with material means, while in the Hereafter, we will live in His shelter without need for any material means.

So, God's words '...and that you may be guided aright' mean that you might become aware of the goal which is required of you, and that none of you might imagine that the life of this world is the goal, or the end, or the purpose, and so work for the sake of this life alone, taking whatever he can from it, whether it be lawful or unlawful, considering it the sole means of enjoyment that has been created for him; we say no; in this state he will have

gone astray, and has not been guided because if he had been guided, he would have known that the true life of mankind is the Hereafter, and he would have known that the bliss of the Hereafter which neither leaves you nor do you leave it, must be the goal for us in this worldly life so that , we do everything we can to reach the bliss of Paradise which depends on no material means.

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ ءَايَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ  
وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٥١﴾

**just as We have sent among you a Messenger of your own to  
recite Our revelations to you, purify you and teach you the  
Scripture, wisdom, and [other] things you did not know [151]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 151)**

After having spoken to us of guidance to His teachings and His way, God *the Most High* now speaks to us of the blessing He gave us by sending a messenger to convey to us the signs of God; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was destined to be the channel for the coming of the greatest blessing of all: the Quran, and the final religion.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...a Messenger from yourselves....’ That is, he is not from any other race. Rather, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was one of you, and you knew him before that he was given the Message and before he came with any argument. Why? It was because he was known for his impeccable conduct, his noble speech, and his trustworthiness, and for possessing every characteristic which raises a person’s standing and respectability. The first persons to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were those who knew him the best, such as Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *God be pleased with him* and the Prophet’s wife, our Lady Khadija *God be pleased with her*, and his nephew 'Ali ibn Abu Talib *God be pleased with him*. They believed without requiring any evidence because they based their faith on how they knew the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* before he was given the Message. They had never known him to lie, and they reasoned that the one who will not lie about other people will certainly not lie about God, and so they

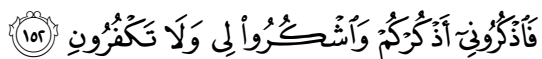
believed. So out of His mercy, God *the Most High* sent to them a Messenger from among themselves, who was unlettered that his Lord might teach him. And so the True Lord *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that indeed, there has come to them a Messenger from among themselves; it heavily weighs upon him that they might suffer, and he is full of concern for them and is full of compassion and mercy towards the believers (*at-Tawba*: 128).

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘...reciting to you Our verses and purifying you....’ The verses referred to here mean the verses of the Noble Quran, and purifying means cleansing. So there must have been some impurity which had to be cleansed from them; he purified them from idol-worship, from burying their newborn daughters alive, from alcohol, gambling, and usury. Purification also means to remove that which is harmful; so, it is as though he brought them benefit and removed harm from them.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...and teaching you the Book and wisdom....’ The Book in its general sense means the Noble Quran, and wisdom means to put things in their right places. The Book charges you with responsibilities, either by commanding you to do something or by forbidding you from doing something.

So, it revolves around action and abstinence. Wisdom (*hikma*) means to do those actions which bring goodness to you and keep evil from you; the Arabic word is derived from the word for the bit of metal which is placed in a horse’s mouth so that it can be steered and stopped, and always does what it is required to do. ‘Wisdom’ here also means the collected sayings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, as God *the Most High* addresses the Prophet’s wives instructing them to bear in mind all that is recited in their homes of God’s verse and wisdom (*al-Ahzab*: 34).

God then says, ‘...and teaching you that which you did not know,’ for you are an unlettered nation, and so if the world stuns you with its civilisation, you will amaze it with the rays of faith which mark you out above them all, as everything that comes from heaven is superior to all the civilisation of earth. And this is what made ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* say, ‘Were it not for Islam, what would Omar be?’



**So remember Me; I will remember you. Be thankful to Me,  
and never ungrateful [152] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 152)**

God *the Most High* says, 'So remember Me,' That is, you should not forget all of these blessings and favours, and you should always remember the One who gave them to you. God *the Most High* wants His servants to remember Him; and every time they remember Him and thank Him, He thanks them and gives them more. God *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me: if he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself; if he remembers Me in a group, I remember him in a group which is better; if he draws nearer to Me by a hand's span, I draw nearer to him by an arm's length; if he draws nearer to Me by an arm's length, I draw nearer to him by a fathom; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.'<sup>(1)</sup>

This is the desire of the Most Generous to give, on condition that we are worthy to receive; for He wants to give us more and more. So He says 'So remember Me,' that is, remember God at all times: His blessings, His bestowal, His shelter, His mercy, His forgiveness. One of the pious persons said: 'I heard from someone, who had heard it from my beloved, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, that when you drink water, you should divide it into three parts: for the first sip, say, "In the Name of God," and drink and then say, "Praise be to God," and then for the second sip say, "In the Name of God," and drink and then say, "Praise be to God", and then say, "In the Name of God", and drink the third sip, and finish by saying "Praise be to God." As long as this water is in your body, no atom of your body will incline towards sin.' Try it one day yourself; say, 'In the Name of God', and drink and then say, 'Praise be to God,' and repeat it three times. In doing so, you will have received God's blessing by remembering the One Who gave it, and you will have set aside your own strength and power, and then you will have completed this blessing by praising God. But why water? That is because water fills the belly more completely than anything else.

