vol. (11)

REFLECTIONS



المجلد (11)



In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy. vol. (11)

### REFLECTIONS



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info@alhosnuae.ae

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## the chapter of

## Hud

## Continued

#### To the Thamud<sup>(1)</sup>, We sent their brother, Saleh. He said, 'My people, worship God. You have no god other than Him. It was He who brought you into being from the earth and made you inhabit it, so ask forgiveness from Him, and turn back to Him: my Lord is near, and ready to answer' [61] (The Quran, *Hud:* 61)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* points out that the messenger who was sent to the tribe of Thamud was one of them. This was Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the word *akhahum* to call attention to the relationship between Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him and his people for he had grown up among them, and they are intimately acquainted with him so that when he brought them the message-the authenticity of which is palpable—they must indeed have put their faith in the doctrine which he had brought. Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him calls to them, 'va gawm' which comes from *givam*, that is, 'O you who undertake actions', or 'O you who carry out actions'. Now carrying out action is normally the role of men because women's affairs are to be kept discreet and veiled, as it were, behind the activities of men, for not every article of faith that mentions women most concern men, the affairs of the women being contained implicitly in the affairs of the men. The men toil and labour, while the women manage the life of the house and the rearing of children. We find many cases of men and women who come to the agreement that, after marriage, the woman will not go out into the world to work. Of course, a woman has every right to work if she needs to do so and does not find someone to care for her. However, if she finds someone who can support her, is it not better for her, then, to focus on the equally important task of caring for the family? There are also those who attack the veil in the name of freedom. Who, we ask, are you doing this for? If you refuse to condemn promiscuous clothing, because you consider that it is a

<sup>(1)</sup> The tribe of Thamud: One of the first Arab tribes. Some say they are the descendants of the survivors of the tribe of `Ad. [See Lissan Al-`Arab –under *t h m d*].

'freedom', why are you involving yourself in the issue of the veil; is wearing the veil not also a 'freedom'?

Returning to the Quranic verse, '...Worship Allah [alone]: you have no deity other than Him...' (Hud: 61), the word 'worship' involves the directives-'dos' and 'do nots'-that are to be received from Allah and applied to all aspects of human life. The first thing that Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him asked of the tribe of Thamud was that they 'Worship Allah [alone]'. This commandment is incumbent upon every soul, and none can afford to contravene it. '...you have no deity other than Him...' (Hud: 61) expresses an incontrovertible fact which you cannot alter as indeed, you have no other deity than Allah, notwithstanding your veneration of other false deities. The True Lord Glorified is He says, '... He brought you into being out of the earth. and made you thrive thereon ... ' (Hud: 61). The notion of insha` implies bringing something into being from scratch, i.e. out of nothing. That is why we do not say that one who has invented, has ansha` because he made use of other existing materials to come up with his invention. For instance, he might have made use of materials that were mined from under mountains, and he might have drawn on knowledge that was cultivated by previous generations of men. It is only the True Lord Glorified is He Who creates out of nothing. Thus, there are two categories of creation: creation that draws on pre-existing things, and creation from nothing. The latter is known as true *insha* and only Allah Glorified is He is capable of such creation.

Exalted is the True Lord's creation; for He creates man out of the convergence of husband and wife, and if you were to trace this procreation back to Adam *peace be upon him,* you would find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has created him out of the same substance as the earth—and the earth itself is one of Allah's creations. Both a man's sperm and a woman's egg are extracts of human blood, and the latter is what is extracted from food which comes from the earth. So, whether you look back at the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* from the substance of the earth or whether you look at the biological processes by which his progeny continues to multiply—all comes back to earth. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...He brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon…' (*Hud:* 61), note that the word `*amar* is prefixed by

the letters '*alif*', '*sin*', and '*ta*''. This indicates that the verb, in addition to its original meaning, also connotes a 'demand' or an 'appeal'. So the word *ista*'*mar* denotes 'asking to inhabit'. Therefore, it is a catastrophic error to label colonizing nations as '*duwal al-isti*'*mar*'. I say this because these nations did not really want to 'inhabit' other lands; rather, what they wanted was to 'exploit' other lands and hinder the development of the peoples of those lands. That is why they ought to be called instead, '*duwal al-istikhrab*' (the nations of destruction).

So *ista marakum fiha* means that Allah asked you to live there and prosper, and this requires that two conditions be fulfilled: maintain that which is good in its state or make it better. Just as I have previously given the example of the improvements that were made in bringing drinking water into people's homes thanks to the discovery of water towers. Before the advent of water towers people used to get their water directly from the canals. Now with the discovery of water towers and the improvements of water treatment systems, every home now has its own supply of water.

Thus, now with drinking water reaching every household—this is a situation in which something good became even better. Also, if we succeed in reinvigorating land that is fallow, we can expand the area of agricultural land to produce more food for a growing population. Since population numbers are rising, we must find a way of rejuvenating the land. The current crisis is a result of our inattentiveness to the fact that rapid population growth was not matched by an increase of agricultural land. This is all part and parcel of 'living and thriving on earth' that is mentioned in the Quranic verse. The Greatness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* is that He projects His Exalted Qualities into His creation. The strong helps the weak, and the True Lord's Power is absolute; He also bestows His Wisdom, His Contraction, His Expansion, and His Wealth. All these Divine Qualities are innate to Allah, and we are merely the recipients.

The proof of this is that the strong among us eventually becomes weak, and the rich among us can easily succumb to a state of poverty. Therefore, we must realise that we do not inherently possess any of these qualities that it is the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who bestows on us of His Attributes some abilities so that we can function. It is incumbent on him whom Allah *the Exalted* 

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

has given the capacity to take action, to realise that he himself is merely the beneficiary of action taken by those who came before him. For instance, if today he eats a date, he must remember that the date palm was planted by someone who came before him. So, he who enjoys the date today should plant a date palm so that, in seven years—the time required for a date palm to bear fruit—he and others can derive benefit from it.

Going back to the current verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* told the tribe of Thamud, '...Ask Him, therefore, to forgive you your sins, and then turn towards Him in repentance – for, verily, my Lord is ever-near, responding [to the call of whoever calls unto Him]!' (*Hud:* 61). For if a person was to ask forgiveness for sins that do not involve violating other peoples' rights, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is Ever-Near; Allah *Glorified is He* responds to those who ask him for forgiveness. So what was the tribe of Thamud's response?

The True Lord Glorified is He mentions them as saying:

قَالُواْ يَصَلِحُ قَدْ كُنتَ فِينَا مَرْجُوًّا قَبْلَ هَذَاً أَنَنْهَكْنَاً أَن نَعْبُدُ مَا يَعُبُدُ ءَابَآؤُنَا وَإِنَّنَا لَفِى شَكِّ مِّمَّا تَدْعُونَآ إِلَيْهِ مُرِيبٍ (11)

They said, 'Saleh, We used to have such great hope in you. Will you forbid us to worship what our fathers worshipped? We are in grave doubt about what you are asking us to do' [62] (The Quran, *Hud:* 62)

Indeed, they had had high hopes for Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* that is, until he started calling them to worship Allah alone, to the exclusion of any other false deities. The term *marju* means a person in whom there are high hopes because he exhibits the qualities of intelligence, ambitiousness, honesty and any other qualities that are signs of a good future. As soon as Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* started calling them to worship Allah *Glorified is He* they announced that—because of such calls—all their hopes for him were dashed. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* had only done what all previous messengers had done before him, and that is he warned them that worshipping idols, trees or the sun is wrong. True worship consists of following commandments that were revealed as part of a total doctrine, whereas the objects which they were wont to worship lay down no such doctrine, and there is no true worship without a doctrine. The tribe of Thamud said furthermore, '...we are in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about [the meaning of] thy call to us!' (*Hud:* 62)

Now doubt occurs when the two sides—confirmation and denial—balance each other out. Thus, they are not entirely certain that their worship of their forefathers' idols is a valid religion; for Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* made them uncertain about the validity of that kind of worship and this shows that it was Saleh (Shelah)'s virtuous qualities that gave him credibility to cause them to question their old pagan habits.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* states what Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* told the tribe of Thamud:

قَالَ يَنَقَوْمِ أَرَءَيْتُمُ إِن كُنتُ عَلَى بَبِّنَةٍ مِّن زَبِّ وَءَاتَىنِي مِنْهُ رَحْمَةً فَمَن يَنِصُرُنِي مِنَ ٱللَّهِ إِنْ عَصَيْنُهُ، فَمَا تَزِيدُونَنِي غَيْرَ تَخْسِيرِ ١٣

#### He said, 'My people, just think: if I did have clear proof from my Lord, and if He had given me mercy of His own, who could protect me from God if I disobeyed Him? You would only make my loss greater [63] (The Quran, *Hud*: 63)

Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* wisely responded, 'Tell me, am I not making my stand on clear evidence from my Lord, that He has sent me and endorsed me; and if I have fooled other people I will surely not fool myself; so shall I abandon all that my Lord has blessed me with, shall I abandon the message He has entrusted me to deliver to you? Shall I abandon all of this and, instead, heed your words? Shall I overlook my certainty in that I am His Messenger, that He has, '...vouchsafed unto me grace from Himself...' (*Hud:* 63), the grace of prophecy? '... [if this be true,] who would shield me from Allah were I to rebel against Him?' (*Hud:* 63) When a person poses such a rhetorical question in this kind of a situation, this person cannot be but certain that the response will please him. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* quotes Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* as saying, '...Hence, what you are offering me

is no more than perdition!' (*Hud:* 63) We know that the term *al-khusara* is the antonym of the word *maksab* meaning that which is gained. *Al-khusara* on the other hand signifies a decrease, especially when it comes to wealth. So, is it he who will cause them to lose, or is it them who will cause him to lose? The richness of the Quranic language brings out all these meanings. For if Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* were to obey them and disobey his Lord, he would have incurred upon himself an overall loss. At the same time, they would have incurred an even more devastating loss because they were misguided to begin with, and wanted him to become lost as they were, and to worship false deities (*in lieu*) of Allah *the Exalted*. Therefore, either Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* to perdition.

Then, Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him further says:

وَيَنَقَوْمِ هَنذِهِ عَنَافَةُ ٱللَّهِ لَكُمْ ءَايَةَ فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلُ فِيَ أَرْضِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا بِسُوَءِ فَيَأْخُذَكُرُ عَذَابٌ قَرِيبٌ <sup>(11)</sup>

#### My people, this camel belongs to God, a sign for you, so leave it to pasture on God's earth and do not harm it, or you will soon be punished' [64] (The Quran, *Hud:* 64)

The tribe of Thamud had asked Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* to perform a miracle that would confirm his prophecy, and so they said, 'If you are truly a prophet then make a she-camel appear out of this boulder, and they pointed to a certain boulder. They were a tribe that was famous for carving their houses out of rock cliffs. Anyone who travels to the region lying between the Levant and the city of Medina can see the remnants of their villages, for they are carved out of mountains. The True Lord *Glorified is He* refers to them in the following verse, 'and that you will [always be able to] hew dwellings out of the mountains with [the same] great skill?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 149)

Thus, it is they who had specified what type of miracle they wanted. They wanted that a she-camel would come forth from within the boulder which they pointed at, and when the she-camel appeared, she was pregnant. After the she-camel was brought into existence, they still did not have the heart to

affirm Saleh's (Shelah's) peace be upon him prophethood. Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him had told them, 'And [then he said], "O my people! This she-camel belonging to Allah..." (Hud: 64). When you hear that something is attributed to Allah the Exalted know that this thing is immensely great as a result. Just as we would say, 'the house of Allah', when these words are spoken we know that they are a reference to the Holy Ka'ba. If we designate a spot and say that it is 'the house of Allah', we then would build a mosque in this spot-a structured consecrated entirely to the worship of Allah, where no other type of activity takes place. Thus, the Ka'ba is Allah's house because Allah the Exalted chose the spot, and other spots are also houses of Allah because they were designated by His servants. That is why the house of Allah-at the spot chosen by Him-now becomes the Oibla for all the other secondary houses of Allah selected by His servants. Therefore, whenever anything is attributed to Allah the Exalted that thing then takes on greatness akin to the Greatness of the True Lord Glorified is He Himself. Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him tells them, "... This she-camel belonging to Allah..." (Hud: 64), does not belong to Zayd or `Amr. The people of Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him paid little attention to what Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him had said, and they did not realise that anything that is attributed to Allah the Exalted becomes endowed with the same Greatness. An example of this<sup>(1)</sup> is the son of Abu-Lahab who had married the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. When Abu-Lahab's intransigence towards the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him increased, Abu-Lahab told his son to divorce the Prophet's daughter<sup>(2)</sup>. Such an action is a mark of utter disdain, so the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him told him, 'I ask that Allah unleash his beasts on him.' Then Abu-Lahab exclaimed, 'Muhammad's prayer fills me with ominous forebodings'. Then, when Abu Lahab took his entourage on a long trip, he asked that his son sleep in the middle of the caravan's camp, out of fear that the Prophet's prayer would be answered. Nevertheless, a lion jumped over the travellers and ate the son, whereby the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* attributed this event to Allah, saying, 'You were eaten by one of Allah's beasts.' Indeed, Allah's beast was a lion.

<sup>(1)</sup> The story of `Utba the son of Abu Lahab with Um-Kalthum the daughter of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the latter's accusing him

<sup>(2)</sup> Um-Kalthum Allah be pleased with her

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

Going back to the verse which we are currently studying, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* explained to them that this she-camel is the product of the miracle which you asked of me, and she has miraculously appeared out of a boulder. Out of that inanimate object he could have brought a higher class of creature such as a plant. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* answered their demands he brought forth a creature belonging to an even higher category, namely, from the animal kingdom. We know that when it comes to earthly creatures, they can either belong to the category of inanimate objects, or they can possess the capacity for growth, and so they are plants, or they can possess the capacity for movement and sensory experience, and are thus animals, or they might possess the capacity for movement, sensory experience as well as rational thought, and are thus humans.

It would have been possible that Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* bring forth a tree. This would also have been a miraculous feat. The True Lord *Glorified is He* affected the miracle exactly as they had demanded: a she-camel, belonging to the animal kingdom, and pregnant at the same time. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* asked them to take good care of her because she was a divine miracle. Thus, they could not harm her. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* said, '…leave her alone to pasture on Allah's earth, and do her no harm, lest speedy chastisement befall you!' (*Hud:* 64) Thus, did he warn them and asked that they let it graze on Allah's earth. If they harmed it, and grave suffering did not befall them, all those who had come to believe in Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* would then revert to disbelief. Therefore, if they were to harm the she-camel, swift punishment must necessarily follow. In the end, they harmed it, as the following verse explains:

## فَعَقَرُوهَا فَقَالَ تَمَتَّعُوا فِي دَارِكُمْ ثَلَنَةَ أَيَّامِ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ وَعْدُ غَيْرُ مَكُذُوبٍ ٢

#### But they hamstrung it, so he said, 'Enjoy life for another three days: This warning will not prove false' [65] (The Quran, *Hud:* 65)

They stayed in their homes for three days, and then the suffering befell them. One might ask: Why were they spared for those three days? If the punishment would have befallen them immediately, they would have been

spared the anxious, unbearable wait. Allah the Exalted had willed that they experience that feeling for three whole days, and with every passing day their distress would increase as the fateful day drew closer as they knew that Allah's Wrath was coming, '...a judgment which will not be belied!' (Hud: 65) Since this is the True Lord's Judgment, and He being fully Capable of carrying it out-with no power being capable of standing in His way-the promise is therefore a sincere one that will not be belied. This is not the case with human promises, where a person might make a vow, but when the time comes to make good on it he might not be able to. That is why the True Lord Glorified is He tells us, 'And never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow, without adding, "if Allah so wills..." (al-Kahf: 23-24). If you say, 'I will do this tomorrow', and you promise someone that will do this or that then you should say, 'Allah willing' because Allah the Exalted does not prevent actions from being accomplished in the future, but he who intends on performing future action must do so 'by the Will of the Powerful, the Fully Capable', so that even if he does not end up accomplishing what he planned to accomplish, at least he would not have lied about it, since, in that case, it was Allah the Exalted who did not will it. When man gives a promise, he is not depending on his own will, but is relying on the Will of Allah the Exalted that is above all else.

Every action requires a performer, an object to be performed upon, a time to perform the action in, a motivating cause and finally the actual capacity for a person to carry out the action; does any human being own any of these things? A man has not even the power to guarantee that we will live until tomorrow; he does not have the power to guarantee that there will be a tomorrow, and he has not the power to guarantee the reason for there being a tomorrow. And even if he could guarantee all these conditions, a man has not the capacity of carrying out the action. Therefore, if he says, 'I will do this or that with so-and-so tomorrow' he would have thereby promised something over which he has no power whatsoever. But if he says, 'Allah willing', then he is seeking the help of Allah, who has all these capacities. The True Lord *Glorified is He* demonstrates His Power over his creation every moment. He says for example, 'But they cruelly slaughtered her. And thereupon Saleh (Shelah) said, "Only for three days [more] shall you enjoy life in your homes; this is a judgment which will not be belied!"" (*Hud:* 65) The words "in your

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

homes" indicate that these disbelievers were scattered around a large area and were not all centred in a single village. Some of them were travelling, for example, and others were returning from their travels, and so the suffering befell them wherever they happened to be. The punishment did not target a single location, but befell everyone no matter where they were.

None was spared this fate save an individual called Abu-Raghal, who was on a pilgrimage at the Ka'ba. His sentence was not carried out while he was in those holy quarters because Allah Glorified is He has asked us, His servants, to give protection to anyone who visits His house. Allah Glorified is He also protects whoever enters His house, so Allah held back the stones that were to strike him, or the 'shout' that was to overtake him, until he left the holy sanctuary, then his suffering befell him...This suffering had struck all the disbelievers from amongst Saleh's (Shelah's) people peace be upon him. It befell all those who were in their homes, except for this one man, and the moment this man left the house of Allah, the suffering befell him. That is why anyone who had blood on his hands because of having murdered someone, when they took refuge in the holy sanctuary, they were protected until they left the grounds. The community then used to do what it could to make life unbearable for the criminal. They would not feed him, nor would they give him water, so as to force him out. Only after he came out would they carry out his punishment, so that the sanctity of Allah's house would be preserved. We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has wisely forbidden killing in his house to uphold human dignity.

We also know that every event requires a time and place. The Arabs were always raiding one another, and so the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished that there be a place where such killing was forbidden, and so He consecrated the holy *Ka'ba* for that purpose. Allah *Glorified is He* also wanted that there be a time period during which killing was forbidden; these are the holy months because when two warring parties are equally matched it can bring out of both the feelings of vainglory and pride. Every one of these warring individuals secretly wishes that these wars would end, at the same time he does not want to be seen as a coward in front of other people. So the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to give them all an honourable excuse for ceasing hostilities during the holy months. With the coming of these holy months, one of the warriors is always

wont to say, 'If it were not for the holy months I would have dealt a crushing blow to my enemies'; however, he only says as much to satisfy his sense of pride. Deep inside, he wished that the war would be over. Similarly, when a warrior seeks refuge in Allah's house, his enemy announces, 'Had he not taken refuge in the sanctuary, I would have made him taste the shame of defeat'.

'Then the True Lord Glorified is He says:

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْهُنَا بَحَيَّنَا صَلِحًا وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِّنَا وَمِنْ خِزْي يَوْمِبِذٍ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ ٱلْقَوِيُّ ٱلْعَزِيزُ (11)

#### And so, when Our command was fulfilled, by Our mercy We saved *Saleh* and his fellow believers from the disgrace of that day. [Prophet], it is your Lord who is the Strong, the Mighty One [66] (The Quran, *Hud:* 66)

So when, after the three days had passed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wrought the suffering down of the tribe of Thamud, He saved Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* and those who had believed in his message from the destruction. Allah's Mercy protected them because they had believed in the doctrine which Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* had brought. They were thus spared the humiliation and ignominy suffered by the rest of the tribe of Thamud. That was the humiliation, and such was the ignominy that befell the tribe of Thamud. The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying, '…Verily, your Lord alone is Powerful, Almighty!' (*Hud:* 66) These words are addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a means to bolster his determination. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* is capable of dominating and defeating every disbeliever, and nothing can resist His Will. Herein is a warning to those who rejected the message of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then the True Lord Glorified is He says:

وَأَخَذَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ٱلصَّيْحَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَرِهِمْ جَبْمِعِينَ (٧)

#### The blast struck the evildoers and they lay dead in their homes [67] (The Quran, *Hud:* 67)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* calls the punishment that befalls the tribe of Thamud *as-sayha*, and elsewhere He calls it *at-taghya*, 'Now as for the Thamud – they were destroyed by a violent upheaval [of the earth]' (*al-Haqqa: 5*).

Elsewhere He also calls it sa'iqa, 'But if they turn away, say, "I warn you of [the coming of] a thunderbolt of punishment like the thunderbolt [that fell upon the tribes] of `Ad and Thamud!'" (Fussilat: 13) In the chapter of al-A'raf He calls it ar-raifa; all of these terms denote an event that occurs suddenly, an event from which there is no escape. One might ask, 'Why does the True Lord Glorified is He say, 'And the blast [of Allah's punishment] overtook those who had been bent on evildoing...' (Hud: 67), akhdh and not akhadht? Why is the letter 'ta' denoting the feminine gender omitted? The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And the blast [of Allah's punishment] overtook those who had been bent on evildoing...' (Hud: 76). We would reply that the Speaker in this case is the Lord of His servants; and it is not proper to conceive of the 'blast' as having been singular. This would have the effect of weakening the expression. When the letter 'ta' is omitted, and we understand that there were multiple 'blasts', this gives the expression more power. Then Allah Glorified is He says, '...and then they lay lifeless, in their very homes, on the ground.' (Hud: 67) meaning that they lay on their faces, motionless.

Then the True Lord Glorified is He says:

## كَأَن لَّمُ يَغْنَوُا فِبِهَأْ أَلَآ إِنَّ ثَمُودا كَفَرُوا رَبَّهُمُّ أَلَا بُعَدًا لِتَمُودَ ٢

#### As though they had never lived and flourished there. Yes, the Thamud denied their Lord – so away with the Thamud! [68] (The Quran, *Hud:* 68)

The term *ghina* has many meanings which are all ultimately related to each other. *Ghana*` is presence; the presence of something absolves the need for it, so *ghina* (in this case meaning wealth) is the presence of money which

absolves you from depending on others; and ghina (in this case meaning singing) is what which we hear from singers, and the *ughniya* (song sharing the same root of ghina) is that which one becomes enchanted with, its words and melody, and becomes 'occupied' with it. In other words, one's mind dwells on it and excludes all other words it reads and hears despite how many they may be. Ghana' is establishment (and exclusion of need). Just as the True Lord Glorified is He says in another verse, '... when the earth has assumed its artful adornment and has been embellished, and they who dwell on it believe that they have gained mastery over it – there comes down upon it Our judgment, by night or by day, and We cause it to become [like] a field mown down, as if there had been no yesterday....' (Yunus: 24) In other words, it is as if it were never there. Here the True Lord Glorified is He says, 'as though they had never lived there...' (Hud: 68) meaning they did not reside there because it had become like a field that has been mown down. Then the True Lord Glorified is He says in the same verse, '...Oh, verily, [the tribe of] Thamud denied their Lord...' (Hud: 68). This is exactly why they suffered such severe punishment.

The words '*kafaru bi rabihim*' mean that they tried concealing Allah's existence. However, this is itself an acknowledgement that He exists. It is just that, outwardly, they deny this. Therefore, the words '*kafaru bi rabihim*' is Allah's rejoinder to those heretics that do not acknowledge His existence; there is no greater sin than to deny the existence of Allah. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...Oh, away with the Thamud!' (*Hud:* 68) meaning that they deserved what befell them—their destruction and their expulsion from Allah's Grace—and no one will have any pity on them given the enormity of their sin. Then, in the next verse, the True Lord begins *Glorified is He* recounting another one of the stories of the Prophets.

The following is part of the story of the father of Prophets—Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him.* 

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَآ إِبْرَهِيمَ بِٱلْبُشْرَى قَالُواْ سَلَامًاً قَالَ سَلَامٌ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَن جَآءَ بِعِجْلٍ حَنِيذٍ (1)

# To Abraham Our messengers brought good news. They said, 'Peace.' He answered, 'Peace,' and without delay he brought in a roasted calf [69] (The Quran, *Hud:* 69)

The word *rasul* means he who is 'sent forth'; any person that you send somewhere is called a *rasul*, but religiously the term means 'he who is sent by Allah'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'In His Almightiness, Allah chooses message-bearers from among the angels as well as from among men...' (*al-Hajj:* 75).

Angels are selected to deliver Allah's messages so as to mitigate the power of receiving direct messages from the Lord *Glorified is He*. The power that receives messages directly from The Creator *Glorified is He* has to be itself great. No human being has the capacity for receiving revelation directly from the True Lord *Glorified is He* that is why He sent us messengers. He elects the most elite of angels and sends them down to deliver the message to select human beings capable of bearing it.

Thus, we learn that not all angels are capable of receiving direct revelation from Allah *the Exalted* and that not all human beings are capable of receiving direct revelation from Allah or by way of the angels. Such episodes in the history of Divine Revelation are intentionally willed by the True Lord *Glorified is He* so that the weak might be empowered through the strong, and human beings resort to such measures during their lifetimes. I have previously given this example, where at night we turn off all the lights in our homes, but we leave a dim light on to delineate the contours of the house, so that if we were to wake up in the middle of the night, we would not bump into the furniture, such that we break it, or we injure ourselves if the furniture in question is made of sturdier stuff than ourselves. The dim light also allows us to locate the switch for the brighter lights. When it comes to revelation, the True Lord *Glorified is He* operates in much the same way such that He conveys His Message to an elite angel who then transmits it to an elite class of human beings. To be sure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And it is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden inspiration, or [by a voice, as it were,] from behind a veil, or by sending an apostle to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills [to reveal] ...' (*ash-Shura:* 51).

Here the True Lord Glorified is He says, 'And, indeed, there came unto Ibrahim (Abraham) Our [heavenly] messengers, bearing a glad tiding...' (Hud: 69). A glad tiding is news that causes joy, even before the joyous event arrives; in contrast, a warning is news that causes sorrow before the event occurs. Before the messengers conveyed to Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him the good news which they came to tell, the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us about the proper manners of entering peoples' homes-that is, we must begin by greeting its residents. As the True Lord Glorified is He says, 'O you who have attained to faith! Do not enter houses other than your own unless you have obtained permission and greeted their owners...' (an-Nur: 27). That is why the True Lord Glorified is He relates what the angels had said before delivering their message, 'They bade him peace' (Hud: 69). Then came Ibrahim's (Abraham's) response, 'And he answered, "And upon you be peace!"" (Hud: 69) Note how their greeting indicated a renewal of the relationship, and how Ibrahim's (Abraham's) peace be upon him response was firm and insistent. The True Lord Glorified is He says, 'But when you are greeted with a greeting [of peace], answer with an even better greeting, or [at least] with the like thereof....' (an-Nisa': 86). This is how Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him welcomed the True Lord's messengers. Then the True Lord Glorified is He says, '... and made haste to place before them a roasted calf.' (Hud: 69) A calf is an offspring of a cow. There are many sections of the Quran which speak about the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him; this is not a case of pointless repetition, for every snapshot in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him contains hidden wisdom so that if all the sections of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) story are brought together, you will then have a complete understanding of the saga from every angle. To give an example, the True Lord Glorified is He says, 'And thus we gave Ibrahim (Abraham) [his first] insight into [Allah's] Mighty Dominion over the heavens and the earth...' (al-An'am: 75), in another part of the Quran, the True Lord Glorified is He showcases the education of certitude that He Willed

for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*; Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Then, when the night overshadowed him with its darkness, he beheld a star; [and] he exclaimed, "This is my Lord!" – but when it went down, he said, "I love not the things that go down." Then, when he beheld the moon rising, he said, "This is my Lord!" – but when it went down, he said, "Indeed, if my Lord guide me not, I will most certainly become one of the people who go astray!" Then, when he beheld the sun rising, he said, "This is my Lord! This one is the greatest [of all]!" – but when it [too] went down, he exclaimed, "O my people! Behold, far be it from me to ascribe divinity, as you do, to aught beside Allah! Behold, unto Him who brought into being the heavens and the earth have I turned my face, having turned away from all that is false; and I am not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him."" (*al-An'am:* 76-79)

These verses demonstrate the primary function of the senses, that is, realization. They demonstrate the function of the human conscious, that is, to discern. They also demonstrate the function of the human free will, that is, to choose the Oneness of Allah and to choose the knowledge of certainty. Then the True Lord Glorified is He recounts another episode during which Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him addresses his father<sup>(1)</sup> with a high level of deference. The True Lord Glorified is He says, 'And call to mind, through this Book, Ibrahim (Abraham). Behold, he was a man of truth, [already] a prophet when he spoke [thus] unto his father, "O my father! Why do you worship something that neither hears nor sees and can be of no avail whatever to you? O my father! Behold, there has indeed come to me [a ray] of knowledge such as has never yet come to you; follow me, then, I shall guide you onto a perfect way. O my father! Do not worship Satan- for, verily, Satan is a rebel against The Most Gracious! O my father! I dread lest a chastisement from The Most Gracious befall thee, and then you will become [aware of having been] close unto Satan!"" (Maryam: 41-45) These verses demonstrate the gentleness of the speaker and the beauty of the proposition. When the uncle remains adamant in his disbelief, Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him tells him, '...I shall ask my Lord to forgive you...' (Maryam: 47). After that Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him acquits himself from his father's persistent

<sup>(1)</sup> Azar

disbelief. Then there is the episode where some people were debating Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* about Allah, 'Are you not aware of that [king] who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) about his Lord, [simply] because Allah had granted him kingship? Lo! Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord is He who grants life and deals death." [The king] replied, "I [too] grant life and deal death..." (*al-Baqara:* 258).

This empty argument resulted from the king's inability to communicate because condemning someone to death and then forgiving him is not the same as killing him and bringing him back to life. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* even takes him to where no one dares to venture. He says, 'Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east. Cause it, then, to rise in the west!' (*al-Baqara:* 258). This verse is a testament to the logic of truth and the incoherence of falsehood.

In another part of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* compared the concept of disbelief with the concept of faith. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And convey unto them the story of Ibrahim (Abraham), when he asked his father and his people, "What is it that you worship?" They answered, "We worship idols, and we remain ever devoted to them." He said, "Do you really think that they hear you when you invoke them. Do they benefit you or do you harm?" They exclaimed, "But we found our forefathers doing the same!"" (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 69-74)

In this last verse, the questions Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* posed to his people had self-evident answers. Then Allah *Glorified is He* narrated that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, 'The One (Allah) who has created me and guides me. He is The One Who sustains me with food to eat and water to drink. When I fall ill, He is The One Who restores me to health. He is the One who will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life and who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on Judgment Day!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78-82)

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Anbiya*`, 'And, indeed, long before We bestowed unto Ibrahim (Abraham) the awareness of what is right; and We were Knowledgeable of (what moved) him when he said unto his father and his people, "What are these statues to which you are so intensely devoted?" They answered, "We found our forefathers worshipping them." He

said, "You and your forefathers have indeed gone astray!" They asked, "Have you come to us with the Truth, or are you of the ones that play?" He answered, "Nay, but your (True) Lord is The Lord of the heavens and the earth. He is the One who has brought them into existence by breaking them asunder and I am one of those who bear witness to this truth!"" (*al-Anbiya*': 51-56) This is the knowledge of certainty which Allah *Glorified is He* granted to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in order that we learn what true faith is. Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) people used to worship deities other than Allah *Glorified is He* but Ibrahim (Abraham) turned to worship the One who brought him into existence and created the universe. He is the Supreme Architect who laid down the laws by which His creation functions.

That is why we need to pay close attention to the meaning of Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) words that are narrated in the Quran, 'He is the One (Allah) who has created me and He is the One who guides me' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78). In this verse, the Arabic pronoun *huwa* (Who) was used to highlight that guidance was from Allah *Glorified is He* alone. As many people have tried to obtain guidance elsewhere and formulated their own immoral laws in life, the verse placed emphasis on the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator is the Only Guide and Lawgiver. This excluded any other source of guidance such as the false deities that the disbelievers have claimed were their guides.

When it came to matters that can only be directly made by Allah *Glorified is He* the Quranic verses omitted the pronoun, *huwa*, as such issues were uncontested by the pagans. For instance, a following verse that narrates Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) says, 'And (Allah) will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 81). Thus, this verse spoke of a matter of life and death and omitted the word *huwa* (Who). The emphasis was redundant and unnecessary because the pagans already believed that Allah alone created life.

On the other hand, in verses of coarser conflict with the pagans, the word *huwa* is included to strike emphasis. An example of this is the verse which says, 'And when I fall ill, He (Allah) is the One who cures me' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 80). This verse highlighted the pronoun *huwa*, as some disbelievers might say, 'It is the doctor who heals diseases'. This concept is not true, because it is Allah *Glorified is He* who allowed medical knowledge to

accumulate and be understood by mankind. It is He Who created the illnesses and it is He Who created their corresponding cures.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* continues the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* 'And remember when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the *Ka'ba (al-Baqara:* 127). Therefore, every occasion where one of the meanings of faith is explained is accompanied by one of the scenes from the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him.* When you look at all these lessons in faith, you will have looked at his complete story.

Allah *Glorified is He* narrates all these stories to Prophet Muhammad *peace* and blessings be upon him because He wanted to strengthen the Prophet's heart with certitude, 'And remember out of all the accounts relating to the earlier apostles We convey unto you that wherewith We aim to make firm your heart' (*Hud:* 120). The Prophet *peace be upon him* persevered through many different experiences. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* reminded him of the events that previous prophets had faced. These experiences of the previous messengers were narrated to reinforce his heart.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They greeted him [Ibrahim (Abraham)] with peace (and) he answered, "And peace be upon you"; he did not delay placing before them a roasted calf.' (*Hud:* 69) In another chapter of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'As they entered to him [Ibrahim (Abraham)] and they said, "Peace!" He said, "Surely, we feel tremulous of you" (*al-Hijr:* 52). In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when he saw that the guests would not eat, he became apprehensive of them, but they said, "Fear not", and gave him the glad tiding of (the birth of) a son who would be blessed with deep knowledge' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 28). Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* felt fear from their strange angelic behaviour. This fear is a normal emotion that is found in any heart. Every action begins with a perception and awareness. Then there comes the desire for action, followed by the action itself. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) felt fear when he saw them, but he directed himself to an action that is contrary to fear, which is bidding them peace.

In general, religious law does not interfere with our perceptions or their resulting emotions. However, it does intervene regarding how we react to

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

these feelings. Nevertheless, there is one exception to that rule, which is the male's perception of female beauty. Jurisprudence orders us to lower our gaze when faced with a woman's beauty, as this prevents a male's perception from leading his behaviour in an unbecoming manner. When a man's senses perceive feminine beauty, he may easily act on impulse. His behaviour in that instant is instinctive and may jump from perception to immediate action without pausing for reflection.

We now return to the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* tells us of Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) feelings in the situation with the angels, 'But when he saw that their hands did not reach out (towards their meal), he deemed their conduct strange and became apprehensive of them. But they said, "Fear not,"" (*Hud:* 70). Allah *Glorified is He* demonstrated Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) instinctive reaction in the verse, 'They greeted him with peace (and) he answered, "And peace be upon you", (*Hud:* 69). This is an example of insistence and emphasis. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'He did not delay placing before them a roasted calf (*`ijlin haneeth*)' (*Hud:* 69).

*`Ijlin haneeth* is a calf that is roasted on hot stones because, as we know, one can roast meat over open flames, burning coals or hot stones. This way of roasting meat is still practiced today in Arab countries when they heat delicate stones over fire and roast meat over them. This is to avoid the reactions that may occur when metal or coal is placed on fire. For them, hot stones are the cleanest way to roast meat. The words *`ijlin haneeth* could also mean that the calf was dripping with fat after being roasted.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* 'He did not delay placing before them a roasted calf' (*Hud:* 69). It was in the nature of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) to love and honour his guests. It is a habit of hospitality to hasten when welcoming a guest while offering the guests food as soon as possible. This is the definition of a person who is *kareem* (generous), since the host does not know how much time has passed since his guests had their last meal. After being presented with food, the guests will eat if they were hungry, and will let their host know if they had already eaten.

Allah *Glorified is He* told us what happened after Ibrahim (Abraham) brought them the roasted calf:

فَلَمَّارَءَا أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ نَكِرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً قَالُوا لَا تَخَفُ إِنَّا أَرْسِلْنَآ إِلَى قَوْمِ لُوطٍ ( )

#### When he saw that their hands did not reach towards the meal, he found this strange and became afraid of them. But they said, 'Do not be afraid. We have been sent against the people of Lot'[70] (The Quran, *Hud:* 70)

When Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) noticed that they were not eating, he became fearful of them. Did Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him suspect that they were angels? Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) realised that they were angels from the way they spoke. Allah Glorified is He explains this in another verse in the Quran, 'When they presented themselves before him and bade him peace, he answered, "Behold, we are afraid of you!" They said, "Fear not! Behold, we bring you the glad tidings of (the birth of) a son who will be blessed with deep knowledge." He said, "Do you give me these glad tidings despite the fact that old age has overtaken me? Of what (strange thing), then, are you giving me a tiding!" They answered, "We have given you the glad tiding of something that is bound to come true, so be not of those who abandon hope!" Ibrahim (Abraham) exclaimed, "And who - other than those who have utterly lost their way - could ever abandon the hope of his Lord's grace?" He added, "And what (else) may you have in view, O you (heavenly) messengers?" They answered, "We are sent to (punish) people lost in sin."" (al-Hijr: 52-58)

Therefore, they did not tell him what they told Prophet Lut (Lot) in a later encounter, "O Lut (Lot)! Behold, we are messengers from your Lord' (*Hud:* 81). Here, when they told Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), 'Fear not! Behold, we are sent to the people of Lut (Lot)' (*Hud:* 70), they understood that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) knew that they were angels.

Angels can assume human form, just as the arch-angel Jibril (Gabriel) took on the form of a man when he came to see Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Jinn have the ability to assume different forms as well, but there is a difference between the Jinn and the angels in this respect. When a jinni takes on a different form, the jinni becomes subject to the laws that

govern that form. For example, if a jinni resembles the form of a human being, you can physically harm them if you wanted to.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A highly mischievous demon came to interrupt my prayer last night, but Allah gave me the power to overcome him. So I seized him and intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the mosque so that you all could see him, but then I remembered the supplication of my brother Sulaiman (Solomon), "O my Lord! Forgive me my sins, and bestow upon me the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after me. Verily, You alone are a giver of gifts!" (*Sad:* 35) So, I repulsed him.<sup>(1)</sup>

Thus, if one of the Jinn takes on a particular form, they become a captive of that form and it is possible to inflict harm on them. However, when angels take on a particular form, they do not become subject to its physical laws. Thus, since the Jinn become subject to the same physical laws that humans are subject to, they fear us just as we fear them. Jinn may appear in human form for fleeting moments only, and then quickly vanish in the fear that you might physically assault them. Allah *Glorified is He* has willed it to be so, in order that the Jinn do not constantly frighten human beings.

Here Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But when he saw that their hands did not reach out towards it, he deemed their conduct strange (*nakirahum*)' (*Hud:* 70). To understand the meaning of the Arabic word *nakirahum*, we must look at the root of the word which comes from the letters *nun*, *kaf* and *ra*. The words *nakar* and *ankar* are both used in the Quran. An Arab poet once said:

She shunned me, and what she shunned was not,

Of my mishaps, except aging and baldness.

The linguistic manner in which the term is used in this verse indicates that bad behaviour is called *munkarat*. These *munkarat* are the actions that people naturally shun. So, when Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) noticed that they did not eat the roasted calf that was placed before them, he stopped to notice their behaviour and became slightly fearful. When they noticed this fear, they said, 'Fear not! Behold, we are sent to the people of Lut (Lot)' (*Hud:* 70). Thus,

<sup>(1)</sup> Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3426) and by Muslim in his Sahih (541). This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.

when he realised to whom they had been sent, he took comfort in the fact that his own people had not done anything to warrant punishment.

Tradition<sup>(1)</sup> tells us that Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife<sup>(2)</sup> had told him, 'Will you not take your nephew<sup>(3)</sup> under your wing because his people are on the verge of being punished by Allah'. When she heard that the angels had been sent to the tribe of Lut (Lot), she was pleased with her keen intuition, for she had sensed this matter beforehand.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They answered, "Behold, we have been sent unto a people lost in sin, to let loose upon them stone-hard blows of chastisement, marked out in your Lord's sight for (the punishment of) those who have wasted their own selves.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 32-34)

Then, Allah Glorified is He says:

وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ، قَابِمَةٌ فَضَحِكَتْ فَبَشَّرْنَهَا بِإِسْحَنَى وَمِن وَرَآءٍ إِسْحَقَ يَعْقُوبَ (٧)

#### His wife was standing [nearby] and laughed. We gave her good news of Isaac and, after him, of Jacob [71] (The Quran, *Hud:* 71)

When Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife was preparing the food for the guests, she heard the words of the angels and took comfort in the fact that no suffering was to befall their community. She was also pleased that her intuition was confirmed. Allah *Glorified is He* gave her even more cause for joy when the angels delivered the glad tidings of the coming birth of her son, Prophet Ishaq (Isaac), followed by her grandson, Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them.* 

Thus, after being reassured that the suffering was not to befall their community, but was destined for another wicked people, they were given the good news which Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his wife<sup>(4)</sup> had been longing for. It had previously seemed to them that the time (for having children) had

<sup>(1)</sup> The prediction of Sara, the wife of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* of a befalling torment on the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* 

<sup>(2)</sup> Sara peace be upon her

<sup>(3)</sup> Prophet Lut (Lot) peace be upon him

<sup>(4)</sup> Sara peace be upon her

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

passed, as Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife had reached the age of seventy and Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) himself had reached the age of one-hundredand-twenty. This promise told Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that, in addition to a son, they would also have grandchildren. Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed the blessings of children upon His servants. He says, 'And Allah has given you mates of your own kind and has given you, through your mates, children and grandchildren.' (*an-Nahl:* 72) Man loves to have a child, but he desires to have grandchildren even more because this represents a continuation of his bloodline.

These glad tidings were successive. The angels had announced that they had been sent to punish the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot) with whom Ibrahim (Abraham) had previously argued due to their indecent transgressions. However, they reassured Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his wife *Allah be pleased with them* both that their actions did not displease Allah *Glorified is He*. The third piece of glad tidings was the blessing of a boy, as the wife of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them* had for a long time desired a son although she was barren. She received the first piece of glad tidings with joy and received the glad tidings about the son with astonishment. This is clear in the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَتْ يَنُوَيْلَتَنَ ءَأَلِدُ وَأَنَاْ عَجُوزٌ وَهَاذَا بَعْلِي شَيْخًا إِنَّ هَاذَالَشَيْءُ عَجِيبٌ (١٧)

#### She said, 'Alas for me! How am I to bear a child when I am an old woman, and my husband here is an old man? That would be a strange thing!' [72] (The Quran, *Hud*: 72)

An event is truly remarkable when it defies natural laws. However, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the natural laws and can change them at His will. Note that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said in another verse, 'Do you give me this glad tiding despite the fact that old age has overtaken me' (*al-Hijr:* 54). Here, however, Allah *Glorified is He* narrated that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife said, 'Woe (to me)! Shall I bear a child, now that I am an old woman and my husband (*ba ly*) is an old man?' (*Hud:* 72) The

use of the Arabic word ba'ly (my husband) here is very precise because al-ba'l is a husband who performs all the needed matters of his wife so she does not need the help of anyone else. It is the definition of a husband who performs a function for his wife which neither her father nor her brother can perform. This is when he satisfies her sense of motherhood. This is the most important thing a woman can ask for.

A date palm is also called by this term *(ba`l)* if it does not require regular watering after it has been planted. Such date palms are able to survive by making use of the little water that is in the ground or that occasionally falls as rain. The term is also used to describe a type of bean *(fool ba`li)* because it does not require watering. Therefore, *al-ba`l* is the husband who tends to the affairs of his wife so that she is never in need of anyone else.

Here, Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife<sup>(1)</sup> was astonished at the prospect of conceiving a child. Astonishing things usually come up suddenly without warning. That is why the angels answer her question in the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوَا أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ ٱللَّهِ رَحْمَتُ ٱللَّهِ وَبَرَكُنْهُ. عَلَيْكُمُ أَهْلَ ٱلْبَيْتِ أَإِنَّهُ حَمِيدٌ مَّجِيدٌ (٧)

They said, 'Are you astonished at what God ordains? The grace of God and His blessings be upon you, people of this house! For He is worthy of all praise and glory' [73] (The Quran, *Hud:* 73)

It would be truly astonishing if a breach of the natural laws was performed by a human being, but Allah *Glorified is He the Fully-Capable* can suspend such laws without awe. Miracles that serve to attest to the authenticity of Allah's messages are the results of such laws being suspended. Indeed, miracles transcend all natural laws.

This story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his wife<sup>(2)</sup> has its parallel in the story of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* 

<sup>(1)</sup> Sara peace be upon her

<sup>(2)</sup> Sara peace be upon her

bestowed upon Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* plentiful fruits. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) asked her, 'Whence came this unto you?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her responded* 'It is from Allah; behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning (and without account).' (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

Despite it being normal that meticulous accounting be practised between Allah's creatures, no such accounts are plausible between the Creator and His creatures. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'In that same place, Zakaryya (Zechariah) prayed unto his Lord' (*Al-'Imran:* 38). Since Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) had realised the truth of Maryam's (Mary's) words, 'Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning (and without account).' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) It was only right that he ask his Lord, 'O my Lord! Bestow upon me (too), out of Your grace, the gift of goodly offspring.' (*Al-'Imran:* 38) So Allah *Glorified is He* told him, 'O Zakaryya (Zechariah)! We bring you the glad tiding of (the birth of) a son whose name shall be Yahya (John). Never have We given this name to anyone before him.' (*Maryam:* 7) Allah *Glorified is He* blessed him with a son and gave the son a name that no one had ever held before.

Allah's method in naming is very different from names given by humans. Some people have subsequently named their sons Yahya which means 'living' out of optimism and hope that the son would survive. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* named Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* this meant that he would survive to maturity and never die. That is why Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* was martyred because martyrs are always alive with their Lord, forever unaffected by death.

This is not necessarily the case when it comes to human beings naming their children with pleasant names. A parent may name his child Sa'eed (the happy one), but the child could end up living a life of gruelling misery. An Arab poet once said, after naming his child Yahya, hoping that he may live to old age:

I named him Yahya so that he may live,

but it was no measure to reverse Allah's verdict upon him.

Maryam *peace be upon her* was the one who told Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* about Allah's countless blessings. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah)

prayed to his Lord, that he was getting older and that his wife was infertile. This prayer was a mere supplication, as Zakaryya (Zechariah) knew that Allah *Glorified is He* Himself created and had all knowledge of the events of his life. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to reassure Zakaryya (Zechariah) that he would be blessed with a son who He had named. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Thus, it was (decreed); (as) your Lord said.' (*Maryam:* 9) Since it is Allah *Glorified is He* who has decided this blessing, there is none who can reverse this decision. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'This is easy for Me, just as I have created you before out of nothing' (*Maryam:* 9).

Thus, as Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* informed Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* that Allah *Glorified is He* can suspend the natural laws for his creation, she was also presented with a similar event. Later, Allah *Glorified is He* suspended the natural order for her as well. An angel came to her in the form of a man and gave her the good tidings of a son. His name was 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*. Maryam (Mary) peace be upon her asked how this could be possible when no human being has ever touched her. The angel reminded her of the words that she had uttered in her conversation with Zakaryya (Zechariah), 'Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning (and without account).' (*Al-'Imran: 37*) It was necessary for Maryam (Mary) to be comforted because giving birth to 'Isa (Jesus) with no father was a situation in which her honour might be questioned. It was necessary that she approach the situation with confidence and without apprehension that she might be accused (of wrongdoing).

Now, in the verse which we are currently examining, Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's)<sup>(1)</sup> wife found herself in a similar situation. The angels explained to her that she should not be astonished in what Allah *Glorified is He* had willed for her, even though it goes against all natural laws. Allah's Mercy can encompass all that is good and can include the prophetic family in His blessings. Part of this mercy includes the gift of children after the natural time of childbearing. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse, 'The Grace of Allah and His Blessings be upon you, O people of this house' (*Hud:* 73).

<sup>(1)</sup> Sara peace be upon her

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concluded the verse by saying, 'Verily, ever to be praised is Allah (*Hameed*) sublime is He (*Majeed*)!' (*Hud:* 73) Allah *Glorified is He* deserves all the praises from His creation for being Who He is and for everything that comes forth from Him. There is no limit to His favours and goodness. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Sublime.

The word '*Hameed*' in this verse has two meanings. One meaning is that it is an active verb which indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* receives praise from those upon whom He bestows His blessings. On the other hand, the word could indicate a passive meaning which is that Allah *Glorified is He* Himself praises those who revere him in their faithful hearts.

Allah *Glorified is He* is also the Sublime Lord who bestows His blessings on His servants before His servants even ask for them. For instance, we have a story<sup>(1)</sup> of the righteous man who was approached by a beggar. The righteous man put some coins in the beggar's hand, but went back to his wife in misery. His wife asked him, 'Why are you in misery. You gave the poor man the money that he needed.' The righteous man replied, 'I am in dismay because I waited until he asked, whereas I should have helped him before he needed the opportunity to ask others.'

Allah *Glorified is He* has given us His blessings before we even knew how to ask for them. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* provides sustenance for the foetus inside its mother's womb even before the foetus learns how to communicate.

Throughout the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* explains how we must approach social situations according to the tenets of faith. In the current verse, for example, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* placed a roasted calf in front of his guests. This is to show us that if we receive guests and they do not eat the food that we have offered, the proper response is not to take the food away immediately. Instead, we should sincerely and generously ask them to eat. At that point, they may insist that they have no desire to eat because, for instance, they may have eaten before coming to see us. In such cases, we may take the food away, only after having encouraged them to eat with fervour.

Some religious scholars have posited that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked the angels, 'Will you not eat?' The angels responded,

<sup>(1)</sup> The story of the righteous man and his wife with the beggar

'We would only eat the food if we pay for its price.' Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) said, out of the wisdom bestowed on him by Allah *Glorified is He* 'The food's price is invoking Allah's Name before eating it and praising Him after finishing.' If you were to begin a meal by saying, '*Bismillah'* and finish the meal by saying, '*Alhamdulilah'* (All praises are due to Allah), you would have thereby fulfilled your obligation towards the blessing of food. Allah *Glorified is He* says about blessings in general, 'And on that Day (of Judgment), you will most surely be called to account for (what you did with) the comforts of life!' (*at-Takathur:* 8)

To summarize the previous verses we have studied in this chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* shows us how Ibrahim (Abraham) and his wife <sup>(1)</sup> rejoiced in the good tidings brought to them by the angels. They were also relieved that the angels did not intend any harm to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* or his people. Rather, they were sent to punish the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot).

Allah Glorified is He then says:

فَلَمَا ذَهَبَ عَنْ إِبْرَهِيمَ ٱلرَّوْعُ وَجَآءَتْهُ ٱلْبُشَرَىٰ يُجَدِلْنَا فِي قَوْمِ لُوطٍ ٧

#### Then, when the fear left Abraham and the good news came to him, he pleaded with Us for Lot's people [74] (The Quran, *Hud:* 74)

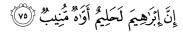
The Arabic word *jidal* (argument) means that for each argument put forth by an opponent, one should put forth a counter-argument until the truth is reached. This is different from *al-mira*` where one already knows where the truth of the matter lies, but they continue to argue on the side of error while avoiding the truth. Allah *Glorified is He* forbids us from engaging in the latter type of argument. On the other hand, He encourages us to engage in civilized exchanges of opinion, as long as these exchanges serve a greater good.

Allah *Glorified is He* shows us that after Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* regained his composure, with his initial fears turned into joy after hearing that Allah will bless him with a son, he realised that the angels were sent

<sup>(1)</sup> Sara peace be upon her

to punish the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot). 'They (the angels) answered, "Behold, we have been sent unto a people lost in sin, to let loose upon them stone-hard blows of chastisement, marked out in your Lord's sight."" (*adh-Dhariyat:* 32-34)

The argument put up by Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* regarding the punishment of the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* was not an objection to Allah's orders. Rather, it was Ibrahim's (Abraham's) merciful temperament that prompted him to ask for their forgiveness, in the hope that they will come to believe. Allah *Glorified is He* pointed this out when He says:



#### for Abraham was forbearing, tender-hearted, and devout [75] (The Quran, *Hud:* 75)

Thus, the reason why Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* 'contended' with them is because he was always kind-hearted, never wanting to hasten punishment. Note that the word *awwah*, in this context, means 'the one having a gentle heart'. If the context deals with a person being *awwah* towards the 'higher power' (Allah), the adjective (*awwah*) denotes a fear of not having paid the obligatory dues to the higher power. On the other hand, as in this verse, if the context deals with being *awwah* towards a 'lower entity', the adjective denotes 'mercifulness' and 'leniency'. That is why Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* implored Allah *Glorified is He* to delay the punishment to the tribe of Lut (Lot), hoping that they would turn to Allah in faith. So, in this case, the term *awwah* denotes both a fear of Allah's wrath as well as a feeling of pity for those who have earned for themselves severe suffering.

Allah *Glorified is He* also described Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) as *muneeb*. This means that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) ultimate tendency is to resign himself to Allah's Judgment. Allah *Glorified is He* described this attribute of Ibrahim (Abraham) in another verse, 'And Ibrahim's (Abraham's) prayer that his father be forgiven was but due to a promise which he had given to him (during his lifetime)' (*at-Tawba:* 114). Then, after Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) had searched for the truth and set his heart to it, he ultimately accepted Allah's Judgement, 'But when it was made clear unto him that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) father had been Allah's enemy, Ibrahim (Abraham) disavowed him.' (*at-Tawba:* 114)

In the verse which we are currently studying, Ibrahim (Abraham) resigned to Allah's decree, but also felt pity for the tribe of Lut (Lot) who refused to believe. The other reason why Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) pleaded that Allah *Glorified is He* spare them is mentioned in the chapter of *al-'Ankabut*, 'And so, when Our (heavenly) messengers came to Ibrahim (Abraham) with the glad tiding (of the birth of Ishaq (Isaac), they (also) said, "Behold, we are about to destroy the people of that land, for its people are truly evildoers!" And Ibrahim (Abraham) exclaimed, "But Lut (Lot) lives there!"" (*al-'Ankabut*: 31-32)

Here, Ibrahim's (Abraham's) question to the angels was, 'How can you destroy the people of this town when faithful people live among them, including Prophet Lut (Lot)'. The angels responded by saying, 'We know clearly well who is there. Indeed, we shall save him and his household - all but his wife. She will indeed be among those that stay behind (in punishment).' (*al-'Ankabut: 32*) Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* assumed that, since the village was inhabited by both believers and disbelievers, he can rightfully plead for the forgiveness of the entire village. The answer to Ibrahim's (Abraham's) pleas came in the following verse. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

# يَنَإِبُرَهِيمُ أَعْرِضْ عَنْ هَٰذَآً إِنَّهُۥ قَدْ جَآءَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ وَإِنَّهُمْ ءَاتِيهِمْ عَذَابٌ غَيْرُ مَنْ دُودٍ (٣)

# Abraham, cease your pleading: what your Lord has ordained has come about; punishment is coming to them, which cannot be turned back' [76] (The Quran, *Hud:* 76)

When the angels said, 'O Ibrahim (Abraham), desist from this (pleading)' (*Hud:* 76), it meant that Allah's judgment was final. The angels were there to execute the punishment and not to warn or intimidate the people of Lut (Lot). They told Ibrahim (Abraham), 'Behold, your Lord's judgment has already gone forth.' (*Hud:* 76) Thus, since Allah's Judgment has already gone forth, and given that Ibrahim (Abraham) was inclined to resign to Allah's Will, Ibrahim (Abraham) accepted Allah's judgment. 'And, verily, there shall fall upon them a chastisement which none can avert!' (*Hud:* 76) This meant that no one was capable of reversing Allah's decision to punish (these people).

Just as there is, 'A divine promise which will not be overturned', there is also 'A chastisement which none can avert'.

It is stated that when Ibrahim (Abraham) was pleading with the angels, he asked them, 'If there were fifty believers from among the tribe of Lut (Lot), would you still punish them?' They said, 'No'. He asked, 'If there were ten believers from among the tribe of Lut (Lot), would you still punish them?' They said, 'No.' He asked, 'What if the only believer from among the tribe of Lut (Lot) was Lut (Lot) himself?' They answered, 'We know clearly well who is there. Indeed, we shall save Lut (Lot) and his household - all but his wife. She will indeed be among those that stay behind (in punishment).' (*al-'Ankabut:* 32) Thus, the argument ended and the angels went about their mission which was to bring suffering to the tribe of Lut (Lot).

Allah Glorified is He says:

وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوْطًا سِيٓءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالَ هَٰذَا يَوْمُ عَصِيبٌ ٢

## And when Our messengers came to Lot, he was anxious for them, feeling powerless to protect them, and said, 'This is a truly terrible day!' [77] (The Quran, *Hud:* 77)

Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* sensed the imminent danger. In the expression, '*Daaqa bihim dhar'an*' (It was beyond his reach to shield them), the word *dhar'an* is taken from the word *dhira*' which means 'arm'. The meaning, therefore, is all that one can push away with one's arm. If your arm was unable to reach a certain person to push them away, you would say, '*Diqtu bihi dhar'an*.' which means, 'My arm was unable to reach that person'. Therefore, it is a matter that is beyond your reach and capacity.

Why was Prophet Lut (Lot) sorely grieved when he was visited by the angels? It is said that the angels manifested themselves, as they usually do, in stunningly handsome forms. The expression, 'That person is an angel', is an indication that a person's appearance is sublime. The evil that plagued Prophet Lut's (Lot's) people was sodomy. Prophet Lut's (Lot's) wife<sup>(1)</sup> also welcomed this evil that her people engaged in. It is said that when she noticed

<sup>(1)</sup> The story of the wife of Lut (Lot) peace be upon him with the angels

the handsome guests, not knowing that they were angels who are intent on destruction, she climbed up to the roof of the house and began clapping in an attempt to draw her people's attention. When no one paid her any attention, she lit a fire, and people began taking note. Then, she announced that some supremely handsome guests had arrived. At this point, Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* told them, 'This is a woeful day (*Yawmun 'aseeb*)!' (*Hud:* 77)

In Arabic, one can say, 'Yawmun 'aseeb', or 'Yawmun asabsab' to mean, 'What a day full of difficulties this is!' The term *al-usba* is derived from this. It is used to indicate a group of people who swarm over something, where the power of one individual is magnified by the size of the crowd. Prophet Lut's (Lot's) deduction proved correct. Allah *Glorified is He* describes this in the following verse.

Allah Glorified is He says:

وَجَاءَهُ قَوْمُهُ, يُهْرَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ وَمِن قَبْلُ كَانُوْأَ يَعْمَلُونَ ٱلسَّيِّعَاتِ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ هَتَؤُلَاً بَنَاتِي هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ فَأَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُخَزُونِ فِي ضَيْغِيٍّ أَلَيْسَ مِنكُمْ رَجُلٌ رَشِيكُ ٢

His people came rushing towards him; they used to commit foul deeds. He said, 'My people, here are my daughters. They are more wholesome for you, so have some fear of God and do not disgrace me with my guests. Is there not a single right-minded man among you?' [78] (The Quran, *Hud:* 78)

Allah's words, 'And his people ran (while being rushed) (*yuhra'una*) to him' (*Hud:* 78) meant that they scurried towards him in droves. When a person is not accustomed to committing sin, he approaches it with hesitancy and trepidation. However, those in the habit of sinning, like the people of Prophet Lut (Lot), approached their matters with confidence and energy

Traditionally, the word *yahra'una* (with an initial *ya*) is used to indicate a group of people rushing (in the active form). The word used in this verse is *yuhra'una* (with an initial *yu*) which means that the verb assumes the passive tense. This depicts the picture that Lut's (Lot's) people were hurrying towards his house, as if by a force that was outside them, or a force that is not specifically mentioned. It is as if these people were not rushing (in the active

sense of the verb), but were being rushed to sin (in the passive sense) by their evil desires. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And his people ran (while being rushed) (*yuhra'una*) to him' (*Hud:* 78). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that in their rush towards Prophet Lut's (Lot's) house, they were neither timid nor hesitant. In fact, they were so habituated with committing the sin of sodomy that they rushed forward eagerly. Each one of them was driven forward by his craving and the craving of the others around him.

Imagine a market where it is announced to the shoppers, 'We are giving out free rations!' You would indeed see the people pushing and shoving each other (to be first in line). In the same sense, the people of Lut (Lot) were clearly comfortable with such an obscene sin that they were rushing to it without hesitation. Allah *Glorified is He* said concerning the tribe of Lut (Lot), 'For they had always been committing (such) abominations' (*Hud:* 78). They enjoyed committing the sin of sodomy and were used to it. It was not something that burdened their consciousness, nor did it cause any sense of shame in their hearts. To have a sense of shame means that while certain people are engaged in something sinful, they are uncomfortable with the idea of others doing the same actions. However, since the people of Lut (Lot) all shared a love for that sin; no one felt embarrassed from the other members in the group of sinners.

So how did Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* react to this woeful day? They had raced towards his house and surrounded it like swarms, and he knew all too well what their intentions were. They had done this many times in the past. So, in an attempt to get rid of them, Prophet Lut (Lot) sought to redirect their desires. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Lut (Lot) said, "O my people! Take instead these daughters of mine (in marriage); they are purer for you (than men)!"" (*Hud:* 78) Prophet Lut (Lot) said this because women and men are created for this purpose. Therefore, he wanted to give them the possibility of marrying his daughters. In fact, it was permissible in Prophet Lut's (Lot's) day for a believer to allow his daughter to marry a disbeliever. Prophet Muhammad himself *peace and blessings be upon him* allowed one of his daughters to marry 'Utba Ibn Abu Lahab and another daughter to marry Abu Al-`As ibn Ar-Rabi`. Shortly thereafter, however, Allah made it unlawful for a female believer to marry a disbeliever.

Whose 'daughters' was Prophet Lut (Lot) referring to? Was he referring to his own daughters, the daughters of the community at large or the daughters of his followers? It is said that the only believers from among the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot) were Lut (Lot) himself and his two daughters. How could these two daughters be married to this large crowd of men? Some say that Lut (Lot) had offered this to prominent men who had political influence. They would have been the only ones capable of putting a stop to all of this. Prophet Lut (Lot) thought that this offer might influence them to desist from their sins and purify themselves, while redeeming his honour in the eyes of Prophet Lut's (Lot's) guests.

Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* said, 'Be, then, conscious of Allah, and disgrace me not by assaulting my guests (*dayf*)' (*Hud:* 78). The word *dayf* is singular, but can also be used to denote the plural of male or female guests. In another chapter of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And has the story of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) honoured guests (*dayf*) ever come within your ken?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 24). There are other words in the Arabic language, such as *tifl* which are used to denote the singular and the plural nouns. The word also has a plural which is *atfal*. Allah *Glorified is He* says when describing the males that a woman does not need to wear the full veil with, 'Or the children (*al-tifl*) that are as yet unaware of women's privacy' (*an-Nur:* 31). Therefore, the word (*tifl*) can also be used to denote a group of children.

Here, Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* asked these people not to disgrace him by harming his guests. The word *al-khizy* implies being disgraced or shamed in front of oneself and others. A person might be tempted to commit an evil act so long as no one is watching. However, if they are caught in an act by other people, they are then socially humiliated (*al-khizy*). On the other hand, personal disgrace (*al-hawan*) occurs when the only one who knows about the evil act is the person himself. Prophet Lut (Lot) asked them, 'Is there not among you even one right-minded man?' (*Hud:* 78). 'Is there not even a person among you who is conscientious, virile, noble and can put an end to this'?

Then Allah Glorified is He says:

قَالُوا لَقَدْ عَلِمُتَ مَا لَنَا فِي بَنَاتِكَ مِنْ حَقِّ وَإِنَّكَ لَنَعْلَمُ مَا نُرِيدُ (٧)

## They said, 'You know very well that we have no right to your daughters. You know very well what we want' [79] (The Quran, *Hud:* 79)

This was how the crowd of people answered Prophet Lut's plea, 'We have no use of your daughters, and they are not what we came for. You know exactly what we want'. Thus, they refused to accept Prophet Lut's (Lot's) suggestion and instead wanted to commit the sin of sodomy with his guests. They were unaware that these guests were actually angels who had taken the form of handsome men.

Allah Glorified is He says:

قَالَ لَوُ أَنَّ لِي بِكُمْ قُوَّةً أَوْ ءَاوِيَ إِلَى رُكْنٍ شَدِيدٍ (\*)

# He said, 'If only I had the strength to stop you or could rely on strong support!' [80] (The Quran, *Hud*: 80)

When you see the Arabic term *laww* (if that), it denotes a wish, or a longing. Prophet Lut (Lot) wished that he had the strength to cast them all out. It is traditional in Arabic that a conditional statement (such as 'if that') is followed with an answer for the conditional element. For instance, one could say, 'If that Zayd was not there, I would have come'. However, in this verse we only find the condition (if that) without the answer. This indicates the level of dismay that Prophet Lut (Lot) was in. That is why some scholars narrated, that at this point of his sadness, the angels turned to him and said, 'Your support is mighty, indeed'. Thus, Prophet Lut (Lot) said, 'Or that I could lean upon some mightier support!' (*Hud:* 80)

A thing that is described in Arabic as *shadeed* is that which is condensed together tightly such that it is hard to break up. When you add different elements together, they still retain a sense of individuality. However, melting elements together is another matter. For example, when you mix two kinds of beans together you are still able to differentiate between the two because they both retain their individual shape and colour. On the other hand, if you were

to mix lemon juice with sweetened water, this mix would be much harder to separate. Similar to that range of difficulty, Prophet Lut (Lot) felt that he had not power in preventing his people from doing what they were about to do. These people are also known by the name of 'Sodom', and some say that these were five villages near the city of Hams.

It was narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was moved by Prophet Lut's (Lot's) response. According to Al-Bukhari, Prophet Muhammad was heard saying, 'May Allah bestow his Mercy on my brother Lut (Lot), for he had sought refuge with Allah (during those distressing moments).'<sup>(1)</sup> It was the extreme anguish of those moments which prompted Prophet Lut (Lot) to say that statement although he was certain that no support is mightier than Allah's support.

Allah *Glorified is He* then states what the angels had told Prophet Lut (Lot):

## They [the messengers] said, 'Lot, we are your Lord's messengers. They will not reach you. Leave with your household in the dead of night, and let none of you turn back. Only your wife will suffer the fate that befalls the others. Their appointed time is the morning: is the morning not near?'[81] (The Quran, *Hud:* 81)

Thus, for the first time, Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* came to know that they were angels sent by Allah *Glorified is He*. Even though when these angels spoke with Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) in the earlier verses, they never explicitly divulged their nature as messengers from Allah. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had assumed correctly that they were angels, but he did not know exactly why they had come. The angels informed Prophet

<sup>(1)</sup> Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4694, 3375), by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/326, 332, 35) and by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4026) This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra.

Lut (Lot), 'Behold, we are messengers from your Lord! Never shall (your enemies) approach you' (*Hud:* 81). This means that the people will not harm Prophet Lut (Lot) and his family and will, indeed, not approach the angels themselves. The angels ordered Lut (Lot) to take his family and leave during the night, because the ordained punishment was to take place in the morning, 'Verily, their appointed time is the morning – (and) is not the morning near?' (*Hud:* 81) The angels told Prophet Lut (Lot), 'Depart, then, with your household while it is yet night' (*Hud:* 81). This means that he should travel during the second or third quarters of the night by beginning his journey when the first quarter of the night ends. His aim should be to leave the vicinity of the villages when the fourth quarter of the night begins. His total travel time would amount to half of the night.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And let none of you look back (*yaltafit*)' (*Hud:* 81). The Arabic word *yaltafit* (to look back) means in the verse to discontinue some current act. In this case, the act is travelling away from the village. The word also has a metaphorical meaning, which is to abandon or to let go of something. So, which of these two meanings is relevant in this case?

We know that Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* was to bring the believers with him on this journey. He would take them away from their homes and wealth as well as from the life that they had become accustomed to. That is why the angels warned them not to look back regretfully on what they had left behind. For the time being, they must save themselves and Allah will replace their losses in due time. Thus, both the literal and the figurative meanings of the word *yaltafit* are relevant here. They must not think of physically turning back or remain psychologically attached to the life that they have left behind.

The angels also advised Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* not to bring his wife along, for she had betrayed him by lending a helping hand to those perverted people. She divulged her husband's secrets. Thus, he must leave her with those who are to be punished. When the time came to leave, she argued that she had been faithful to Prophet Lut (Lot) and said, 'I will leave with you'. Then she looked back at the people and decided to stay with them. Thus, she was visited by the same suffering that was destined to visit her tribe, at the time which the angels had specified in the morning, 'Verily, their appointed time is the morning – (and) is not the morning near?' (*Hud:* 81) The time for their appointed suffering was set in the morning because it is a calmer, more peaceful time. Therefore, the punishment will be much more severe on their hearts. Allah then says:

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا عَلِيهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِّن سِجِّيلِ مَّنضُودٍ (٧)

# And so when what We had ordained came about, We turned their town upside down and rained down stones of baked clay on it, layer upon layer [82] (The Quran, *Hud:* 82)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* made it clear that when His Judgment came to pass, all the natural elements complied with His command to destroy the tribe of Lut (Lot). It is said that the tribe of Lut (Lot) included five villages. These were Sodom, Daduma, Da'uh, 'Amura and Qatim. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We turned those (sinful towns) upside down' (*Hud:* 82), this meant that these villages were completely upturned.

The Quran said in another chapter, 'Just as He thrust into perdition those cities (*al-mu`tafika*) that were overthrown' (*an-Najm:* 53). The word *al-mu`tafika* is derived from the word *ifk* which means 'intentional lying' or 'purposeful deceit'. In effect, these people intentionally 'inverted' the truth into falsehood and contradicted reality. Therefore *al-mu`tafika* is a reference to those villages that were upturned in a state of complete disarray. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* pelted them with waves of hard clay pebbles.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, 'To let loose upon them stonehard (*hijara*) blows of chastisement' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 33). The word *hijara* (stones) gives a sense of solidity, whereas the word *teen* (mud) gives the sense of pliability. However, the mud that rained on them that day had solidified and became as hard as rocks, by Allah's Command. Furthermore, it rained down upon them in systematic waves. It was as if every rock knew exactly who its target was. Allah Glorified is He says;

مُسَوَّمَةً عِندَ رَبِّكَ وَمَا هِيَ مِنَ ٱلظَّٰ لِمِينَ بِبَعِيدٍ ٢

## Marked from your Lord. It is not far from the evildoers [83] (The Quran, *Hud:* 83)

The word *Musawwama* means that the stones were 'marked'. It was as if every pebble was pre-destined to strike its respective target as cruise missiles seek out their individual targets. Allah *Glorified is He* had intended these pebbles to punish selected human beings and not to annihilate entire countries. Thus, the clay pebbles were raining down in a highly organized attack. Allah *Glorified is He* used the word *sijjeel* when describing their nature, 'Stone-hard blows (*sijjeel*) of pre-ordained chastisement, one upon another' (*Hud:* 82). Thus, the pebbles were ordered, as the word *sijjeel* was used in this verse. The word also occurs in the following verses describing the punishment of Abraha, the Abyssinian, who had attacked the *Ka'ba*, 'Thus, He let loose upon them (Abraha's army) great swarms of flying creatures, which smote them with stone-hard blows (*sijjeel*) of chastisement pre-ordained' (*al-Fil:* 3-4).

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse we are currently studying by saying, 'And these (blows of doom) are never far from the evildoers!' (*Hud:* 83) These 'evildoers' are those disbelievers who rejected Allah's message which was brought to humanity by the long succession of messengers that was finalized by the mission of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* 

We know that these stories of past prophets served to reinforce the certitude and the confidence of our own Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* They also served as examples of commendable behaviour (on the part of previous prophets), 'We convey unto thee (only) that wherewith We (aim to) make firm your heart' (*Hud:* 120).

These stories narrated the conflicts that arose between Allah's messengers, who were enforced with divine miracles, and the disbelievers that denied them. All these conflicts inevitably ended with the victory of the messenger over the disbelievers. However, previous prophets were not asked to fight for their faith on the battlefield. They were only responsible for the exposition of the metaphysical proofs and the delivery of their messages. When their people rejected these proofs, Allah intervened to punish the transgressors. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with (the tribe of) `Ad, these were the people of Aram who had many pillars, the like of whom has never been constructed in all the land. And with (the tribe of) Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the (many) monuments? It was they who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein. Therefore, your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering, for verily, your Lord is ever on the watch!' (*al-Fajr:* 6-14)

With the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* arose new obligations. This is because the religion which Prophet Muhammad brought would be the prevailing religion as the end of time draws near. His community of believers would be responsible for carrying forth the Divine Message after him. Every member of his community must have a basic understanding and knowledge of Allah's Commands, so that he can share it with others. Every member is, in his own right, a representative of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And thus have We willed you to be a community of the optimal way, so that (with your lives) you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that The Apostle might bear witness to it before you' (*al-Baqara:* 143). Therefore, every member from the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an extension of the Islamic Message. Instead of defeating the disbelievers through direct intervention from heaven, Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered Prophet Muhammad's community to defend their religion with strength. The purpose here is not to force their beliefs upon people, for, as a matter of Islamic principle, belief is forbidden to be imposed on others. You can force a person to perform physical actions, but you cannot dictate what they feel in their hearts. Allah *Glorified is He* wants faith that comes from the heart, as a result of people's free will. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Would you (Muhammad), perhaps, torment yourself (with grief) because they (who live around you) refuse to believe (in

the message)? Had we so willed, we could have sent down unto them a message from the skies, so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4)

Thus, the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was entrusted with a two-fold mission. Firstly, they are to transmit the message of Prophet Muhammad to the future generations, with every generation being responsible for transmitting it to the next. Prophet Muhammad said, 'Allah bestows a radiating glow on the one who, upon hearing my sayings, teaches them and conveys them to those who did not hear them, for many a receiver (of knowledge) will understand better than the one who heard it first.'<sup>(1)</sup> Secondly, they were entrusted in standing firm against the disbelievers, not to force faith upon them, but to defend the right of people to choose their religion. In Islam, no swords are to be unsheathed to impose faith on people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it.' (*al-Kahf: 29*) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wants the hearts that are sincere in their reverence and not the hearts that are forced or compelled.

In fact, if a man chooses to believe in Islam, he is told that he must commit himself to its faith and not break any of its laws. This serves to make entering Islam a voluntary step. Given this, how can it be argued that Islam was imposed on people?

Thus, the believer from among Prophet Muhammad's community should adhere to the following two principles. The first principle is observing the pillars of Islamic faith and the second principle is the spreading of its message. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The scholars ('*Ulama*') from among my community are equivalent to the Prophets of Israel.'<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/437), by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2657, 2658), by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (232) and by Al-Hamidi (1/47). This saying was narrated on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him.

<sup>(2)</sup> Cited by As-Suyuty in (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) (293), adding that its source was unknown. According to Ash-Shawkani in Al-Fawa`id Al-Majmu`a) (286), this is also the opinion of Ibn Hajar and Az-Zarkashy. Also, see Al-'Ajaluni's Kashf al-Khafa` (2/83). We can understand from the Hadith, that we must venerate the scholars for their sincerity and their integrity in the transmission of the message, and for their intelligent exposition [of the message].

Now does the word '*Ulama*' (scholars) refer only to religious scholars? No. The term applies to anyone who has thorough knowledge of at least one issue pertaining to faith. They should then roam the earth conveying this knowledge to the disbelievers while leaving them the free decision to choose their faith. The believer should also stand ready to defend Prophet Muhammad's Message against any power that threatens people's freedom to choose their faith.

Thus, stories such as this story in the Quran, served to strengthen Prophet Muhammad's heart. We know that Allah *Glorified is He* entrusted His Prophet with the Message while he was in Mecca. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proclaimed the message loudly and clearly, directly addressing the chiefs of the Arabian Peninsula and not just the tribes living on its outskirts. Therefore, no one can accuse him of having preached only to the weak tribes (of the outlying provinces), shying away from the masters of the peninsula, who were Quraysh at that time.

Quraysh had risen to prominence having taken up residence near the *Ka'ba* which all the Arab tribes used to visit. Thus, if any member of the tribe of Quraysh were to be harmed, Quraysh could exact its revenge when the members of the offending tribe made their pilgrimage to the *Ka'ba*. Thus, the tribe of Quraysh rose to power due to the strategic value of the *Ka'ba*. It is the *Ka'ba* that lifted Quraysh to their prominent position, and gave value to the deified idols brought in by the various tribes. Those idols were then placed inside the *Ka'ba* in the hopes that the sanctity of the *Ka'ba* would include them. Therefore, Quraysh gained all their power from the *Ka'ba*. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came along and proclaimed the message of Islam clearly to the chiefs of Quraysh, he publicly exposed their ignorance without being intimidated by their power or their prominent status.

Allah willed for the triumph of Islam not to happen at the hands of the leaders of Quraysh in Mecca; it happened in Medina because Allah wanted to let the world know that tribal allegiance to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not cause the people to follow and believe him. Allah willed for the weak people who dwelled near the boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula to be those who advocated the Message of Islam. It was the people's belief in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that caused them to

advocate him, not tribal allegiance. Allah has described the tribe of Quraysh as unjust and clarified to them that the place which was turned upside down is not too far from them, and they should learn from these events of the past.

It is well known that injustice means taking someone's right away and giving it to another who does not deserve it. When it is used in the context of religion, it refers to major *shirk* (associating others with Allah in His Divinity or worship). Accordingly, there are different levels of injustice.

The tribe of Quraysh wronged themselves extremely because they associated others with Allah in His Divinity which is the greatest form of injustice. Allah wants to remind them that when He passes His Judgment, nothing can hold it back. Therefore, Allah instructed them to pay attention to the fact that just as suffering befell the other villages which are close to them they were liable to be punished. The distance between Medina and the Levant may seem great, but Allah enabled them to travel to the Levant every summer.

The ruins of these villages lay on the routes they took while travelling. Allah says about their location, 'They are still there on the highway.' (al-Hijr: 76) This means that they lie on the routes which they regularly took without being swept away by flood or winds. Therefore, they should have learnt lessons every time they passed by them for them to avoid committing another injustice. Allah also warned them every time they passed by the village of the tribe of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him to whom Allah Glorified is He says, 'Do you construct on every elevation a sign, amusing yourselves. Take for yourselves palaces and fortresses that you might abide eternally? And when you strike, you strike as tyrants.' (ash-Shu'ara': 128-130) As Quraysh saw how the old dwellings of the tribes of Thamud, 'Ad and Lut (Lot) were completely vacant, they should not have avoided injustice and learnt a lesson concerning the destiny of those who associated others with Allah in His Divinity. Allah Glorified is He alerts them to the fact that not only did they associate others with Allah in His Divinity, but also they were also ungrateful to Allah Who blessed them with the winter journey to Yemen and summer journey to the Levant. Both journeys were for commercial purposes and brought about immense profits to the people of Quraysh, as they used to travel with their capital money to buy goods which they sold to the dwellers

of Mecca and the pilgrims of the Ka'ba. The people by whom the merchants of Quraysh passed during their journey held Quraysh in high esteem because they lived near the holy Ka'ba. Therefore, Allah Glorified is He has shown them the bounties He bestowed on them in His saving, 'Have you not considered, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their plan into misguidance? He sent against them birds in flocks. Striking them with stones of hard clay, He made them like eaten straw. (al-Fil: 1-5) If the people who came to destroy the Ka'ba - the symbol of power for Ouraysh - had succeeded in destroying the Ka'ba and the pilgrim's destination had shifted from Mecca to Sana'a, the people of Quraysh would have no longer enjoyed their prominent position. However, Allah protected the holy Ka'ba and sent against the aggressors birds in flocks that made them like eaten straw. Why did Allah Glorified is He do this? The answer is mentioned in the chapter of *Quraysh* which follows the chapter of *al-Fil*, as Allah says, '[He did this] to make Quraysh feel secure. Secure in their winter and summer journeys. So let them worship the Lord of this House: who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.' (Quraysh: 1-4)

Therefore, they should have learnt a lesson when they passed by the ruined villages. As they used to pass by these ancient villages for purposes of trade to earn their living without learning a lesson, they committed another injustice. Therefore, Allah says, 'Allah's punishment is not from the wrongdoers [very] far' (*Hud:* 83). The verse may also mean that Allah warns Quraysh that the destruction that befell the previous disbelievers is not too far from them, and that He can strike every disbeliever with a marked rock wherever he may be.

Those who have superficial knowledge of Arabic find fault with the Quran out of misunderstanding. For example, they wonder how Allah says in the Arabic text of the following verse, '...Allah's punishment is not from the wrongdoers [very] far.' (*Hud:* 83) *Ma hiya* which is a feminine form and follows it by *biba'eed* (not very far) in the masculine form, while it is supposed to be *biba'eedah*, i.e. in the feminine form, they have forgotten that this is the saying of Allah. They may not also have a wide knowledge of the Arabic language because when the form *fa'il* of the morphological balance - which refers to the word 'far' in the translation of the verse - occurs as *maf'ul* (the object of a verb), it is

permissible to use the masculine or the feminine form. For example, Allah says in another verse, 'angels, moreover, are [his] assistants.' (*at-Tahrim:* 4), and, 'Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to the doers of good' (*al-A'raf:* 56). Their ignorance of the language causes them to make such a mistake.

Allah *Glorified is He* begins recounting another story of the numerous stories of the prophets; this one is the story of Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro).

Allah Glorified is He says:

وَإِلَىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمُ شُعَيْبًا قَالَ يَنَقَوْمِ أَعْبُدُوا ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَهٍ غَنْرُهُ وَلَا نَنقُصُوا ٱلْمِكْيَالَ وَٱلْمِيزَانَ إِنِي أَرَىنِكُم بِخَيْرٍ وَإِنِي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمِ مُحِيطٍ ﴿

## And to Midyan, We sent their brother *Shu`aib*. He said, 'My people, worship God. You have no god other than Him. Do not give short measure nor short weight. I see you are prospering, but I fear you will have torment on an overwhelming Day [84] (The Quran, *Hud:* 84)

Midyan is the name of Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) peace be upon him son who was not alive during the era of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) peace be upon him but the tribe whose members were his descendants was named after him. The village where these people dwelled was also named after him. Thus, if you say that Shu'aib (Jethro) was sent to the tribe of Midyan, this statement will be true; and if you were to say that Shu'aib (Jethro) was sent to a village called Midyan, this statement will also be true, since there must be inhabitants living in that village. Allah quotes the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) as saying, 'Ask the town in which we were and the caravan in which we came' (Yusuf: 82). Thus, sometimes the word refers to the place and at other times it refers to the inhabitants of a certain place. Shu'aib (Jethro) began preaching his message to his people in the same way that previous messengers had done, as he called them to worship Allah alone without any partners. This is the common element in all prophetic messages. Allah Glorified is He says, 'He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what We enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham), and Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus) - to establish the religion and not be divided therein. Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him].' (ash-Shura: 13) Therefore, the most important element in creed is to worship Allah Alone without any partners. Allah enjoins commands only on those who believe in Him while those who do not believe in Him receive no commands. Allah prefixes every command with, 'O you who have believed' (al-Bagara: 178), whether this commandment concerns the issue of fasting or seeking retribution, for example, it is always preceded by 'O you who have believed'. Therefore, I have always said that underlying reason (for obeying) any commandment is one's faith in the One Who enjoins this command, and there is no need to look for any other reasons. For example, if someone says that the reason for ablution is cleanliness, we say that in case that water is unavailable, we perform *tayammum* (dry ablution with clean earth) using dust or rock. The goal, therefore, is to prepare ourselves for prayer in any way that fulfils the religious objective; worshiping the Creator Glorified and Exalted is He. The believer should never delay the performance of a religious rite for merely finding the reason behind it because the reason for performing it is the fact that it has been enjoined by Allah.

Similarly, we follow everything that Prophet Muhamma *peace and blessing be upon him* said without looking for the reason. If we postponed obeying Allah's commands concerning eating pork and drinking alcohol until they are scientifically justified, diseases would spread, as it has been proven that pork is impure as it contains diseases, and alcohol causes damage to the brain and liver.

Muslims obey Allah's Commands concerning these issues the moment they were enjoined due to their belief in the instructions of their creed and their desire to draw closer to Allah. These commands have been proven beneficial.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and to Midyan, We sent their brother Shu`aib (Jethro). He said, "My people worship Allah. You have no god other than Him."" (*Hud:* 84) We have learnt that worship is not limited solely to prayer, fasting, alms giving and pilgrimage, as these are the basic pillars<sup>(1)</sup> of Islam

<sup>(1)</sup> It is narrated on the authority of Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him and his father that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Islam is based on five (pillars): testifying that there is no true god except Allah and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, performing prayer, the payment of zakat (alms giving), fasting during Ramadan and performing pilgrimage to the House of Allah (the Ka`ba).' [Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (8) and by Muslim in his Sahih (16)]

which involves the construction of the earth through following Allah's commands<sup>(1)</sup>. Therefore, every action, which makes performing the obligatory actions possible, is itself obligatory in turn.

Any work, which a person performs and the society needs, is an act of worship. If a particular profession is in decline, it is incumbent on the officials to find people who can learn and reinvigorate the craft in question; perfecting one's work or craft is also a form of worship.

Allah quotes Shu`aib (Jethro) as saying, 'You have no god other than Him' (*Hud:* 84). It means, in other words, not to take your religious commands from anyone other than Allah *Glorified is He* as there is no god other than Him with no partner.

A person should never accept rulings from a human being while finding fault with Allah's rulings. In addition, a person should never wrong himself by thinking that Allah overlooked a certain ruling which we should follow.<sup>(2)</sup> Therefore, beware of supplanting any of Allah's rulings; understand it first, and if it is precise and clear, apply it, and if it is general or nor clear, make juristic effort to infer the most suitable legal ruling.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked his envoy to Yemen, 'How will you judge?' he said, 'We will judge according to what is in Allah's Book.' Prophet Muhammad asked, 'If it is not in Allah's Book?' he said, 'Then with the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah.' Prophet Muhammad asked, 'If it is not in the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah?' he said, 'We will give in our view.' Then he said that Prophet Muhammad gently stroke his

<sup>(1)</sup> The commandments constitute all the prescriptions and the proscriptions. We derive from the prescriptions that which is *fard* (obligations), *Sunnah* (whatever is narrated from the Prophet) and '*mustahab*' (desirable). Prescriptions involve religious and social matters. Proscriptions include that which is *haram* (unlawful) and *makruh* (prohibited). The society will be good so long as the prescriptions are followed and proscriptions are avoided, as Allah says, '...so accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you...' (*al-Hashr:* 7). Allah also says, 'Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on a right course...' (*Fussilat:* 30).

<sup>(2)</sup> Allah says, '...This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as your religion...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 3).

chest and said, 'All praise is due to Allah, Who granted the messenger of the Messenger of Allah success in what pleases the Messenger of Allah.<sup>(1)</sup>

After Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* called the people of Midyan to worship Allah *Glorified is He* alone - which is the common denominator between all the Prophetic messages - rulings followed; for every sinner, there is a means of repentance. As for the person who gave short measure, the messenger rectified this matter.

In the past, world communities were isolated from one another; thus, some deficiencies might be prevalent in one area, but did not exist in another. All prophets were sent to treat the shortcomings and a deficiency that was specific to the area to which they were sent except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is a mercy for all people, and is the last Prophet and Messenger. Prophet Muhammad was sent when the world was on the eve of an era of unprecedented religious interconnectedness. With the advent of modern communication, distances between countries were enormously reduced. At present, what happens on the American continent is broadcast in our country on the same day, as the world is closely interconnected. Spiritual diseases have proliferated and prevailed because of the speed at which communication takes place. In addition, there is no longer any discernment between good and evil. Therefore, Allah willed for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be the Seal of the Prophets.

The shortcomings of the people of Midyan were that they did not worship Allah alone, and were guilty of giving short measure. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* quotes Shu`aib (Jethro) as saying, 'do not give short measure or short weight. I see you are prospering' (*Hud:* 84). When the religious scholars read this verse, they realised that the verse is not only relevant to things measured and weighed.

This is just from the point of view of the seller. The meaning of this verse encompasses the seller and buyer so that the buyer must take his rightful share

<sup>(1)</sup> Related by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/230, 236, 242) and by Abu Dawud in his (Sunnan) (3592, Book on Judgments, from the Hadith narrated by Mu`adh ibn Jabal

of the commodity and the seller must take his rightful share of the profit. Therefore, this verse includes both buyer and  $seller^{(1)}$ .

It is well known that *al-kayl* is the process of measuring something against something else. If we are measuring weight, then we need units for measuring weight. If we are measuring volume, then we need units for measuring volume. Textiles are measured by the metre; land is measured by area etc. Other things are measured by volume which entails calculating the length, width and height and multiplying them.

The important matter is that every person should receive his rightful share. This principle applies even when it comes to compensating a worker for the effort of work he has exerted in performing his work. The most famous case is the measure and weight, and the purpose of other kinds of measurement is to give everyone his rightful due. If a person starts to take other people's rights, he will continue doing so; and if some people usurp the rights of others, the latter would stop doing their work correctly. When you give someone less than what he deserves or if the payment he receives does not suite the effort he has exerted in work, he will become sluggish in his work and will not perform his work properly. This will result in work deficiencies. Therefore, I emphasize that giving everyone his rightful due results in a better quality of work.

Instead of hoarding money, ambitious people must work because when they set up a project or establish a building, they benefit the poor-even if they do not realise it -because he who establishes a building benefits the construction workers and the manufacturers of building materials. Therefore, he benefits the poor workers even before he himself benefits from this building.

Therefore, it is important that every person receives his rightful due before his sweat dries. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Give the worker his wage before his sweat dries.'<sup>(2)</sup>

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<sup>(1)</sup> It is deduced from Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi's intention that giving everyone his due right amounts maintaining balance in life.

<sup>(2)</sup> Related by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2443) on the authority of Ibn `Umar... Al-Busairi states in his book `Az-Zawa`id, 'Its chain of transmission is weak, as there are two weak narrators.

We learn that Islam encourages altruism and emphasises at the same time the rewards that Allah will give to the one who gives preference to other people over himself although he may be poor. When a person has little money, but gives it to another in need this means that this person has given another preference over himself, but he will receive reward from Allah *Glorified is He* double the money he paid.

Islam teaches us the superior usefulness which Allah intends to establish among people. When this principle governs the people's lives, everyone in society will benefit easily.

In this verse, which we are currently explaining, Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* tells the people of Midyan, '...do not give short measure or short weight. I see you are prospering...' (*Hud:* 84). This means that they had no need to do such underhand practises because the sellers owned enough merchandise, and the buyer had enough money. Therefore, they should have been content with what they had and everyone should have received his rightful due. This is an issue which many people ignore; if the seller cheats his customers when they buy a certain commodity from him, other sellers will cheat him when he buys other types of goods that are necessary for his life.

If a person cheats others by giving short measure and weight, other sellers will cheat him when he buys the commodities he needs for his daily life. Therefore, Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* told them that they were not in need for such dishonest measures because they were already prosperous. Then, he warned them, saying, 'But I fear you will have torment on an overwhelming Day.' (*Hud:* 84) when you give a buyer less than his full due or when you take from a seller more than your rightful due, you are not only cheating the person you are dealing with, but also you are cheating yourself. We all know that the seller or the buyer may be inattentive, and a

The Hadith is related by Al-Tabarany in his (Al-Mu'jam As-Saghir) (1/20) on the authority of Jabir; also, Abu Na'im in Al-Hulya (7/142) on the authority of Abu Hurayra. By these chains of transmission and narrations, the Hadith has acquired the status of Hasan (a Hadith whose chain of narration contains a narrator with weak exactitude, but is free from eccentricity or blemish). The origin of the Hadith is mentioned in Sahih Al-Bukhari, (Book on Transactions) where it is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah

seller may try to take advantage of the buyer's inadvertence by pressing down upon the scale with his fingers (so that the desired merchandise may seem heavier). The buyer may also try to take advantage of the seller's inadvertence by lifting the scale up with his fingers while the seller is not looking to take more than his fair share. This is a type of self-deception because Allah has ordered us to be honest in our economic dealings with other people as the benefits gained from anything - no matter how copious it is - is limited as human life on earth is limited. Therefore, he who cheats and deceives others exposes himself to Allah's endless punishment in the Hereafter. Thus, a person may earn a meagre profit in this transient world, but he meets endless and overwhelming torment in the Hereafter. This indicates that the tormented person cannot escape from it. In the worldly life, you may escape some suffering by seeking refuge with someone more powerful than you are, but on the Day of Judgment, if you are destined for hellfire, you will face a day on which there will be no trading, friendship or intercession.

Allah continues with what Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) said to the people of Midyan saying:

# وَيَقَوْمِ أَوْفُواْ ٱلْمِكْيَالَ وَٱلْمِيزَانَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ وَلَا تَبْخَسُواْ ٱلنَّاسَ أَشْيَآءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْثَوْا فِ ٱلْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ٢

# My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land [85] (The Quran, *Hud:* 85)

In the previous verse, Allah says, 'in fairness, give full measure and weight' (*Hud:* 85). Accordingly, we learn that fulfilment of measure and weight is religiously required because Allah speaks about things measured or weighted in the absolute sense, as this includes every transaction that takes place between the buyer and the seller. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Woe to those who give short measure, who demand of other people full measure for themselves, but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 1-3) The seller may ask the buyer to weigh for himself regarding him trustworthy, but the buyer may

cheat the seller by taking more than his right. The seller may do the opposite, a matter which involves misery for the both. Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) says, 'My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight...' (*Hud:* 85). Allah has explained the issue of giving people short measure and weight and that of fulfilment of measure and weight. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs...' (*Hud:* 85).

This verse has a general meaning which is not limited to things measured or weighed. A buyer may belittle the value of a certain commodity, a person may take a bribe from another, usurp that which is not rightfully his, extort or embezzle, which all amount usurping someone else's right using in different ways.

Snatching means taking hold of something suddenly and running away, extortion means obtaining something by force, embezzlement means secretly taking something which is in one's care and bribery means taking money or presents in return for offering a service for a person who is already entitled to this service.

Allah's saying, '...in fairness, give full measure and weight...' (*Hud:* 85), includes different meanings, and the word *al-bakhs* is to harm someone by giving him less than his full due, whether this be in terms of volume or weight. The word *ashya*` is the plural of the word *shay*` which refers to different things regardless of their gender. Allah instructs us not to be lured by anything no matter how small it is.

In this verse, we notice that the word *an-nas* is plural just as the word *ashya`ahum* is. When two plurals occur together, the meaning of the verse applies to each person of these people and everything of these *ashya*`. In other words, the verse means that no one is allowed to belittle anything possessed by any person.

There is a story of a pious man who leased a riding animal from a lender so that he could ride it from one place to another. As he was riding it, his whip with which he guided the animal fell to the ground, so he stopped the animal and dismounted and returned on foot to the spot where the whip fell. When he had found the whip, he walked back to his animal and remounted it. A person asked him, 'Why did you not ride your animal back to where you had dropped your whip'? Whereupon the pious man replied, 'I leased this

animal to go from a certain point to a certain destination; my agreement with the lender does not include using the animal to search for my lost whip'

There is a story of another pious man who was writing a book. In the past, people used to help the ink dry faster by soaking up the excess using sand. However, the pious man could not find anything with which he could soak up the excess ink. Therefore, he took a handful of dust from the base of a wall, and then he went to the owner of the wall and asked him to assess the price of the dust he took from the base of his wall. Therefore, the owner of the wall said, 'By Allah, because of your integrity I will not assess the price of the dust.' Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* concludes the verse saying, '...do not commit abuse on earth, spreading corruption.' (*Hud:* 85)

The Arabic word *adha* means committing abuse and spreading corruption, such as sullying water well or digging a hole in a road used by people. Thus, it is something that destroys that which is good.

All members of society are ordered not to spread such corruption. If all were to apply this directive, the whole society would become upright. However, the problem is that some people want other people not to be corrupt, while they themselves are corrupt and do not like other people to stop their acts of corruption.

Then Allah Glorified is He says:

بَقِيَّتُ ٱللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُم تُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَآ أَنَّا عَلَيْكُم بِحَفِيظٍ (٥)

## What lasts with God is best for you, if you are believers: I am not your keeper' [86] (The Quran, *Hud:* 86)

This means that whatever they gain from honest transactions is better for them because the one who takes more than his fair share commits a mistake because unlawful earning removes blessing from lawful earning. In addition, the one who takes what is not rightfully his, Allah will cause him to lose his unfair share. Someone may say, 'so and so is awash with Allah's blessings' which means that even though his income is low, he is well off and able to raise his children in relative comfort as opposed to someone else who has amassed his wealth through unlawful means and leads a distressing life. This person may have numerous expenses so that his budget cannot afford his expenses, as Allah *Glorified is He* has caused him to fall prey to many evil temptations. A person may succeed in deceiving other people, but he can never deceive his Lord.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'What lasts with Allah is best for you...' (*Hud:* 86) which means that Allah guards the person who does not usurp other people's rights against evil temptations and all the expenses that consume their money. Consider negative provision rather than a positive one because most people tend to emphasize positive provision which means seeking large amounts of money. However, they forget that Allah causes the person who gained money unlawfully to lose his money through evil channels of expenses while He protects the person who guards the people's rights from these evil channels of expenses.

Allah does not bless those who raise their children with unlawful money. We find - for example - that the son of a briber takes private lessons and still fails whereas the son of an upright person, who earns his living from lawful sources, gains knowledge easily and succeeds. In addition, Allah may cause the person who earns his living from unlawful sources to have a greedy wife that is never satisfied with anything whereas He grants the person who guards the people's rights a wife that is content and appreciative of her husband.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'What lasts with Allah is best for you, if you are believers...' (*Hud:* 86). This means that if you believe that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Ever-Watchful and the Self-Existing; do not usurp other people's rights as Allah watches you. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying, '...I am not your keeper.' (*Hud:* 86) Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* has made it clear to the people of Midyan that he will not watch every corrupt person to prevent him from doing any act of corruption because every person must watch over himself as long as he believes in Allah *Glorified is He* and knows that He says, 'What lasts with Allah is best for you, if you are believers...' (*Hud:* 86). This means that what lasts will be blessed, and the purpose of faith is to follow what is prescribed and to shun what is proscribed. This is not the case with man-made law which is not concerned with what people do secretly. Therefore, it seems as if it protects people from being subject to legal prosecution. On the other hand, the Divine Law encompasses all that humans do in public and secretly.

Allah says, 'and to Midyan, We sent their brother Shu'aib (Jethro). He said, "My people worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. Do not give short measure or short weight. I see you are prospering, but I fear you will have torment on an overwhelming Day. My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land. What lasts with Allah is best for you, if you are believers; I am not your keeper." (Hud: 84-86) When one contemplates these verses, he can find the elements that protect the well-being of society; if the society is not protected, it will not corrupt. Allah has willed for the society to be integrated without redundancies, because if the skills are redundant, people will not need each other and will not be interdependent. Public interest necessitates that people depend on the skills of each other. For example, the person who studies for obtaining a PhD needs the person who sweeps the streets, and the person who treats people - with the help of Allah needs the person who repairs the sewers. What werethe response of the people of Midyan to Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro)?

Allah Glorified is He says:

# قَالُواْ يَشْعَيْبُ أَصَلَوْتُلَكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَن نَتْرُكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ ءَابَ آَوُنَا أَوْ أَن نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمَوْلِنَا مَا نَشَتَؤُأَ إِنَّكَ لَأَنتَ ٱلْحَلِيمُ ٱلرَّشِيدُ ٢

## They said, 'Shu`aib, does your prayer tell you that we should abandon what our forefathers worshipped and refrain from doing whatever we please with our own property? Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man' [87] (The Quran, *Hud:* 87)

The verse means that the people of Midyan asked Prophet *Shu'aib*, 'Does your Lord ask us to abandon what our forefathers worshipped'? One may ask why they said, 'does your prayer' (*Hud:* 87)? The answer is that Islam is based on five pillars. The first is to testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Prophet; it suffices a person to utter this testimony of faith once in his lifetime. Then performing the prayer, giving alms, fasting during the month of *Ramadan* and performing pilgrimage, for whoever can bear the journey. If you consider these pillars, you will find that a person may

not be able to give alms or perform the pilgrimage. In addition, a person may be sick, so he may be excused from fasting during *Ramadan*, and he may utter the testimony of faith once during his life. Only the prayer remains; therefore, it is said, 'Prayer is the most important pillar of faith, whoever performs it, establishes the entire faith, and whoever abandons it destroys the entire faith'. Prayer is the only pillar which enables the believer to reaffirm his loyalty to his Lord five times daily.

No person is excused from the daily prayer whatever his circumstances are. If a person is unable to move, he can perform the prayer with his eyes. If he is not able to move the eyes, he must pray with his heart. Even in the condition of war or battle, the Muslim should perform the prayer of fear. Therefore, the prayer is the pillar which is not waived and should be performed five times a day. In addition, Allah has attached due importance to it in the Islamic law.

All religious obligations have been revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* as Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* brought them to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who conveyed them to us. The five daily prayers were the only rituals with which Allah charged Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Night Journey when he was at *sidrat al-muntaha* (a lote-tree of the utmost boundary over the seventh heaven beyond which none can pass) because of its great importance.

For example - and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - you will find that when a president of a country receives his daily briefings he delegates the work to his subordinates while putting in a suggestion as to how the work should be done. However, when the president receives a matter of critical importance, he summons the responsible official and arranges with him the appropriate arrangements and procedures that should be taken. If this is the case with human matters, what will be the case when Allah assigns an obligation to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?

Allah *Glorified is He* willed for the obligation of prayer to be the only obligation that has attained this status due to its importance, as it is the only pillar that must be performed five times a day. You may utter the testimony of faith once in your lifetime, but you utter it every time you pray.

Alms giving involves paying a portion of one's wealth; a person may not be born with any money except if he had inherited some. It is obligatory for a person to give alms from his money which can only be attained by hard work. In addition, work itself takes up time, but praying involves sacrificing some time; sacrifice of one's time is broader than giving alms.

During fasting, you refrain from the carnal desires from dawn until sunset, but you continue to practise all the other activities of life. However, during prayer, you do not only abstain from the carnal desires, but also you abstain from the other activities of life which are permissible during fasting.

During pilgrimage, as well as prayer, you direct yourself towards the Holy House of Allah. Thus, all the pillars of Islam are contained in the prayer.

In the verse which we are currently examining, the people of Midyan mocked their Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his prayer, just as the disbelievers of Quraysh mocked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The people of Midyan told Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro), 'does your prayer tell you' (*Hud:* 87) thinking that they were ridiculing him as he was in the habit of praying often; the disbelievers of Quraysh were also ignorant of the fact that prayer can prevent sins.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). Thus, prayer can urge a person to do the good and prevent him from doing evil. Since a ruling has been issued for a certain matter, it entails some repercussions. A person may say to another, 'I know that you pray so I trust you' or 'how you can commit such a sin although you perform prayer'? Many people forget that such analogies can solve numerous dilemmas; they tend to consider only one side of the issue and forget its counterpart. Therefore, so long as Allah *Glorified is He* says that prayer prevents committing sins, it should enjoin good. Another example is Allah's saying about the drowning of Pharaoh's people, 'And the heaven and earth wept not for them...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29). So long as Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* forbade the heavens and the earth from weeping over the people of Pharaoh, then it is clear that they weep over other people because the heavens and the earth were created for the sole purpose of praising Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains,

and they declined to bear it...' (*al-'Ahzab:* 72). In this verse, the heavens and the earth chose to be among the creatures who praise Allah, as He says, '...there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise....' (*al-Isra':* 44) Therefore, if the heavens and the earth see a person praising Allah, they will inevitably love him and if they see a disbeliever, they will hate him. The heavens and the earth did not weep over the people of Pharaoh because they were deluded, as the heavens and the earth only weep over the upright people.

'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* settled this issue as he said, 'When a believer dies he is mourned in two places: one on the earth and the other in heaven. The place which mourns him on earth is the place where he used to pray, and the place which mourns him in heaven is the spot where his good deeds ascend to heaven.' The place where he used to pray loses a person who used to pray there, and the place through which his good deeds used to ascend to heaven misses the scent of his good works ascending to heaven. Therefore, prayer may refer to and symbolises the religion. The prayer itself involves commands just as the religion involves commands; it represents sincere faith because false faith has no benefit.

The people of Midyan wanted to mock Prophet Shu`aib's call to faith, so they asked, '...does your prayer tell you that we should abandon what our forefathers worshipped...' (*Hud:* 87). This saying involves their response to his call for them to worship no god but Allah, as there is no other god but Him, not to give short measure and weight and not to deprive people of their dues. This saying also involves their response to their call for them to realise that whatever lasts with Allah is better for them, and not to spread corruption on earth. They asked him, 'Do you also forbid us from using our money in the way we want to'? It seems that they lost their insight because if they allowed themselves to do whatever they wanted with their money, others will also do what they wish with their own money; and interests will clash and everyone will lose. Their saying, '...Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man.' (*Hud:* 87)

They continued to mock Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* as they said at the beginning, '...does your prayer tell you that we should abandon what our forefathers ...' (*Hud:* 87). Their situation resembles that of the hypocrites of Medina who said to the Ansar (Helpers from Medina), '...Do not spend on

those who are with the Messenger of Allah....' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) Their purpose was to stir temptation between the Immigrants and the Ansar. They said, 'the Messenger of Allah' only out of sarcasm, as they were urging the wealthy men of Medina to starve the immigrants.

They also resembled the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) when he forbade them from committing sins; they said ironically, '...Evict them from your town! Indeed, they are men who keep themselves pure.' (*al-A'raf:* 82) Is their purity a valid reason for expelling them from the town? Because they did not want anyone to disturb their life of sin, this saying resembles what some people say in our daily life, 'Do not consult so-and-so as he is strict in religious matters'.

The people of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) said, '...Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man.' (*Hud:* 87) They mock him because he did not agree with them on worshipping any god other than Allah and giving short measure and weight. He also forbade them from depriving people of their due. When a righteous ruling is pronounced by a person who does not adhere to or believe in it, his purpose of doing so is mockery and ridicule. This type of mocking language is mentioned in the Quran in many verses. Allah *Glorified is He* tells those who were tyrannical and oppressive in their life, and will be tormented in the Hereafter, 'It will be said, "Taste! Indeed, you are the honoured, the noble!"" (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '...if they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like murky oil, which scalds [their] faces...' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

Both sayings include mockery and sarcasm. The following verse which we are explaining now, '...does your prayer tell you...' (*Hud:* 87) involves mockery of his prayer. Likewise is their saying, '...Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man.' (*Hud:* 87). They tell him that he is a tolerant and sensible, so he should not say, '...worship Allah. You have no god other than Him' (*Hud:* 84). They said that because they used to worship idols. They also ridiculed him as he called them to stop giving short measure and weight. They also rejected his advice regarding making good use of their wealth, and the reason that justifies Shu`aib's preaching is that he is a tolerant and sensible, so how can he call them to do that which opposes their desires? Allah *Glorified is He* relates what Shu`aib (Jethro) says to them, saying:

قَالَ يَنَقَوْمِ أَرَءَيْتُمُ إِن كُنْتُ عَلَى بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن زَبِّي وَرَزَقَنِي مِنْهُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُخَالِفَكُمْ إِلَىٰ مَا أَنْهَىٰ حَكُمْ عَنْهُ إِنَّ أُرِيدُ إِلَّا ٱلْإِصْلَحَ مَا ٱسْتَطَعْتُ وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أَنِيبُ ()

# He answered, 'My people, can you not see? What if I am acting on clear evidence from my Lord? He Himself has given me good provision: I do not want to do what I am forbidding you to do, I only want to put things right as far as I can. I cannot succeed without God's help: I trust in Him, and always turn to Him [88] (The Quran, *Hud:* 88)

In this verse, Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* announced that he was acting on clear evidence from Allah; *Glorified is He* who gave him an authoritative proof. Allah bestowed on him good provision with which he needed no one else, as he lived in well-being. The words *ar-rizq al-hasan* may refer to the blessing of prophethood. Allah *Glorified is He* quotes Shu'aib (Jethro) as saying, '...I do not want to do what I am forbidding you to do...' (*Hud:* 88). This means that he practised what he preached; he did not give short measure or weight and did not deprive people of their due, as he did not worship anyone but Allah.

And the word *ukhalif* (contradict) indicates two opposing directions; if you intend to discourage people from doing something so that you could do it, this is expressed by the phrase *khalafta ila*, but if you intend to encourage a person to do something so that you do not have to do it, this is expressed by the phrase '*khalafta* 'an'.

Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* clarified to them that he did not forbid them from these actions for him to do them. Rather, he forbade them from doing these actions which he did not do because Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered him not to engage in such actions, as He has revealed to him a divine message.

Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) did not do the actions in which they regarded good, as there is no good in giving short measure or weight or worshiping any god other than Allah. In fact, these actions involve evil. Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* explains to them the mission of prophethood as he

said, 'I only want to put things right as far as I can' (*Hud:* 88). Allah sent prophets when corruption spread, as prophets were sent with doctrines to guide people and to rectify their affairs by giving those commands and prohibitions. These prophets were sent as models to show people how to apply the doctrine, as the prophets cannot give a certain command without applying it first.

Therefore, Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* said, 'I only want to put things right as far as I can' (*Hud:* 88). Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* only charges a soul with that which it is capable of and that which lies within its means. Prophet *Shu'aib* then said, '...I cannot succeed without Allah's help. I trust in Him, and always turn to Him.' (*Hud:* 88) This verse reveals that there is a difference between work and success because your limbs may be busy with work, but the intention may not be sincere, so success is not granted by Allah. However, if you work with the intention that Allah will grant you success in working sincerely, Allah will draw your intention to any mistake you may make, you will do your work perfectly and will be impressed by the beauty of perfection.

Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* as saying is quoted saying, '*`alayh tawakkaltu'* (I trust in Him) (*Hud:* 88). This means that Shu'aib (Jethro) places his trust in none other than Allah, and it is not appropriate at all to modify such a formula or to add anything to it; for if you do, by saying for example, 'I have placed my trust in Allah as well as in so-and-so', then expect that Allah will not grant you success, as you associate someone along with Him. Hud (Eber) is also quoted as saying, '*tawakkaltu 'ala Allah'* (I have relied upon Allah) (*Hud:* 56). One of the upright people said, 'O Allah, I seek your forgiveness for any deed which I intended to do for your sake, but other motivations interfered'. Nothing should detract you from complete dependence on Allah because you will eventually return to Him. Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) said, 'and always turn to Him' (*Hud:* 88).

Then, Allah Glorified is He says:

وَيَنَقَوْمِ لَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شِقَافِيٓ أَن يُصِيبَكُم مِّثْلُ مَا أَصَابَ قَوْمَ نُوْجٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ هُودٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ صَلِحٍ وَمَاقَوْمُ لُوطٍ مِّنكُم بِبَعِيدٍ ٢

## My people, do not let your opposition to me bring upon you a similar fate to the peoples of Noah or Hud or Saleh; the people of Lot are not far away from you [89] (The Quran, *Hud:* 89)

Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* told them not to let their antagonism towards him to commit sins that cause Allah *Glorified is He* to punish them just as He punished the peoples that preceded them and who opposed their prophets. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* inflicted torment upon them like floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes. He told them to beware of acting like these people. Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* advised them out of his keenness for their interest although he knew that they harboured hostility towards him because he called them to cease worshipping the idols which their forefathers had worshipped. He also forbade them from giving short measure and weight and depriving people of their dues. Allah tormented the predecessors who opposed Allah's *shar*` (Islamic Law). Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*. Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَٱسْتَغْفِرُواْ رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيكُ وَدُودٌ ٠

# Ask forgiveness from your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance: my Lord is merciful and most loving [90] (The Quran, *Hud:* 90)

This demonstrates that Allah *Glorified is He* never closes the door of repentance even the one who is persistent on committing sins. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Verily, Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His slave than a person who has his camel in a waterless desert carrying his provision of food and drink and it is lost.'<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6308-6309) and by Muslim in his Sahih (2744) on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, and the wording is stated by Al-Bukhari.

Imagine the feeling of the person who lost his camel, which carries all his food and drink, then he comes across his camel. Such a person must indeed be very happy to have found his camel.

Allah *Glorified is He* relates that which Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* told his people, 'Ask forgiveness from your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance...' (*Hud:* 90). As long as a person asks forgiveness from his Lord for his past sins and turns to Him in repentance, with the intention of abstaining from these sins, Allah will never turn away the one who seeks His Graces, '...my Lord is Merciful and Most Loving.' (*Hud:* 90) His Forgiveness and Mercy repel torment. Allah *Glorified is He* represents the broadest possible meaning of forgiveness, mercy and love. Allah is Most Loving, an attribute which implies compassion for the person loved.

For example - and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - if a mother has two sons, the first is wealthy and provides her with anything she wants and the second is weak and poor. We find that the mother's heart always leans towards the poor son, and she implores the stronger and wealthier son to feel compassion for him. We find that when an Arab mother in the past was asked, 'Which of your sons is dearest to you'? She would respond, 'The youngest until he reaches maturity, the absent until he returns and the sick until he recovers his health'. Therefore, love requires an outpouring of compassion insomuch as needed. Allah Glorified is He says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'O son of Adam, have no fear of any powerful person, so long as my Power endures, and my Power never runs out. O son of Adam, have no fear of scarcity of provision, so long as my coffers are full and never run out. O son of Adam, I have created you for worship, so do not dally, and I have guaranteed your sustenance so do not tire after it. Therefore, by My Majesty and Glory, if you content yourself with that which I have allotted for you, your heart and your body will be at rest, you will deserve my praise. If you do not content yourself with that which I have allotted for you, By My Majesty and Glory I will let this worldly life rule over you, you shall strive for your living just as the beasts strive for their living, and still you shall only be able to gain what I have already allotted for you. O son of Adam, I have created the heavens and the earth without being exhausted; would it then lie outside my capacity to bring a morsel of bread your way? O son of Adam, do not ask about tomorrow's sustenance, just as I do not ask you for tomorrow's work. O son of Adam, I have much love for you; therefore, it is my right to expect that you love me in return.' This Hadith shows how deep Allah's love for His creation is which the disbelievers' hearts cannot grasp. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* states the response of the people of Midyan to Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*:

قَالُوا يَشْعَيْبُ مَانَفْقَهُ كَثِيرًا مِّمَّا تَقُولُ وَإِنَّا لَنَرَىكَ فِينَا صَعِيفًا وَلَوْلَا رَهْطُكَ لَرَجَمْنَكَ وَمَآ أَنتَ عَلَيْنَا بِعَزِيز ()

# They said, '*Shu`aib*, we do not understand much of what you say, and we find you very weak in our midst. But for your family, we would have stoned you, for you have no great status among us' [91] (The Quran, *Hud:* 91)

This saying is similar to what the disbelievers of Quraysh said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as they said, 'Our hearts are within coverings from that, to which you invite us, and in our ears is deafness, and between us and you is a partition...' (*Fussilat:* 5). Faith needs a heart that is not cluttered with falsehood so it can warmly embrace faith. However, when a heart is filled with falsehood, it becomes unable to receive faith; if the minds work to rid the heart of this falsehood, it will allow that which it accepts as the Truth to enter the heart. Therefore, Allah seals up the hearts that are full of disbelief, so that He causes disbelief to remain firmly established in the hearts and prevents faith from entering them.

The people of Midyan did not only declare their disbelief, but they also threatened Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* saying, '...and we find you very weak in our midst. But for your family, we would have stoned you, for you have no great status among us.' (*Hud:* 91) Such a threat carries an open challenge as they thought that they were capable of harming him because they detested him. However, they declared that they would kill him but for the rest of his family that still worshipped idols and would be angry if any harm befell him. They forgot that He Who sent forth Prophet Shu'aib

(Jethro) *peace be upon him* is fully capable of protecting him. Accordingly, they carried out Allah's Will to subject disbelief to serve faith. Another example on this point is the Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* uncle Abu Taleb who remained adherent to paganism, a matter which apparently served to protect Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Quraysh.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then relates Shu`aib's (Jethro) *peace be upon him* response to his people:

قَالَ يَنْقَوْمِ أَرَهْطِي أَعَنُّ عَلَيْكُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَأَتَّخَذْ تُمُوهُ وَرَآءَكُمُ ظِهْرِيًّا إِنَّ رَبِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطً (١)

## He said, 'My people, is my family stronger in your estimation than God? And have you put Him behind you? My Lord surrounds everything you do [92] (The Quran, *Hud:* 92)

Here Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* condemns them for equating of the Glory of Allah with the clout of his own family. How could they put those two side by side and conclude that the retribution of Shu'aib's (Jethro) family can be more terrifying than the wrath of Allah?! Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* is not at all flattered by the esteem they have for his family, especially in the face of his own reverence for His Lord. Shu'aib (Jethro) had already announced his absolute reliance on Allah, and he knows full well that Glory and Might belong first and foremost to Allah.

Not only did they hold *Shu'aib's* (Jethro's) family in higher esteem than Allah, but they also cast the idea of faith (in Allah) behind their backs because Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* tells them. '...And have you put Him behind you?' (*Hud:* 92) He meant they did not put Allah *Glorified is He* in the forefront (of their lives) and they did not recognize His Greatness nor His ability to protect His prophets since they ascribed to some of His creatures a greatness that exceeds His own. Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* reminds them, 'My Lord surrounds everything you do.' (*Hud:* 92), He meant that everything you say or do is recorded with Allah and can be used against you, for with the True Lord *Glorified is He* there is nothing that goes unregistered. Previously, we have come to learn how our speech is like a vehicle for our

deeds (whether good or bad); the deed of the tongue is speaking; just as much as the actions of the rest of the organs are also 'deeds'.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given speaking a special status because it is the primary means of spreading His Word. Then Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* is quoted as saying:

وَيَقَوْمِ أَعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَئِكُمُ إِنِّي عَنِمِلْ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَن يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَمَنْ هُوَكَنِدِبٌ وَٱرْتَعِبُوٓا إِنِّي مَعَكُمُ رَقِيبٌ ١

My people, do whatever is within your power, and I will do likewise. Soon you will know who will receive a disgraceful punishment and who is a liar. Watch out, and so will I [93] (The Quran, *Hud:* 93)

This means that Shu'aib (Jethro) peace be upon him is standing on an opposite platform (than they are); Allah is dearer to him than his family. By cherishing his Lord in such a manner, he has taken refuge with the strongest of 'pillars'. So, it is from the standpoint of such an ardent faith that he announces to them, 'Do whatever is within your power-and you are no more capable than any other human being. I, for my part, will do all that is in my capacity; however, I am not alone; Allah Glorified and Exalted is He is with me and your power will be no match with Allah's Absolute Power. No matter what you do in your attempt to divert me from my reforming mission, I will not be let down by He who has sent me forth. You have put yourselves in the same position adopted by previous nations which have tried to stand in the face of Divine reformation; people whom Allah Glorified is He has defeated with earthquakes, hurricanes or other obliterating forces from Him'. So, he said to them: Do all that is in your power, and do not imagine for once that I will beg you to desist; I have taken my stand on clear evidence from my Lord, and I want the best for you, and I wish that you would check yourselves.

By no means did Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* say the above out of weakness; it was rather a response to their threat, '...and we find you very weak in our midst. But for your family, we would have stoned you...' (*Hud:* 91). Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* makes it known that he holds significant

status and clout in the eyes of Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* who has sent him. He says, 'My people do whatever is within your power, and I will do likewise...' (*Hud:* 93).

Thus, Shu'aib (Jethro) makes it clear to them that he will not sit idle, that he shall do all that is in his capacity and, '...Soon you will know who will receive a disgraceful punishment and who is a liar. Watch out, and so will I.' (*Hud:* 93) He meant that time will tell who of us is rightly guided and who of us is misguided and who of us shall be victorious, and who of us shall be humbled in defeat. This meant that the loser will come to hold himself in contempt, and will feel disgraced and humiliated in front of all of Allah's creation, Time will tell who of us is on the side of the truth.

Consequently, the verse that follows reads:

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمَرُنَا نَجَيَّنَا شُعَيْبًا وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مَعَهُ, بِرَحْمَةٍ مِّنَّا وَأَخَذَتِ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ ٱلصَّيْحَةُ فَأَصْبَحُواْ فِي دِيَرِهِمْ جَيْمِينَ عَنَى

## When what We had ordained came about, in Our mercy We saved *Shu`aib* and his fellow believers, but a mighty blast struck the wrongdoers. By morning they lay dead in their homes [94] (The Quran, *Hud:* 94)

We notice that in the chapter of *Hud*, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses two different kinds of expressions to describe to the passing of His Judgment and the suffering that ensues. First, He uses *wa-lamma* and then He uses *fa-lamma*. The first comes in 'so, when Our command was fulfilled...' (*Hud:* 66). The second which starts with the letter (*f*) is used to state a punishment which arrives instantaneously without any time lapse. Like when the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us He causes man to die then get buried (with no time lapse) ('*Abasa:* 21).

As for *thumma*, its role is to state an event which will occur after the elapse of a certain period of time; such as when The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that, with His will, He will raise man again from the dead (*'Abasa:* 22).

The word *falamma* occurs in the story of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* because the True Lord *Glorified is He* had specified the exact time at which the

suffering would be brought down from Him. Allah *Glorified is He* said to him that their appointed time is going to be the morning (*Hud:* 81). In this case, *falamma* had to precede the statement of their punishment; so Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that when the time He ordained came about, He turned their town upside down and bombarded them with raining stones made of baked clay, layer upon layer (*Hud:* 82).

As for the verse that we are currently studying, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'When what We had ordained came about, in Our Mercy We saved Shu'aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers...' (*Hud:* 94). Here, He makes no mention of a specific date for the suffering. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'When what We had ordained came about...' (*Hud:* 94). Every order requires that there be an issuer, a description, and a receiver upon whom the order will be acted. The giver of the order is Allah, and He is capable of executing all that He orders, and no one ordered by Allah is even capable of refusing the order; the whole universe is subject to the orders of its Creator.

Therefore, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* informs us that suffering had befallen them, this means that the order had been given and the suffering did not escape them. The possibility of refusing an order can only occur if the receiver of the order is disobedient, but 'the suffering' dares not disobey the Divine Command. It is forced to obey; it has no choice in the matter.

In this instance the speaker is Allah *Glorified is He* – the issuer of both the cosmic order and the legislative order. So, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* issues one of His Judgments, and records it in the Quran, you can be certain that it must come to pass. All laws related to the running of the universe fall within the True Lord's domain, and these are not capable of disobeying His Will; as for His legislative commandments, the one who follows them will live in peace, and the one who disobeys them will surely suffer; either in this life or the afterlife.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an example of this in the story of Musa's (Moses') mother. He tells us that He inspired her to suckle him and that if she feared for him, then she must cast him into the river (*al-Qasas:* 7).

Our common sense might wonder, 'How can one tell a mother to cast her baby in the river if she feared for him? How can you save your son from a potential threat by sending him off to a certain death'? Though such behaviour goes against human nature, the mother of Musa (Moses) hastened to carry out Allah's order; for when Allah issues such orders—through inspiration—to those who are near and dear to Him, the human mind voices no objections. Just as the True Lord *Glorified is He* ordered her to cast her newborn into the waters, He also inspired her to place him in a cradle and throw it into the river. (*Ta Ha:* 38-39) The True Lord *Glorified is He* also ordered the water to bring the cradle carrying Musa (Moses) to the shore. Therefore, Musa's (Moses') mother knew with certainty that Allah's orders are never disobeyed, and this is what made her hasten to carry out what Allah had ordered her to do. The True Lord *Glorified is He* always wants to nurture and grow the faith of His servants. Imagine, then, if Allah passes some order, and then the universe did not carry out that order properly, what would people think?

Thus, since the Lord has issued an order, this order must necessarily come to pass. Likewise, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that His soldiers are indeed the ones who will be victorious, (*as-Saffat:* 173) then victory must necessarily go to the soldiers of Allah. But when they are defeated, then it must be that the conditions of being the 'soldier of Allah' are no longer fulfilled, and that one of the elements (such as obedience) has dropped from the equation.

For instance, remember those who disobeyed the Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* orders to maintain their position on the mountain during the Battle of Uhud? They had disobeyed the Prophet's order; so what would have been the case had they won that battle despite this disobedience? Consequently, the Muslims suffered defeat on that day because of those individuals in whom the quality of being 'soldiers of Allah' had been disrupted.

Both causes must coincide: the Quranic and the Cosmic because the author of the Quran is (at the same time) the Creator of the universe. So, when the people of Midyan hereby announced their disbelief, suffering had to befall them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* calls this suffering that befalls them *as-sayha* (literally, the shout or blast). Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...but a mighty blast struck the wrongdoers. By morning they lay dead in their homes.' (*Hud:* 94)

Elsewhere the True Lord *Glorified is He* calls the suffering that befell them *ar-rajfa* (the earthquake) which overtook them till they lay lifeless in their

very homes and right on the ground (al-A'raf: 91). In the story of the tribe of 'Ad, Allah inflicted them with a raging storm (al-Haqqa: 6). As for Qarun (Korah), Allah describes the torment He sent upon him as *alkhasf* (earth sinking). It is a testament to Allah's Greatness that the suffering befell the disbelievers only, and not those who attained to faith; as the True Lord Glorified is He says, '...in Our Mercy We saved Shu'aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers...' (Hud: 94). None is so capable except Allah, the fully Capable, and the One Who runs all the affairs as He wills. The word *najayna* comes from *najah* meaning the act of rescuing, or the condition of being rescued. But it is also related to the word najwa which means an elevated ground. The Arabs had come to experience, very early, how destructive the force of water can be since they used to live in Yemen and then they got scattered by the floods. The True Lord Glorified is He relates the story of the people of Sheba who had two vast expanses of gardens, to the right and the left, for which they thanked their Sustainer for His provisions. Then they turned away from Allah so He sent upon them a flood that destroyed their dams and turned their gardens into a couple of lands yielding bitter fruits, tamarisks and a few Lote trees (Saba': 15-16).

This is how the Arabs started spreading out from Yemen, and became scattered around the Arabian Peninsula. Still, they were fearful of water, even though it is the secret of life. They preferred to exert extra effort in finding drinking water—for themselves and their animals—rather than living close to a ready supply of water. From this primordial fear of water, originated the word *naja* meaning high ground. This word has been used in every situation wherein a man escapes any impending danger. Thus, one can say '*naja min an-nar*' (escaped fire) or '*naja min al-`adew*' (escaped the enemy) and '*naja min al-hayawan al-muftaris*' (escaped the predator); all derived from the word *najwa*—meaning, a high place. The word *naja* implies that the person is able to save himself from the danger depending on himself. But when a man is unable to depend solely on himself in escaping danger, he will surely need someone to save him. In each case the word *anjah* is used where a special effort is required to achieve deliverance.

In this verse, the doer is Allah and so He says *najayna*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses in this particular case the 'We' of divinity, like when He tells us, 'We sent it (the Quran) down on the Night of Glory.' (*al-Qadr:* 1)

The 'We' of divinity '*inna*' is used anywhere an action performed by the True Lord *Glorified is He* is involved. When the matter involves any of the attributes of His Divine Entity, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the first-person pronoun *ana* (I); for example, 'I am Allah...' (*Ta Ha:* 14) The True Lord *Glorified is He* saved Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his faithful followers because Shu'aib (Jethro) had said to his people, 'My people, do whatever is within your power, and I will do likewise...' (*Hud:* 93).

Shu'aib's (Jethro) endeavours where backed with a sincere intention and characterized by complete confidence in Allah. That is why Allah saved him and those who shared his faith; for all that Allah asks of His servants is that they turn toward Him with sincere intentions, and when his servants do so the True Lord Glorified is He relieves their anxiety and grants them the confidence to carry out any task. For the servant of Allah, the mere act of turning to Allah with full faith and sincerity opens horizons of success and eminence. The key is indeed in the servant's hand; for the True Lord Glorified is He has said in a Qudsi Hadith, 'Whosoever mentions Me (by name) to himself I will mention his name in a loftier assembly.<sup>(1)</sup> Indeed, it is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who says, 'He who draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length.' Thus, the True Lord Glorified is He leaves the question of drawing closer-to Him-to the servant. When the servant draws near to Allah, Allah Glorified is He draws near to the servant more. Then the True Lord Glorified is He says in the Qudsi Hadith, 'If he comes to Me walking, I go to him running<sup>(2)</sup> because walking can tire the servant, but nothing ever tires the True Lord Glorified is He; for He is transcendent of such things. Hence, the True Lord Glorified is He wishes that we purify our intentions when seeking His Company so that He may envelop us with the attributes of His Splendour and Beauty.

<sup>(1)</sup> The complete Hadith is as follows, 'I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he makes mention of Me. If he makes mention of Me to himself, I make mention of him to Myself; and if he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an assembly better than it. If he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length. If he comes to Me walking, I come to him running.' The Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra.

<sup>(2)</sup> Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7405) and by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/315); narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him

Look, for instance, how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, while he was in the cave with Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* saying to his companion not to grieve because Allah is with them (*at-Tawba:* 40). This means that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was telling his companion not to despair, for they are in the company of Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*. Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* must have said something that bespoke of his sorrow; and his sorrow did not spring from nothing, it was a very natural sorrow based on the laws of nature. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If any of them had just looked down at his feet, he would have seen us!' But the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was not worried about the laws of nature, when he said, 'What do you think of two (persons), the third of whom is Allah? <sup>(1)</sup>', he was referring to the (infinite) ability of the Creator. Thus, by being in the company of Allah, they became endowed with some of His Majesty and His Beauty; no human vision can encompass Him, but He encompasses all human vision.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* rescued Shu'aib (Jethro) and those who followed him out of His Mercy; the Mercy is in being unharmed. A man could get sick, take a medication, and then recover back to normal, or Allah can keep the illness away from him altogether. So, remember that the Quran came with a twofold topic: cure and mercy. If you get afflicted, and you refer it back to Allah's method, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will remove it. As for mercy, it is about not being afflicted in the first place.

Now we come to the unjust people who were overtaken by the mighty 'blast'; or as related in another verse were struck by the mighty blast (*Hud:* 67). Allah says, '...but a mighty blast struck the wrongdoers...' (*Hud:* 94). The whole language of the Quran came very close to the dialect of the tribe of Quraysh, and this was not intended to distinguish the tribe of Quraysh in any way; it was only because their dialect was purer than that of the rest of the Arab tribes. Their dialect incorporated the supreme articulacy of all the other neighbouring tongues. But this does not mean that we should belittle the other Arab tribes.

<sup>(1)</sup> Unanimously agreed upon authentic Hadith... Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4663) and by Muslim in his Sahih (2381); the Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him.

That is why the language of the Quran pays tribute to some of the dialects of the other tribes so as not to establish a leadership for Quraysh over Islam just because of the leadership it enjoyed over the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era. That is why we find the Quran exhibiting patterns from the different dialects of the Arabs at that time.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying, '...By morning they lay dead in their homes.' (*Hud:* 94) We notice that for every punishment, the True Lord *Glorified is He* sets a specific time, like setting the morning for the torment in the verses, (*Hud:* 81), or (*as-Saffat:* 177). The morning is the time when the punishment befalls those who are still light headed with sleep. Like the police forces who are dubbed 'dawn visitors' because they assault the houses at the early hours of the day.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'By morning they lay dead in their homes.' (*Hud:* 94) The word *diarihim* is pluralized to be broad enough to denote places other than the homes. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses this word—as opposed to *darihim* —to explain that some of them might not necessarily have been in their homes at that time, that they might have been visiting someone else or on a business trip.

For example, a man called Abu Raghal was in Mecca at the time, but the stones which slew him by Allah's will were hurled upon him not in Mecca but in Al-Biqa'. It was Allah's will that these stones would not be hurled in the sanctified sanctuary. As if the stones picked him, just as the mighty cry had picked the disbelievers from among the people of Midyan. We notice that in the last word of the verse—*jathimin*—when the letters *j* and *th* are combined—and notwithstanding what letters come after them—they convey the essence of 'destruction' and 'death'; with this very unusual musical or lyrical tone. The word *jathimin* means that they lied motionless on the floor, on their stomachs. Elsewhere, The True Lord *Glorified is He* also tells us that on Judgment Day we will see every nation kneeling on its knees (*al-Jathiya:* 28). A dead body is also called *al-juththa*.

Look at the greatness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* causing the people to utter the word *juththa* to describe any dead person whether the corpse is for a great man or a simple person. Then the corpse is then placed in the grave.

If you want to calm a grieving or agonized person who has just lost a loved one, ask him, 'Will you feel better if you kept his corpse with you for a week'? He will answer, 'No'. So, the instant Allah *Glorified is He* extracts the 'secret' which makes us human—this secret being the soul—the body becomes a mere corpse then decays and then turns to ash.

Describing those—from among the people of Midyan—who were overtaken by the mighty cry, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

## كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَأْ أَلَا بُعْدًا لِّمَدْيَنَكُمَا بَعِدَتْ تَمُودُ ٢

## as if they had never lived and flourished there. Yes, away with the people of Midyan, just like the Thamud! [95] (The Quran, *Hud:* 95)

This means that anyone who passes by the people of Midyan will feel as though they never existed, Elsewhere, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us how His punishment drops at the most unexpected time; when the earth has assumed its full beauty and adornment and when those who lived upon it believed they have gained mastery over it (*Yunus:* 24). Human civilization has reached a level where a man can pour himself a cup of coffee by the press of a button, but if Allah *Glorified is He* so wills, He can wipe out all that in the blink of an eye.

A human being may enjoy such a pleasant life by being served (by others or by machines); but it is nothing like paradise where a man's desires are instantly gratified the minute a thought crosses his mind. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'As if they had never lived and flourished there...' (*Hud:* 95). Now from the word *ghina* there are several derivatives; there is *al-ghina*` which is the singing performed by singers. There is also *Al-ghana*` which is something that makes you self-sufficient for example, having enough money not to need what other people have.

As for the word '*l-ghina*' (singing), we use this word because the ear hears a lot, and the eye reads a lot but a human being only repeats the speech which pleases him. The Same is with the singer who sings in a way which pleases him. So, *al-ghina*' is the sweet melody which leaves you without a need for any other.

*Al-ghana*` also means to reside in a place such that you have no need for going elsewhere; so you settle down in that place that suffices you.

Therefore, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'As if they had never lived and flourished there...' (*Hud:* 95), it means as if they had never even resided there in the first place; as if it did not leave them needless for going elsewhere.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us in another verse that some of the ruins would stay standing and some others would be mowed down (*Hud:* 100) meaning that the ruins had survived in the form of a few rocks, like the old pharaonic temples for instance. When you visit these temples, you never find them intact, rather, you find that while some pillars have remained upright, others have fallen over and lie on the ground, and you find ruined doors. Had they been all mowed down, they would have completely disappeared, but most of the pharaonic temples have survived in some form or another, while others have vanished without a trace. Here the Quranic content reaffirms the fact that there existed great civilizations in the past; for if these had all vanished, we would not have known that such civilizations existed long before our time.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...Yes, away with the people of Midyan, just like the people of Thamud!' (*Hud:* 95) The word '*ala* —as we have previously explained—is a linguistic device that serves as a prelude to a statement, or grasps the listener's attention, to be sure that he is not distracted and prepared to hear what will follow. The word *bu* '*daa* is not a request for the people of Midyan to go far away, for they had been, in effect, destroyed. The root of the word *bu* '*daa* consists of the letters *b* '*ud* and is used in two ways: the first implies parting—parting that assumes reunion at some point in the future. But, when it is certain that such a reunion will never happen, it will be followed, as in the following example by, '...just like the people of Thamud!' (*Hud:* 95) In this case, it implies that there will be no further reunion—at least not until the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings all people together on the day of Resurrection.

The poet says:

As they bury me they say do not go far,

but is there a place farther than where I am?

This is the 'distant' dimension where a human being goes to and never comes back. Why does the True Lord *Glorified is He* single out the tribe of Thamud, even though He says, '*ala bu*'*dan*' to many other peoples? Because the tribe of Thamud were also destroyed by the blast, so the means by which they were both punished coincides. Thus, the story of Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his people<sup>(1)</sup> comes to an end, and we notice that it overlaps with the times of other prophets such as Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; just as Lut's (Lot's) time overlapped with Ibrahim's (Abraham's) *peace be upon them*.

Thus, we learn that some prophets were contemporaries of each other, meaning that each was sent to a specific environment and a specific place. Since these messengers are all servants of Allah, every one of them was given a methodology that befits the specific moral defects prevalent in the societies to which they were sent . Ibrahim (Abraham) was Lut's (Lot) uncle, and Musa (Moses) was Shu`aib's (Jethro) son-in-law *peace be upon them all*. Musa (Moses) was sent to the people of Midyan even before Allah had sent him to Pharaoh's people.

We know that, in the old days, places used to be isolated from one another, and communication between them was difficult. Every community resided in its specific spot not knowing anything about the other communities. Hence, the moral and social defects were different from one community to the other.

Yet, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent forth Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the seal of prophets, the Lord knew beforehand that the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heralded the dawn of a new age of interconnectedness, where the various defects would be merged. Nowadays, whatever happens in one corner of the world reaches us via satellites in a few seconds; that is why the need for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was of the essence.

As for the multitude of prophets and their various stories in the Quran, there is no redundancy as the literalists would have it; the wisdom behind the mention of the stories of previous prophets in the Quran is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished to bolster Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* resolve.

<sup>(1)</sup> The people of Midyan.

These verses were revealed from Allah to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so as to correspond to specific instances where he found himself in need of reassurance. The True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to take note of his fellow prophets to remember what happened in their struggle with their people, and ultimately, the victory that Allah helped them achieve.

But when the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to relate an intricate and wholesome story he revealed the chapter of *Yusuf*. So, there is no redundancy in the Quran. Every scene was revealed to address a specific situation which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was going through. We notice that the story of Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his people could not but end with a reference to the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who was incidentally Shu'aib (Jethro) son-in-law.

We notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions two scenes from the story of Musa (Moses). The first scene is sending him with evident signs to Pharaoh. The second scene is the ultimate meeting of Pharaoh with, not Musa (Moses), but with the True Lord on Judgment Day. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that he will be at the forefront of his people on Judgment Day leading them down towards Hellfire; for they were all pursued by Allah's rejection in this life and hence will receive the same treatment on Judgment Day. (*Hud:* 98-99)

One of the roles of Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* was to keep Musa's (Moses') heart steadfast and help cure his anxiety. Musa (Moses) had told him that he was afraid from being killed by the people of Pharaoh since he had killed one of them. So, Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* told him (as mentioned in the chapter of *al-Qasas* not to worry and that he was now safe from these evildoing lowlifes. (*al-Qasas:* 25) So, he reassured him and prepared him to a life in which he would live in safety for eight, or even ten years. Allah relates to us how he offered one of his daughters to Musa (Moses) for marriage and how he asked him to remain for eight years in his service, or ten if he wanted to as an act of grace from him. He also told him that he will find him righteous in all his dealings. So, Musa (Moses) accepted the kind offer and requested from Shu'aib (Jethro) that whichever of the two terms he fulfils let there be no injustice against him, as Allah is there witness (*al-Qasas:* 27-28).

That was how, Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* played a role in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Here and there the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us that the pure, innate nature (of human beings) can deduce laws that often coincide with the laws of Allah. Allah does not prevent human minds from reaching the truth because we reach the truth after strenuous experience. See, for example, how the True Lord *Glorified is He* ordered the rules of divorce in Islam, and how other non-Muslim countries have now begun to appropriate these laws for their own societies after having suffered strenuously from the lack of it!

Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* made drinking alcohol forbidden, then, centuries later, science came forth and confirmed its bad effect on health. Should we have delayed the application of Allah's law for all that time that it took the human mind to reach this conclusion? No, because the Quran is the revealed law of Allah which when applied, will save us the troubles of strenuous and life-wasting experiences because He Who has revealed the Quran has also created us and is our trustworthy guardian. Time has proved the wisdom of the laws of Allah that even those who do not believe in the Quran have come to adopt and apply some of its laws; out of experience.

The story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is a clear example of the True Lord's Will, for here was the disbelieving Pharaoh who adopts baby Musa (Moses)—after having found him on the riverbank—in the hopes that he will grow up to become a dear son to him. This is despite the fact the Pharaoh was killing all the baby boys born to that class of society. Then Musa's (Moses') sister recognizes her brother, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* reunited Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with his mother.

A poet describes this scene saying:

If your child is not in the care of Allah,

Then your yearning has been betrayed and your hopes disappointed,

For the Musa<sup>(1)</sup> who was raised by Gabriel turned a disbeliever,

And the Musa who was raised by Pharaoh turned a Messenger

<sup>(1)</sup> Musa the Samaritan who saw the archangel Gabriel *peace be upon him* disobeyed the commandments of his Lord, and was exiled and destined to great suffering; contrary to Musa the Messenger *peace be upon him*.

The story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was briefed, both in the beginning and in the end, because the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to show us that Shu`aib (Jethro) had a role to play alongside one of the prophets of 'great determination'— Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

Before his revelation, Musa's (Moses) destination was the wells of Midyan, and it is this episode that offers us a cure to the problems of both sexes –men and women –it is based on gender issues that Islamic societies are most criticized because some people want the woman to do her best in exposing herself to seduce men at an age where their interest in women is at the peak.

But the Quran cures this problem for us during this brief episode. The True Lord Glorified is He tells us how Musa (Moses) peace be upon him arrived to Midyan and he first saw a large group of men watering their flocks and beside them were two women keeping their flocks back, so he asked them what was the matter with them. (al-Qasas: 23) They were keeping their cattle from the water; and this was the scene which captivated Musa (Moses) peace be upon him. So, it was only natural for him to ask: did you two not come here to water your cattle?! They told him that they did come to water their flock but that they won't be able to do it until the men leave, and that they are weak and their father is a very old man (al-Qasas: 23). Thus, we learn that the reason why the girls left their house and gone out into the world was because the father was an old man. We also learn that the reason that caused them to leave their house does not make engage in pushing and shoving around the waterhole. They only did what was necessary without excess, so they had to wait until all the other cattle had been watered. In fact, they kept a respectable distance, and that is why Musa (Moses) peace be upon him stepped up and carried out his role as a man, and watered their flock for them (al-Qasas: 24).

Such is the prerogative of the community of faith at large. It is not simply the prerogative of a specific tribe, or the prerogative of an acquaintance or the prerogative of a family member. Rather, it is the prerogative of the community of faith at large. When someone sees that a woman has left her house and gone out into the world, he knows that necessity compelled her to do so, and so a Muslim man must do what he can to help her go about her business. I remember when I went to Mecca in 1950; my friend pulled over the car in front of a house and stepped out of the car right in front of the house's gate. There was a wooden board in front of it that had on it some dough loaves which had not been baked. So, he took them to the bakery, and then returned with them to that same door after they had been baked. He turned to me and said: this is common tradition among the people of Mecca. If a person finds unbaked loaves of dough (in front of a door), he should take them to be baked because this means that the man of the house is not present. This wisdom is taken from the lesson of Musa who watered the flock for the girls whose father (man of the house) was too old (*al-Qasas:* 24).

`Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* used to order his soldiers to knock on people's doors and ask what they needed. The third and most important matter is that the woman who leaves her house and goes out (into the world) to perform some task must not get used to this type of life. Rather, she must only perform what is necessary, and if she finds an opportunity to fulfil her needs, she must quickly seize it (without delay). This was why the young maiden told her father Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* to hire Musa (Moses since the best one to hire is always the strong and trustworthy (*al-Qasas:* 26).

Then, Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* concludes this episode in a wise and resolute manner. He offered one of his daughters to Musa (Moses) for marriage and asked him to remain for eight years in his service, or ten if he wanted to, as an act of grace from him (*al-Qasas:* 27). This means that Shu'aib (Jethro) was not just marrying off his daughters without a dowry. No, there had to be a dowry for her. This offer also meant that marrying her sister would be unlawful to Musa<sup>(1)</sup>.

This story lays out the principles which address most of the criticisms levelled at Islam by its enemies. We now hear modernizers from the West asking that the woman remain at home to care for her family and children; not because a woman is deficient in any way but because she achieves her utmost potential when she is performing her most noble role—raising her children.

<sup>(1)</sup> Marrying two sisters is temporarily unlawful and the unlawfulness ceases once its causes cease to exist (if the wife is divorced and after she completes her waiting term, or if the wife dies). The evidence to this is mentioned in (*an-Nisa*': 23).

We know that human beings undergo the longest period of childhood compared to other creatures, and children who grow up under the care of a dedicated mother turn out to be better than those who are not. This is what we learn from the story of Shu`aib (Jethro), and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*.

Next, the True Lord Glorified is He says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَى بِحَايَنِتِنَا وَسُلْطَنٍ مُّبِينٍ (")

## We also sent Moses, with Our signs and clear authority [96] (The Quran, *Hud:* 96)

The signs that are mentioned in the Quran fall into one of three categories. First, the universal signs which everyone can witness like the turning of day and night, the sun and the moon, the stars and the submissiveness of the earth, which rises and flourishes when water pours down upon it. All these universal signs captivate the minds and lead to the realization that behind this intricately engineered universe there is a Fully-Capable Creator. There are other signs whose purpose is to attest to the sincerity of any prophet conveying Allah's message to his people—these are the miracles, such as Thamud's clairvoyant she-camel, and 'Isa's (Jesus's) ability to heal the blind and the lepers, by Allah's will.

Then there are signs which articulate the commandments of the religious methodology—namely, the directive 'do' and 'do not'. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* has says, 'We also sent Musa, with Our signs and clear authority.' (*Hud:* 96) So, there are signs that prove his sincerity, supported with a clearly manifest power. Either this power can be a forceful, compelling one or it can be a power that wins over the minds through persuasive argument. This mighty power might be able to defeat most people outwardly, but it has no power over the hearts, and Allah *Glorified is He* is interested in the core, not the outward crust. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to be tormented with sadness to the point of almost dying out of grief because of those who refuse to believe. Had Allah willed it, He would have sent down upon them a miracle from the skies that would compel their necks to bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 2-4).

Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* requests sincere and reverent hearts; not an outwardly compliant crust. He requests the hearts to worship Allah by their own free will. So, the most important dominion is the dominion of persuasive argument, since it persuades a human being to act... and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not possess the dominion of power, he possessed the dominion of persuasive argument. The True Lord *Glorified is He* relays to us how he went to Pharaoh and told him that he is an apostle from the Sustainer of all the worlds, and that he cannot say anything about Allah except the truth. He also added that he came to him with clear signs and requested him to let the Israelites leave with him (*al-A'raf:* 104-105). But the Pharaoh asked him to show any of those signs to prove his truthfulness and to this, Musa (Moses) threw down his staff and it turned into a plainly visible serpent. He also drew his hand from his pocket and it appeared so white and flawless to the viewers (*al-A'raf:* 106-108).

The whiteness of Musa's (Moses) hand was subjective but it was also unforeseen. It was not due to some skin disease like vitiligo because Allah points out that Musa's hand came out 'white' and 'flawless' (*Ta Ha:* 22). As for Musa's (Moses's) staff, its transformation into a serpent was the reason which prompted Pharaoh to bring out the sorcerers so that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could defeat them in full view of Pharaoh and his elite. What happened next was that the sorcerers became followers of Musa (Moses) and they all became believers in the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*.

We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* had sent Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* forth with nine signs: 1) The staff which transformed into a serpent and devoured what the sorcerers had concocted, 2) the white and flawless hand, 3) the catastrophic years which befell Pharaoh's people, 4) the decline in population and agricultural production till the lands became so barren that no food could be planted, and the fortunes were lost leading to famine, 5) the unleashing of floods, 6) the swarms of locusts, 7) the lice, 8) the frogs and 9) the blood. These are the nine 'signs' which the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent to the people of Pharaoh because of their refusal to believe in the message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

There are also other signs which the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent to the people of Musa (Moses) through Musa (Moses) himself. These are the

suspension of the mountain, the splitting of the sea with the staff, the striking of the rock wherefrom twelve springs gushed forth, and finally the descent of the tablets with the Torah. The nine 'signs' mentioned earlier refer to the sings with which Musa (Moses) was sent forth to Pharaoh whereas the latter signs occurred after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had left the land of Egypt, or during his exodus; like the parting of the seas with the staff.

What proves the special nature of the story of Musa (Moses) is that he had two messages (to deliver): the first of these was to Pharaoh, and the second was to the Israelites. Thus, we note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* informs us —at the end of the chapter—about the disagreement that came between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Israelites (*Hud:* 110). So, the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Israelites took place after Musa (Moses) had been brought the book; the Torah. But in this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is speaking about the 'signs' which occurred earlier when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was confronting Pharaoh, 'We also sent Musa (Moses), with Our signs and clear authority.' (*Hud:* 96) '*Sultan mubin*' means an all-encompassing dominion which leaves the enemy with no room to manoeuvre or escape.

Then the True Lord Glorified is He says:

إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَإِيْهِ فَأَنَّعُوٓا أَمَّرَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَا أَمْرُ فِرْعَوْنَ بِرَشِيدٍ ٧

### To Pharaoh and his supporters, but they followed Pharaoh's orders, and Pharaoh's orders were misguided [97] (The Quran, *Hud:* 97)

The word *al-mala*` refers to those who 'fill' the eyes. In other words those who are the center of attention, and are always the head of every assembly, One says, '*fulan mil*` *al-`ayn*', meaning that people's eyes are constantly focused on him because he is a celebrity. Thus, *al-mala*` refers to the great ones among the community; the elite. Usually, they are also the ones who reassure the tyrant that it is acceptable for him to belittle his subjects. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us how Pharaoh incited his entourage to levity, and how they obeyed him because they were depraved (*az-Zukhruf:* 54).

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about Pharaoh and his entourage, we find the He sets the entourage on one hand, and Pharaoh on the other. Then He also sets Pharaoh on one hand, and Pharaoh's people on the other. This means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* deals with each one of these three parties in a different way, Here Allah explains how the entourage followed Pharaoh's orders—his directives which the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes as, '…and Pharaoh's orders were misguided.' (*Hud:* 97) At the opposite of *ar-rushd* (guidance) comes *al-ghay* (misguidance) which means that Pharaoh's entourage did not scrutinize his directives carefully. For if they had thought it over carefully, they would have never followed these orders. The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains to us why Pharaoh's orders were by no means guided. He also reminds us of what is to become of him and his people (who followed him); Allah says:

## يَقَدُمُ قَوْمَهُ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيكَمَةِ فَأَوْرَدَهُمُ ٱلنَّارَ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْوِرْدُ ٱلْمَوْرُودُ ٢

### He will be at the forefront of his people on the Day of Resurrection, leading them down towards the Fire. What a foul drinking place to be led to! [98] (The Quran, *Hud:* 98)

The root of the word *yaqdum* contains the letters 'q', 'd' and 'm'. When this root is used either in written or verbal forms, it indicates 'direct confrontation'. Thus, to say *qadam qawm* means that these people are all moving in one direction with their leader at the vanguard. Therefore, from this verse we understand that the entourage and elite had followed Pharaoh and that the people at large had followed Pharaoh and the entourage. Since they had (all) followed his lead in this world, they must also follow his lead in the afterlife. Allah relates to us clearly that He shall gather them and the devils together and set them on their knees around Hell. Then, He shall seize out of each group those who were most disobedient towards the Lord of Mercy, and that He knows best who most deserves to burn in Hell (*Maryam:* 68-70).

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will seize out of each group the most disobedient bullies, and then He will cast them in hellfire, for He knows best who is more deserving of hellfire. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also tells us that every single one of *us* will approach hellfire, and that this is a decree from our Lord

which must be fulfilled. But He shall save the devout and leave the evildoers there on their knees (*Maryam:* 71-72). In the verse (*Maryam:* 71), the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the word (*minkum* - us) and not (*minhum* - them) which mean that we are all addressed, not just the disbelievers apart from the believers.

But in the verse we are explaining the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…leading them down towards the Fire. What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98). When the Noble Book of Allah—which is the book revealed in a clear Arabic tongue—speaks of *al-wurud* in the verse (*Maryam:* 71), the term Allah uses signifies reaching the water, but not drinking from it. Had He wanted to include drinking from the water as well, He would have used the word *wird*; like in the verse we are explaining now. That is why, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98) meaning that they will feel miserable after seeing the water of Hell. Then they will drink from it. Therefore, the word *al-wird* is used to signify the act of drinking from a body of water. The word can also be used about those who move eagerly towards the water to drink from it. That is why the same term is used when Allah tells us that He will drive those who were lost in sin unto hell as a thirsty herd is driven to a well (*Maryam:* 86).

The pre-Islamic poet Zuhir ibn Abu Salma says:

Thus, when we came upon a body of blue water,

We laid down the staffs of (those in our) caravan.

Here, the poet is describing how the people of the caravan—upon seeing the pure, blue waters—laid down their walking sticks. It was customary in the old days for people to carry walking sticks when they walked. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to Allah, when He asked him about his staff, that he leans on it, uses it in herding the sheep and that he has many other uses for it (*Ta Ha:* 18).

Another poet says:

So, she set down her staff and settled upon her destination,

Like a traveller happy to come back to his abode.

Once the travelers saw 'blue' water, this would mean that the water is not stagnant, or polluted. We know that water is transparent and that, technically

speaking, it has no colour. However, the attribute of being 'blue' is ascribed to it when it is free of pollutants, crystal-clear and reflective of the blue sky. So, what the poet is describing is that moment when the travelers arrived at this clear water, so they stopped and began setting up their camp.

Thus, we learn that *al-worud* signifies the act of moving towards water without drinking from it. Coming across the water lifts the souls with happiness and joy, but then we drink from the water to quench our thirst and hydrate all the organs of our bodies. But, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98)

This constitutes serious mockery because – when Pharaoh and his people will perceive the water they, will feel happy that their thirst will soon be quenched, but when they drink from the waters of hellfire, they will find it foul. First they will drink from it and then the will be filled with misery. Elsewhere Allah tells us that even when they beg for water, they will be given scalding water like molten lead which will scald their faces (*al-Kahf:* 29). In this latter verse, Allah uses the word *yughathu* (succoured) giving them a false impression that they will be succoured only to end up with the misery of the mocking truth in the form of water as hot as molten lead.

Imagine, for example, if someone invited you to the most delicious and gourmet foods. After you wash your hands, that person proposes desserts, and so you feel hopeful that it must be even better than what you ate. But your host tells the cook to mix hot chili with the desserts, and your mouth is set on fire. Is this not making fun of you? The True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about this water as if it is going to be a cool relief, but upon drinking it (their) insides will be on fire. In addition, the food eaten by the people in hellfire will have the same effect. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that their food will be nothing but filth (*al-Haqqa:* 36). Thus, one disaster becomes a multitude of disasters.

Some people have understood the verse (*Maryam:* 71) to mean that we shall all go to hellfire. They forgot that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says just in the verse before it that He knows best as to which of them is most deserving of hellfire. (*Maryam:* 70) which means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* will present the scenes of hellfire to everyone. So, when the believers see the blazing fire, and are held back from it, they will know that it is their faith

that saved them from it and they will praise Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* and thank him for saving them from it.

After this, the True Lord Glorified is He says:

وَأُتَّبِعُوا فِي هَاذِهِ - لَعُنَةَ وَيَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَامَةَ بِئُسَ ٱلرِّفْدُ ٱلْمَرْفُودُ ١

They were pursued by God's rejection in this life and will be on the Day of Resurrection, too. What a foul gift to be given! [99] (The Quran, *Hud:* 99)

This means that this rejection persists, and that we Muslims have been, and are still, rejecting them until they come face to face with the great rejection of the Day of Resurrection, 'What a foul gift to be given!' (*Hud:* 99) Now the word *ar-rifd* means 'gift', so can this rejection really be considered a gift in the hereafter? This, in fact, is another mockery (a very bitter one). Just like when He says, 'What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98)

Then He says:

ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَآءِ ٱلْقُرَىٰ نَقُصُهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنْهَا قَآبِهُ وَحَصِيلاً ()

## We relate to you [Muhammad] such accounts of earlier towns: some of them are still standing; some have been mown down [100] (The Quran, *Hud*: 100)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has obliterated those past communities with His punishment because they had rejected their prophets. Such a verse is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to comfort him and to give him courage. The True Lord *Glorified is He* shows him that the disbelievers shall not elude the suffering just as the peoples of earlier times were punished by Allah.

The True Lord's words, 'We relate to you' (*Hud:* 100) urge us to distinguish between the popular meaning of the word '*qasas*' and its true meaning. Some people say that the Quran contains stories which, like many other stories, are dramatized for the sake of a catchy narrative. We say to these people: you have not grasped what the word *qissa* 'story' means in the Arabic language

because, in our language, this word means being literally factual about every little detail of the events relayed.

In fact, this word is taken from the word *qass al-athar* which means to follow the tracks of someone or something until one arrives to the desired destination. Therefore, the story (*al-Qasas*) of the Quran contains factual events only. As for the popular concept of the word *qasas*, on which ensue fictional events and characters, these are called *ruwayat* (tales or fables), not *qasas*. The stories of destroying the disbelieving communities represent admonitions for the people, if only they would heed them. People know that the stories which the Quran relates are real and are corroborated by the ruins of the perished civilizations which have kept nothing behind but a few scattered rocks and carved tombstones.

The remnants of ancient civilizations contain some, still erect, carved pillars, and other fallen ones. According to another verse, the Lord says, 'Verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138), i.e. you witness their remnants; some are still standing and others have been left in complete disarray. Regarding these ancient communities, the Lord says,

## وَمَا ظَلَمْنَهُمْ وَلَكِن ظَلَمُوَا أَنفُسَهُمَ فَمَا أَغْنَتْ عَنْهُمْ ءَالِهَتُهُمُ ٱلَّتِي يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَهِ مِن شَيْءٍ لَّمَّا جَآءَ أَمْ رَبِّكَ وَمَا زَادُوهُمْ غَيْرَ تَنْبِيبِ (")

## We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves. Their gods, which they called on beside God, were no use to them when what your Lord had ordained came about; they only increased their ruin[101] (The Quran, *Hud:* 101)

The Lord explains that when He destroyed these people, He did them no *zhulm* (injustice). *Zhulm* designates the violation of rights of anyone or acting unjustly against them. Those nations disbelieved in Allah and consequently received their due punishment. They did themselves injustice by setting up associates besides Allah. They belied all prophets who had come forth with irrefutable proof of the legitimacy of their prophecy and messages. The disbelievers wronged themselves. Evidently, the Lord never wrongs anyone.

When they associated others with Allah in Divinity, why did these supposed deities fail to act on behalf of their subjects and protect them?! The Lord tells us that the rocks they worshipped curse them. Those disbelieving souls were destined for hell and their rock-gods shall be fuel for their punishment. The Lord mentions the Hereafter saying, 'Then be conscious of the fire whose fuel is human beings and stones which awaits all who deny the truth!' (al-Baqara: 24) The people—who unreasonably worship equal human beings or idols—have deteriorated into a demonic ignorance and let themselves be obsessed with those human beings or stones which they venerated and prayed to. A Muslim poet once compared the caves of Hira'a and Thawr-both are made out of rock—and found that the cave of Hira'a witnessed the descent of revelation to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him while the cave of Thawr had the honour of protecting the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him during his emigration from Mecca to Medina, when he sought refuge there with his companion Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him. The poet muses at how the cave of Thawr had envied the cave of Hira'a, saying:

How we envied Hira'a when we saw the trustworthy Spirit pervading you with lights

Well Hira'a and Thawr do currently stand equal and intercede for the community of stones

The cave of Hira'a had witnessed the descent of the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* when he brought the Revelation (from Allah) to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. However, the cave of Thawr also earned its prestige for having protected the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* during his emigration. The poet puts these words into the mouths of the [idolized] stones:

They worshiped us while we are sincere slaves of Allah,

Standing for prayers at the late part of night

They ignorantly alleged that we are gods

As did with the son of Maryam (Mary) and the pure ones

For the extreme wrongdoers their punishment,

But the falsely worshiped innocent ones will receive the Forgiving Lord's Mercy

They derive no good whatsoever from their idols, be they human or mineral. The idols were powerless to protect them from the world's sufferings and will be powerless to protect their subjects from the hellfire of the hereafter. If those people had venerated idols in lieu of Allah, the idols certainly did not come to their succour when they were punished. The Lord concludes this blessed verse by saying, '...and brought them no more than utter perdition' (*Hud*: 101), i.e. the idols, which they had set up as associates with Allah and worshipped instead of Allah, denied them. This desertion causes them even more psychological trauma because—in addition to 'perdition', the word '*tatbeeb*' denotes being 'marooned' and 'cut-off'. The Lord says, 'Doomed are the hands of him of the glowing countenance, and doomed is he!' (*al-Masad:* 1) In a similar way, Allah has dealt with the people who rejected their prophets. That is why the Lord follows up with the following verse:

## وَكَذَلِكَ أَخُذُ رَبِّكَ إِذَا أَخَذَ ٱلْقُرَىٰ وَهِي ظَلِمَةً إِنَّ أَخُذَهُ أَلِيمُ شَدِيدُ ١

## Such is the punishment of your Lord for towns in the midst of their sins: His punishment is terrible and severe [102] (The Quran, *Hud*: 102)

The way in which Allah dealt with the disbelieving communities, represents a warning to anyone who would disbelieve [i.e. they are in imminent danger of suffering the same fate]. The Lord says, 'Consider the daybreak and the ten nights! Consider the multiple and the One! Consider the night as it runs its course! Considering all this – could there be, to anyone endowed with reason, a [more] solemn evidence of the truth?' (*al-Fajr:* 1-5) Here, the Lord swears by these things. As such, those endowed with sound minds might realise the absolute necessity of having faith. Allah then cites some examples of the past perished nations, 'Are You not aware of how Your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] `Ad, [the people of] Aram—the many-pillared? 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] tent-poles [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein; and therefore Your Lord is ever on the

watch!' (*al-Fajr:* 6-14) Allah overcame and destroyed those sinful nations, as He is the Almighty and the Omnipotent.