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad in his *Musnad*, with different narrations

God *the Most High* says, ‘...and be grateful to Me and do not deny Me.’ Being grateful for blessings makes God *the Most High* increase them, as He *the Exalted* tells us that if we are grateful to Him, He will most certainly give us more and more (*Ibrahim: 7*). Offering thanks to God puts an end to self-delusion so that you do not become infatuated by material means, or say, ‘I was given this because of my own knowledge.’ ‘...and do not deny Me,’ that is, do not ignore God’s blessings, but rather keep them always in your mind and on your lips; for if you receive every blessing from God by saying ‘This is what God willed! There is no power except with God!’, you will never find any fault in these blessings because you will have kept the blessing connected to the One Who granted it, and thereby recognised God’s right in His blessing; but if you do not do so, and ignore it as though it was your own doing, and your own creation, forgetting the One Who gave it, God *the Most High*, the blessing will leave you.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

**You who believe, seek help through steadfastness and prayer, for God is with the steadfast [153]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara: 153*)**

God tells us here to seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer – aid with what? It is aid with everything that God requires from us: His teachings and His commandments; and the way to seek aid with these things is through steadfast patience and prayer. But why is it through steadfast patience? That is because patience is to keep the soul from becoming frantic because of something that happens; and it takes many forms according to the level of one’s devotion.

For example, Imam Ali God *be pleased with him* was asked about the rights of the neighbour, and he replied, ‘You know that you should not harm him, don’t you?’ They replied that this was so. He went on: ‘It is also that you bear his harm with steadfast patience.’ So, it is not only required from you that you do not harm your neighbour, but you must also bear it patiently if he harms you. Steadfast patience is what helps you to do what God has commanded you, and to abstain from that which He has forbidden you. God *the Most High* has forbidden you from doing certain things which are tempting to the soul, and has commanded you to do things which may be difficult, and this requires patience. If you accept God’s

teachings out of devotion to Him, then you will become accustomed to them after a while. One of the pious people prayed: 'O God, I ask you not to leave me to my own devices; for I fear, Lord, that You might not reward me for my devotions to You because I have come to enjoy my devotions, and – Glory be to You! – You commanded us to fight our desires!' Because of intense love for God, obedience can become desirable and beloved to the soul. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to Bilal *God be pleased with him* when it was time for the call to prayer: 'Give us peace with it, o Bilal!'

He did not say, as some people do (in God is our refuge), 'Let us be rid of it.' This is because there are those who will say to you, 'Prayer is like a mountain on my shoulders, and then I relax when it is done.' We say to them: You relax because of it, not because you are done with it because you have stood before God, the Lawgiver; and as long as a person stands before their Lord, every difficulty becomes easy.

One of the devotees said, 'I do not approach God with my servanthood, but rather, I approach Him with His Lordship; and so I find peace, for He is my Lord and the Lord of the worlds.' If someone has a father to help him, he has no worries; so what of one who has a Lord to aid him and succour him?

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '...for, God is surely with those who are patient in adversity.' That is, He asks you to approach life with awareness of being in the company of God; for if you face all your problems with the company of one in whose power you trust, you will face all things bravely – so, what if you are in the company of God, He to whom everything in existence yields? Will anything dare to stand in your way when you are in the company of God?

Events do not fill people with panic and fear unless they have forgotten about the protection of their Lord, as for those who live in the protection of their Lord, Satan does not dare to approach them, for Satan is insidious; what does 'insidious' mean? If you forget God, he will dare to approach you, while if you remember God, he sneaks away and is enfeebled. He has no power, and he cannot enter into a battle with God *the Most High*, but rather, his battle is with the creatures of God who forget God and stray far from Him. The Noble Quran tells us that Satan has sworn by the Might of God that he will seduce all mankind into sin except those of them who are true servants to God (*Sad*: 82-83).



Since God *the Most High* is with those who are patient in adversity, we should yearn to be patient; how can we not yearn for that which means that God is with us? The True Lord *the Exalted* says in the Qudsi Hadith: ‘Son of Adam! I fell ill, and you did not visit Me! He will say, O Lord, how could I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds? He will say: Did you not know that my servant, So-and-so, was ill, and you did not visit him? Did you not know that had you visited him, you would have found Me with him?’<sup>(1)</sup>

A pious man once said, ‘O Lord, I am reluctant to ask You for cure and health, lest this prevents me from being with You.’ So, we must yearn to have patience because it means that we are always with God.

God *the Most High* says, ‘...for, God is surely with those who are patient in adversity.’ We want God to be always with us; and this verse means that one must never despair, whatever hardships life might bring.

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمُوتَ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٥٤﴾

**Do not say that those who are killed in God’s cause are  
dead; they are alive, though you do not realize it [154]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 154)**

The True Lord *the Most High* knows that the events in the course of the faith, and the enemies of the faith, will cause the Muslims much suffering, which will endanger not only their material possessions but also their lives. And so God *the Most High* wanted to give the believers immunity against these events, and so He counselled them to have steadfast patience and prayer so that they could face every event that disturbed them. He told them that things might go so far that some of them would be killed, and be martyred in God’s cause. He wanted to reassure them that martyrdom is the highest level of faith that a believer can reach in this world, and so He *the Exalted* said, ‘And do not say of those who are killed in the way of God, ‘They are dead....’ To be killed is the worst thing that can happen to a person. You could lose your possessions, or your children, or your earnings, or your health, but to lose your own life by being killed is the absolute loss. God called death a ‘calamity’ when He instructed the

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(1) Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Sahih*

believers that they should have two witnesses to testify for the testament of the dying person if the calamity of death comes upon them while they are travelling far from home (*al-Ma'ida*: 106).

God *the Most High* wants the believers to understand that those who are killed in God's cause do not die, but rather God gives them a new kind of life which contains blessings which cannot be counted or reckoned. He *the Exalted* says, 'And do not say of those who are killed in the way of God, 'They are dead;' rather, they are alive, but you perceive [it] not.'

What distinguishes the life that they have? The sign of life for us is movement; so, what is the aspect of life for someone who is killed in God's cause? It is that the non-believers and enemies of Islam and who have killed him have not really taken his life from him because he goes on to a happier life, and his death takes him on to that which is better than what he left behind. Although the non-believers may have killed him, they have not taken anything from him, but rather, all they have done is send him on to a greater blessing than anything he had before. As for the believers, he will protect for them the teachings of God so that they continue to be conveyed to them until the end of time.

All of the battles in which the believers are martyred are a continuous chain of protection for the existence of faith. The greatness of life is not only that I live, but rather that I make it so that others can come after me. When the believer is martyred, he leaves his trace in existence in the form of the works of all who come after him. Every subsequent action to protect the faith is based on what he did, and inspired by it, and from his own faithful action, motivation is taken for another to fight and be martyred. So it is as though the action is continuous, and the work is continuous. As for the disbeliever, life ends for him when he dies, but another life is waiting for him when God raises all mankind, and then brings forth death itself to die; and once death is dead, there begins life without death, either in paradise or in hell.

God *the Most High* wants us to know that those who are killed in God's cause are alive with their Lord, and pass from the life of this world to the life of the Hereafter immediately, and do not have to lie dead in the isthmus zone until the Day of Resurrection as those who die ordinary deaths must. And because this life is reserved for the martyrs, God conceals its details from us because it is another order of life altogether, and it is unseen to us; and so He

*the Exalted* says, ‘...but you perceive [it] not.’ Since we cannot perceive it, it must be a life which is greater than our worldly life.

People suppose that the one who is martyred has lost his life, while in God’s sight he has gained a new life. When we open the grave of a martyr, and we find that his body is how it is (dead before our eyes), we say, ‘He is obviously dead!’ You must be aware that the moment you opened his grave, he came from the realm of the unseen to the realm of the seen. God *the Most High* says that they are ‘alive with their Lord,’ not that they are alive with us in the realm of the seen. He is alive as long as he is in the realm of the unseen, but once you open his grave and expose him, you find that he is a body in a grave because he has returned from the realm of the unseen to the realm of the seen. As for the ‘how’ of this, we said before that the unseen has no ‘how’, and so you cannot know, and you do not need to know.

If we perform a surgical operation on a sick person, the doctor anaesthetises him so that he loses consciousness and sensation, but he does not simply make him die so that he can do the operation without him feeling any pain.

So, the matter itself is (does not feel), since you can perform the operation on it while the body is still alive, its blood flowing, its lungs breathing, yet it feels nothing. Rather, it is the conscious soul, which in this case is absent, that feels pain.

When there is some pain in your body and you sleep, the sensation of pain goes away, as though pain is not a matter of nerves, but rather of consciousness so that when you sleep, you go to another world which has different laws. Scientists have studied the brains of people while they sleep, and found that they can have dreams which last no more than seven seconds which they can then take hours to tell. When God *the Most High* says that they are alive with their Lord, we must understand that this life is drawn from God’s power and is from Him. God *the Most High* wants to help us understand the notion of the Resurrection by likening it to sleep, and so He *the Exalted* says that it is He Who takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die He takes during their sleep. Then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others for a specified term (*az-Zumar*: 42).

So it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* gives the martyrs an eternal, everlasting life because they died in His cause. And since He said ‘...you

perceive [it] not,' do not attempt to imagine it with your feelings and sensations because you will never be able to envisage it. And the martyr must be killed in God's cause, not for any worldly cause; it must be the result of an effort to make the Word of God uppermost.