Allah then says, 'And such is...' (Hud: 102), i.e. in the same way that the other nations were destroyed, the nations that denied their prophets and wronged themselves met the same end. Akhdh designates punishment for actual crimes. See how Allah relieved Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) peace be upon him and saved him from the punishment that the rest of his tribe suffered because of their injustices. Man is essentially pure and innocent. It is human actions which incur punishment. For example, when Allah told Prophet Nuh (Noah) peace be upon him 'Behold, he was not of your family; for, verily, he was unrighteous in his conduct' (Hud: 46). What put Nuh's (Noah's) son in this situation was his unrighteous conduct? That is why Nuh (Noah) should not say that he is my son. Punishment does not depend on one's personality, one's bloodline, or family. It is the concomitant of one's actions. For example, if somebody drinks alcohol, you would not hate him, but you hate his sins. When it comes to prophets, progeny is not determined according to biological criteria; it rather depends on works. We find that the Lord warns Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him against supplicating for all of his progeny. The Lord blessed Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him after trying him, 'And When Ibrahim (Abraham) was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them, [Allah] said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people." Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him then implored his Lord, 'And of my descendants?' [Allah] said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers," (al-Bagara: 124) Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him wished that the leadership continues through his bloodline. In response, Allah says, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers' (al-Bagara: 124). This matter remained at the centre of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) peace be upon him consciousness. He came to know that, for prophets, progeny is not determined by bloodline but by actions. That is why Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him uttered the following supplications after leaving his family in a barren valley, 'O my Lord! Make this a land secure and grant its people fruitful sustenance' (al-Bagara: 126). Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him then added, 'such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day' (al-Bagara: 126). Then the Lord points out Ibrahim's (Abraham's) misjudgement. Simply, sustenance is a grace bestowed by the

Lord equally on the believers and disbelievers, obedient and disobedient. Do not confuse the Lord's sustenance to all human beings and His Divine Graces; the grace of the Lordship is for all whereas the grace of worship is a duty for humankind. The Lord says, '[Allah] answered, "And whoever shall deny the truth, him will I let enjoy himself for a short while – but in the end, I shall drive him to suffering through fire: and how vile a journey's end!"" (*al-Baqara:* 126)

O Ibrahim (Abraham)! You uttered a supplication for the sustenance of the believers, because your fervent emotions prevented you from deep reflection on the issue. There is a difference between the Gracious Divine Blessings involving Allah's Commands and the natural sustenance of Allah as the Lord and Creator. A disbeliever receives the sustenance from the Lord. He can enjoy worldly pleasures for a short while, but in the hereafter they will be held to account. Therefore, the Lord calls the unjust accountable for their disbelief. He deals with them justly and punishes them for their transgressions. The severe punishment depends upon the severity of the crime. Evidently, the Divine punishment consists with the Power and Might of the Omnipotent Lord. Punishment is a sign of Divine Justice; those who proved unjust to themselves and committed the gravest sin, i.e. disbelief. Doing injustice to oneself or others is sinful; when the Lord makes it unlawful for you to wrong others, He has also implicitly made it unlawful for you to wrong yourself. The Lord describes His dealing with the unjust as follows, 'Verily, His punishing grasp is grievous [and] severe!' (Hud: 102)

The pain of His punishment is proportional with His Attribute as the Omnipotent. Imagine that one person wrongs another. In this case, the True Lord has made it lawful for the victim to respond in kind to placate irritating sentiments and pressures. The Lord says, 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack, respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you' (*an-Nahl:* 126). In this manner, your bitter feelings do not fester inside you. For those who have a strong willpower and self-domination, they must look to the Lord's words, 'Those who hold in check their anger' (*Al-'Imran:* 134). There are two possible options; you may retaliate for a wrong in kind or you may suppress your anger in which case you do not translate your bitterness into retaliatory actions. Or else, one may transcend to the highest degree of virtue and forgive the wrongdoer; Allah loves those who exhibit the quality of forbearance.

When they asked Al-Hasan Al-Basri, "How does a person show kindness towards the one who has wronged them?" In response, he said, "If a servant of Allah wrongs you, will that not anger the Lord?" They said, "Yes." He said, "When Allah is angry with the person who wronged you, will [the Lord] not stand by your side? Will you not then be kind to them who caused the Lord to stand by your side?" That is why it is said that when one of the righteous men heard that a person had backbitten him, he offered him and his servants a platter of fresh dates. Whereupon, the servant asked in astonishment: why are you gifting him dates when he has slandered you? The knower of Allah replied: convey my gratitude to him, for by slandering me he has gifted me with his good deeds; such charity on his part is, doubtless, worth far more than these dates. It is said that he who forgives is wiser than he who punishes; he who punishes can only punish in measure of his own strength. Whoever chooses to forgive leaves the punishment to be carried out by the Lord whose strength is infinite.

It is in this manner that we understand the Lord's words, 'And such is Your Lord's punishing grasp whenever He takes to task any community that is given to evildoing. Verily, His punishing grasp is grievous [and] severe!' (*Hud:* 102) The severity of Allah's punishment is as great as is His Power. The *shiddah* (severity) designates the act of joining two things together insomuch that it is difficult to break them up and it is almost impossible to separate one from the other. In short, it is the most powerful knot of power.

The True Lord then says:

## إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَأَيَةً لِمَنْ خَافَ عَذَابَ ٱلْأَخِرَةِ ذَلِكَ يَوَمُّ تَجَمُوُمُ لَمُ ٱلنَّاسُ وَذَلِكَ يَوْمُ مَّشْهُودٌ <sup>(1)</sup>

## There truly is a sign in this for anyone who fears the punishment of the Hereafter. That is a Day in which all people will be gathered together, a Day for all to see [103] (The Quran, *Hud:* 103)

The verse relates the account of past nations and emphasizes—for those who fear the Day of Judgment—the need for faith and belief in the reckoning

of human beings for their faith and deeds. He who hears the accounts of past nations and wisely reflects on the lessons contained therein is endowed with insightful vision. The life of past nations represents important signs for us. It is said that 'every verse begets new children-namely, the lessons drawn from it'. Therefore, he who has no faith will never benefit from the messages [provided by these verses]. The Lord says, 'But [then] – how many a sign is there in the heavens and on earth which they pass by [unthinkingly] and on which they turn their backs!' (Yusuf: 105). The Lord willed us to note these signs and draw lessons from them. As such, we might be among those who contemplate and will hopefully avoid being among those who have no fear of punishment. These bereft people endure disgraceful suffering in this world and suffer the endless punishment of hellfire in the Hereafter. That disgrace is witnessed by all of Allah's creatures. The Lord says, 'That Day on which all mankind shall be gathered together – that Day [of Judgment] which shall be witnessed [by all that ever lived]' (Hud: 103). The scandalous shame of that day will be seen by all human beings from Adam peace be upon him to the very last human being. The humiliation will be witnessed, not only by those people who used to know the person, but also by everyone else. The Lord says, 'That Day on which all mankind shall be gathered together' (Hud: 103). The word majmu' (gathered) requires 'someone who gathers', for the numbers of the gathered people depends on the power of the one who gathers them-the Lord and the Creator of the universe. On that day humankind will be gathered awake and attentive. The Lord says, 'He but grants them respite until the Day when their eyes will stare in horror' (Ibrahim: 42).

The Lord also says, 'The while the true promise [of resurrection] draws close [to its fulfilment]. But then, lo! The eyes of those who [in their lifetime] were bent on denying the truth will stare in horror' (*al-Anbiya':* 97). In this instance, the Lord says, 'That Day [of Judgment] which shall be witnessed [by all that ever lived]' (*Hud:* 103). In other words, all the creation shall be witness to the dishonourable scandal of those who did not consider the 'signs.' Regarding this fateful Day, the Lord says:

وَمَانُؤَخِرُهُ إِلَّا لِأَجَلِ مَّعَدُودٍ (

#### We are delaying it only for a specified period [104] (The Quran, *Hud:* 104)

We learn that if the coming Day of Judgment is delayed, it does not mean that the day will not come. It will absolutely come, but every event has its appointed time. The fact that carious events follow each other in succession proves that the appointed time of events is determined by Allah. The Lord says, 'and which we shall not delay beyond a term set [by us]' (*Hud:* 104). To understand these words, we must know that *al-ajal* refers to the span of human life from birth to death. The Lord says, 'Every age has had its fixed record' (*ar-Ra'd:* 38). *Al-ajal* is also used to denote the 'final moment' and the 'term-limit'. The Lord says, '...and when [the end of] their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it' (*al-A'raf:* 34). Let us realise that any affixed time—no matter how long—is always limited. As such, any duration of time, in reality, is short even though it might seem long. Finally, any finite period of time is ultimately short.

Then the Lord says:

يَوْمَ يَأْتِ لَا تَكَلَّمُ نَفْشُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ فَمِنْهُمْ شَعِّيٌّ وَسَعِيدٌ ١

## And when that Day comes, no soul will speak except by His permission, and some of them will be wretched and some happy [105] (The Quran, *Hud:* 105)

The Lord brings everyone together under a single verdict. Thus, when Allah says, '...not a soul will speak...' (*Hud:* 105), it means that no soul shall speak unless Allah permits it to do so. During their life on earth, they had been speaking freely since Allah had granted them the power to speak and graced them with faculties and senses. The Lord had created human bodily organs and had given human beings the power to control them. The Lord also wishes that a select number of His creatures to stand witnesses to His Power to deprive some of these organs and faculties. For example, you find a mute person who cannot speak, a paralyzed person who cannot move, or a blind

person who cannot see. For human beings, these examples reinforce the plain truth that all that human control over bodily organs is a gift bestowed upon them from Allah. These capabilities are not innate to them. When the Lord says, 'When that Day comes, not a soul will speak, unless it be by His leave' (*Hud:* 105), He explains to us the true meaning of why, during our tenure on earth, our organs are placed under our command—for they are subject to our will. It is, indeed, the Divine Will that puts these organs under human control. No one ever speaks outside this general leave—the leave which allows our organs to subject to our will. To be sure, Allah could retract this permission such that our organs will no longer react to our will. For example, the Lord says:

- 'None will speak but he to whom the Most Gracious will have given leave and [everyone] will say [only] what is right. (*an-Naba*': 38)
- '[Since it will be too late,] they will turn upon one another, demanding of each other [to relieve them of the burden of their past sins].' (*as-Saffat:* 27)
- 'That Day on which they will not [be able to] utter a word, nor be allowed to proffer excuses!' (*al-Mursalat:* 35-36)
- '[Be conscious, then, of] the Day when every human being shall come to plead for himself [alone].' (*an-Nahl:* 111)
- 'And halt them [there]! [And then,] behold, they shall be asked.' (*as-Saffat:* 24)

Some might think that it is a contradiction in the Quranic verses. Some verses permit speaking and others deny the power of speech. In reply, we need to understand that the kind of speech that those miserable souls will utter on the Day of Judgment. Some will utter useless and irrelevant sophistry, e.g. accusing one another of evildoing. The Quran describes that scene, 'They who [in their life on Earth] were bent on denying the truth will [thereupon] exclaim, "O our Lord! Show us those of the invisible beings and humans that have led us astray: we shall trample them underfoot" (*Fussilat:* 29). This kind of talk does not in any way benefit the speaker. Therefore, only the useful and beneficial speech is forbidden for them. The ranks of different

souls are different on the Day of Resurrection. There is a time when they are talking and another when they are brought to account, at which point they are dumbfounded and speechless. The Lord then orders the organs and human limbs to speak and testify against them. The Lord distinguishes between two different types of human conditions: He says in the concluding part of the verse, 'some will be wretched and some, happy' (*Hud:* 105). Allah uses nouns to describe the permanence of wretchedness and happiness. The Lord goes into further detail and describes the conditions of those destined to suffering and misery and those set for happiness. He then shifts from the use of nouns to verbs as follows:

## فَأَمَا ٱلَّذِينَ شَقُوا فَفِي ٱلنَّارِ لَمُمْ فِبِهَا زَفِيرٌ وَشَهِيقٌ ٢

# The wretched ones will be in the Fire, sighing and groaning [106] (The Quran, *Hud:* 106)

Those who condemned themselves to misery by straying from the path of Allah will be reunited in their misery, but [in the end] they shall enter Hellfire individually or in groups. The Lord says, 'And those who were bent on denying the truth will be urged on in throngs towards hell.' (*az-Zumar:* 71) In another verse, Allah says, 'Every time a host enters [the fire], it will curse its fellow-host' (*al-A'raf:* 38). Thus, we learn that the disbelievers—since their description is fixed—are miserable. At the moment when they enter hellfire, they enter it as individuals. Indeed, they accompany the sinful Muslims who have disobeyed the Divine Orders and every one of them receives their punishment according to the sins and the transgressions they did. Each one suffers misery in proportion with their sins. They share misery, even if their suffering varies in nature and quantity according to their sins. Towards no one does the Lord act unjustly!

The Lord uses the verb *shaqu* (brought wretchedness) to emphasize the fact that it was they who chose misery and brought wretchedness upon themselves. The Lord has created His servants and given them freewill to choose. He revealed His Message for them to nurture their souls. For those who have chosen faith, the Lord expects them to be obedient and steadfast. Then,

in the same verse, the Lord mentions the state of those who brought misery upon themselves, He says, '[They shall live] in the fire where they will have [nothing but] moans and sobs [to relieve their pain].' (*Hud:* 106) We know that he who breathes in hellfire shall inhale and exhale extremely hot air. The Lord continues describing the conditions of the miserable inhabitants of hellfire:

خَلِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ ٱلسَّمَوَتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ إِلَا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ فَعَّالُ لِمَا يُرِيدُ (١٠٠)

## There to remain for as long as the heavens and earth endure, unless your Lord wills otherwise: your Lord carries out whatever He wills [107] (The Quran, *Hud:* 107)

The word *khulood* designates long residence in a certain place. Indeed, an endless tenure is eternal in confirmation that their stay is indefinite. Those who were disobedient shall enter hellfire, 'When that Day comes, not a soul will speak, unless it be by His leave' (*Hud:* 105). For the disbelievers, it is an endless suffering. The punishment of a deviant Muslim for their transgressions begins at the moment when their verdict is pronounced and will last until the appropriate period has elapsed, and then they are allowed to enter paradise. The Lord says, 'unless Your Lord wills it otherwise' (*Hud:* 107).

The Lord then reduces hellfire sentences for the believers; He is 'A sovereign doer of whatever He wills' (*Hud:* 107), and is not compelled by anything. No one has the right to question what Allah does. If He wishes to reduce the tenure of a disobedient person, He does so in the end. Therefore, this person's tenure in paradise is reduced because they only enter it after having received their due punishment in hell. When we conceive of the matter, we resolve that issue over which a hundred-and-fifty religious scholars once differed. Some had imagined that Allah closes the doors of hell on those whom He had put there and their suffering lasts forever. Those whom He decreed to paradise from the beginning will dwell there forever. Some of those scholars believe that Allah will never allow into paradise those who are guilty of major sins [no matter how much they dwell in hell]. This opinion equates major sins with outright disbelief, which is wholly inconceivable.

It clearly takes no account whatsoever of Allah's Mercy. Some religious scholars cited the verse of the chapter of *al-Jinn* in support of this view, 'If I should fail to convey [to the world whatever illumination comes to me] from Allah and His messages. Now as for him who rebels against Allah and His Messenger – verily, the fire of hell awaits him, therein to abide beyond the count of time.' (*al-Jinn*: 23)

Here, the Lord shows Mercy towards the disbeliever to believe and towards the offender to repent. This is part and parcel of Allah's Mercy. Eternalizing the suffering in hellfire is only mentioned twice in the Quran. It is evidence of the Greatness of Allah's Mercy and His Vast Compassion. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is even declared a mercy for the worlds; namely, for all things other than Allah. Thus, the Mercy is shown to disbelievers through the bounties granted to them by Allah in this world. We learn that Allah has Absolute Dominion over the physical laws of the universe. He did not leave them to operate on their own. Rather, He constantly controls them. Since He is the maker of the Divine Decree; He may alter it in any way He wishes. He is Lord over time, space and movement and the Lord of all things. He does what He wills. In this case, the eternity of time is subjected to His Will. When the Lord says, 'as long as the heavens and the earth endure' (*Hud:* 107), we understand that, for both heaven and for hell, there must be that which transcends them and towers above them.

They must exist above some ground or other. If one claims that the Lord says in the Quran that the sky shall be thrown into convulsion and shall break up, we say in response: Do not take a single Quranic verse without referring to other Quranic contexts. The Lord says, 'On the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens' (*Ibrahim:* 48).

The Lord allows whomsoever He wills to inherit Paradise, for it is He who quotes the believers saying, on the Day of the Resurrection, '...and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion, so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!' (*az-Zumar:* 74) Noticeably, a man enjoys the services of the inanimate, plants and animals. Generally, human life spans might surpass the creatures which serve them but human life spans are ultimately shorter than that of the sun or the moon. Here, the Lord depicts the human lifespan in the

next world. He cites the longest type of life span that we can possibly understand. He says, 'As long as the heavens and the earth endure' (*Hud:* 107). Thus, if Allah attaches importance to something, there must be a reason for it. The Lord is talking about the disbelieving dwellers of hell saying, 'Verily, unto those who give the lie to Our messages and scorn them in their pride, the gates of heaven shall not be opened; and they shall not enter paradise any more than a twisted rope can pass through a needle's eye: for thus do We requite such as are lost in sin' (*al-A'raf:* 40). A rope will never pass through a needle's eye! We must consider those things—to which Allah attaches importance—in light of His statement, 'A sovereign doer of whatever He wills' (*Hud:* 107).

In the Quran, 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* says, 'If You cause them to suffer – verily, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them – verily, You alone are almighty, truly wise!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) From a contextual point of view, Allah should have said, 'and if You forgive them, verily You are Much-Forgiving, Dispenser of Mercy'. However, this is to take a shallow view of the meaning of the Quran. It expresses the human view, but from the point of view of the eloquence of the Lord it is a different matter. For the question of punishment or forgiveness lies in the hands of Allah alone; it is nobody's right to question it. Here lies the true meaning of '*izza*. That is why Allah is indeed mighty. He is, moreover, Wise in all Judgments, punishment, or forgiveness. Allah concludes the verse in such a manner as to establish, beyond all doubt, that the issue of punishment and forgiveness is in His hands. Concerning the punishment of the disbelievers, He says, 'A sovereign doer of whatever He wills' (*Hud:* 107). For those who submitted to His Will and won paradise, Allah says:

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ سُعِدُواْ فَفِى ٱلجُنَّةِ خَلِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ ٱلسَّمَوَتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَآءَ رَتُبُكَ عَطَآءً عَيْرَ مَعْذُوذٍ (١٠٠)

As for those who have been blessed, they will be in Paradise, there to remain as long as the heavens and earth endure, unless your Lord wills otherwise – an unceasing gift [108] (The Quran, *Hud:* 108)

The Lord grants the believers their every wish. In this verse, He confirms that their stay in paradise shall be everlasting and His gifts to them shall be unceasing.

Then the Lord says:

فَلَا تَكُ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِّمَا يَعْبُدُ هَنَوْلَاً مَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَا كَمَا يَعْبُدُ اَبَاوَهُم مِّن قَبْلُ وَإِنَّا لَمُوفَنُوهُمْ نَصِيبَهُمْ غَيْرَ مَنْقُوصٍ (1)

#### [Prophet], have no doubt about what these people worship: it is merely what their fathers worshipped before them, and We shall certainly give them their share in full, without any reduction [109] (The Quran, *Hud:* 109)

Was Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in any doubt or uncertainty? No! This is a general Divine Command of the All-Supreme to all: and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* receives the Command as do all others. Elsewhere, the Lord says to His Prophet peace and blessings be upon him 'Be constant in [your] prayer from the time when the sun has passed its zenith till the darkness of night, and [be ever mindful of its] recitation at dawn. For, behold, the recitation [of prayer] at dawn is indeed witnessed [by all that is holy]' (al-Isra': 78). Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him already used to pray but the words of the Lord are general to all. Similarly, the Lord also tells Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him 'O Prophet! Remain conscious of Allah, and defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites. Allah is truly All knowing, Wise' (al-'Ahzab: 1). The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him was conscious of Allah. The verse intends to perpetuate the remembrance of Allah. When Allah issues an order to be followed by the highest created being, this order becomes a general rule for all his followers to be conscious of Allah and to avoid hypocrisy and blasphemy. It is for the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and for his community as well to apply this command always.

Likewise, Allah says, 'O you who have attained to faith!' (*al-Baqara:* 153) It is a call to the believers who honour their faith, so whosoever of them hears this verse must strive to keep the faith perpetually. A believer who hears these words gets the honour of the Divine Address in affirmation of the lofty status of faith. When Allah mentions a certain quality which a person already possesses, He intends this quality to be perpetual. The perpetuity of such qualities indicates spiritual progress.

The Lord's words, '[O Prophet,] be not in doubt about anything that those [misguided people] worship' (*Hud:* 109). Actually, they do no real worship; true worship means that a worshipper receives orders from the True Lord. They worship idols and they do not supply their subjects with a doctrine to follow. However, the Lord has hereby confirmed that they worship idols. They had previously said, 'We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 3). This is the form of faith that has lost its intellectual underpinning. We must mull over the question of faith with intellects. When we have faith, our minds are convinced. However, they adopted their idolatry in imitation of their forefathers. This imitation entails a withering away of the pure, primordial human state. There is no benefit whatsoever in such imitation. The Lord has infused the universe with a host of different 'qualities'. These qualities can be either positive or negative.

"...they but [thoughtlessly] worship..." (Hud: 109). Their worship of idols is not real worship; real worship requires prescriptions and proscriptions, but the idols cannot possibly furnish them. Their worship of idols is a mere imitation of the practises of their forefathers. That is why they said, 'Nay, we shall follow [only] that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing' (al-Bagara: 170). The Lord decides what their reward shall be, ...and, behold, We shall most certainly give them their full due [for whatever good or evil they have earned], without diminishing aught thereof' (Hud: 109). In other words, We shall give them their full, undiminished due, for their corruption in the universe. The Lord had given them the right of choice; to do it or not to do it. If choices are not made in a disciplined manner, the social equilibrium starts to falter. Man has the right to choose; if he chooses faith, the Lord has provided for him-from on high-a doctrine which comprises all the obligations of faith. By imitating their forefathers, they espoused a path which spreads corruption on earth. Then, the Lord promises to give them their full due of punishment. Normally, the term al-naseeb stands for blessings, but the Lord uses it ironically to describe their share of misery, then the Lord says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَبَ فَٱخْتَلِفَ فِيهِ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِن زَبِّكَ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مُرِيبٍ (")

## We gave Moses the Scripture before you, but differences arose about it and if it had not been for a prior word from your Lord, a decision would already have been made between them, though they are in grave doubt about it [110] (The Quran, *Hud*: 110)

The chapter of *Hud* is the only chapter which highlights the account of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* twice (*Hud:* 96-97; 110). The Lord first only mentioned His Command to Musa (Moses) to go forth and present the Divine Signs to Pharaoh. Then, it turns to the fate of Pharaoh, 'He shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection' (*Hud:* 98). Simply, the context shifts the focus from the very beginning to the culmination of the story where, on the Day of Judgment, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* oversees the entry of Pharaoh and his people into the hellfire. Here, the Lord picks up the account of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* after the latter had begun his mission; Allah says, 'and, indeed, [similar was the case when] We vouchsafed the Book unto Musa (Moses)' (*Hud:* 110).

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was mentioned in the beginning about Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* when Musa (Moses) came upon the water hole of the town of Midyan. What is strange is that when Allah brings up Shu'aib (Jethro), He does not also bring up the story of Musa (Moses) in his encounter with Shu'aib (Jethro). Rather, he mentions the story of Musa (Moses) with Pharaoh. We knew that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had come to Pharaoh with a single goal in mind; he wanted to take the Children of Israel with him and relieve them form oppression. As for the events that later transpired, where people come to believe in Allah, they followed as natural consequences.

The message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was oriented solely towards the people of Israel. He comes to them with the Book to deliver the message, whereas in the previous episode, Allah was talking about the signs which He had charged Musa (Moses) to bring to Pharaoh. We know that the chapter of *Hud* talks about the long procession of messengers: Nuh (Noah),

Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Shu`aib (Jethro) and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*. Two parts speak of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The first deals with Musa's (Moses') account with Pharaoh and the second with Musa's (Moses) story with the children of Israel. Every part has an important function in the context of the divine doctrine for human beings at large from the first human being Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Judgment. Whenever a prophet is mentioned, there is a process of healing of a specific ailment which torments a particular community. The common denominator of all prophetic messages can be summed up in Allah's words, 'Worship Allah alone: you have no deity other than Him' (*al-A'raf: 59*).

Thereafter, the details of messages diverge from one prophet to another. Some bid people to desist from the worship of idols while other prophets ask their people not to give short measure and weight. In every instance, the messenger heals one of the ailments which his community suffers. For Islam, it heals all social ills. That is why the Quran affirms all good virtues as a doctrine for the entire of humanity. The Lord does not recount these stories for entertainment, nor to kill time or as a history lesson. Indeed, it is for us to take heed of the examples of previous prophets as they delivered their healing messages to their respective communities. Since the community of Muhammad *peace be upon him* shall live to see an age of unprecedented inter-communal contact during which every kind of ill will be prevalent. For this reason, they must take heed of these lessons. The Islamic message contains all aspects of wisdom beyond time and place.

Here, the Lord says, 'Indeed, [similar was the case when] We vouchsafed the Book unto Musa (Moses), and some of his people set their own views against it' (*Hud:* 110). The grammatical structure of this sentence permits us to conclude that views were set against both the Divine Book and against Musa (Moses) himself. One cannot consider Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* independently of the divine Book which Allah had revealed to him. The two issues intersect with one another: The Divine Message of the Holy Scripture and Prophet Musa (Moses) as divinely chosen. The Lord does not distinguish between the two issues, but rather frames them as one. The messenger is not to be regarded distinctively from his message. When the Lord says, 'We vouchsafed the Book unto Musa (Moses)' (Hud: 110). This matter is related to Allah's 'actions'; Allah has His own Essence, Qualities and Actions. In Essence, Allah is far above any comparison and His Qualities are not like other qualities. For example, the Lord exists and you exist, but His Existence is primeval and eternal, whereas your existence is accidental and ephemeral. We understand what is related to Allah considering the verse, 'There is nothing like unto Him' (ash-Shura: 11). When the Lord speaks of His action, consider it in the context of His Infinite Power. Here, when Allah says, 'We vouchsafed the Book unto Musa (Moses)' (Hud: 110), we understand that His Action reveals Knowledge and Wisdom, Power, Forgiveness, Omnipotence and Dominance. There are many things that come together to bring about this revelation. A question may be raised: if the people of Musa (Moses) peace be upon him disputed over his message, why did the Lord not punish them as He did with the peoples of Nuh (Noah), 'Ad, Thamud or the other peoples whom Allah had taken to task? In response, they did not escape Allah's punishment because of any power they had, but because the Lord postponed their punishment to the Day of Judgment. Allah says in the same verse, 'Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from Your Lord, judgment would indeed have been passed on them [then and there]' (Hud: 110). The Lord passed this decisive judgment, just as He had passed judgments on earlier peoples whose prophets were charged with the Divine Missions. The past prophets' mission was only to deliver the Divine Message and not to battle their nations for a call or right. It was Allah that always intervened and pronounced a final judgment. When it came to Musa (Moses) peace be upon him his mission was different. Allah willed to defer the reckoning of his people to the Day of Resurrection. The Lord says, '...for, behold, they were in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about him [who called them unto Allah]' (Hud: 110). They doubted the Day of Judgment-the day when all shall be brought to account. This doubt is similar to their doubts-mentioned by Allah in the beginning of the verse-which they harboured about Musa (Moses) peace be upon him and the Divine Book he brought them. Then the Lord says:

وَإِنَّ كُلَّا لَّمَّا لَيُوَفِّينَهُمْ رَبُّكَ أَعْمَالَهُمّْ إِنَّهُ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ٢

## Your Lord will give everyone full due for whatever they have done: He is aware of everything they do [111] (The Quran, *Hud*: 111)

Before Musa (Moses), the disbelievers faced Divine Punishment. When Musa (Moses) peace be upon him began his mission, the Lord deferred the punishment until the Day of Judgment. However, never think that you may escape the delayed punishment on the Day of Judgment. Each and every one of us shall be given the full reward for their actions. Goodly rewards for the obedient and punishment for the disobedient, Allah's judgment is certainly coming. This compensation will depend on one's works, whether unbelief or belief, virtuousness or perversity, and the time of this remuneration is the Day of Judgment. There is a brief pause in the Quranic style, so that the meaning can be digested by those who do not have an innate aptitude for the classical Arabic language—unlike the ease with which the early Arabs understood it. Evidently, the old Arabs had no teachers. They just understood and articulated proper Arabic as hailing from a community gifted with highly complex linguistic style and outstanding eloquence. Language, as we know, is not a matter of gender or genetics. It is a social phenomenon. The society in which a child grows up determines their language. The child who grows up in an Arab society speaks Arabic.

And the child living in an English society speaks English. The language is articulated by tongue according to that which is heard by ears. In the old days, the Arab environment was usually isolated and those who grew up in this environment used to speak the language correctly and flawlessly. As for the Arab who lived in a community such as Mecca—the renowned centre of cultures, they used to receive visitors from every corner. As such, the people of Mecca used to send their newborn children out to the countryside to hear nothing but the pure, unadulterated Arabic tongue. In this way, they would not need to be re-taught sound Arabic later in life. Consider, for example, that in our own lives there are two predominant languages: the language used at home and in streets. It is the language we use to communicate with one another. It is the colloquial form of Arabic. There is also the language we learn in schools. It is the polished and refined language that stands for eloquence and correctness. The people of Quraysh used to send their children to the countryside so that their ears could develop a taste for the undiluted Arabic tongue. This pure idiom was the norm in the countryside. A child growing up there had no need of a teacher to learn it. The eloquence was all that his ear ever heard.

This was the language of excellence at that time. This language is different from the language which we acquire nowadays in schools. This latter is almost artificial. Here, what about the orientalists who did not learn Arabic before and only learn the language with an arrogant attitude. These people did not possess the purity of language. That is why they tried to undermine the Quran. Some even tried to claim that the Quran contains grammatical errors. They said this even though it was they who had learned the artificial language whereas those who received the Quran in the Prophet's time were men of unsurpassed eloquence. They did not find any faults with the Quran. Had they detected any linguistic imperfections in the Quran at that time, they would have pointed them out, because the Quran was revealed in a pure Arabic tongue. It was revealed to an eloquent community whose genius manifested itself in the language.

Allah had allowed the disbelievers of Quraysh and the Arabs to remain entrenched in their intense disbelief for a while. Had they discovered any imperfections in the language of the Quran during that time, they would have most certainly announced it. No one could say that he had become a believer and had concealed the imperfections of the Quran. If anyone had any critical remarks about the Quran, their disbelief would certainly motivate them to declare it. Is it possible for the orientalists who lived in the twentieth century to find grammatical mistakes in the Quran when they did not fully master the language (as the early Arabs had)? Rather, their learning of Arabic was mechanical. This precludes the possibility of an intuitive 'feel' of the language. For example, their failure to understand the subtleties of the verse in question, 'and, verily, unto each and all will Your Lord give their full due for whatever [good or evil] they may have done: behold, He is aware of all that they do!' (*Hud:* 111), means that both believers who believe and honour the message, and disbelievers who denied it, shall receive their reward. Good rewards for the believers and punishment for the disbelievers. The word *inna* (verily) serves to emphasize something, especially if the audience is inclined to reject what follows after it. As we know, there are different levels of denial. If you want to inform someone about something new to them, you tell them, for example, 'so-and-so came to see me yesterday'. The listener comes to know about the news for the first time. If they were to tell you, 'but yesterday, so-and-so was somewhere else', you would tell them, *inna* (verily) so-and-so visited me yesterday'. When the listener answers you: 'but yesterday, I saw this person whom you are talking about in another place'. At this point, you might emphasize your words by saying, 'I swear by Allah, so-and-so was with me yesterday'. Therefore, you emphasize your words according to the degree to which your audience contest your claim.

When the Lord postpones the suffering of certain people while on earth, one who is inattentive might say: perhaps Allah is no longer punishing people. That is why the Lord emphasizes that all will be called into account be they obedient or disobedient: 'Verily, unto each and all will Your Lord give their full due for whatever [good or evil] they may have done' (Hud: 111). Those who do not have an innate 'feel' of Arabic, like orientalists who have a mechanical understanding of the language, paused at this verse and said: why is there *tanween* in the word *kullan*? They did not know that *tanween* stands for a complete sentence. When the Lord says, 'Why, then, when [the last breath] comes up to the throat [of a dving man] the while you are [helplessly] looking on' (al-Waqi'a: 83-84), the word kullan in the verse in question denotes that 'both' the obedient believer and the disobedient disbeliever shall be fairly compensated with either goodly rewards or punishment. The word *lamma*—in the same verse—is used to denote a time, a period, or a moment. When the Lord says, 'And when Musa (Moses) came [to Mount Sinai] at the time set by Us and his Lord spoke unto him' (al-A'raf: 143), and 'And as soon as the caravan [with which Ya`qub's (Jacob's) sons were traveling] was on its way, their father said [to the people around him], "Behold, were it not that you might consider me a dotard, [I would say that] I truly feel the breath of Yusuf (Joseph) [in the air]!' (Yusuf: 94) When they had left the city behind

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

them and were well on their way out of the land of Egypt, their father said, 'I truly feel the breath of Yusuf (Joseph) [in the air]!' (*Yusuf*: 94)

The word *lamma* can also be used for negation. Allah says, 'The Bedouin says, "We have attained to faith." Say [unto them, O Muhammad], "You have not [yet] attained to faith"; you should [rather] say, "We have [outwardly] surrendered" – for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts" (*al-Hujurat:* 14). In other words, faith had not yet taken root in their hearts.

The term *lamma* connotes the idea that faith shall be allowed to take root in their hearts at a later stage. When the word *lamma* is used in the sense of negation, it is similar to the term *lam*, but it is slightly different from the word *lam* because the latter speaks of the past time and its negation is not connected with the actual moment when the words are uttered, even if the situation might change. As for the term *lamma*, its negation is connected with the actual time during which the word is spoken and its use portends that the situation may change. Thus, we understand the words of the Lord, 'Verily, unto each and all will Your Lord give their full due for whatever [good or evil] they may have done: behold, He is aware of all that they do!' (*Hud:* 111) to mean that both the obedient and the disobedient shall be brought to account and rewarded or punished when the moment of remuneration comes to pass the Day of Judgement.

The word *lamma* puts forth the notion that the punishment expected to occur in this world is divinely postponed for the disbelievers until the Day of Judgment. Then, you come upon the word *la-yuwfiyannahum* in which the letter *la* stands for a swearing article. The True Lord swears that He will compensate them fairly with either goodly rewards or punishments.

And Allah *Glorified is He* is fully Aware of His servants' actions, and He knows these actions before they happen, but when they take place, they cannot be forgotten or overlooked because they are known by the All-Aware Who possesses the precise knowledge. Being aware is different from being knowledgeable for the knowledgeable person might have a general picture of things, but the aware person is the one trained extensively in a specialized field. And that is why the Divine Names of 'the Aware' and 'the Subtle' usually appear together because 'the Aware' is He Who knows the location of

things, and the 'the Subtle' is He Who knows how to arrive at the location of those things. For example, you might know the location where some man is hiding in a mountain. This knowledge and this information are not enough to reach the place where this man is hiding. This would require a little more; it would require precision and subtlety.

Allah Glorified is He talks about Musa (Moses) peace be upon him to cheer up Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for some people who disbelieved in his Message said, 'If Allah tends to inflict those who reject His Message with a punishment, then why has He not brought a punishment upon us?' Thus, these particular verses of the chapter of Hud serve to inform the disbelievers that Allah Glorified is He will most certainly bring down punishment upon them. Therefore, be careful not to let them trick you-O Muhammadin any way; do not let them chaffer with you over anything, such as when they said, 'We shall worship your God for a year, and you shall worship our deities for a year'. Allah Glorified is He has previously put an end to this particular matter when He has revealed His Words: 'Say [Prophet], "O Disbelievers! I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship...' (al-Kafirun: 1-4). Thus, the matter was decisively brought to an end-for there can be no bargaining when it comes to matters of faith. And we know that faith is a matter connected with the heart, and there can be no negotiation in such a matter, and the complete and final rupture of one's relationship with those who would seek to bargain on such an issue is obligatory, for there can be no chaffering when it comes to faith. It is not a case of human politics, rather, it is a matter that comes from the Lord and is completely dependent on Him. So Allah Glorified is He says, '...I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship...' (al-Kafirun: 2-4). These verses impart the listener and the reader with a strong sense that the disbelievers will remain steadfast in their worship of false deities, and that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him will remain steadfast in his worship of Allah Glorified is He. These verses also indicate that the Name of 'Allah' shall be raised high, for immediately following the chapter of al-Kafirun, Allah Glorified is He says, 'When Allah's help comes and He opens up your way [Prophet, and when you see people embracing Allah's faith in crowds,

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

celebrate the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness; He is always ready to accept repentance.' (*an-Nasr:* 1-3)

Back to the chapter of Hud; Allah Glorified is He says:

فَأَسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَمَن تَابَ مَعَكَ وَلا تَطْغَوّْ إِنَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ٢

## So keep to the right course as you have been commanded, together with those who have turned to God with you. Do not overstep the limits, for He sees everything you do [112] (The Quran, *Hud:* 112)

*Al-istiqama* (keeping to the right course) means not to swerve or to lean one way or the other—even by a hair—and this is not an easily achievable matter because the grey area—in between maintaining the right course and veering off course—can sometimes be very narrow. For example, when you look at a lighted area and a shaded area, sometimes the shaded area eats into the lighted area, and at other times the lighted area eats into the shaded area. It would be difficult indeed—no matter how precise the measuring equipment is—to determine the line that separates between the shaded area and the lighted one.

Thus, separating something from its opposite can be difficult. And that is why remaining steadfast on the right course is a truly arduous task. When these verses were revealed to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him he said, 'The chapter of Hud and its sisters have turned my hair grey.' And had Allah Glorified is He not said in His noble Book, 'Be mindful of Allah as much as you can ...' (at-Taghabun: 16), and had this verse not been revealed, Muslims would have been completely exhausted. This above-mentioned verse had been revealed after the following one, '...be mindful of Allah as is His due...' (Al-'Imran: 102). And this proved to be difficult for the companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. So, Allah Glorified is He revealed the following verse that relieved the burden of the ummah (followers of Islam) of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him 'Be mindful of Allah as much as you can ...' (at-Taghabun: 16). Thus, the Divine Command to remain unwavering on the straight course requires the precise adherence to Allah's orders and proscriptions such that we veer neither to one side nor to the other. Thus, maintaining the straight course requires our full concentration.

We can never be inattentive or forgetful. So Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So keep to the right course as you have been commanded, together with those who have turned to Allah with you...' (*Hud:* 112). This represents Allah's command to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should not feel hopeless by the strong resistance of Quraysh to his message, for they will fall, one after the other, day after day.

Allah's words, '...Do not overstep the limits, for He sees everything you do.' (Hud: 112) mean that we must not transcend the boundaries of righteousness, for to oppress others means to have overstepped these boundaries. Therefore, we learn that religion has determined the boundaries of things; however, the boundaries of Allah's commands differ from that of His prohibition, for if Allah Glorified is He commands you to do something. He thereby orders you to remain steadfast to this practise and to never transgress it, as He says, '...these are the bounds set by Allah: do not overstep them...' (al-Baqara: 229). These words concern Allah's commands, but concerning His proscriptions, He says, "...these are the bounds set by Allah, so do not go near them..." (al-Bagara: 187); that is you should stay completely clear of those bounds. Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him says, 'He who falls into doubtful things falls into that which is unlawful, just as a shepherd who grazes his cattle near a pasture declared prohibited (by the king); he is likely to stray into the pasture. Mind you, every king has a protected pasture and Allah's involved limit is that which He has declared unlawful.'(1) When Allah Glorified is He forbids us from approaching something, it amounts to a precautionary, preventive righteousness. In effect, it allows you to view things, which are not necessarily prohibited, as belonging in the category of forbidden things. Thus, for example, when it comes to the prohibition of alcohol, Allah Glorified is He orders us to shun it, that is, to stay clear of all that which has to do with alcohol so that a Muslim never finds himself in the same place where alcohol is to be found.

Allah *Glorified is He* also recommends us to be steadfast when it comes to matters of obedience, as He says, '...pay what is due on the day of harvest...' (*al-An'am:* 141). In this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* orders us not to give out

<sup>(1) [</sup>Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

too much to protect us from that moment when we recall how bountiful was our harvest, but how, at the present moment, we find that we have nothing to sustain us, for a man might give away much of his harvest if it happens to be plentiful, but then difficult circumstances arise and so he says, 'I wish I had not given so much away'. Therefore, Allah Glorified is He safeguards us against a situation such as these. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him says, 'Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately and know that your deeds will not make you enter paradise, and that the deed most beloved to Allah is the one that is regular and constant, even though it were little.<sup>(1)</sup> So the religion is powerful and firm<sup>(2)</sup> and whoever makes the religion a rigour, it will overpower him.<sup>(3)</sup> Thus, we find that Allah Glorified is He and Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him are wise and more knowledgeable than us. Allah Glorified is He does not only order us against trespassing on that which has been forbidden but He also orders us not to overstep the boundaries of propriety when it comes to that which is lawful. Accordingly, He prescribes kindness, leniency, and clemency, and that a human being allows himself the freedom to choose. For example: a human being commits himself to praying twenty prayers every night, and he vows to perform this rite as a consecration to Allah Glorified is He, but when he actually starts practicing this vow, he realises how hard it is, and he draws the ire of his soul. That is why Allah Glorified is He orders us to remain steadfast and not to overstep the boundaries of propriety when it comes to Allah's Commandments and Proscriptions. Thus, the precaution applied to matters of worship is more comprehensive for those who wish to be steadfast. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him says, 'That which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is clear, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honour."<sup>(4)</sup> And that is why Allah Glorified is He-the Wise, Issuer of Decrees-orders us to take preventive action, sometimes by going the extra distance—a positive preventive measure,

<sup>(1) [</sup>Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

<sup>(2) [</sup>Narrated by Ahmad]

<sup>(3) [</sup>Narrated by An-Nisa`i]

<sup>(4) [</sup>Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

and sometimes by keeping a safe distance—a negative preventive measure. For when you pray in a place other than the Sacred Mosque, it suffices that you orient yourself towards the *Ka'ba*, whereas when you pray inside the *Ka'ba*, you know that the *Ka'ba* is divided into two parts: one part is built high above the ground, and the other part is called *al-hatim* and that is a part of the *Ka'ba*, but the available funds at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace* and blessings be upon him were running short, so they did not build it. That is why you orient your vision towards the high structure that is definitely a part of the *Ka'ba*, and this is a form of negative prevention.

As for positive preventive measures, consider for example the circumambulation around the *Ka'ba*. People might be densely packed around the *Ka'ba* itself, and thus the circumstances would force you to make the circumambulation around the entire sanctuary. This would mean a longer circumambulation and, therefore, it is a form of positive prevention. Thus, when it comes to the prayer, one takes negative preventive measures, and when it comes to the circumambulation one takes positive preventive measures.

Therefore, we find that the nature of the preventive measure determines the meaning of the notion 'steadfastness'. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying, '...for He sees everything you do.' (*Hud:* 112) And in the previous verse He says, '...He is aware of everything they do.' (*Hud:* 111) We have come to understand what the word *Al-Khabir* (All Aware) means; as for the word *Al-Baseer* (All-Seeing), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* knows about every action performed in the religious context because the actions of worship are visual.

Then Allah Glorified is He says:

وَلَا تَرْكَنُوا إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا فَتَمَسَّكُمُ ٱلنَّارُ وَمَا لَكُمُ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِنْ أَوْلِياَءَ ثُمَّ لَا نُنصَرُون (

## Do not rely on those who do evil, or the Fire may touch you, and then you will have no one to protect you from God, nor will you be helped [113] (The Quran, *Hud:* 113)

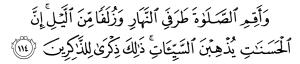
The disbelievers, as we know, had proposed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he worship their deities for a year, and that they

worship Allah for a year, but Allah *Glorified is He* had put a decisive end to this matter. And here this matter is emphasised when He says, 'Do not rely on those who do evil...' (*Hud:* 113).

Now the word *ar-rukun* means to incline towards something or someone. It means tranquillity, peace, and mercy. Thus, to incline towards one who is unjust means that you convince him that his power has sway over your calling. The word also means helping this unjust person and doing his bidding, also to justify his injustice to people. The great evil of the world is that people incline towards the unjust people because when people incline towards those who are unjust this encourages the latter to persist in their injustice, and intensify their efforts in being unjust. And the lowest rank when it comes to inclining towards those who are unjust is not preventing him from wronging another person. And the highest rank of inclining towards an unjust person is to convince him that his injustice is acceptable, and to convince other people that this injustice is acceptable. And if you were to research the state of injustice in the whole world, you would find that the evil that plagues human societies stems from inclining towards those who are unjust, but if you distance yourself from the unjust person, and if you cut off all ties with him, he will think that the reason why you avoid him is because you have confidence in some other sturdy pillar, and so he loses confidence in himself, and takes account of the power which you have sought refuge with. This represents a weakening of his power, isolation for him and a deterring factor so that he might give up his injustice.

To incline towards one who is unjust renders a man liable to be touched by the hellfire since this act of relying upon the unjust has negative consequences as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Do not rely on those who do evil, or the Fire may touch you, and then you will have no one to protect you from Allah, nor will you be helped.' (*Hud:* 113) Therefore, when you incline towards those who are unjust, you put yourself at odds with Allah's Doctrine; and thus, He abandons you and does not grant you victory, for there is no ally and there is no granter of victory except Allah *Glorified is He*.

Afterwards, Allah Glorified is He says:



## [Prophet], keep up the prayer at both ends of the day, and during parts of the night, for good things drive bad away – this is a reminder for those who are aware [114] (The Quran, *Hud:* 114)

This is a command to do good deeds issued by Allah Glorified is He to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We notice that these particular verses in the chapter of Hud include commands and prohibitions. The commands are always to do good deeds, and the prohibitions are always to stay clear of evil. And we notice that Allah Glorified is He says, 'So keep to the right course as you have been commanded, together with those who have turned to Allah with you...' (Hud: 112). Then He directs the prohibition to this ummah (The followers of Islam) as a whole, 'Do not overstep the limits...' (Hud: 112). Allah Glorified is He does not say, 'Keep to the right course and do not overstep the limits' because the command to do righteous deeds is directed at Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and his community, but in the prohibition of evil, the speech is addressed to the community only, and this emphasises the elevated status of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. Likewise, Allah Glorified is He directs the address to the community of Messenger Muhammad saying, 'Do not rely on those who do evil...' (Hud: 113). And he does not say, '[Prophet] do not rely on those who do evil....'

And in the verse which we are currently reflecting on, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to his community, 'Keep up the prayer ...' (*Hud:* 114). And the word *iqama* (keeping up) means to execute the order correctly and perfectly, just as houses are erected, and to renders it conducive to the purpose that is asked for. One says, '*aqam ash-shay*' meaning one rendered it conducive to the goal to which it is assigned. And Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Keep up the prayer at both ends of the day.' (*Hud:* 114) meaning, its ends from one side, and its other end from the other because *at-taraf* of something is its ends, or its sides, The two ends are determined by the middle area of a thing. In other words, the middle area is the buffer between the two extremities. Thus, all that which is to the right of the middle

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

area is considered a *taraf* (one side), and all that which is to the left of the middle area is considered the other *taraf* (side). In fact, any area not pertaining to the middle area is considered a *taraf*.

The middle area is usually considered the point which marks the absolute middle. Everything to the right of this middle point is divided into ten portions, and everything to the left of it is divided into another ten portions, and every one of those segments on either side is considered a taraf. So, when Allah Glorified is He says, 'Keep up the prayer at both ends of the day...' (Hud: 114), we should realise that, for us, the day begins with the dawn of the early morning. This is the first portion of the day where we offer our *fajr* (dawn) prayers. Then comes *adh-dhur* (noon) prayers. If adh-zhur occurs before midday, we consider it as occurring before the middle of the day, and if it occurs after midday, we consider it as an occurrence pertaining to after the middle of the day. After adh-zhur comes al-'asr (afternoon), and this represents another portion of the day. Allah's Words, '... and during parts of the night...' (Hud: 114) require that we understand that the word *zulfa* is the plural of *zalfa* which is taken from the verb *azlf* which means to draw close to something. Knowing that the plural form implies at least three or more; and we know that at night we have the maghrib prayer and the 'isha' prayer; that is why we find that Imam Abu Hanifa Allah rest his soul considers the witr prayer an obligatory rite. He said that the 'isha' prayer is a 'must', and the *witr* prayer is an obligatory rite. There is a difference between rites that are considered a 'must' and those that are considered obligatory.

Immediately following this, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '... for good things drive bad away...' (*Hud:* 114). This remark places prayer at the top of the list of good deeds. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has clarified this point when he said, 'The five (daily) prayers and the Friday prayer to the Friday prayer explate whatever minor sins may be committed in between, so long as major sins are avoided.'<sup>(1)</sup>

The religious scholars have different opinions when it comes to the definitions of *sayye*'a (a sin) and *hasana* (a good deed). Some of them maintain that the *hasana* is that for which Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed a goodly reward,

<sup>(1) [</sup>Narrated by Muslim]

and a sayye'a is that for which Allah Glorified is He has prescribed a punishment. The very first hasana in the Islamic religion is that you testify that there is no other deity worthy of worship except Allah Glorified is He. This good deed expiates one's previous state of disbelief; for good deeds drive the bad ones away. That is why some of the religious scholars have said that a Muslim who has committed a minor or a major sin does not dwell eternally in Hellfire; for if the good deed of believing in Allah Glorified is He explates the bad deed of disbelieving, then does his faith not have the power to expiate the sins lesser than disbelief? And thus, a Muslim's punishment is mitigated somewhat in that he receives his punishment in hellfire, but he does not stay there forever for we cannot equate one who believes in Allah with one who does not believe in Him. Belief in Allah Glorified is He is the highest kind good deed, and it is one that explates the sin of disbelief; and it necessarily has the capacity to expiate lesser bad deeds. Some of the religious scholars have wondered: is it the obligatory acts which, in their capacity as good deeds, explate the bad deeds? Other religious scholars replied: there are some sound hadith of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him which mention some good deeds which do not belong to the obligatory acts. Prophet Muhammad said that the fasting of the day of 'arafa one year, then fasting on the day of 'arafa the next year, explates all sins that one had committed in that year. Prophet Muhammad said that a man who accepts Allah's blessings by saying, 'Praise be to Allah Glorified is He who has showered me profusely with His gifts, while I have no power nor any strength of my own; and praise be to Allah who clothed me, while I have no power nor any strength of my own.'; will explate all his sins. Also, that if you utter the following prayer, 'Glorified is Allah, and praised, and there is no god but Allah, and Allah is the Greatest, and there is no power and no strength save with Allah the Highest, the Great'; will drive the sins away.

Thus, the good deeds should be taken in an absolute sense if they be of the obligatory acts. These good deeds drive the bad deeds away. The bad deed is the action for which Allah has promised to punish its doer. Some religious scholars also wondered: the bad deed is an action, and when an action is performed it is registered and recorded, so how is it that a good deed can expiate a bad one? Others answered: driving the sin away occurs through the one who records your actions, and thus Allah *Glorified is He* erases it from your record of sins, or through Allah's Forgiveness; and thus, He does not punish you for the sin. Driving the sins away may also mean erasing the sinful actions and not recording what happened; or Allah *Glorified is He* records it if it happens because it is He who says, 'He does not utter a single word without an ever-present watcher.' (*Qaf:* 18) Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'Over you stand watchers, noble recorders who know what you do.' (*al-Infitar:* 10-11) And thus driving the sins away occurs either by erasing them from your record of sins, or that they remain recorded in that record, but Allah *Glorified is He* forgives you for committing them such that you are absolved from the punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'As for those who avoid grave sins and foul acts, though they may commit small sins, your Lord is ample in forgiveness.' (*an-Najm:* 32) The avoidance of major sins does not prevent the small ones from occurring.

And Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...for prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behaviour...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45).

And when we look at the times of prayer, we find that they are five. Thus, whosever's heart clings to the prayers, his heart will be preoccupied with the movements of the prayer whenever he prays, then night time comes and he sleeps. And the mind of those who commit a sin will be preoccupied with this for a time, and were it not for the coming of the prayer time, he would feel a sense of loss, but when the time of prayer comes, his heart concentrates on Allah *Glorified is He* and he asks for His forgiveness.

And when a sin is committed once, it might not be committed a second time; or that the prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behaviour by virtue of the time it takes to get oneself ready for it, for he who sets in the gatherings to gossip about others, or he who acts unjustly towards others, when such a person hears the call to prayers, he gets up and performs his ablution. During the time of making ablution, praying, and concluding his prayer, he ceases to harm people. There are many actions from among the obligatory acts and the good deeds which expiate one's sins. A Muslim must busy himself with increasing his good deeds, and he should not busy himself with trying to erase past sins because for every one good deed performed, a person is rewarded with

the reward of ten good deeds, and he may have it doubled many times if Allah Glorified is He wills. As for when a person commits a bad deed, it is written only as a single bad deed. Allah Glorified is He concludes the noble verse by saying, '...this is a reminder for those who are aware.' (Hud: 114) This means that keeping up prayer at the beginning and at the end of the day, and during the early watches of the night—constitutes good deeds which expiate sins. In such a practise, there is a reminder to the soul of that which had been forgotten. In other words, these thoughts existed in the past, but forgetfulness covered it over, and thus receiving the piece of news for the first time removed the ignorance, and receiving it for the second time, reminds you of the commandment because the ill which afflicts human beings is that the things which pass through the human psyche, one after the other, they pass from the centre of one's consciousness and are then pushed to the margins such that a man becomes forgetful of that which is located in the margins of his consciousness. Then, there is a real need for the coming of something new to remind him of what had been relegated to the margins of consciousness. For example, if you throw a stone into a pond, this stone becomes the epicentre of several concentric circles which form around it. These circles then spread out as far as the human eye can see. The proof is that a man might recall events that happened twenty years ago or more. The memory of these events existed in the man's subconscious, and then some new event occurred and brought these memories back. The human mind is like a photographic camera which can capture memories sometimes in the first try, and sometimes in the second try or more. To capture a memory from the first try occurs because the mind is, at that moment, clear of any thoughts. We find that, for those who lost their sight, Allah Glorified is He bestows other blessings upon them, namely, an immense capacity for memorising knowledge because when a blind person hears knowledge being spoken, his mind is not preoccupied with the visual stimuli which tend to distract one's centre of consciousness. As for the person who has ability to see, his centre of consciousness might be distracted by what is passing in front of him. Thus, he might have to listen to the knowledge being spoken more than once, until there comes a moment when the centre of consciousness is receptive and is free of distractions, and then the knowledge will have a

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

chance to become fixed in the memory. This is how remembrance operates because it stirs memories that are latent in the subconscious and calls them up to the centre of consciousness. Thus, if you were distracted from obeying Allah *Glorified is He* by turning to disobedience, remembrance can remind you of the responsibility that comes with committing a sinful act, namely, punishment. That is why it is said that, 'there is no goodness in a good action that leads to Hellfire, and there is no evil in an evil action that leads to paradise'.

Allah Glorified is He says in the verse which we are now examining, '[Prophet], keep up the prayer at both ends of the day, and during parts of the night...' (Hud: 114). And when you look at the pillars of the Islamic faith, you will see that, first, you testify-that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah-at least once during your lifetime. The second pillar is prayer, and this is a pillar that can never be waived, for it is required of us five times a day. While offering prayer, you utter the testament of faith, and you sacrifice a bit of your time, so that Allah Glorified is He blesses the rest of your time. In prayer, you also abstain from food and drink and all that which breaks the fast, and when you offer prayer, you turn to face Allah's Sacred House. Thus, all the other rites of the Islamic faith manifest themselves in prayer. Indeed, prayer contains within itself some elements of the five pillars of Islam. That is why prayer can never be dropped, for if you cannot pray standing up, you can pray sitting down and if you are incapable of movement, you can even pray with moving your eyelids. And thus, you will find that in prayer are contained all the pillars of the faith, and due to its importance, it remains with a man until his very last breath. Due to the importance of prayer, it should be offered until the last moments of one's life. It assumed its importance in the Islamic legislation since it is an important part of the religious obligations. All Islamic obligations came about through revelation, except for prayer. The latter came directly from Allah Glorified is He Who summoned Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him so as to charge him with the commandment of prayer. It is thus a special compliment to the community of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for it has been prescribed, whilst he was in intimate proximity to His Lord Glorified is He. That is why Allah Glorified is He has made prayer a means for Prophet

Muhammad's ummah (The followers of Islam) to get closer to Allah Glorified is He; therefore, prayer is the rite that will always remain. It is said that `Ali Allah be pleased with him approached a group of people and asked them, 'Which verse in Allah's Book is dearest to you?' meaning which verse in the Quran imparts a greater sense of hope, reassurance and glad tiding-that Allah Glorified is He will accept us, forgive us and have mercy on us. Some of them said that it is Allah's Words, 'Allah does not forgive the worship of others beside Himthough He does forgive whoever He wills for lesser sins...' (an-Nisa': 116). `Ali Allah be pleased with him said that it is indeed a blessed verse, but it is not the one he had in mind. In other words, this verse truly does give us hope, reassurance and glad tiding, but it is not the one to which he was referring. Others then came forth and said that it is Allah's Words, 'Yet anyone who does evil or wrongs his own soul and then asks Allah for forgiveness will find Him Most Forgiving and Merciful.' (an-Nisa': 110) 'Ali again said that is indeed a blessed verse, but it is not the one he was looking for. Then others proffered the following verse, 'My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's Mercy. Allah forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.' (az-Zumar: 53) 'Ali Allah be pleased with him said once more that it is a blessed verse indeed, but it is not the one he had in mind. Then others suggested the following verse, 'those who remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins if they do something shameful or wrong themselves- who forgives sins but Allah?' (Al-'Imran: 135) `Ali Allah be pleased with him again replied that it is a blessed verse, but not quite the one he was looking for. Then the people became silent and stopped offering their suggestions, whereupon 'Ali Allah be pleased with him, said 'What are you thinking O Muslims?' It is as if he was asking them why they had gone silent. They said, 'We cannot suggest anything else.' Thus, 'Ali Allah be pleased with him, used the suspense as a basis on which he built up what he was going to say. They leaned towards him, ears perked, and he said, 'I have heard my beloved Messenger peace and blessings be upon him say, 'The most inspiring, hope-giving verse in Allah's Book is His saying, '[Prophet], keep up the prayer at both ends of the day, and during parts of the night, for good things drive bad away— this is a reminder for those who are aware.' (Hud: 114) Prophet Muhammad then said, 'O 'Ali, when any one of you finishes his ablution, his sins fall away from his limbs such that, by the time he turns to face Allah with a sincere heart, Allah forgives him for all of his sins, and he becomes in a clean state of sins as if his mother had just given birth to him. Then if he commits another sin in between prayers, it gets recorded.' Then he counted the prayers one by one and said, 'Between *fajr (dawn)* and *zhuhr* (noon), and between *zhuhr* and '*asr* (afternoon), and between '*isha*' and *fajr (dawn)*.' Then he said, 'O 'Ali, verily the five prayers are, for my community, as a river running next to someone's house. If there happened to be an impurity sticking to the body of any one of you, and then he were to bathe himself in the ocean, would there still be any impurities left on him? Indeed, by Allah, that is what prayers are for my community.'

That is why if we look at any righteous deeds, we will find that every deed has a period of time in the life of man. As for prayer, its time is the entire human lifespan. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ٢

## Be steadfast: God does not let the rewards of those who do good go to waste[115] (The Quran, *Hud*: 115)

The word `*isbir* (be steadfast) serves to emphasise righteousness in all its aspects. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'Order your people to pray, and pray steadfastly yourself...' (*Ta Ha:* 132). There are two types of patience. In the context of religious observances, 'patience' is displayed towards the hardships of obedience such as getting up from bed early to perform the *fajr* prayer; one also demonstrates patience when it comes to refraining from carnal pleasures. And thus, we learn that patience is required in two kinds of ways: in an active way to perform our religious duties, and in a passive way to refrain from the carnal pleasures. And we know that the road to paradise is paved with arduous religious duties—therefore, perform them dutifully—while the road to Hell is paved with carnal pleasures—therefore, refrain from them. Imagine, for instance, that someone wants to enjoy a steak, but cannot afford it. He thus

remains patient and refrains from begging. That is why the ascetics say that there is no such thing called 'pricey', but there is such a thing as 'cheapness' of soul. That is why we find those who say, 'If the price of something rises beyond my means, I will not buy it, and the cheapest it will be is when it is expensive'.

And Allah Glorified is He says, '... bear anything that happens to you steadfastly...' (Lugman: 17). And here He says, 'be steadfast: Allah does not let the rewards of those who do good go to waste.' (Hud: 115). It is theythrough their own works-who earned themselves the rank of *ihsan*, that is, they obliged themselves to follow all that which Allah Glorified is He had prescribed, and they performed even more than what was been ordered. This includes prayer, fasting, giving of the prescribed alms and the pilgrimage to Allah's Sacred House because religious rites are not offered randomly from worshippers to the worshipped; rather, it is the worshipped that determines exactly how His worshippers can earn proximity to Him. Try not to attain to the status of *ihsan* through taking a vow because it can then become hard for you to carry out that which you have vowed to perform. Rather, you should make the time of supererogatory worship your own choice such that you do not take a vow to get closer to Allah Glorified is He and then you break it. That would be as if-Allah forbid-you had tried Allah's Kindness, but had not found it to be to your liking. This is indeed a transgression on your part.

If you see the abundant light of someone who has reached the stature of *ihsan*, do not deny it, or else you would equalise between one who stopped at what Allah *Glorified is He* has imposed upon him, and he who has done more than what Allah *Glorified is He* has imposed yet from the same kind of His obligations. Try this yourself, hold yourself to Allah's commandments by honouring the times of prayer, and rise in the early hours of the morning and pray the *fajr* at the mosque, then make sure to perfect your work, and when *azh-zhuhr* arrives, go and pray it at the mosque, and try to pray as many supererogatory units of prayer as you can, and you will find that the darkness deep inside your soul has left, and that spiritual light, beyond the perception of the senses, has filled that space. Therefore, do not envy those who engage in such spiritual practise when you find that their insight has been enlightened by Allah *Glorified is He* through His divinely gifted means of perception.

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

That is why we do not find anyone who has attained such stations of spiritual enlightenment and purity claiming something that he does not have. In fact, one of them might know certain things about another human being who is not religiously disciplined, but he does not tell him about it, because Allah Glorified is He has bestowed qualities upon him which he must not vainly show off. And when Allah Glorified is He presents this matter in the story of Musa (Moses) peace be upon him when he and his servant found the righteous servant, He wants to put limits on those who engage in this discipline and those who do not. Allah Glorified is He describes the righteous servant saying, '...one of Our servants - a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.' (al-Kahf: 65) And the righteous servant told Musa (Moses) peace be upon him 'You will not be able to bear with me patiently.' (al-Kahf: 67) Then the righteous servant respectfully explained to Musa (Moses) peace be upon him the reason why he might not be able to have patience, and said, 'How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?' (al-Kahf: 68). But, Musa (Moses) peace be upon him responded, "God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way." (al-Kahf: 69) Whereupon the righteous servant said, 'If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself.' (al-Kahf: 71). But, events ensued; and Musa (Moses) peace be upon him was unable to remain patient, and so the righteous servant told him, 'This is where you and I part company...' (al-Kahf: 78). And this is an eternal ruling that those who practise the spiritual discipline-those who have attained to the rank of ihsan-cannot be equated with those who are not used to such a discipline. Those who do not practise the spiritual discipline should maintain a respectful attitude, as should those who do practise it; the latter should excuse those who do not practise the spiritual discipline as the former do not know what they know. And if those who engage in the spiritual practise excuse those who do not practise the spiritual discipline; and conversely, if those who do not practise the spiritual discipline maintain a respectful attitude towards those who do-the cosmic equilibrium would be restored.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the status of *ihsan* and the reward of those who attain it, when He says, 'The righteous will be in Gardens with [flowing]

springs. They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before.' (adh-Dhariyat: 15-16) And Allah Glorified is He explains the different stages of *ihsan* for us, and how they are categorised under what He has ordered; He says, 'They were sleeping only little at night.' (adh-Dhariyat: 17) Allah Glorified is He does not make it obligatory in Islam that a Muslim should abstain from sleep at night except for a little time at night, for the Muslim is required to pray the `isha' prayer, then he can sleep until fajr. Allah Glorified is He continues describing the stages of *ihsan* saying, 'They were praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness' (adh-Dharivat: 18). Allah Glorified is He does not make such practises obligatory for Muslims. However, those who wish to ascend to the station of *ihsan* should do so. Allah Glorified is He also says, "... They give a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived..." (adh-Dhariyat: 19). Here, Allah Glorified is He does not indicate a precise amount. Rather, this is left undetermined. He only has obligated az-zakat (the prescribed alms) on the Muslim. However, he who aspires to the rank of *ihsan* gives out of his money to the beggars and the deprived. And thus, a Muslim ascends to the rank of *ihsan* and into the love and intimacy of Allah Glorified is He. Allah Glorified is He has the highest example, we, for example, find that when a person gives someone else, he gives him out of his own private wealth, and he showers him with his talents—whether this be knowledge or money—so what do we think of he who places himself in a position to receive Allah's love?

Then Allah Glorified is He says:

فَلَوْلَاكَانَ مِنَ ٱلْقُرُونِ مِن قَبْلِكُمُ أَوْلُوا بَقِيَةٍ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ ٱلْفَسَادِ فِ ٱلْأَرْضِ إِلَا قَلِيلًا مِّمَّنُ أَبْعَيْنَا مِنْهُمٌ وَٱتَّبَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَا أَتَرِفُوا فِيهِ وَكَانُوا مُحْرِمِين (")

## If only there had been, among the generations before your time, people with a remnant of good sense, to forbid corruption on the earth! We saved only a few of them, while the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and persisted in sin [116] (The Quran, *Hud:* 116)

Allah *Glorified is He* points us to the fact that only substantial things can withstand the test of time, for time comes to erase those things which are insignificant and what is lower than them. The only remaining thing is the strong

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

one because it transcends time altogether. Therefore, the word *baqeyya* means the good things which remain. Allah *Glorified is He* shows us that He has destroyed the communities that came before because no group among them had forbidden corruption on the earth. Thus, the destruction came when those who enjoin the good and forbid the evil stopped their resistance to the corruption on the earth.

And Allah *Glorified is He* gives us examples of that which is virtuous, that which can withstand the tide of time; for in the story of Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and to Midyan, We sent their brother Shu'aib (Jethro). He said, "My people worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. Do not give short measure or short weight. I see you are prospering, but I fear you will have torment on an overwhelming Day. My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land. What lasts with Allah is best for you, if you are believers."" (*Hud:* 84-86) This means that giving short measure and short weight could give the trader more, but he pays no attention to that which he has in store. That is why Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* says, 'My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs and short weight could give the trader more, but he pays no attention to that which he has in store. That is why Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* says, 'My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land....' (*Hud:* 85).

So, if you look at something that has gone, and you possess the power to make use of it through your capacity of understanding, you would find it in store and waiting for you in the Hereafter. We have the best example in the attitude of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with 'Ai'sha *Allah be pleased with her* when he asked her about an ewe that was gifted to her. She knew that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to prefer the meat of its shoulder, so she gave away all ewe's meat except for a part of the shoulder, so when he asked her, 'What did you do with the meat of the ewe?' She replied, 'I gave it all away except for the shoulder.' This is how realistically 'Ai'sha *Allah be pleased with her* looked upon this situation; the only remaining part of the ewe was the shoulder, and she gave away the rest. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a pious religious gesture said, 'All of it remains except for the shoulder.'<sup>(1)</sup> This

<sup>(1) [</sup>Related by Ahmad and by At-Tirmidhi]

is how Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him conceived of the situation; he looked to the ultimate goodness of the part of the ewe which was given away. Corroborating this, there is another hadith in which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'O son of Adam, is there anything that is your belonging except that which you have consumed and exhausted, or which you wore and was then worn out, or which you gave as charity and sent it forward.<sup>(1)</sup> And the Quran emphasises this perspective, and reminds us of that which is stored away, so Allah Glorified is He says, 'Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life, but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord ... ' (al-Kahf: 46). And Allah Glorified is He describes this reward that lies in waiting as, '...A better reward with your Lord and better grounds for hope...' (al-Kahf: 46). And in another verse He says, '...and good deeds of lasting merit are best and most rewarding in your Lord's sight.' (Maryam: 76) Therefore, you must look at the good deeds of lasting merits because it is that which one can count upon. Allah Glorified is He mentions this more than once in the Quran; He says, 'Even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting.' (al-A'la: 17) And He also says, '...that which is with Allah is better and more lasting...' (al-Qasas: 60). Therefore, be wary of looking upon that which has gone and will never return, always look upon that whose value is everlasting. Whenever unfortunate events deprive the believer of something or another, we find that the one whose belief is superficial becomes agitated and worried over what has been taken away, but we find that the one with firm belief is thankful to Allah; Glorified is He for what is left over. Here we also have the example of 'Abdullah ibn Ja'far Allah be pleased with him when he severely injured his leg on his way to Syria. Once he reached the royal castle, the doctors looked at his leg and said, 'We must give you anaesthesia and amputate your infected leg. He said, 'By Allah, I would not like to be oblivious about remembrance of Allah even for a blink of an eye.' This meant of course that he would have to undergo surgery without anaesthesia. And when his leg was amputated, and they wanted to take it out to be buried—so that it may, Allah willing, enter paradise before the rest of him does-he asked them to bring it him, and so they did; and he held it with his hand and said, 'O Lord! Even if it may be that I have been tested by

(1) [Narrated by Muslim]

suffering the loss of a limb, indeed I have been absolved from such suffering in many other limbs.' This is how the believer conceived of his situation.

And when the Quran speaks about the degrees and stations of faith, it says of some people, '...these will enter Paradise...' (*Ghafir:* 40). And regarding others it says, 'These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord...' (*al-Baqara:* 157). Paradise will remain everlasting because Allah *Glorified is He* will sustain its existence, whereas His Mercy will remain everlasting as He remains Everlasting. And thus, the station of mercy is higher and loftier than the station of paradise. And thus, you find in every situation that which can be called 'the everlasting'.

Here Allah Glorified is He says, 'If only there had been, among the generations before your time, people with a remnant of good sense, to forbid corruption on the earth! We saved only a few of them....' (Hud: 116), meaning were it not for a select few people who-unlike the rest-are good, faithful and have certitude and oppose the spread of corruption on earth; were it not for them, Allah Glorified is He would have caused the earth to swallow up all those who dwell above it. Thus, that which endures from everything is the result of our choices and the tests that we endure as Allah Glorified is He says, '...the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind....' (ar-Ra'd: 17) And in the modern age we say, 'survival of the fittest'. Therefore, Allah Glorified is He allows life to go on because of these select few who forbid the spread of corruption on Earth; for they act in consideration of Allah's clear directives. To follow these directives adds nothing to Allah's dominion, nor does it enhance any of His Attributes, for He has created the universe and endowed it with all the perfect qualities inherent in it. The role that the Divine directives play is that they regulate the life of the cosmos and the beings living in it. And thus, the directives of heaven end up benefiting Allah's creatures, and not Allah Glorified is He Who has created the cosmos with His Perfect Attributes. Read, if you will, His Words, 'He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance so that you may not exceed in the balance.' (ar-Rahman: 7-8) Thus, just as Allah Glorified is He has raised the sky without using any pillars, and just as He has made things stable and balanced; you ought to apply the principles of moderation in matters where you can exercise your freedom of choice, and you ought to consider matters with a very fine balance, for when equilibrium is disrupted, life on earth becomes corrupted. One of the ways in which equilibrium can be disrupted is when the person who is unemployed usurps the daily bread of the hardworking person. Then people see the unemployed person, living in luxury through robbing the provisions of the hardworking person, and they, therefore, imitate him, and thus corruption starts spreading.

Then we start to see talented people receding into mediocrity, working only to satisfy their basic needs, for if they were to expend any extra effort, there would be no justice to guarantee the fruit of their labour. Thus, life on earth becomes corrupted, the principles of justice become eclipsed, and societies fail to keep up with the pace of life. So, Allah Glorified is He says, 'If only there had been, among the generations before your time, people with a remnant of good sense, to forbid corruption on the earth!' (Hud: 116) It was Allah's Will to make the community of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him the best of all human communities, on the condition that they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. Allah Glorified is He says, '[Believers], you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong ... ' (Al-'Imran: 110). Allah Glorified is He has willed that Prophet Muhammad's community be the very last, for no other divine messages are destined to come after that of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. The earlier divine messages used to be revealed after righteousness had diminished amongst communities, and within human souls. Allah Glorified is He has set the Doctrine for the very first human beings. So, the man had internal conscience so that if he committed a sin, he would turn to Allah Glorified is He in repentance after having reprimanded himself. However, if he gets accustomed to committing misdeeds, his own self-reproaching soul would give up and he falls under the influence of his evil whisperings. In this case, he will find support among the community, but if the latter also becomes corrupt, Allah Glorified is He intervenes by sending messengers, but the community of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him is exempt from all this because Allah Glorified is He has guaranteed that it will always have-until the Day of Judgment-individuals who call on people to be good and who enjoin what is good, and forbid what is wrong. That is why no prophet is destined to come after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emphasised this fact saying, 'The scholars from amongst my community are tantamount to the prophets of the Children of Israel.'<sup>(1)</sup> The scholar is anyone who knows even one of Allah's rulings; and he is obliged to communicate it to people. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'May Allah bestow a radiating glow on the face of him who, upon hearing my sayings, teaches them and conveys them to those who did not hear them; for many a transmitter [of knowledge] is wiser than the receiver [of the knowledge].'<sup>(2)</sup>

Allah Glorified is He says, '...people with a remnant of good sense, to forbid corruption on the earth! We saved only a few of them, while the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and persisted in sin.' (Hud: 116) Allah Glorified is He has saved a few of those who forbid the spread of corruption on earth. We find an example of this in the town located by the sea; whose fish would surface for them on the Sabbath, which was the day that they forbade themselves to engage in any fishing activities; then on the other days, all the fish would be gone. Allah Glorified is He says, 'when some of them asked [their preachers], "Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy, or at least punish severely?" [the preachers] answered, "In order to be free from your Lord's blame, and so that they may perhaps take heed." When they ignored [the warning] they were given, we saved those who forbade evil, and punished the wrongdoers severely because of their disobedience.' (al-A'raf: 164-165) And thus, Allah Glorified is He has saved those from among that village who forbid evildoing. We may find two elements in societies. The first is that society in which there is no group of people to counter the forces of corruption. The second is when the door of luxury opens for society, which has a debasing effect on human beings; for you might find a person whose means render him incapable of living the high-life of luxury that he desires, so he resorts to bribery, theft, and extortion to supplement his income. All this starts when a human being sees another human being enjoying the luxuries of life, whereas his own means do not allow him to indulge in such luxuries. Allah says,

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Al-`Ajluni in Kashf al-Khafa` (1744)

<sup>(2) [</sup>Narrated by Ahmad and Ibn Majah]

regarding the destruction of societies such as these, 'When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth [to reform], but they [persist in their] disobedience...' (*al-Isra*': 16). Some people do not understand the true meaning of this last noble verse. They understand that the disobedience was the result of an order from Allah *Glorified is He*; but the truth is that they had violated Allah's Order; for He says, 'Though all they are ordered to do is worship Allah alone, sincerely devoting their religion to Him...' (*al-Isra*': 16). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered the most privileged among them to follow His Path, whereby they violated, by their own choice, the Divine Laws; thus, they transgressed their Lord's orders.

The holy verse which we are currently studying, '...while the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and persisted in sin.' (al-Masad: 16) The word *dhalamu* (those who oppressed) which Allah Glorified is He uses, shows that the nature of the opulence which they enjoyed was obtained from wronging others, from usurping the rights of others and from sucking the life-blood of the destitute. The word *taraf* (luxury) denotes the bounty which a man enjoys. Therefore, the derivative term *ataraf* means to be corrupted by such abundant blessings, and to have succumbed to a state of forgetfulness regarding who the Bestower of these blessings really is. Atraf means that Allah Glorified is He has bestowed His blessings upon him only to seize him with all His Might and Power. Allah Glorified is He says, 'So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received, we opened the gates to everything for them.' (al-An'am: 44) No one should ever think that he who takes hold of his enemy and then raises him is just caressing him. Rather, he raises him only to throw him down from a greater height, such that his pain becomes that much greater. It is as if Allah Glorified is He bestowed worldly blessings on the likes of these people so that they could demonstrate their tyranny. We must pay attention to the word al-fath which brings about the joyful expanse of the human soul. We must pay attention to whether it is a case of *fatah* 'alayk or of *fatah* lak.

The Arabic word *fath* denotes 'victory', so mentioning it generally expresses good news. However, this is only when it is associated with the preposition '*l*' (to or for). When it is associated with the preposition '*ala* (against), it denotes an affliction, even if disguised in the appearance of a blessing. Allah says,

'Truly We have opened up a path to clear *fath* (triumph) for you [Prophet]' (*al-Fath:* 1). In the verse we are currently reflecting on, the word *fath* is used in the negative sense. The verse mentions people whom Allah has opened up against whom blessings that are actually nothing but harm, blessings intended to immerse them more in the heedlessness of Allah. So, Allah has punished them in this life, for they have grown forgetful of Him. Allah concludes the verse by saying, '...and so lost themselves in sinning' (*Hud:* 116). They violated that which must have been honoured. They disobeyed the ordinance of Allah which they were to abide by. In the original Arabic text of the verse, the word used to denote 'persisting in sinning' is *mujrimeen*. It is derived from the word *jurm* which means 'severance. One who persists in disobedience severs his relationship with his Creator since he has strayed into heedlessness and neglecting His guidance. They have lost themselves by indulging in the finery of this worldly life and usurping the fruits of others' labour.

Then, Allah says:

وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ لِيُهْلِكَ ٱلْقُرَىٰ بِظُلْمٍ وَأَهْلُهَا مُصْلِحُونَ ٢

# Your Lord would not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously [117] (The Quran, *Hud:* 117)

Using 'would not' denotes that something is not proper or should not exist, not that it does not exist, There is a difference between stating that something *does* not exist and that something should not exist. Based on this understanding, this verse means that it is impossible that Allah will destroy any town unjustly. Injustice means usurping the rights of others for the benefit of oneself, and there is nothing whatever which human beings possess which could benefit Allah for it is Him Who bestows all blessings on His creatures. Therefore, injustice is completely out of the question when it comes to the relationship between the Exalted Creator and His servants.