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ  
وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالْثَمَرَاتِ ۚ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٥﴾

**We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger,  
and loss of property, lives, and crops. But [Prophet],  
give good news to those who are steadfast [155]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 155)**

We know that trials in themselves are not bad, but rather, what is bad is that you fail the trial. Every trial is a test and an assessment, and no one says that tests are always bad. Rather, they only become bad in the eyes of the one who cannot bear the hard work required to succeed; as for the one who makes effort and so passes with flying colours, the test was a good thing for him. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And We will surely test you...' that is, we will give you a test to establish the challenge of the new religion.

Before this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* reminded us of the ultimate trial which is for a person to be martyred in God's cause; and He told us the reward of the martyr which is to remain alive with his Lord. This served as an introduction to the mention of lesser trials; for the absolute trial – in our eyes – is to lose one's life, and so the True Lord wants also to give the believers immunity from that which is less than the loss of life, an immunisation against danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, of lives and of labour's fruits. Everything less than the loss of one's own life is easy compared to it, and so those who do not lose their lives will be tried by that which is less than this, namely the trials of danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, and the loss of one's fellow believers, and the loss of labour's fruits. All of these things are beloved to man, and so religion comes and asks the believer to sacrifice some of what he loves; and these trials are part of what it means to preserve the religion.

The first of these trials is fear. Fear causes the soul to be disturbed and lose its wellbeing because of expectation that something unpleasant will happen. The soul has many faculties, and when it is faced with danger, it suffers a lack

of harmony. Fear is an unnecessary weakness because if you want to brace yourself against some danger which frightens you, you must strive as hard as you can to keep this fear at bay; but if you give in to fear, you cannot face up to the danger with all your faculties because you will face it while some of your faculties are weak and confused.

Yet your spiritual faculties must be in equilibrium at times of danger so that you can draw from your spirit what you need to protect you from this danger. If your worry goes too far, you do nothing but help the source of this danger against yourself because you do meet the challenge with neither all your power nor all of your concentration.

So to the one who fears danger, we say: You are helping the source of your fear against yourself, and your fear and worry will not hold back this danger. You must concentrate on that which will hold this danger back, and forget about fearful things until they actually happen. Do not live in fear of danger before it comes to you because the trouble with people is that they live with calamities before they even occur, and so they make these calamities last even longer for themselves. A calamity might be due after a month, for example, so why extend the life of this calamity by fretting about it and dreading the time you will have to face it? If you leave it until it comes, you will lessen its span. You should know that when calamities come, the True Lord *the Most High*, in His mercy, sends His subtle kindness along with them. If you live with a calamity before it occurs, you thereby live with the calamity alone, without this subtle kindness that accompanies it; but if you remain steadfastly patient, and brace yourself to meet any difficulty, you will not need to live with the calamity without God's subtle kindness.

The call to God and Islam was still in its infancy, and so it was necessary that the people's faith be well prepared and strong. Danger was expected because the enemies of the religion were plotting and scheming against it, and this was a trial indeed. What is required from a believer when he faces the trial of danger? It is that he uses his fear to amass the means required to ward off this danger, and if he does this, he will have passed this trial successfully.

Now, we come to the second trial mentioned in this noble verse, which is hunger. Hunger is a powerful desire for food which is necessary for the preservation of life.

Out of His mercy, the True Lord *the Most High* placed within man the ability to store nutrients in their body at times of ease to save for times of hardship. A person stores the extra nutrient in the form of fat and flesh, and so when he is hungry and finds no food, he consumes this fat; and when there is no more fat, he uses the flesh; and when there is no more flesh, the body takes its sustenance from the bones so that the person can stay alive.

A person is composed of many different systems, the most important of which is the brain. As long as there is life in the cells of the brain, everything else in you is ready to work; but if these cells die, everything is over. This is why we see that sometimes people say that someone has died, and then they give him a certain treatment and he comes back to life. They thereby ignore the confirmed scientific fact that life only leaves a person when their brain ceases to function. And so a person's heart might stop, but the doctors treat him with electric shocks so that the heart begins to beat again, or they open his chest and massage his heart back to life. But once the brain cells are all dead, this is true death, and all the other parts of the body are at the service of their master, the brain.

It is amazing that the master of man, the brain, is at the summit of his body, and the same is the case for animals, whilst plants are controlled from their roots; so, the leaves wilt first, then the high branches deteriorate, then the trunk; and eventually the trunk dries up when no water comes to it, but if water comes to the roots at the right time, they spring into verdure once again, and the plant grows and life returns. The same is the case for the human brain. When a person's reserves of fat and flesh run out so that he draws sustenance from his bones, he can still be saved if his brain is nourished; and so the Arab woman, who did not know anatomy, famously said, describing what three years of famine did to them, 'We spent years when in one year our fat melted away, and in another our flesh was eradicated, and in the third our bones were destroyed.'