It is worthy of mention that the word 'town', which is a noun referring to places, is used in the verse, but those addressed by it are the dwellers, not the place. This is also the case in other verses, as in: 'And ask them about that town which stood by the sea...' (*al-A'raf:* 163). Allah also says, 'and ask (the

people of) the town where we have been...' (Yusuf: 82). As the translation shows, 'the people of' is not part of the structure of the verse. In these two examples, as well as in the verse we are currently reflecting on, Allah refers to the place, while He means the residents of that place. Allah says, 'Your Lord would not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously.' (Hud: 117) It means Allah is far above the possibility of destroying them unjustly. If He destroys any town, it is a punishment for the disobedience of its people. If wrongdoers did not receive punishment, the scale of justice would be deficient. For justice to be established, punishment or reward must be administered to those who deserve it. On the level of humans, when we bring an unjust person to justice and punish him, the suffering inflicted on him is a relief to all those who have suffered under his oppression. This is the true meaning of justice. One of the errors occurring in the justice systems applied by people is the delaying of sentences. It would take years before a criminal is sentenced for his crime. Such laxity in carrying out sentences is a failure of justice, for the longer the interval between committing a crime and administering justice, the less sensitive people are to the gruesomeness of the crime. There would be no deterrent to prevent people from sinning. That is why Islamic law is keen on shortening this interval as much as possible. Punishment must be administered while the community is still reeling from the shock of the crime. This is sure to generate general satisfaction from the punishment of the criminal. It also serves to remind everyone of the heinous nature of the crime.

In the verse, Allah says, 'Your Lord would not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously.' (*Hud:* 117) In another verse, He says, 'Your Lord would not destroy towns for their wrongdoing if they had not been warned.' (*al-An'am:* 131) Therefore, Allah has sent prophets to convey to us the Truth that was revealed to them, to bring good news of reward to the obedient and admonition to those heedless of Allah's message. Allah would not punish people for anything unless He has made it clear for them that it is a sin and warned them against committing it.

Thus, Allah has conveyed to us the broad principles by which to manage our life on earth and left it to us to devise based on those principles and regulations to achieve reform and welfare. He says, 'Your Lord would not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously (muslehun).' (Hud: 117) The word islah literally means 'reform', and it has a rather deeper connotation than that conveyed by the word 'righteous'. It is the act of employing the means and resources Allah has created for us to make our livelihoods and achieve wellbeing. Allah has made for us ample resources for sustenance and commanded us to develop creative inventions to promote our lives. He has secured for us the basic necessities of life- food, water, and air; they exist in abundance in the universe. He has also guaranteed preservation of kinds through reproduction by creating the male and female in living beings. Using these means and resources to achieve wellbeing is what the word *islah* means, and this is what Allah commands. We have previously pointed out that *islah* means maintaining that which is already good to derive more benefit from it and reforming that which is not so it can be useful too. A *muslih* is he who increases the quality or efficiency of something so it can be more suitable for answering human needs and reaching goals more easily. Allah would not destroy a community that commits itself to *islah* by following a system that governs life and manages people's affairs rightly. In case this system is based on believing in Allah and accepting His religion, the result is harmony and balance between humankind and the universe. In this way, society can continue to exist and prosper. On the other hand, some societies have not accepted divine guidance, but they have devised a system of values that organizes their lives, for Allah does not prevent the human mind from establishing rules and systems to make life easier and more comfortable.

However, when people replace the Law of Allah by their own laws, they must go through difficulty and hardship until they manage to devise a system that governs life. Allah has sent down His guidance to us to spare us difficulty and hardship. He has revealed to us the perfect law that can best govern life without having to incur any effort or toil to devise our own laws. No matter how we try to render perfect the laws we make, there will be flaws and imperfections. Only the law of the All Knowing, All-Wise Creator can set life to rights and meanwhile spare us hardship and suffering from the first.

Thus, we understand that Allah does not destroy any society only because they are disbelievers. Allah would not strip a society from the right to live so long as it follows laws and values that establish the rights and obligations of its members, even though they would have to incur distress and pain in the process replacing the law of Allah. However, it is the inevitable duty of the believers to alert them to the ordinance of Allah. If they accept it, they thus guarantee happiness in this life and the other. If they reject it, let it suffice that, at the very least, they would not fight against the believers or try to block the way of faith before people.

That is why we find that in countries Muslims have ruled, there are people who have adhered to their religions; Muslims have not conquered countries to force their peoples to embrace Islam. Rather, Islam spread in those countries by the power of logic, justice and irrefutable proof. Allah *the Exalted* says, 'and He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes; Allah loves the just.' (*al-Mumtahana:* 8) Allah would not destroy a society that seeks reform and justice, even if it is a disbelieving society. Rather, He grants them the fruits they deserve in this worldly life. For as He *Glorified is He* says, 'If anyone desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall increase it for him; if anyone desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him a share of it, but in the Hereafter he will have no share.' (*ash-Shura:* 20)

In the following verse, Allah says:

وَلَوُ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ ٱلنَّاسَ أَمَّةً وَحِدَةً وَلا يَزَالُونَ مُخْلَلِفِينَ ٢

# If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community, but they continue to have their differences [118] (The Quran, *Hud:* 118)

Allah has prepared the universe with all the basic necessities that sustain life before bringing humankind to it. He has created things whose only role is to be at the service of humankind so as to help the latter perform the mission they are created for as vicegerents on earth. These creatures have no will of their own and it is not their choice to accept or reject their role as servants to people, whether believers or disbelievers. Allah has brought humankind into existence and secured for them the sustenance required to maintain this existence. He has guaranteed for us preservation of life and kind. This is a gift Allah grants to His servants be they believers or disbelievers.

#### EL SHA'RAWY REFLECTIONS / vol- 11

So as for sustenance, Allah grants it to all. As for guidance, it is a gift only to the believers. All people receive provisions from Allah whether they believe in Him or not, but only those who believe benefit from His guidance. Those who receive both Allah's provision and guidance are the happiest in both this life and the Afterlife. Allah, with His Infinite Power, compels all creation- except for human beings- to perform the roles they are created for, and they have no choice or free will respecting this. Had Allah so willed, He would have created a single community of human beings that never strays from His path- just as the sun, the moon, the air, or any of the other creatures which are completely subservient to His Will and have no will of their own.

Allah has made his creatures subservient to Him, never faltering in their servitude. This proves His Absolute Power over them. As for His servants' love for Him, this is demonstrated by those of His creatures He has given the freedom of choice: whether to obey or disobey Him. If a servant chooses to embrace faith and obey Allah, this is a proof that he loves Him. Thus, the creatures that have no will of their own and are compelled to remain subservient to Allah demonstrate His Divine Might and Omnipotence. As for those creatures Allah has given freewill, if they obey Him, this demonstrates love for Allah Who says, '... The truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so...' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

However, does freewill mean that we are absolutely free in every respect? No, beware of this self-deception. Besides the fact that this freewill is a bestowal from Allah and a manifestation of His Will, let us also remember that there are aspects where we have no choice. It is true Allah has given us the choice to worship Him or not, but it does not mean we have escaped His Control. Allah has power over the means that preserve human life. He strips us of the ability to choose in some respects to remind us of this absolute truth: we are His servants and He has Absolute Power over us all. He has created animals, plants and inanimate objects for our service and wellbeing and distinguished us from them by the gift we call the 'mind'.

Some fall into the mistake of taking words to have meanings quite opposite to what they are intended to convey. The word `*aql* (mind) is taken from the verb `*aqala* which means 'to tie' or 'to restrain' It denotes control, for the

function of the mind is to rein in caprices and conceit, not to go beyond the limits Allah has set. Always remind yourself of the One in Whose Grasp you are and think of those aspects of your life where you have no choice. As long as there are realms where you have no freewill, and then be mindful of Allah in the areas where He has given you choice. Remain steadfast in faith and maintain the right attitude and conduct in relation to Him. Remember that it is He Who has given you the gift of life including the aspects where you have freewill and those where you do not. Allah teaches us lessons to remind us of His Omnipotent Power by stripping us of abilities we perhaps believe we have complete control over. One may lose control over his own leg or arm and fail to move them. If these abilities were solely under our control, they could never let us down. Rather, these abilities are bestowed from Him, and He can take them away if He wills. So long as this is the case, let everyone say to himself: do not become conceited if Allah has given you freewill on a certain level. Allah has only given us this freedom to test us regarding His ordinance. He has sent down to us His guidance which consists of His commands and prohibitions. So long as we are commanded to do something, it means we have the power not to do it. Likewise, prohibitions mean we have the power to do what we are prohibited from doing, or else the notion of obligation would be nonsensical. We have the choice to obey or disobey divine guidance, but in other matters, we have no choice. Had Allah so willed, He would have stripped us of freewill in all matters. Therefore, it befits people of understanding to discipline themselves with the Almighty Creator and show obedience to Him in matters where He has given people freedom of choice.

Allah says, 'Man is ungrateful to his Lord' (*al-'Adiyat:* 6). Indeed we are, for we sometimes forget that the first and foremost function of the mind is to make us realise our limits. We do not control the way our bodies function, nor can we modify them to make them resistant to natural laws, for example. Allah gives us no choice there, and in this is a constant reminder of His Might. Therefore, we should submit humbly to Him and abide by His ordinance in what He gives us freedom to choose.

It is worthy of mention that religious obligations and prohibitions constitute a very limited range of life's activities, perhaps only 5% of them. The remaining 95% fall into the category of permissible things that are neither

mandatory nor forbidden. Allah has made obligations and prohibitions to maintain healthy functioning of our life on earth. Compliance with them means setting this life to rights and reaping ample reward in the life to come.

Let us ponder this example. Islam commands the wealthy to give zakat (alms). Is it any form of transgression against their properties? No, but this obligation guarantees that they too will sure receive sufficient help if they turn poor. So is the case with all the commands of Islam. They are meant to cure ailments of society and solve problems with justice. They promote compassion and helpfulness among the members of society based on true faith in the Creator and devotion to His religion. Here is another example. Islam forbids one from prying into the private lives of others, so is this a restriction of one's freedom? No, but it is a guarantee that others too would not pry on one's private life. Therefore, if we think deeply about the nature and purpose of duties in Islam, we find that both obligations and prohibitions are to our advantage. In the verse we are reflecting on, Allah says, 'If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community...' (Hud: 118). There is a common misconception that this verse contradicts what Allah says in the following one, 'Mankind was a single community, then Allah sent prophets to bring good news and warning...' (al-Baqara: 213). The latter gives the impression, at first sight, that humankind were heedless of their Creator at the very beginning and it was only after Allah sent forth His prophets one after another that they took heed. As we said, this is a faulty understanding. Allah has guaranteed for humankind- ever since He brought Adam and his wife on earth- provisions that sustain their lives and guidance that keeps them on the straight path. People have known their Creator ever since their parents were ordered to descend to earth to perform their role as vicegerents. Allah says, '... Whoever follows My guidance, when it comes to you [people], will not go astray nor fall into misery' (Ta Ha: 123). Thorough consideration of the Quranic verses that deal with this matter would remove any misunderstanding. Allah says in the verse we are dealing with, 'If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community...' (Hud: 118). In the verse wrongly thought to contradict it, Allah says, 'Mankind was a single community, then Allah sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So, by His leave Allah guided the believers to the truth they had differed about; Allah guides whoever He will to a straight path.' (*al-Baqara:* 213) Divine guidance was revealed concurringly with the descent of Adam *peace be upon him.* After this first reminder, people strayed into heedlessness and disagreement regarding the issue of faith, so Allah sent forth His prophets to remind them of the Truth and judge between them. People were already on the straight path of Allah when He created them and brought them down to earth. Allah could have made them continue in a state of righteousness, all rightly guided and obedient to Him. However, He has chosen to give them freewill to choose their paths and, due to this freedom, they began to disagree regarding faith and will continue to disagree, '... but they continue to have their differences' (*Hud:* 118).

In the following verse, Allah states an exception to this rule. He says:

إِلَّا مَن رَّحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمُّ وَتِمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ ٱلْجِنَّةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ (١٠)

#### Except those on whom your Lord has mercy – for He created them to be this way, and the word of your Lord is final: 'I shall definitely fill Hell with both jinn and men' [119] (The Quran, *Hud:* 119)

So among the servants of Allah are the rightly guided whom He saves from disagreement respecting faith. Allah says about the creation of humankind, 'I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56). Worship means submission to Allah and adherence to His ordinance. However, people's caprices and prejudices have caused them to disagree regarding faith and disobey divine commands. Allah has made us different. Were we all alike, there would be no such disagreement. Everyone has a different temperament and tendency. That is why some tend to be right wing or left wing in politics; some choose communism, others capitalism, some existentialism etc.

Therefore, human standards and inclinations cannot be the basis for the truth, as Allah says, 'But if the truth were in accordance with their desires, the

heavens, the earth and everyone in them would disintegrate...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71). The world cannot be governed by the desires of people who forever disagree. Rather, harmony and righteousness can only be achieved when we all follow the law of the Creator and transcend our desires. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you will attain to true faith until he makes his desires compliant with the message I have been sent with.'<sup>(1)</sup>

In our daily lives, the various professions and activities that help keep life going have been left to us to govern. In this realm, there is great variation based on the different powers and talents of people. Allah could have created us all geniuses in every aspect of life; He could have made us all talented poets, or doctors or philosophers, but who then would perform the other professions? Had we all been doctors or engineers, who then would perform the works of farming or trade? It is the Will of Allah that He has created us different in talents and capacities. This is for the world to be bound together through inter-relationships and inter-dependencies. Life cannot go only by the compassion and goodwill of people.

That is why Allah says, 'Are they the ones who share out your Lord's grace? We are the ones who give them their share of livelihood in this world and We have raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). This verse states the wisdom for which Allah has made people different in rank and social status. This is not for the rich to exercise superiority or authority over the poor. Every human being is distinguished in his own station by the skills Allah has given him. Everyone is elevated by his good work in the particular field he masters. One's diligence is what gives him status, whatever his domain is.

This way, human beings all share in the benefits of each other's varying talents. Differences in human talents act as channels for cooperation and exchange of experiences and services. In terms of abilities and talents, everyone's share is just equal to everyone else's. The real worth of a person is determined by the things he masters whatever his field or profession is, and the only thing that makes one person superior to another is devotion to Allah.

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Ibn Abu `Asem in his As-Sunnah (12/1) on the authority of `Abdullah ibn 'Amr, and Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in his Jami` Al-`Ulum (460).

The rich owner of a luxury car is in need of a mechanic in dirty and ragged clothes, even though the latter is less wealthy and socially less advantageous. That is why I insist: if you see someone who is apparently *below* you in appearance or status, do not be conceited for what you have achieved or gained over him. Remind yourself that this person sure masters something you know nothing of; he sure excels over you in some domain or another. Allah has begot no child to prefer him above all the others and endow him with all talents and powers, leaving the rest powerless or devoid of talents that distinguish them.

Allah says, '... but they continue to have their differences, except those on whom your Lord has mercy– for He created them to be this way...' (*Hud:* 118-119). Differences concerning religion result in the existence of believers and disbelievers. The fact that some disbelieve in Allah contains a message in itself. Were it not for the existence of disbelievers, the believer would perhaps be unable to appreciate Allah's favour on them. Were disbelief completely pointless, Allah would have eliminated it from existence. As a matter of fact, disbelief is serviceable to faith. It shows the greatness of faith through the flagrant contrast between them. This is just as pain is serviceable to health; were it not for pain, the illness could not be discovered, diagnosed, or cured. In this sense, pain is like a messenger heralding the advent of good health.

So Allah says, '... but they continue to have their differences, except those on whom your Lord has mercy...' (*Hud:* 118-119). Difference is actually at the core of harmony, the means that leads to general agreement. Take this simple example. If all the members of a family preferred the same part of chicken, this similarity would entail disagreement and dispute. Agreement would be achieved when tastes and preferences vary. The same goes for professions and social statuses: variation leads to harmony whereas similarity would cause dispute. This poses a question: Are people created to be forever entrenched in their divergent views, or are they created for peaceful coexistence and mutual compassion? The answer is that we are created for both difference on the one hand and mercy on the other hand, since each has a role and a reason behind it and there is no contradiction.

Then Allah says in the same verse, '... and the word of your Lord is final, "I shall definitely fill Hell with both jinn and men."" (*Hud:* 119) One of the

Attributes of Allah is Omnipotent Knowledge, so He has eternally known who of His servants would choose faith and who would reject it. This is what it means that '... the word of your Lord is final...' (*Hud:* 119). He has known in advance the choices His servants would make. He has known who would struggle to attain paradise and who would do evil and deserve to abide in Hellfire.

Let me again give the example I have frequently given. It is just for illustration, for Allah is above all comparison. Suppose the dean of a college asks the teachers that the best students of every class should be announced to be awarded for their excellence. Even though the teachers already knew those students, the dean ordered a test to be given before selection. The test results may or may not corroborate the teachers' expectations and knowledge of their students. Some of the students may be out of form due to sickness or the like, so he may not do well in the test. Thus, judgement of the teachers would be thrown into doubt. However, the Judgment of Allah is not subject to error, and what He has eternally known about His servants most certainly comes true. His word must be fulfilled. His Knowledge is eternal, and in several verses of the Glorious Quran, Allah challenges the disbelievers to alter His Judgement or prove it wrong. He says, for example, 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too!' (al-Masad: 1) Abu Lahab heard this verse and still did not try to defy fate by declaring faith, or even hypocritically professing faith. Indeed '... the word of your Lord is final...' (Hud: 119). What Allah says must undoubtedly be fulfilled for there is none that can go against His Will. Allah commands us, when we promise or announce that we mean to do something, 'And never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow" without [adding], "if Allah so wills" (al-Kahf: 23-24). This is showing respect for Allah and an acknowledgement of our limited scope. We are subject to the vicissitudes of fate. We have no control over events, their times, places, implications, reasons or results. Allah is the One Who possesses dominance over all things. Thus, acknowledging that one can only do a thing 'if Allah so wills' (al-Kahf: 24) protects one from being accused of breaching his promises in case any unexpected event turns up. However, when the Owner of the universe, in Whose Hand all Power rests, promises to do a thing, He is Capable of carrying out that which He has promised with absolute certainty.

It is also worthy of mention that, as we have pointed out before, the actions of Allah are independent of time. In the original Arabic text of the Quran, a verb expressing an action of Allah may be in the past, present or future tense. Still, these tenses encompass only human actions. Divine Actions are not measured by the same standards. When Allah decrees a matter, we must consider it fulfilled. He says, 'Allah's judgement is bound to come. Do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent! ...' (*an-Nahl:* 1). So long as the matter has been decided upon, it will surely occur at its appointed time. No power is capable of preventing Allah's Will from being executed, for His rule over His kingdom is absolute, uncontested.

Allah concludes the verse by saying, 'I shall definitely fill Hell with both jinn and men' (*Hud:* 119). Allah has created humankind and jinn for His worship and charged them with the heavy trust of faith and moral responsibility. Therefore, they will all be recompensed for what they do.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَكُلَّا نَّقُصُ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَآءِ ٱلرُّسُلِ مَا نُثَبِّتُ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَجَآءَكَ فِي هَذِهِ ٱلْحَقُّ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ (")

#### So [Muhammad], We have told you the stories of the prophets to make your heart firm and in these accounts truth has come to you, as well as lessons and reminders for the believers [120] (The Quran, *Hud:* 120)

This verse refers to all the prophets whose stories are told to the Prophet Muhammad by Allah in the Glorious Quran.

Some of the actions of Allah correspond to His Names and Attributes and some are not. For example, Allah has 'created' all things, and this action corresponds with His Name 'the Creator'. On the other hand, some actions do not correspond to any of the ninety-nine Names of Allah. He says in the verse we are reflecting on, '... We have told you the stories...', yet we can by no means ascribe to Allah the name of 'story-teller'! Similarly, it is improper for anyone to say that Allah is 'the Schemer', even though He says, '...They schemed and so did Allah...' (*al-Anfal:* 30). Allah also says, 'The hypocrites try to deceive

Allah, but it is He who causes them to be deceived...' (*an-Nisa*': 142). However, it does not mean we can call Allah 'the Deceiver'! Thus, we understand the proper way of speaking about Allah. We should show reverence for Allah by ascribing to Him only the Attributes of Majesty and Loftiness He ascribes to Himself. When the actions of Allah are described in the Quran using words that do not correspond to His Names, it is only for the purpose of suitability, yet they denote meanings different in quality and degree from those denoted by the same words when referring to human actions.

Allah says, 'So [Muhammad], We have told you the stories (*anba*') of the prophets...' (*Hud:* 120). The Arabic word *anba*' means 'news of great moment', news capable of altering the state of the mind that receives and comprehends it, Stories of prophets who preceded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are mentioned in several chapters throughout the Glorious Quran. They tell news of the ailments of their peoples that they addressed by their messages and the hardships they had to endure from those who opposed them. Allah tells Prophet Muhammad these stories in the Quran to make firm his heart, for he too was going to encounter hardships in the course of his mission of calling for Islam. Allah says about one of the previous prophets and those who believed with him, '... they were so shaken that even [their] Messenger and the believers with him cried, "When will Allah's help arrive?" (*al-Baqara:* 214)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims encountered such difficulties too, as Allah says, '[Remember what you felt] when they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when [your] eyes became dim and [your] hearts came up to [your] throats, and [when] most conflicting thoughts about Allah passed through your minds.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 10). When events reach such a point, reassurance is most needed by firming up faith in the hearts of the believers. Allah has sent His prophet to deliver His message, so He would not let that Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* fall victim to his adversaries. Great difficulties had to be faced, so Allah braced the heart of His prophet to be strong enough for them.

The heart is the centre of one's beliefs. The mind stores the information supplied by the senses. Perceptions are formed through the eyes that see, the

ears that hear, the nose that smells, the mouth that tastes, and the skin that feels. Information is thus generated for the mind to start its process of storing and analysing them. When this information acquires approval and validation of the mind, they are passed to the heart, there to rest as certainties that doubt cannot interfere with. That is why the Arabic word used to express this meaning is `aqidah (creed). It comes from the word `uqdah meaning 'knot'. When thoughts turn into beliefs, it is as if they are knotted to the very strings of the heart so they become inextricable. Once the mind has done its work and beliefs have been firmly rooted in the heart, they serve as the principles around which one's life revolves. A young man thinking about his future career would consider the advantages and disadvantages of the different professions to choose the one that best matches his talents and aspirations. The senses gather the required information, the mind analyses them, and when results are crystalized, they are sent to the heart as beliefs that govern one's conduct and choices in life. We all know for sure that fire burns, so where has this certainty come from? The senses encountered the experience which the mind stored and analysed. Due to this process, the heart has grown firm and unwavering in its conviction that fire burns. The heart is the vessel whose role is to be ready to receive the truth, heed reminders and warnings and accept the wise counsel revealed by its Lord. What comes from Allah is the Truth, and it is a quality true of truths that they never change. The Truth Allah has revealed to His servants is the source from which faith springs and based on which humankind are assigned their religious obligations. One must have confidence in the Wisdom of the One Who has decreed laws and obligations before he can accept to abide by them. That is why evidence for the Existence of the True Lord must be first provided so His Ordinance may be heeded. Obedience stems from faith in the Almighty Lord Who is never affected by any change or swayed by caprice or fancy. Religion may command one to commit himself to heavy duties from which he would like to refrain. Only true faith would urge one to comply in such a case. Devotion stems from firm belief that Allah is the One Who has created us, and it is therefore impossible for Him to cheat or deceive His creatures, so whatever He sends through His messengers is true, wise, and just.

One normally dislikes teachings or counsels when they are given by a human being like himself, for they are usually associated with a kind of perfection the advice-giver has and the advised person lacks. In case the former himself lacks that aspect of perfection to which his advice pertains, his addressee would only answer him: do not preach what you do not practise. That is why Allah says, 'Most loathsome is it in the Sight of Allah that you say what you do not do!" (*as-Saff:* 3). When someone preaches something he does not practise, this gives his addressee a pretext to reject his advice, for he would think to himself, 'if there were any good to be found in that advice, he would have applied it to himself?!

The verse we are examining explains the situation Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* faced and his need for reassurance and support. It also underlines the believer's need to be reminded that they too would face hardships as those who believed with the previous prophets.

As a matter of fact, hardships sometimes result from the seemingly arduous nature of religious obligations. This is the outcome of looking at these obligations on the surface and failing to comprehend their deep significance. For example, some perhaps consider the command to lower one's gaze (from looking at what is unlawful) is an unnecessary prohibition of an almost unavoidable pleasure. However, they do not realise that when others also commit themselves to this command, their own privacy would be secured against violation. Some may, likewise, see the obligation of giving zakat (alms giving) an injustice that causes to deprive him of some of his money. They do not realise that this obligation will in turn serve them in case they go through tough times and become poor themselves. If the giver of zakat becomes the one in need, his fellow believers will rally to his aid to protect him and his family from suffering under poverty. Thus, correct understanding of religious obligations is fundamental to faith. Allah says in the Quran, 'Will they not, then, try to understand this Quran?' (an-Nisa': 82) When you consider the matter more closely, you will see that religious obligations are not meant to be restrictions to your freedom. Rather, they are meant to guard your honour and dignity. Allah has enjoined such duties on you for your protection and prosperity, even though, outwardly, they may seem to benefit only others.

Besides religious obligations, among the difficulties the believers encounter is rejection and resistance of those who benefit from corruption. They are people who thrive on the spread of corruption and persecute anyone who oppose their interests. They would sure harbour hatred for those who resist the spread of corruption on earth. Therefore, the attitude of Prophet Muhammad's adversaries was natural, for in their folly, they defined their interests only in terms of the life of this world. They did not consider the possible consequences- of either reward or punishment- they were to incur in the Afterlife. Had they possessed sound judgement, they would have realised that it sure serves their best interests to have someone who calls them to be upright so they will not lose the Hereafter. Had they reflected rationally on the matter, they would have seen that, just as Prophet Muhammad's mission was to stand up for the weak and oppressed, it was also to stand up for them, wealthy and powerful as they were. Had they come to that essential realisation, they would have supported the Prophet's cause rather than oppose it. Had they heeded his admonition concerning the recompense they were to receive in the Hereafter for spreading corruption, they would have been grateful to him for warning them and helping them purify themselves.

Thus, Allah has assured Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was nothing new among the rest of His prophets, for every prophet has encountered difficulties as well in the course of their mission. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sure to expect particularly severe trials and hardships, for he was the final messenger and the message he was sent with would not be followed by any other message. Since it was certain that he would go through trying times, Allah related to him stories of the difficulties faced by the previous prophets to make his heart firm; it was that heart which received the fundamentals of faith, starting from the essence of creed: 'there is no god but Allah', until every principle of faith became ingrained in it. Reassurances were therefore essential to make that heart firm and firm up faith in the hearts of the believers who followed him as well, for they too were destined to go through trying times.

Let us ponder what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to *al-ansar* (helpers) when they swore allegiance to him at `*Aqabah*. They

said, 'If we honour our pledge to you, what will we receive in return?' The Prophet did not tell them, for example, 'You will rule over the world! Your dominion will stretch from Persia to the Mediterranean'! Instead, his reply to them was, 'You will be rewarded with Paradise.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that some of them might die before the aspired victories would be achieved, so he did not promise them reward in this worldly life. Rather, he promised them that which everyone who dies as a believer will attain, whether he witnesses the victories of Muslims or passes away before they take place.

The verse we are reflecting on shows the reason why Allah mentions the stories of previous prophets in the Quran. By that, He meant to strengthen Prophet Muhammad's heart to prepare him to receive the Truth and remind with it those who believed with him.

Now, what about the other party? Those who denied the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and fought against him? Allah also gives an account of them since the aforementioned verse is such that it makes the soul receptive to hearing about the other party that opposes the Truth. After speaking about firming up faith in the hearts of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers at times when they are about to falter, Allah also speaks about the disbelievers and commands His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to face them without fear. He says:

### وَقُل لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ٱعْمَلُواْ عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنَّا عَنِمِلُونَ ١

## Say to those who do not believe, 'Do whatever you can: we too are doing what we can' [121] (The Quran, *Hud:* 121)

Let the disbelievers do whatever they like, for Prophet Muhammad *peace* and blessings be upon him and the believers relied on the solid basis of faith in Allah and therefore any preparation their opponents made did not deter them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers would not face their enemies alone, nor was their confidence derived from their numbers. Rather, they relied on the never-failing Power of Allah. Any military commander engaged in a battle would feel a surge of confidence when news of aids and supporting troops reach him from the nation for whom he is fighting. How much confidence do you think would be inspired then if help were to come from Him whose reserves are never depleted? The One Who compels all and none can compel?

This is how the prophets dealt with their enemies; they sought refuge with the All-Powerful Lord. When Prophet Musa (Moses) peace be upon him was about to be overtaken by Pharaoh, when he realised that there was no possible escape where the sea laid in front and the enemy was at the back, his people cried out, '...We shall certainly be overtaken' (ash-Shu'ara': 61). However, Prophet Musa (Moses) reassured them, '...No, my Lord is with me, He will guide me' (ash-Shu'ara': 62). He knew he was backed by the power of faith, of reliance on Allah, not the material power of himself or his followers, so Allah rescued them with a miracle, 'Strike the sea with your staff' (ash-Shu'ara': 63). Prophet Musa (Moses) peace be upon him did and the sea parted, each side like a huge mountain, and a narrow path of dry land appeared where Prophet Musa (Moses) peace be upon him and his followers proceeded. It occurred to Musa (Moses) peace be upon him that he must strike the sea with his staff again so it would return to its natural, fluid state. He wanted to prevent his enemy and his soldiers from taking that passages, so Allah revealed to him, 'Leave the sea behind you parted and their army will be drowned' (ad-Dukhan: 24). Allah commanded Prophet Musa (Moses) peace be upon him to leave the sea as it was so that it might deceive Pharaoh into attempting to tread upon that dry path. Then, Allah would cause the sea to suddenly return to its original state. Thus, the same thing that saved Prophet Musa (Moses) and his followers also destroyed Pharaoh and his soldiers. Only Allah the Exalted is capable of that. It is in such a manner that Allah grants the believers strength to stand up to the disbelievers.

Faith is a battle of challenge. The challenge of a prophet is to prove sincere as the conveyer of Allah's message who is supported by a miracle proving his truthfulness. The other challenge faced by a prophet and the believers is to gain victory against the disbelievers in spite of their relatively much smaller numbers and limited material powers. The power of faith is what brings that victory. Allah says, '...How often a small force has defeated a large army with Allah's permission! Allah is with those who are steadfast' (*al-Baqara:* 249). Thus, amid any battle where faith is at stake, an attitude of challenge and perseverance is widespread among those who fight for the Truth.

Every prophet was first supported by a miracle with which he challenged his opponents to prove his truthfulness. Then the role of the miracle would come to an end, and Allah would reveal to His prophet a doctrine to be delivered to his people. However, the case was quite different with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for the miracle associated with his advent is unique in that its role never comes to an end. Furthermore, it is the essence of his message for it contains the fundamentals of faith and the ordinance of Allah. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with the timeless message addressed to all humankind for all times and places, so it was necessary to send with him a miracle that would stand until the Day of Judgement. Everyone who believes in Islam knows that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is Allah's messenger and the Quran is his miracle until the coming of the Hour.

Allah says in the verse we are considering, 'and say to those who do not believe: "Act according to your ability and way (*makanatikum*)...' (*Hud:* 121). The Arabic word *makanah* is derived from the same root of *makan* (place). Every creature has a physical form and a place occupied by this form. As for *makanah*, it denotes 'a prestigious status', a status among people that is indicative of the consequence and authority of its holder. When Allah says, '... Act according to your ability and way...' (*Hud:* 121), it is a challenge to the disbelievers: do all that your powers and numbers are capable of, for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is supported by the Almighty Lord Who has sent him and who would bring him victory. As we said, this is meant as a direct challenge, not a command. Allah would not address any commands to the disbelievers, for they do not believe in Him in the first place so that they would obey Him.

Were they to obey the commands of Allah, they would not be disbelievers anymore, for obedience necessarily entails faith. The challenge reaches a peak when Allah says at the end of the verse, 'We are acting (in our way)' (*Hud:* 121). Let them do what they can; their power is ever so limited, for they are mortals who are subject to vicissitudes. Allah too is acting, and His Power and Capacity to act are unlimited. He is the True Lord Who has ever existed with no beginning and no end and Who has Power over all things and nothing has power over Him. When He decrees something, none can counteract His Will.

Every power possessed by any of His creatures is bestowed by Him in the first place, but the Power of the Creator has eternally been His; it was bestowed by none and none can defeat it or eliminate it. The moment and influence of any action is measured by the power of him who acts. The mistake of most people is that they forget who the actor is when they consider an action. Human beings can well be opposed and their actions counteracted. However, if the action is performed by Allah, then people must humbly acknowledge the limits of their powers. A very good example of this mistake is the attitude of the disbelievers to Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey regarding which Allah says, 'Glory to Him Who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship [in Mecca] to the furthest place of worship [in Jerusalem], whose surroundings We have blessed....' (*al-Isra*': 1) They wondered saying, 'It takes us a month to reach Jerusalem even when riding our fastest camels, so how did he reach it in a single night'?! They forgot that it was not the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him who made the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem by his own power. Rather, he was taken there by Allah. Measure, therefore, that miraculous act by the Power of Allah and not that of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.

Allah says in the following verse:

#### وَٱننَظِرُوٓا إِنَّا مُننَظِرُونَ (٢٠٠) And 'Wait: we too are waiting' [122] (The Quran, Hud: 122)

In this verse, an even greater sense of threat and defiance is felt. The disbelievers only await fulfilment of the devil's promise to them, whereas the believers await fulfilment of their Lord's Promise to them. The believers will tell the disbelievers on the Day of Judgement, 'We have found what our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found what your Lord promised you to be true?' (*al-A'raf:* 44) Waiting of the disbelievers is a defiant threat to them, for they only wait for their due punishment. To the believers, contrarily, waiting is soothing and reassurance as they wait for Allah's victory.

Had the future events foretold in the Quran not come true, doubt would have crept to the hearts of the believers. The word of Allah must be fulfilled, so we can be sure that this threat, 'And "Wait, we too are waiting."" (*Hud:* 122)

was given in full confidence that what Allah has promised would come true. Indeed, actual events did corroborate everything that has been foretold in the Quran. Did the True Lord the Exalted not say, 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee' (al-Qamar: 45)? At the time this verse was revealed, the Muslims were still weak, and this prompted 'Umar Allah be pleased with him to ask Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him 'Which of the two groups will be defeated?' He feared the word 'forces' referred to the believers for their wanting of material power then made him exclude the possibility of their being the victorious party. A Muslim then was unable even to protect himself. Later, when the Battle of Badr took place, the foretold news of victory came true. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him had even marked the very spots on the land of the battlefield where some of the great leaders of Ouravsh would meet their end! The Ouran foretold even the body parts where some of them would be wounded. Allah has revealed to His Prophet, 'We shall brand him on the snout!' (al-Qalam: 16) Allah has foretold such events so that when they came true, this would be evidence for Prophet Muhammad's truthfulness as His Messenger. Thus, Allah has always been on the side of those who follow His straight path. He has related in the Quran certain events from the stories of previous messengers to firm up his peace and blessings be upon him heart and grant him courage and strength to bear the burden of the message and help the believers remain steadfast in faith.

Allah concludes the chapter of *Hud* with the following blessed words:

وَلِلَّهِ غَيْبُ ٱلسَّمَوَاتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ ٱلْأَمَرُ كُلُّهُ. فَأَعْبُدُهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَنِفِلِ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ (١)

All that is hidden in the heavens and earth belongs to God, and all authority goes back to Him. So [Prophet], worship Him, and put your trust in Him: your Lord is never unaware of what you [people] are doing [123] (The Quran, *Hud:* 123)

This verse in question addresses mankind and tells them that they previously knew nothing about those secrets presented to them in the verses of the Noble Quran which have been revealed down to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* 

Here, we should consider that Allah *Glorified is He* out of the undeniable fact that He encompasses the knowledge of everything, guards this Quran so we will never be doubtful about the absolute truthfulness and veracity of the Quran.

As a matter of fact, there are undoubtedly a lot of secrets which man is still unable to uncover, that is, there are barriers between him and the uncovering of these secrets. One of these barriers may, for example, be that of time. Here, we heavily stress that whenever Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about any topic as well as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself never previously knew about, this falls under the category of uncovering the secrets of the old past.

For this reason, scholars call some verses of the Quran *ma kunnat al-Quran* in reference to these verses which start with the words *ma kunta* (You were not...) such as the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Maryam (Mary). Nor were you with them when they disputed.' (*Al-'Imran:* 44) In actuality, the Quran has many verses of this same stylistic form.

we should know that there were already certain people who had knowledge of the events that occurred long before the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and his companions, yet the case is totally different with him *peace and blessings be upon him*; for Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who uncovered the knowledge of these unseen secrets to him *peace and blessings be upon him*; that is, no human being told him *peace and blessings be upon him* about any of these secrets; an unshakeable fact which is established by the adversaries of Islam themselves. As such, we can clearly state that Allah *Glorified is He* has uncovered the unseen of time and place to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the extent that he was informed of some of the secrets of the future. Once again, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who revealed these secrets to Prophet Muhammad.

Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has kept some secrets unknown up to the present time because people at the time

of Messenger Muhammad would for sure be unable to understand them because understanding such secrets were beyond their mental capacity during that period of time. In the same connection, Allah *Glorified is He* spoke about the occurrence of future events which none of the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could foresee.

Let us offer an example to fully illustrate this point; the two greatest empires during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him (the Roman Empire Persian Empires) were in permanent conflicts and wars with each other; each of them aimed at expanding the scope of their authority. During one of these wars, the Persians, worshippers of fire, defeated the Christian Romans. Even though those Romans did not believe in the message of Prophet Muhammad, he peace and blessings be upon him felt sad for their defeat because they at least believed in the existence of a god. Whereupon Allah comforted him *peace and blessings be upon him* by revealing down verses of the Quran in which He tells obviously that the Romans will for sure defeat the Persians. Allah says, 'Alif Lam Mim. The Romans are vanquished. In a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome. Within a few years, Allah's is the command before and after; and on that day the believers shall rejoice. With the help of Allah; He helps whom He pleases; and He is the Mighty, the Merciful. (ar-Rum: 1-5) These verses of the chapter of ar-Rum precisely define the time when the Romans would be given victory over the Persians; they state clearly that this will for sure take place within *bida sinin* (a few years), that is, in a period of time from three to nine years, for this is the denotation of the Arabic term *bida* 'sinin.

Yet, if someone claims that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who predicted the occurrence of these events between these two empires, we answer him saying, 'How did Prophet Muhammad know about the military situation of each of these two camps? As a matter of fact, he *peace and blessings be upon him* previously knew nothing about the military and the political conditions of these two powers. In the same connection, we find that the Romans had already defeated the Persians exactly as has been mentioned in the Quran, a matter which is viewed as an act of unveiling the unseen secrets of time and place by Allah *Glorified is He* to Messenger Muhammad *peace and* 

*blessings be upon him.* In other words, Allah, the One Who has the knowledge of the absolute unseen, is He Who revealed this secret to Prophet Muhammad.

We should be perfectly aware of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who knows the 'absolute unseen'. That is to say, that no one has the ability to uncover it, nor will anyone be able to know about it except when Allah *Glorified is He* wishes; a fact which is definitively proved by the Quran in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The Knower of the unseen! So He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses as a messenger....' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27)

We should state that there is a difference between the 'absolute unseen' and the 'limited unseen', as follows: the secrets of the latter can be disclosed and unveiled on condition that man should carry out certain procedures and measures. Today's discovery of the secrets of the universe is a case in point. This point is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* in which He says, 'Allah– there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being. Neither slumber overtakes Him, or sleep. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on Earth. Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave? He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to aught of His Knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain] ...' (*al-Baqara:* 255).

It is thus clear that all the discoveries—that have so far been made—have always existed in the universe but in a hidden form. In addition, we should fully realise that Allah *Glorified is He* has set a specific date for the discovery of each of these secrets; a point which is crystal clear in the fact that the discoveries of steam, electricity, atoms etc. had been made in different times. Here, we should consider that man will, by the Leave of Allah, be able to disclose more secrets of the universe in defined dates, all of which tell clearly about the Existence of Allah *Glorified is He* the All-Wise.

These discoveries may be the result of man's efforts in making researches, or they may even be made by chance. The Law of Buoyancy by Archimedes and the Law of Gravity are two cases in point, for they had been discovered by chance. Allah *the Exalted* allowed one of His servants to discover something, although mans' researches were not primarily meant with the discovery of this

thing in particular, a point which clearly tells us why Allah *Glorified is He* ascribes to Himself the Attribute of 'All-Encompassing'.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'All that is hidden in the heavens and Earth belongs to Allah, and all authority goes back to Him' (*Hud:* 123). We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* puts His saying, *wa `ilayhi yurja`u al-`amru kulluh* (and all authority goes back to Him) in the passive form to indicate that everything in the universe is run by due measure. In our daily life, we have numerous examples which are carefully and perfectly arranged such as the setting of an alarm to wake one up at a particular time. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* plainly states that He runs the affairs of the entire universe by the rule mentioned clearly in the following verse of the chapter of *Ya Sin* in which He says, 'His Being alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says to it, "Be" – and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82) Everything in the universe takes place according to what Allah has predestined.

Another possible interpretation for the word *al-`amr* (authority) is that it may have to do with the entire environment surrounding mankind. Here, we should realise that even though Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all what is in the heavens and the earth, Allah *Glorified is He* allows man to get benefit from them. In other words, even though Allah *the Exalted* possesses all these creatures, He, out of His Infinite Mercy, allows man to benefit from them. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; man gets benefit from the heat and temperature of the sun although none owns it except Allah *the Almighty*. Out of the undeniable fact that the sun is viewed as one of the most essential pillars of life, Allah *Glorified is He* does not grant man, whom He gave the free will to decide on matters, the right to own it so that the course of life will continue running smoothly.

In the same vein, He does not entrust the affairs of all the main constituents of life to any of His creatures, but all authority goes back to Him alone. Considering the earth with its elements, water, air etc., we find that Allah *the Exalted* does not grant any creature the right to own or to take control over these objects so that people will not corrupt the lives of one another. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Infinite Mercy allows none of His creatures to take control over these absolute necessities of life as man is subject to

permanent change, which is why he will misuse his authority over these things from time to time.

We should know fully well that Allah *Glorified is He* has subdued all these basic needs of life to all His creatures including man; yet Allah *the Exalted* does not grant man the authority over certain creatures. As for man's power itself, Allah *Glorified is He* predestined that it should be subject to change, that is, the strong become weak, the poor become rich and so on.

As such, we reach the conclusion that all what we own in this worldly life is granted to us by Allah *Glorified is He*, that is, we possess nothing of our own will. In addition, all what we possess today will be under our authority for a particular period of time, and then it will be returned back to Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Resurrection; it is a point which is definitively proved by the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16) It is out of this Divine Absolute Sovereignty on the Day of Resurrection that man's body parts will confess all the sins committed by them in the life of this world.

Even though this verse in question reads, 'All that is hidden in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah' (*Hud:* 123), Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran, 'His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and what is between them two and what is beneath the ground.' (*Ta Ha:* 6) In this verse in the chapter of *Ta Ha*, Allah *Glorified is He* drives our attention to the importance of those treasures placed by Allah under the ground confirming meanwhile that they are His. It is obvious today, we, human beings, make use of these treasures.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...and all authority goes back to Him ...' (*Hud:* 123), this implies that man must seek salvation, so as not to blame himself for being among the losers on the Day of Resurrection.

We should be fully aware of the fact that all what we enjoy in this worldly life are but blessings conferred upon us by Allah the Almighty the All-Powerful Who granted man power and the All-Wise Who granted him wisdom. Allah *the Exalted* out of His Bounty, grants man handfuls of these attributes, yet all the matter belongs to Him *the Almighty*.

Here, we should consider that when the Quran tells us about something you have no previous knowledge about, we should firmly believe in its veracity because the One Who has sent down this Quran is Allah the One Who does not lie. That is why we find Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* having full confidence that Allah would give him victory over the enemies of Islam, for all authority belongs to Him *Glorified is He*.

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions Allah *be pleased with them* were absolutely sure that the disbelievers would be punished in the Hereafter in case they were not tortured in this worldly life, that Allah *Glorified is He* would take over their properties which they owned in this life, and that Allah *the Exalted* would not allow the disbelievers to decide on matters in the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who will for sure inherit the earth and all what is on it. So, if this is the case, we must offer our acts of worship to Him *the Almighty* alone; we must have firm belief in all the events of the past He told us about, and we must be absolutely sure that all authority goes back to Him *Glorified is He* Alone.

Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Wisdom, divided time into three parts as follows: one part pertains to the period of time before the creation of Adam, whilst the second starts from the creation of Adam to the existence of any of us. As for the third part of time, it pertains to the endless future. As such, man experiences three different periods of time which are the past, the present, and the future. As a matter of fact, each of us has a due role to perform in this existence.

Logic states that man, having enjoyed existence in this life and having matured intellectually, is supposed to wonder about his ancient past that is, the history of mankind. When one wants to investigate such a topic, his acceptance to the narrations is subject to confidence in the speaker, that is, whether or not he speaks the truth, especially if the talk turns to the history of what happened before the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*. One should wonder, 'None can tell me about what happened before the creation of Adam but the One Who created me'! This point is narrated in the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says, 'There

was Allah and nothing else before Him....<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith clearly indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only Who can tell us the absolute truth about what had happened before the creation of Adam. Yet, if someone wonders about his existence in a specific time in particular, we say to him, 'This happens based on the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* Who knows best what benefits man and what causes him harm'.

Yet, one must wonder about what he is supposed to do in this worldly life. The answer is crystal clear in the fact that he is supposed to take part in pushing the course of life forward, for it is undoubtedly this active engagement that marks the line between life and death, a point which is proved by the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'He brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon' (*Hud:* 61).

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has equipped man with a mind so as to reflect upon matters and with power by means of which he is able to act. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* subdued the entire universe to man to get benefit from all the different kinds of provision in it. It is thus clear that everything in this universe needs one to exert effort, a matter which cannot be fulfilled except for when man receives power from Allah.

We should know for certain that offering the five prescribed daily prayers is the most important thing in man's life, for by doing so, one recharges his spiritual energy in such a way that makes him show absolute loyalty to Allah *the Almighty*. In this vein, we strongly stress that in case one sincerely offers these prayers to Allah, his future will be positively affected by this.

In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* giving us a striking example to illustrate this point, says, 'O you who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the Remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you, if you know.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) This particular kind of action

<sup>(1)</sup> Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, 431/4; and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, Hadith no. 3191 on the authority of `Umran ibn Husayn who narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'There was Allah and nothing else before Him and His Throne was over the water, and He then created the Heavens and the Earth and wrote everything in the Book.'

mentioned in this verse in the chapter of *al-Jumu'a*, i.e. hastening to the Remembrance of Allah, necessitates that man must receive spiritual energy from above. Then, the positive effect of this energy will be shown clearly in the following kind of action which is manifested in the saying of Allah, 'But when the prayer is ended, then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah's grace, and remember Allah much, that you may be successful.' (*al-Jumu'a*: 10)

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse in question with His saying, '...So [Prophet], worship Him, and put your trust in Him: your Lord is never unaware of what you [people] are doing.' (*Hud:* 123) This part of the verse in question orders the believers to obey the divine commands. Man is supposed to offer the various acts of worship including the performance of prayers, the giving of the prescribed alms, the observing of fasting and making the pilgrimage to Mecca if one is able to do so. Having offered these acts of worship sincerely, one gets higher spiritual energy which enables him to do his due roles by means of which the course of life is run smoothly.

Amazingly enough, the efforts exerted by man in this worldly life helps him in one way or another receive spiritual energy from Allah, the Creator. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. When one wants to offer prayers, he is in need of clothing to cover his private parts. We should consider that we, in pursuit of getting clothing, have to undergo a number of stages including agriculture, weaving, buying, and selling. In this way, one gets benefit from all the different sciences so as to be able to offer prayers and thus gets the spiritual energy from Allah the Almighty. As such, one is in constant movement; he receives spiritual energy from Allah and thus can run the affairs of the life normally; he, in the same connection, makes use of the elements of life what enables him to stand before Allah Glorified is He. Thus, it becomes clear that one's life is based on two important elements: receiving spiritual energy from Allah Glorified is He and making use of the elements placed in the universe so that the course of life is run smoothly. For all this, one is supposed to worship Allah Glorified is He in the light of His Divine Way of Guidance sent down to mankind through messengers and prophets, considering that he will be faced with hardships and challenges. Yet, in case one undergoes any of these matters, he has to put his trust in Allah- a great benefit obtained from continuously showing loyalty to

Allah *Glorified is He*. That is why we find Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hastening to offer prayers at times of distress.<sup>(1)</sup>

As for the Arabic phrase *hadhabahu* (while in distress), it means that when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was no longer able to address the matter, he then turned to Allah, the Creator of reasons to ease this distress. If one worships Allah *Glorified is He* and places his trust in Him, Allah *Glorified is He* will undoubtedly help him get rid of this distress for Allah is not unaware of what we are doing.

This verse in question shows man the way to happiness in the present and the future. That is because when one obeys the orders of Allah and does good deeds, he will be rewarded with ten good deeds in return for the one good deed, and Allah *Glorified is He* multiples (the reward) for whom He pleases. As for the evil deed, out of the Mercy of Allah, it is recorded as one evil deed.

As such, it is perfectly clear that this verse under discussion has set the affairs of man in order throughout the entire life including the time before his existence, his present time and his future to the Day of Resurrection. In this vein, it is good to quote the following verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the Call of Allah and the Messenger whenever he calls you to that which will give you the life...' (*al-Anfal:* 24). This means showing obedience to Allah and following the perfect, moral example of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* 

<sup>(1)</sup> Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him narrated that 'When anything distressed the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him he prayed.' Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, 5/388; and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan, Hadith no. 1319.

## the chapter of

# Yusuf

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

الرَ تِلْكَ ءَايَنْتُ ٱلْكِنَبِ ٱلْمُبِينِ ()

# Alif Lam Ra, these are the verses of the Scripture that makes things clear<sup>(1)</sup> [1] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 1)

We have previously shed light on the openings of the chapters of The Quran,<sup>(2)</sup> such as the chapters of *al-Baqara*, *Al-`Imran*, etc. In this regard, we

(2) Imam As-Suyuti who, in his Al-Itqan, is reported to have said, 'Know that Allah Glorified is He has opened the chapters of the Quran, using ten different styles, as follows: First: Praising His Glory, which is divided into two kinds: praising Him the Almighty

and declaring His Glory. Here, we should know that five chapters of the Quran start with praising him the Almighty; two start with His saying, "Blessed is He"; there are yet seven chapters starting with declaring His Glory.

Second: The discrete letters; there are twenty-nine chapters of the Quran starting with these letters.

Third: There are ten chapters in which Allah calls upon Prophet Muhammad or the ummah (followers of Islam), as follows: there are five chapters starting with calling upon him peace and blessings be upon him and another five in which Allah Glorified is He starts them with calling upon the ummah.

Fourth: There are twenty-three chapters in which Allah the Exalted starts with predicative sentences, such as 'They will ask thee about the spoils of war...' (al-Anfal: 1). Fifth: There are fifteen chapters in which Allah starts with an oath.

<sup>(1)</sup> This chapter is Meccan (revealed in Mecca) that is, before the migration of Prophet Muhammad to Medina. In his Al-Itqan fi `Ulum Al-Quran, Imam As-Suyuti says, 'Abu Hayyan opines that the entire chapter was revealed in Mecca before the migration of Prophet Muhammad, except for the first three verses, yet this opinion is very weak.' (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan; 1/40). The verses of this chapter count 111. It sheds light on several topics including the stories of the prophets, the righteous, the angels, the devils, mankind, livestock, birds, kings, kingdoms, traders, scholars, the ignorant people, men, and women. In addition, it reviews the topics of monotheism, jurisprudence, biographies, the interpretation of dreams, policy, coexistence and running the affairs of the state, as well as several topics by means of which one is prosperous in this worldly life and the Hereafter. (See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Al-Bayan; 4/3441).

confirmed that there are several chapters in the Quran that start with the 'discrete letters' stressing that these letters must be read in the full form to get the correct recitation of the verse. That is, it is not right just to pronounce the sound of the letter.

We should consider that every Arabic letter has both a specific name and a sound that it represents. Only the educated people are the ones who know the names of letters. As for the uneducated which are a majority, they do not know the names of the letters even though they pronounce the sounds represented by them in their daily speech; they are unable to pronounce the letters in their full form. For example, an illiterate person is neither able to spell a word nor to identify its letters because he did not learn how to read and write. In contrast, the literate person knows both the pronunciations and sounds represented by the letters as well as their corresponding names.

We know for certain that the Quran has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in hearing, which is why one must hear the recitation of the Quran before starting to read it himself, otherwise, he will mistakenly recite the opening of the chapter of *al-Baqara in* the same way as he recites the opening of the chapter of *ash-Sharh*. Yet, if one listens to the recitation of the Quran before he starts reading it himself, he will be fully able to read it the way Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* recited the verses to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, for instance, *Alif Lam Mim* instead of *Alam*<sup>(1)</sup>.

Sixth: There are seven chapters in which Allah Glorified is He starts with conditional statements, such as, 'When that which must come to pass [at last] comes to pass.' (al-Waqi'a: 1)
Seventh: There are six chapters starting with Divine Orders, such as the saying of Allah, 'Say, "He is the One God.' (al-Ikhlas: 1)
Eighth: There are six chapters in the Quran starting with a question, such as the saying of Allah, 'About what do they [most often] ask one another?' (an-Naba': 1)
Ninth: There are three chapters starting with a supplication, namely; al-Humaza, al-Mutaffifin and al-Masad.
Tenth: There is one chapter in the Quran in which Allah starts with giving justification, which is Ouraysh. (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itgan, 3/316).

<sup>(1)</sup> Hearing prior to reciting is a necessary condition for correct and clear pronunciation of the words of the Quran. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Even as We have sent to you a messenger from among yourselves to convey to you Our Messages, and to=

Once again, I strongly stress this point in question which is that the recitation of the Quran cannot be done before first listening to its sound recitation from a well-versed scholar so that one is fully able to pronounce its words correctly. Having been well taught to do that, you then are able to recite the verses of The Quran, considering that every letter in it is used in a due measure.<sup>(1)</sup>

We know fully well that the verses of the Quran are divided into two kinds, namely; *ayat muhkamat* (clear verses) and *ayat mutashabihat* (unspecific verses).<sup>(2)</sup> As for the clear verses, they tell us about the rules that we are obliged to follow and carry out, that is, we will be punished for not carrying them out. As for the legal wisdom behind sending down of the unspecific verses of The Quran,<sup>(3)</sup> it is that they could, according to some scholars, be explained in

<sup>=</sup> cause you to grow in purity, and to impart to you revelation and wisdom, and to teach you that which you knew not.' (*al-Baqara*: 151) The following meanings are clear in this verse: one makes the first step by correct recitation; he then attains higher spiritual rank. As for education, it purifies the soul. The verse then tells that we should set everything in its due place.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his book entitled An-Nashr fi Al-Qira'at Al-'Ashr, Imam ibn Al-Jazri states, 'Undoubtedly, just as understanding the meanings of the verses of the Quran and abiding by its laws are acts of worship, its correct articulation is also viewed as an act of worship. Further, one is supposed to receive the correct articulation of its verses from those well-versed reciters who orally got the articulation from their teachers who, in turn, received it from their teachers, and so on till we reach the end of the chain, which is Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. In this vein, we stress that it is impermissible to recite the Quran in any way other than that received from him peace and blessings be upon him.' (See ibn Al-Jazri, An-Nashr fi Al-Qira'at Al-'Ashr, 1/210.)

<sup>(2)</sup> Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise - they are the foundation of the Book - and others unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them] And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firm in knowledge say, "We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord." And no one will be reminded except those of understanding.' (*Al- 'Imran:* 7)

<sup>(3)</sup> The unspecific verses of the Quran refer to those verses whose meanings are not known to anyone but Allah *Glorified is He*. Another possible meaning for them is that they are those verses that are eligible to be explained in various ways; this meaning is yet deduced from the seventh verse in the chapter of *Al-'Imran*. As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...Allah has sent down the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration...' (*az-Zumar*: 23), it means that all the verses of the Quran are all true and consistent with each other. (See *Abu Yahya Al-Ansari, Fath Ar-Rahman Bi Kashf Ma Yaltabis Fi Al-Quran*, p. 60).

various ways, based on people's different abilities of understanding and perception. Here, we should consider that all people have the same body parts by means of which they can perceive items. For example, they all have eyes, ears, noses, tongues, and hands.

Yet, we should be fully aware of the fact that there are certain natural laws that govern man's sensory organs, as follows: One's eye, for example, is governed by principles which determine sight. Scientists believe that when the light falls on objects, it is reflected to the eye which is thus able to form an image for this object in its pupil. But, as the distance between the eye and the perceived object increases, the image gradually diminishes until it finally vanishes from sight. There are also physical laws that determine the sound waves which reach the hearing mechanisms inside one's ear. In the same connection, one's ability to smell is subject to certain laws, for he is unable to smell a flower that exists in a distant area. The same applies to the human mind, for it is also governed by certain laws.

As a matter of fact, Allah *Glorified is He* has already instructed man how to correctly use our senses. For example, Allah *the Exalted* does not prevent us from smelling the scent of a beautiful flower, yet Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to lower our gazes upon seeing women. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* tells about what we are obliged to do and about that from which we are prohibited. Likewise, the human mind may be able to understand a particular topic but not another. Here, we stress that being unable to understand a particular topic is viewed as an act of understanding.

Let us offer an example to fully illustrate this point; a high-school student who is presented with a college-level exercise in architecture by his teacher, will for sure respond to the teacher, saying, 'We did not learn the necessary mathematical rules by means of which we can solve this problem yet'; it is a matter which clearly indicates that the student is fully aware of his own abilities. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us how to correctly use our senses. There are certain rules which man can easily understand and perceive by mind; yet there are also others which are beyond one's capacity of understanding, which is why he must unquestioningly obey them. I often cite the following example in this regard; every room in a large hotel has its own unique key which does not open other rooms. However, each floor of the hotel has a master key that unlocks the doors of all the rooms. Only an expert in designing such keys can understand the intricate mechanisms that enable the master key to work. This is what the Quran does to mankind; it includes all what causes them prosperity in this worldly life and the Hereafter. In addition, it is a comprehensive Book about which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise - they are the foundation of the Book - and others unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them] And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firms in knowledge say, "We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord." And no one will be reminded except those of understanding.' (*Al-'Imran:* 7)

This verse tells clearly that deviant people misuse these unspecific verses of the Quran to achieve their goal of denying the Message of the Truth, in one way or another. By doing so, they are given to arrogance. To such people, we declare that the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* decrees that some of the chapters of the Quran should start with these miraculous discrete letters which must be articulated in their full forms. In truth, these openings of the Quran in these forms are viewed as a means of testing the human mind, that is, whether or not it will accept and firmly adhere to the Divine Order although it might be unable to understand it. We should consider that Allah *Glorified is He* will for sure test man in all spheres of life. As for the topic in question, the sending down of these unspecific verses of the Quran is viewed as a test to man's means of perception, that is, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to know how the believers will deal with these verses.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firms in knowledge say, "We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord.' (*Al-'Imran: 7*), it may be explained as follows: the well-versed scholars are the ones who know the explanation of these specific verses of The Quran, and thus they will for sure convey this knowledge to mankind. Yet, we should not forget a very important point,

which is that the explanation to be given by these well-versed scholars is none but their saying, as mentioned clearly in The Quran, '...All [of it] is from our Lord...' (*Al-'Imran: 7*), they exerted their utmost efforts to make explanation for these verses, yet all the knowledge they get is from Allah *Glorified is He* in Whom they have firm belief. We can quote the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said, 'As for the unspecific verses of The Quran, you are obliged to believe in them.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Let us offer another example to fully illustrate this point; we are obliged, under the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to touch, or point to, or kiss the Black Stone. In addition, we are obliged to stone the rocks that symbolise Satan. Even though both are but rocks, we are obliged to firmly adhere to the Prophet's command out of devotion and faith.<sup>(2)</sup>

Attempting to judge every matter using the mind's discernment, one will for sure deviate from the right path, because there are undoubtedly certain matters that man's mind will never be able to reach the wisdom behind, which is why Muslims are obliged, under Islam, to act upon the rules of Allah *the All-Wise*. Here is a striking example so that we will correctly understand this point; if someone is told that drinking alcohol severely damages the liver and was meanwhile presented an ultrasound image, he will refrain from doing so because he fully realises the bad result of drinking on the liver.

Here arises a good question, 'Does man's abstention stem from his faith in Allah, or from his past experiences'? Undoubtedly, this man's behaviour is moulded by his experience. There is a great difference between him and a believer who unquestioningly obeys the commands of Allah and abstains

<sup>(1)</sup> The full text of the Hadith reads, 'Most surely, the Quran was not revealed down so that its verses may contradict one another. Therefore, comply with that which you have understood from it. As for its unspecific verses, you are obliged to believe in them.' (See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 1/346; the Hadith is narrated on the authority of ibn Mardawih from the authority of `Abdallah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As.

<sup>(2) &#</sup>x27;Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him said, 'I know that you are just a stone and that you can neither do any harm nor give benefit. Had I not seen the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him kiss you, I would not have kissed you.' (See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1610; this Hadith is narrated on the authority of ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with them.)

from alcohol out of the fact that Allah *the Exalted* has declared it prohibited. One is not allowed, in a way or another to abstain from following the divine command until he realises the wisdom behind them.

It is thus clear that we are obliged to firmly believe in these unspecific verses of the Quran despite the fact that the wisdom behind them is not clear to us. We cannot defer believing in these verses until we prove this wisdom.

I often reiterate that man must address the topics of faith in the same way he interacts with his doctor. That is, when an ill person goes to a doctor, he tells him about what causes him pain, whereupon the doctor will prescribe the necessary treatment. In the same way, man's mind has nothing at all to do with the matters of Divine Legislation.

We can quote the statement of some of the most righteous Muslims who used to say, 'The mind is like a riding animal; it delivers you to the door of the Sultan, but it does not pass through that door with you.' As such, we reach the conclusion that those who want to know about the wisdom behind all legislative matters will for sure be disputing with Allah in one of His Attributes, i.e. the All Wise; yet we know for certain that Allah *Glorified is He* has no counterpart. For this reason, we are obliged to believe in these miraculous discrete letters, considering that none will be unable to reveal their secrets but Allah *the Almighty*.<sup>(1)</sup>

Amazingly enough, all the verses of the Quran are linked together by connecting vowels. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *Hud* with His saying, '...and your Lord [O Prophet] is not unaware of what you [people] are doing.' (*Hud:* 123)

Out of the fact that this part of the verse indicates the end of the chapter, the last letter of the sentence was supposed to be constant, which is not the case here; for we find the Arabic word *ta*'*maluna* (what you are doing)

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, ibn Kathir says, 'The total number of letters mentioned in the beginnings of the chapters of the Quran–discounting those that are repeated– are 14: (Alif, Lam, Mim, Sad, Ra', Kaf, Ha', Ya', 'Ain, Ta, Sin, Ha', Qaf and Nun)– and together they form the following sentence: Nassun Hakimun Qati`un Lahu Sirr, that is, 'a wise and decisive text endowed with a secret.' (See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al- 'Azhim, 1/37.)

ending with a vowel on the last letter, and thus it is connected to the *basmala* (in the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful).

Based on this abovementioned rule, we were supposed to recite these discrete letters in the beginning of the chapter of *Yusuf* this way, yet we did not, because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed us to recite them as *Alif Lam Ra*, that is, without the articulation of vowels. This point clearly indicates that the pronunciation of the words of the Quran has been taught to him *peace and blessings be upon him* through revelation, a matter which also points out that there is great wisdom behind all the Divine orders and commands.

I would like to remind you of the fact that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to recite the Quran one time in the month of Ramadan to the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* yet when it was the year of his death, he *peace and blessings be upon him* recited it twice. It is thus that the Quran has been transmitted to us in the same way it has been revealed down upon the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '*Alif Lam Ra*. These are the verses of the Scripture that makes things clear.' (*Yusuf:* 1) As for the Arabic pronoun *tilka* (these), it refers to what is mentioned after these discrete letters in the very beginning of the chapter that is 'the verses of the Scripture'. You, O believers, must believe that the verses of the Quran contain such letters. This is how some scholars understand the meaning of these discrete letters at the beginning of this chapter.

Let us give an example of our daily life to clarify this point; a tailor wanting to advertise his sartorial skills– displays in his shop window samples of threads that he uses in his work. Analogically speaking, Allah *Glorified is He* by opening some of the chapters of the Quran with these discrete letters, wants to tell us the words of the Quran are made up of miraculous letters like this, which is why you, O mankind, you will be unable to produce something similar to it, even if aided by the jinn.

Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that the miraculous nature of the Noble Quran does not stem from its linguistic style, but rather, from the fact that it is the Speech of Allah *Glorified is He* which is why it must be miraculous even though it uses the same letters we use in our speech.

An interesting observation is how could Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pronounce these discrete letters in their full forms even though he was unlettered?! It thus goes without saying that his *peace and blessings be upon him* articulation of these letters in such a manner clearly tells that he has been actually taught to articulate them this way by Allah *the Most High.* As for the Arabic word *al-kitab* (the Scripture) mentioned in this verse is used to refer to the Noble Quran.<sup>(1)</sup>

As for the Arabic adjective *al-mubin* (that makes things clear), denotes that the Quran is the Book which elucidates everything to man, who is Allah's vicegerent on earth. Man will find the explanation of everything in The Quran, which is why it is believed that those who think that the Quran misses the mentioning of topic are wrong, for they do not carefully reflect upon it.

In this regard, it is narrated that Imam Mohammed 'Abdu<sup>(2)</sup> once met an orientalist<sup>(3)</sup> in Paris, who asked him the following question, 'O Imam, as long

<sup>(1)</sup> The word *kitab* has been mentioned 220 times in the Quran; it is used to impart various meanings including The Quran, the Torah, the Bible, and the Guarded Tablet. It may also be used to give the meaning of the Arabic word 'letter' which is deduced from the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Go with this my letter and convey it to them; and thereafter withdraw from them and see what [answer] they return.' (*an-Naml*: 28) It may be further used to refer to the written account of deeds that man receives on the Day of Judgment. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And he will be told, "Read this your record! Sufficient is your own self today to make out your account!" (*al-Isra*': 14)

<sup>(2)</sup> The Grand Mufti of Egypt at his time, Mohamed 'Abdu *ibn* Hasan Khayrallah At-Turkumani. He was born in 1849 C.E. in the Al-Gharbiyyah governorate, Egypt, and was brought up in the village of Mahallat Nasr, Al-Buhyrah governorate. He received his education at Al-Ahmadi Mosque in Tanta, and then he pursued further education at Al-Azhar. Having reached the age of forty, he mastered the French language, which is why he in collaboration with Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani established the magazine of *Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* in Paris. He died in 1905 in Alexandria, and was buried in Cairo. (See *Az-Zirikili, Al-'Alam*, 6/252.)

<sup>(3)</sup> Orientalists are western scholars who study the sciences, literatures, religions, and philosophies of the Orient. They are specialized in studying matters dealing with Oriental studies. Among them are those who treat Islam equitably, and those who dedicate their works to defaming it.

as you, O Muslims, have a verse in your Book that reads, '…No single thing have We neglected in Our decree<sup>(1)</sup>…' (*al-An 'am:* 38), allow me to ask you the following question, 'how many loaves of bread does a dry measure of wheat yield?' The Imam, in response to the question, called for a baker and asked him how many loaves of bread can be made from a dry measure of wheat, whereupon the baker answered him the exact number. Yet, the orientalist protested and said, 'I asked you for an answer from The Quran, not from a baker!' Imam `Abduh then told him that Allah *Glorified is He* says in The Quran, 'So ask the people of the message if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43) Imam<sup>(2)</sup> 'Abduh was fully aware of the fact the human mind can in no way encompass all knowledge, and thus the All Great Wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He* decrees to distribute talents among people so that everyone will excel in a particular field of life.

In the same connection, we refer the problems of inheritance to those who are well versed in this field of knowledge to exactly tell us how the share of each inheritor will be. Likewise, it is enough for an ordinary Muslim to know that he is obliged to perform pilgrimage. Yet, he should seek the advice of well-versed scholars on how to perform the rituals in the same way it was performed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

There are many other occasions when one is obliged to seek the advice of an expert in a particular field. When one wants to build a house, for example, it is not enough to possess the financial means. One must also consult an

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this particular verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'Allah *the Exalted* recorded everything in the Preserved Tablet. This verse may also refer to The Quran, and thus it means that there is no one single matter of religion except is explicitly mentioned in The Quran, or is explained in detail by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or by consensus or by sound analogy, which is proved by the texts of the Quran.' (See Al-Qurtubi, *Jame*` *Al-Bayan*, 3/2505.)

<sup>(2)</sup> Imam Mohamed `Abduh is one of the great scholars of Islam. He was entitled 'the Renewer of Religion' of his time. He left his mark on Islamic thought and was the founder of a reformist school. He was a contemporary of Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani. He was of the opinion that to edify individuals and societies, it is necessary to begin by educating the individual. Although `Abdu's approach to reforming societies by starting with the individual differed from that of Al-Afghani, there are common features between them both

architect to prepare the necessary designs. It is thus crystal clear that man's mind can in no way encompass all the knowledge of life, which is why Allah, out of His Bounty, distributed talents to people so that they are forced to complement each other.

Allah says:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَهُ قُرْءَ نَا عَرَبِيَّا لَعَلَّكُمُ تَعْقِلُونَ ٢

### We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran so that you [people] may understand [2] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 2)

There is a very important point which we should consider; sometimes Allah *Glorified is He* describes The Quran saying, 'The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down.' (ash-Shu'ara': 193); that is, Allah the Exalted states that the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him is the medium through which the Quran has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* other times Allah Glorified is He says, 'And those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down upon Muhammad...' (Muhammad: 2); the process of revelation includes Allah Glorified is He, the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him and the rest of angles. Yet, Allah the Exalted says elsewhere in The Quran, 'And when it is said to them, "Believe in what Allah has revealed" (al-Bagara: 91), the rulings of The Quran, upon being revealed to Prophet Muhammad must be put in action by the *ummah* of Islam. This verse of *al-Bagara* refers to the fact that the Quran was revealed all at once from the Preserved Tablet to the heaven of this world, and then it was sent down piecemeal to give answers to all the questions offered to or by Muslims.

Once again, we state plainly that it is possible to say that the Quran has been sent down, or that the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*, the Trustworthy Holy Spirit, had brought it down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In the chapter of *al-Isra*', Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from above; with this [very] truth has it come down [to you, O Prophet]...' (*Al-Isra*':105). Allah *Glorified is He* sent

the Quran down from the Preserved Tablet to the heaven of this worldly life, and then it was revealed down piecemeal to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to fulfil its mission in the world on the earth.<sup>(1)</sup>

As for the verse in question, Allah *the Exalted* says, '...We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran...' (*Yusuf:* 2), while the previous verse reads, '...These are the verses of the Scripture...' (*Yusuf:* 1); Allah *the Exalted* once described the Quran as an item which is being read, while another time Allah *Glorified is He* described it as an item which is written; it is a point which indicates the inimitability of the name itself.

Concerning the topic of the compilation of the Quran<sup>(2)</sup>, we should know fully well that the scribe did not record any verse in it except what has already been written and unless two witnesses testify to its ultimate accuracy.

<sup>(1)</sup> One of these real examples tackled by the Quran is the case in which some companions stayed too long in the house of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. Allah Glorified is He says, 'O you who have attained to faith! Do not enter the Prophet's dwellings unless you are given leave; [and when invited] to a meal, do not come [so early as] to wait for it to be readied: but whenever you are invited, enter [at the proper time]; and when you have partaken of the meal, disperse without lingering for the sake of mere talk: that, behold, might give offence to The Prophet, and yet he might feel shy of [asking] you [to leave]: but Allah is not shy of [teaching you] what is right....' (al-'Ahzab: 53) In his Asbab An-Nuzul, Al-Wahidi narrated the following Hadith, 'Anas said that he was ten years old when the Messenger of Allah came to Medina. He said, "My mother decided that I would serve him and I served him for ten years. He died when I was twenty. I am the person who knows best about the business of the veil. The first instance that was revealed occurred when the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him married Zaynab bint Jahsh Allah be pleased with her. He celebrated the wedding there, invited the people who came, ate and then left. A group remained with the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. They stayed for a long time and then the Prophet went out and I went out hoping that they would leave. He walked and I walked with him until he came to the threshold of `A`isha's, room. Then, thinking that they would have left, he returned and I returned with him. He went to Zaynab, but they were still sitting there. He left again and I left with him until he once more reached the threshold of `A`isha's room. When he thought that they would have gone, he went back again and I went back with him. This time they had indeed left. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him then put up a curtain between me and him, and the veil was revealed.' (See Al-Wahidi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p. 205)

<sup>(2)</sup> In his Al-Mustadrak, Imam Al-Hakim said, 'the Quran has been complied three times, as follows: the first time took place in the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him, whilst the second was done in the Caliphate of Abu Bakr=

Undoubtedly, man's memory may not always be reliable and may differ with temperaments, but written lines cannot be altered.

Out of the fact that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was to convey his message to the Arabs, he must have been supported with a miracle that proves his veracity. Out of the fact that miracles imply challenge, the Quran must have been revealed in the Arabic language which Arabs fully mastered. Had the miracles been relating to a particular field, which is beyond the Arab's capacity, they would not have accepted their incapability before it. They might have even said, 'If we had learnt about this, we would have brought forth something which is better than it'. Arabs were masters of eloquence and poetry. They used to gather in markets <sup>(1)</sup> where poets would recite their poems and where and orators would give their eloquent speeches. They used to compete to select the best from among them in this regard. The Arabs encompassed all the skills of the Arabic language, to the extent that people in the markets were able to judge their rhetorical products. In short, they were masters of eloquence and rhetoric.

It is for this reason that Allah willed the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be from the same field in which his people had excelled in. We should consider that the Arabs were the first people to

<sup>=</sup> Allah be pleased with him. As for the third time, it occurred during the Caliphate of 'Uthman Allah be pleased with him.'

Sheikh Sha'rawi Allah rest his soul refers in this regard to the second compilation of the Quran. In this respect, it is narrated that Abu Bakr had said to Zayd ibn Thabit Allah be pleased with him 'You are a wise young man and we do not have any suspicion about you, and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for Allah's Messenger peace and blessings be upon him. So you should search for (the fragmentary scripts of) the Quran and collect it in one book', whereupon Zayd said, 'So I started looking for the Quran and collecting it from (what was written on) palm stalks, thin white stones and from the men who knew it by heart.' It is narrated that he Allah be pleased with him did not write anything unless two witnesses testified to its veracity and accuracy. Commenting on this act of Zayd, Imam As-Suyuti said, 'This clearly indicates that Zayd did not suffice with the already written verses unless those who heard them directly from Prophet Muhammad testified to their accuracy. He did this out of taking extra precautions, for he himself memorized the Quran by heart.' (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan, 1/164-167).

<sup>(1)</sup> Arabs had several markets (gatherings), such as `*Ukazh* and *Dhi Al-Majaz*; it was in these markets that poets used to recite their poems by way of competing to choose the best from among them.

hear the Quran from him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Had the Arabs believed in the truthfulness of The Quran, the element of challenge would have made no sense for them.

It is of great importance to know that when the Quran was reavled, the Persians and Romans became fully aware that this Bedouin *ummah* had possessed the constituents by means of which its members could set up an unprecedented civlisation, although they were unlettered and their propeht himself was unlettered.

Moreover, when the Persians and Romans found that the Arabs, masters of eloquence, were unable to produce even one verse similar to that of The Quran, they became fully aware that their own civilisations became at risk because they had to face this advanced civilisation of Islam.

Once again, Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Will decreed that the Quran must be revealed in Arabic; for Allah *Glorified is He* did not send any messenger except in the tongue of his own people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them...' (*Ibrahim:* 4).

It is clear that the Quran is the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We should stress that there is a difference between the Quran and the rest of all the heavenly-revealed Scriptures. The Quran encompasses both the two qualities of being a miracle and a Book that contains legal rulings of the religion, a point which is not provided in the rest of all the heavenly-revealed Scriptures.

The Quran will continue revealing the Divine Way of Guidance to Muslims to the end of time. I would like to drive your attention to the fact that the promise of Allah on the universality of the Quran has been actually fulfilled at the hands of the early generations of Muslims who went all over the corners of the world to disseminate the Message of Islam embodied in the Quran.

When the disbelievers seek to explain how Islam spread with such amazing speed, they discover that it did not spread through the power of those who believed in it, but rather by the might of those who were drawn to its consistence and cohesion- those who were extremely surprised by its impressive rulings which would, they thought, make them get rid of their problems and alleviate their distresses.

We heavily stress that the Quran contains rulings by means of which people could achieve their happiness. As well, it includes several predictions of what is going to take place in the universe in such a way that makes the believers know for sure that it does not neglect any topic.

An orientalist could pose the following question, 'How can Muslims assert that the Quran was revealed in a clear and elucidating Arabic tongue when it contains non-Arabic words, such as *Ameen* (Amen)- a word indicating agreement to what the supplication made by the Imam- as well as other Roman<sup>(1)</sup> and Persian<sup>(2)</sup> words'? These orientalists are oblivious to the fact that Arabs, as a result of their intermingling with other communities, had used some of their vocabularies, to the extent that these words became already part of the Arabic language, exactly as we today 'Arabise' some foreign vocabularies, as long as we properly understand their meanings.<sup>(3)</sup>

- As-Sirat; the two great scholars An-Naqqash and ibn Al-Jawzi opine that it is a Roman word meaning the Path.

- *Tafiqa;* Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and they both began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden ...' (*al-A'raf:* 22).

(2) The following is a list of the Persian words that are used in the Holy Quran:

- *Abariq*; Ath-Tha`alibi, in his *Fiqh Al-Lugha*, is of the position that it is derived from the Persian language. Al-Jawaliqi, on his part, holds the position that it is an 'Arabised' Persian word meaning either water conduit, or the act of decanting water.

- *Dinar;* Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and among them there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a *dinar* he shall not pay it back to you except so long as you remain firm in demanding it...' (*Al-Imran:* 75). Al-Jawaliqi, among many other scholars, are of the position that it is a Persian word.

- Sijjil; Mujahid holds the position that it is a Persian word meaning stone or mud.

<sup>(1)</sup> The following are examples of words from the Holy Quran that are derived from the Roman language:

<sup>-</sup> Ar-Raqim; Allah Glorified is He says, '...do you [really] think that [the parable of] the Men of the Cave and of [their devotion to] the scriptures – Ar-Raqim- could be deemed more wondrous than any [other] of Our Messages?' (al-Kahf: 9). Commenting on this word in question, Imam As-Suyuti opines that it could be used to refer to the Preserved Tablet, the Book, or the inkwell. (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan, 2/112.)

<sup>(3)</sup> In his Al-Itqan, Imam As-Suyuti states that scholars have different opinions concerning the various linguistic origins of these words. Having mentioned the proofs of each group, he said, `Abu 'Ubayd Al-Qasim ibn Salam is of the position that both opinions =

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying, '...so that you [people] may understand...' (*Yusuf:* 2). Allah *the Exalted* wants people to make use of their minds to carefully reflect upon matters. Here, we should consider that truthful people are very keen on urging people to utilise their minds, unlike the liars who want them to set them idle. The same happens in our daily life. For example, when a vendor tries to sell his product, he touts it by means of proving that he is fully confident in its excellence and high quality. On the contrary, if the product at hand is substandard, then the merchant would not induce you to deeply consider the purchase you are about to make, that is, he would not give you the chance to discover his cheating.

Allah Glorified is He then says:

نَحْنُ نَقُشُ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ ٱلْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَـٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ وَإِن كُنتَ مِن قَبْلِهِ عَلَمِنَ ٱلْغَنْفِلِينَ ()

### We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories in revealing this Quran to you. Before this you were one of those who knew nothing about them [3] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 3)

This verse tells that when the subject matter is a Divine Act, Allah *Glorified is He* employs the plural personal pronoun 'We'. The reason for this is that His acts are done in the light of the existence of a number of Divine Attributes including Knowledge, Wisdom, and Power etc.

We strongly stress that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only One Who has such Attributes that can do anything at any time. None but Him *the Almighty* has such Attributes, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only One Who has these Attributes which can do anything at any time.

We should be aware of a very important point which is that when Allah *the Exalted* talks about His Oneness, He does not use the plural pronoun, a fact

<sup>=</sup> concerning the origin of these words are true, confirming that even though these words are of non-Arabic origin, they were used by the Arabs and thus became 'Arabised'. So, when the Quran was revealed, these words had been used by the Arabs, which is why the two group of scholars are true. As a matter of fact, Al-Jawaliqi and ibn Al-Jawzi, among many others, support this opinion.' (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan, 2/105-108.)

which is clear in His saying, 'Surely I am Allah, there is no god but I, therefore serve Me and keep up prayer for My Remembrance.<sup>(1)</sup>, (*Ta Ha:* 14)

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* sheds light on a number of acts which cannot be performed except by Him; Allah *the Exalted* says, '...We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories ...' (*Yusuf:* 3). This part of the verse tells that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who recounts these stories to Prophet Muhammad. We stress that we are not allowed to derive Names for Allah *Glorified is He* from all the acts attributed to Him *the Almighty* unless these acts are derived, in essence, from His Most Beautiful Names.

We are obliged to pay great respect to Allah, His Names, and His Attributes. We know nothing about His Divine Essence except that about which Allah *the Exalted* told us. For this reason, it is not right to derive a Name for Allah from the verb *Qassa* (recount), that is, we cannot say that Allah *the Exalted* is *qassas* (narrator).

All told, we may address Allah with the Names that He attributes to Himself. However, we cannot call Him by a name that is derived from a verb corresponding to a Divine Act.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories...' (*Yusuf:* 3). As for the Arabic verb *qassa* (narrated), it gives the meaning of 'following one another', which is why some scholars believe that the word 'story' is given this name because words within it follow each other. It also may give the meaning of 'tracing', that is, following the footprints of someone so that one knows the correct way in such a way that causes him not to lose the way of the person who preceded him in it. This meaning is deduced from the saying of Allah, 'And so she said to his sister, "Follow him," and [the girl] watched him from afar, while they [who had taken him in] were not aware of it.' (*al-Qasas:* 11)

<sup>(1)</sup> Adh-Dhikr means invocation and meditation with the heart. It gives several meanings including the speech, the story, the Quran, and all the heavenly revealed books. Allah Glorified is He says, 'Behold, it is We Ourselves who have bestowed from on high, step by step, this reminder – (dhikr) –: and, behold, it is We who shall truly guard it [from all corruption].' (al-Hijr: 9) It may further be used to the great honour of a person; a point which is clear in the saying of Allah, 'And [have We not] raised thee high in dignity – (dhikrak) –?' (ash-Sharh: 4)

It is thus clear that the true meaning of *al-qass* is to trace the events that took place in the past and not for words to follow each other in sequence. In The Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us another striking example to illustrate this point. He says, 'He said, "Did you see when we took refuge on the rock? Then I forgot the fish, and nothing made me forget to speak of it but *Shaitan* (Satan), and it took its way into the river; what a wonder!" He said, "This is what we sought for"; so they returned retracing their footsteps.' (*al-Kahf:* 63-64)

In these verses of Al-Kahf, the meaning of *al-qass* is to retrace the footsteps of someone. Thus, we conclude that the word *al-qass* means to trace the events and accidents that took place in the past in such a manner that is identical to reality.

Divinely revealed narratives are not akin to works of modern fiction and literature in which the author adds fictitious scenes for the sake of formulating a tightly knit plot. The modern author seeks to create a riveting story that will attract his reader's attention. Yet, the case is totally different with stories of The Quran which are historical accounts that detail real incidents with the aim of serving as a source of moral teachings<sup>(1)</sup> for man. Furthermore, they were revealed either to inform us of the events of the past or to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

I repeathere that the stories of the previous prophets, with the exception of the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*, were deliberately revealed to console and fortify the heart<sup>(2)</sup> of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

<sup>(1)</sup> This fact is clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...Indeed, in the stories of these men there is a lesson – ('*Ibra*) – for those who are endowed with insight...' (*Yusuf*: 111). The Arabic word `*ibra* connotes something which serves as a guiding moral for man. It gives the same meaning of *al-idhah*. In The Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...There is surely a lesson – ('*ibra*) – for all who have eyes to see!' (*an-Nur*: 44) Allah *the Exalted* also says, '...Learn a lesson, then, O you who are endowed with insight!' (*al-Hashr*: 2) (See *Al-Qamus Al-Muhit*, 2/4.)

<sup>(2)</sup> Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and [remember] out of all the accounts relating to the [earlier], messengers we convey to you [only] that wherewith we [aim to] make firm your heart: for through these [accounts] comes the truth to you, as well as an admonition and a reminder to all believers.' (*Hud:* 120), the accounts of the Quran were revealed down to make the heart of Prophet Muhammad firm while delivering the Message. See Al-Qurtubi, (*Jame' Al-Bayan,* 4/3435.)

Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the story of Prophet *Yusuf peace be upon him* in full, which is why whoever claims that the Quran is unable to come forth with a complete and comprehensive narrative is wrong. One can examine the story of *Yusuf peace be upon him* from two different angles; the first, the story of characters that revolve around an event. The second, the events that revolve around a single character

In other words, it is not only the riveting plot that makes the Quranic account of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* unique. This story combines two themes: firstly, an event around which people's lives is centred, and secondly, a person around whom events unfold.

This chapter sheds light on the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) and the events that marked his life: his dream, the machinations of his jealous brothers, attempts by the wife of the sovereign to seduce him into debauchery, his imprisonment, his interpretation of dreams in prison, assuming the authority, meeting with his brothers and finally meeting with his father.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'We tell you [Prophet] the best stories' (*Yusuf:* 3) is a fitting description for the narrative of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* which was also recounted by the previously revealed books. Interestingly, when the Jewish rabbis read the Quran's narrative of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*, they gave up their own books and relied on what has been mentioned in the Quran in this regard.

The Jews did so for the following reasons: the events that took place in this story are vividly depicted. In addition, the narration masterfully illustrates human psychological states, exposes the secrets of the human psyche, and tells about the fulfilment of the prophecies. All these themes are woven into a plot that is clear in its delivery and is impossible to be challenged. These facts definitively prove that what has been mentioned in the Quran about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is the 'best of narratives'. Another possible explanation for this point is that it is the best of narratives because it encompasses numerous lessons, including friction between childhood and senility, rivalries between jealous siblings, rebellion, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is the 'best' machinations, his unjust imprisonment, his reaction to those who mistreated him, his support for the

truth until he was granted power and victory, how Allah *Glorified is He* cast love down upon him, so that whoever met with him *peace be upon him* loved him and how he *peace be upon him* protected the legacy of prophethood by pardoning the sins committed by his brothers against him; a fact which is proved by the Quran in which Allah says, '...No reproach shall be uttered today against you. May Allah forgive you your sins' (*Yusuf:* 92)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said something like this to the people of Mecca on the Day of Opening. Ibn Ishaq narrated that he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'Leave freely, for no harm will afflict you.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Once again, this chapter is a source of admonition because of the events it sheds light on including the imprisonment of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* unjustly, his later release and finally his assuming of authority. It for this reason that it is regarded the best of narratives. Another possible explanation for the fact that it is the best of narratives is that it had precisely told us about the events of this story in the same way it took place and in agreement with what has been mentioned in the previous Scriptures, but in a way which is stunningly attractive. A third possible explanation for the fact that it is that it had completely covered man's different aspects of life including childhood, mental maturity, and emotional maturity.

As for the news of other previous prophets, they are scattered in the Quran in such a way which proves its inimitability. It is thus clear the fact that this chapter includes the best of the narrative stems from the miraculous style of The Quran, which none can produce anything like it.

<sup>(1)</sup> Ibn Ishaq said, 'Some scholars told me that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him stood up on the door of the Ka'ba and proclaimed, "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah; He is one and has no partner. All kingdoms are for Him, and all the praises are for Him, and He is Omnipotent. We are returning with repentance, worshipping, prostrating, and praising our Lord. He has kept up His promise and made His slave victorious, and He Alone defeated all the clans of disbelievers." Then, he peace and blessings be upon him said to them, "What do you think I am going to do with you?" They responded, "We think that you will treat us virtuously, for you are a generous man, and the son of a generous brother," whereupon he peace and blessings be upon him said to them, "Leave freely, for no harm will afflict you."" (See ibn Ishaq, Sirat ibn Hisham, 4/412.)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories in revealing this Quran to you. Before this, you were one of those who knew nothing about them.' (*Yusuf:* 3) As for the word *min al-ghafilin* (one of those who knew nothing about them), it means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was unlettered who did not master making eloquent speeches or even composing poetic verses, and that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was only known for his great moral conduct characteristics that must be met in anyone who is supposed to deliver the Divine Message to people. Here arises a very good point; as long as he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not previously tell a lie to people, he would not fabricate a lie against a lie. It was impossible for him *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell a lie before the mission or even after it. Here, we can quote the example of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* who firmly believed in his Message from the first moment, without hesitation. Upon being told about this message of Prophet Muhammad, he *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, 'You told the truth.'

Also, when the miracles of *al-`israa'* and *al-mi`raj* (Night Journey and Ascension) took place, the people of Mecca wondered how this could happen, especially if we consider that they used to make this long journey within a month! But Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* had a different position, for he said, 'Muhammad has told the truth.'<sup>(1)</sup>

In the same connection, some people during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were unable to understand the wisdom behind some of the decisions made by him *peace and blessings be upon him* which is why Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* used to say to them, 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'. Let us offer an example to illustrate

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this incident, ibn Hisham says, 'On the morning of his return from Jerusalem, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him imparted the great news of his nocturnal voyage to Quraysh, but his narrative was met with incredulity. Having heard the Prophet's account, a group of the disbelievers went to Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him to communicate the news. At first, he Allah be pleased with him accused them of 'fabricating canards', but they insisted, 'What we say is true. In fact, he is at this moment in the (Sacred) Mosque recounting details of this voyage.' Abu Bakr then rejoined, 'By Allah, if he said so, then it is true. And why such are you so astounded? By Allah, he tells me that news is revealed to him from Heaven, be it night or day, and I believe him. This (revelation) is more extraordinary than this journey that has so amazed you.'

this point. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* signed the Treaty of Al-Hudybiya with the polytheists of Mecca, he accepted their unjust terms and conditions, whereupon 'Umar ibn Al-Kattab *Allah be pleased with him* who was reluctant to this Treaty, wondered why Prophet Muhammad did something like this. It is narrated that 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'are we not fighting for the Truth and they for falsehood? Why should we then put a blot upon our religion?'

'Umar posed the same questions to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* who answered 'Umar saying, 'O 'Umar. Adhere firmly to his (Prophet Muhammad's) instructions and decisions, for he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah'.<sup>(1)</sup> Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* wanted to draw 'Umar's attention to the fact that Prophet Muhammad did not do anything due to his own desire. Here, we should clarify that the statement of Abu Bakr is based on full confidence in the undeniable fact that Prophet Muhammad was permanently guided by the Support of Allah; that is, it was not a matter of blind obedience.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Before this, you were one of those who knew nothing about them (*al-ghafilin*)' (*Yusuf:* 3). The Arabic word '*al-ghafil*' is used to refer to a person who knows nothing about a particular matter simply because he does not bother to think about it. Another possible explanation for this particular part of the verse is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* out of the undeniable fact that he was unable to read or write, was not able to learn or hear anything, from any source, about the story of Prophet Yusuf. Yes, this is true, for we all know for certain that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not receive any kind of knowledge before the revelation. In this vein, it is even recorded that

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad on the authority of Al-Miswar ibn Makhramat Az-zuhari and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam. The full version of the Hadith reads, "Umar approached Abu Bakr and said, "Abu Bakr, are we not fighting for Truth and they for falsehood?" He replied, "Yes". 'Umar asked, "Are those not killed from our side in Paradise and those killed from their side in the Fire?" He replied, "Of course?" 'Umar (then) said, "Why should we then disgrace our religion and return while Allah has not yet decided the issue between them and ourselves?" Abu Bakr said, "Son of Khattab, truly, he [Prophet Muhammad] is the Messenger of Allah, and Allah will never ruin him". See Ahmad, Musnad, 4/323-325.

this chapter of *Yusuf* was not revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until the Jews urged the disbelievers of Mecca to ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* why the sons of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) left for Egypt?<sup>(1)</sup>

As a matter of fact, telling Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him about the events of this story in such minute details is a kind of miracle, for it offers firm and concrete evidence that Allah the Almighty is the One Who revealed this to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. We previously explained that the act of revelation is a disclosure of something that was previously concealed. Concerning this, we should take into account that Allah Glorified is He reveals matters to His creatures, including the angels, as Allah Glorified is He says: 'When your Lord revealed to the angels: I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe...' (al-Anfal: 12), those whom He the Almighty chooses from among mankind as He Glorified is He says: 'And when I revealed to the disciples, saying, "Believe in Me and My Messenger", they said, "We believe and bear witness that we submit (ourselves)" (al-Ma'ida: 111); the mother of Prophet Musa (Moses) who was inspired by Him the Almighty to cast her child into the river, when Allah says: 'When We revealed to your mother what was revealed, saying, "Put him into the chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore; there he shall be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him. And I cast down upon you love, from Me, and that you might be brought up beneath the care of My eyes' (Ta Ha: 38-39); the inanimate earth as the Lord Glorified is He says: 'Because your Lord will have inspired her' (az-Zalzala: 5); and the bees when Allah says: 'And your Lord revealed to the bee saying, "Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build. Then eat of all the fruits and walk in the ways of your Lord submissively." There comes out from within their bodies a beverage of many colours, in which there is healing for men; most surely there is a sign in this for a people who reflect' (an-Nahl: 68-69).

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi quoted the following statement of An-Nahhas, 'It is narrated that the Jews said (to the disbelievers of Mecca), "Ask him, i.e. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him about the reason why the family of Prophet Ya'qub moved from Ash-Sham to Egypt; and ask him also about the story of Prophet Ya'qub", whereupon Allah the Almighty sent down this chapter in Mecca in accordance with what has been mentioned in the Torah and more than this'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3440.

It is thus clear that Allah *the Almighty* inspires and reveals whatever He wants to whomever He wants including inanimate objects, plants, animals, mankind, etc. He *Glorified is He* addresses them in accordance with the particular means of perception placed in each of them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَتَأَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكُبًا وَٱلشَّمْسَ وَٱلْقَمَرَ رَأَيْنُهُمْ لِي سَنِجِدِينَ <sup>(1)</sup>

### Joseph said to his father, 'Father, I dreamed of eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them all bow down before me' [4] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 4)

This verse in question is the beginning of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) peace be upon him; it states clearly that he called upon his father, Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), saying, 'O Father!' Here, we should take into account that the following Arabic words 'Abi', 'Abati', 'Abatah' and 'Abat' all give the same meaning of 'father', although each of them is used in a particular context. Everyone has undoubtedly observed the sun and the moon, and has noticed that they have particular times when they rise and set. Likewise, we have all witnessed the limitless number of stars that dot the night-sky. But we should stress that the dream of Yusuf (Joseph) peace be upon him had a special character which is that he *peace be upon him* saw both the sun and the moon at the same moment, and that he saw only eleven stars. How could this happen? As a matter of fact, the statement of Yusuf which is stated in The Quran clearly indicates that he *peace be upon him* was able to count them, and that this sun and moon, as well as the eleven stars had special characteristics. In addition, the verse shows that Yusuf peace be upon him had seen them all bow down before him. This means that he, first of all, saw them in their natural, original state and then he saw them bowing down to him. At that point, we stress heavily that their prostration to Yusuf peace be upon him was a matter of surrendering to the Will of Allah the Almighty. The verb 'saw' (ra'ayt) has been mentioned twice in this verse to indicate the original state and also the bowing of these heavenly bodies.

In the same vein, we notice that the word *Sajidin* (prostrating) is written in the normal masculine plural form. Here, we should be aware that nothing can be written in this form but the masculine, animate, and rational subject. We should take into account that the mind enables a person to make choices. The true believer is the person who makes choices that are in accordance with the Divine Way of Guidance. And the apex of surrender to Allah is apparent when one prostrates before Allah *the Almighty*. As for the family of Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* they bowed down before him *peace be upon him* in obedience to the Divine Order; that is, they fully understood how to obey this Divine Command.<sup>(1)</sup>

We can thereby compare the obedience of the stars in Yusuf's vision to the obedience of the sky which will fully understand how to obey the Command of Allah *the Almighty* on the Day of Judgment, a fact which is recorded in the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'When the sky bursts asunder, and gives ear to [the Command of] its Lord, and it must [do so]' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2). That is to say the sky about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do they not then look up to the sky above them, how We have made it and adorned it and there are no gaps in it?' (*Qaf:* 6) will, on the Day of Resurrection, understand and obey the Order of Allah, as Allah says: 'And gives ear (*Adhinat*) to [the Command of] its Lord, and it must [do so]' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2). In other words, we can say that it is equipped with the sense of hearing, for the Arabic word *Adhinat* ('obeys' or 'gives ear') is linguistically derived from the word *Udhun* (ear); that is, once the sky hears the Divine Command, it responds immediately by bursting asunder.<sup>(2)</sup>

(2) The following verse fully illustrates this point; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Then He directed Himself to the sky and it was a vapour. And He said to it and to the earth, "Come both, willingly or unwillingly". They both said, "We come willingly" (*Fussilat*: 11).

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this verse in question, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Al-Khalil and Sibawaih opined that when Allah told us that these things obeyed Him by prostrating, which is an action that is carried out by animate, rational beings, He indicates that they can understand His Orders'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3443. As for the late Imam Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi, he opined that this verse clearly shows the high rank of Prophet Yusuf among his family members and in the sight of Allah. It also indicates that they will eventually recognise his virtue. Here, we should take into account that the characteristics of dreams are totally different from the normal sense of seeing, for the former gives details of what will happen in the future.

As such, we notice that mankind<sup>(1)</sup> is but one community among many other communities in the world. And we know for certain that people can communicate with each other by virtue of a shared language through using sign language, though seeking the help of a translator or even by learning the language of others.

But man is not able to apprehend the language of inanimate beings, plants, and animals unless Allah *the Almighty* enables him to do so. The mountains' repetition of the Praise and Glory of Allah with Prophet Dawud (David) is a case in point. In this instance, man–the most exalted creature on the surface of the earth–and the mountains–inanimate objects–form a harmonious union, for the man, i.e. Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* used to praise the Glory of Allah first, and then the mountains repeated after him. We know fully well that everything in the universe glorifies Allah *the Almighty* but in a manner that we cannot understand.<sup>(2)</sup>

However, Allah may choose some from among mankind who He teaches the language of other creatures. Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* is a case in point. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And Sulaiman was Dawud's heir. And he said, 'O men! we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given all things; most surely this is a manifest grace' (*an-Naml:* 16).

This aforementioned verse in the chapter of *an-Naml* clearly tells us that birds have their own language by means of which they can communicate with each other. It also affirms that Prophet Sulaiman *peace be upon him* was taught this language of birds by Allah *the Almighty*. In the same connection, the Quran tells us that Allah *Glorified is He* has also taught Prophet Sulaiman the language of ants. He *the Almighty* says: 'Till, when they came upon a valley [full] of ants, an ant exclaimed, "O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]!"

<sup>(1)</sup> This point is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'and there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you' (*al-An 'am*: 38).

<sup>(2)</sup> Allah *the Almighty* says: '...and there is not a single thing but it glorifies Him with all praise, but you do not understand their glorification; surely, He is Forbearing, Forgiving' (*al-Isra*': 44).

Thereupon [Sulaiman] smiled joyously at her words, and said, "O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Yours with which You have graced me and my parents, and that I may do what is right [in a manner] that will please You; and include me, by Your Grace, among Your righteous servants!"" (*an-Naml:* 18-19)

Clearly, every community of creatures has its own language by means of which its members can understand the Divine Orders. In addition, we now realise that Allah teaches these languages of different creatures to whomever He wants from mankind. Based on this, we know for certain that when the sun, the moon and the eleven stars prostrated before Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* in his dream, they did this as they had understood it to be a Divine Order.<sup>(1)</sup> Allah *the Almighty* then says:

# قَالَ يَبُنَى لَا نَقْصُصْ رُءَيَاكَ عَلَى إِخُوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا إِنَّ ٱلشَّيْطَنَ لِلإِنسَنِ عَدُقٌ مَّبِيتُ ٥

### And he replied, 'My son, tell your brothers nothing of this dream, or they may plot to harm you — Satan is man's sworn enemy [5] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 5)

Referring to the way how fathers call upon their sons, the Quran uses the diminutive form 'ya bunayy' (O my dear son!) which shows a father's deep affection and love for his son.<sup>(2)</sup>

Yet, when fathers speak of matters regarding their son, we find the Quran using the form '*i'bni'* (my son); this fact is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...Surely, my son (*ibni*) was of my family...' (*Hud:* 45) This statement was, in fact, made by Prophet Nuh (Noah) about his disbelieving son. Here, we stress that the style 'ya bunayy' will be very helpful for us in understanding the following events of the story and how his father loved Yusuf *peace be upon him* very much.

<sup>(1)</sup> We should stress that the main purpose behind the creation of the entire universe is to offer worship to Allah *the Almighty*.

<sup>(2)</sup> This special form of calling upon sons has been mentioned six times in The Quran, as follows: three times in the chapters of *Hud, Yusuf* and *as-Saffat*, one time in each of them, and three times in the chapter of *Luqman*.

Furthermore, using this style in particular indicates that Yusuf *peace be upon him* during that period of time was still a young boy, which is why Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), the father of Yusuf, showed him deep love. In addition, this style tells us clearly that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was not qualified yet to decide on matters himself, and that is why he was supposed to follow the instructions of his father; a point which is perfectly clear in the fact that when he, i.e. Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* was in distress, he used to hurry to his father whom he *peace be upon him* viewed as the best one who was able to alleviate his distress. Further, when Yusuf *peace be upon him* related his dream to his father, the latter advised him, saying: '...My son, tell your brothers nothing of this dream ...' (*Yusuf:* 5).

As for the Arabic word '*ru*'ya' (dream), it refers to a series of events or images that happen in one's mind while sleeping; this is because the sun, the moon, and the stars never bow down before anyone in real life. This actually indicates the ultimate accuracy of the words used in the Quran. Here, we should differentiate between the following two words, namely; '*ru*'ya' (dream) and '*ru*'yah' (seeing). We have already given the meaning of the first. As for the latter, it refers to what one is able to see while awake.

As such, the two words are derived from the same linguistic root, which is (r-a'-a), yet each imparts a different meaning,; for one of them is used to refer to dreams coming to the mind of a person who is asleep, while the other is used to refer to what one sees while awake. Grammatically speaking, both of them are feminine words, as the three Arabic letters by means of which the word can be changed from masculine into feminine are: *ta' marbutah* ('ah' sound), an elongated *alif* (written with an *alif*) and a shortened *alif* (usually written with the letter *ya*).

Concerning these two words in question, the word '*ru'yah'* (seeing) ends with a *ta' marbutah*, while the other word, i.e. '*ru'ya'* (dream) ends with an elongated *alif*. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the word '*ru'ya'* (dreams) in all places in the Quran refers to what the person sees when he is asleep, except in one verse when Allah *the Almighty* mentions Prophet Muhammad's miraculous Ascension into the heavens: 'And We made the vision (*al-ru'ya*) which We showed you as a trial for mankind...' (*Al-Isra':* 60). Some people

claim that this miraculous Ascension into the heavens was shown to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a dream. Yet, we say to them, 'You are unable to properly understand the meaning of this verse, for it means that what happened was a miracle, not just something which was imagined or seen in a dream; it was something that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* actually experienced. This is proved by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* describes the Night Journey and Ascension as a trial to mankind. As such, if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had declared that he had seen these events in a dream, none will have accused him of fabricating lies. However, he declared that he experienced the events of this journey in reality, and that is why the Quran says that it was a trial for the people'.

Back to the verse in question; Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* advised his son Yusuf (Joseph) not to tell his brothers about the dream he had seen. As a matter of fact, the main reason behind Ya'qub's worry was that he felt the rest of his sons, driven by grudge and envy, might harm Yusuf; a matter which was later fulfilled. As for Ya'qub *peace be upon him* himself, he wanted his son not to be harmed, which is why he advised him not to tell the story to them.<sup>(1)</sup>

Here arises the following question, 'Why were the brothers of Prophet Yusuf so jealous of such a dream?' The answer to this question is clear from the fact that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* must have known the interpretation of this dream; he knew for certain that it was a prophecy which will be inevitably fulfilled. In addition, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* must have known that the rest of his sons, i.e. Yusuf's brothers, had the ability to interpret this dream too, and if Yusuf had told them about it, they will have known its explanation and as a result will have plotted to harm him.

Furthermore, we should not forget the fact that they, i.e. Yusuf's brothers were already jealous of him, although he was still a young boy; from this we realize they will have been bitterly jealous if they had known about this dream in question.

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this verse, Al-Qurtubi said, 'This verse clearly indicates that one should not tell his dream to anyone but one who loves him or is able to explain it'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3447.

Yet, those brothers of Prophet Yusuf cannot be judged as evildoers, for they are Al-Asbat (heads of the Jewish tribes). Here, someone might reject this idea and say, 'If they were not truly evildoers, why did they plot to harm Yusuf *peace be upon him*?' We answer this question, saying, 'Their jealousy was a natural human feeling which resulted from their father's deep love for Yusuf; they were not truly evildoers. This is because evildoers are extremely insistent on pursuing their wrong ways, but the anger of the doers of good calms down with time'.

Let us offer a example to fully illustrate this point; an evil person might want to slap someone on the cheek. However, this initial desire to inflict harm might increase, and he might want to hit him twice. Then, he might think that two slaps are insufficient, and therefore he threatens his foe with a gun. As a matter of fact, this example shows us clearly how the evildoers are extremely insistent on doing evil, in one way or another.

The case is yet totally different with the doer of good, for we find that he is not insistent on committing evil. For example, a good person might want to hit someone who has harmed him. The good person's vindictive intentions might soon allay, to the extent that he might suffice with only slapping him twice instead of beating him up. With time, however, he might calm down and pardon his foe completely.

If we review the situation of Yusuf's brothers, who are the fathers of the twelve Jewish tribes, <sup>(1)</sup> in the light of the aforementioned two cases, we will find that their anger evaporated step by step; this shows that they were not evildoers by nature. Here is the explanation of this point: first of all, they plotted to kill Yusuf *peace be upon him*; a fact which is recorded in the Quran; Allah reports them as saying: '...Slay Yusuf (Joseph)...' (*Yusuf*: 9).

Yusuf's brothers were resentful of Ya'qub's love for his youngest son. However, they soon gave up this malicious tone and moved to a lower level of wrong; a fact which is also recorded when Allah *the Almighty* relates them

<sup>(1)</sup> The word '*Al-Asbat*' has been mentioned five times in the Quran. In four citations, it is used to refer to Prophets. As for the fifth citation, it has been used to impart the meaning of 'the heads of the Jewish tribes'. Here, we should know that Ya'qub's sons are themselves '*Al-Asbat*' of the Jewish tribes.

as saying: '...Or banish him to another [faraway] land, and your father's attention will be free to return to you [alone]...' (*Yusuf*: 9).

However, they were not bold enough to oust him to a remote land, which is why they moved to an even lower level of wrong, deciding to cast Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the dark depth of the well. Referring to this fact, Allah *the Almighty* states that they said: '...Cast him into the dark depths of this well, [where] some caravan may pick him up...' (*Yusuf:* 10). This plainly shows that those brothers of Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* had given up the idea of killing him and decided to do something which is less harmful instead, indicating that they took his safety into account.

The verse under discussion continues with Allah *the Almighty* saying: 'Ya'qub (Jacob) replied, "My son, tell your brothers nothing of this dream, or they may arrange a harmful plot for you ...' (*Yusuf*: 5). It is worth noting that the Arabic word '*al-kayd*' (plot) is a stealthy machination devised by someone unable to confront his enemy. Clearly, such schemes are weapons of the weak, since someone who is powerful is capable of overtly confronting his foe, hence the popular saying, 'Women's insidious plots are great because their weakness is even greater'.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '...Satan is man's sworn enemy' (*Yusuf:* 5). This animosity between man and Satan is not a secret. We all know that Satan was expelled from paradise, for he was cursed by Allah *Glorified is He*. As for Adam, Allah *the Almighty* accepted his repentance, which is why Satan swore by the Might of Allah that he will misguide the sons of Adam, except for the purified slaves among them.<sup>(1)</sup>

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, 'There is none among you who does not have a comrade from among the jinn (devil)'. They (the Companions) said, 'Allah's Messenger, with you too?' Thereupon Prophet Muhammad replied, 'Yes, but Allah helps me against him and so I am safe from his hand, and he does not command me but to do good'.<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He said, "Then by Your Might I will surely misguide them all, except Your slaves from among them, the purified ones' (*Sad:* 82-83).

<sup>(2)</sup> See Ahmad, Musnad, 1/385

In the verse in question, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* describes Satan as a sworn enemy to man; that is, he (Satan) desperately tries to tempt man by all possible means. This fact is painstakingly recorded in The Quran, as Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the statement of Satan, saying: 'And [I] shall most certainly assault them from before them as well as behind them, and from their right and from their left...' (*al-A'raf:* 17).

Here, there is a very important point that we should take into account which is that Allah *the Almighty* in the aforementioned verse in the chapter of *al-'Araf,* does not mention that Satan will come to man from below or from above him; this is because those purified slaves who are permanently connected to the earth below them in Prayer and the Divine Way of Guidance that came from above cannot be approached by Satan in anyway. Concerning this point, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* tells us about Ya'qub's advice to his son, saying: '...or they may plot to harm you ...' (*Yusuf:* 5) meaning that the plotting of the brothers will be for the good of Yusuf *peace be upon him* because the Quran does not use the expression '*fa yakiduka'* (they will harm you) for this means that their plotting will surely harm Yusuf *peace be upon him*. This is not the intended meaning. This point is crystal clear in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...In this way did We plan for Yusuf [to attain his heart's desire]...' (*Yusuf:* 76).

Allah the Almighty subsequently says:

وَكَذَلِكَ يَجْبَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِن تَأْوِيلِ ٱلْأَحَادِيثِ وَسُتِمُّ نِعْمَتَهُ، عَلَيْك وَعَلَيْ ءَالِ يَعْقُوبَكُمَا أَتَمَّهَاعَلَىٰٓ أَبَوَيْكَ مِن قَبْلُ إِبْرَهِيمَ وَإِسْحَقَّ إِنَّ رَبِّكَ عَلِيمُ حَكِيمُ ٣

### This is about how your Lord will choose you, teach you to interpret dreams, and perfect His blessing on you and the House of Jacob, just as He perfected it earlier on your forefathers Abraham and Isaac: your Lord is all knowing and wise [6] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 6)

That is to say that just as Allah *Glorified is He* has conferred His Favour upon you, O Yusuf, by allowing you to see this dream, He *the Almighty* tells you that you will attain a superior rank, for He *the Almighty* will choose you from among your brothers. In addition, the Lord *Glorified is He* will make their plot for your good. Furthermore, He will teach you the interpretation of dreams in such a way that will attract the attention of those people in authority.

As for the Arabic word 'ta'wil' (interpretation), it refers to understanding the concealed meaning of something. Here, we should take into account that not all people are able to interpret dreams, with the exception of those whom Allah *the Almighty* has granted the talent to do so. That is to say that it is not a field of knowledge which is based on rules and maxims, but rather, it is a matter of Divine Inspiration.

The Blessings of Allah *the Almighty* on Prophet *Yusuf peace be upon him* will not end at that point, for the Lord *the Almighty* will entrust Yusuf *peace be upon him* with running the affairs of the treasury of Egypt. Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* will make Yusuf *peace be upon him* the chief of Egypt.

As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...and perfect His Blessings on you ...' (*Yusuf:* 6), it refers to the blessings of this worldly life topped by being elected as a Messenger. Another possible interpretation for this part of the verse is that Allah *the Almighty* will permanently confer His Blessings on Yusuf *peace be upon him*. This explanation may be viewed in the light of the fact that Yusuf *peace be upon him* will be appointed as a chief of Egypt; although it is a position from which he might be ousted, for one reason or another.

A third possible explanation is that the Lord *the Almighty* will confer His Blessings on Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the next life in the same way He conferred them upon him in the life of this world.<sup>(1)</sup> As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...and the House of Ya'qub (Jacob), just as He perfected it earlier on your forefathers Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishaq (Isaac): your Lord is All Knowing and All-Wise' (*Yusuf:* 6), it is a Divine Instruction to Yusuf *peace be upon him* not to harbour any enmity towards his brothers for Allah *Glorified is He* will also perfect His Blessings on them in the same way He *the Almighty* 

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this particular part of the verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'The saying of Allah the Almighty: '...and perfect His Blessings on you ...' (Yusuf: 6) may be explained in the light of the fact that Yusuf has been elected a Messenger, or in the light of the fact that his brothers had driven him away. It yet might mean that Allah the Almighty has saved you from all harm'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Byan, 4/3450.

previously perfected them on their forefathers, i.e. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them* by taking the first as a friend<sup>(1)</sup> and by appointing the second as a Messenger. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* out of His Great Wisdom knows best who deserves to be assigned the mission of delivering the Divine Message to mankind. He arranges everything for it to be in the correct state.

He Glorified is He then says:

لَقَدْكَانَ فِي يُوسُفَ وَإِخْوَتِهِ عَايَنْتُ لِلسَّآبِلِينَ ٧

### There are lessons in the story of Joseph and his brothers for all who seek them [7] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 7)

This verse tells us clearly that the entire events of this story will revolve around Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* a point which is deduced from using the Arabic preposition '*fi*' (in) which indicates a sequence of events.<sup>(2)</sup>

Being of a non-Arabic origin, the name Yusuf is non-declinable (i.e. cannot take some case endings), which is why the verse in question cannot be read as '*fi Yusufin*'.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'There are lessons *(ayat)* in the story of Yusuf and his brothers for all who seek [the Truth]' (*Yusuf*: 7), it means that the events of this story of Prophet Yusuf and his brothers clearly indicate the Omnipotent Power of Allah *Glorified is He*; for the story states that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was thrown in the dark depths of the well from which he was taken to be raised up in the house of one of the Egyptian leaders.

As for the Arabic word 'aya' (singular for 'ayat', meaning 'lessons' or 'signs'), it is used to refer to extraordinary matters which attract the attention

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this particular part of the verse, Imam ibn Kathir said, 'Allah the Almighty says: "...And Allah took Ibrahim as a friend" (an-Nisa': 125). That is because Allah Glorified is He loves Ibrahim peace be upon him very much because he showed total obedience to Him the Almighty'. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 1/560.

<sup>(2)</sup> In his Mughni Al-Labib, ibn Hisham Al-Ansari said, 'The Arabic preposition 'fi' (in) can be used to impart ten different meanings including its reference to time and place-two meanings which are clear in the saying of Allah the Almighty: "Alif Lam Mim. The Romans are vanquished, in (fi) a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome, within (fi) a few years" (ar-Rum: 1-4)'.

of people. Yet, it is used in the Quranic context to impart three different meanings, as follows: first of all, it is used to refer to the signs in the universe, such as the sun, the moon, the day, the night, etc. As a matter of fact, these signs produce conclusive evidence on the Existence of Allah *the Almighty*. That is, if we contemplate how the affairs of the universe are run with such absolute order, we will come to the conclusion that there has to be a Creator of this perfectly balanced universe. Second, this word in question (*aya*) can also be used to give the meaning of 'the miracles' given to Prophets and Messengers that prove their veracity and truthfulness. The fire<sup>(1)</sup> which did not harm Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and the Red Sea which was divided into two huge mountains before Musa (Moses) are two cases in point. This word in question, i.e. '*aya*', is further used to refer to a verse of the Quran.

Back to the verse in question; it tells us clearly about the events of the story of Prophet Yusuf with his brothers and how their plotting to harm Yusuf *peace be upon him* was eventually turned into a blessing for him. It is important here to take into account that Allah *the Almighty* has sent down these verses of the chapter of *Yusuf* as a comfort for His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to strengthen his heart. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* instructs Prophet Muhammad not to pay attention to all the abuses and plots of the disbelievers of Mecca, for they will be in no way able to harm him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to despair, for He *the Almighty* is his Supporter and Protector, which is why Prophet Muhammad and his Companions should not

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this miracle of Prophet Ibrahim, Imam ibn Kathir said that Allah the Almighty says: 'They said, ''Burn him and help your gods, if you are going to do (anything)''. We said, ''O fire! Be cool and [a means of] safety for Ibrahim''' (al-Anbiya': 68-69). The Arabic word 'bard' (cool) is the opposite of hotness. Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talim opined that the fire did not harm Ibrahim peace be upon him. Ibn 'Abbas and Abu Al-'Aliya, on their part, said, 'Had Allah the Almighty not made the fire a means of safety for Ibrahim, he will have been hurt by its coldness'. Juwaiber narrated that Ad-Dahhak explained this verse, saying the town of Ibrahim had made up their minds to collect a huge pile of wood and they set fire to it from all directions, but Ibrahim peace be upon him was not harmed'. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Adhim, 3/184.

think that Allah's Victory has been delayed. Allah *the Almighty* says: '[But] do you think that you will enter paradise without having suffered like those [believers] who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and so shaken were they that the Messenger and the believers with him exclaimed, "When will Allah's Succour come?" Oh, verily, Allah's Succour is [always] near!' (*al-Baqara:* 214).

The events of the story continue until Yusuf's dream come true. They tell us how Yusuf *peace be upon him* was persecuted by his brothers and how Allah *the Almighty* turned their plot into a blessing for Yusuf *peace be upon him*. Some scholars opined that the dream of Yusuf *peace be upon him* came true within forty to eighty years.<sup>(1)</sup>

At that point, we can affirm that a dream of good tidings takes a long time to come true, while a dream portending an ominous future will not come true according to the Hadith of Prophet of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says: 'Good dreams are from Allah, so if any one of you sees which he likes he should not disclose it but to one whom he loves. But if he sees something which he does not like he should spit on his left side thrice and seek refuge with Allah from the mischief of Satan and its mischief (i.e. of the dream), and he should not relate it to anyone. Then it will not harm him'.<sup>(2)</sup>

Here, we should also be aware of the fact that evil, in general, happens quickly and has only one form, while goodness takes time to happen and can take many forms. If we apply this to the interpretation of good dreams, a person can imagine many ways of how he may receive the good.

An example of a supplication for evil to happen is clear in the supplication made by Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* against the people of Pharaoh; a fact which is recorded in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Our

<sup>(1)</sup> Abu 'Uthman An-Nahdi narrated that Sulaiman was of the opinion that the time span between Yusuf's dream and its fulfilment was forty years. Al-Hasan, on the other hand, said, 'Yusuf was separated from Ya'qub for a total of eighty years. During this period, sadness never left Ya'qub's heart, and tears never ceased to stream down his cheeks'. This latter opinion is identical to that of Ibn Kathir. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/491.

<sup>(2)</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim

Lord! Destroy their riches and harden their hearts so that they believe not until they see the painful punishment' (*Yunus:* 88). This supplication for evil was answered quickly.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'There are lessons in the story of Joseph and his brothers for all who seek [the Truth]' (*Yusuf:* 7). The word '*ayat*' ('lessons' or 'signs') indicates that all of the events of this story are viewed as signs and lessons. Yet, according to another mode of recitation, the word '*ayat*' is read in the singular '*aya*' which thus means that the entire events of the story are viewed as one amazing and wonderful sign. This last meaning is supported by another Quranic verse in which Allah describes both 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and his mother as one '*aya*' (wonderful sign); the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And We made the son of Maryam and his mother a sign (*ayah*)...'<sup>(1)</sup> (*al-Mu'minun:* 50).

That is to say that we can understand the story of Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the light of the fact that it is one wonderful sign that includes different events, or that each event in it represents a single sign.

Allah then concludes the verse with His saying: '...for all who seek [the Truth]' (*Yusuf*: 7). This saying of Allah might be interpreted in two different ways; it may be used to refer to the polytheists of Mecca sent by the Jews<sup>(2)</sup> to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about Yusuf's story.

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this verse, Imam Ibn Kathir said, 'Allah the Almighty made them, i.e. 'Isa and his mother, a wonderful sign that indicates Allah's Omnipotent Power, for He the Almighty has created Adam out of nothing, created Eve from a male when there were no females and created 'Isa peace be upon him from a female, although she never had any relationship with men'. See\_Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 3/246.

<sup>(2)</sup> Commenting on this verse in question, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'This saying of Allah established the veracity and truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for the Jews had urged the polytheists of Mecca to ask him peace and blessings be upon him about a prophet whose son was driven away by his brothers from Ash-Sham to Egypt, and who consequently went blind. Whereupon Allah the Almighty sent down the chapter of Yusuf all at once; it contains all the information mentioned in the Torah and even adds further details. That is to say that this miracle was of the same magnitude of 'Isa's (Jesus Christ's) miracle of reviving the dead'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3450.

The second possible explanation for it is that it refers to those Muslims who seek wisdom and admonition from the stories of previous nations, which is why Allah *the Almighty* revealed this chapter in such a miraculous way which cannot be brought by mankind.

Reading this chapter of Yusuf (Joseph) from the very beginning to the end might take you a total of twenty minutes. Here a good question arises, which is 'Who can continuously speak for about twenty minutes without even forgetting one word of his speech?' It goes without saying that none can do this, yet the case is totally different with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for Allah *Glorified is He* promised that He will teach him *peace and blessings be upon him* so he will never forget. Allah says: 'We will make you [Muhammad] recite so you shall not forget' (*al-A 'la:* 6). Thanks to Divine Help, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* committed to memory all that was revealed to him from his Lord. He recited the verses of the Quran to his Companions and recited them in the prayers. It is worth mentioning that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never made a mistake while reciting The Quran, although it is full of verses that are very similar to each other.

Here is a list of some of the verses of the Quran which are very similar to each other; Allah *the Almighty* says: '...and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these are among (*min*) the acts that require diligent resolve' (*Luqman:* 17); However He *the Almighty* in another verse, says: '... surely these are indeed among (*lamin*) the acts that require diligent resolve' (*ash-Shura:* 43). Another example is when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in the midst of gardens and fountains' (*al-Hijr:* 45), although in another position, He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in gardens and bliss' (*at-Tur:* 17).

This makes one wonder how this unlettered Prophet (Prophet Muhammad) was able to recall all of these verses; it is impossible unless Allah *the Almighty* enabled him to do this.

Allah the Almighty subsequently says:

إِذْ قَالُواْ لَيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُ إِلَى أَبِينَا مِنَّا وَنَحَنُ عُصْبَةً إِنَّ أَبَانَا لَفِي ضَلَالِ تُبِينٍ ٥

### The brothers said [to each other], 'Although we are many, Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are — our father is clearly in the wrong' [8] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 8)

It is important here to discuss this verse in the light of the different bonds of brotherhood. We know fully well that there are sibling brothers, paternal brothers and maternal brothers. Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* had a total of twelve<sup>(1)</sup> children; six of them were delivered by one woman, four were the children of Zulfa and Balha, and Yusuf and Benyamin (Benjamin) were the children of *Rahil*.

The verse in question starts with the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The brothers said [talking among themselves], "Although we are many, *Yusuf* and his brother are dearer to our father than we are ..."" (*Yusuf*: 8). Here, we should know that using the Arabic the particle '*lam*' before the name of Yusuf denotes emphasis and intensity; that is, the brothers of Yusuf said, 'By Allah! Truly! Our father loves Yusuf and his brother more than the rest of us!' In the same connection, we should be aware that emphasis is used when one wants to deny the opposite case.

This clearly indicates that they, i.e. the brothers, disagreed about Yusuf and also how they should deal with him *peace be upon him*; this is also derived from the fact that some of them suggested to kill him while others thought of just casting him down in the depths of a dark well. They, however, eventually reached the conclusion that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was dearer to their father than them.

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on the number of Ya'qub's children, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'Ya'qub first married Liyya bint Liyyan, his uncle's daughter. She gave birth to six children including Rubil, the eldest of Ya'qub's sons, Sham'un, Lawi, Yahudha, Zayalun and Yasakher. Ya'qub peace be upon him then married two slave girls who gave birth to four children, who were Dan, Niftali, Jad and Ashar. After the death of Liyya, he married her sister Rahil, who bore him Yusuf and Benyamin (Benjamin). Therefore the total number of his sons was twelve. As-Suhili, on his part, opined that the mother of Ya'qub was called Rafqa, adding that Rahil had died shortly after giving birth to Benyamin (Benjamin)'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3451.

As a matter of fact, careful reflection upon the statement of those brothers plainly indicates that they were somewhat fair, for they admitted that their father loved them as well. That is to say that if they had carefully examined the matter, they will have reached the main reason why their father loved Yusuf and his brother more than them.

First of all, Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother were young when their mother died.<sup>(1)</sup> Ya'qub *peace be upon him* therefore had to compensate for the loss of their mother by providing them with more love and affection. Furthermore, it is Allah *the Almighty* who filled Ya'qub's heart with this deeper love for both Prophet Yusuf and his brother Benyamin (Benjamin). Here, we stress that Ya'qub had nothing to do with this matter, i.e. showing deeper love for Yusuf and his brother, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who plants this affection in people's and animals' hearts alike.

Out of His All-Wise Will, He *Glorified is He* dispenses affection among His creatures according to their need for it. A cat, for example, attacks anyone that approaches its kittens.

It is for this reason that when the ancient Arabs were asked which child was dearest to them, they replied, 'The youngest until he becomes adult; the absent until he returns; and the sick until he recovers'.

We also witness this phenomenon in our daily life. Consider the example of a mother of two sons; one of whom was provided with abundant provision while the other barely meets his needs. The wealthy brother takes care of his mother's needs, and perhaps even financially supports his brother. Yet, the mother always displays more affection to the poor son. We therefore contend that love is a matter of emotions, which cannot be regulated or controlled according to a certain rule or law; a fact which is proved by the Quran which clearly states that 'love' and 'hatred' are nothing but natural feelings, which is why one is allowed to love whomever he wants and to hate whomever he wants on condition that he should not commit injustice against people for the benefit of the person whom he loves. In addition, one is not allowed to

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis, Imam Al-Qurtubi stated that their mother, Rahil died shortly after giving birth to Benyamin.

commit injustice against whom he hates. This point of maintaining justice in all cases is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '... and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety. And be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is Aware of what you do' (*al-Ma'ida:* 8).

Someone may yet cite the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'None of you truly believe until I am more beloved to him that his own self' in opposition to this point.

We contend that the full form of this Prophetic Hadith provides the answer to this question. 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* is narrated to have responded to Prophet Muhammad, saying, 'O Prophet Muhammad, you are truly more beloved to me more than any property and children, but not more than my own self'. Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reiterated, 'None of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self'.<sup>(1)</sup>

At that moment, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* understood that the love of Prophet Muhammad is a binding Divine Commandment, and that what is meant by this love is following his guidance (intellectual love), and not emotional love.

We previously explained that 'intellectual love' entails man fully realising that which is beneficial and acting upon it. For example, when you take bitter medicine, you are doing this out of intellectual love, seeking to be cured by the Permission of Allah.

Likewise, the Muslim loves Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he knows that without the Prophet's advent, he will have never savoured the gratifying sweetness of Faith. In fact, the Muslim may cultivate his love of Prophet Muhammad until the bond becomes an emotional one as well.

<sup>(1)</sup> The grandfather of Zuhra ibn Ma'bad related the following account, 'We were in the company of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him who was holding the hand of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him when 'Umar said, "By Allah, Oh Messenger Muhammad, you are truly dearer to me than everything except my own self". Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad replied, "By He who holds my soul in His Hand, none of you truly believes until I am dearer to him than his own self", whereupon 'Umar replied, "Now, by Allah, you, O Messenger of Allah, are dearer to me than my own self". Then Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, "Now, Oh 'Umar (you have attained complete faith)". See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 4/336.

It is thus clear that the incident of 'Umar ibn Al-Kattab *Allah be pleased with him* has clearly shown the difference between the two acts of emotional love and intellectual love. Let us offer another example to fully illustrate this point. A man who had slain 'Umar's brother walked past the companions. When someone sitting next to 'Umar remarked, 'This is the man who murdered your brother', 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* replied, 'And what am I to do? He has embraced Islam'. He *Allah be pleased with him* then directed his gaze away from the murderer, who approached him and asked, 'Why do you turn your face away from me?' 'Umar responded, 'Because I do not love you, for you killed my brother'. When the man asked, 'No'. The man then exclaimed, 'You may love whom you want, and hate whomever you want. Only women cry out of love'.

Concerning the story of Prophet Yusuf, his brothers should have realised that Ya'qub's profound love for his two youngest sons was a natural reaction to the death of their mother.

The events of the story, consisting of good and evil aspects, continue, but here arises a question, which is, 'Why was the brothers' anger directed to only Yusuf?' Some scholars opined that either they wished to make their father not feel the pain of losing both of his favourite sons–Yusuf and Benjamin–or that the contents of Yusuf's dream had leaked out.

As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...we are many ('Usba)...' (*Yusuf:* 8), it indicates that their number was more than ten; this is understood from the Arabic word '*Usba*' (many). Another possible meaning for this word '*Usba*' is that it refers to a group of people whose members support each other, whether they are right or wrong. Because Ya'qub *peace be upon him* had become very old, he was unable to run the affairs of the family, and as a result his sons played this role instead. With this burden on their shoulders, they whispered, 'Since we are the ones responsible for the family's affairs, we should be the dearest to our father'. Little did they realise that their father did in fact love them, partly because they were a tightly knitted group, but he gave more care to his youngest sons because they were not members of any tightly knitted group. Sadly, the brothers remained unable to discern matters properly to the extent that they said: '...our father is clearly misguided [about this]' (*Yusuf:* 8).

To recap: the brothers' conclusion was based on flawed reasoning because Yusuf *peace be upon him* and Benyamin (Benjamin) were bereft of their mother, and for this reason were in great need of their father's deeper and warmer affection. Moreover, his love for them did not exclude his love for the self-reliant older brothers.

As for the Arabic word 'dalal' (misguided) mentioned in the verse in question, some people might mistakenly understand it in its general sense. Yet, we stress that there are two types of dalal, namely: misguidance which is committed intentionally and another which is done unintentionally. As for the first, it is when a person deviates from the path of righteousness to that of wrong. As for the second, it can be seen in the example of a man who unintentionally follows a road that does not lead him to his intended destination. It could also refer to a person forgetting the true state of any matter. This second meaning is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...So that if one of them should forget (*tadil*), the other can remind her...' (*al-Baqara:* 282); and in His saying: 'And find you unaware [searching for the right way] (*dala*) and then guided you?' (*ad-Duha:* 7) Clearly, the reprehensible act of misguidance is to deviate from the right to that which is wrong.

In short, both the brothers' assessment of their father's love for the two youngest sibling brothers as well as the conclusion they reached were wrong. The conclusion is erroneous because they based their reasoning on false precepts. Had they examined their initial assumptions very carefully, they will not have arrived at the wrong conclusion that led them to state, as mentioned in the Quran: '...our father is clearly misguided [about this]' (*Yusuf:* 8).

Allah Glorified is He continues to relate what the brothers had said, stating:

## ٱقْنْلُوا يُوسُفَ أَوِ ٱطْرَحُوهُ أَرْضًا يَخْلُ لَكُمْ وَجَهُ أَبِيكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا مِنْ بَعَدِهِ - قَوْمًا صَلِحِينَ ()

[One of them said], 'Kill Joseph or banish him to another land, and your father's attention will be free to turn to you. After that you can be righteous' [9] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 9)

This verse in question tells us plainly that they first thought of killing Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. However, being the founding fathers of the

twelve Israelite tribes, they moved to a lower level of evil, a point which is clear in Allah's saying: '...or banish him to another land ...' (*Yusuf:* 9). It is as if they feared the consequences of committing murder. Nevertheless, they deemed that with Yusuf's absence, Ya'qub's love will be theirs completely, an idea which is deduced from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...and your father's attention will be free to turn to you ...' (*Yusuf:* 9).

The Arabic word '*wajh*' (face)–here translated as 'attention'–refers to the body organ primarily concerned with showing how man interacts, smiles, and expresses affection or repulsion.

This particular part of the verse means that the attention of your father will be totally free for you, that is, there will be no barrier between them and their father, Ya'qub *peace be upon him*. And as for Allah's saying: 'After that you can be righteous' (*Yusuf*: 9), it may be explained in three ways, as follows: it may give the meaning that they were fully aware of the value of righteousness and thus fully realised that their plot was contrary to the standards of rectitude, which is why they intended to repent once the plot had been carried out. But, what guarantees that they will live long enough to repent?! This reasoning neglects the fact that our appointed time of death is concealed for this particular reason, that is, to prevent us from committing grave sins.

Another possible explanation of the verse is that they, having gotten rid of Yusuf, will be able to pursue the activities of their daily life in a good way, and will not destroy their relationship with their father anymore. According to their reasoning, when their father's attention will be theirs alone, he will finally treat them fairly and devote his love to them.

A third possible explanation is that once the brothers do away with Yusuf, they will no longer be engrossed in this ordeal. Only then will their situation become good and they will be able to get on with their daily lives.

As such, we can reach the conclusion that the actions of Yusuf's brothers were steered by their own understanding of the concept of goodness and righteousness and the concept of life.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ قَابِلُ مِّنْهُمْ لَا نَقْنُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَأَلْقُوهُ فِي غَيْبَتِ ٱلْجُبِّ يَلْنَقِطُهُ بَعْضُ ٱلسَّيَّارَةِ إِن كُنتُمُ فَنِعِلِينَ ()

# [Another of them] said, 'Do not kill Joseph, but, if you must, throw him into the hidden depths of a well where some caravan may pick him up' [10] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 10)

This verse in question indicates that Yusuf's brothers had moved to a lower level of evil, for one of them suggested the idea of throwing him *peace be upon him* in the dark depths of a well instead of killing him. Here, we should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* does not specify the speaker in order to protect all the brothers from any low opinion that might be held of them.

The Arabic word '*al-jubb*' (well) is used to refer to a well that is not stone-lined. We know that once the well's shaft reaches the underground reserves, water continually streams into its chamber. To prevent the well from collapsing and to ensure that its waters are always accessible, the shaft is often reinforced with stone. This kind of well is referred to in Arabic as '*bi'r mutawwa*'.

As for the Arabic term 'ghayabt al-jubb' (hidden depths of a well), it refers to the hidden part of a well, usually just above the water, and whose contents cannot be spotted with the naked eye. This statement conjures the following question, which is 'How could a caravan that happened to pass by a well notice a child hidden in its dark depths?!' We maintain that this statement indicates another form of respite on the part of the brothers, for they refused the act of killing and had replaced it with driving Yusuf *peace be upon him* away, but yet they again rejected this idea, which is why one of them proposed the suggestion in question. Having voiced his opinion, the speaker<sup>(1)</sup> showed deep sympathy for his brother Yusuf *peace be upon him*, a point which is clear in Allah's saying: '...if you must...' (*Yusuf:* 10). That is to say that he expected his brothers to reject his proposition.

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this part of the verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'Ibn 'Abbas opined that the speaker was Ya'qub's eldest son, Yahudha. Other scholars are yet of the opinion that the speaker is Rubil, Yusuf's maternal cousin, while another group of scholars are of the opinion that the speaker was none but Sham'un'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3452.

As such, Allah *the Almighty* explains how the inimical brothers were mollified. The speaker did not remonstrate vehemently against the idea of killing Yusuf or banishing him to a faraway land, but rather he placated their indignation gradually and tactfully. Here, we should realise that the mere uttering of Yusuf's name, when Allah reports the speaker as saying: 'Do not kill Yusuf', is bound to make them show compassion and sympathy for him *peace be upon him*.

It is as though this unidentified speaker from among the brothers hoped that they will abandon the scheme altogether.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُواْ يَتَأَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَنْنَا عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَصِحُونَ ١

# They said to their father, 'Why do you not trust us with Joseph? We wish him well [11] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 11)

Having agreed to the suggestion of casting young Yusuf into a well, they started to implement their plan. One of them speaks to the father while they were all present, saying: 'Why do you not trust us with Yusuf (Joseph)?' (*Yusuf*: 11)

At that point, we should consider the fact that when a person uses the plural form in the presence of others, this means that they all agree on what he is saying, either tacitly or by gesture. To fully illustrate this point, let us read the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* in which He *Glorified is He* tells us about the supplication made by Prophet Musa (Moses) against Pharaoh: 'Our Lord! Destroy their riches and harden their hearts so that they believe not until they see the painful punishment' (*Yunus:* 88). Here, let us wonder how Allah responded to that call of Musa. As a matter of fact, He accepted it, saying: 'The supplication of you both has indeed been accepted ...' (*Yunus:* 89), that is to say that even though this supplication was made by *Musa*, Harun (Aaron) agreed on it.

In the same way, we understand that the rest of Yusuf's brothers agreed on what the speaker said to their father in this regard. In addition, this Saying of Allah under discussion indicates that they had previously tried to convince their father to allow Yusuf to accompany them, yet he had refused. As for Allah's saying: '...We wish him well' (*Yusuf:* 11), it means that Ya'qub should be rest assured because the brothers will look after Yusuf and protect him from all harm.

Allah *the Almighty* then continues telling us about what the brothers of Prophet Yusuf had said:

# أَرْسِلْهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَعْ وَيَلْعَبُ وَإِنَّا لَهُ, لَحَنِفِظُونَ ٢

# Send him with us tomorrow and he will enjoy himself and play–we will take good care of him [12] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 12)

In order to persuade Ya'qub *peace be upon him* into entrusting them with their younger sibling, the brothers needed a compelling argument, as they themselves were herdsmen, and as such they used to go out to look after the cattle. They proposed to take Yusuf to the fields to play, for playing was allowed and even encouraged for the young Yusuf since he was not yet mature or legally responsible. That is to say that no harm could afflict the young boy from recreation and merriment.

Concerning this point, we should take into account that the Islamic Sharia prefers that the child should practise some kind of sport which will benefit him in the future such as swimming, wrestling, or shooting. In this sense, we can state that the term '*la*'*ib*' unlike '*lahw*', is used to refer to entertainment activities which do not prevent one from fulfilling his duties.<sup>(1)</sup> There are certain games that are played in groups which engross the competitors even to the point of preventing them from performing Prayers on time. In this case, '*lahw*' has distracted them from carrying out an obligation. Had they stopped their games to pray, they will have had no negative repercussions.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

<sup>(1)</sup> Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with them narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him passed by some people who were shooting (arrows) and said, 'Shoot, Banu Isma'il, for your father was an archer'. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2899.

قَالَ إِنِّي لَيَحْزُنُنِيَ أَن تَذْهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَخَافُ أَن يَأْكُلُهُ ٱلذِّئْبُ وأنتمر عنَّهُ غَنِفِلُونَ (١)

# He replied, 'The thought of you taking him away with you worries me: I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are not paying attention' [13] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 13)

Surely, the father's answer displeased the brother's much because it revealed his deeper love for Yusuf *peace be upon him*. This love, as well as his concern for Yusuf's safety, made it difficult for Ya'qub *peace be upon him* to allow the young boy to go with them. Ya'qub *peace be upon him* then told them, as shown clearly in this verse in question, another reason for not wanting to allow the boy to go. Ya'qub is quoted as saying: 'And I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are not paying attention' (*Yusuf*: 13).

Relying on this verse, a group of scholars <sup>(1)</sup> have voiced that Ya'qub himself was the one who (unintentionally) gave them the excuse they later used.

In the same connection, we should take into account that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* wanted to remind them of the rights of brotherhood, which is why he said: 'I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are not paying attention', and not 'I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are resting'. That is to say that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* tried to remind them of the rights of brotherhood under which they are obliged to protect their brother from any harm that might afflict him.

Furthermore, we should know that the brothers were unable to come up with a reply that could dispel the father's anxiety. That is because his deeper love for Yusuf is what gave rise to their resentment against the young boy in the first place. The only answer the brothers concocted is what Allah makes clear in the following verse:

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this verse in question, Imam Ibn Kathir said, 'They, i.e. the brothers of Yusuf, got the idea from Ya'qub and used his words to justify their acts'. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Adhim, 2/470.

# قَالُوا لَبِنَ أَكَلَهُ ٱلذِّنْبَ وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّا إِذَا لَخَسِرُونَ ٢

# They said, 'If a wolf were to eat him when there are so many of us, we would truly be losers!' [14] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 14)

In this verse, the Lord *the Almighty* tells us how they attempted to reassure Ya'qub and convince him to hand over Yusuf. The conspirers affirmed that a wolf will not devour Yusuf since they were numerous. They added that were an evil to befall him, they will not only be troubled by their conscious, but they will also be disgraced publicly. Such an ignominy, the brothers affirmed, is indeed too high a price to pay.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُواْ بِهِ وَأَجْمَعُوَا أَن يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غَيْبَتِ ٱلجُبِّ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْ لِ لَتُنَبِئْنَهُم بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَنَذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ (أَنَّ

# Then they took him away with them, resolved upon throwing him into the hidden depths of a well – We inspired him, saying, 'You will tell them of all this [at a time] when they do not realize [who you are]!' [15] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 15)

Allah's saying: '(They) resolved to throw him into the hidden depths of a well' (*Yusuf*: 15) indicates that the brothers came to their final decision after discussion and debate.<sup>(1)</sup>

Through inspiration, Allah *Glorified is He* told Yusuf *peace be upon him* that he will tell his brothers what they did to him.

This fact is demonstrated later on in the story; for once Yusuf assumes reign over Egypt, and the brothers enter upon him, he will tap on a goblet

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this verse in question, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'Ya'qub did not entrust the brothers with Yusuf until he took from them a solemn oath that they will look after him. When they did this, he handed Yusuf to Rubil and said, "Oh Rubil, he is young, and you know how dear he is to me. Therefore, if he becomes hungry, feed him; if he becomes thirsty, give him water; and if he becomes tired, carry him. Bring him back to me as soon as possible". The brothers thus took turns carrying him on their shoulders'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame'Al-Bayan, 4/3462.

with his fingers and tell them, 'Listen to what the goblet has to say: it says that you have a brother, and that you did such and such a thing to him'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Some commentators opine that Allah *the Almighty* inspired Yusuf that he will tell them what they did with him and his brothers did not notice this. We assert that divine inspiration is revealed subtly, and only its recipient can sense its presence. This explains why they were only aware of what was inspired to Yusuf after the latter assumed power over Egypt. In fact, they did not even realise that Yusuf was their brother at that time; this is clear in Allah's saying: '…If he has stolen, a brother of his did indeed steal<sup>(2)</sup> before…' (*Yusuf:* 77).

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this story, it is related on the authority of Ibn Abi Hatim and Ibn Jarir that Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with them said, 'When the brothers met up with Yusuf, he recognised them, but they did not recognise him. Then a goblet was placed in Yusuf's hand, which he tapped to produce a clinking sound. He peace be upon him then said, "This goblet informs me that you had a paternal brother. His name was Yusuf and he had the same religion as you. The goblet tells me that you took him away and cast him into the dark depths of a well. After that, you went back to your father alleging that the wolf had devoured him. Along with this claim, you brought forth his shirt spattered with false blood''. After listening to Yusuf, the brothers said to each other, "Truly, this goblet informs him of our deeds!'''. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 4/511.

<sup>(2)</sup> Here, the brothers are referring to Yusuf peace be upon him. Commenting on this verse, Sa'id ibn Jubayr narrated that Qatada said, 'Yusuf stole a statue from his maternal grandfather and broke it'. Mohammed ibn Ishaq narrated that 'Abdullah ibn Abi Nujayh narrated that Mujahid said, 'I have been informed that Yusuf's first tribulation came as a result of his aunt, Ishaq's (Isaac's) oldest child. In those days, inheritance was reserved for the eldest child, and she had inherited Ishaq's belt. It had been agreed upon that whoever stole this belt will be enslaved by the person it belongs to. After Yusuf was born, his aunt nursed him and eventually fell in love with the child. Her love for him was so profound that no one was dearer to her than him. A few years later, Ya'qub's longing for Yusuf was overpowering and as a result he went to her and said, "Oh sister, return Yusuf to me for, by Allah, I cannot bear to be separated from him one more hour". She responded, "By Allah! I will not leave him". Then she added, "Allow me to keep him for a few more days. Perhaps living within his proximity a bit longer and looking at him more will help me overcome his loss". When Ya'qub left, she took Ishaq's belt and wrapped it around Yusuf's waste, under his clothes. Then she cried out, "I've lost Ishaq's belt. Who took it?" She then inspected Yusuf and said, 'Uncover Yusuf, Oh people of the house". They uncovered him and found the belt wrapped around his waist, whereupon she declared, "By Allah! He is my captive, and I can do with him what I please". When Ya'qub returned, she conveyed the news to him. Ya'qub replied, "If he took the belt, then he is indeed your captive, and there is nothing I can do". And in this way she took him, and there was nothing Ya'qub could do to return him until she died'. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Adhim, 486/2.

It is important to clarify that what is meant by inspiration in this verse in question is companionship and support during times of hardships. Revelation is therefore divinely bestowed and cannot be thwarted by Satan. Furthermore, these types of inspirations are imparted unto individuals who do not have any prophetic function, such as the aforementioned example of Musa's mother who was inspired by Allah to cast her son into the river.<sup>(1)</sup>

As such, it is clear that the human soul does not refuse such Divine Inspiration. In this regard, we know that Allah *the Almighty* revealed to Yusuf *peace be upon him* what comforted him after being thrown in the dark depths of the well, an act by means of which he *peace be upon him* was deprived from his father's and brother's love and compassion, and which caused him to live in a land far away from where he was brought up and an environment very different from what he was used to.<sup>(2)</sup>

It was therefore necessary that a heartening heavenly message be revealed, *'Yusuf,* what has befallen you is not intended to alienate you. Rather, it is to prepare you to face more important matters. Your resentful brothers will one day be forced to knock on your door for help, asking for provisions, and you will recognise them but they will not recognise you'.

So far the story has addressed Yusuf's situation and the well into which he has been cast. The story must yet address the brothers' encounter with Ya'qub.

Allah the Almighty then says:

<sup>(1)</sup> Allah the Almighty says: 'When We revealed to your mother what was revealed, saying, "Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore..."' (Ta Ha: 38-39).

<sup>(2)</sup> In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Ad-Dahhak narrated that Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him descended upon Yusuf while he was in the well and told him, "Shall I not teach you words, if uttered, will make Allah hasten your escape from this well?" Yusuf responded, "Yes". Then Jibril said, "Oh Creator of all created things, Oh Compeller of all those who have been defeated, Oh Witness of all secrets, Oh One Who is present in every congregation, Oh Dispeller of all troubles, Oh Escort of every stranger and Oh Companion of every forsaken person, grant me relief and hope, and infuse desire for You in my heart for me to desire none but You". When Yusuf repeated this supplication throughout the night, the next morning he was rescued by Allah from the well'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3465.

وَجَاءُو أَبَاهُمْ عِشَاءً يَبْكُون ١

### And at nightfall they returned to their father weeping [16] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 16)

This verse reveals the Quran's extraordinary ability to convey in detail impulses of the human psyche. How are Yusuf's brothers to confront their father whom they deceived?! Even worse: they double-crossed their brother and threw him into a well despite Ya'qub's great love for him, and despite the fact that the latter had grudgingly entrusted them with the young boy.

In situations like these, mental distress cannot be fully concealed by anyone. The brothers therefore conclude, 'We will delay our encounter with father until nightfall'. This is because when darkness fully sets in, facial features are undetectable and it will be easier for the brothers to hide their disturbance as well as the contradictions rolling off their tongues. Clearly, they will not confess to their father what truly happened; instead, they will recount a factitious tale. In other words, they might be belied by their fake gestures, uncontrollable stuttering, or other signs of dishonesty in front of their father. Therefore, they thought, 'At night our faces will be more shrouded than during the day, for night hides such shameful acts. So, when we enter upon our father at night, he will not detect our agitation'.

The brothers carefully chose a time to inform their father of their crime. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And at nightfall they returned to their father weeping' (*Yusuf:* 16). The act of weeping is a natural or innate impulse that is inborn in man, in fact, it is uncontrollable. However, to feign this act is referred to in Arabic by the verb '*tabaka*'. One feigns crying either by rubbing or by applying some saliva to his eyes.

However, the light must be dim for these fake tears to be passed off as being genuine. And so, the brothers came to their father pretending to be weeping after nightfall.<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'Scholars affirm that this verse proves that weeping does not confirm the veracity of the weeper, for there is a possibility that his tears are feigned. Indeed, some people are able to feign crying while others are not. It has also been said that false tears do not completely mask the person's insincerity, as a wise poet once said,

When Allah *the Almighty* speaks of His Unique Attributes which only He possesses, He informed us that it is He Who causes death and grants life. Also, it is He Alone Who causes man to laugh and to weep. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And that it is He Alone Who causes [you] to laugh and to weep, and that it is He Alone Who gives death and grants life' (*an-Najm*: 43-44).

Clearly, there is no fundamental difference between the laughter and crying of an Englishman and an Arab, nor is there a difference between the death and birth of a Chinese man, an Arab or a Frenchman. Why? Because these attributes are shared by all of humanity.

When one pretends to laugh, he is referred to in Arabic as performing '*yatadahak*'; and when he pretends to cry, he is referred to as performing '*yatabaka*', that is, to simulate laughter or crying. Finally, it is daytime that exposes false laughter or crying from genuine expressions of happiness or sadness.

History <sup>(1)</sup> bears witness to a multitude of acts that were concealed by the obscurity of night. Take the example of Imam Al-Hussayn *Allah be pleased with him* when the events in Karbala' took place. He noticed that the enemy had encircled him, and he was also abandoned by the locals after they had invited him to pledge their allegiance to him. In the end, very few were steadfast. Imam Al-Hussayn *Allah be pleased with him* had a great sense of honour and did not let his few followers be slain in an unbalanced battle which he *Allah be pleased with him* was determined to fight.

So, after nightfall, he gathered his followers and said, 'If you feel ashamed of abandoning me during daylight, then night has come and its darkness has given you cover. Whoever wants to depart let him do so. You may leave me here alone'.<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>= &</sup>quot;When cheeks are bedaubed with tears, discern between genuine and phony weepers". See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3466.

<sup>(1)</sup> The story of Imam Husayn with his follower on the night before the battle of Karbala'.

<sup>(2)</sup> In his book, Ibn Kathir cited that Al-Husayn ibn 'Ali Allah be pleased with him told his companions, 'Whoever desires to return to his people tonight, I have given him permission because those people want only me. The darkness of this night has veiled you from their sight, so flee expediently, and let each man take a member of my household surreptitiously to his localities and cities, for those people want only me. If they capture me, that will at least distract them from trying to capture other members of my =

The Lord *Glorified is He* then relates what happened shortly after Yusuf's brothers faced their father:

# قَالُواْ يَتَأْبَانَا آِنَا ذَهَبْ نَا نَسْتَبِقُ وَتَرَكْنَا يُوسُفَ عِندَ مَتَعِنَا فَأَكَلَهُ ٱلذِيَّبُ وَمَآ أَنتَ بِمُؤْمِنِ لَنَا وَلَوُ كُنَّا صَدِقِينَ ١

# They said, 'We went off racing one another, leaving Joseph behind with our things, and a wolf ate him. You will not believe us, though we are telling the truth!' [17] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 17)

As for the Arabic word '*nastabiq*' (to race), it denotes that someone outran someone else in a race. The purpose of this race is to see which runner is fastest. So, when two runners compete to outrun one another, this is called '*al-istibaq*' (racing).

This word in question, however, may also denote a contest to measure one's skill at using a firearm such as a gun. Two people compete to see who can shoot more accurately and whoever strikes closest to the target proves his superiority in that field.

*Al-Istibaq* may also denote a contest to measure one's skill in archery. The shape of the bow is known to all: it is a flexible branch which can bent and to which a cord is tied to both ends. The arrow, which is placed in the middle of the taut cord, is drawn by the archer and then released for it to fly directly to the target.

The accuracy of the archer is determined by the type of arrow used and the speed at which the arrow is launched. The act of evaluating the archer's precision is called *'tahdid al-hadaf'* which refers to the archer's ability to hit the target.

Sometimes the winner of archery contests is determined by the maximum length the arrow covers. This type of contest gauges the archer's strength.

Such competitions can take different forms, all within the scope of what is lawful. This is understood as the competitors in the chapter of Yusuf were

<sup>=</sup> family. So disperse until Allah the Almighty grants relief from this trial'. See Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah Wa An-Nihayah, 8/178.

the founding fathers of the twelve Israelite tribes and the children of Ya'qub *Allah be pleased with him.* 

There is nothing wrong in playing a game, as long as it does not distract the person from his duties. In fact, such past-times may sometimes prove useful–especially if one faces an enemy. At that moment, his skill in archery or throwing a javelin or any other weapon will be useful. In short, any kind of past-time that does not prevent the person from offering acts of worship to Allah *the Almighty* and which is useful during times of conflict is lawful.

There are certain past-times which people might think are of no use, such as football. But football involves strength and the implementation of clever techniques on the part of the player in order to keep the ball away from his goal.

However, love for football must not divert one's attention from his duties. A case in point is when the call to prayer is made; we must not defer prayer in order to finish the football game. Needless to say, the players should not wear clothes that expose the private parts of their body.

The sons of Ya'qub said, as is stated in the Quran: '...leaving Yusuf behind with our things...' (*Yusuf*: 17). By supposedly leaving Yusuf *peace be upon him* behind with their things, the brothers violated their agreement with Ya'qub *peace be upon him* since the latter entrusted them with Yusuf *peace be upon him* only after they had pleaded: 'Send him with us tomorrow and he will enjoy himself and play....' (Yusuf: 12) Further, they assured him *peace be upon him* by saying: 'We wish him well' (Yusuf: 11), and also by saying: 'We will take good care of him' (*Yusuf*: 13). Here arises a question, which is 'Did the brothers of Yusuf *peace be upon him* take him out with them that he may enjoy himself, play, eat fruits and be safeguarded by them–or to watch over their belongings while they were racing?!'

This is the brothers' first lie, as well as their first violation of the condition stipulated by their father to entrust them with Yusuf *peace be upon him*. The brothers' excuse is reminiscent of the aphorism which declares that 'the suspect all but incriminates himself'. To continue, they said: 'and a wolf ate him. But you will not believe (*bimu'min*) us, though we are telling the truth!' (*Yusuf*: 17)

That is, they said this because they fully knew that their father will not believe them, no matter what they say.

The Arabic word '*aamana*' (from the word '*mo*'*mun*' in '*bimo*'*mun*' which means 'to believe' or 'to safeguard') can be associated with the object of the sentence, such as in the phrase 'Allah has safeguarded him from hunger'. An example of this from the Quran is Allah's saying: '...and gives them security (*aamanahum*) against fear' (*Quraysh:* 4).

The word '*aamana*' can also be followed by the letter '*ba*' and thus denote 'to believe or have faith in', or it can also be followed by the particle '*lam*' and thus denote 'accept what someone says as true'.

In the verse in question, the brothers accused their father of doubting their claim, although they were telling the truth, as they said. However, they knew fully well that they were untruthful, but they mentioned the word 'truth' to conceal their dishonesty. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَجَآءُو عَلَى قَمِيصِهِ بِدَمِ كَذِبِ ْ قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمَرًا فَصَبُرُ جَبِيلٌ وَٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُسَتَعَانُ عَلَى مَاتَصِفُونَ (١)

## And they showed him his shirt, deceptively stained with blood. He cried, 'No! Your souls have prompted you to do wrong! But it is best to be patient: from God alone I seek help to bear what you are saying' [18] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 18)

This verse plainly indicates that when they returned to their father, they brought Yusuf's shirt with them. It has been said that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* upon seeing the false blood stains on the shirt, deduced that the wolf had been clement to Yusuf *peace be upon him* since it had devoured Yusuf's flesh without tearing his shirt. It is as though he fully realised that there had been a plot against Yusuf *peace be upon him* and that Allah *the Almighty* will reveal it to him.<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi cited what is narrated from Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him and others, 'When Ya'qub peace be upon him examined the shirt and did not find any tears or marks that suggested a wolf had attacked Yusuf, he fully realised that the brothers were lying. He expostulated, 'How is it that this wolf happened to be a wise wolf? It ate Yusuf without tearing his shirt!' See Al-Qurtubi, Jama' Al-Bayan, 4/3471.

Interestingly, certain scholars refer to Yusuf's story as 'The Story of the Shirt'. This is because the brothers presented Yusuf's shirt splattered with false blood. In the middle of the chapter of *Yusuf*, <sup>(1)</sup> Yusuf's shirt again plays a central role. As we shall see, the shirt will provide evidence indicating the guilt of the governor's wife; having been torn from behind, the shirt will conclusively prove that she was the one who had tried to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

Towards the end of the same chapter,<sup>(2)</sup> the brothers deliver Yusuf's shirt to Ya'qub *peace be upon him* and the latter's sight is restored.

Therefore, the word 'shirt' has taken on a symbolic significance in the eyes of scholars and men of letters alike.

What the people said about the battle that was waged between 'Ali and Mu'awiya *Allah be pleased with them* may be viewed as a case in point. Mu'awiya grasped the shirt of 'Uthman ibn Affan *Allah be pleased with him* demanding 'Ali to take revenge for the assassination of 'Uthman. For this reason, people referred to, 'The shirt of Uthman' to indicate the vested interest of Mu'awiya', that is, to rule in place of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb, Allah be please with them all. That is, 'the shirt of 'Uthman' symbolised hidden ulterior motives.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they showed him his shirt, deceptively stained with blood<sup>(3)</sup>...' (*Yusuf*: 18).

The brothers had Yusuf's shirt, and they had smeared it with false blood. Clearly, blood does not lie, but the one who smeared the shirt with goat's blood did indeed lie!

Here, we should take into account that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the gerund '*kadhib*' when describing the act of lying to indicate their insistence on telling the lie, as if the blood itself had lied. For example, the person who is just is described as 'the very personification of justice', implying that he is

<sup>(1)</sup> The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But he said, "She tried to seduce me". A member of her household suggested, "If his shirt is torn from the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying, but if it is torn from the back, she is lying and he is telling the truth' (*Yusuf*: 26-27).

<sup>(2)</sup> The Lord *Glorified is He* states *Yusuf peace be upon him* saying to his brothers: 'Take my shirt and lay it over my father's face: he will recover his sight...' (*Yusuf*: 93).

<sup>(3)</sup> This is a form of metaphorical speech, suggesting that the blood was contrived.

the very embodiment of justice. One might also say, 'so-and-so commits evil', but the listener retorts, 'in fact, he himself is evil'. These two expressions are examples that intensify the act.

But this makes us ask, 'Is it possible to describe blood as being "honest"?' We opine that such a statement could be possible if the wolf had actually eaten Yusuf *peace be upon him* and if the shirt was ripped and stained with Yusuf's blood. However, this did not take place; in fact, in this story, dishonesty itself almost cries out, 'I am a liar!'

Had the wolf eaten Yusuf *peace be upon him* the blood will have come out from the inside of the shirt to the outside. However, the brothers brought forth the shirt smeared only on the outside with the goat's blood. If the wolf had actually eaten Yusuf *peace be upon him*, surely its fangs will have torn the shirt to shreds!

In this connection, various accounts relate that when their father discovered their dishonesty, one of the brothers made a discreet gesture and whispered to the rest, 'Tell your father that bandits had besieged Yusuf and killed him'. Upon hearing this, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* replied, 'Surely, the bandits wanted to steal his shirt rather than just his blood!'<sup>(1)</sup>

This incident clearly illustrates Ya'qub's remarkable astuteness–a quality which any investigator should have in order to solve a murder case. As a matter of fact, the investigator needs this quality when he interrogates the culprits and witnesses because he knows that a liar's answers are not based on reality; rather, they are devised by a person's imagination. At that point, we can quote the following proverb, 'The inveterate liar must have a good memory!'

In our story, the Lord *Glorified is He* tells us what Ya'qub said to his sons, saying: 'He cried, "No! Your souls have prompted (*sawwalat*) you to make

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this point, Al-Qurtubi mentioned the brothers' attempts to justify Yusuf's absence to their father, saying, 'It has been related that the brothers told Ya'qub peace be upon him 'In fact, bandits killed him', but their narrations were conflicting, which is why Ya'qub replied accusingly, 'You claim that the wolf ate him, but had it done so, his shirt will have been torn before his flesh. However, I see no tears in the shirt. Also, you claim that the bandits killed him, but had they done so, they will have stolen his shirt. Do the bandits want anything apart from his clothes?!"' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Byan, 4/3472.

up a tale! [For me] patience is good and most fitting: from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying" (*Yusuf:* 18).