We must understand that hunger makes any kind of food seem fair to us; if you are hungry, every food is delicious. The thing that makes people cook all kinds of different foods is lack of hunger; a person wants to have something tasty, so he eats, but if he were truly hungry, any kind of food would be good for him. And so they say, 'A hungry man welcomes any food, and a tired man welcomes any bed.' When a person is tired, he will happily sleep on rough

ground, and sleep very well; but if a person is not tired, he will keep tossing and turning in bed even if it has silken sheets.

So the trial of hunger is that you have to put up with only the bare essentials of nutrients that will keep you alive, eating it simply as fuel to keep you alive, not as a way of gaining pleasure. When a person takes sustenance just to keep himself alive, any food will do. And so God ordained fasting so that we could practise bearing the pangs of hunger because the believers might be forced in a battle to spend long hours without food, and if they are not used to bearing the pangs of hunger, they will weaken and tire.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants the believer to be completely prepared; the believer faces danger and so prepares to meet it, and he faces hunger and so takes as much (or as little) sustenance as he needs to survive.

And so you find that some societies deal with economic difficulties by living more simple lives, whilst other societies are incapable of doing so, and some people in these societies cannot live simply. So we say to those who lead lives of luxury: You are not preparing yourself properly to face the vicissitudes of time. I say as Ibrahim ibn Adham said:

If something becomes dear for me, I leave it be,

And so it is as cheap as can be when it is dear.

If something is very expensive and you leave it and do not buy it, it becomes the cheapest of all things because you do not lose any money by buying it.

The third trial is the loss of worldly goods which occurs because the believers busy themselves with the call to the faith. If they are distracted from worldly pursuits by having to face the enemy, they will be forced to sacrifice their work by which they earn their livelihoods, and so their worldly goods will be affected, for their efforts will be directed towards facing the enemies of God. Likewise, they may have to face the enemy on the battlefield, and some of them might be martyred. And last of all they will face a loss of labour's fruits, which are the goal of all worldly work. When the True Lord *the Most High* prepares us in this way, if we succeed therein, it will have been glad tidings for us because we will have borne with patience all these misfortunes. We will have borne fear, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, loss of lives, and loss of labour's fruits.

So, it is essential for the believer to endure all of these trials successfully so that he can face life with strength and vigour, and so he knows that life is just a journey, and so he will not be distracted by the journey from the journey's end. And so the True Lord *the Most High* gives their characteristic identification in the next verse:

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾

**those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, ‘We  
belong to God and to Him we shall return’ [156]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 156)**

A calamity (*musiba*) is something that causes one difficulty and pain, and is derived in Arabic from the word *isaba*, which means to hit a target. The believer should accept calamities with certitude that, however painful they are, the reward for them will be commensurate with them. And so when the disbelievers were happy to see calamities befall the believers at a certain battle, God *the Most High* revealed to the believers the true words: ‘Say, “Never can anything befall us except what God has decreed for us!”’ (*at-Tawba*: 51). That is, say, o believers, to these foolish disbelievers: Nothing happens to us except that which God has destined.

Notice that the True Lord *the Most High* instructed them to say, ‘...what God has decreed for us’ (*at-Tawba*: 51), that is, the matter would be counted for them, in their favour, and they would be well rewarded for it by God. The True Lord *the Most High* did not have them say ‘what God has decreed on us,’ because if this were the case, it would mean that it would be requital and punishment from God.

If a calamity befalls a person, either he has a hand in it, in which case he cannot complain because he is the one who has brought it upon himself, or else, he has no hand in the calamity, and it has been caused by someone else, for example, and in this case he should look for the cause of it; was it just, or unjust? If it was just, then his misdeed has been expiated by it, and if it was unjust, then God will give him retribution from the one who wronged him. Because of this, the believer wins either way.



So the believer should expect every calamity to bring him some kind of good; and every believer should evaluate himself sincerely: ‘Does God owe me anything? I belong to God, and He owes me nothing, and so whatever He does to me, He does to that which He owns.’ Anyone who finds this far-fetched, let him refuse to accept any calamity, and say to it: ‘Do not afflict me.’ He will not be able to ward off any calamity like this. As long as we cannot prevent calamities and accidents from happening, we should accept them as believers; for the True Lord *the Most High* wants to honour us and give us esteem by the connection that exists between us and Him, so He tells us to say, ‘Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return.’ By saying this, we ascribe ownership of ourselves to God, and we accept what happens to us. Here we must give an example of this (and God is beyond compare): Have you ever seen anyone in their right mind deliberately destroy their own possessions? No, I have never seen any. The one who owns something will do everything he can to keep his possessions in good condition, even if people from the outside imagine that he is doing them harm. So what about God *the Most High* and we are His possessions? He *the Exalted* never exposes His possessions to harm, but rather, He maintains them with wisdom and rectitude.