As for the Arabic word 'as-sawl' (from 'sawwalat', translated as 'have prompted' in the verse), it denotes 'relaxation', for when a person is overwrought, he is only at ease physically and emotionally after relaxing for some time. As such, the verb 'sawalat' implies that Yusuf's brothers found certain ease and relief when their souls prompted them to make up the tale. As for Ya'qub peace be upon him his appropriate response to this situation was to patiently endure the difficulty.

Concerning this, adversaries of Islam ask the following question, 'Is it possible to describe patience as being "good"?!' In our response to them, we say that they are unaware of the fact that if the Arabic word 'sabr' (patience) is followed by the preposition ''an' (to be away from), then this patience concerns a desire that could have negative repercussions. This is an example to illustrate this point; when you order someone to control himself from drinking alcohol, gambling or practicing usury, you order him to be patient in avoiding these things.

On the other hand, when the word 'sabr' (patience) is followed by the preposition 'ala', it indicates being patient over a particular thing is painful, As a matter of fact, patience can be good when the person does not complain or tear his clothes etc. in grief.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Mohammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: '...and avoid them with a dignified avoidance' (*al-Muzzammil*: 10).

We stress that those who eagerly look for inconsistencies or contradictions in the Quran are people who do not know how to study the Scripture and properly grasp its meanings. Ya'qub *peace be upon him* clearly shows us that good patience is that in which a person does not complain about his difficulties to the people; a point which is proved by the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He said, "I only complain of my grief and sorrow to Allah, and I know from Allah what you do not know" (*Yusuf*: 86). As such, it becomes clear that there is a difference between complaining about something to Allah *Glorified is He* and complaining about what Allah has predestined for you. That is why Ya'qub

*peace be upon him* says in the verse in question: '[For me] patience is good and most fitting...' (*Yusuf*: 18) The Lord continues to state what Ya'qub says: '...from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying' (*Yusuf*: 18).

From this verse, we may infer that the good type of patience is hard for the human soul to bear. In fact, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was unable to believe what his sons told him; for how could he believe such lies? How could he possibly face his sons with what they had done? After all, they are also his children, and as such he could not confront them with their lies.

With regards to this, we can quote the following lines of a poem in which the poet commenting on the reaction of a man who was told that his son had killed the man's brother, said:

'I say to myself, "[Such] sadness and grief!

One of my hands has assailed me, but my soul

Does not want to charge either one for the crime

This one I call brother, and that one I call son"".

Such situations are difficult and call for compassion, since the one who experiences them does not know whether to be severe or merciful. How can one possibly merge such conflicting positions? Such situations are indeed distressing to all men, and concerning them, one must seek refuge with Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that when anything distressed him (*hazanahu amr*), he used to pray.<sup>(1)</sup>

As for the expression 'hazanahu amr' (when anything distressed him), it means to be faced with a matter that is beyond human ability to surmount. In this case, the person afflicted must seek relief from Allah *the Almighty* the One Who creates all means. That is why Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said: '...from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying (*tasifun*)' (*Yusuf:* 18).

The Arabic word '*tasifun*' (what you say) implies that Ya'qub's sons were not saying the truth; rather, they were telling him something which does

<sup>(1)</sup> Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him related, 'When anything distressed Prophet Muhammad, he used to pray'. This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad 5/388, and Imam Abu Dawud in his Sunnan, No. 1291.

not conform to reality. This is similar to Allah's saying: 'and do not say what your tongues describe (*tasifu*): the lie, "This is lawful and this is unlawful"...' (*an-Nahl*: 116). That is, your very tongues reveal the falsity of your words. In this connection, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Honor, above what they describe (*tasifun*) (ascribing partners to Him)' (*as-Saffat*: 180). This means that those who described Him in such (false) ways were not telling the truth and that their lies were bound to be exposed.

Back to the verse in question; the Lord *Glorified is He* relates what Ya'qub said to his sons: '...from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying' (*Yusuf:* 18). That is how Ya'qub *peace be upon him* expressed himself, for although his wounds might not have been outwardly visible, his heart was full of pain and worry, and he longed for peace. Due to this unrest, it was necessary for him to take recourse in Allah *the Almighty*.

In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* has taught us in the chapter of *al-Fatiha* to say: 'You alone do we serve and You alone do we ask for help' (*al-Fatiha*: 5).

As you stand in worship before the Lord *Glorified is He* worldly matters might distract you from worship. Therefore, you should ask for your Lord's Help to make you sincere in your worship.

After presenting the situation of Ya'qub *peace be upon him* with his sons, Allah *the Almighty* turns our attention to the situation of Yusuf in the well.

He Glorified is He says:

وَجَاءَتْ سَيَّارَةُ فَأَرْسَلُوا وَارِدَهُمُ فَأَدْلَى دَلُوَهُ. قَالَ يَـ بُشَرَى هَذَا غُلَمٌ وَأَسَرُوهُ بِضَعَةً وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمُ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ ١

## Some travellers came by. They sent someone to draw water and he let down his bucket. 'Good news!' he exclaimed. 'Here is a boy!' They hid him like a piece of merchandise – God was well aware of what they did [19] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 19)

Here arise two questions that are: 'Where were the travellers coming from?' and 'Where were they heading?' But the Lord *Glorified is He* does not answer these questions in the chapter in question.

As for the Arabic word 'sayyara', it denotes a group of expert travellers, such as the people of Quraysh who used to undertake summer and winter journeys in order to carry out trade and import goods. As a matter of fact, not all the travellers went to the well; rather, they sent one person to bring them water from that well. Such a person is called '*al-wared*' (water-drawer) because he brings water for the rest. Here, we should know that Arabs tie a rope to the bucket, and they call this rope '*ar-risha*''. When the rope was within reach, Yusuf clung to it and the water-drawer felt the weight of the boy's tug. Upon looking down, he, i.e. the water-drawer, found a young boy clinging to his rope. Elated, he cried out: 'Good news! Here is a boy!' (*Yusuf*: 19)

In other terms, the water-drawer was saying, 'What good news! This is your lucky moment!' It is as though he were relating good tidings to his people, for not only did he pull water out from the well, but he also brought them a young boy. The Lord says: 'They hid him like a piece of merchandise–but Allah was well aware of what they did' (*Yusuf:* 19). That is, they concealed him and treated him as though he were a piece of merchandise. Fearing that he might be a runaway slave who was sought after by his master, the travellers did not allow Yusuf *peace be upon him* to walk beside them, as they wanted to sell him *peace be upon him* to take a profit.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: 'But Allah was well aware of what they did' (*Yusuf:* 19). This part of the verse refers to those who hid Yusuf *peace be upon him* like a piece of merchandise; they are these same travellers who later sold Yusuf.

Allah the Almighty subsequently says:

# وَشَرَوْهُ بِثَمَنٍ بَغْسٍ دَرَهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ ٱلزَّهِدِينَ ٢

## And then sold him for a small price, for a few pieces of silver: so little did they value him [20] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 20)

We know clearly that the travellers themselves did not buy him, but rather found him. We also know that the word '*shiraa*" in this verse indicates the act of selling. In other words, we are told that they sold him for a small, paltry price. In those days, the slaves were evaluated by money.

As for the Arabic word 'bakhs' (small price), it indicates a lack of quantity or quality. For example, a boy is worth one hundred *Dirhams*, but was sold for only twenty. Slaves of Yusuf's young age were sold for a high-price, but they sold him for less than he was worth. The Lord *Glorified is He* sheds further light on this point, saying: '...for a few pieces of silver: in such low estimation did they hold him' (*Yusuf:* 20). The travellers' were content with a small price, selling Yusuf *peace be upon him* for only a few pieces of silver, for they feared that Yusuf's father or friend might come searching for him. They thought to themselves, 'Any price that this child brings us is a gain for us'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Allah the Almighty then says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِى ٱشْتَرَىْهُ مِن مِّصْرَ لِأَمْرَأَتِهِ ٱصَّرِمِ مَثْوَىْهُ عَسَىّ أَن يَنفَعَنَآ أَوْ نَنَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًأْ وَكَنَا فِي مَكَنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلِنُعَلِّمَهُ، مِن تَأْوِيلِ ٱلْأَحَادِيثِ وَٱللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَى آَمْرِهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَصَّثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (أَ)

The Egyptian who bought him said to his wife, 'Look after him well! He may be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son.' In this way We settled Joseph in that land and later taught him how to interpret dreams: God always prevails in His purpose, though most people do not realize it [21] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 21)

Yusuf *peace be upon him* was purchased by the Egyptian to be the servant of his wife who was childless and had often urged her husband to seek

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this verse in question, Al-Qurtubi said, 'some scholars explained Allah's saying: '...in such low estimation did they value him' (Yusuf: 20) to refer to Yusuf's brothers, the travellers or the water-drawers. In all cases, Yusuf peace be upon him was not a source of joy for them-not for the brothers because the object of their plot was to separate him from his father, not to get money by selling him, and not for the travellers, for they feared that Yusuf's brothers may claim him as their runaway slave. The Arabic word 'az-zuhd' (holding in low estimation) denotes a lack of desire for something. Yusuf was also not a source of joy for the water-drawers, as they did not want to share the money they received from selling Yusuf with the rest of the travellers. Consequently, the water-drawers thought that a paltry price that is not divided among many was more profitable than a high price that is shared among many'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3479.

treatment. Most accounts relate that the buyer was weak in terms of his sexual desires for women.

As a matter of fact, this incident in the story reveals the immorality that may ensue within households that adopt a child. The parents did not have any foresight as to what might happen when the child, who is used to being coddled and kissed by his adopter, attains adulthood. The adopter may easily become intimate with the boy, and at a certain point it is hard for her to control herself with him. Consequently, as the child grows into a mature man, he may easily fall into the realm of sin.

As for Allah's saying: 'The Egyptian who bought him said to his wife, "Look after him well! He may be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son" (*Yusuf:* 21), it means that she should keep his lodging clean, which necessarily means that she should take care of the boy himself, hoping that one day they will benefit from him.

Here arises the following question, 'How could the boy be of benefit to a man who is the governor of Egypt and for whom everyone works?' We reply, 'Benefit in this case denotes a sentimental bond which differs from the gain that the potentate derives from the employees who work under his and his wife's command. By virtue of being raised as a son in a household, the bond between both parties changes. That is, one might say that the governor benefitted from Yusuf *peace be upon him* on an emotional level. In reference to this emotional rapport of the Egyptian, Allah says: '...or we may adopt him as a son' (*Yusuf:* 21). The significance of this verse becomes clear once we learn that, according to accounts of the Prophets, the couple were not blessed with children.'<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis of The Quran, Al-Qurtubi narrated that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'He was infertile and thus childless'. Likewise, Ibn Ishaq said that he could not sleep with women and did not bear children. If it were said, 'How could he propose to adopt Yusuf *peace be upon him* as their son when Yusuf was his slave, especially if we take into account that slavery and fatherhood are contradictory?' One could answer in the following way, 'He could manumit him, and then he could adopt him *peace be upon him* as his son. Adoption was known among his people, as it was in the early days of Islam'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3482.

In the same verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'in this way we settled Joseph in that land that We might teach him how to interpret dreams: For Allah has full power and control over His affairs, though most people do not know' (*Yusuf*: 21).

Yusuf's earthly empowerment began the moment he entered the house of Egypt's governor where he began to live a good life. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* taught Yusuf *peace be upon him* how to interpret dreams, that is, He *the Almighty* granted him the ability to explain visions and dreams. As such, Allah has full power and control over His affairs and what He wills.

Had the group of brothers known what became of Yusuf *peace be upon him* they will have realised that their intent was not achieved, and that Allah's Aim to honour Yusuf prevailed. Moreover, had they known this, they will not have cast him down in the dark depths of the well. This is the case for all evildoers. Thus we contend, 'Had the evildoer known what the Lord *Glorified is He* had in store for the oppressed, he surely will have renounced his misdemeanour'.

As for Allah's saying: 'For Allah has full power and control over His affairs, though most people do not know' (*Yusuf*: 21), it is a decisive statement, meaning that only Allah *the Almighty* can command something to 'Be' and 'It is'. Further, there is no god other than Him; Glorified is He, who can oppose His Will. That is why we previously said Allah *the Almighty* Himself bears witness that there is no god but He.<sup>(1)</sup> He possesses the absolute proof confirming the non-existence of a god other than Himself. Indeed, to Him belongs the dominion of everything, and it is He Who has Power over all things.

In fact, only the lowly nature of certain human beings paints the illusion that they are capable of deceiving and beguiling others. They forget or disregard the fact that Allah, the Ever-Watchful, is fully aware of their actions, and that He *Glorified is He* is never overtaken by slumber or sleep. Were these

<sup>(1)</sup> This fact is recorded in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge. [He always] maintains His creation in justice; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

human beings to contemplate such realities, they will know that Allah *the Almighty* empowers those who have been oppressed over their oppressors.

Throughout our history and our life, we have witnessed how oppressors insisted on oppressing others, which is why they were eventually severely punished.

Subsequently, Allah the Almighty says:

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَ ءَاتَيْنَهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْرِي ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ٢

## When he reached maturity, We gave him judgement and knowledge: this is how We reward those who do good [22] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 22)

As for the Arabic word 'bulugh' (maturity), it denotes attaining one's final objective, and therefore Allah's saying: 'When he reached maturity (balagha)....' (Yusuf: 22), means that Yusuf peace be upon him reached the final state of adult maturity. Furthermore, the juristic term 'bulugh' is derived from the verb 'balagha', that is, to attain puberty. A person becomes fully responsible once he reaches puberty, when he is able to have a child.

In this vein, when a person such as Yusuf *peace be upon him* who was raised in a house full of luxuries, attains maturity, he could easily become foolish and lax in his morals. Only wisdom and knowledge can safeguard him from such baseness, and that is why the Lord *Glorified is He* preserved him by giving him wisdom and knowledge.

As for the Arabic word '*hukm*' (the derivative '*hukman*' being used in the verse, meaning 'wisdom'), it denotes an ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood; two matters which are antithetical and in opposition to each other. As a matter of fact, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has given Yusuf *peace be upon him* wisdom, the latter will be able to discern between right and wrong.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* granted Yusuf *peace be upon him* knowledge which he was able to communicate to others. A part of the granted knowledge is his ability to interpret the visions as well as the skills manifested when he was in charge of Egypt's repository.

At this point in the story, Yusuf *peace be upon him* had attained full manhood and Allah *the Almighty* had safeguarded him with both wisdom and knowledge.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '...this is how We reward those who do good' (*Yusuf*: 22). When man devotes himself thoroughly to what is placed before him, the Lord *Glorified is He* rewards him with the fruits of his diligent labour. Let us offer an example to fully illustrate this point; when a poor person does not complain about what Allah predestined for him, and instead tries to perfect and refine his work, Allah *Glorified is He* rewards him, 'You have accepted what I have appointed to you, and you have perfected your work, so here is your good reward'. Such is the case of the great men of this world.

Thus, Allah's saying: '...this is how we reward those who do the good' (*Yusuf*: 22) does not only apply to Yusuf *peace be upon him* but also to anyone who gratefully accepts Allah's Decree. This is due to the fact that when Allah *the Almighty* issues a specific Decree, and then generalises it, then this Decree is not specific; rather it applies to all mankind. That is, even if Allah *Glorified is He* presents this Decree as a response to a specific incident, He confirms that He gives wisdom and knowledge to anyone who does the good.

As for Allah's saying: 'When he reached maturity....' (*Yusuf:* 22), it reveals that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had reached the prime of his life, a period which clearly marks the beginning of his troubles in the palace of the Egyptian governor. As a child, the governor's wife saw him as a beautiful young boy. Clearly, as a young boy, he did not possess the manly traits that aroused her. However, once he reached puberty, the nature of her affinity for Yusuf *peace be upon him* began to change. She started to realise his charms, and her imagination indulged in matters that were not possible, that is, her heart started to be filled with burning desires. After these two stages comes the third one of the practical fulfilment of her desires. Here, we should take into account that this wife of the governor of Egypt will not have fallen prey to her negative emotions had she veiled herself from Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

This incident brings to light the merits of lowering one's gaze away from sexual temptation. If you do not lower your gaze, your imagination will run unchecked—and you will eventually find what you are looking for. Your last resort will be marriage or simply repressing your carnal urge by virtue of chastity. If you repressed yourself, you might suffer from anxiety and inner tension, and if you fail to have the virtue of chastity, you will commit transgression against other peoples' honour.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* commands women to reveal their beauty only to certain people whom He *Glorified is He* specifies in the following verse: 'And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and they should wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants who do not have any sexual desire, or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women...' (*an-Nur:* 31). The 'male servants' referred to in the aforementioned verse are those who have reached a certain age where they no longer have a sexual attraction to women.

Back to the story of Yusuf; the governor's wife regarded him *peace be upon him* differently after he had reached puberty. Allah *the Almighty* makes this matter clear in the following verse in which He says:

وَرَوَدَتْهُ ٱلَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيْتِهَا عَن نَّفْسِهِ، وَغَلَّقَتِ ٱلْأَبُوْبَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ قَالَ مَعَادَ ٱللَّهِ إِنَّهُ, رَبِّي أَحْسَنَ مَثْوَاتٌ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ ٱلظَّلِلِمُونَ ٢

The woman in whose house he was living tried to seduce him: she bolted the doors and said, 'Come to me,' and he replied, 'God forbid! My master has been good to me; wrongdoers never prosper' [23] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 23)

The verb '*rawada*' (to seduce) used in the beginning of this verse implies that two parties are involved in the action in question. For instance, one may say, '*Sharaka* Mohamed 'Ali', that is, Mohammad collaborated with 'Ali and 'Ali also collaborated with Mohammad. Mohammad and 'Ali are both subject and object.

As for the Arabic word '*al-murawada*', it is used to kindly and gently ask a person for something. Logically, if the matter sought after is easily granted, then the suppliant's cajoling more or less comes to an end. However, if the second party withholds what is sought after, then the seducer's seduction only ceases when the desired object is granted.

In the same way, the governor's wife sought to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* cajoling him gently and tenderly and speaking in an enticing voice to convince him to satisfy her desire.

We should take into consideration that as a boy, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was merely her servant, and that she, i.e. the wife of the Egyptian governor, saw him as a child. Once he reached puberty, however, the matter totally changed. Suppose that she asked him to bring her something, and once he brings it to her, she tells him 'Why do you stand so far away from me?! Come Near!' Obviously, it was difficult for Yusuf *peace be upon him* to free himself from her because he is in her house. The governor's wife has authority over him for she is the queen of the castle.

Upon analysis, we see *that Yusuf peace be upon him* was in a complex situation. After all, he was raised in her house, and she cared for him and showed him affection, but when the aspects of the relationship changed, he understood her objective.

Thus, the Lord *Glorified is He* fully and carefully explains the case from the very beginning to the very end. He *the Almighty* says: 'she in whose house he was living tried to seduce him: she bolted the doors...' (*Yusuf:* 23).

The expression: 'she bolted the doors' highlights this incident or refers to repeated acts, that is she closed more than one door. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; suppose that you want to ensure that a door has been closed properly, what do you do? Of course, you bolt the door and turn the key in the lock. There is a difference between just closing a door and bolting it. By shutting the door with a bolt, we are ensuring that the door cannot be opened from outside. Hence, you describe what you have done as bolting the door. Since great mansions have multiple entrances, the governor's wife not only closed several doors but also bolted them. When visiting a head of state,

for example, you do not find him waiting for you at the entrance of the first door. Rather, a person must pass through many gates before reaching the host.

In this connection, history has preserved the story of the man who refused to give allegiance to Mu'awiya *Allah be pleased with him* in Medina and therefore Mu'awiya *Allah be pleased with him* summoned him to his palace in Damascus.

This palace was previously visited by 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* who found it excessively grandiose, whereupon Mu'awiya justified the matter for 'Umar saying that this extravagance was necessary to display the power of the Arabs to the neighbouring Romans. This justification indicated Mu'awiya's wisdom which made 'Umar keep silent about it.<sup>(1)</sup>

When Mu'awiya invited the man, he was escorted through the main entrance by a retinue of guards. The man presumed that he will meet Mu'awiya upon passing through the main entrance, but the guards escorted him through more doors. Instead of being impressed by such lavishness, the visitor calmly entered upon Mu'awiya. He refused to call him 'the Commander of the Faithful', instead, he exclaimed, 'Peace be upon the Messenger of Allah (Mohammad) *peace and blessings be upon him*'. At that moment, Mu'awiya *Allah be pleased with him* fully realised that the visitor's statement was a refusal to give him a pledge of allegiance.

Back to the verse in question; being well aware of the gravity of her sin and seeking to hide it from others, the governor's wife bolted the doors. She chose a discrete location that was far from the workers and inhabitants of the palace. We infer that her seducing of Yusuf *peace be upon him* has taken some time, but it is clear that he was not responsive to her.

When the governor's wife said: 'Come to me,' (*Yusuf:* 23), she moved from seduction to bluntly requesting her desire. Simply, she was saying, 'I have adorned myself for you' but Yusuf's response was: 'Allah forbids (*ma'atha*)!' (*Yusuf:* 23)

<sup>(1)</sup> In his book, Abu 'Ali Al-Qali narrated that Al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba said, 'Whenever 'Umar looked at Mu'awiya, he said, "Here stands the Khosrau of the Arabs". See Al-Qali, Al-A'mali, 2/136.

The Arabic word 'ma'atha' is used to refer to one in whom one seeks refuge. As a matter of fact, you only seek refuge if all solutions have been exhausted and if you have no other alternative. When desperate, you can only hope for someone to save you. It is as if the situation weighed so heavily on Yusuf *peace be upon him* that his only refuge was Allah *Glorified is He*.

As a matter of fact, none can face such a trial but those who have been safeguarded by Allah *the Almighty* and who have wisdom and knowledge that is granted by Him *Glorified is He*. Allah *the Almighty* grants those people the ability to discern between what is permitted and what is prohibited.

To fully illustrate the gravity and power of the act of seeking refuge in Allah *the Almighty*, it is worth relating the following story from the biography of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding his marriage with the daughter of a certain king.<sup>(1)</sup> The story relates that some of the Prophet's wives were jealous of the new bride's magnetic attraction, which led one of them–perhaps 'A'isha Allah *be pleased with her* to exclaim anxiously, 'If he marries her and he consummated his marriage, he might prefer her over the rest of us'. Having said this, she approached the new bride and told her that Prophet Muhammad loves anyone who utters a specific phrase<sup>(2)</sup> to him. Upon hearing this, the girl asked what phrase it was, and 'A'isha replied, 'If he approaches you, say, "I seek refuge in Allah from you!"" When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard this, he forsook her and said, 'You have sought refuge with Him in whom refuge is sought!'<sup>(3)</sup> Prophet Muhammad then divorced her in a becoming manner.<sup>(4)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> At-Tabari related that this woman in question was either Malika bint Dawud Al-Laythi or Fatima bint Ad-Dahhak Al-Kelabyya. See Al-Tabari, Tarikh Al-Umam Wa Al-Muluk, 3/123 and 3/139.

<sup>(2)</sup> In his book, Ibn Hajar said that in At-Tabaqat, Ibn Sa'd related that the first time she entered upon 'A'isha and Hafsa, they combed and dyed her hair. One of them told her, 'Verily, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him loves the woman he enters upon to tell him, "I seek refuge in Allah from you". See Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari, 9/359.

<sup>(3)</sup> See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no.5255.

<sup>(4)</sup> From the Proofreader: The Hadiths which mention that the reason Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him divorced the daughter of a certain king was that Aisha or another of the Mothers of the Believers Allah be pleased with them told the new bride that Prophet Muhammad loves anyone who says, 'I seek refuge in Allah from you' are false. One of =

Another case in point is the story of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* when the angel appeared to her in the form of a well-made man. She said: 'Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent Allah, (do not come near me) if you are one who guards (against evil)' (*Maryam:* 18). Mary sought refuge with Allah *the Almighty*: the Only One Who could save here.

Returning to the verse of our discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...he replied, "Allah forbid! My master has been good to me; wrongdoers never prosper" (*Yusuf*: 23).

From this verse we may derive two meanings:

First, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not succumb to her after she had revealed her intent. The second is that he *peace be upon him* sought support from Allah *the Almighty* for it was none other than the Lord *Glorified is He* Who rescued him from the plot of his brothers and from the well, and Who granted him the finest of Egypt's houses to be raised in. Upon attaining manhood, Allah *Glorified is He* also granted him knowledge and wisdom. After the bestowal of such blessings, is it possible that Yusuf *peace be upon him* responds by disobeying Allah *the Almighty*? Of course, it is not,

Another possible interpretation is that Yusuf *peace be upon him* said: '...My master has been good to me...' (*Yusuf:* 23) to remind the wife of the governor that she has a husband, and that this husband was generous to him. After all, it

the narrators in the Hadith stated here in the discussion of the chapter of Yusuf used to make-up Hadiths. See fatwa. islamweb.net. The authentic Hadith cited by Al-Bukhari states that Abu Usaid said, 'We went out with Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, to a garden called Ash-Shaut till we reached two walls between which we sat down. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, "Sit here", and went in (the garden). The Jauniyya (a lady from Bani Jaun) had been brought and lodged in a house in a date-palm garden in the home of Umaima bintun- Nu`man bin Sharahil, and her wet nurse was with her. When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him entered upon her, he said to her, "Give me yourself (in marriage) as a gift". She said, "Can a princess give herself in marriage to a commoner?" The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him raised his hand to pat her so that she might become tranquil. She said, "I seek refuge with Allah from you". He said, "You have sought refuge with One Who gives refuge". Then the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him came out to us and said, "O Abu Usaid! Give her two white linen dresses to wear and let her go back to her family",' without any mention of any of the Mother of the Believers.

was this man, i.e. the governor of Egypt, who told her to: 'Look after him well! He may be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son' (*Yusuf*: 21).

This situation is very difficult for several reasons. To begin with, she was inviting Yusuf *peace be upon him* to be intimate with her. Secondly, she has a husband; that is, she is not even a single woman. To make things worse, this husband asked her to look after Yusuf *peace be upon him* and to choose quarters for him when he was a boy that were fitting for a son. After being treated so generously, Yusuf *peace be upon him* could not return these favours with betrayal and ingratitude. As such, when Yusuf *peace be upon him* said: '…my master…' (*Yusuf:* 23), he was referring either to Allah *the Almighty* or to the sovereign of Egypt.

As a matter of fact, encompassing a wide array of meanings is one of the Quranic distinctive features. Here, we should take into account that just as Allah *Glorified is He* rewards those who do good deeds, as He says: 'This is how We reward those who do good' (*Yusuf:* 22), He *the Almighty* punishes those who commit misdeeds, and thus they will not succeed. That is to say these two matters are opposite sides of the same coin, a point which is clear in Allah's saying: 'This is how We reward those who do good' (*Yusuf:* 23).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِ أَ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوُلَا أَن رَّءَا بُرْهَن رَبِّهِ عَكَ لِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ ٱلشُّوءَ وَٱلْفَحْشَاءَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ ٢

## She made for him, and he would have succumbed to her if he had not seen evidence of his Lord – We did this in order to keep evil and indecency away from him, for he was truly one of Our chosen servants [24] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 24)

As for the Arabic word '*al-hamm*' (from which the word '*hammat*' is derived, meaning 'she desired'), it denotes the act of inwardly debating over whether one should seek a certain matter or not. In this vein, it is out of Allah's Mercy towards His creatures that when we think about performing an evil

deed and then renounce the ill intention, we are rewarded and Allah *the Almighty* writes it down as a good deed.<sup>(1)</sup>

At that point, this expression, i.e. '*al-hamm*' addresses her attempts to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his refraining from her enticements, a matter which implies a reciprocal struggle between the two parties. One of these two parties is the wife of the governor about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: 'She desired him...' (*Yusuf:* 24) and the other is Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

In the preceding verse, Allah *the Almighty* reveals to us her affinity for Yusuf *peace be upon him* as she said: 'Come to me' (*Yusuf*: 23), and Yusuf's steadfast attitude came to light when he responded: '...Allah forbid...' (*Yusuf*: 23). Here, it is clear that the idea of desiring her passed through Yusuf's mind, and consequently Yusuf was similarly tempted. However, Yusuf *peace be upon him* soon understood the evidence and reasoning of his Lord. Thus, we may opine that had Yusuf *peace be upon him* not seen the sign and evidence or reasoning of his Lord, he will have also desired her as well. The Arabic particle '*lawla*' used in this verse implies a negation of something. We could use this word in the following manner, 'Were Zayd not at your place, I will have passed by'.

Here arises a question, which is 'How could those who maintain that Yusuf desired her be heedless about the negation implied in this verse? Also, why does Allah *the Almighty* not say that she desired him, but he did not desire her to avert this possible confusion of meanings?'

We say that Allah *the Almighty* relates the story as such for an intended meaning, as the governor's wife desired him; and had He *Glorified is He* revealed this verse as 'she desired him, but he did not desire her', we will have thought that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was impotent. In such a case, a logical conclusion will be that he lost his libido.

<sup>(1)</sup> It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'He who intended to do good but did not do it, one good is recorded for him, and he who intended to do good and also did it, ten to seven hundred good deeds are recorded for him. And he who had a fleeting intension to do evil but did not commit it, no entry was made against his name, but if he committed that (evil), it is recorded'. See, Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 206.

In short, had Allah *Glorified is He* stated that he did not desire her, then we might conclude that he lacked desire for biological reasons, or that he was so embarrassed by this woman, who was his master, that he lost all desire for her. That is why the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to clarify that Yusuf's physique was normal, and that he had reached manhood and maturity. Furthermore, had he not seen the sign and evidence of his Lord, he will have desired her.

Clearly, it is not out of lack of normal feelings that Yusuf refrained doing what was asked of him, nor was it that he lost his sexual urge unexpectedly because he was caught by surprise as this is sometimes what happens to grooms on their wedding night. In fact, the groom may even unable to approach his bride, and days pass by before he restores his balance and finally approaches her.

As such, had the Quran wanted to indicate a total lack of desire on Yusuf's part, the verse will have stated, 'She desired him, but he did not desire her.' One might also add that the phrase 'she desired him but he did not desire her' negates there was any seduction, and it does not prove Yusuf's chastity and infallibility; it might suggest that Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not desire the governor's wife since he was lacking in some way. Moreover, this expression will lead us to equate Yusuf *peace be upon him* with one of the mansion's servants, since a servant shies away from the beautiful girls of the family that he works for. More often than not, servants might fall in love with a maid that works for his neighbours. This is because emotions are reciprocated between those who have a lot in common.

Out of kindness for His creatures, the Lord *Glorified is He* sparks reciprocal sentimental connections between people who have a similar social status. Rarely will a servant feel emotions for one of the daughters of his master. But he might, on the pretext of going to buy something from the shop, ask permission to go outside with the hope of meeting the neighbour's maid! Perhaps the servant reckoned that were he to desire one of the girls of his employer's household, he will be fired and lose his source of happy livelihood. Thus the Lord *Glorified is He* has willed to distribute these matters in an orderly and harmonious manner.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'She desired him, and he will have desired her if he had not seen a sign and the evidence of his

Lord...' (*Yusuf:* 24). Thus, seeing the sign and evidence or reasoning of his Lord preceded his desire for her, that is, having been imparted with such an understanding in his heart, which he knew from the very beginning, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not succumb to his passions.

In this way, the dispute over this point ends, and it is useless for people to wonder about trivial details. One such triviality is the allegation that he 'sat between her legs',<sup>(1)</sup> and he did not refrain from doing the act except when the face of his father, Ya'qub, appeared to him, reproaching him for what he was doing.<sup>(2)</sup> If caught in this situation by his father, even the most dissolute person on earth will surely faint.

Curiously, when you discuss with someone who holds such opinions, he says his interpretation is meant to uphold and prove Yusuf's sexual potency, since he desired her but resisted his own desire. To those who hold this opinion, we ask, 'Are you speaking of the Lord *Glorified is He* or of Satan?!' Upon close analysis, you will conclude that the wife of the governor, Yusuf *peace be upon him*, the governor himself, the witness–who admitted that Yusuf *peace be upon him* tried to extricate himself from the wife–and the women whom the governor's wife invited to admire Yusuf's beauty are the main characters of this story. Furthermore, it is the Lord *Glorified is He* Who protected Yusuf *peace be upon him* from sinning.

All these characters in the story bear witness to the fact that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was never guilty of misconduct. Yusuf *peace be upon him* himself said: 'She tried to seduce me...' (*Yusuf:* 26), and the governor's wife asserted in agreement: 'I tried to seduce him and he wanted to remain chaste...' (*Yusuf:* 32) Moreover, the wife also exclaimed: 'now the truth is out: it was I

<sup>(1)</sup> It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, ""When (a man) sits between the four parts of his wife's body, then *Ghusl* becomes obligatory'. The phrase '*shabatayha al-a'rba*'' (four parts) denotes her two arms and legs. It has also been said that this expression denotes her legs and the area bordering her vagina, and implies inserting the penis inside the vagina. *See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, under the root 'sha'aba'*.

<sup>(2)</sup> Commenting on this point, Al-Qurtubi narrated that Qatadah, Al-Hassan, Ad-Dahhak and Sa'id ibn Jubair said, 'On the wall, he saw a picture of Ya'qub peace be upon him biting his fingertips and threatening him. At this point, Yusuf peace be upon him calmed down and his desire left him from his fingertips'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3492.

who tried to seduce him-he is indeed one of the honest. [*Yusuf* said, 'This was] for my master to know that I did not betray him behind his back...' (*Yusuf*: 50-51).

Concerning the women, Yusuf said: '...what happened to those women who cut their hands—my Lord knows all about their treachery' (*Yusuf*: 50). Yusuf also proclaimed at that moment: '...If you do not protect me from their treachery, I shall incline (*asbu*) to them and do wrong' (*Yusuf*: 33).

In the aforementioned verse, the Arabic word 'asbu' (incline) is used to give the meaning of thinking about committing a particular act which proves that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was sexually potent, but Allah *the Almighty* protected him from misguided inclinations, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'His Lord answered his prayer and protected him from their treachery' (*Yusuf:* 34).

Considering the scene in which the women were gossiping about the governor's wife and her story with Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not they say: '...He cannot be mortal! He must be a precious angel'?! (*Yusuf*: 31) This verse tells us that when Yusuf *peace be upon him* entered upon them, all eyes were turned to him. Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that eyes and human impulses communicate subtle messages. Otherwise, why did Yusuf *peace be upon him* say: 'If You do not protect me from their treachery...' (*Yusuf*: 33).

Thus, we know that the other women coveted Yusuf *peace be upon him* just as the governor's wife had. Furthermore, they thought that the governor's wife might fire him and hoped that Yusuf *peace be upon him* will then be theirs. Such are the habits of those in corrupted households.

As a matter of fact, there is no house more corrupt than that of the governor, for after the witness testified that it was the wife who tried to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* the governor brushed the story away, saying: 'Yusuf, overlook this; but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin–you have done wrong' (*Yusuf:* 29). At this point, the governor sought to protect his reputation from being slurred.

In the same connection, when the witness asked the women, what was their answer? Allah *Glorified is He* states that the women acknowledged:

"...We know nothing bad of him!" (*Yusuf:* 51) In fact, He *the Almighty* kept the devil–who always incites evil–away from Yusuf *peace be upon him.* At that point, we should take into account that Satan never combats the Lord *Glorified is He*; he only fights His creatures. Allah *the Almighty* records the oath taken by Satan when Allah relates him saying: "Then by Your Might I will surely misguide them, all, except Your slaves from among them, the purified ones" (*Sad:* 82-83). As such, Satan himself maintains that he cannot approach or mislead those whom the Lord *Glorified is He* elects as His purified slaves.

And finally the witness, who is a relative of the governor's wife and who was assigned by the governor to uncover the truth of the matter, concluded: '...but if the shirt is torn from the back, then she is lying and he is telling the truth' (*Yusuf*: 27). Thus, after presenting all the aforementioned proofs, no one has the right to ask whether or not Yusuf *peace be upon him* was on the verge of succumbing to the governor's wife.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *the Almighty* says: '... if he had not seen a sign and the evidence of his Lord...' (*Yusuf:* 24). As a matter of fact, the evidence is what substantiates a judgment, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '...nor do we punish until we send a Messenger (to warn)' (*al-Isra*': 15). In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '(We sent) Messengers as the givers of good news and as warners, so that people should not have a plea against Allah after the (coming of) Messengers; and Allah is Mighty, Wise' (*an-Nisa*': 165). We deduce from these verses that Allah *Glorified is He* necessarily sends a Messenger to his people. Moreover, this Messenger should be supported by a miracle that convinces his people to believe in Allah's Divine Way of Guidance for them to live in spiritual harmony and for Allah *the Almighty* to save them from the punishment in the Hereafter.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse in question by affirming: '...We did this in order to keep evil and indecency away from him, for he was truly one of Our chosen slaves' (*Yusuf:* 24). In this verse, the Arabic word '*al-fahshaa*'' (indecency) refers to committing adultery, while the word '*as-su*'' (evil) denotes the possibility of succumbing to the wife.

Some moderate interpreters said that after attempting to make him yield to her, her enticement escalated to the point of insanity. As they rushed to the door, the wife considered killing Yusuf *peace be upon him*. However, the latter sensed her intention and even tried to kill her in self-defence. But had he done this, he will have been prosecuted as a murderer.<sup>(1)</sup> That is, the Lord *Glorified is He* turned him away from the idea of murder which is what Allah *the Almighty* here means by 'evil'. However, I am personally inclined to understand 'evil' as the idea of succumbing to the wife's enticements, which is an impulse that precedes the act.

At that point Allah *the Almighty* affirms that Yusuf *peace be upon him* is one of the purified slaves of Allah *the Almighty*. In a sense, this declaration is a response to Satan who had said: 'Except Your slaves from among them, the purified ones (*al-mukhlaseen*)' (*Sad:* 83). Here, Allah's saying: '...for he was truly one of our chosen slaves (*al-mukhlaseen*)' (*Yusuf:* 24) emphasises Satan's assertion that he will not come near Allah's chosen slaves. There is a difference between the two Arabic words '*mukhlaseen*' (sincere) and '*mukhlaseen*' (chosen). As for the sincere slave, he is one who struggles and attains the level of truly obeying the Lord *Glorified is He*, while the chosen slave is one who struggles in the Way of the Lord *Glorified is He* and who is finally chosen by Him *Glorified is He*.

That is, on the one hand, there are people who, by obeying Allah *the Almighty* are blessed by His Grace. On the other hand, there are those who receive Allah's Grace and as a result they obey Him. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point, although Allah is beyond any comparison. Someone asking you to give him from what the Lord *Glorified is He* has given you might knock upon your door, whereupon you invite him in and treat him generously. On a different occasion, however, you might be walking down the street and this time you call upon someone and give him some of the bounty Allah has bestowed on you. As such, there are those who ask and are granted their demands, while there are others whom you seek out in order to offer charity.

<sup>(1)</sup> Commenting on this point, Al-Qurtubi mentioned that among the possible interpretations of the thoughts that crossed Yusuf's mind regarding the governor's wife was to strike her and push her away from him. However, the evidence and reasoning of his Lord turned him away from doing this, for had he hit her, he will have been accused of sexually harassing the woman. Moreover, it will appear that she refused him and consequently Yusuf peace be upon him struck her. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3488.

After discussing the wife's trials to tempt, entice, and coax, the Lord *Glorified is He* describes what took place next, saying:

وَٱسْتَبَعَا ٱلْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُ، مِن دُبُرٍ وَٱلْفَيَا سَيِّدَهَا لَدَا ٱلْبَابِ قَالَتْ مَا جَزَآءُ مَنْ أَرَادَ بِأَهْلِكَ شُوَءًا إِلَّا أَن يُسْجَنَ أَوْ عَذَابُ أَلِي لُمُ ٢

# They raced for the door – she tore his shirt from behind – and at the door they met her husband. She said, 'What, other than prison or painful punishment, should be the reward of someone who tried to dishonour your wife?' [25] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 25)

We previously explained that both of them raced to the door, trying to arrive there before the other. At that point, we should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* only mentions the existence of a single door, but that the governor's wife had previously bolted several doors. However, Allah's saying: 'And at the door they met her husband...' (*Yusuf:* 25) proves that she caught up with Yusuf *peace be upon him* at the last door. That is, she raced after Yusuf *peace be upon him* until they reached the last door. The wife wanted to shut this door, thereby locking his last possible exit. Here, we should take into account that each of them was racing for a different reason: the governor's wife was chasing after Yusuf *peace be upon him*, while the latter was running away from her. That is how she tore his shirt from the back.

The fact that she tore his shirt from the back proves that he outran her to the door. In fact, the shirt was torn in her hand, and the witness–who was a member of her own household <sup>(1)</sup>–used this as evidence to show what had truly happened.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And at the door they met her husband...' (*Yusuf:* 25). This means that both of them were surprised when the governor of Egypt appeared suddenly before them. Therefore, the situation turned into a three-person scenario: the governor's wife, her husband, and Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

<sup>(1)</sup> This is referred to in Allah's saying: 'A member of her household suggested, "If his shirt is torn from the front, it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying, but if it is torn from the back, she is lying and he is telling the truth' (*Yusuf:* 26-27).

At this moment, the woman accused Yusuf *peace be upon him* by posing a question that implies her innocence, thus evading her guilt and turning Yusuf *peace be upon him* into the culprit; a point which is recorded in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'She said, "What is the [fitting] punishment of someone who tried to dishonour your wife?"' (*Yusuf*: 25) Then, she specified the form of punishment: '[What] other than prison or a painful punishment?' (*Yusuf*: 25)

Afterwards, The Lord *Glorified is He* relates the response of Yusuf: 'But he said, "She tried to seduce me". A member of her household suggested, "If his shirt is torn from the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying" (*Yusuf:* 26). Here, the governor of Egypt finds himself faced with two contradictory claims: each accuses the other of sexual harassment. It is therefore necessary for someone who is judicious and discerning in such matters to evaluate the two claims.

Allah the Almighty continues:

قَالَ هِيَ زَوَدَتْنِي عَن نَّفْسِيُّ وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدُ مِّنَا أَهْلِهَا إِن كَانَ قَمِيضُهُ، قُدَّ مِن قُبُلٍ فَصَدَقَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ ٱلْكَذِبِينَ (")

## But he said, 'She tried to seduce me.' A member of her household suggested, 'If his shirt is torn at the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying [26] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 26)

As for the Arabic word '*shahida*' (to witness), it takes on many meanings in the Quran. At times, this verb denotes the act of being present, as in Allah's saying: '...and let a party of the believers witness (*yash-had*) their punishment.'<sup>(1)</sup> (*an-Nur:* 2) In some cases, this verb concerns knowing something, as in Allah's saying: '...and we do not bear witness (*shahidna*) except to what we know....' (*Yusuf:* 81) It may furthermore be used to mean 'to assess and make

<sup>(1)</sup> This verse refers to the chastisement of the adulterer and the adulteress, and how the punishment should be carried out. This is stated in Allah's saying: '(As for) the fornicatress and the fornicator, flog each of them (giving) a hundred stripes, and let not pity for them keep you from (carrying out) this Law of Allah, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of the believers witness their punishment' (*an-Nur*: 2).

a judgment', that is, the witness weighed their differing claims to deduce the truth of the matter. In the verse in question, the Quran asserted that the witness was a member of the household of the governor's wife, who is the culprit. Were he a relative of Yusuf *peace be upon him*, his judgment will have been rescinded.

To continue we say the scene now involves four people: the governor's wife, Yusuf *peace be upon him*, the governor of Egypt and the witness. The verse in question relates half of the witness's comments: 'If his shirt is torn from the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying' (*Yusuf:* 26). We can deduce from this statement that had Yusuf *peace be upon him* been the one who approached her, his shirt will have fallen to the ground, and when he supposedly stumbled, it will have become torn. But clearly this contradicts what really happened.

Allah the Almighty continues with the witness's remarks, saying:

وَإِن كَانَ قَمِيضُهُ, قُدَّ مِن دُبُرٍ فَكَذَبَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ ٱلصَّدِقِينَ ٧

## But if it is torn at the back, then she is lying and he is telling the truth [27] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 27)

The verse indicates that if Yusuf's shirt was torn from the back, then he is speaking the truth and the governor's wife is lying. Concerning this, we should take into account that the witness made this remark before seeing the shirt. In fact, it is on the basis of this statement that the witness will inspect the shirt. That is to say that he was establishing the basis to substantiate his verdict.

The following makes this crystal clear, for Allah the Almighty says:

فَلَمَا رَءَا قَمِيصَهُ, قُدَّ مِن دُبُرٍ قَالَ إِنَّهُ مِن كَيْدِكُنَّ إِنَّ كَيْدَكُنَّ عَظِيمٌ ٢

When the husband saw that the shirt was torn at the back, he said, 'This is another instance of women's treachery: your treachery is truly great [28] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 28)

Allah's saying regarding the judging witness: 'When he saw that the shirt' definitively proves that he had established a criterion of judgment and had

decided on the principles prior to examining the shirt; that is, he did not see the shirt except after laying down these principles. Thus, his reflections prior to examining the scene are his basis for evaluating the case at hand. In charging the governor's wife, the witness said: 'This is another instance of women's treachery: your treachery is truly great' (*Yusuf*: 28).

It is worth noting that the Arabic word '*al-kayd*' ('treachery' or 'plot') denotes a stealthy machination devised by someone unable to confront his enemy. Due to the fact that women's weakness is great, their plotting is even greater.

Afterwards, the verses of the chapter of Yusuf turn to shed light on the reaction of Egypt's governor; Allah *the Almighty* states the governor's response to the incident, saying:

يُوسُفُ أَعْرِضْ عَنْ هَدَداً وَٱسْتَغْفِرِى لِذَنْبِكِ ۖ إِنَّكِ حَصْنَتِ مِنَ ٱلْخَاطِئِينَ ٢

## Joseph, overlook this; but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin – you have done wrong [29] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 29)

With this statement of the governor, Allah *Glorified is He* puts an end to this four-member scene in which the governor ruled that his wife was at fault, and in which he asks Yusuf *peace be upon him* to overlook what happened and to keep it a secret.

As a matter of fact, the governor's reaction clearly shows how the elite people address the problems that face them in their houses. This phenomenon continues in our contemporary time. This matter is clear in the case of a powerful man turning a blind eye to malefactions committed by his own family. In fact, a potentate will refuse to let outsiders know of events—such as the one at hand—and he will try to hide his family's blunders. In short, the governor has been disgraced and does not want to be humiliated by his foes and enemies.

Here, we should take into account that the matter of faith is still rooted even in the hearts of deviants and those who conceal sinful acts. This fact is clearly manifested when the governor of Egypt told Yusuf *peace be upon him*: '...overlook this...' (*Yusuf:* 29); and when he told his wife: '...but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin–you have done wrong' (*Yusuf:* 29). In saying this, the governor is asserting the fact that a sin had taken place; an

acknowledgement that he could not make without being aware of the Divine Way of Guidance. In fact, the governor's only choice is to ask her to plead for forgiveness from Allah *the Almighty*.

At first, the scene included four individuals, as follows: Yusuf *peace be upon him* the wife, the governor and the witness who solved the case and made the judgment. Afterwards Allah *the Almighty* broadens the scope, casting light on the social class in which the case took place.

This proves that there is no such thing as a secret within a palace, since 'secret' events that take place within palaces are always spied on by stealthy observers. Moreover, people always speak of these secrets. That is why no one should think that he can stop his crime from becoming known. Inevitably, the secret will be disclosed, no matter how well the owner of the secret covers it up and conceals it. In the incident under discussion, some of the servants of the palace had spied on its people and told the story to others until the women began to speak of it. The Quran describes this situation in the following manner:

## وَقَالَ نِسُوَةٌ فِي ٱلْمَدِينَةِ ٱمُرَأَتُ ٱلْعَزِيزِ تُزَوِدُ فَنَهَا عَن نَفَسِهِ - قَدَ شَغَفَهَا حُبًّا إِنَّا لَنَرَىهَا فِي ضَلَالٍ مَبْيِنٍ (")

## Some women<sup>(1)</sup> of the city said, 'The governor's wife is trying to seduce her slave! Love for him consumes her heart! It is clear to us that she has gone astray' [30] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 30)

As for the two Arabic words '*niswah*' and '*nisaa*'' which refer to women, they are used to refer to the plural. However, the roots of these two words completely change when transformed into the singular form, as their singular form is '*imra*'ah' (a woman). Interestingly, this singular form has a dual form, namely '*imra*'atan' (two women), but it does not have a plural in Arabic. Simply put, we refer to a group of women as '*niswah*' or '*nisaa*'', and to one single woman as '*imra*'ah'.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis of The Quran, *Al-Qurtubi* narrated that *Ibn 'Abbas* and others said, 'The women referred to in the verse are the wives of the governor's cupbearer, his baker, his shepherd and his prison guard. It is also said that among the women was the doorkeeper's wife'. See *Al-Qurtubi*, *Jame' Al-Bayan*, 4/3498.

In the verse in question, the women said: 'The governor's wife is trying to seduce her slave!...' (*Yusuf*: 30). In fact, these women said the truth, but they were not saying it out of love for truth or virtue. Allah *Glorified is He* willed to negate that they upheld truth and virtue, and therefore He discloses the ulterior objectives behind their words when He says: 'When she heard their malicious talk, she prepared for them a cushioned couch (to lie on at the feast) and sent for them, and [then] gave each of them a knife. She said to Yusuf (Joseph), "Come out and show yourself to them" and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty and cut their hands, exclaiming, "Allah preserve us! He cannot be mortal! He must be a gracious angel!" She said, "This is the one you blamed me for..." (*Yusuf*: 31-32).

The Arabic word 'al-makr' (malicious talk) implies disguising a matter behind something else. At this point, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the motivation behind the malicious talk of the women was not to uphold the truth or for the love of virtue. Rather, they sought to harm the governor's wife and expose her dishonourable act to the public's attention. Furthermore, they wanted to injure the pride of the governor's wife by making her blunder known to everyone. In this way, they showed that they wanted to uphold the truth but in reality they wanted the opposite–an evil which is only carried out by the most uncouth characters.

After all, she is the wife of the governor, and therefore the most important female figure in society. However, her high standing as the wife of the victorious governor that could not be overcome had been shaken.

It is interesting to note that the Arabic word '*al-'aziz'* (governor) is derived from a word that has a tangible, physical meaning. For example, one can describe the earth as being '*al-i'zaz'* (cannot be overcome), that is, a ground that is rocky and difficult to walk upon.

It is debasing for the governor's wife to be the subject of gossip. Even worse, she tried to seduce her slave-boy, which makes the rumour more ignominious and disgraceful because a slave-boy is among the lowest of the low.

The women also said: 'Love for him consumes her heart!' (*Yusuf*: 30) As a matter of fact, there are different stages of love, the first of which is '*al-hawa*'

(attraction). This stage can be likened to a sprouting plant. It is said, 'He saw something and was attracted (*hawa*) to it'. In some cases, attraction ceases at the moment the person encounters the other individual. However, if a person becomes attached to that individual, then a relationship forms. After forming this relationship, one's fondness for the other person grows deeper, that is, the person seeks to achieve what is demanded in the relationship. After deep fondness, love manifests itself and both parties' reciprocally express their feelings. At this point, both parties express their deep fondness to each other and that is why they are referred to as 'lover and beloved'. After these stages of love comes the stage of '*at-tadlih*' which denotes being on the verge of losing one's sanity. At this point, the body itself becomes physically affected, and the person loses himself completely in love. In the next stage, man burns and becomes totally consumed by passionate love. This stage is called '*al-huyam*' in which the lover becomes an aimless wanderer with no particular destination. If this leads to committing a crime, then this stage is called '*jawa*'.

These are the different degrees and stages of love that the heart may pass through.<sup>(1)</sup> As we know, the heart, i.e. the physical organ, is considered to be the place of firm creeds; those which man has already investigated and believed in.

As a matter of fact, the human being perceives things with his external senses; he sees, smells, hears tastes and feels. When he grasps certain matters, the mind assesses them and selects the soundest idea. Following this assessment, the selected ideas are transferred to the heart where they remain as inviolable creeds.

Concerning concepts that pertain to the mind, they can be removed by other different concepts. That is why things firmly settled in the heart are called 'beliefs' (*aqa'id*), and they derive their meaning from the word '*ma'qud'*, that is, something which is tied tightly and cannot be unfastened. In the same connection, beliefs that settle in the heart are reflected in one's behaviou because when an idea is rooted in the human soul, all the person's actions take place within the fold of these beliefs.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his book, *Ibn Al-Qayyim* mentioned around sixty names for love, each name corresponding to a special stage or level of love. See, *Ibn Al-Qayyim, Rawdat Al-Muhibbin,* p. 25.

Therefore, we are now fully aware of the various stages that belief goes through before taking root in the soul. The first thing that occurs is the perception of ideas,<sup>(1)</sup> then comes the stage of reasoning, and finally man reaches the stage of believing in these ideas, which then are reflected in all of the person's actions.

Back to the verse in question; the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Love for him consumes her heart (*ash-shaghaf*)!' (*Yusuf:* 30) means that the emotions evolved from a simple perception to an acute mental awareness, and finally the feeling became fixed in the heart of the governor's wife. Interestingly, the Arabic word '*ash-shaghaf*' (consumes her) refers to the thin skin that envelops the heart. This expression therefore denotes that love had completely seized her heart.

Concerning the women's words: 'It is clear to us that she has gone astray' (*Yusuf:* 30), this was a true statement but was uttered with wicked intentions. That is why Allah *the Almighty* discloses their malevolent intentions saying:

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَّكًا وَءَاتَتْ كُلَّ وَحِدَةٍ مِنْهُنَّ سِكِيْنَا وَقَالَتِ اَخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ. أَكْبَرْنَهُ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَشَ لِلَهِ مَا هَنَذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَنَذَا إِلَا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمُ (أَ)

When she heard their malicious talk, she prepared a banquet and sent for them, giving each of them a knife. She said to Joseph, 'Come out and show yourself to them!' and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty, and cut their hands, exclaiming, 'Great God! He cannot be mortal! He must be a precious angel!' [31] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 31)

Here arises a good question, which is 'How were they informed of the private incident that occurred between Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the governor's wife?' The only people present during the palace incident were the

<sup>(1)</sup> Imam *Ash-Sha* 'rawi's opinion is further corroborated by psychologists who affirm that when choosing anything, one must first perceive it, then an impulsive reaction takes place, and finally one makes a selection.

governor, his wife, Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the witness. Therefore, the one who related the happenings to the people from outside the palace must have had a relationship with both the people living in the palace and the people outside it.

In this vein, scholars have looked into the social contacts of the women who disclosed the secret happenings. They generally opine that there were five women who were responsible:<sup>(1)</sup> the cupbearer's wife, the baker's wife, the chamberlain's wife, the stable keeper's wife, and the jailer's wife. Here arises another question, which is 'Who disclosed the palace secrets to these women who live inside their respective houses?' Without a doubt, one of their husbands was talking to his wife casually, and he happened to relate the situation of the governor's wife with Yusuf *peace be upon him* and then his wife spread the news to the other women.

When the governor's wife became fully aware that the women were spreading gossip and became aware of how they maliciously talked about her: 'She prepared for them a cushioned couch (*muttakana*) and sent for them, and [then] gave each of them a knife...' (*Yusuf*: 31).

As for the Arabic word '*muttaka*'' (from which the word '*muttakana*' is derived), it denotes a comfortable cushioned couch which prevents one from becoming bored of sitting down.

This verse is therefore implying that the meeting will be long. Furthermore, the governor's wife planned to reveal how they will react upon seeing Yusuf *peace be upon him* and that is why she gave them all knives which also suggested that food will be served.

Allah *the Almighty* continues: 'She said to Yusuf, "Come out and show yourself to them!" and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty (*akbarna*)...' (*Yusuf*: 31).

The expression 'akbarta ash-shay'' (to be stunned by something) from which the word 'akbarna' is derived, is used to refer to the case when the object is depicted in a beautiful way by your imagination before you actually see it, but when you see the object, you find that it is even grander than the picture

<sup>(1)</sup> This is mentioned by Ibn 'Abbas and others. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3498.

you had previously imagined. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. Someone might speak to you of another person in high terms, but when you encounter him, his positive qualities outshine even your highest expectations.

A poet once said:

When I asked Ja'far ibn Habib's retinue about the man's outstanding virtues,

I was related an almost complete description.

But by Allah, when we met, the sight of him was even more splendid

Than the good accounts that I had heard.

However, there is a counter proverb to this expression, which is, 'It is better to hear descriptions of someone from the tribe of '*Ma'add'* than to see him for yourself!'<sup>(1)</sup> In other terms, it is better if you only heard of a person without ever encountering him because when you meet him, you will be disappointed because your expectations were too high.

Back to the verse in question; when the women were causing damage to the wife's reputation by spreading news of her attempts to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* they imagined that he had a rather attractive appearance. Nevertheless, when they saw him, they were astounded because his beauty far outshone their expectations. The first stage of amazement is bewilderment when you forget what you were doing at that moment; you might even drop whatever is in your hand. That is how the women cut their hands with the knives which were given by the governor's wife for the purpose of paring fruit or cutting food that was served to them. Concerning this matter, Allah *the Almighty* says: '...and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty and cut their hands' (*Yusuf*: 31). Could there possibly be a depiction that describes this scene with more accuracy?<sup>(2)</sup> Allah *the Almighty* continues:

<sup>(1)</sup> This maxim is said with regard to someone whose reputation exceeds his worth. For example, a man might be renowned or he may even be a celebrity, but when you meet this person, you despise him. The word 'Ma'add' denotes a neighborhood or the name of a tribe. This expression is generally used to undermine the subject concerned. See. Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, the root 'Ma'ad'.

<sup>(2)</sup> In his Tafsir of the Quran, Ibn Kathir said, 'More than one scholar have mentioned that she told the women, after they were each given a knife, "Do you want to see Yusuf peace be upon him?" to which they responded "Yes". Then she sent for him and ordered =

"...exclaiming, "Allah preserve us! He cannot be mortal! He must be a gracious angel!" (*Yusuf*: 31)

The expression: 'Allah preserve us' (*Yusuf:* 31) is a way of exalting Allah *Glorified is He*; that is to declare that He *the Almighty* is great enough to be able to create such ideal beauty. Another possible interpretation is that the women recognised that Yusuf *peace be upon him* is too noble to commit an indecent or vile deed with the governor's wife.

A third possible interpretation could be that the appearance of Yusuf *peace be upon him* was more handsome than any human they had ever known,<sup>(1)</sup> which is why they exclaimed that he could only be a gracious angel. At this point, we should take into account that the image of the angel is a figment of our imagination, as images correspond to impressions within the human mind. Similarly, when we envisage Satan, we visualise the most hideous image. In fact, ugliness itself is conceived differently by different people; what you consider to be ugly might not be seen as such by others, since the criterion of beauty and ugliness differ from one community to another.

Let us give an example to properly understand this point; men from central parts of Africa consider a woman with very fat lips or frizzy and wavy hair to be beautiful. In passing, it is interesting to note that modern society confirms that this is a type of beautyto which men are sometimes attracted. In fact, some women with smooth hair go to a hair stylist to make their hair curly.

Thus, we might say that beauty is measured by people's tastes. What one person perceives as beautiful is seen differently by another, and another person's

him to appear in front of them, and when they saw him, they started to cut their own hands. While the women were still slashing their hands, she ordered him to go back inside. When they finally felt the pain, they began to wail. The governor's wife then retorted, "You do all of this after only one gaze, so why am I to be blamed?"' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/476.

<sup>(1)</sup> Al-Qushayri Abu Nasr said, 'The women mentioned that Yusuf's physical appearance was more beautiful and perfect than that of any human. In fact, they said that he looked like an angel'. But Allah Glorified is He says: 'We create man in the finest state' (at-Tin: 4). When these two verses are considered together, one may infer that their exclamation 'Allah preserve us' confirms that Yusuf peace be upon him did not succumb to the enticements of the governor's wife'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3505.

understanding of beauty might not be shared by someone else. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* makes the human soul appreciate some beauty to which this person normally tends to be attracted. For this reason, one sometimes hears the following expression in rural Egypt, 'For every bean, there is a particular person who is attracted to it'

Let us offer an example to clarify this matter; one may find a young man who proposed to a woman and, upon seeing her, became revolted by her. However, another young man might go to ask for the same woman's hand in marriage and as soon as he sees her, he falls in love with her and hurriedly marries her. This suggests that the criterion of beauty of the latter differs from those of the former.

When Allah *the Almighty* wills to join two individuals, no one is able to stop the attraction they both have for each other from developing. We are not able to understand how this phenomena happens since it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who decrees this affinity. He does so by uncovering a beauty in the woman that attracts one man but not another. Clearly, this also applies to women.

Back to the verse under discussion; when the women saw Yusuf *peace be upon him* they exclaimed: 'He cannot be mortal! He must be a gracious angel!' (*Yusuf:* 31) We can deduce from this statement that Yusuf *peace be upon him* represented the highest form of human beauty, and that such magnificence cannot be found in any other individual.<sup>(1)</sup>

Following this incident, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the wife's response to the stunned women, saying:

<sup>(1)</sup> Anas Ibn Malik narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Yusuf and his mother were endowed with half of (all the) beauty (in the world)'. See, Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 3/286; Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, 2/570. In his book, As-Suyuti narrated that Ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him said, 'Yusuf's countenance was like a flash of lightning. Whenever a woman approached him for a certain matter, he covered his face lest she be drawn to him'. As-Suyuti attributed this narration to Al-Hakim At-Tirmidhi in his Nawadir Al-Usul, as well as Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, Abu Ash-Sheikh and At-Tabarani'. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 4/532.

قَالَتُ فَذَالِكُنَّ ٱلَّذِى لُمُتُنَّنِي فِيهِ وَلَقَدْ رَوَدَنَّهُ مَن نَفْسِهِ عَاسَتَعْصَمُ وَلَبِن لَمْ يَفْعَلْ مَا ءَامُرُهُ لَيُسْجَنَنَ وَلَيَكُونَا مِّن ٱلضَّنِعِ بِنَ 🖤

## She said, 'This is the one you blamed me for. I tried to seduce him and he wanted to remain chaste, but if he does not do what I command now, he will be put in prison and degraded' [32] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 32)

After the women had admitted that Yusuf *peace be upon him* has been granted a beauty which has no likeness among humans, the governor's wife found in this acknowledgement a justification for her attempts to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

The saying '*fadhalikunn*', that is, 'This is the one ...' (*Yusuf*: 32) which the governor's wife utters includes the demonstrative pronoun 'this' which refers to Yusuf *peace be upon him*, but the entire word '*fadhalikunn*', addresses the women.

What concerns us here is the linguistic style used by the speaker because when words are uttered or even written for reading purposes, they may take on different forms and styles. Sometimes, the words simply make up prose devoid of any rhythm or rhyme. Other times, ideas may be expressed either in loosely rhyming prose, or even as disciplined, rhythmical, and rhyming poetry.

There are examples of rhyming prose in The Quran, and the following saying of Allah *the Almighty* is a case in point: 'By the mountain,<sup>(1)</sup> by a Scripture inscribed in unrolled parchment, by the much-visited House' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1-4). These aforementioned verses are an example of loosely rhyming prose, each verse ending with the same sound 'or'. In this connection, when you read or hear a text, the more eloquently sounding the prose the more you can visualise the scene portrayed. And when you move from one text to another, your ear notices the stylistic difference between both texts.

The mountain referred to in the verse is called 'At-Tur' which is located in Sinai, where Musa (Moses) peace be upon him stayed with his people after they were driven out of Egypt. Allah Glorified is He says: 'We made the mountain (At-Tur) tower high above them...' (an-Nisa': 154). It is also called 'Tur Sayna', as in the following verse: '...Mount Sinai...' (al-Mu'minun: 20) and also called 'Tur sini'n' in Allah's saying: 'And Mount Sinai' (at-Tin: 2). See Al-Qamous Al-Qawim, 1/407.

A good example of a change from one style to another can be found in the letters in which Ibn Zaydun<sup>(1)</sup> implored Ibn Jahwar, 'The painful consequences of this criticism are worthy of praise, for this hardship exalts (the individual) only after having debased (him). My high esteem for you, my lord, will not diminish if the cause (of this criticism) is protracted or delayed, for you are not sparing and never withhold things (from those who regard you in high esteem). And so I (shall) lower my water drawer and fill it with bounty (that is like) the heaviest roaming cloud that I can recall. Each day is tied to the next, and each appointed moment is recorded in the Book. Praise be to Allah for putting us to the test, and never (should He be) criticised for His Leniency.

For if one of His Actions saddened me,

His Actions that delight us are thousands'.

In this communication, you can clearly notice Ibn Zaydun's transition from straightforward prose to poetry. However, when reading The Quran, you can hardly distinguish between poetry and prose as you move from standard prose to loosely rhyming prose, and then to rhyming and rhythmic poetry.

Let us give an example from the verse under discussion: 'This is the one you blamed me for...' (*Yusuf:* 32). This part of the verse has a rhythm, but one is almost entirely oblivious to the fact that the verse has transferred from prose to poetry. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'Allah guides whoever He wills to a straight path<sup>(2)</sup>...' (*an-Nur*: 46). He *Glorified is He* 

<sup>(1)</sup> He is Ahmad ibn Abdullah ibn Zaydun Al-Khawarizmi Al-Andalusi, Ab Al-Walid. He was a minister, author and a poet from Cordoba. Born in 394 AH, he served as ambassador for *Ibn Jahur* (a king of one of the confederate states of Andalusia) who sent him to different parts of Andalusia. He died in Seville in 463 AH in the reign of Al-Mu'tamid 'Alallah Ibn Al-Mu'tadid. Paraphrased from Al-A 'lam by Az-Zirikli 1/158.

<sup>(2)</sup> Al-Azhari said, 'Ibn Kathir, Nafe', Abu 'Amr, Ibn 'Amir, 'Asim, and Al-Kisa'i read the verse: "Guide us to the Straight Path" (al-Fatiha: 6) pronouncing the word 'as-sirat' with the letter 'sad' instead of the letter 'sin'. Ya'qub, on the other hand, read this word with the letter 'sin', and explained that the letter 'sad' in this word is derived from the letter 'sin' but the word was pronounced with a 'sad' to ease the pronunciation because of its proximity to the letter 'sad' are both legitimate ways of reciting this word'. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab the root 'sarata'.

also says: '[Prophet], tell My slaves that I am the Forgiving, the Merciful...' (*al-Hijr:* 49). These verses come after prose as well which proves that there is no dissonance in the intonation of The Quran, be it verse, poetry or prose. In fact, the style of the Quran is so harmonious that it appears as one single flow of words. Such eloquence can only emanate from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, you may not even be aware of these poetic subtleties if no one were to bring them to your attention. However, in ordinary human speech, however, your ear easily feels the transition from rhyming words that are followed by prose. The same is true when you read prose and then move to poetry. In both cases, the ear of the reader easily senses the shift from one form of expression to another.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'She said, "This is the one you blamed me for. I tried to seduce him and he wanted to remain chaste..."" (*Yusuf:* 32). The governor's wife uttered this statement audaciously only after noticing the impact Yusuf's presence had on the women. Moreover, she declared that he had remained chaste which implies that he restrained himself and repressed his carnal desire with great effort. Furthermore, this statement proves that Yusuf's manhood is in no way lacking, for he struggled against his own ego to prevent himself from performing the dissolute act. Further the wife is related to have continued saying: '... but if he does not do what I command now, he will be put in prison and degraded' (*Yusuf:* 32). We should take into account that she proclaimed this with the tone of someone who was decreeing orders. She is declaring to the listeners—who were stunned by Yusuf *peace be upon him* when they saw him—that if he refuses to obey her and satisfy her desire, she will surely imprison, disgrace and dishonour him.

As for the women who heard her, each one of them secretly wished that the governor's wife will expel Yusuf *peace be upon him* from the palace so that one of them could be alone with him.

That is why Allah the Almighty narrates Yusuf's response, saying:

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱلسِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَىَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِيٓ إِلَيْهِ ۖ وَإِلَّا تَصْرِفْ عَنِي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُنُ مِّنَ ٱلْجَنِهِايَ ٣

### Joseph said, 'My Lord! I would prefer prison to what these women are calling me to do. If You do not protect me from their treachery, I shall yield to them and do wrong' [33] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 33)

Here arises a question, 'Why did Yusuf *peace be upon him* use the plural form (women) in his statement?' After all, he did say: 'I prefer prison to what these women are calling me to do...' (*Yusuf:* 33) despite the fact that it is only the governor's wife who said: '... but if he does not do what I command now, he will be put in prison and degraded' (*Yusuf:* 32). Here, we should stress that there is no doubt that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had sensed the innuendos or winks from the women. Through these insinuations, the women were advising him to avoid the complicated situation that will lead to his imprisonment. That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* included the female guests in his speech about the governor's wife. It is the women who gave him discreet signs and hints for him to avoid imprisonment.

One may suppose that more than one woman looked at him and attempted to earn his affection.<sup>(1)</sup> Indeed, eyes, physical gestures and facial expressions communicate better than words, and perhaps the signs given by their eyes told Yusuf *peace be upon him* of the intentions of each and every one of them. In such meetings, eyes play a great role in communicating ideas and intentions. Let us offer an example to clarify this point; there is an account of the poet Abu Dalama who sat in the court of a caliph. Abu Dalama was famous for his prowess in ridiculing others through his satiric poetry. Knowing this, the Caliph asked him to deride one of them for fun.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Each woman asked to be alone with Yusuf peace be upon him and to give him advice on how to act with the governor's wife. Their ulterior motive, however, was to rebuke Yusuf peace be upon him and ask him to succumb to her rather than to the wife. With the hope that Yusuf peace be upon him might be open to their allures, each woman went up to him peace be upon him inviting him and inveigling him by saying, "Yusuf, fulfill my need, for I am better than your mistress". Yusuf peace be upon him responded, "O Lord, she was one and now there are many!"' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3507.

The eyes of the people present began circulating around the room, and all of the attendees stealthily indicated to Abu Dalama that they will shower him with gifts if he spared them public derision. Since Abu Dalama was known for his greediness, and he feared being denied any of the gifts that were being tacitly offered to him, he decided that he will deride himself. He said:

In reality, the most hideous of your company is Abu Dalama,

for he is neither of the generous nor of the noble-hearted.

When he dons a turban he resembles a monkey,

and a pig when he takes it off!'

In this way, the poet fulfilled the oath of the Caliph and also gained the gifts that he was promised by those who were attending the gathering.

In the verse under discussion, we find that Yusuf *peace be upon him* included the women with the governor's wife when he said: 'My Lord! I prefer prison to what these women are calling me to do...' (*Yusuf*: 33). In other words, imprisonment was more preferred to Yusuf *peace be upon him* than to agree to commit the sinful act with the governor's wife, or to consent to the women's advice to free himself from prison by answering the wife's desire and then staying with them outside the castle.

Instead, Yusuf *peace be upon him* called to his Lord, saying: 'If You do not protect me from their treachery, I shall yield to them and do wrong' (*Yusuf:* 33). Here, someone may ask, 'Why did Yusuf *peace be upon him* not say 'O Allah', instead of 'My Lord'?' After all, Yusuf *peace be upon him* knows for certain that Divine Obligations which come in the form of 'Do' and 'Do not do' are a result of Allah's Divinity which is represented in His Name 'Allah'.

We contend that Yusuf *peace be upon him* wanted to call Allah *the Almighty* using the Name 'Lord' as he wanted to acknowledge Allah's Bounty and Generosity towards him. Indeed, He, Glorified is Him, is the One Who protected him and took care of him. By invoking Allah by the Name 'My Lord', Yusuf *peace be upon him* is asking Allah not to forsake him in this calamitous situation.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* was aware that he was weak, like every human being, and he knew that unless his Lord turns away their guile from him, he might succumb to their request, thereby becoming one of the ignorant who

ignore the consequences of their acts. Despite the fact that prison is a detestable place to be, he still prefers it to disobeying his Creator. Moreover, since Yusuf sought refuge in the Primary Protector, Allah *Glorified is He* answered his *peace be upon him* plea. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَٱسْتَجَابَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ فَصَرَفَ عَنَّهُ كَيْدَهُنَّ إِنَّهُ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ (٣)

## And his Lord answered his prayer and protected him from their treachery – He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [34] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 34)

Clearly, Allah *Glorified is He* Who created, nurtured and safeguarded Yusuf *peace be upon him* has once again bestowed His Bounties upon him by freeing him *peace be upon him* from the threat of their guile. This threat came in the form of both asking him to give in to the wife's demand as well as their subtle demands and insinuations. As a matter of fact, their enticement is clear in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The king asked the women, "What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?" They said, "Allah forbid! We know nothing bad of him!"" (*Yusuf:* 51) This way, Allah *the Almighty* saved Yusuf *peace be upon him* from the evil scheming of the women, for He *Glorified is He* is All-Hearing and All Knowing; nothing is hidden from Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* surely answers the pleas of the truthful.

Allah the Almighty then says

ثُمَرَ بَدَا لَمُم مِّنْ بَعَدِ مَا رَأَوُا ٱلْآيَنَتِ لَيَسْجُنُنَّهُ حَتَّى حِينٍ ٢

## In the end they thought it best, after seeing all the signs <sup>(1)</sup> of his innocence, that they should imprison him for a while [35] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 35)

Thus, the signs proving Yusuf's innocence became clear to the governor and his royal advisors. Moreover, the wife's aberration and her audacious and

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi quoted Ibn 'Abbas as saying: 'The shirt is one of the signs; the testimony of the witness is one of the signs; the women's cutting their hands is one of the signs; and the women's exaltation of Yusuf peace be upon him is also one of the signs'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3508.

foolhardy insistence that Yusuf *peace be upon him* commit the sordid act with her also became clear. That is why the governor and his advisors deemed it necessary to put Yusuf *peace be upon him* in prison and thus separate the latter from his wife. In this way, the scandal will be forgotten and people will be convinced that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was responsible for the indecent act at the palace.

However, the Arabic word '*layasjununnahu*', that is: '...that they should imprison him...' (*Yusuf:* 35) reveals a certain affection that the governor had for Yusuf *peace be upon him*. After all, the governor did not order him to be executed or exiled to a distant land. Rather, he just kept him away from his wife who adamantly wanted to betray him and from the people who were constantly talking about these shameful events.

Prison, as we know, is a place that confines one's movements in this world. A judge may deem it necessary for a person to be put in confinement as a punishment to disgrace the guilty, or to protect society from his wickedness. Furthermore, we know that a man only breaks a law when he thinks or is certain that he has the power to do so with impunity. Afterwards, a judge or a ruler announces the end of this transgressor's power and might, and orders him to be imprisoned. In prison, a jailer ensures the transgressor's confinement and the latter might even be beaten or disgraced.

This is prison according to both ancient and modern times. It is a place where the detainee is detached from society. Perhaps some members of society might feel compassion for the detainee. Maybe some of his relatives will even visit him and bring food or other needed provisions.

In the same connection, there is also what might be called a 'religious prison' which was established by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he alienated three people from the believing society. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prevented anyone from speaking to these three individuals<sup>(1)</sup> who had failed to appear for battle under insubstantial

<sup>(1)</sup> These three are: Ka'b Ibn Malik, Marara ibn Ar-Rabi' Al-'Amri and Hilal ibn Umayya Al-Waqifi. In his Sahih, Muslim related the Hadith of Ka'b who narrated their entire story of failing to go to battle with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in Tabuk. See Imam Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2769.

pretexts. This isolation was intensified to the point where their own kin did not speak to them, until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered this seclusion to be lifted after its objectives had been accomplished.

To continue, we ask: what happened to Yusuf *peace be upon him* in prison? Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

## وَدَخَلَ مَعَهُ ٱلسِّجْنَ فَتَكِانٍ قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَآ إِنِّي ٓ أَرَىنِيٓ أَعْصِرُ خَمَرًا ۖ وَقَالَ ٱلْآخُرُ إِنِّي آَرَىنِيَ آَحْمِلُ فَوْقَ رَأْسِي خُبْزًا تَأْكُلُ ٱلطَّيْرُ مِنْهُ نَبِتْنَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ ۗ إِنَّا نَرَيْنِكَ مِنَ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ (")

Two young men<sup>(1)</sup> went into prison alongside him. One of them said, 'I dreamed that I was pressing grapes'; the other said, 'I dreamed that I was carrying bread on my head and that the birds were eating it.' [They said], 'Tell us what this means – we can see that you are a knowledgeable man' [36] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 36)

Two individuals accompanied Yusuf *peace be upon him* when he entered the prison, allegedly the baker and the cupbearer. It has also been alleged that the reason for their imprisonment was the governor's desire to distract the people from the great scandal which had broken out in the palace; namely, his wife's enticement of Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the latter's refusal to succumb to her. The governor wanted to distract the people by spreading the news that the cupbearer and the baker had plotted against the governor and were caught while trying to poison him.<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Al-Mawaridi opined that Allah the Almighty says 'Fatayan' (two young men) because they were slaves and the slave is referred to a 'fata', be he young or old. Al-Qushayri said that perhaps it was customary to call a slave 'fata', as in Allah's saying: "The governor's wife is trying to seduce her slave (fataha)!" (Yusuf: 30)'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3511.

<sup>(2)</sup> On this subject, it has been said that the king was upset with his baker and the wine maker. These two had lived under the rule of the king for such a long time that they longed to see him replaced by someone else. However, while the baker agreed to poison the king, the wine maker changed his mind and told the king of the conspiracy. The king, in turn, ordered both plotters to be incarcerated, and the two joined Yusuf peace be upon him in prison. Abridged from Al-Qurtubi's Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3511.

After spending some time with Yusuf *peace be upon him* in prison, and after living with him on a daily basis, the two became fully aware that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was a righteous man. It happened that each one of them saw a dream, and they asked him to interpret their dreams. As a matter of fact, a prisoner is often inclined to be anxious since he has no guarantees for the future. This is perhaps why they entreated Yusuf *peace be upon him* to interpret their dreams, saying: 'One of them said, "I dreamt that I was pressing grapes". The other said, "I dreamt that I was carrying bread on my head and that the birds were eating it." [They said], "Tell us what this means–we can see that you are one of those who do good"". (*Yusuf:* 36)

From this verse, we have two persons who had seen dreams; the first saw himself pressing wine, while the second saw himself carrying bread on his head from which birds were eating. As such, both of the prisoners addressed Yusuf *peace be upon him* perhaps each one separately asking him for an interpretation of this dream.

Moreover, the reason why they sought Yusuf's advice specifically is clear in their saying: 'We can see that you are one of those that do good *(Al-Muhsineen)' (Yusuf:* 36). This verse ascertains that *ihsan* (goodness) is something known to all people even malicious souls. Clearly, no one can deem another person to be a *Muhsin* ('righteous', plural '*Muhsineen'*) except if his actions are in accordance with the criterion of *ihsan* (goodness) conceived in the evaluator's mind.

As a matter of fact, each soul knows what is evil as well as what is good. However, people tend to judge good and evil according to their own needs and benefit. But, had they considered these two qualities from a holistic point of view, where all creatures of the world are considered, and had they deemed a matter that concerns someone else to the same level as something that concerns them directly, they will have realised that what is considered good is the same for all people.

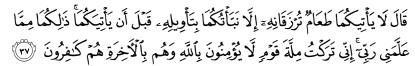
Let us offer an example to illustrate this matter; we may come across a thief who is not disturbed when he steals from someone, but who is greatly bothered when someone steals from him. Thus, we see that he is able to recognise goodness in his heart when he himself is targeted by evil. Ironically, he acknowledges the true value of goodness only when he is hurt. However, when he is stealing-thus channelling evil from himself towards other people-he is somehow oblivious to the meaning of goodness. In short, if you want to know the value of *ihsan* (goodness) concerning virtues and righteous behaviour, you must understand it when it results in both negative and positive consequences for you.

In the same connection, I always give the following example: if you consider it normal to violate the religious limits by looking at women who are forbidden to you, you should consider normal the case when all eyes are turned to your female relatives. To recap, if you want to evaluate your actions in a sensible manner, you must consider the impact other peoples' deeds have on you, without neglecting the impact that your acts have on others. Also, examine the inner inclination of your soul; therein you will find an accurate and reasonable judgment of matters. I often stress that when Allah *Glorified is He* has forbidden you from stealing, He has not constricted your freedom. On the contrary, Allah *the Almighty* has constricted the freedom of millions of others, lest they steal from you–a matter which is in your interest. Hence, he who is aware of the value of *ihsan* considers the repercussions of both other peoples' actions on him and his own actions on others. By doing this, this person takes everything into consideration. In short, just as a person hates to be harmed by others, he should also hate to harm others.

Back to the verse under discussion; the two prisoners were innately aware that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was among those who do good deeds in this world. Furthermore, Yusuf *peace be upon him* recognised that the two prisoners also understood the value of goodness, and that is why he agreed to answer their questions. Moreover, he seized this chance to extract what he sought from the former while granting them what they had asked for. As we said, Yusuf *peace be upon him* recognised gleams of goodness in these two men, for they trusted virtuous people. Moreover, there was no reason that prevented him *peace be upon him* from benefitting from this situation to attain what he wanted from them before he gave them what they wanted.

It is as if Yusuf *peace be upon him* was telling the prisoners, 'What do you see in my virtuous behaviour? Have you not seen how benevolently I have

treated you? Perhaps one of you has recognised my righteous way of speaking! Perhaps neither of you knew that I possess-thanks to Allah's Grace-even greater qualities!' This is what Allah *the Almighty* refers to in the following verse in which He says:



## He said, 'I can tell you what this means before any meal arrives: this is part of what my Lord has taught me. I reject the faith of those who disbelieve in God and deny the life to come [37] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 37)

In this verse, Yusuf *peace be upon him* makes it clear that the two prisoners are only cognisant of his external demeanour, and that there are still other hidden realities which they are unaware of. Moreover, it is as if Yusuf *peace be upon him* were inculcating in them an awareness of his great spiritual position, the excellence of his character and also his ability to inform them of their upcoming meal before it even arrives.<sup>(1)</sup>

This gift of foretelling future events is not an intrinsic attribute of Yusuf *peace be upon him*; rather, it emanates from the knowledge he received from Allah *the Almighty*. In other words, unveiling certain secrets before their eyes is something that Allah *Glorified is He* grants to His righteous slaves. In fact, these two prisoners could be like Yusuf *peace be upon him* if they had only perfected their belief in Allah *the Almighty*. Hence He *Glorified is He* relates Yusuf as saying: '...this is some of what my Lord has taught me. I reject the faith of those who disbelieve in Allah and deny the life to come' (*Yusuf: 37*).

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis of The Quran, *Al-Qurtubi* said, 'The statement "...before any meal arrives..." (*Yusuf*: 37) means that before any food comes to you from your homes, "I can tell you the interpretation..." (*Yusuf*: 37). In other words, this prediction of your upcoming meal will give you certainty that my interpretation of your dreams is correct. The latter are some of the knowledge of the unseen that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was given. Moreover, he *peace be upon him* explicitly said that this knowledge is Allah's Gift, since he abandoned the religion of a people who do not believe *in Allah. Note that the religion that Yusuf peace be upon him is referring to is the king's religion'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3512.* 

Through this response, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was guiding the prisoners to the path of the virtuous who are given some Divine Gifts by virtue of which they can see things that others cannot.

Hence, when a believer sees in a man a glimmer of goodness, let him cultivate this goodness so the man will do more good deeds. By doing so, the believer will not keep this goodness he sees in another limited, but he will make it grow to achieve more good. Moreover, by recognising–potential and actual–virtues in others, the believer encourages these people to improve until they then become guides for others who will then seek Allah's Pleasure in order to, like them, receive His Great Blessings.

That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* made it clear to the prisoners that he had rejected the religion of a people whose beliefs are not befitting Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, these people believed neither in the Resurrection nor in the Final Judgment which bring about the rewards of Paradise or the torments of the Fire.

Allah the Almighty continues relating what Yusuf said to the prisoners:

وَٱتَبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ ءَابَآءِ آ إِبْرَهِيمَ وَإِسْحَقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ مَاكَاتَ لَنَآ أَن نُشْرِكَ بِٱللَّهِ مِن شَيْءٍ ذَلِكَ مِن فَضْلِ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَصْتُرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ (٣٠)

And I follow the faith of my forefathers<sup>(1)</sup> Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Because of God's grace to us and to all mankind, we would never worship anything beside God, but most people are ungrateful [38] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 38)

In this way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* made it clear that he rejected the religion of the people who worship others beside Allah and those who denied that there was a Hereafter, stressing that he chose to follow the faith of his forefathers Ibrahim, Ishaq and then Ya'qub *peace be upon them* all. These three

<sup>(1)</sup> Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The honorable, the son of the honorable, the son of the honorable (was) Yusuf (Joseph), the son of Ya'qub (Jacob), the son of Ishaq (Isaac), the son of Ibrahim (Abraham)'. See Imam At-Tirmidh, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3116; Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 2/332, 416; and Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 2/346.

figures were sent by Allah *the Almighty* to guide people to believe in His Oneness, and also to believe in the Hereafter which entails being rewarded with Paradise or punished by the Fire.

It is out of the Benevolence of Allah *the Almighty* that He revealed this Divine Way of Guidance. Moreover, thanks to His *the Almighty* Grace, He assigned the great honour of prophecy to Yusuf's forefathers; and he who knows all this has no right to worship anything besides Allah *Glorified is He* for polytheism denotes taking recourse in other false gods.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Never did Allah take to Himself a son, and never was there with him any (other) god-in that case each god will have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them will certainly have overpowered others; glory be to Allah above what they describe!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91) We can deduce from this verse that were there any other gods aside from Allah, each will have created something which the other gods were incapable of doing. Moreover, there will be a conflict among these differing gods in the end.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* explains that out of His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed His Divine Way of Guidance on the Prophets–among whom are Yusuf's forefathers Ibrahim, Ishaq, and Ya'qub *peace be upon them*–to deliver this Way to Allah's creation. The Prophets, on their part, did not restrict this Merciful Guidance emanating from Allah *the Almighty* to them; instead, they faithfully delivered it to their respective peoples.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse by saying: 'But most people are ungrateful' (*Yusuf:* 38). When you come across phrases such as '...are ungrateful' (*Yusuf:* 38), you should take into consideration that the object one is ungrateful about is something one should justly and rightly, according to a man's innate nature and sound mind, be grateful for. As a matter of fact, gratefulness is only expressed in return for a blessing.

Were people to contemplate on the matter of sending Prophets to guide them, they will be grateful to the Prophets and Messengers for Allah's Way of Guidance that they communicated to them. Indeed, the Divine Way of Guidance teaches man how to successfully manage his worldly affairs, and, moreover, it guides him to paradise. Allah the Almighty continues to state Yusuf's discourse with the prisoners, saying:

يَصَحِبَ ٱلسِّجْنِ ءَأَرْبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِر ٱللهُ ٱلْوَحِدُ ٱلْقَهَارُ ٢

### Fellow prisoners, would many diverse gods be better than God the One, the All Powerful? [No indeed!] [39] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 39)

As for the Arabic word 'sahib', it denotes a companion or fellow. As we know, Yusuf peace be upon him and the prisoners are linked by a common bond: prison. In this vein, the word 'sahib' denotes something that links two or more things together, as when it is said, 'So-and-so is my fellow pilgrim or student'. Clearly, a thing which binds two or more individuals together is attributed either to a particular place or to a circumstance which binds a particular group in friendship.

In the verse in question, Yusuf *peace be upon him* posed the following question: 'Are many diverse gods better-or Allah, the One, the All Powerful?' (*Yusuf:* 39) When Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked this question, he knew fully well in advance the listener's response. He knew that the prisoner will acknowledge that the diverse gods were not better than only one God. Thus, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was sure that their answer could only be, 'Worshiping a single God is better'. In fact, Yusuf *peace be upon him* only posed this question as he was sure that, after considering the matter, they will answer him the way he wanted.

Both prisoners had worshipped various gods. However, were these gods real, it will have been reasonably unnecessary for the prisoners to resort to the only one God. That is, while plurality on the human plane brings about wealth and achieves success in one's work, associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He* renders a person's worship null and void.

Concerning this there is the *Sufi* saying, 'Devote your works to Allah Alone, and He will satisfy all your needs'. That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* told his follow prisoners: 'Are many diverse gods better...' (*Yusuf:* 39).

Clearly, if the essence of these gods differed from each other, they will be imperfect and unworthy of worship. Furthermore, if they were multiple yet identical, then their existence will be redundant. Finally, if they had different

abilities, then each of them will have both strong and weak points, and this multiplicity will be a sign of the deficiency of the gods.

Consequently, out of His Mercy toward us, the believers, Allah *the Almighty* commands us to worship Him Alone, as He says: 'Allah sets forth a parable: a slave belonging to (several) partners [who] are at variance with one another, and a slave belonging entirely to one man. Are the two equal [as regards to their condition]? (All) praise is due to Allah. Nay! Most of them do not know' (*az-Zumar:* 29).

Indeed, Yusuf *peace be upon him* tried to guide the prisoners to worship Allah *the Almighty* Alone. He also told them what Allah *the Almighty* says in the following verse:

مَا تَعَبُدُونَ مِن دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاء سَمَّيْ تُمُوهَا أَنتُم وَءَابَ آَوُ كُم مَّا أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلْطَنٍ إِنِ ٱلْحُكُمُ إِلَّا بِلَهِ أَمَر أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوٓ إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ ٱلَذِينُ ٱلْقَيْهُ وَلَنكِنَ أَصْحُرُ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ٢

All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented, names for which God has sent down no sanction. Authority belongs to God alone, and He orders you to worship none but Him: this is the true faith, though most people do not realize it [40] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 40)

We should take into account that up to this point Yusuf *peace be upon him* has not spoken to the prisoners about their request: namely, the interpretation of their dreams. Had he first interpreted their dreams, he will have lost their attention since each one will be thinking of his personal needs rather than the lasting universal truths that concern each aspect of human life and for which Yusuf *peace be upon him* was calling.

In this way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* shows altruistic behaviour towards the prisoners. Rather than simply addressing the secondary matters which they were asking about, he *peace be upon him* wanted to bring to their attention the essential issue of Faith. In other words, he sought to correct their worldview and turn their gaze to a religion which teaches man how to live every aspect

and facet of his life correctly. Needless to say, Yusuf's strategy ensues from altruism rather than selfishness. At this point, Yusuf isquoted saying: 'All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented...' (*Yusuf:* 40). In other words, the gods that you worship other than Allah are nothing but meaningless names that do not indicate any actual being in reality. These gods are just names that you either have inherited from your forefathers or invented yourselves. Accordingly, you have disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* by having concocted these names of unreal deities, just as your forefathers disbelieved by either forgetting the Divine Obligations or turning their backs on them.

As a matter of fact, a name is used to refer to the named object. When we utter a name, we mentally envision the image of the named object. That is why when a baby is born, he is given a name that distinguishes him from his other siblings and therefore when his name is called, it only refers to his entity. Moreover, when the same name is given to many different people, it is necessary to distinguish between the identical appellations; otherwise, it will be difficult to differentiate between the named individuals.

Let us give an example to further clarify this point. When a father from the Egyptian countryside is particularly fond of the name '*Mohammad*', he calls all of his children by this name. However, he distinguishes between them by saying 'old *Mohammad*', 'middle *Mohammad*', and 'young *Mohammad*'.

Returning to our verse under discussion, it is unreasonable and unacceptable to give a name to something that is unreal. Yet, the people that Yusuf *peace be upon him* were addressing had given a name to non-existent gods. In other words, they based their faith on names of illusory entities. On the Day of Judgment, these people will be asked: "Where now are those you called upon besides Allah?" They will say, "They have abandoned us: those we called upon before were really nothing at all". This is how Allah leaves disbelievers to go astray' (*Ghafir:* 73-74). That is, on the Day of Judgment the people will admit that they were no gods; they were only empty names. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: 'All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented...' (*Yusuf:* 40).

It is as if Yusuf peace be upon him was asking, 'If you have a need of something from heaven, why will you ask these names that, in reality, do not stand for any actual being? Do these empty names show you any favour?' Yusuf peace be upon him knew that a God that deserves to be worshipped cannot be an empty name. Furthermore, Yusuf peace be upon him knew for certain that Allah, the only One worthy of worship, has a Name which He has communicated through His Messengers, and through those to whom He reveals His Divine Way of Guidance which comes in the form of Commands and Prohibitions. These people, on the other hand, had given a name to non-existent gods, while non-existent beings cannot reveal any way of guidance, nor can they satisfy peoples' dire needs. That is why the Quran narrates Yusuf's discourse with the prisoners about these names, saying: 'All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented, names for which Allah has sent down no sanction...' (Yusuf: 40). We deduce from this verse that Allah Glorified is He has not given any justification for such an act.

In the verse, Yusuf continues saying: 'Authority belongs to Allah alone, and He orders you to worship none but Him...' (*Yusuf*: 40). In other words, Yusuf *peace be upon him* said to them, 'If you hear me saying anything, I am simply communicating Allah's Decree. The words I speak do not ensue from myself or from my desires. It is Allah Himself Who ordered mankind to worship only Him; that is, do not obey any order or keep away from any prohibition except Allah's Orders and His Prohibitions–commandments which have been laid down in His Divine Way of Guidance'.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes this verse by saying: 'This is the true faith, though most people do not realise it' (*Yusuf*: 40). In other words, this faith is the only religion that guides to the Right Path. Most people, however, do not realise this; that is, Messengers have communicated Allah's Way of Guidance, but most people have not applied these teachings in their lives and actions.

Then, Yusuf *peace be upon him* began to interpret the dream for them as they had demanded.

Allah the Almighty then mentions what Yusuf said:

يَصَحِبِي ٱلسِّجْنِ أَمَّا أَحَدُكُما فَيَسَعِى رَبَّهُ, خَمْرًا وَأَمَّا ٱلْأَخَرُ فَيُصْلَبُ فَتَأْكُلُ ٱلْظَيْرُ مِن رَّأْسِدٍ قَضِي ٱلْأَمَرُ ٱلَّذِي فِيهِ تَسْنَفْتِيانِ (١)

## Fellow prisoners, one of you will serve his master with wine; the other will be crucified and the birds will peck at his head. That is the end of the matter on which you asked my opinion [41] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 41)

At this point, Yusuf *peace be upon him* returned to the initial question of the prisoners. He explained that the prisoner who had dreamt of himself pressing grapes will be freed from prison and will return to the palace to pour wine for his master. As for the other prisoner, he will be crucified and birds will peck at his head. The image of a bird pecking at his head is metaphorical and means that his head will be food for birds.

As for the interpretation of dreams, it is a type of knowledge that Allah *the Almighty* sends into the hearts of those whom He taught the interpretation of dreams. In other words, it is the art of deciphering the coded language of dreams and it is only granted to those whom Allah *the Almighty* chooses.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* informed the prisoner who had said: 'I dreamt that I was pressing grapes...' (*Yusuf:* 36) that, according to his dream, he will be granted absolution. As for the other dreamer, the birds will peck at his head; that is, he will be crucified, according to the interpretation of his dream.

We should take into consideration that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was completely absorbed in assessing the two dreams of the prisoners. This indicates that the mind of the judge must focus intently on giving a verdict, and not on the person to be judged. Consequently, Yusuf *peace be upon him* while listening to both parties, did not prematurely conclude who will be found innocent and who will be punished. Accordingly, he *peace be upon him* detached himself emotionally from the prisoners' cases, thus preventing any feelings from negatively affecting his judgment. This is because sentiments can make a decision maker biased. What is even more alarming is that once feelings become involved in a case, they cannot be tempered or ignored. That is why it is absolutely necessary for a judge to be free from any desires or emotional inclinations when he issues his decree.

Allah *the Almighty* teaches us this lesson by revealing the story of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* in the Quran: 'And has the story of the litigants reached you, when they climbed over the wall of the private chamber? When they entered in upon Dawud (David) and he was frightened of them. They said, "Fear not; [we are] two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other. Therefore decide between us with justice, and do not act unjustly, and guide us to the right path. This is my brother; he has ninety-nine ewes and I have a single ewe, but he said, 'Entrust it to me', and he overcame me in the argument''. He [Dawud] said, "Surely he has been unjust to you in demanding your ewe (to add) to his own ewes; most surely most partners act wrongfully towards one another, save those who believe and do good, and very few are they". And [suddenly] Dawud was sure that We had tried him, so he sought the Forgiveness of his Lord, fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned time after time (to Him)' (*Sad*: 21-24).

In these aforementioned verses, the speaker who mentioned the number of ewes that his brother owned was not only trying to depict his brother's transgression but also attempting to earn Dawud's sympathy and pull him to his side. Thereupon, Dawud *peace be upon him* decreed that the one who had taken the ewe was the transgressor. However, he, i.e. Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* then felt that his judgment was not completely sound because he, in his decree, only considered the fact that the one who had many ewes sought to pull the sole ewe from his brother; that is, Dawud did not consider the case in detail. In Prophet Dawud's eyes, the fact that he took the other brother's sole ewe was the only reason for deeming the brother–who had appropriated his brother's right–to be guilty. For this reason, Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* considered this case to be a test that he failed, and that is why he sought Allah's Forgiveness by bowing down and repenting.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf *peace be upon him* by contrast, had passed a wise judgment when he interpreted the dreams because he detached himself completely from the case. Yusuf *peace be upon him* concluded his interpretation of the dreams by stating: 'The matter on which you asked my opinion has been decided [by Allah]' (*Yusuf*: 40). Yusuf's statement implies that there is no space for reassessing or reconsidering whether or not his

interpretation will take place because his interpretation of the dream was in accordance with divinely revealed teachings.

There are many narratives which allude to the hardships which Yusuf *peace be upon him* had to bear, even before being cast into the well and before being imprisoned. For instance, there are accounts of his aunt-the daughter of Ishaq (Isaac) and the eldest of his children-who raised Yusuf *peace be upon him* after his mother's death; the aunt grew more and more attached to him so that she loved him more than anyone she had ever loved.

With time, however, Ya'qub's longing for Yusuf *peace be upon him* became unbearable and he went to the aunt to take Yusuf *peace be upon him* back. However, the woman responded, 'By Allah, I cannot bear to be away from him for an hour and I will not abandon him'.

Therefore, when Ya'qub *peace be upon him* left her house, she fetched an heirloom<sup>(1)</sup> that she had inherited from Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and which was inherited only by the eldest of his family. The aunt then strapped the heirloom under Yusuf's clothes.

During that time, it was common law that if someone was caught guilty of stealing something, he was no longer free but instead became the slave of the owner of the object. Consequently, when Ya'qub *peace be upon him* and his son Yusuf were returning home, the aunt announced that she had lost the heirloom that her father Ishaq *peace be upon him* had given her. She inspected Yusuf *peace be upon him* and found her lost heirloom. The aunt said, 'By Allah, he is my slave!' As we have already mentioned, it was common law that whoever steals something becomes the slave of the owner of the stolen object. In this way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* stayed with his aunt and was separated from his father for some time, and his father was unable to reclaim him *peace be upon him* until the aunt died.

After that, *Yusuf* was tested by being cast into the well. This was followed by the attempts of the governor's wife to seduce him and, despite the governor

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir of the Quran, Ibn Kathir said that the heirloom was Ishaq's belt. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim 2/486. Al-Mantiqa (belt) is anything that straps around the waist. The verb 'intataqa' means 'to strap a belt around the waist'. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, the root 'nataqa'.

being certain of Yusuf's innocence, him being thrown into prison. Yusuf *peace be upon him* was known in prison for his benevolence, trustworthiness, veracity of speech, rightfulness in both worldly and spiritual actions, intense piety, his ability of interpreting dreams and his kindness towards the prisoners.

When these two young men were put in prison with Yusuf *peace be upon him* they grew close to him and began to love him very much. They said, 'By Allah, we love you very much'. As such, he responded, 'May Allah bless both of you. But, verily, all those who have loved me have harmed me in one way or another. My paternal aunt loved me and I was hurt because of her love; my father loved me and I was harmed because of his love; and the governor's wife loved me and I was harmed by her love as well'.

That is to say that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was harmed by the governor's wife's love for him since he was imprisoned with the two young men for no valid reason. The prisoners replied, 'Our love for you is beyond our control'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Afterwards, Yusuf *peace be upon him* is quoted saying to the prisoner who he thought will be released from prison:

وَقَالَ لِلَّذِى ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ نَاجٍ مِّنْهُمَا أَذْكُرْنِ عِندَ رَبِّكَ فَأَنسَنهُ ٱلشَّيْطَنُ ذِحَر رَبِّهِ عَلَبِتَ فِي ٱلسِّجْنِ بِضْعَ سِنِينَ (<sup>1)</sup>

Joseph said to the one he knew would be saved, 'Mention me to your master,' but Satan made him forget to do this, and so Joseph remained in prison for a number of years [42] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 42)

In this verse, Yusuf *peace be upon him* addressed the prisoner who saw himself pressing grapes in a dream. This man was the person to whom Yusuf

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said that the prison supervisor loved Yusuf peace be upon him and this is why he made his cell more spacious. The admirer exclaimed, 'Yusuf, I love you more than anyone I have ever loved' whereupon Yusuf peace be upon him retorted, 'I seek refuge in Allah from your love!' When the former asked why, Yusuf explained, 'My father loved me, and because of this my brothers did with me what they did. Moreover, my master's wife loved me, and you see what has happened to me as a result'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3511.

*peace be upon him* interpreted the dream predicting that he will be released and will thus resume his job as cupbearer for his master.

As for Allah's saying: 'Yusuf said to the one he thought will be saved...' (*Yusuf*: 42), it implies that this man's release from prison was not yet certain. At this point, Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked the prisoner: '...Make mention of me to your master...' (*Yusuf*: 42).

As for the Arabic word '*dhikr*' (make mention), it means to recall something, and it is specifically used with recalling something in the future. *Al-Dhikr* is to recall a matter that you know, stored in the memory, forgot for a while, and then recalled it once again. That is, we understand that man has the ability of storing and recalling certain pieces of information. Such pieces of information do not dwell in man's immediate consciousness at all times because the mind is only capable of focusing on one thing at a time. For this reason, when another topic or idea comes up, the mind pushes aside the first object to the sub-consciousness for the new topic to settle in one's consciousness.

I often give an example of this process referring to the image of ever-expanding and growing concentric circles that result when you throw a rock into still water. Man's consciousness when processing new data can be compared, analogically speaking, to these ripples. To further clarify this point, we say that the new centre of attention has the effect of distancing other mental thoughts from the centre to the sub-consciousness. Eventually, however, one comes across something that is reminiscent of a fact at the fringe of one's consciousness and, consequently, recalls it in details. As a matter of fact, the human memory has two primary functions: it both stores and recalls information.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf *peace be upon him* addressed the man he thought will be freed, saying: '...Make mention of me to your master...' (*Yusuf:* 42). In other words, tell your master what a good and righteous person I am. In the same vein, some Quranic exegetes said that when Yusuf *peace be upon him* uttered these words, the Lord *the Most High* willed for him to remain in prison for a few more years. The reason is that as a Messenger, he should not have deputed another person to tell others of his virtues, even if this man has the power to free Yusuf *peace be upon him* from prison.

As a Messenger of Allah, Yusuf *peace be upon him* receives knowledge through revelation, as he told the two prisoners: 'I can tell you what this means before any meal arrives: this is some of what my Lord has taught me...' (*Yusuf:* 37). Yusuf received his inspiration directly from Allah *the Almighty* and as a result he should have kept relying only on this Divine Source of inspiration. Allah *Glorified is He* continues: 'But Satan made him forget to do this, and so Yusuf remained in prison for a number of years' (*Yusuf:* 42).

The freed man's forgetfulness is a form of a punitive action for Yusuf *peace be upon him*; it may also be viewed as a way of educating him. Interestingly, we find that Satan–who caused the freed man to forget Yusuf's request–himself plays a role in fulfilling Allah's Will regarding His creation.

This explains why Yusuf *peace be upon him* remained in prison for several years. The Arabic word '*bida*'' (some) ranges from three to ten years. However, some scholars exactly pinpointed the numbers of years that he remained in prison, namely seven years.

The Lord Glorified is He then says:

The king said, 'I dreamed about seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones; seven green ears of corn and [seven] others withered. Counsellors, if you can interpret dreams, tell me the meaning of my dream' [43] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 43)

The story of Yusuf *peace be upon him* took place in Egypt. This is deduced from Allah's saying: 'The Egyptian who bought him said to his wife, "Look after him well!"' (*Yusuf:* 43)

At this point, we should take into account that the Quran states that in Egypt–at that time–there was a king and there was also a governor. But we know that the ancient rulers of Egypt were called pharaohs. However, after the Rosetta Stone was discovered and the hieroglyphic language was deciphered, we found out that the rule of the pharaohs disappeared for a while. This temporary disappearance of the pharaohs happened when the

kings of the herdsmen–called Al-Huksus–conquered Egypt. During this period, Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brothers worked for these kings. When the pharaohs once again re-took power in Egypt, they expelled Al-Huksus and killed those who had supported their rule.

Clearly, the Quran mentioning the existence of a king in Egypt during the time of Yusuf *peace be upon him* is an example of one of the miracles of the Quran.

When we read Allah's saying: 'The king said, "I dreamt about seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones..." (*Yusuf:* 43), we learn that the king had a dream in his sleep which he asked to be interpreted. In this verse, the Arabic word 'seman' (fat) means that the cows which the king dreamt about were plump and healthy. As for the Arabic word 'i'jaf' (lean), it indicates that the cows were scrawny and weak, as the laymen say, 'skin and bones'. Here arises a question, which is, 'How could the lean cows eat the fat ones? Is not the opposite more conceivable?'

The king also added: '...seven green ears [of grain] and [seven] others withered....' (*Yusuf:* 43) However, the king did not specify any action related to the ears of grain. The king then consulted the leading figures of his people who often frequent his royal gatherings, saying: 'Counsellors, if you can interpret (*ta'burun*) dreams, tell me the interpretation of my dream' (*Yusuf:* 43).

The Arabic word 'ta'burun' (you can interpret), literally means to cross. Arabs used to say, 'Abartu an-nahr', that is, 'I crossed a river from one shore to the other'. Here, the king was asking them about the meaning embedded or hidden in his dream.

In addition, the Arabic words '*i*'brah' (beneficial experience) and '*al-i*'barah' which means to express an idea that is buried within the mind, are both derived from the Arabic word '*a*'bar' (to cross). Furthermore, the word '*al-a*'barah' is also derived from the verb '*a*'bar' and denotes a tear that one sheds to express a certain emotion, be it happiness or sadness. We should note that all these words revolve around the idea of identifying unknown matter through something already known.

Because of this, we understand that interpreter of dreams crosses from imagination to reality by deciphering the meaning of the images in dreams.

However, members of the king's entourage were incapable of explaining the meaning behind the dream he had seen.

In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions their response to the king, saying:

## قَالُوا أَضْغَنْتُ أَحْلَنِمٍ وَمَا خَنْ بِتَأْوِيلِ ٱلْأَحْلَمِ بِعَالِمِينَ ٢

# They said, 'These are confusing dreams and we are not skilled at dream-interpretation' [44] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 44)

Thus, they proclaimed that the king's dream was confusing and devoid of any meaning. As for the Arabic word '*adghath*' (confusing), it is related to the word '*addaghath*' which refers to a bouquet assortment of different plants. This description indicates that the kings' retinue were unqualified to explain the hidden meaning behind dreams, and that they could not interpret the king's dream.

At this point, we should take into consideration that it is a sound attitude for the king's retinue not to say something they were ignorant of. In fact, it is not shameful that anyone admits his ignorance of something he does not know. By admitting one's ignorance to a questioner, the former encourages the latter to inquire about his question somewhere else. However, if the person who is asked provides any sort of answer, perhaps the questioner's curiosity will be satisfied and he will not search for the correct answer.

In order to encourage the scholars to give correct *fatwas* (religious rulings), scholars have stated that if one says, 'I do not know' (regarding a religious ruling), then this itself is a *fatwa* because by acknowledging his ignorance, the scholar thereby pushes the questioner to search and ask others.

The Lord the Almighty then says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِى خَامِتْهُمَا وَٱدَّكَرَ بَعْدَ أُمَّةٍ أَنَا أَنَبِتُكُم بِتَأْمِيلِهِ فَأَرْسِلُونِ ٢

but the prisoner who had been freed at last remembered [Joseph] and said, 'I shall tell you what this means. Give me leave to go' [45] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 45)

The released prisoner was listening to the king's request and the retinues' response which made him recall what had happened to him in prison, that is,

the dream he had seen and how Yusuf *peace be upon him* had interpreted it. As for Allah's saying: 'But the prisoner who had been freed and remembered after a period of time...' (*Yusuf:* 45), it indicates that he made a concerted mental effort to recall the incident of Yusuf's interpretation of his dream, as a considerable amount of time had passed since he had last seen him.

As for the word '*ummah*', it signifies a period of time, a point which is clear in Allah's saying: 'If We defer their punishment for a determined time (*ummah*), they are sure to say, "What is holding it back?" But on the Day it comes upon them, nothing will divert it from them; what they mocked will be all around them' (*Hud*: 8).

In the same connection, the word 'ummah' can also denote a group of people, or even a man, who embodies all virtuous qualities. The latter meaning of this word is used to describe Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him in Allah's saying: 'Ibrahim (Abraham) was truly an example (ummah): devoutly obedient to Allah and true in faith. He was not an idolater' (an-Nahl: 120). This verse means that every sort of virtue was found in Ibrahim peace be upon him and upon our Prophet Muhammad.

Back to the verse under discussion; after struggling to recall his memories of prison and of the time he had a dream which Yusuf *peace be upon him* interpreted, the cupbearer said the following to the retinue and the king about the latter's dream: 'I shall tell you what this means. Send me (to Yusuf)' (*Yusuf:* 45). In this way, the cupbearer excused himself and sought out the person who could interpret the king's dream.

When the cupbearer said: 'Send me (to Yusuf)' (*Yusuf*: 45), he was indicating that he himself could not interpret dreams, but he knew a person who was capable of doing this.

We should notice that the Quran does not explicitly state the man whom the cupbearer will seek to interpret the dream, as the person referred to is known not only by the cupbearer but also by us-readers who are reading the chapter of *Yusuf*.

The Quran then moves from relating that the cupbearer sought permission to meet Yusuf *peace be upon him* to relate their meeting together. The Quran

relates the cupbearer's conversation with Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the following verse:

يُوسُفُ أَيُّهَا ٱلصِّدِيقُ أَفْتِنَا فِي سَبْعِ بَقَرَتِ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعِ سُنُبُكَنتٍ خُضَرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَنتٍ لَعَلَّى آَرْجِعُ إِلَى ٱلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ (١)

# 'Truthful Joseph! Tell us the meaning of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, seven green ears of corn and [seven] others withered [46] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 46)

Describing Yusuf *peace be upon him* as 'as-siddiq' (man of truth) implies that the cupbearer tested him in many situations and verified his truthfulness. His truthfulness does not only include his speech, all his actions and how he acts in every situation, but the meaning of truthfulness is broader than that in the case of Yusuf *peace be upon him*; it signifies that truthfulness always accompanies his words and actions, i.e. it is something inborn in him. Yusuf's veracity of speech was plainly evident, since what he uttered was subsequently corroborated by other incidents. As for his veracity of actions, it was substantiated when his deeds were in conformity with his words. Such a person merits the description of 'siddiq' (man of truth).

In this vein, we know that man's deeds in life are divided into two categories: words and actions. Words are expressed by the tongue, while actions are conveyed by all of the parts of the body.

Thus, there are two fundamental types of deeds: those that are performed physically, and those that are expressed verbally. Both, however, can be categorised as 'human actions'. Thus, speaking is an action, seeing is an action, hearing is an action and similarly touching with one's hands is an action. However, speaking is an action that is specifically carried out by the tongue, while the other actions are performed by other parts of the human body. It is through speech that the speaker communicates with the listener.

From this, it is clear that human deeds are divided into two categories: verbal and bodily.

Concerning the word 'as-siddiq', it refers to someone who speaks the truth, and what he utters corresponds to reality. In addition, he is sincere in his

actions, that is, he never says something upon which he does not act. That is why The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you say that which you do not do' (*as-Saff*: 3).

Back to the verse in question; we know that the king's cupbearer had experienced two unique incidents with Yusuf peace be upon him. The first experience is when the cupbearer and the baker accompanied him in prison. At this stage, they told him: 'We can see that you are one of those who do the good' (Yusuf: 36). This statement was their justification for seeking Yusuf's interpretation of their two dreams which were as follows: 'One of them said, "I dreamt that I was pressing grapes." The other said, "I dreamt that I was carrying bread on my head and that the birds were eating it." [They said], "Tell us what this means-we can see that you one of those who do the good' (Yusuf: 36). As for the second experience that the cupbearer had with Yusuf peace be upon him it is when the soundness of the latter's dream interpretations were confirmed by the subsequent events. That is why the cupbearer tells Yusuf peace be upon him in the verse in question: 'O Yusuf, O man of truth! Tell us the meaning of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears [of grain] and [seven] others withered. That I may return to the people and that they may know' (Yusuf: 46). In other words, tell us about the meaning of a dream in which seven fat cows were being eaten by seven lean ones, and in which seven green ears of grain appeared next to seven others that had dried up. If you tell me the interpretation of this dream, I can go back and inform the people of the court that they may know its significance.

When the cupbearer said: '...Tell us the meaning of....' (*Yusuf:* 46), he was making it clear that the dream he was enquiring about was not his dream; rather, it was the dream of someone he did not identify. However, the reader knows that it was the king's dream.

Moreover, when the cupbearer says: 'That I may return to the people and that they may know' (*Yusuf*: 46), he is being cautious and circumspect because he is referring to an unknown future event (him returning to the people) whose fulfilment depends on what Allah has destined for him. The inquirer is using a cautious tone so as not to appear a liar since he knows that he does not have the power to return to his people unless Allah *the Almighty* decrees this.

That's why Allah *the Almighty* teaches us this lesson in the following verse: 'Do not say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow", without adding, "Allah willing", and whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say, "May my Lord guide me closer to the right course" (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

By definition, the moment you say 'in shaa' Allah' (if Allah wills), you will avoid lying. As long as you invoke Allah the Almighty in your speech, He will guide you to the correct choice, no matter in what circumstance you may find yourself. By saying 'in shaa' Allah', Allah the Almighty teaches His slaves to protect themselves from sinning by being truthful in their speech and actions. For, no matter how much you plan for something, you are planning using a mind conferred by Allah Glorified is He. Moreover, when you carry out even the smallest of actions, it invariably involves different and numerous factors that you have no power over. That is why you must attribute all matters to the One Who owns all things. At this point, the cupbearer said: 'That I may return to the people' (Yusuf: 46). With this statement, Allah the Almighty teaches us not to be overly confident regarding future events.

Moreover, He *Glorified is He* mention the man's wish: '...and they may know' (*Yusuf:* 46). It is as if the cupbearer knew that he had no way of predicting the people's reaction regarding Yusuf's interpretation of the dream when he returned to them; will they be receptive to the interpretation of the dream, or will they dispute regarding it? Will they accept Yusuf's explanation as being true and thus recognise his supreme spiritual rank, and consequently free him from the torments of prison?

Allah's saying: 'That I may return to the people and that they may know' (*Yusuf*: 46) may make someone ask the question, 'Who ordered the cupbearer to go to Yusuf *peace be upon him*? Was it the king himself, or was it his retinue?'

We contend that the answer lies in the cupbearer's all-embracing statement which included both the king and his court.

Allah says:

# قَالَ تَزْرَعُونَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ دَأَبًا فَمَا حَصَدتُمْ فَذَرُوهُ فِي سُنْبُلِهِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّمَّا نَأ كُلُونَ ٢

Then I can return to the people to inform them.' Joseph said, 'You will sow for seven consecutive years as usual. Store all that you reap, left in the ear, apart from the little you eat [47] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 47)

Thus begins the interpretation of the king's dream. The Arabic word '*ad-da*'*ab*' (as usual) denotes constancy. It is as if Yusuf was asking the people of Egypt to farm industriously and without indolence.

Afterwards, the Lord continues to relate what Yusuf *peace be upon him* said: 'Store all that you reap, leaving it in the ear, apart from the little you eat' (*Yusuf:* 47). In other words, you should eat only a little portion of what you harvested through diligent and hard labour, and store the remainder of the untouched ears of grain.

The fact that Yusuf specifies that the ears should be preserved untouched indicates the miraculous nature of the Quran and of the Omniscience of Allah *the Almighty* Who revealed this Holy Book. Moreover, this sheds light on the great amount of knowledge Allah *the Almighty* conferred on Yusuf *peace be upon him* concerning all aspects of life. This knowledge ranged from economic issues to ways of storing grains, in addition to other fields.

As for the matter of storing grains, modern science has proved that if the ears of grain are stored in their entirety, the grain is protected and safeguarded from grain-eating weevils. Some scholars explained that this verse implies the grain should be stored not only in untouched ears, but also while the stems are attached. I contend, however, that the meaning of this verse is to leave only the ears untouched because the stems are used as animal fodder.

We know that a grain of wheat has two covers, as follows: the protective wrap which is separated from the seed during the process of threshing and the chaff which is then removed through winnowing. In fact, the grain of wheat also has a cover which unwraps and is separated from wheat during grinding. This wrap is called *'ar-radah'* and appears in two different forms: a rough wrap, and a smooth wrap.

Some people separate '*ar-radah*' from the flour, but they neglect or are ignorant of the scientific studies which have proven that eating bread that is made of white flour from which '*ar-radah*' has been removed can cause stomach problems. This covering that wraps around the grain not only protects the grain but also has great nutritional value.

The wealthy class in the Egyptian countryside used to remove *ar-radah* from the flour, and they called this '*ad-daqeeqah al-'alamah'* (pure flour). However, if you were to put this refined flour in your mouth, you will feel that it is unwholesome. On the other hand, you do not have the same feeling when you put whole-wheat flour in your mouth.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* refers to His Bounty on His slaves in His Saying: 'Its husked grain, its fragrant plants' (*ar-Rahman:* 12).

Modern scientists have discovered the value of grinding wheat while preserving the outer covering. They have found evidence to prove that those who consume bread that is made from refined white flour suffer from nutritional imbalance and must eventually eat bread that is made from only the husk of wheat, *'al-khubz as-sin'*, to restore the body's nutritional balance.

In the verse in question, Allah says: 'Store all that you reap, leaving it in the ear, apart from the little you eat' (*Yusuf*: 47). Thus, Yusuf *peace be upon him* told the cupbearer, who asked him to interpret the king's dream, that they must save as much harvest as possible during the upcoming seven fruitful years in preparation for seven years of drought. They should do this while eating the bare minimum during the first seven years of saving: '...apart from the little you eat' (*Yusuf*: 47). Allah continues to state Yusuf's interpretation of the king's dream:

ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعَدِ ذَلِكَ سَبْعُ شِدَادٌ يَأْكُنَ مَا فَدَّمْتُمْ لَمُنَّ إِلَّا فَلِيلًا مِّمَّا تُحْصِنُونَ ٧

## After that will come seven years of hardship which will consume all but a little of what you stored up for them [48] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 48)

In this way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* predicted the seven years of drought that will follow seven years of productive and work-demanding harvest.

When Allah *the Almighty* describes the seven years as entailing '...hardship...' (*Yusuf:* 48), He implies that the years of drought will be taxing on the people and could even lead to famine if no portion of the harvest from the first seven productive years is stored. Furthermore, people are advised to eat only what is necessary during the first seven years so as to ensure their wellbeing during the following years of drought.

As a matter of fact, man depends on breathing, eating and drinking to survive, and food nourishes man and gives him the power to go through life. However, we eat food out of pleasure; most of what we eat is not consumed for energy. Obviously, if man wanted only to satisfy his hunger, he will be satisfied with boiled food, or simple bread and sauce dishes. However, we eat for enjoyment.

Referring to this fact, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...then eat it with enjoyment and good cheer' (*an-Nisa*': 4). In other words, He *the Almighty* tells the believers in Paradise to enjoy the food and not be worried about harmful side effects, nor about having to seek recourse to medicines to digest the food properly. This is what is meant by Allah's saying: '...with enjoyment...' (*an-Nisa*': 4). As for: '...good cheer' (*an-Nisa*': 4), it strictly refers to food that is both energising and beneficial to the body, but is not necessarily very tasty.

Back to the verse in question; the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'after that will come seven years of hardship which will consume all but a little of what you stored up for them' (*Yusuf:* 48). Obviously, the years of hardship did not literally consume what is stored; rather, it was the people who lived at that time. We clearly understand this because every event involves a time and place. Moreover, the action is sometimes attributed either to a time or to a place. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; in the following verse, the action is attributed to a place: 'Ask<sup>(1)</sup> [in] the town where we have been; ask the caravan we travelled with...' (*Yusuf:* 82). Clearly, we understand from this verse that what is intended is questioning the residents of the town that they were in as well as the members of the caravan that were accompanying them. On the other hand, the verse under discussion ascribes the action to a particular period. The people of Egypt will eat all their storage during the

<sup>(1)</sup> *Al-Jurjani* opined that this command is metaphorical in which there is an ellipsis. See *Al-Jurjani, Dalai'l Al-I'Jaz.* 

difficult years, except for a little, because after eating, they must save a certain amount of grains to be used as seeds in the year that follows the seven difficult and dry years.

In Allah's saying: '...what you stored up (*tohsinoon*) for them' (*Yusuf*: 48), the Arabic verb '*tohsinoon*' (you store) is derived from '*hasana*' which denotes abstention. The noun is '*hisn*' which is literally used to refer to a stronghold which prevents the attack of the enemies. One can say, 'They dwelled within a fortification ('*al-hisn*')' to mean that they were protected by an impenetrable stronghold from the assailing enemy.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And all married women (*muhsanat*)...' (*an-Nisa*': 24). The word '*muhsanat*' comes from '*hasana*' and refers to the married women who abstain from committing fornication. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And [remember] she who guarded (*ahsanat*) her chastity...' (*al-Anbiya*': 91). This verse refers to Maryam (Mary), *al-batul* (the virgin)<sup>(1)</sup>, peace be upon her, who guarded her chastity. Therefore, it is clear that '*hisn*' implies abstention.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* continues to state what *Yusuf* told the cupbearer by saying:

ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعَدِ ذَلِكَ عَامٌ فِيهِ يُغَاثُ ٱلنَّاسُ وَفِيهِ يَعْصِرُونَ ٢

## After that will come a year when the people will have abundant rain and will press grapes [49] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 49)

We should take into account that what Yusuf *peace be upon him* said in this verse is not a part of the interpretation of the dream, for the king's dream consisted of seven emaciated cows that were eating seven fat ones, as well as seven green ears of grain and seven dried ones. Therefore, after concluding his interpretation of the dream, Yusuf *peace be upon him* informed the cupbearer of what will logically happen after the years of hardship; namely, the lands will be productive and fruitful once again.

<sup>(1)</sup> The Arabic word 'al-batul' describes a woman who is a virgin and who does not have a husband. It is used to refer to that woman who has detached herself from this world and attached herself to Allah the Almighty. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, root 'batala'.

This phenomenon can be called '*al-ghawth*' (rescue), as one sometimes says, '*Agheth fulan* (help that person)' when he is in need of aid. Interestingly, the Arabic word '*ghaith*' refers to rain which brings a drought to an end. As such, Allah's saying: '...will have abundant rain (*yughath*)...' (*Yusuf*: 49) implies that they will suffer in the seven years of hardship from a lack of indispensable Divine Bounty from which they derive their nourishment and sustenance.

He *the Almighty* concludes this verse by stating: 'After that will come a year when the people will have abundant rain and will press grapes' (*Yusuf:* 49). That is to say that they will press their grains and crops such as sesame, olives, grapes, sugarcane, and dates. Clearly, you only press such grains or fruits when there is enough to feed yourself and your dependants. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* has made it clear to us that they will be showered with bounties more than what was necessary to save them from the drought and what will give rise to a plentiful harvest that they can store.

The past few verses concerning the dream and its interpretation shed light on the dialogue between Yusuf *peace be upon him*—the man of truth—and the king's cupbearer. Furthermore, we have seen how the Quran made a transition from the scene in which the retinue was unable to unveil the hidden meaning of the dream, to the cupbearer asking permission to seek the interpretation of this dream, and finally to the conversation between Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the cupbearer.

Next, the Quran narrates what happened after the king knew about Yusuf's interpretation of his dream. Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلْلِكُ ٱنْنُونِ بِهِ ۗ فَلَمَّا جَاءَ ٱلرَّسُولُ قَالَ ٱرْجِعْ إِلَى رَبِّكَ فَسَّكَلُهُ مَا بَالُ ٱلنِّسُوَةِ ٱلَّتِي قَطَّعْنَ أَيَدِيَهُنَّ إِنَّ رَبِّي بِكَيْدِهِنَّ عَلِيمٌ ٢

The king said, 'Bring him to me,' but when the messenger came to fetch Joseph, he said, 'Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands – my Lord knows all about their treachery' [50] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 50)

This verse implies that the cupbearer returned to the court immediately after having been told the meaning of the dream, which he then conveyed to

the court. Thereafter, the king insisted that the man who interpreted the dream be brought before him, for he was certain that a man of such insight could benefit him greatly. Upon the royal request, the cupbearer returned to bring Yusuf *peace be upon him* out of prison, but was surprised that the latter refused to leave and, instead, said to the one who came to take him to the royal court: 'Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands–my Lord knows all about their treachery' (*Yusuf:* 50).

Thus, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was not responsive to the man who had come to free him from his torments in jail. He made it clear that he will only be responsive if his innocence is proved and recognised by the king, for it is possible that this had been hidden from the king during all this time. For this reason, Yusuf *peace be upon him* wanted the king to investigate the matter of his innocence with regard to what had happened with the women who had cut their hands and had tried to seduce him into debauchery.

We should pay attention to the fact that Yusuf *peace be upon him* made a subtle allusion to his innocence by saying: '...my Lord knows all about their treachery' (*Yusuf:* 50). This statement is implicitly referring to what the women had told Yusuf *peace be upon him* regarding the necessity of responding to the lustful desire of the governor's wife.

We should note that Quranic stories supply us with lessons that serve us in our daily lives. These narratives are not for entertainment; rather, their wisdom is meant to be a guiding light to the decisions that we make in life.

As a matter of fact, a man's complete innocence is very important; that is, all unfounded doubts about someone must be discarded before tackling anything. In the same connection, Yusuf *peace be upon him* demanded that all accusations against him be lifted, such that no one may claim overtly or secretly that he had moral shortcomings. Someone could have said about him, 'Is this not Yusuf who was involved in the affair with the governor's wife and who made him yield to her?'

In the same vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I marvel at the patience of my brother Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his generosity-may Allah pardon him-for someone was sent to him to interpret the dream, and were I (in Yusuf's place) I will have only told him (the interpretation) after being released (from prison). I marvel at his patience and generosity [a second time]–may Allah pardon him–for someone was sent to release him (from prison) and he refused to leave until his innocence was made known. Had I been in his place, I will have hurried through the door. But, he wanted first to be exonerated'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emphasised Yusuf's remarkable patience, self-respect, uprightness and dignity by stating, 'The honorable, the son of the honorable, the son of the honorable, (was) Yusuf, the son of Ya'qub (Jacob), the son of Ishaq (Isaac), the son of Ibrahim (Abraham)'. Prophet Muhammad also said, 'Were an envoy to seek me out after having dwelled in prison for a long period like that of Yusuf *peace be upon him* I will have been responsive'. He *peace and blessings be upon him* then recited the following verse: 'But when the Messenger came to fetch Yusuf, he said, 'Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands....' (*Yusuf:* 50)<sup>(2)</sup>

In these Hadiths, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* illustrated Yusuf's extraordinary patience and uprightness, as well as his fear of having fingers pointing at him after being released from prison, saying, 'That is the one who seduced his master's wife'.

Moreover, this Prophetic Hadith alludes to Yusuf's insistence on proving his innocence, for it is more seemly for him to work towards establishing his innocence after being released from prison. This also means that an honourable person, by nature, does not foolishly take advantage of a situation; rather, he

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir (11640). Al-Haythami said in his book Majma' Az-Zawid (7/40), 'Ibrahim Ibn Yazid Al-Qurashi Al-Makki's narrations are classified as discarded Hadiths.' As-Suyuti also narrated this Hadith in his book Ad-Dar Al-Manthur (4/548), and ascribed it to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abi Hatim, At-Tabarani, Ibn Mardawaih on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas.

<sup>(2)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (2/332) and by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (3116). At-Tirmidhi opined that this Hadith is classified as good. Likewise, this Hadith was narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (2/346). All these narrators related this Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayrah. Al-Hakim said, 'This Hadith is authentic according to the stipulations of Muslim, but neither Al-Bukhari nor Muslim have narrated this Hadith as the (above mentioned) version'. Adh-Dhahbi did not comment on Al-Hakim's statement.

addresses each situation on its own terms and plans accordingly. Clearly, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was sure about his innocence, but he wanted to ascertain that the king will not be the last person to realise this.

In this connection, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he affirmed, 'Give up what is doubtful to you for that which is not doubtful; for truth is peace of mind and falsehood is doubt'.<sup>(1)</sup> Therefore, he saw that avoiding questionable affairs was an integral part of faith in Allah *the Almighty*. On the other side of the coin, some become envious when they see an eminent person, and their envy may cause them to speak badly and spread lies about who they are jealous of, making people unfairly doubt the eminent person's integrity. Out of caution, you must therefore protect yourself by avoiding all circumstances that may raise suspicion; and when you come across anything doubtful or any form of doubt, you must shun it completely.

We have a lofty example in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is narrated that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was observing '*i*'tikaf' during the last ten days of *Ramadan* when his wife Safiyah Bint Huyayy visited him one night and talked with him for some time. After that, she stood up to return to her room, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accompanied her until she reached the door of the Mosque which faced his wife Umm Salama's dwelling. At that moment, two members of the *Ansar* (Supporters) who were passing stopped to greet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then they departed. As they were leaving, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'Do not run away. She is (my wife) Safiyyah Bint Huyayy'. Both of them said, 'Glory be to Allah (how could we think something evil of the Prophet)'. Whereupon he explained, 'Satan circulates in man's body just like blood circulates in [his] body, and I was afraid lest it should instil any evil [thought] in your minds'.<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith was narrated by Abu Dawud At-Tayalisi in his Musnad (1178), Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (1/200) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (2518) on the authority of Al-Hassan ibn 'Ali. At-Tirmidhi graded this Hadith as a good, authentic Hadith.

<sup>(2)</sup> The soundness of this Hadith is agreed upon by both Al-Bukhari and Muslim, who narrated it on the authority of Safiyyah Bint Huyayy. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6219; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.2175.

In the story we are discussing, the king summoned the women who had cut their hands and who had attempted to make Yusuf *peace be upon him* yield to their enticements. This is what the Lord *the Most High* says in the following verse:

قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكُنَّ إِذْ رَوَدِتَّنَّ يُوسُفَ عَن نَّفْسِهِ - قُلُرَ حَسَ لِلَهِ مَا عَلِمْنَا عَلَيْهِ مِن سُوَءٍ قَالَتِ ٱمْرَأَتُ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْنَنَ حَصْحَصَ ٱلْحَقُّ أَنَا رَوَدَتُهُ عَن نَّفْسِهِ - وَإِنَّهُ لِمِنَ ٱلصَّدِقِينَ ٢

# The king asked the women, 'What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?' They said, 'God forbid! We know nothing bad of him!' and the governor's wife said, 'Now the truth is out: it was I who tried to seduce him – he is an honest man' [51] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 51)

We know that the first attempt to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* was carried out by the governor's wife, but that the former remained chaste. After that the wife invited the women to her banquet, and the female guests cut their hands when they saw Yusuf's dazzling beauty. We also know for certain that the women almost overwhelmed him with sexual innuendos about which Yusuf said: '...If You do not protect me from their treachery, I shall yield to them and do wrong' (*Yusuf*: 33).

Next, the king called for the women and asked, 'What was this (past) concern of yours (*khatbukun*) when you tried to seduce Yusuf?' (*Yusuf:* 51) As for the Arabic word '*al-khatb*' from which '*khatbukun*' (this concern of yours) is derived, it denotes a great event or an unusual circumstance that is a subject of conversation among the people; it is not something that simply took place between two people. On the contrary, it is an event that shakes the city at the time it happens.

What Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to a group of angels is a case in point. Allah states: 'He [Ibrahim] said, "What, then, is your concern (*khatbukun*), O messengers?!" They said, "Surely we are sent to a guilty people" (*adh-Dhariyat:* 31-32). In other words, the angels reassured Ibrahim *peace be upon him* of their mission; they were sent to punish the guilty community.

Likewise, upon returning to his people and finding that As-Samiri had fashioned a calf out of the gold taken from the people of Pharaoh, Allah states

that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asked As-Samiri: 'He said, "What, then, was the reason [that made] you do this (*khatbuka*), O Samiri?"" (*Ta Ha:* 95)

Back to the story of Yusuf peace be upon him in the verse under discussion; the king asked: 'What was this (past) concern of yours when you tried to seduce Yusuf?' (Yusuf: 51) This statement proves that the story was narrated to the king in detail, that he was greatly shocked, and that he deemed it to be a great event. The king's reaction also sheds light on the universality of ethical principles which always remain the same and do not alter with time or place. The verse states that the women replied: 'Allah forbid! We know nothing bad of him!' (Yusuf: 51) Here, we notice that they failed to mention their own attempts at seducing Yusuf peace be upon him because the central point was to establish the latter's innocence before the king. As for their proclamation: 'Allah forbid!' (Yusuf: 51), it is a way of affirming that Yusuf peace be upon him is too righteous to perform any misbehaviour, as Allah the Almighty had protected him from sinning. At that moment, the governor's wife interjects: "...and the governor's wife said, "Now the truth is out..." (Yusuf: 51). The admittance of the governor's wife implies that it was no longer possible to hide her culpability, and that the hidden truth of the matter had finally been revealed. Truth had triumphed over falsehood, and it was necessary for her to confess what had truly taken place: '... it was I who tried to seduce him-he is surely [one] of those who are truthful' (Yusuf: 51). The king's wife continues her confession in the following verse saying:

# ذَلِكَ لِيَعْلَمُ أَنِي لَمُ أَخُنَهُ بِٱلْغَيْبِ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِى كَيْدَ ٱلْخَابِنِينَ ٢

## [Joseph said, 'This was] for my master to know that I did not betray him behind his back: God does not guide the mischief of the treacherous [52] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 52)

This wife's statement was intended to announce Yusuf's innocence, and to communicate that she did not take advantage of his being away from them in prison to seek revenge on him for having refused her seduction. Moreover, she implies that she did not conspire, plot or even connive against him while he was locked up in prison. This proves that wicked elements in the human soul can be triggered by a certain object, but when the possible interest disappears, the soul regains its natural agreeable character. In fact, the initial act of wrongdoing can sometimes be positively utilised by the transgressor as a means that encourages him to act virtuously afterwards in areas where he has no weak points. By doing so, the good act covers the misdeed, as the Lord *the Most High* states: 'Surely, good deeds take away evil deeds. That is a reminder for the mindful' (*Hud*: 114).

In fact, if a person exposes a transgressor's misdeed, the exposer deprives society of the latter's potential good deeds. It is for this reason that I often advise others to cover the misdeeds of wrongdoers, for this very sin may inspire the wrongdoer to perform good deeds that will wipe out his sins. In the same connection, it has been said, 'If you examine human history, you will notice that even men of virtuous characters and principles have foibles and shortcomings. However, these great figures try to compensate for their shortcomings by performing good deeds that erase their sins. That is because they keep remembering their weaknesses, and this pushes them to do even more good'.

Having admitted her guilt, the governor's wife said: 'Allah does not guide the mischief of the treacherous' (*Yusuf:* 52). In other words, she acknowledged that Allah *Glorified is He* thwarts the conniving traitors and prevents them from reaching their aims.

The governor's wife continues, as stated in the Quran:

وَمَا أَبَرِيُّ فَقُسِىَ<sup>5</sup> إِنَّ ٱلنَّقْسَ لَأَمَّارَةُ بِٱلسُّوَءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي<sup>5</sup> إِنَّ رَبِّي عَفُوُرٌ زَحِيمٌ <sup>(1)</sup> I do not pretend to be blameless, for man's very soul incites him to evil unless my Lord shows mercy: He is most forgiving, most merciful [53] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 53)

With this statement, the governor's wife concluded her discourse. Here, she explained why she attended the royal gathering: she did not attend to absolve herself, since she said: 'I do not pretend to be blameless, for man's very soul incites him to evil...' (*Yusuf:* 53)

Affirming the fact that the human soul, in general, incites man to do evil leads us to conclude that Yusuf *peace be upon him* as a human being, has desires.

A number of scholars<sup>(1)</sup> opined that the verse under discussion relates the speech of Yusuf *peace be upon him* in response to the governor's wife's confession: '...it was I who tried to seduce him-he surely is [one] of the truthful. This [I say] so that he may know I did not betray him behind his back: Allah does not guide the mischief of the treacherous' (*Yusuf:* 51-52).

According to this opinion, it is suitable for Yusuf's response to be: 'I do not pretend to be blameless, for man's very soul incites him to evil except when my Lord showers His Mercy [protecting a person from sinning]...' (*Yusuf:* 53). Upon reading the text in this context, one may interpret Yusuf's mention of the evil-inciting soul as a warning against being proud of one's own faith. Being a divinely ordained Messenger, he knows that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who saved him from the women's plots.

In the same connection, Yusuf's Prophethood was a form of Divine Mercy towards him, for the divinely conferred infallibility and Way of Guidance protected him from deviation into which any normal human being may fall.

Furthermore, it is out of Mercy that Allah *the Almighty* affirms that the inner self incites man to evil. This pithy statement amply clarifies the nature of the human soul; the desire does not simply disappear after inciting man to do one evil deed. On the contrary, you should be mindful, man, of the nature of the inner self! It continually urges man to do evil deeds.

In this connection, we know that all the Divine Obligations are either orders or prohibitions, and man may very well view these orders as a heavy burden. We also know that Divine Prohibitions may prevent man from actions that appear to be desirable; they appear to satisfy the person and please certain instincts within man.

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Paradise is surrounded by hardships, and Hellfire is surrounded by

<sup>(1)</sup> This opinion is held by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari and Ibn Abu Hatim. The most common interpretation which most appropriately fits the context of the story and its meanings is that the speaker in the verse was the governor's wife. We maintain this because the words of the verse were uttered in an unbroken manner in front of the king while Yusuf peace be upon him was not present, rather he was brought before the king only after the meeting had taken place. Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/581.

temptations'.<sup>(1)</sup> In this Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refers to the fact that sinful acts may be alluring, but a person with a sound mind has enough self-control to assess the long-term repercussions of his acts. Such a person only considers the immediate pleasures that result from his action after having contemplated its final outcome. In fact, some of what the person derives immediate short-lived pleasure from might be a cause of long-term difficulties.

Hence, we say that the one who wrongs himself by following his lower desires is neither aware of the immense reward of obeying Allah *the Almighty* nor of the punishments of disobeying Him. Had this person considered the reward of obedience and the punishment that results from disobedience, he will surely be careful not to sin.

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The one who commits illegal sexual intercourse is not a believer at the time of committing illegal sexual intercourse, a thief is not a believer at the time of committing theft, and a drinker of alcohol is not a believer at the time of drinking'.<sup>(2)</sup> As such, at the moment a person commits a sin, he hides his faith and ignores the fact that his life may come to an end before he can repent or explate for his wrongdoing. Man errs when he thinks about how long he will live, for no one knows when his appointed time will come, nor does anyone know how long it will be until Allah punishes him for his wrongdoings on the Judgement Day.

Each one of us should remember the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* '(A person's) death is (his) Day of Judgment, and he who dies faces his own Day of Judgment'.<sup>(3)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Anas Ibn Malik. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 3/153, 254; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2822; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunan, Hadith no. 2559.

<sup>(2)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim in the book of Iman, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2475; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 57.

<sup>(3)</sup> In his book, Al-'Ajluni mentioned this Hadith on the authority of Anas ibn Malik. The Hadith continues in the following manner: 'Mention death frequently, for if you remember it half-heartedly, [Allah the Almighty] will make it difficult for you, and if you remember it seriously [Allah the Almighty] will render it easy for you'. See Al-'Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa', Hadith no. 2618.

We find a fine example in 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, the third Caliph after Prophet Muhammad, who used to stand in front of a grave and weep until his beard became wet with tears. Someone asked him the reason behind this, 'Why do you not weep when you mention Paradise and the Hellfire, but you weep when you stand in front of a grave?' He responded, 'I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* say, "Indeed, the grave is the first stage among the stages of the Hereafter. So, if one is saved from it, then what comes after it is easier than it. And if one is not saved from it, then what comes after it is worse than it".'<sup>(1)</sup> To sum up, let no one consider his appointed time of death is far-off.

The verse in question continues: '...except when my Lord showers His Mercy [protecting a person from sinning]: He is All Forgiving, Most Merciful' (*Yusuf:* 53).

We know that there are certain medications which cure, and that there are certain things which strengthen man's resistance to disease and fortify his immune system. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* is All Forgiving, and He overlooks one's sins and erases them. Moreover, He is Most Merciful: He offers man the ability to resist the spiritual diseases for man not to be afflicted by any ailments. In other words, He gives man power to resist evil so he does not fall into sin.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We send down the Quran as a healing and a mercy to those who believe' (*Al-Isra*': 82). The very act of hearing the Quran cures you from psychological ailments and fortifies your resistance to spiritual illnesses. In fact, listening to the Quran releases potential therapeutic energies in the depths of your being.

Furthermore, the Quran is a mercy for you when you embrace it as your Way of Guidance and apply it to your life. It makes you resistant to disease: it is both a medical treatment and a preventive care at the same time.

Allah Glorified is He says after that:

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith was narrated by Imam Ahmad, Ibn Majah and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. At-Tirmidhi graded it as Hasan, Gharib (good but with only one narrator in one of its levels). See Ahmad, Musnad, 1/63; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no.4267; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunan, Hadith no. 2308.

# وَقَالَ ٱلْمَلِكُ ٱنْنُونِي بِهِ ٢ أَسْتَخْلِصْهُ لِنَفْسِي فَلَمَّا كَلَّمَهُ وَقَالَ إِنَّكَ ٱلْيَوْمَ لَدَيْنَا مَكِينُ أَمِينُ ٢

The king said, 'Bring him to me: I will have him serve me personally,' and then, once he had spoken with him, 'From now on you will have our trust and favour' [54] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 54)

We notice that the king said: 'Bring him to me...' (*Yusuf*: 54) twice:<sup>(1)</sup> the first time was when he heard the interpretation of the dream, but Yusuf *peace be upon him* refused to leave the prison prior to having his innocence proven. Another possible interpretation of this part of the story is that he left prison and attended the meeting with the women, including the governor's wife.

The king saw that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was endowed with high moral qualities and vast knowledge. After the first meeting between them, the king had a chance to think over the man's qualities. Indeed, his first encounter with Yusuf *peace be upon him* assured the king and gave him peace of mind. Subsequently, *Yusuf peace be upon him* found a place in the king's heart.

The second time is when the king wanted to draw Yusuf *peace be upon him* close to him and make him a royal advisor. Allah *the Almighty* conveys this idea in the verse under discussion: '...Bring him to me: I will draw him close to me'. Then, once he had spoken with him, he said, 'From now on you dwell with us, having a secure and honourable position and our trust' (*Yusuf:* 54).

This attachment or bond only occurred after the king had spoken with Yusuf *peace be upon him* and after the latter had created a good impression on him. After speaking with him, the king was sure that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had protected himself from the most irresistible instinct: sexual attraction.

Moreover, the king became certain that Yusuf *peace be upon him* accepted his fate in prison in which he dwelled for such a long period of time. The king

<sup>(1)</sup> The first time occurs in the following verse: 'The king said, "Bring him to me", but when the messenger came to fetch *Yusuf*, he said, "Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands—my Lord knows all about their treachery" (*Yusuf*: 50); and the second time is when the Lord *the Most High* says here: 'The king said, "Bring him to me: I will draw him close to me". Then, once he had spoken with him, he said, "From now on you will dwell with us, having a secure and honourable position and our trust" (*Yusuf*: 54).

also realised through the interpretation of the dream that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was a man of great learning and insight into the nature of things. He interpreted the dream despite the fact that he was imprisoned, and he only left prison to prove his innocence or after his innocence was confirmed.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, Yusuf *peace be upon him* became one of the king's close trustees. The king declared his trust in him by proclaiming: '...From now on you will dwell with us, having a secure and honourable position (*makeen*) and our trust' (*Yusuf:* 54). This statement puts an end to all possible plots and schemes against Yusuf *peace be upon him* for a place that is '*al-makeen*' (a secure and honourable position) is a place where no harm can reach a person because of his high position.

That is why the Lord *the Almighty* describes Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who descended with the Divine Revelation, by saying: 'This is the speech of a noble messenger, who possesses great strength and holds a secure and honourable position with the Lord of the Throne' (*at-Takwir:* 19-20).

Consequently, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was one of the ruler's confidants. In fact, it was he who was executing orders, and he had a bond with the subjects. Yusuf was endowed with power by the king, and he was also trustworthy with his people.

Problems in our contemporary societies occur when the ruler prefers the people he trusts over the experienced, honest people. That is how the delicate balance of justice is upset. The astute ruler should elect those endowed with both qualities: those who are worthy of the ruler's trust and who are, at the same time, honest with the people; and in this way, the balance of life is restored according to the Divine Way of Guidance.

When Yusuf *peace be upon him* heard the king make the declaration: '...From now on you will dwell with us, having a secure and honourable position and our trust' (*Yusuf*: 54), he decided to ask the king for something related to the interpretation of the dream: 'You will diligently sow for seven consecutive years as usual. Store all that you reap, leaving it in the ear, apart from the little you eat. After that will come seven years of hardship which will consume all but a little of what you stored up for them, After that will come a year when

the people will have abundant rain and will press grapes' (*Yusuf*: 47-49). This is an economic agenda that demands planning, implementation, supervision, sound management, determination, and knowledge. Moreover, Yusuf's demand implied that the future will surely unfold in accordance with his interpretation of the dream. The verse reads:

قَالَ ٱجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَآبِنِ ٱلْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظُ عَلِيكُ ٢

# Joseph said, 'Put me in charge of the nation's storehouses: I shall manage them prudently and care- fully' [55] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 55)

This statement confirms Yusuf's certainty that the impending years will require sound governance. There is no doubt that the upcoming years will be fruitful; however, the harvest of these years must not be squandered as they will provide the means to survive the approaching difficult years. The task (of ensuring that the grain is stored during the first seven years) demands both honesty and knowledge.

Clearly, Yusuf *peace be upon him* proved himself to be both honest and knowledgeable. Here arises a good question, which is, 'Is not Yusuf's demand an indirect way of asking for power?' But the rule<sup>(1)</sup> states that: he who asks for power should not be granted a position of authority'. We answer that Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not ask for power, rather, he asked to reform (the agricultural planning of) Egypt in order to preach his Call and fulfil his Message. He was put in a position of authority and will therefore be obeyed, not being subservient nor forced to yield to the commands of others because he was completely confident and certain in his beliefs.

Certain dire situations arise in which the consequences of an inexperienced person taking power and failing are unbearable. In such situations, the person who is confident in his ability to resolve a problem must bring himself to the fore.

<sup>(1)</sup> A proof of this principle is in the Hadith on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari who narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By Allah, we do not appoint someone to this post (public office of authority) who seeks it or someone who contends for it'. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.1733.

Let us offer an example to clarify this point; assume that a ship full of people is suddenly assailed by a storm. Imagine that the captain does not know what to do, and that someone claims he is able to get all out of the storm and lead them to safety. Clearly, the captain should let him take command of the ship if he has proof that the man is indeed competent. After the complicated situation is solved, the captain must thank the man who saved them and take command of his ship once again.

Clearly, one has the right to ask for power if such situations arise. If one sees that another inexperienced person is unable to solve a problem, one should offer to remedy the situation. In such a case, it is in fact a collective obligation to intervene for the sake of society at large. In this case, the person who asked for authority possesses two courageous traits:

Firstly: he asked for authority because he is confident in his ability to accomplish the task. Secondly: he prevented the person who does not have enough experience from assuming a position for which he had no administrative skills, as this will result in matters being governed in ignorance. That is, when the trustworthy, experienced people replace those who is incompetent, truth prevails and ignorance has no control over anything.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked the king: 'Put me in charge of the nation's storehouses: I shall manage them prudently and carefully' (*Yusuf:* 55). The provisions in the storehouses will enable the ruler (Yusuf) to manage the economy. Some said he asked the king to place him in charge of the storehouses because he wanted to put economic policies into practice. These policies will make it possible for them (Egyptians) to subsist during the upcoming seven years of drought. Such an undertaking requires wisdom, diligence, and knowledge.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* charged people gold or silver for their food provisions. Those who did not own gold or silver bartered food with precious rocks or livestock. The poor who did not have such valuables sold their children into slavery. The head of the impoverished family used to say, 'Take my child as a slave, and in return give me enough food to feed the rest of my family'.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* excelled in the management of affairs during the period of drought. Each person had to not eat excessively, thereby filling

'only one intestine rather than seven'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in the following Hadith, 'the believer fills one intestine (is satisfied with a little food), and the disbeliever eats to fill seven (eats much)'.<sup>(1)</sup>

During these years of hardship, administering provisions demanded meticulous planning and the avoidance of any wasteful spending. Each item was worth a particular value, and each person collected whatever was within his means. After the prolonged drought was replaced by abundant rains, Yusuf *peace be upon him* returned all things to their rightful owners. When Yusuf was asked, 'Why did you seize things from the people if you were going to return them anyway?' He replied, '(I did this) for each person to take only the minimum needed to survive through the years of drought'.

We witness this sort of phenomenon among those who feed their cattle with the subsidised bread. When the price of bread rises, each person purchases within his means and ascertains that none of the loaves goes to waste.

The economic power of Egypt during these times of drought was limited; therefore each person had to work hard for his or her livelihood.

This sort of struggle can be still witnessed in our lives: when someone does not have the means to buy meat, he might stop yearning for it. In fact, some may put on a show by conceitedly proclaiming, 'My stomach no longer tolerates meat!'

Moreover, a poor person might assert that he loves smaller sized fish because they are tasty, unlike the foul-smelling flesh of larger fish. This same person might claim to love fresh radish because it is delicious.

Many years ago, we used to study far away from our homes. In our study dormitories, we sometimes had only one piece of falafel which we used to split into parts to be enough for the last morsel of bread we ate. But if we had five pieces of falafel, each person ate half a falafel per bite. Thus, it is clear that each man acts according to his means and resources. A poet once said:

The soul desires things when it is tempted

but it is content when given little.

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in the book of drinks on the authority of Jabir and Abdullah ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with them. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2060.

Allah the Almighty then says:

وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ يَتَبَوَّأُ مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَأَهُ نْصِيبُ بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَن نَشَاء كُولا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ٢

In this way We settled Joseph in that land to live wherever he wished: We grant Our mercy to whoever We will and do not fail to reward those who do good [56] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 56)

Thus Allah *the Almighty* established Yusuf's authority in the land of Egypt and the latter administered the affairs of Egypt in a diligent and just manner. When the time of drought came, it did not only afflict Egypt but also the surrounding regions. This is proven by the fact that some people came to Egypt from other regions asking for provisions. Yusuf's brothers, who travelled from Ash-Sham (northern area of the Arabian Peninsula) asking for food not only for themselves but also for their families who were waiting for them, is a case in point. This demonstrates that the area inflicted with drought was very vast.

We can understand from the Lord's saying: 'In this way we settled Yusuf in that land to live wherever he wished...' (*Yusuf:* 56) that although Yusuf *peace be upon him* owned houses in many places, no one should think of him as an extravagant squanderer of public funds; but one should remember that people in authority take good care of the region where the ruler's house is located.

This fact can be seen in the modern world: when a head of state visits a certain part of his country, local authorities repave the streets, mend the facilities and sometimes beautify the surroundings by planting flowers. As a matter of fact, if local authorities labour so intensively when a head of state is on a visit, how well maintained do you think a place will be if the ruler had a mansion therein? There is no doubt that local authorities will take good care of maintaining the public facilities in such a region.

Hence, the saying of Allah: 'In this way We settled Yusuf in that land to live wherever he wished...' (*Yusuf*: 56) implies that the public facilities of the entire country where Yusuf *peace be upon him* lived were well maintained. For this

reason, no one should misinterpret this verse to mean that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was living luxuriously and squandering extravagantly. Rather, we should understand that these expenditures benefitted those around him, whether intentionally or coincidentally.

That is to say that Yusuf's full mastery over Egypt was not only a form of mercy for him, but for the people of Egypt as well. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in the same verse: 'We grant our mercy to whoever We will and do not fail to reward those who do good' (*Yusuf:* 56).

In this way, whoever did not have access to potable water will enjoy a clean source of water, and whoever had difficulty finding a comfortable environment in which to live will find that his district will become comfortable, being fully endowed with the facilities of that time. This is because the house of Yusuf *peace be upon him*—who had been granted complete authority over Egypt—was next to his home. Consequently, the needs of that neighbour will be met thanks to the administrative structure and the authorities which cared for all the people living therein. Hence, granting Yusuf *peace be upon him* mastery over the land of Egypt was a form of Mercy from the Lord not only towards Yusuf, but also towards those around him.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes this noble verse by asserting: '...and do not fail to reward those who do good' (*Yusuf*: 56). The Arabic word '*al-mushin*' (a doer of good) refers to a person whose performance exceeds what is demanded of him.

In this verse, it is clearly noted that the act of '*ihsan*' (doing good) is attributed to Yusuf *peace be upon him*; this is because having built houses in different parts of Egypt, he treated the people around his houses well by ensuring high standards of public facilities and other services.

As a matter of fact the Lord *the Most High* fully and copiously rewards the people of *ihsan*, just as He rewarded Yusuf *peace be upon him* by establishing his authority in the land of Egypt and making his subordinates love him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلِأَجَرُ ٱلْأَخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لَّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَكَانُوا مَنَّقُونَ ٢

## The reward of the Hereafter is best for those who believe and are mindful of God [57] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 57)

Here, the Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that His Reward to '*al-muhsineen*' (the people who do good) is not confined to this world. Rather, He confers a better and everlasting reward on them in the Hereafter.

As for the Arabic word '*khayr*' (the best), it can have two distinct connotations: firstly, it may denote that one thing is better than another thing, yet both of them possess the quality of goodness. This is the intended meaning in the verse under discussion. A case in point is Prophet Muhammad's Hadith in which he said, 'A strong believer is better (*khayr*) and dearer to Allah than a weak one, and both are good. Adhere to that which is beneficial for you. Keep asking Allah for help and do not refrain from it. If you are afflicted in any way, do not say, "If I had taken this or that step, it will have resulted in such and such", but only say, "Allah has determined this and did as He willed". The word 'if' opens the gates of satanic thoughts'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Secondly, this word, i.e. '*khayr*' (the best) can be used as the antithesis of evil. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So he who has done an atom's weight of good (*khayran*) shall see it. And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it' (*az-Zalzala*: 7-8).

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* wants to indicate that there has to be a balance in this life. However, this balance is not achieved if you were to say to man in general that he will be rewarded for his good deeds in the Hereafter, for at that time only the true believer will be rewarded for his good deeds. The disbeliever, on the other hand, transgresses the rights of others, sheds blood, steals, and/or causes corruption on earth as he does not believe in the Hereafter.

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, Muslim and ibn Majah on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/366, 370; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.2664; and ibn Majah, Sunan, Hadith no.79.

This is precisely the reason why Allah *the Almighty* has decreed that rewards take two forms, as follows: a reward in this world as a recompense for any good deeds the doers of good may have performed, be they believers or disbelievers; and a reward in the Hereafter that the Lord *the Most High* prepares for those who believe in Him *Glorified is He*. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: 'The reward of the Hereafter is the best for those who believe and are mindful of Allah' (*Yusuf:* 57). This verse clarifies that the reward of the life to come is far better than the reward of this worldly life because the reward of the former is eternal, whereas the reward of the latter is temporal. In fact, man will lose the reward of this worldly life either when it expires or when death overtakes him.

The different natures of both rewards are of particular importance because man's time in this world is confined to the length of his life span, whereas the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that life in the Hereafter shall be eternal.

Allah the Almighty then speaks of Yusuf's brothers, saying:

# وَجَاءَ إِخْوَةُ يُوسُفَ فَدَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَعَرْفَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُ مُنكِرُونَ ٢

## Joseph's brothers came and presented themselves before him. He recognized them – though they did not recognize him [58] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 58)

This verse tells us clearly that Yusuf *peace be upon him* recognised his brother, whereas they did not recognise him. This is understandable because they threw him into the well when he was still a young boy. After the travellers found him, the journey of life took its course and he was sold to the governor of Egypt. Then, Yusuf experienced the events that we have examined, including the governor's wife's trying to seduce him and his seven years in prison. During these long years, Yusuf *peace be upon him* became physically mature and strikingly beautiful.

Clearly, such events leave their mark on a man's physical features. Moreover, Yusuf's brothers came after Yusuf had assumed a very high position within the government, and this prestige obliged him to be royally arrayed and regally posed.

On the other hand, Yusuf *peace be upon him* recognised his brothers because he was separated from them when they were young adults and when the effects of time had already left an impression on their physical features. We know that, with the passing of time, a person's physical traits become more clearly delineated. However, the physical changes that happen to an adult are much less than the changes that happen to a child when he grows.

The brothers were compelled to seek Yusuf's help because of the drought which not only afflicted Egypt, but also the surrounding areas. Yusuf's fame became widespread because he had saved food provisions for the time of drought. That is why his brothers were sent by their father to ask for provisions and food.

The brothers did not imagine for a split-second that the person in front of them was their brother Yusuf whom they had cast into the well.

Allah the Almighty subsequently says:

وَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُم بِجَهَازِهِمْ قَالَ ٱنْنُونِ بِأَخِ لَكُم مِّنْ أَبِيكُمْ أَلَا تَرَوْنَ أَنِي أُوفِ ٱلْكَيْلَ وَأَنَا خَيْرُ ٱلْمُنزِلِينَ ٢

## And once he had given them their provisions, he said, 'Bring me the brother [you left with] your father! Have you not seen me giving generous measure and being the best of hosts? [59] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 59)

There is no doubt that they spoke to him of their condition, of their father and brother, Benyamin (Benjamin), nor is it not clear that he ordered for them to be fully furnished with provisions after they asked for them.<sup>(1)</sup> In this verse, the Arabic word '*jihaz*' refers to the provisions for which they, i.e. Yusuf's brothers, had left their country and come to him in Egypt.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir, ibn Kathir mentioned that As-Suddi and others said that when Yusuf peace be upon him addressed his brothers, he asked them, 'Why have you come to my country?' They replied, 'Governor, we are here (to ask) for provisions'. He then asked, 'Are you spies?' Having said, 'By Allah, we are not (spies)!' Yusuf responded, 'So, where have you come from?' The brothers replied, 'From the land of Kan'an, and our father is Ya'qub, the Prophet of Allah'. Yusuf then asked, 'Does he have other children?' 'Yes, we used to be twelve brothers, but our youngest brother, who was the dearest to our father, perished in the wilderness. However, our half-brother is still alive, and our father kept him to help him forget his grief about his lost son', they replied. So Yusuf peace be upon him ordered them to be housed and served generously. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/483.

Having provided them with provisions, Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked them to bring their brother, Benyamin, with them the next time. He said to them: 'Have you not seen me giving a generous measure and being the best of hosts?'<sup>(1)</sup> (*Yusuf:* 59) This statement is a reminder that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was generous and gave them a generous measure. Apparently, the brothers asked him for more provisions under the pretext that they had a younger brother whom they had left with their elderly father. Upon hearing this, Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked them to bring their brother in return for an extra measure of provisions. Being a just ruler, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not like to give out provisions without clear proof of need. Each of the brothers came to Egypt on camels, loaded with goods that they intended to give in exchange for food. Yusuf *peace be upon him* made it clear that if they brought Benyamin with them the next time, they will be granted an extra load of food provisions.

The brothers related Yusuf's condition to their father when they asked him to let Benyamin go on the journey with them. The following verse makes mention of their plea; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We shall be entitled to another camel-load of grain...' (*Yusuf:* 65).