‘Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return.’ That is, we are God’s possessions, and we shall go back to Him; and even if we were afflicted with calamities in this world because of injustice done to us by someone, we will be compensated for the injustice done to us when we return to God. So we belong to God in the first place, and we are headed for God in the end when we return to Him, and so He has possession from sides, beginning and end. So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that when any calamity afflicts us, we should say: ‘Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return,’ and he added that we should also say: ‘O God, reward me for my calamity, and recompense me with that which is better than it.’ If you say this when any calamity afflicts you, you will certainly find that goodness will come to you after it; and even if one forgets to say this when the calamity occurs, and then remembers it and says it later, he will be rewarded for it as though he said it at the time of the calamity.

There is a story about Umm Salama *God be pleased with her* that upon the death of her husband Abu Salama *God be pleased with him*, to whom she was completely devoted, she grieved for him severely, and so someone said to her, 'Say what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us.' She said, 'What did he teach you?' They replied, 'Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return. O God, reward me for my calamity, and recompense me with that which is better than it.' She said it, and then after her mourning period had finished the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked for her hand in marriage. It was said to her, 'Did you find better than Abu Salama, or not?' She replied, 'I never imagined that this could happen!'

So whenever a person is beset by a calamity, he should say, 'Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return. O God, reward me for my calamity, and recompense me with that which is better than it.'<sup>(1)</sup>

And what will be the state of those who make this supplication? The True Lord *the Most High* says:

أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

**These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord,  
and it is they who are rightly guided [157]  
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 157)**

See the ultimate end to which God directs us so that we can take forth His call, and protect the way of the truth, and bring down the power of the spreaders of falsehood: these are goals, but they are not the ultimate goal; the ultimate goal is that we do all this to obtain God's blessings and grace in the Hereafter. So, the ultimate goal of all faith and all action is to gain God's Pleasure and Grace. As Sheikh Sayyid Qutb *God rest his soul* said, 'Do not let anything distract you from trying to attain God's blessings, graces, and benedictions – even the struggle to support the religion.' This means that the struggle to support the religion is a way to obtain the blessings and graces of your Lord, and anything apart from this is a

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(1) Narrated by Imam Muslim, beginning with the words 'No servant says, when beset by a calamity, "Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return..."'

way to reach the goal; and the goal of the believer is to be one of those who are included in God's words: 'Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy, and it is those who are the [rightly] guided.'

We know that the Arabic word *salat* (rendered as 'blessing' here) literally means prayer. People make *salat*, the angels make *salat*; and God too makes *salat*, as He *the Exalted* says that He makes *salat* for us, and His angels also (He bestows His blessings upon us, and His angels pray for us) (*al-Ahzab*: 43).

We all live with God's graces. Even the disbeliever lives on this earth by the grace of God, and he obtains the means of his livelihood by the grace of God, and all of the gifts and beneficial things by means of which he lives come to him by the grace of God. The believer obtains the beneficial things of this world by the grace of God, and then God increases the grace for him by blessing him and giving him inner peace. Inner peace is the supreme gift, and those who live this life with the assurance that they will go on to a better life after it, thereby have an immense inner peace.

So, *salat* from God means the bestowal of grace and favour ;

And *salat* from the angels means supplication for forgiveness ;

And *salat* from the believers means supplication.

And when you pray for goodness, mercy, and blessings for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, you are thereby praying for yourself. Why? That is because every time the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is raised in status, this also applies to his community and to the whole world.

Who is it that will intercede before God at the Resurrection so that God will hasten the reckoning of His creatures? It will be the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, every goodness that comes to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* also comes to his community, and so when you pray for him you are also praying for yourself. When you send one prayer for him, God sends ten prayers upon you. Is this not good for you? 'Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy, and it is those who are the [rightly] guided.' The ones who are guided to the right path are those who adhere to the way which leads directly to the goal which is blessings and grace from

their Lord. You are now enjoying the blessings of God by the means God created; and in the Hereafter, you will find enjoyment, by God's leave, in the blessings of God and the meeting with God.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ حَجَّ الْبَيْتَ أَوْ اعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا وَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٥٨﴾

**Safa and Marwa are among the rites of God, so for those who make major or minor pilgrimage to the House it is no offence to circulate between the two. Anyone who does good of his own accord will be rewarded, for God rewards good deeds, and knows everything [158] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 158)**

As-Safa and Al-Marwa are two small hills known to those who have visited the sacred sites. As for those who have not gone, I ask that God allow them to see them as well; and when they see them with their own eyes, they will have absolute certainty. These are the two hills around which our Lady Hajar *peace be upon her* walked searching for water for her son Ishmael *peace be upon him* after Abraham *peace be upon him* left them at the Sacred House of God. I ask you by God, what would a woman think if her husband left her with her suckling baby in a place bereft of food and water? Upon this, Hajar *peace be upon her* said to her husband Abraham *peace be upon him*, 'In whose care do you leave us? Has God commanded you to do this?'

Our master Abraham *peace be upon him* replied, 'He has.' And so she said, 'Then He will not desert us.' She found sufficiency for herself with the Creator from having need of His creation, and she only uttered these words under Divine inspiration. This was a primary matter of faith, which also came from the sacred character of the land in which she stood, as Abraham *peace be upon him* prayed to his Lord, saying that he has settled some of his offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to God's Sacred House so that they might devote themselves to prayer (*Ibrahim*: 37).

When you read the words 'no arable land,' know that this means that there was no water; for where there is water, there is vegetation. Water is the

basic source of life; and if a mother and her baby are without water, what will their condition be?

The child became thirsty, and so she wanted to search for a spring of water, or a bird landing somewhere to indicate the presence of water, or a caravan passing by who could give her water. And so she set out for the highest place, leaving the valley floor and climbing Mount As-Safa; but she found nothing, and so she went over to Mount Al-Marwa on the other side and climbed it, but found nothing. She continued to run between As-Safa and Al-Marwa until she had done so seven times. We can imagine the state she was in, a woman of her age, alone as she was, having no water. She must have been as thirsty as her baby. But when she had no more energy, she gave up and returned to where she had left the baby.

Had her running between As-Safa and Al-Marwa paid off, and had she found water, we would have said that it was her effort alone which brought her water. But she herself had said before, ‘Then He will not desert us,’ and by saying this she looked to the Creator of means, not the means themselves. Had He given her water as a result of the means she utilised, namely her search for water, she would have had nothing to show the truth of her words ‘Then He will not desert us.’ The True Lord *the Most High* wanted her seven passes between the two hills to be fruitless so that she returned to her baby and then found water right there at his feet. And so Hajar’s certitude was proved correct when she trusted that God would not desert her. God wanted to say to her, ‘Indeed I would not desert you; it will not be by means of your running, but rather, by means of the foot of your baby boy: he will strike the earth with it, and water will spring forth.’ And so the baby’s striking the earth with his foot, was not an ordinary means, but rather, God wanted it to be the means so that causality would remain, even if it would ordinarily not be enough.

When Hajar found the water at the foot of her baby, she saw with certainty that God indeed would not desert her. So this passing between the hills remained as one of the symbolic rites of the pilgrimage to God’s Sacred Mosque, to preserve a person’s faith in the Creator of means, whilst not ignoring the means themselves so that, he would approach all his actions with faith in the Creator of the means. And so we must be clear on the difference between putting trust in God (*tawakkul*) and

indolence (*tawaakul*). To trust in God is an act of the heart, not the body, whilst indolence means simply to be inactive (while saying or pretending to be putting trust in God). There is no place for indolence in Islam, but rather the body should work, whilst the heart trusts in God. This was how Hajar *peace be upon her* practised trust in God; she acted, and trusted in God at the same time, and so God gave her what she needed by the simplest of means, by her baby's striking the earth with his foot, and this remained as one of the symbolic rites of the pilgrimage namely seven circuits between As-Safa and Al-Marwa.

But when people forgot about the worship of God, and idolatry entered the Arabian Peninsula, they made an idol on Mount As-Safa called 'Isaf', and another on Mount Al-Marwa named 'Na'ila', and so they would go between Isaf and Na'ila, not between As-Safa and Al-Marwa. In doing so, they turned their worship from pure monotheism into unclean idolatry.

And so when Islam came, God did not want the believers to pray towards the Sacred Mosque until it had been cleansed and devoted to God Alone; and likewise, when some of the believers went to the *Ka'ba*, they were reluctant to pass between As-Safa and Al-Marwa while the idols Isaf and Na'ila remained standing on them. It is as though they wanted to cut off every link to the old ignorant ways of worship, and they were too proud of their new faith to pass between Isaf and Na'ila. And so God *the Most High* revealed His words: 'Indeed, As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols set up by God; so, whoever performs pilgrimage to the House or performs *'Umra* - there is no blame upon him for going round about them. And whoever volunteers good - then indeed, God is appreciative and Knowing.' That is, do not be reluctant to do this because you will pass between As-Safa and Al-Marwa, not between Isaf and Na'ila as the polytheistic idolaters used to do; so, the action here was determined by the intention behind it.

The intention of the first passing between the mountains by Hajar *peace be upon her* was exercising belief in God *the Most High* and practising the use of means at the same time; but idolatry changed pure faith into vile disbelief. And so when they visited the Sacred Mosque, the Muslims had to invoke the original intention as they passed between As-Safa and Al-Marwa. In Islam, we yield to the command of the Commander. He tells us to kiss the Black Stone,

and at the same time He tells us to pelt another stone, symbolising Satan, with pebbles. So the true significance is in the intention, not the outer form of the action, and the true significance is the obedience of God's command. It is as though with this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* is saying to the believers: The idolaters worshipped Isaf and Na'ila, but you should cast this from your minds, and proceed to As-Safa and Al-Marwa; for As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols set up by God, not the symbols of idolatry, but it is only the error of the idolaters that has caused them to be linked with the idols of Isaf and Na'ila. By placing Isaf on As-Safa and Na'ila on Al-Marwa, the idolaters wanted to give sanctity to these idols. If As-Safa and Al-Marwa had not already been sacred sites, they would not have put their statues on top of them, and they would not have put their idols in the *Ka'ba*. This proves that these sites were sacred long before the idols were placed there; they were trying to give Isaf and Na'ila sacred status by placing them on As-Safa and Al-Marwa.

After explaining to the believers that As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols He set up, the True Lord *the Most High* then affirms that the occupant of a place does not make that place impure. This is proved by the fact that once the faith was destined to become victorious, all the idols were broken and removed from the *Ka'ba*, and the House became pure; and when the believers were reluctant to perform an action which had existed at the time of the pagan ignorance, the True Lord *the Most High* reassured them by saying to them, 'Indeed, As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols set up by God....'

The word *Safa* literally means 'smooth stone,' and indeed it was smooth because of all the people who had touched it over the years. It is also said that the name *As-Safa* is derived from the Divine election (*istifa*) of Adam *peace be upon him*. And it is said that the name Al-Marwa is named after the woman (Arabic (*mar'a*)), namely Eve *peace be upon her*; but these are just stories, and so we need not pay them much attention because knowing it, does not bring any good and being ignorant of it, does not harm. What is important for us is that it was the place where Hajar *peace be upon her* ran to and fro searching for water for her son. The True Lord *the Most High* made striding between them one of His symbols, meaning the signs of worship connected with certain places so that, one place is for circumambulation, another for walking to and fro, another for flinging pebbles at stones, and another is the site of the sacred shrine (*mash'ar*) of Muzdalifa.

The meaning of (*mash'ar*) is a place where a specific act of worship is offered, and since As-Safa and Al-Marwa are both also places, they are described as being '...among the symbols set up by God...' (*sha'a'ir* Allah). So '...whoever performs pilgrimage to the House or performs 'umra - there is no blame upon him for going round about them....' The rites of *haji* (greater pilgrimage) and 'umra (lesser pilgrimage) can either be obligatory or supererogatory. If the Muslim performs the greater and lesser pilgrimage once, he has fulfilled his obligation; but this does not stop him from performing the pilgrimages again, and this is a supererogatory act which will be accepted, God willing, and rewarded by God.

When you say 'there is no blame upon you if you do such-and-such,' this means that if you do it, you will not be sinning, and that it is not a mistake to do it, but it is also not obligatory to do it. This has made some people imagine that walking between As-Safa and Al-Marwa is not one of the obligatory acts of the pilgrimage. To these people, we say: This verse came for a specific purpose, which is that they were reluctant to walk in the same place where the idolaters walked, and so God *the Most High* said to them, '...there is no blame upon him for going round about them....'

The negation of wrong does not mean that if you do not do it, it is acceptable. No; rather, God *the Most High* was responding to a situation in which they were reluctant to do it. God's words '...going round about them....' require us to pause for a moment. The pilgrim walks back and forth between As-Safa and Al-Marwa, so, why does God use the word *yattawwaf* for this, which literally means to walk around in a circle?

In order to understand this, we must explain the meaning of the Arabic verbs *tafa*, *jala*, and *dara*. *Tafa* means to walk in a circle around something; so, what circle is there between As-Safa and Al-Marwa so that the True Lord *the Most High* would express it with this verb? When someone walks in circle, they begin in a certain point and then return to the same point; and so any point on a circle can be considered both, the beginning and the end of it, and any movement that starts and ends in the same place makes a circle.

It is true that the one who goes back and forth between As-Safa and Al-Marwa does not make a perfect circle, but he does go from As-Safa to



Al-Marwa, and then back to As-Safa, and then back to Al-Marwa again, and so it becomes a kind of circling. Let us take another example from our ordinary lives: a policeman who patrols to guard the streets and houses at night might go around the whole town, or he might stick to a single street which is his jurisdiction. This walking around the street from one end to another and then back several times is called ‘walking around’ (*tawaf*), and this explains why God *the Most High* uses the verb *yattawwaf*, that is, to walk between them several times from beginning to end.

And so we see that to walk between As-Safa and Al-Marwa is one of the symbolic rites of the greater and lesser pilgrimages, and we see that the obligatory performance of the greater and lesser pilgrimage is essential once, after which it is good to repeat it as a supererogatory act. ‘...And whoever volunteers good - then indeed, God is appreciative and Knowing’. These words lead us to understand that the One who thanks has derived some good from the one He thanks: so what good does the True Lord *the Most High* derive from repeated pilgrimages?

When the believer fulfils what God *the Most High* has charged him with, he merely fulfils his obligation; but when he adds more than he is bound to out of love for the rite itself, God thanks him for this additional effort. So gratitude from God *the Most High* means that a blessing will come. When the True Lord *the Most High* commands His servant to do a certain action, the faithful servant is bound to do this; and if the servant then adds more of the same action that God has charged him with, this indicates his love and yearning for God’s commands; and if he loves and yearns for God’s commands without God imposing it on him, and not only performs them, but also loves to do so, this deserves gratitude from God – and for God to ‘thank’ a servant means for Him to give him untold blessings.



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