As for the statement: '... I have been the best of hosts' (*Yusuf*: 59), it means that Yusuf *peace be upon him* warmly welcomed his guests and treated them generously. His brothers were cognisant of this when they were treated kindly and were housed in luxurious guest quarters. In these guestrooms, anything that a person could possibly need was at their disposal.

The Arabic word for host which is used in this verse is '*munzil*'; it is derived from the verb '*nazala*', that is, 'to descend'. This appears to be antithetical to the idea of exalting or honouring a guest. In reality, however, a '*munzil*' is someone who furnishes a guesthouse with all the necessary provisions. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* describes Paradise as being '*nuzul*' in the following verse: 'A hospitable gift (*nuzulan*) from the Forgiving, the Merciful' (*Fussilat:* 32). Therefore, due to His Absolute Clemency and Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* has fashioned Paradise to be beyond man's imagination. As long as Allah *the Almighty* 

<sup>(1)</sup> The Arabic word 'an-nuzul' implies dwelling in a place. The words 'an-nuzul' and 'nuzul' also refer to what is served to the guests. See ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, the root 'nazala'.

Himself is the One Who prepares paradise, then it is for certain beyond all human imaginations.

In the same vein, I once told my brothers and friends who were amazed by the luxury of a grand hotel in San Francisco, 'When a person sees something that is sumptuous, lavish or beautiful that someone else owns, he reacts in two possible ways which reflect the state of his soul; he either reacts enviously and therefore with a degree of hatred and odium, or, if he is a believer, he feels happy and says, "This worldly blessing that I behold with my eyes makes me filled with a longing for Paradise because I am looking at what was created by one man for another. And if this was the creation of man, how will the Lord's Creation of paradise be?" After all, it is He Who created the universe and all men therein!'

I often say that every time I meet someone who has been gifted with a bounty, my belief in Allah *the Almighty* grows more steadfast. Things which are fashioned by one person for another cannot be compared to those that the Creator of mankind has fashioned for the believers.

As for the person who regards someone's blessing enviously, he is depriving himself of the happiness that this blessing brings to others, himself included. This is because the Lord's Bounty is propitious not only for its bearer but also for the person who delights in the blessings of others. If you delight in the fortunes of others, be sure that a blessing will come to you. However, if you resent the fortunes of others, then blessings will stay away from you.

For this reason, you must delight in a blessing that someone else has been granted, in order for blessings to come to you. If you act accordingly, you will not burden yourself trying to obtain or maintain blessings because they will come to you through Divine Grace.

Back to the verse in question; when Yusuf said: 'I have been the best of hosts' (*Yusuf*: 59), he asserts how justly he treated them; a point which is proven by the fact that he has given them full measure and treated them generously. Furthermore, there is no doubt that when they bring their younger brother, they will be met with the same warm welcome.

Afterwards, The Quran mentions Yusuf's discourse with his brothers:

فَإِن لَمْ تَأْتُونِ بِهِ عَلَاكَيْلَ لَكُمْ عِندِى وَلَا نَقْ رَبُونِ ()

### You will have no more corn from me if you do not bring him to me, and you will not be permitted to approach me [60] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 60)

Yusuf *peace be upon him* was aware of the fact that it was difficult for the brothers to bring Benyamin (Benjamin) with them to Egypt. Clearly, their father will be reluctant to entrust the brothers with him. That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* gave them the following warning: 'You will have no more wheat from me if you do not bring him to me...' (*Yusuf:* 60). As a matter of fact, *peace be upon him* gave this warning to his brothers and he also knew fully well that they had no choice but to obey him. After all, their country was barren and afflicted by both drought and famine. Furthermore, he added: '...and you will not be permitted to approach me' (*Yusuf:* 60). This implies that they will not be allowed to approach the land of Egypt over which he has total authority. As we shall see, the brothers will tell their father: 'Father, we have been denied any more wheat [unless we take our brother with us]; so send our brother back with us that we may be given another measure. We shall guard him carefully' (*Yusuf:* 63).

Having been warned by Yusuf *peace be upon him* the brothers replied saying what is told to us by Allah *the Almighty* in the following verse:

قَالُوا سَنُرَاوِدُ عَنْهُ أَبَاهُ وَإِنَّا لَفَعِلُونَ (

# They said, 'We shall do all we can to persuade his father to send him with us, indeed we shall' [61] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 61)

The statement: 'We shall do all we can to persuade<sup>(1)</sup> his father' (*Yusuf:* 62) implies that it will not be easy to convince his father to hand over the son to them. Moreover, the brothers recalled how they treated Yusuf *peace be upon him* beforehand. We should also take into account that the act of persuasion often requires negotiation, give and take, or even manipulation. Previously, we have discussed this idea in Allah's saying: 'The woman in whose house he was living tried to seduce him' (*Yusuf:* 23).

<sup>(1)</sup> In other words, we will do everything within our means to ensure that he is brought to you. Indeed, we will spare no effort to prove that we mean what we say. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/483.

In the verse under discussion, the brothers underlined their intention to persuade their father saying: '... indeed we shall' (*Yusuf:* 61). In other words, they will exert their utmost effort to convince their father to send Benyamin with them, knowing well that it is a great favour to ask of their father and at the same time a difficult thing to accomplish. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

# وَقَالَ لِفِنْيَكِنِهِ ٱجْعَلُواْ بِضَعَهُمْ فِي رِحَالِمِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْرِفُونَهَا إِذَا ٱنقَكَبُوا إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ٣

# Joseph said to his servants, 'Put their [traded] goods back into their saddle- bags, so that they may recognize them when they go back to their family, and [be eager to] return' [62] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 62)

In other words, Yusuf *peace be upon him* ordered his servants to pack the merchandise–which they had intended, in their first meeting, to barter in exchange for wheat and foods–into his brothers' saddlebags. Moreover, Yusuf's servants were instructed to do this in secrecy, thereby providing them with an incentive to return once again.<sup>(1)</sup> After relating this incident, Allah *the Almighty* says:

# فَلَمَّا رَجَعُوٓا إِلَى أَبِيهِمْ قَالُواْ يَتَأَبَانَا مُنِعَ مِنَّا ٱلْكَيْلُ فَأَرْسِلُ مَعَنَا آخَانَا نَصَّتَلْ وَإِنَّا لَهُ, لَحَنِفِظُونَ (٢)

# When they returned to their father, they said, 'Father, we have been denied any more corn, but send our brother back with us and we shall be given another measure. We shall guard him carefully' [63] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 63)

This was the first thing that the brothers told their father after their return with the provisions. They wanted to clarify to Ya'qub *peace be upon him* that they will be denied re-entrance to Egypt if they did not bring Benyamin with them.

Furthermore, the brothers told their father how generously they were treated by the governor of Egypt. They made it clear to him that they will be

<sup>(1)</sup> Regarding this issue, ibn Kathir mentioned many different opinions. One of these opinions is that Yusuf peace be upon him feared that the brothers did not have other goods to exchange for food. Yet others opined that he was too ashamed to charge his brothers and his father for food. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/483.

given another measure only if he allowed Benyamin to go with them to Egypt. They further assured their father that they will take good care of him. Clearly, the brothers were trying to allay their father's suspicions, given what they had done to Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the past.

At that point, the Lord the Most High states Ya'qub's response, saying:

قَالَ هَلْ ءَامَنُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا كَمَا أَمِنتُكُمْ عَلَى أَخِيهِ مِن قَبُلُ فَاللَهُ خَيْرٌ حَفِظاً وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ ٱلزَّحِينَ (11)

# He said, 'Am I to entrust him to you as I did his brother before? God is the best guardian and the Most Merciful of the merciful' [64] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 64)

Here, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* is reminding his children that due to the fact that they had previously lost Yusuf *peace be upon him* and alleged that a wolf had devoured him, they were not worthy of his trust this time. Ya'qub *peace be upon him* added: '...Allah is the Best Guardian and the Most Merciful of the merciful' (*Yusuf:* 64). This statement alludes that he had agreed to let Benyamin accompany them to Egypt, for he was praying to Allah *the Almighty* to guard his son during their journey.

After this conversation ended, Ya'qub's sons started unpacking their provisions. Allah *the Almighty* says regarding this incident:

وَلَمَّا فَتَحُواْ مَتَعَهُمْ وَجَدُواْ بِضَاعَتَهُمْ رُدَّتْ إِلَيْهِمْ قَالُواْ يَتَأَبَّانَا مَا بَغِي هَاذِهِ بِضَاعَنْنَا رُدَّتْ إِلَيْنَا وَنَمِيرُ أَهْلَنَا وَنَعْفَظُ أَخَانَا وَنَزْدَادُ كَيْلَ بَعِيرٍ ذَلِكَ كَيْلُ يَسِيرُ ٣

Then, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their goods had been returned to them and they said, 'Father! We need no more [goods to barter]: look, our goods have been returned to us. We shall get corn for our household; we shall keep our brother safe; we shall be entitled to another camel-load of grain – an extra measure so easily achieved!' [65] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 65)

Thus, they discovered that the merchandise that they had brought to Egypt with the intention of exchanging them for food provisions had been returned

to them. Moreover, they declared to their father that they could not possibly desire more, for they had actually received the food provisions they needed to sustain themselves and their families.

The brothers recapitulated: they had to bring their younger brother on their next trip to Egypt, and they will surely take good care of him and will return to their homes with an extra camel-load of grain. This is something easily granted by the governor of Egypt.

In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the condition Ya'qub laid down for his sons, saying:

قَالَ لَنُ أَرْسِلَهُ, مَعَكُمٌ حَتَّى تُؤْتُونِ مَوْثِقًا مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ لَتَأْنُنَنِي بِهِ إِلَا أَن يُحَاطَ بِكُمٌ فَلَمَّا ءَاتَوْهُ مَوْثِقَهُمْ قَالَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَى مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلُ (أَ)

He said, 'I will never send him with you, not unless you swear by God that you will bring him back to me if that is humanly possible.' Then, when they had given him their pledge, he said, 'Our words are entrusted to God' [66] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 66)

Here, we notice how kind-hearted Ya'qub *peace be upon him* is, for he accepted to send Benyamin (Benjamin) with the brothers to Egypt. This kindness is also expressed in his saying: '...Allah is the Best Guardian and the Most Merciful of the merciful' (*Yusuf:* 64). He, however, demanded that the brothers pledge solemnly to return Benyamin safely. The only possible justification for returning from Egypt without him could be if they were faced with circumstances that could not be resolved by human means, such as being surrounded by enemies who wanted to kill them all. One might say that Ya'qub's saying: '...if that is humanly possible...' (*Yusuf:* 65) is a form of prophetic cautiousness.

Afterwards, Ya'qub's sons gave him their pledge, and swore to return Benyamin back safely from Egypt, declaring the Lord *Glorified is He* a witness over them.

When Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said: '...Our words are witnessed by Allah' (*Yusuf:* 66), he was referring to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* was

fully aware of this oath and guaranteed it, and if his sons were to break this oath, Allah *the Almighty* will punish them.

Afterwards, Ya'qub peace be upon him gave further advice to his twelve children:

He said, 'My sons, do not enter all by one gate – use different gates. But I cannot help you against the will of God: all power is in God's hands. I trust in Him; let everyone put their trust in Him' [67] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 67)

We should take into account that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* made this statement prior to the brothers' second journey to Egypt, that is, after having known of both Yusuf's generous hospitality towards them and the fact that their merchandise had been returned to them. In short, he knew that the brothers had gained the favour of the governor of Egypt.

In general, when someone assumes a high position, it is expected that he will have rivals. This explains Ya'qub's wariness and fear that someone might plot against his sons who were, after all, foreigners in Egypt.

Thus he, i.e. Ya'qub *peace be upon him* ordered them to enter Egypt through different gates. In the past, the travellers used to access the old Egyptian cities through various gates which were opened and closed at appointed hours. By entering the city through separate gates, the brothers attracted the least attention possible.

For fear that his sons will be envied by others, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* ordered them to enter from different gates. We should note that envy (and its potentially malicious consequences) is a reality (which should not be denied).

That is why Allah *the Almighty* has taught us to seek refuge in Him from envy, since He knows that human means cannot defend oneself against the harms that envy can sometimes cause. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn; From the evil of what He has created; And from the evil of the utterly dark night when it comes; And from the evil of those who blow on knots; And from the evil of the envious when he envies' (*al-Falaq:* 1-5). When it comes to matters of envy, it is impossible to seek refuge in a fellow human being. This is because the source of envy (that is, the envious person who is casting the evil eye) is often hard to identify. Indeed, the 'radiations' of the envious person's eye can assail anyone who has been blessed. Moreover, since we live in an age of unprecedented material development in which radiation has been used to split things, it is conceivable that envy also has 'radiation' which Allah *the Almighty* gives to certain individuals. In these cases, a simple look may be as piercing and harmful as an arrow or a bullet.

In the same connection Allah *the Almighty* says: '...and none knows the hosts of your Lord but He Himself' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). So, why, someone may ask, does Allah *the Almighty* give such abilities to some of His creatures?!

We contend, 'He *Glorified is He* endows some of His creatures with gifts which they misuse. In addition, each human being is endowed with this injurious gaze to a certain degree. However, it is envy that generates the deleterious effects of this evil look. Keep in mind that one can admire things without being envious simply by saying, "Allah's Will (be done); there is no power but from Allah. O Allah, bless this thing or person!""<sup>(1)</sup>

In this way, one puts out the flame of envy which fuels the evil eye. You should also seek refuge in Allah, the Creator of mankind and of all wonders, by reciting the following verse: 'Say "I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn; From the evil of what He has created; And from the evil of the utterly dark night when it comes; And from the evil of those who blow on knots; And from the evil of the envious when he envies" (*al-Falaq:* 1-5). You could also recite the words that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say when supplicating Allah *the Almighty* for protection of Al-Hassan and Al-Hussayn, *Allah be pleased with them.* These words are, 'I seek refuge with Your Perfect Words from every devil, from poisonous pests and from every evil, harmful, envious eye'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said

<sup>(1)</sup> Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And why did you not say when you entered your garden, "Allah's Will (be done); there is no power but from Allah?'" (*al-Kahf*: 39)

to them, 'Your forefather (i.e. Ibrahim (Abraham)) used to seek refuge with Allah for Ishmael (Ismail) and Ishaq (Issac) by reciting these words'.<sup>(1)</sup>

It is also known that 'When anything distressed the Prophet, he prayed'.<sup>(2)</sup> He used to do this because such a problem that distresses him or one of his followers could not be resolved by human means. When such problems befall man, one must take refuge in the Lord, the Powerful Supporter, but of course after taking the secondary means into consideration. In this way, your invocation will be that of a distressed person who is urgently in need of help; rather than that of an indolent person who does not consider the secondary means.

In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Who [other than Allah] answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him and removes evil...' (*an-Naml:* 62). A distressed person is one who has no solutions to his problem, and only implored Allah *the Almighty* after having made use of everything that was available to him. So, you should not ask for Divine Help before making full use of what He *the Almighty* has provided for you.

In the verse under discussion, we find that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* had advised his children, in fear of envy, not to enter as a group through one gate, but to enter through different gates. However, firm faith in Allah *the Almighty* and submission to the Divine Decree are clear in Ya'qub's words when he said: 'But I cannot help you against the Will of Allah....' (*Yusuf:* 67). In other words, my advice to you cannot protect you from anything that is willed by Allah *the Almighty*. My words are merely cautionary, but it is Allah *the Almighty* Who decides whether or not you will reap the fruit of taking such cautionary steps. It is for this reason that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* added: '...all power is in Allah's hands. I trust in Him; let everyone put their trust in Him' (*Yusuf:* 67). The destiny of each creature depends on Allah *the Almighty* and clearly Ya'qub

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi graded this Hadith as good and authentic. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 1/270; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2060; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4737.

<sup>(2)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 5/388; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no.1319.

*peace be upon him* places his trust in Allah. Indeed, it behoves every believer to place his trust in Allah *the Almighty*.

Ya'qub's sons heeded their father's advice as shown in the following verse in which the Lord *the Most High* says:

# وَلَمَّا دَخَلُواْ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَهُمْ أَبُوهُم مَّا كَانَ يُغْنِي عَنْهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن شَيْءٍ إِلَّا حَاجَةً فِي نَفْسِ يَعْقُوبَ قَضَـنها وَإِنَّهُ, لَذُو عِلْمٍ لِمَا عَلَّمْنَهُ وَلَكِنَّ أَصَحْبَرُ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُون

# And, when they entered as their father had told them, it did not help them against the will of God, it merely satisfied a wish of *Ya'qub*. He knew well what We had taught him, though most people do not [68] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 68)

In other words, the brothers' entry through different gates could not prevent the unfolding of Allah's Predestination, since nothing can thwart His Decree. Perhaps the father wanted to prevent the plots, suspicions or the evil eye of enviers from afflicting his children; but even after taking all precautions, there is nothing that can resist Allah's Decree.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '...it merely satisfied a wish of Ya'qub...' (*Yusuf:* 68). Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was fully aware of the reality that nothing can go against Allah's Will; for any cautionary measures cannot help people avert Allah's Predestination.

The Lord *the Most High* says the following about Ya'qub *peace be upon him*: '...For he was, due to what we had taught him, full of knowledge' (*Yusuf*: 68). In other words, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* fully understood the fact that one must utilise the means at hand. He was also fully aware that pursuing the secondary causes and means does not go against putting one's trust in Allah *the Almighty* for Allah has created these means and causes as a mercy for the people.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes this verse by His Saying: '...though most people do not know' (*Yusuf:* 68). That is to say that most people are unable to identify the fact that they must both utilise the means at hands while seeking the Help of Allah *the Almighty* at the same time. This is precisely what makes life difficult for such people.

Allah Glorified is He then says:

وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَى يُوسُفَ ءَاوَى إِلَيْهِ أَخَاهُ قَالَ إِنِّي أَنَا أَخُوكَ فَلَا تَبْتَبِسُ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ()

# Then, when they presented themselves before Joseph, he drew his brother apart and said, 'I am your brother, so do not be saddened by their past actions' [69] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 69)

When the brothers presented themselves before Yusuf *peace be upon him* he welcomed them warmly and graciously. This hospitality was granted because they fulfilled their promise to him by bringing his full brother Benyamin. It is clear that Yusuf *peace be upon him* longed to see his brother Benyamin. We have learned previously that Benyamin is Yusuf's only full brother since they share the same mother (Rahil), while the rest of the brothers were born to different mothers.

The Lord's saying: '...he drew his brother...' (*Yusuf:* 69) indicates that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was longing to see his brother once again.

Moreover, saying: 'I am your brother, so do not be saddened by their past actions' (*Yusuf*: 69) makes it clear that his brothers had ostracised and mistreated Benyamin for some time. That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* tried to cheer his younger brother up and to relieve the pain caused by his brothers' actions.

Allah the Almighty then says:

فَلَمَّا جَهَزَهُم بِجَهَازِهِمْ جَعَلَ ٱلسِّقَايَةَ فِي رَحْلِ أَخِيهِ ثُمَّ أَذَنَ مُؤَذِنُ أَيَّتُهَا ٱلْعِيرُ إِنَّكُمْ لَسَرِقُونَ <sup>(\*</sup>)

# And, once he had given them their provisions, he placed the drinking-cup in his brother's pack. A man called out, 'People of the caravan! You are thieves!' [70] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 70)

This verse indicates that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had supplied them with food provisions as he had promised and as he had done in the past. But he wanted his brother Benyamin (Benjamin) to stay with him in Egypt. Moreover, how could he take him from his brothers who had taken a solemn oath to return

him to their father and not to lose him or fall short of their duty regarding him, as they had previously done with Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the past?

Clearly, a stratagem was necessary to be able to keep Benyamin with Yusuf. This plot was to be indirectly carried out by his brothers who had mistreated Yusuf *peace be upon him* and who were very envious of him and of his brother, Benyamin.

Here, the story of the king's drinking-cup which was used as a measuring instrument and which was placed in his brother's camel-pack, comes to the fore.

As for the Arabic word '*as-siqayah*', it denotes various meanings, all of which are derived from the root '*saqa*' (spelled with the letters *sin*, *qaf* and *ya*'). It refers to the act of providing pilgrims and people with drinking water.

In this connection, the Quran says: 'What! do you make (one who undertakes) the giving of drink to the pilgrims and the guarding of the Sacred Mosque like him who believes in Allah and the Last Day...' (*at-Tawba:* 19).

*As-Siqayah* may also refer to the water storage from which people drink, or even the bucket that is used to pull water from a well. In the verse in question, *'as-siqayah'* refers to the king's drinking-cup that was also used as a measure for the food provisions; it indicated the value of what is measured.

In the same connection, the Arabic word 'saa'' is a synonym of the word 'siqayah', and therefore it also refers to a drinking-cup, a measure for provisions and a utensil to draw water from wells.

Allah *the Almighty* relates the stratagem used by Yusuf *peace be upon him* to keep Benyamin with him, saying: 'He placed the drinking-cup in his brother's pack' (*Yusuf:* 70). In other words, he, i.e. Yusuf, ordered one of his servants to place the royal drinking-cup in Benyamin's camel-pack. A pack which is carried by camels and which contains a traveller's belongings is referred to in Arabic as '*ar-rahl*'.

Having mounted their camels and prepared to return to Ash-Sham (northern part of the Arabian Peninsula), they were surprised by the herald's outcry. Allah *the Almighty* relates this episode: '...A man called out, "People of the caravan! You are thieves!"" (*Yusuf:* 70) In other words, you owners of the camels, verily, you are thieves. Clearly, theft is a particularly heinous act for which the thief must be punished, especially when the stolen object is valuable.

Apparently, Benyamin agreed beforehand to this plot in order to stay with Yusuf *peace be upon him* until his parents come to Egypt. Here arise two good questions, 'Why did Benyamin agree to be involved in this plot if his absence will only deepen Ya'qub's sadness?' And, 'How could Yusuf *peace be upon him* accuse his brothers of a theft that they did not commit?'

I contend, 'Let us examine the subtle meanings of the Quran and try to understand its verses in depth. If we study the Quran carefully, we will understand that Ya'qub's sadness for having lost Yusuf *peace be upon him* had totally overwhelmed him, and so the loss of Benyamin could not affect him greatly. This is substantiated by the fact that when the sons of Ya'qub *peace be upon him* returned and recounted to him the story of the drinking-cup and Benyamin's detainment in Egypt, his only response was, "Alas for Yusuf!" (*Yusuf:* 84), and he did not mention Benyamin'.

'As for the accusation of theft, this verse does not explicitly state what exactly was stolen. From Yusuf's point of view, the brothers had stolen him from Ya'qub *peace be upon him* and cast him into the well'.

At this point, the Quran states Yusuf's brothers' response to the herald's outcry:

قَالُوا وَأَقْبَلُوا عَلَيْهِم مَّاذَا تَفْقِدُونَ ٢

And they turned and said, 'What have you lost?' [71] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 71)

In other words, Yusuf's brothers turned towards those who had accused them of theft and asked, 'What have you lost? Why do you accuse us of larceny?'

Here, the Quran states the accusers' reply:

قَالُواْ نَفْقِدُ صُوَاعَ ٱلْمَلِكِ وَلِمَن جَآءَ بِهِ حِمْلُ بَعِيرٍ وَأَنَا بِهِ زَعِيمُ أَسَ

They replied, 'The king's drinking-cup is missing,' and, 'Whoever returns it will get a camel-load [of grain],' and, 'I give you my word' [72] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 72)

In other words, Yusuf's servants exclaimed, 'The king's drinking-cup, which is called '*as-suwa*'', is missing. The person who finds it will be rewarded

with a camel-load of food provisions, for perhaps it was placed unintentionally in one of your bags'. The heralds' chief pledged to reward the person who found the drinking-cup before their bags were inspected. This reward, as previously stated, was a camel-load's worth of food provisions and supplies.

To this accusation of theft, the brothers of Yusuf peace be upon him answered:

قَالُواْ تَألَلَهِ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُم مَا جِعْنَا لِنُفْسِدَ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا كُنَّا سَــْبِقِينَ (٣)

# They said, 'By God! You must know that we did not come to make mischief in your land: we are no thieves' [73] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 73)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'By Allah!' (*ta Allahi*) is an oath in Arabic. The letter '*ta*'' generally precedes the Divine Name when an oath is accompanied by a sense of surprise or amazement. That is, Yusuf's brothers swore by Allah *the Almighty* in astonishment for having been accused of theft for such an accusation had never been levelled against them before. Moreover, everyone knew that they did not come to Egypt to make mischief.

In the following verse comes the response of the heralds who had declared that the king's drinking-cup had been stolen:

قَالُواْ فَمَا جَزَؤُهُ إِن كُنتُمُ كَندِينَ (٧)

# They asked them, 'And if we find that you are lying, what penalty shall we apply to you?' [74] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 74)

This question, which was addressed to the brothers of Yusuf *peace be upon him* was posed by his servants regarding the pre-established punishment of thieves. That is to say, 'What should they, i.e. the servants of Yusuf, do if they were to find the royal drinking-cup in one of the brother's camel-packs-thereby proving that their claims to innocence were untrue?'

It was known during that time that a person who was caught stealing remained a captive of the owner of the stolen object. This law was employed by Yusuf's paternal aunt who loved him and who had raised him after his mother's death. Remember when Ya'qub *peace be upon him* wanted to take his son back, the aunt hid a cherished heirloom,<sup>(1)</sup> which had been passed down to her from her father Ishaq (Issac) *peace be upon him* under Yusuf's clothes. Having claimed that Yusuf had stolen it, she kept him with her. Consequently, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was only able to take his son back after the aunt's death.

Yusuf's objective was therefore to keep his brother with him. Clearly, he was aware of this law (before hiding the drinking-cup in Benyamin's camelpack). In this way, he made his brothers unknowingly decide to let Benyamin stay with him, which was exactly what he longed to do.

The Quran mentions their response, saying:

قَالُوا جَرَوْهُ مَن وُجِدَ فِي رَحْلِهِ مَهُوَ جَزَوُهُ كَذَلِكَ خَمْزِي ٱلظَّالِمِينَ ١

And they answered, 'The penalty will be [the enslavement of] the person in whose bag the cup is found: this is how we punish wrongdoers' [75] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 75)

Hence, the brothers themselves decreed the judgment, and even added emphatically: '...this is how we punish wrongdoers' (*Yusuf:* 75). In this way, the brothers indirectly helped Yusuf *peace be upon him* to achieve his goal; that is, to keep his full-brother with him in Egypt. With his brothers' acting in accordance with his plan, Yusuf *peace be upon him* ordered for their belongings to be inspected.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

<sup>(1)</sup> The precious object is in reference to the belt that Ishaq peace be upon him used to wrap around his waist. Yusuf's paternal aunt was Ishaq's eldest child. She fetched Ishaq's belt and strapped it around Yusuf peace be upon him under his clothes. In this way, she was able to retain him and not return him to Ya'qub peace be upon him. Consequently, Yusuf peace be upon him remained with her until her death. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/486.

فَبَدَأَ بِأَوْعِيَتِهِمْ قَبْلَ وِعَاءِ أَخِيهِ ثُمَّ أُسْتَخْرَجَهَا مِن وِعَآءِ أَخِيهُ كَنَالِكَ كِدْنَا لِيُوسُفَ مَا كَانَ لِيأَخُذَ أَخَاهُ فِي دِينِ ٱلْمَلِكِ إِلَّا أَن يَشَكَآءَ ٱللَّهُ نَزْفَعُ دَرَجَنتٍ مَّن نَشَآةٌ وَفَوْقَ كُلِ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيهُ (١)

[Joseph] began by searching their bags, then his brother's, and he pulled it out from his brother's bag. In this way We devised a plan for Joseph – if God had not willed it so, he could not have detained his brother as a penalty under the king's law – We raise the rank of whoever We will. Above everyone who has knowledge there is the One who is All Knowing [76] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 76)

The plan was to begin by inspecting the bags of his ten half-brothers before searching through those of his full brother. This way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* allayed in advance their suspicions that he had asked for Benyamin to be brought to Egypt in order to carry out this plan. The inspection of the full-brother's bags resulted in the discovery of the king's drinking-cup, and as a result, the law of the people of Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was imposed and Benyamin was 'condemned' to stay with Yusuf *peace be upon him*. This clever plan proves Yusuf's intelligence and wisdom.

Clearly, we see that the Lord *Glorified is He* willed for a plot to be carried out in Yusuf's interest; a fact which is proved by the Saying of Allah: '...In this way We devised a plan for Yusuf...' (*Yusuf:* 76). This clearly means that He *the Almighty* contrived a plot to Yusuf's advantage.

Allah *the Almighty* continues: '... if Allah had not willed this, he could not have detained his brother according to the king's law...' (*Yusuf:* 76). In other words, Yusuf *peace be upon him* could not have retained his brother under the Egyptian king's law if the brothers had not accepted in advance that their law for theft entailed confinement of the thief.

Allah *the Almighty* continues: 'We raise the rank of whoever We will. But above everyone who has knowledge, there is One Who is All Knowing' (*Yusuf:* 76). It is clear that Allah *the Almighty* endowed Yusuf *peace be upon him* with an exalted position, devised a plot for him and enabled him to achieve

his goal. It goes without saying that Yusuf merited these rewards. Moreover, it is worth repeating that the Lord *the Most High* had raised Yusuf's rank of knowledge and wisdom.

This scheme was not carried out for the sake of harming Benyamin (Benjamin) or causing him any harm. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* wanted the best for both Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother. Let me mention in passing that there are many calamities which befall people, but the victims rarely perceive the blessings that are born out of such trials.

The believer must realise that unexpected trials do occur in life. When these happen, he must believe that the trial he was inflicted with is ultimately beneficial for him. For example, Yusuf's brothers had previously plotted against Yusuf, but what was the ultimate result of their plot? Allah *the Almighty* willed for their plot to ultimately benefit Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

Furthermore, the verse tells us that Allah *Glorified is He* endowed Yusuf *peace be upon him* with deep knowledge, as He *the Almighty* says: 'But above everyone who has knowledge, there is One who is All-Knowing' (*Yusuf:* 76).

The Arabic expression '*dhi* '*ilm*' used in the verse refers to someone who is endowed with knowledge. Here, we should take into account that this expression entails both a subject and an object: first of all there is the person who receives knowledge, and second the knowledge which is received. Combined together, they give rise to a man of learning (*sahib* '*ilm*) above whom there is always '...One Who is all Knowing' (*Yusuf:* 76). In other words, this verse denotes that Knowledge is one of Allah's Attributes.

Here arises a question, which is, 'How did Yusuf's brothers respond to Benyamin's captivity?' They were clearly dumbfounded and their first reaction was to reprimand Benyamin for having the drinking-cup in his bag. We should note that it was not out of pity that they defended him and tried to prevent him from being detained by Yusuf *peace be upon him*. Rather, they just wanted to keep their promise to their father that they will guard him.

The following verse sheds light on the brothers' previous attitude toward Benyamin: 'Although we are many, Yusuf and his brother are dearer to our father than we are...' (*Yusuf:* 8).

Obviously, the brothers knew that Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother were born to a different mother, namely Rachel. Had Benyamin been their full-brother, they will have undoubtedly shown more compassion toward him.<sup>(1)</sup> Benyamin exclaimed to his brothers, 'Verily, he who packed my bags is also the one who packed yours'.

At this point, one of the brothers said, 'By Allah! The children of Rachel, none has brought down more calamities upon us than you!' to which Benyamin retorted, 'The children of Rachel have suffered more on account of your deeds than you have suffered on account of theirs!'

The Quran states the reply of the brothers:

قَالُواْ إِن يَسَرِقُ فَقَدْ سَرَقَ أَخُ لَهُ مِن قَبَلُ فَأَسَرَّهَا يُوسُفُ فِي نَفْسِهِ-وَلَمْ يُبُدِهَا لَهُمَ قَالَ أَنتُم شَرُّ مَكَاناً وَٱللَهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَصِفُونَ (٧)

[His brothers] said, 'If he is a thief then his brother was a thief before him,' but Joseph kept his secrets and did not reveal anything to them. He said, 'You are in a far worse situation. God knows best the truth of what you claim' [77] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 77)

This verse clearly indicates that the brothers claimed that the seeds of thievery were planted in Benyamin just as they were planted in his full-brother beforehand. This statement, which was an attempt by the brothers to distance themselves from Benyamin's apparent misdeed, brought to light their resentment of Yusuf *peace be upon him* and Benyamin.

Their saying: 'If he has stolen, his brother stole before him' (*Yusuf*: 77) is referred to in technical linguistic terms as a conditional statement. A conditional statement means that one incident occurs in response to a previous

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said, 'When they saw that (the drinking-cup was discovered in Benyamin's camel-pack) Yusuf's brothers lowered their heads and approached the youngster, saying, "Woe unto you, Benyamin! Never have we seen such a day. Your mother Rachel gave birth to two children who are both thieves". But Benyamin retorted, "By Allah! I did not steal it (the cup) and I have no idea who put it in my camel-pack".' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3569.

one. There are some events which take place all by themselves, while others occur as a result of another happening.

Let us offer an example to fully clarify this point; you may tell a student, 'If you study your lessons, you will succeed'. Here, two distinct events are involved: studying and succeeding. According to this statement, succeeding is dependent on the act of studying, and studying must take place before the second event occurs.

Here, the brothers' statement: 'If he has stolen, his brother stole before him...' (*Yusuf*: 77) is intended to clarify the reason why Benyamin was involved in the theft.

Another example of a conditional statement is found in the following verse: 'But if they reject you, indeed Messengers were rejected before you...' (*Al-'Imran:* 184).

That is Allah *the Almighty* made the following clear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: if they refuse to believe the Revelations that you communicate from on high, do not then be saddened or distressed, for all the Messengers before you were also rejected by many of their people. This is because previous Prophets conveyed a Message that the people denied, and therefore their present rejection of your Message, Prophet Muhammad, is almost inevitable. It is through this reasoning that one understands how the conditional statement in this verse is met.

In the verse under discussion, the Lord *the Most High* relates the brothers' statement: 'If he has stolen, his brother stole before him...' (*Yusuf*: 77). In other words, 'Governor of Egypt, do not be astonished by Benyamin's theft for it is a trait which is characteristic of the children of Rachel'. The irony of this statement is that the brothers were unknowingly addressing Yusuf *peace be upon him* the son of Rachel!

Any unjust misfortune that befalls righteous people is prone to cause a certain degree of imbalance. We witness this when a righteous person, for example, is angered or upset by someone's slanderous words. Such libels harm him and stimulate him to respond angrily to such slanderous words.

It is precisely for this reason that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* advised us how to deal with anger in the following Hadith in which

he said, 'When one of you becomes angry while standing, he should sit down. If the anger leaves him, well and good; otherwise he should lie down'.<sup>(1)</sup> This will help the angry person to constrain his anger. Moreover, this position of the body helps channel the energy of one's anger into other directions.

In the verse in question, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not respond to their insults; hence Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Yusuf kept his secrets...' (*Yusuf*: 77). Clearly, he could have told the brothers about what had happened with his aunt who, out of love, had accused him of stealing the belt in order to keep him by her side. However, he wanted to conceal his identity and let events take their natural course: '...Yusuf kept his secrets and did not reveal anything to them...' (*Yusuf*: 77).

We should take into consideration that Yusuf *peace be upon him* kept his secrets and did not reveal anything to his brothers despite the fact that he was hurt by their comments. He, nevertheless, thought to himself: 'You are in a far worse situation. Allah knows best the truth of what you claim' (*Yusuf:* 77). This is due to the fact that they, i.e. the brothers, were the ones who took him as a young boy to play and then threw him into the well, leaving his father forlorn. In addition, he did not steal anything from his aunt–in fact, he himself was stolen; they stole a son from his father.

If these were the thoughts that were going through Yusuf's mind, there is no doubt that they were reflected in his bodily demeanour. His inner thoughts which were reflected on his facial and bodily expressions might have communicated his feelings to his brothers. After all, speech is merely a series of words which carry a meaning to the listener, and the content of Yusuf's thoughts must have been communicated through his non-verbal reactions.

As for Allah's saying: '...Allah knows best the truth of what you claim' (*Yusuf:* 77), it denotes that He knows best the truth of what Yusuf's brothers were claiming, either by their words or gestures.

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud and ibn Hibban on the authority of Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him. Al-Haythami said, 'This Hadith was narrated by Ahmad. Its narrators are upright, and attentive'. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 5/152; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4782; ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 5688; and Al-Haythami, Majma' Az-Zawa'id, 8/71.

As for the word 'tasifun' (you claim), it is often used referring to speech, as in Allah's saying: 'But do not say, for the lie that your tongues describe (tasifu), "This is lawful and this is unlawful"...' (an-Nahl: 116). In other words, the falsity of your words is clearly manifest. Upon close analysis, we understand that the word 'tasifun' (you claim) used in the verse under discussion is often used to refer to the speech whose falseness is self-evident.

The Quran then relates the brothers' response to Yusuf peace be upon him,

قَالُواْ يَتَأَيُّهُا ٱلْعَزِيْزِ إِنَّ لَهُ أَبَّا شَيْخًا كَبِيرًا فَخُذَ أَحَدَنَا مَكَانَهُ ۖ إِنَّا نَرَىٰكَ مِنَ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ٢

# They said, 'Mighty governor, he has an elderly father. Take one of us in his place. We can see that you are a very good man' [78] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 78)

With these words, they began negotiating with Yusuf *peace be upon him* and appealing to his merciful nature by saying: '...he has an elderly father...' (*Yusuf:* 78).

We notice that the Arabic word '*kabir*' (old or great) can be used in many different ways. For example, an elderly person is referred to as '*kabir*'. In addition, it is used to refer to someone of high position.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* also says: '...a grievous word (*kaburat kailmah*) it is that comes out of their mouths; they speak nothing but a lie' (*al-Kahf*: 5). Furthermore, the Arabic word '*kibr*' denotes 'majesty', whereas the expression '*al-kibar fi as-sin*' denotes old age.

In the verse in question, Yusuf's brothers said: '...he has an elderly/great father...' (*Yusuf*: 78). Thus, they asked him to deal leniently with Benyamin because his father was either dignified or aged.

That is to say that his father was a great man and the chieftain of his tribe, and when he hears that his son was detained for having stolen something, he will be greatly hurt. So, please take this fact into consideration, governor of Egypt, and protect his father's honour, might, and reputation by concealing his son's misdemeanour for the sake of his father.

Another possible interpretation is that the brothers' words refer to the fact that the father is an old man who does not have the strength to hear the shocking news, especially since he had already lost one of his children.

So, they made him an alternative offer: '... Take one of us in his place...' (*Yusuf:* 78). In other words, they asked Yusuf *peace be upon him* to complete his hospitality, for he had hitherto welcomed them warmly, had given them a nice place to stay and provided them with food provisions for free. After all, anyone who treats someone with such kindness will surely be responsive to their plea by taking one of the other brothers instead of the young boy.

These appeals were intended to speak to Yusuf's heart, but the law decreed that only the culprit could be punished for his wrongdoings. This is precisely why the brothers' appeals to Yusuf *peace be upon him* fell on deaf ears. In the following verse, the Lord *the Most High* relates Yusuf's response, saying:

# قَالَ مَعَاذَ ٱللَّهِ أَن نَّأْخُذَ إِلَّا مَن وَجَدْنَا مَتَعَنَا عِندَهُ إِنَّا إِذًا لَّظَٰلِمُونَ 🖤

# He replied, 'God forbid that we should take anyone other than the person on whom we found our property: that would be unjust of us' [79] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 79)

In this verse, Yusuf *peace be upon him* seeks refuge in Allah *the Almighty* from the sin of detaining someone who did not steal the kings drinking-cup. After all, what wrong will such a person have done? Clearly, no one deserves to be punished for a sin committed by someone else.

When we come across the word '*i*'dhan' with 'nunation' at the end, we may infer that a part of the sentence has been omitted. In other words, Yusuf *peace be upon him* said, 'If we were to detain someone with whom the royal drinking-cup was not found, then, behold, we will be among the evildoers'.

The letter 'nun' at the end of 'idhan' serves as an ellipsis in the sentence above.

We come across an analogous example from the Quran in Allah's saying: 'And you at that time (*hina i'thin*) (sit) looking on' (*al-Waqi'a*: 84). That is, when one becomes a helpless onlooker at the moment of someone's death when the soul reaches the dying person's throat. The letter '*nun'* at the end of the word '*hina i'thin'* (at that time) replaces the above-mentioned sentence. So Yusuf *peace be upon him* wanted to remind his brothers that he had no right to detain any of them other than Benyamin (Benjamin) since the royal drinking-cup was found in the latter's bags. Nor will it have been right for Yusuf *peace be upon him* to wrong or punish someone on account of another person's offenses. By this stage, Ya'qub's sons understood that the quandary could not be easily remedied, especially since theft is a serious form of misconduct.

Allah the Almighty describes the brothers' state in the following verse, saying:

فَلَمَّا ٱسْنَيْنَسُواْ مِنْهُ حَكَصُواْ بَجَيَّاً قَالَ كَبِيرُهُمْ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمُوَا أَنْ أَبَاكُمْ قَدْ أَخَذَ عَلَيْكُم مَّوْثِقًا مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَمِن قَبَّلُ مَا فَرَّطْتُمْ فِي يُوسُفَ ۖ فَلَنُ أَبْرَحَ ٱلْأَرْضَ حَتَّى يَأْذَنَ لِيَ أَبِي أَوْ يَحْكُمُ ٱللَّهُ لِي وَهُوَ خَيْرُ ٱلْحَكِمِينَ (٥)

When they lost hope of [persuading] him, they withdrew to confer with each other: the eldest of them said, 'Do you not remember that your father took a solemn pledge from you in the name of God and before that you failed in your duty with regard to Joseph? I will not leave this land until my father gives me leave or God decides for me – He is the best decider [80] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 80)

The verb 'ya'isa' denotes the loss of hope. Note that the Quran uses the verb 'istay'asa' here rather than 'ya'isa' which implies that they had not merely lost hope, but they were in fact completely disheartened.

In short, the brothers pleaded in different ways for Yusuf *peace be upon him* to change his position, but their pleas were of no avail, and their petitions were met with closed doors. It is as if the brothers had lost so much hope that they begged for 'hopelessness' itself to befall them. This degree of desperation only ensues from circumstances that are devoid of the slightest flicker of hope.

Moreover, every time they had some hope, their means of attaining a solution were blocked. In their despair, they asked for hopelessness, as it were, to convince Yusuf *peace be upon him* to let Benyamin return with them to their father.

The verse continues: 'They withdrew to hold a conference with each other...' (*Yusuf:* 80). In other words, they retired to discuss in private, away from the onlookers: Yusuf *peace be upon him* the governor, his assistants and their brother Benyamin who was the object of the quandary.

It is worth pointing out that the act of '*al-munajah*' (holding a conference in private) denotes communicating something secretly, which in turn implies that the issue under discussion should not be disclosed to others.

We should note that the verb '*khalasu*' (to withdraw) ends with a plural pronoun, while '*najiyyan*' (the state of holding a conference) is singular. This is actually one of the issues about which a reader, who does not possess a deep knowledge of Arabic, may be unable to understand and thus question, 'How does the Quran place a plural verb with a singular noun?' We contend, 'If the inquirers who posed this question were endowed with a deep understanding of the Arabic language, they will have known that this grammatical structure is entirely acceptable in Arabic'. A case in point is Allah's saying: 'And the angels, moreover, are [Prophet Muhammad's] assistants or support' (*at-Tahrim:* 4).

Clearly, such questioners are oblivious to the fact that there are certain Arabic words whose form does not change when they are used in the singular or the plural form. In the aforementioned verse, we can say that describing the angels (plural) using the word '*zhahir*' ('assistants' or 'a support' which can be both singular and plural) implies that they were uniting their strength into a single cohesive force.

Let us offer another example to clarify this point; the Quran relates what Ibrahim (Abraham), 'The Friend of the All-Merciful', said in the following verse: 'He said, "Have you then considered what you have been worshipping; You and your fathers before you. Surely they are enemies to me; but not (so) the Lord of the worlds' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 75-77).

In these aforementioned verses, the word '*aduwun*' is translated 'enemies' although it is in the singular, that is literally the enemy. In other words; Ibrahim's statement incorporated all the deities that the idol worshipers venerated, and considered them one single enemy.

Likewise, words like '*siddiq*' (the trustworthy person) or even '*'adl*' (a just person) can be used to refer to both the singular and the plural.

Let us look at the word '*adl'* (a just person) more closely. In the Egyptian judicial system, for example, when a decree is being decided, the judge does not issue it individually; rather, he comes to a decision after consulting with two other judges. Accordingly, the decree is issued by three individuals: the head of the court and two other judges sitting on his right and left, and serving as advisors. Afterwards, when the decree is issued, one says, 'The judges rule is just (using '*adl'*, in the singular form)'. That is to say that one does not say, 'Each judge has made a just ruling'.

The same applies to the word '*najiyya*' in the verse under discussion. Having lost all hope of leniency on Yusuf's part, the brothers withdrew from the people around them, forming one group separate from everyone else, to counsel each other.

Normally, the eldest brother gives the first opinion, for he usually has enough experience and wisdom to make the right decision.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* relates the eldest brother's opinion: '...the eldest of them said, "Do you not remember that your father took a solemn pledge from you in the name of Allah and before that you failed in your duty with regard to Yusuf? I will not leave this land until my father gives me leave or Allah judges for me—He is the best to judge' (*Yusuf*: 80).

From this verse, it can be inferred that the speaker is oldest of the other brothers, or that he is the leader of the caravan. Having noticed that his brothers were resigned to the idea of returning to their father without Benyamin, who was detained by the governor of Egypt, the eldest brother expressed his opinion. He reminded his brothers that their father had taken a solemn pledge from them to bring Benyamin back to him if that were humanly possible. He also reminded them that their history with their father was blemished, for he had once entrusted them with Yusuf *peace be upon him* but they did not keep their word.

Based on this line of reasoning, the eldest brother decided to stay in Egypt and not to return to his father until the latter gave him leave; until Allah *Glorified is He* wills for the governor of Egypt to return Benyamin to him; or until he, i.e. the eldest brother, dies in Egypt. The position adopted by the eldest brother is in fact a defensive one for he is too ashamed to return to his

father without Benyamin. One might say that he chose to let his brothers bear the burden of facing Ya'qub *peace be upon him*.

In fact, it appears that the one who suffered the most from this quandary was the father, Ya'qub *peace be upon him*. After all, he had lost Yusuf *peace be upon him* during the youngster's first trip, and now in the second trip he has not only lost Benyamin but also the eldest brother who was the leader of the caravan.

In a word, the eldest brother's decision to stay behind only increased the torment of their father. During their private meeting, the brothers should have discussed and examined the dilemma from different angles. Unfortunately, the eldest brother who is the leader of the caravan put an end to the much-needed discussion. When they asked their eldest brother about what they should do, he gave the following answer which is stated in the following verse:

# ٱرْجِعُوٓا إِلَىٰٓ أَبِيكُمْ فَقُولُواْ يَتَأَبَانَآ إِبَ ٱبْنَكَ سَرَقَ وَمَا شَهَدْنَا إِلَىٰ أَبِيكُمْ فَقُولُواْ يَتَأَبَانَآ إِبَ ٱبْنَكَ سَرَقَ وَمَا شَهَدْنَا إِلَىٰ

# So go back to your father and say, "Your son stole. We can only tell you what we saw. How could we guard against the unforeseen? [81] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 81)

Thus, the eldest brother–or the leader of the caravan–ordered his brothers to return to their father and to relate to him the details of what had happened, 'Benyamin was accused of theft and we only recount this story after the servants of the governor found the royal drinking-cup in his bags. Furthermore, we do not know whether someone had put it secretly in his bag or it was a plot or an intrigue'.

'O father, we are only telling you what was conveyed to us. The governor punished him in conformity with our law. Based on our interactions with Benyamin, we do not accuse him of theft, but the undeniable fact that the royal drinking-cup was discovered in his bags lies at the root of this problem'.

However, the eldest brother knew that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* might not believe his sons, since their history with their father gave the latter reasons to doubt the story. That is why the eldest brother–or the leader of the caravan–advised his brothers to tell the father the following:

# وَسْئَلِ ٱلْقَرْبَةَ ٱلَّتِي كُنَّا فِيهَا وَٱلْعِيرَ ٱلَّتِي أَقْبَلْنَا فِيهَا وَإِنَّا لَصَدِقُونَ ٢

# Ask [in] the town<sup>(1)</sup> where we have been; ask the people of the caravan we travelled with: we are telling the truth [82] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 82)

In other words, they said to Ya'qub, 'Father, if you doubt what we say, then you can ask the people of the town where Benyamin (Benjamin) was captured; for the incident drew much attention, as it took place in front of a crowd of people. Moreover, the caravans that we travelled with also witnessed the incident. Above all, one of the palace servants announced publicly that the king's drinking-cup had been lost, and the camel-packs were inspected in public'.

'Therefore, if you want to ascertain that what we say is true, ask the people of the caravan we travelled with, for they are just as aware of the incident as we are. You can also confirm our report with the people of the town where the incident happened'.

One point is worth noting in the discourse of Yusuf's brothers to their father; which is related in Allah's saying: 'Ask [in] the town where we have been and the people of the caravan we travelled with...' (*Yusuf:* 82). We know that every action has a doer, object, spatial location, time, cause, and an amount of energy which allows it to actualise.

In some cases, the particular spatial location is the primary factor of an action. In such cases, an Arabic speaker attributes the action to its spatial location, as in the verse in question: 'Ask [in] the town...' (*Yusuf:* 82).

Clearly, this means, 'Ask the people of the town'. One might also say that the news of Benyamin's theft was so widespread that even inanimate objects knew of the episode in detail. Another possible interpretation is that Yusuf's brothers

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Al-Qaryah (the town) in this verse implies Egypt. However, it has also been suggested that it denotes one of Egypt's towns where the brothers stopped and were given provisions'. Note that there is a rhetorical style in the beginning of this verse, that is, the true subject of the verb 'ask' is omitted. The original sentence is as follows, 'Ask the people of the town'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3580.

asked their father to order the earth itself to inform him of the episode; for, after all, he was a Prophet who was inspired by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then Yusuf's brothers said to their father: '...and [ask the people of] the caravan we travelled with...' (*Yusuf:* 82). The Arabic word '*al-*'r' (caravan) denotes riding animals, including she-camels, camels, donkeys and mules, which carry loads.

The brothers' saying: '...and [ask the people of] the caravan we travelled with...' (*Yusuf:* 82) implies that the caravan had a more important role to play other than that of a simple mount.

What happened at the battle of *Badr* is a case in point. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* set out to intercept the caravan which was coming from *Ash-Sham* and was carrying bales of merchandise. This assault was intended as a payback for the properties of *Al-Muhajirun* (the migrants) that the disbelievers of Mecca had appropriated. Moreover, the caravan was inadequately protected by guards and shepherds.

However, the warriors who came from Mecca were called by a special name, 'an-nafir', that is, the fighters who fled (nafaru) [to the caravan] to ward off the battalion of believing Muslims, and not just warriors (al-muqatileen). Thus, every major detail of an event is named after a significant episode that took place during the unfolding of that event.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* narrates the conversation between Yusuf's brothers and their father when the former returned without both Benyamin and their eldest brother or the leader of the caravan. Allah *the Almighty* states: '…and [ask the people of] the caravan we travelled with…' (*Yusuf:* 82). It may be expected that the inspection of the brothers' bags took place at a slight distance from any built-up area.

The palace soldiers-or Yusuf's servants-inspected the brothers' camel-packs in which the king's drinking-cup was discovered. This location where that happened was called '*qaryah*' (town), just as nowadays we designate an area as 'customs' in which all packages entering or leaving a country are inspected.

Thus, the statement: '...Ask in the town where we have been...' (*Yusuf*: 82) implies, 'Ask the people of the town in which our bags were inspected'.

Likewise, their saying: '...and [ask the people of] the caravan we travelled with...' (*Yusuf*: 82) implies, 'Ask those travellers in other caravans who accompanied us on the trip'.

It worth noting that the brothers repeated their assertion: '...we are telling the truth' (*Yusuf*: 82) because they were aware of the fact that they had previously lied to their father. Thus they wanted him to verify the veracity of their words this time, for if their father asked about the incident, he will find out that they were indeed telling the truth. In short, the brothers suggested for their father to ask others because this time they were telling the truth.

Allah *the Almighty* narrated their statement using the following nominal sentence: '...we are telling the truth' (*Yusuf:* 82). The brothers knew well that their father was once suspicious of them when they brought the shirt of their younger brother, Yusuf, stained with false blood, claiming he had been eaten by a wolf.

Afterwards, Allah the Almighty relates Ya'qub's response to his sons:

قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنَفُسُكُمْ أَمَرًا فَصَبَرٌ جَعِيلُ عَسَى ٱللَّهُ أَن يَأْتِيَنِي بِهِمْ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ (٣)

Their father said, 'No! Your souls have prompted you to do wrong! But it is best to be patient: may God bring all of them back to me – He alone is the All Knowing, the All-Wise' [83] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 83)

As a matter of fact, any action that is opposed by the conscience, whose consequences one fears and from which one naturally shrinks in shame, are actions which weigh heavily on the human soul. Moreover, in order to undertake such hideous actions, the soul must undergo a process of stimulation and incitement. This act of incitement is called '*sawwal*' in Arabic. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* states Ya'qub's response: 'No! Your souls have prompted (*sawwalat*) you to do wrong!...' (*Yusuf:* 83). In other words, your own souls had incited you to commit a terrible act that no upright person could approve of. This is not the first time that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* addressed his sons

in this (reprimanding) manner. When they came with Yusuf's shirt stained with false blood, Ya'qub retorted: '...Nay, your souls have prompted (*sawwalat*) you to make up a tale! [For me] patience is good and most fitting; from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying'' (*Yusuf*: 18). Having heard their account, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* prayed to Allah *the Almighty* for help. This plea suggests that the brothers' claims and the events of the story had not yet come to an end. Rather, they will be followed by incidents which require a great amount of patience as well as Divine Succour.

Notice that the verse under discussion is different from the latter verse, for while they both mention the evil soul's incitement and Ya'qub's imploring Allah *the Almighty* for patience, one senses in the verse under discussion that the winds of relief and respite were drawing near. This is because Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said: 'May Allah bring all of them back to me...' (*Yusuf*: 83). In this verse, he was praying for a hope which indicates the approaching relief, which took place soon after this.

Certain absentminded people ask, 'Why did Ya'qub *peace be upon him* state: "May Allah bring all of them back to me..." (*Yusuf:* 83) when the only absent individuals were Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his full brother?' We answer, 'Have you forgotten the eldest brother who refused to leave Egypt without Ya'qub's explicit permission or Allah's Relief?'

To recapitulate: Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was, at that time, missing three of his sons: Yusuf *peace be upon him* Benyamin and Sham'oon (Simon). For this reason, he said: 'May Allah bring all of them back to me...' (*Yusuf:* 83) rather than 'May Allah bring both of them back to me'.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes this verse with His saying: 'He alone is the All Knowing, the All-Wise' (*Yusuf:* 83). Undoubtedly, Allah *the Almighty* knows the whereabouts of Ya'qub's missing sons, for He is the Omniscient. Moreover, He is All-Wise in His Actions regarding us.

Afterwards, Allah the Almighty continues to state Ya'qub's response:

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمُ وَقَالَ يَكَأْسَفَى عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَٱبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ ٱلْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمُ (٨٠)

# And he turned away from them, saying, 'Alas for Joseph!' His eyes went white with grief and he was filled with sorrow [84] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 84)

Ya'qub *peace be upon him* withdrew from them and sought refuge in solitude, for the news that they imparted to him caused him great sadness. This is because he was, after all, a human being and so he was distressed by Yusuf's absence, for his longing for Yusuf *peace be upon him* was at the root of his calamities.

In Arabic, one often expresses grief using phrases such as 'wa huznah', 'wa asafah' and 'wa musibatah'. Such expressions imply that one is deeply troubled by some event, as if he were calling out, 'Sadness, come to the fore, because this is your moment!'

Another possible interpretation is that Ya'qub exclaimed: 'Alas for Yusuf!' (*Yusuf:* 84) because Benyamin was the one, from all his children, who was the most similar to Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

Ya'qub's loss of Yusuf *peace be upon him* was the first calamity that befell him. But this (heartbreak) was followed by a second, namely the absence of Benyamin.

Allah's saying: '...His eyes became white...' (*Yusuf:* 84) means that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* had shed so many tears that the black pupils of his eyes began to take on a white colour. Ya'qub's eyes 'became white' as a result of his extreme grief which he was concealing from others and constraining within himself.

We should take into account that it is possible for Ya'qub *peace be upon him* to suppress his anger-triggered by the tragic loss of *Benyamin*-toward his sons. However, physical reactions to grief cannot be controlled by anyone.

For example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wept and shed tears because of the death of his son Ibrahim (Abraham). Abd Ar-Rahman Ibn 'Awf *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, 'You are crying? Did you not

prohibit (your followers) from crying?' He said, 'No. But I prohibited two foolish immoral voices: a voice during a calamity while clawing at one's face and tearing one's clothes, and *Shaitan's* scream'.<sup>(1)</sup>

In the same vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'The eyes shed tears and the heart is grieved, but we will not say [anything] except what pleases our Lord. O Ibrahim! Indeed, we are grieved by your departure'.<sup>(2)</sup>

Consequently, we realise that Allah *the Almighty* does not want man to be tough and hard like a rock that never reacts to external events. Rather, He *Glorified is He* wants man to respond (emotionally) to events; for this human quality should be in one's very nature. After all, Allah *the Almighty* calls for compassion and this is why the believer should value this quality.

Allah *the Almighty* created man's emotions and instincts. Had He willed to create humans without these two qualities, He will have clearly done this. However, He endowed mankind with feelings and an innate disposition (towards sentimentality) for specific reasons.

However, when feelings and human nature deviate from their intended function, the Divine Way of Guidance deters them, as this Guidance is intended to regulate and moderate one's impulses that spring from emotions or from human nature. Man's love for food is a case in point. In this case, the Divine Way of Guidance orders you to eat beneficial food, but it prohibits gluttony. The inborn human passion of seeking knowledge is another example that further clarifies this point. The Divine Way of Guidance commands you to know useful things, but not to apply this instinct to spy on others. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* has endowed us with sexual instincts for the preservation of

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdullah Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi graded it as a good Hadith. This Hadith is narrated in this form by At-Tirmidhi, but in Fath Al-Bari it adds, 'the sound produced by singing, distractions or play, and the wind instruments of the devil'. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1005; and Fath Al-Bari, 10/174.

<sup>(2)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1303; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2315.

the human species so that we may multiply and bear children. This does not mean, however, that we should use our sexual instincts to unlawfully satisfy our desires. Hence, we conclude that the Divine Way of Guidance preserves and regulates the natural instincts and emotions for them to be in line with their specific functions. Emotional bonds–for example–cause a father to treat his young child kindly and to care for him. It could therefore be said that the believer should value his natural instincts and emotions.

Allah describes Ya'qub *peace be upon him* saying: '...he was filled with sorrow (*kazhim*)' (*Yusuf:* 84), which suggests that he tried his best to control his feelings. This is because the Arabic word '*kazhim*' (filled with sorrow) is derived from the expression '*kazhamtu al-qirbah*', that is, 'I closed up the water skin'. In other words, I sealed the mouth of the water skin tightly, thereby ensuring that no water will pour out. This is similar to one's constraint of anger or sadness, etc. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُواْ تَأَلِّلَهِ تَفْتَؤُاْ تَذُكُرُ بُوسُفَ حَتَى تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُوْنَ مِنَ ٱلْهَالِكِينَ (٥٠)

# They said, 'By God! You will ruin your health if you do not stop thinking of Joseph, or even die' [85] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 85)

Here arises the following question, which is, 'Who posed the question in this verse, since Ya'qub *peace be upon him* had withdrawn from his children?'

We contend, 'Ya'qub *peace be upon him* not only lived with his sons, but also with his grandchildren. In addition, certain accounts state that a group of people entered upon him and said to him, "By Allah! You have grown frail, Ya'qub even though you have not attained the age of your father Ishaq (Isaac)!""

In other words, they said to Ya'qub *peace be upon him* 'Ya'qub, you have become old, weak and in poor health', whereupon Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said, 'I have become weak because of Yusuf's absence'. Allah *the Almighty* then reprimanded him for this statement and said, 'Do you complain of your deep sadness to Allah's creation?' This is why he lifted his arms in reply,

'I have made a mistake, my Lord; forgive me!' 'I forgive you' said Allah *Glorified is He*.<sup>(1)</sup>

As such, it is clear that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was addressed by one of his children or grandchildren, who said: 'By Allah! You will ruin your health (*haradan*) if you do not stop thinking of Yusuf, or even die' (*Yusuf:* 85). In other words, you will continue to recall Yusuf *peace be upon him* and what happened to him until you ruin yourself and die. As for the Arabic word *alharad*' (ruining your health), it refers to someone who is on the verge of dying or has already perished.

Ya'qub's response was recounted as:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُواْ بَنِّي وَحُزْنِيَ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَأَعْـلَمُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ٢

# He said, 'I plead my grief and sorrow before God. I have knowledge from God that you do not have [86] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 86)

As a matter of fact, the act of complaining about one's grief or sorrow to Allah *the Almighty* is regarded a form of worship. The Arabic word *'bath-th'* denotes a calamity that one cannot contain within himself, and therefore shares with someone else.

When a person of great standing does something apparently harmful to an ordinary person, the latter reacts in two possible ways: the first typical reaction is to deal with the great person gently by imploring his kindness and leniency and seeking his forgiveness and pardon. The second possible response

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti mentioned this account on the authority of Talha ibn Masriful-'Ayyami. As-Suyuti ascribed it to ibn Jarir At-Tabari. Talha said, 'I was informed that a neighbor entered upon Ya'qub and said to him, 'Ya'qub, why is it that you are in such a state of physical weakness and decrepitude. You have not even reached the age of your father?' (The grieving father) replied, 'I have become physically weak and debilitated because of my concern for Yusuf which Allah has inflicted me with'. At this point, Allah revealed the following to Ya'qub, 'Ya'qub, do you complain (of your deep sadness) to one of My creatures?' Ya'qub said, 'Lord, I have made a mistake; forgive me!' Allah then answered, 'I have forgiven you'. Ever since that day, when asked about his state, Ya'qub said: 'I complain of my grief and sorrow before Allah' (Yusuf: 86). See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 4/571.

on the part of that person in question is to rebel against the person of great standing, while thinking, 'Let him do as he pleases, I do not care'.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says in His Noble Book: 'Yet, why did they not, when Our Punishment came to them, humble themselves...' (*al-An'am:* 43). When a misfortune befalls us and we invoke Allah *the Almighty* the misfortune itself cleanses us from our sins and our forgetfulness of Him. In addition, it reminds us of Him *the Almighty* for it is He Alone Who can remove grief.

On the other hand, woe unto the person who acts pompously and deems himself to be above all vicissitudes! Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* showers His Mercy upon those who call out to Him in times of misfortune. At this point, one may ask why Ya'qub *peace be upon him* did not repeat the words that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us in this regard: 'Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say, "Surely, we belong to Allah and to Him we shall surely return'" (*al-Baqara:* 156). We assert that this prayer is one of the blessings that have been conferred to the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The following anecdote is pertinent in this respect; when some Muslims entered upon 'Ali Ibn Abu Taleb *peace and blessings be upon him* who was suffering from an illness and was moaning in pain, they asked him, 'Abu Al-Hassan, are you in pain?' He answered, 'I seek support and solace (only) in Allah'.

In the verse in question, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* stated that he only complains of his sorrow and misery to Allah *the Almighty* for He is Able to remove all harm. This noble behaviour on Ya'qub's part sprang from the knowledge that was revealed to him and not to his sons and grandchildren. Ya'qub *peace be upon him* intuitively felt that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was still alive, as he doubted the fictitious story of the wolf. He had a presentiment that the vision which Yusuf *peace be upon him* had (secretly) told him will be realised by Allah's Grace.

Ya'qub's words stated in the following verse:

يَبَنِيَّ ٱذْهَبُواْ فَتَحَسَّسُواْ مِن يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَأْيَّسُواْ مِن رَوْجِ ٱللَّهِ إِنَّهُ, لَا يَأْيَّضُ مِن رَوْجِ ٱللَّهِ إِلَّا ٱلْقَوْمُ ٱلْكَنِفِرُونَ ﴿

### My sons, go and seek news of Joseph and his brother and do not despair of God's mercy – only disbelievers despair of God's mercy' [87] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 87)

We notice that the ones who were absent in this situation were three: Yusuf *peace be upon him*, Benyamin (Benjamin) and the eldest brother who insisted on staying in Egypt until his father gave him permission to return or until Allah *the Almighty* granted him relief.

We should pay attention to the fact that this verse makes mention of Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother, and excludes the eldest brother–or the leader of the caravan. One may ask why? We opine that the reason for this is that Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his younger brother were the weaker party who had suffered from the mistreatment of their brothers. Moreover, they were separated from their father at a young age, while no one prevented the eldest brother from leaving Egypt and returning to his father at any time. That is why Ya'qub said: 'My sons, go and seek news (*tahasasu*) of Yusuf and his brother...' (*Yusuf:* 87).

As for the Arabic word 'tahasasu' (seek news), it is derived from the word 'hassa' which in turn denotes a sense of perception. These senses of perception are means by which man receives data from the outside world. In fact, information is only gathered if it is perceivable through the senses. Only after being perceived by the senses, is the information transferred to the mental sphere. Thus, we learn that our sense organs are channels which enable us to know about matters. Note that our senses are not limited to the five outward physical senses; in fact, modern scientists have discovered other inward senses which we have discussed on numerous occasions.

Hence, Ya'qub's command: 'My sons, go and seek news of Yusuf and his brother...' (*Yusuf*: 87) means, 'Employ your senses to the best of your ability in order to reach the truth of this matter'.

It is known that the word 'spy' (*al-jasus*) refers to someone assigned to undertake reconnaissance and gather information–using many of his senses–

of the movements of the enemy. In Arabic, the word 'spy' is referred to as '*jasus*' and also '*'ayn'*.

In common vernacular, one addresses an eavesdropper by saying, 'Look into (literally: smell out) the story behind this or that matter'.

Ya'qub's statement continues: '...and do not despair of Allah's Mercy—only disbelievers despair of Allah's Mercy' (*Yusuf:* 87). In other words, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said to them, 'Beware of telling me, "We searched for them, we employed everything within our means and exhausted all of our energy, but we did not find them", for Allah *the Almighty* is Ever-Present, and He is Ever-Merciful'.

People of the past used to say, 'There is no calamity as long as You are our Lord'. This means that when you are afflicted with something unbearable, you must seek refuge in Allah *the Almighty*. In this connection, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is our example; 'When anything distressed him (Prophet Muhammad), he stood up and prayed'.<sup>(1)</sup> By doing this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sought refuge in the Lord of all means and causes; for Allah is above all causality. Test this for yourselves: when dealing with a dilemma, pray, and you will find a solution to your problem before the prayer ends.

As for the Arabic word 'rawh', translated as mercy in the verse at hand, it can be pronounced in two different ways: 'rawh' and 'ruh'. 'Al-Rawh' is literally a scent or a gentle wind that blows and produces a cooling effect. We experience this, for example, while resting during a scorching summer day, when a gentle breeze blows past and refreshes us with its cool winds and pleasant scent. Allah *the Almighty* refers to this meaning when He says: 'Then happiness (rawh) and bounty and a garden of bliss' (al-Waqi'a: 89) .As mentioned, we can truly appreciate 'al-rawh' on a hot day, when we are resting in a garden, for example, and a gentle breeze blows past, carrying with it the lovely perfume of flowers. As for the Arabic word 'ar-ruh', it is the spirit which

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/388; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1319.

Allah *the Almighty* blows into inanimate things, and through which He gives them life and enables them to move.

Here, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* mentions an important principle which every believer should try to act upon, namely: '...only disbelievers despair of Allah's Mercy' (*Yusuf:* 87). This guiding principle of never losing hope in Allah's Mercy is central to our belief because only those who disbelieve in the Existence of Allah *the Almighty* are at risk of losing hope. This reason is also believed to be the main factor behind the high rate of suicide among atheists; a true believer, by contrast, does not commit such an act, for he knows that there is a Lord Who helps His slaves.

As long as the believer makes use of the available means and causes, Allah *the Almighty* will confer bounties on him that are beyond cause and effect. This fact is plainly stated in Allah's saying: 'And whoever is careful of [his duty to] Allah, He will make for him a way out, And give him sustenance from [sources] he never expected. And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him; surely Allah will bring about what He decrees. Allah indeed has appointed a due measure for everything' (*at-Talaq:* 2-3).

All of these blessings are conferred on the believer who is conscious of Allah *the Almighty*. I challenge anyone to find a person of faith who has never been gifted by these blessings. As long as a man carries out his duties and is conscious of Allah *the Almighty* he will find that unanticipated relief was granted to him after a period of hardship. In short, Allah *the Almighty* is the believer's Ultimate Refuge. Let us give an example to fully clarify this point; although Allah is beyond comparison. Assume that you are walking down a street with nothing more than one Egyptian Pound in your pocket, and then you lose your one and only pound. Will you feel troubled? Yes. But if you have saved ten pounds in your house, then your sadness over the lost pound will be less intense. Moreover, if you have saved one thousand pounds in your bank account, then you will not be upset for having lost one pound.

Whoever believes in Allah *Glorified is He* and makes use of the means in this world, will undoubtedly find a solution to his problems and relief from all troubles that he cannot bear relying only on human means. Here, we should pose the following question, 'Why should man lose hope?'As a matter of fact,

only atheists lose all hope since they do not believe in God. Moreover, if someone believes in a god that is unaware of his pain; or a god that perceives his worshiper's pain but does not help him–either because it is unable or unwilling to do this–then this god is not a true deity and is not worthy of our belief.

However, the true believer, on the other hand, knows for certain that he worships the Omnipotent God, Allah, Who rewards the believer that makes use of the earthly means and causes by giving them results that are beyond causal circumstances. Moreover, when He withholds something from the believer, this is in itself a Divine Bestowal, for He, the All-Merciful, withholds what will bring harm to him.

Allah *the Almighty* then draws our attention to another episode in the story, that is, when Yusuf's brothers presented themselves before him in his palace in Egypt. The verse reads:

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ قَالُوا يَتَأَيُّهَا ٱلْعَزِينُ مَسَّنَا وَأَهْلَنَا ٱلضُّرُّ وَجِئْنَا بِيضَعَةٍ مُزْجَعَةٍ فَأَوْفِ لَنَا ٱلْكَيْلَ وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَأَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَجْزِى ٱلْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ ٢

# Then, when they presented themselves before Joseph, they said, 'Mighty governor, misfortune has afflicted us and our family. We have brought only a little merchandise, but give us full measure. Be charitable to us: God rewards the charitable' [88] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 88)

Note that Allah *the Almighty* does not name the person whom the brothers addressed. This is because he is the protagonist of the story: namely, Yusuf *peace be upon him*. Instead, he is addressed with the following honorary title: 'Mighty governor, misfortune has afflicted us and our family...' (*Yusuf:* 88). In other words, they, the brothers, said to him, 'Hunger has assailed us to the point of emaciation'. Having addressed Yusuf *peace be upon him* with this honorary title, the brothers then began to appeal to Yusuf's emotions. After all, he was in power and they were in need.

The brothers' discourse continues: 'We have brought only a little merchandise, but give us full measure. Be charitable to us: Allah rewards the charitable' (*Yusuf:* 88). We know that they came to Egypt in order to seek news of Yusuf

*peace be upon him* and his brother. And the investigators cunningly chose to flatter and evoke sympathy in order to acquire their needs. By praising the governor as 'the mighty one', they were suggesting that he is capable of granting them what they came for, as it was within his power. By complaining of their hunger and emaciation, the brothers were stirring the governor's sympathy. Furthermore, they declared that they had only a little merchandise to barter for food.

The Arabic word '*muzjah*' (little) suggests a sum that is to be tendered by the buyer or the seller. A derivative of the word '*muzjah*', i.e. the word 'yuzji' also appears in Allah's saying: "Do you not see that Allah drives along (*yuzji*) the clouds, then gathers them together, then piles them up...' (*an-Nur:* 43). That is, the verb '*yuzji*' denotes 'to move onwards'. In the light of this verse, what does the word '*muzjah*' denote?

Let us offer an example from our daily lives—which you can test for yourself—that will shed light on the verse in question. Imagine that you have an amount of money that is made up of old and new bills. When making a purchase, you instinctively pay with the old rather than with the new notes; you will find yourself content to spend your worn bills, and keep your new bills. In some cases, the seller might ask you to exchange one of the old bills for a new one. When spending money, you prefer to get rid of your tatty paper-bills. It is in the light of this human tendency that we may understand the following part of the verse: '...only a little merchandise...' (*Yusuf:* 88). The word '*muzjah*' suggests that the merchandise is of low quality. Thus, the hardship that they underwent has made them unable to barter for provisions with high quality merchandise which they had previously done.

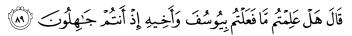
Allah *the Almighty* continues to relate the brothers' plea, saying: '...but give us full measure. Be charitable to us: Allah rewards the charitable' (*Yusuf:* 88). In other words, they were begging for the governor to give them a full measure of provisions and not to shorten the measure, despite the fact that their merchandise was disproportional to the provisions they were asking for. Furthermore, they asked the governor to consider the disproportion in the transaction as a form of charity. Thus, they offered him a price higher than their little merchandise: namely, the reward of giving charity. After all, no

human being could possibly compensate someone for his charitable acts, as the act of providing a reward for this is the Absolute Right of Allah *the Almighty*.

At this point, a very good question arises, which is, 'Were they not descendants of a Prophet, and therefore could not accept charity?' To answer this question, we should note that forbidding the progeny of a Prophet to accept charity is a law that only applies to the family of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and therefore only concerns his followers. This legal ruling is derived from his saying, 'Indeed, *zakat* should not be given to the family of Muhammad; it will be like giving them [something] from the impurities of the people'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Back to the verse in question; the brothers' appeals had a great impact on Yusuf *peace be upon him*. The latter looked at them and smiled, thereby revealing his front teeth. Yusuf's front teeth were unlike any front teeth that they had seen.

Allah the Almighty continues:



# He said, 'Do you now realize what you did to Joseph and his brother when you were ignorant?' [89] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 89)

The inclusion of the above-mentioned question at this point in the dialogue compelled the brothers to contemplate and ponder carefully in order to discover the true identity of the speaker. The question was accompanied by the following clement words: '...what you did to Yusuf and his brother when you were ignorant?' (*Yusuf:* 89) These words imply that Yusuf *peace be upon him* excused his brothers on the grounds that their wrong actions stemmed from ignorance. Furthermore, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not address them smugly or arrogantly which is the way that often characterises the people who have

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Muslim in the book of zakat on the authority of 'Abd Al-Mutalib ibn Rabi'a, as follows, 'Indeed, Zakat should not be given to the family of [Prophet] Muhammad, it will be like giving them [something] from the impurities of the people'. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 4/166; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.1072.

such a stature as his. In short, Yusuf's objective was to mitigate the shock of discovering that the speaker was Yusuf himself. That is why he mentioned that their actions were the result of ignorance.

Let us give an example to clarify this point; assume that you are mistreated by someone in the past. With time, your resentment towards the transgressor allays, and you remind him about his previous actions by saying, 'Your actions in those days were simply the result of your immaturity, but you are now mature and are able to understand the true nature of things'.

The fact that Yusuf *peace be upon him* addressed the brothers with this benevolent tone implies that he felt sorry for all the calamities that had befallen them. And, when he smiled, the brothers saw Yusuf's four front teeth and so recognised him.<sup>(1)</sup> The verse below recounts the dialogue which followed; Allah *the Almighty* says:

# And they cried, 'Could it be that you are Joseph?' He said, 'I am Joseph. This is my brother. God has been gracious to us: God does not deny anyone who is mindful of God and steadfast in adversity the rewards of those who do good' [90] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 90)

They, the brothers, recognised Yusuf *peace be upon him* and discovered the speaker's true identity, whereupon they said: 'Could it be that you are Yusuf?' (*Yusuf:* 90). We should notice that this is a rhetorical question which serves to highlight their astonishment, bewilderment and delight in having accomplished the mission that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* had assigned to them.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi said that when Yusuf peace be upon him smiled, his four front teeth resembled stringed pearls. ibn 'Abbas said, 'When Yusuf smiled, they were reminded of him and exclaimed in their astonishment, "Could it be that you are Yusuf?" (Yusuf: 90)' Al-Qurtubi mentioned other accounts of this incident in his Tafsir. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame 'Al-Bayan, 5/3591.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* responded: 'I am Yusuf, and this is my brother' (*Yusuf:* 90). Obviously, they were well aware of the fact that Benyamin was Yusuf's full brother, but Yusuf *peace be upon him* included his brother in his answer to imply that Benyamin had also been blessed by Divine Grace, and that Allah *the Almighty* had honoured them both.

In the verse, Yusuf *peace be upon him* expressed his gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* for having been blessed so graciously, saying: 'Allah has been gracious to us: Allah does not deny anyone who is mindful of Him [Allah] and steadfast in adversity the rewards of those who do good' (*Yusuf*: 90). He uttered this general principle for the benefit of his brothers and anyone who listens or reads the Quran. Indeed, he was a living proof of this truth; given everything that he experienced from the day he had his dream to this point in the story.

To recapitulate, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was the embodiment of these words; for Allah *the Almighty* had conferred His Grace on him and his brother by relieving them from their calamities. In the end, the two brothers were united.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* presented the reason for Allah conferring Blessings by saying: '...anyone who is mindful of Allah...' (*Yusuf:* 90). The one who is mindful of Allah is the one who avoids displeasing Him, fears Him on account of His Majestic Attributes, follows His Divine Way of Guidance, bears any adversity patiently, does not fall short in worshipping and obeying Him, and avoids all sinful acts, no matter how appealing they may seem. Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* does not fail to reward those who do good and fear Him. It is they who merit His Mercy and Grace both in this world and the Hereafter, on the grounds of being mindful of Him.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* states the brothers' response to Yusuf *peace be upon him* saying:

قَالُواْ تَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ ءَاثَرَكَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْ خَا وَإِن حُنَّا لَخَطِعِينَ ٢

# They said, 'By God! God really did favour you over all of us and we were in the wrong!' [91] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 91)

The expression '*ta'llah*' (by Allah) is a form of swearing by Allah *the Almighty*. As for their saying: 'Allah really did favour you over all of us...' (*Yusuf*: 91),

it means that Allah *the Almighty* favoured Yusuf *peace be upon him* over them, but He did not do this unjustly. Rather, Yusuf merited the kingship and high standing and position that Allah *Glorified is He* had conferred on him.

Thus, the brothers admitted their wrongdoing to Yusuf *peace be upon him* and confessed that they had mistreated him when they sought to be loved to the same level as him by their father. In the end, Yusuf gained the love of the Lord of their father, the Lord of the Worlds, which is why they confessed that the state and condition in which they lived was a conclusive proof that they were in the wrong.

We should pay attention to the difference between the word '*khat'in*' and '*mukht'in*' which both refer to wrongdoers. In order to illustrate the difference, we should recall what the governor of Egypt told his wife: '...but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin–you are one of those who do wrong (*al-khat'in*)' (*Yusuf*: 29).

Note that the governor said '*khat*'*in*' instead of '*mukht*'*in*'. Both have the same root, but there is a subtle difference in the meanings imparted by the two words; A '*khati*'' is someone who knows what actions should be taken but nevertheless transgresses, but the '*mukhti*' is someone who acts wrongly despite his intention to do the right thing. It is out of ignorance that the '*mukhti*'' errs, while the '*khati*'' consciously does wrong.

Having admitted that they were at fault, Yusuf *peace be upon him* said what Allah *the Almighty* mentions in the following verse:

قَالَ لَا تَثْرِيبَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْيَوْمَ يَغْفِرُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ ٱلرَّحِمِينَ ٢

# But he said, 'You will hear no reproaches today. May God forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the merciful [92] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 92)

The word for bitter reproach in Arabic is 'at-tathreeb' which is derived from the word 'ath-tharb' which refers to a thick layer of fat that one finds enveloping the stomach of an animal after it has been slaughtered. If the animal was lean and was not fed adequately, one does not find this layer of fat, 'ath-tharb', because it is consumed by the animal's body for energy. Therefore, '*at-tathrib*' literally suggests that the bitter reproach melted away the fat inside his stomach and caused him to bleed. In fact, the human body, as it were, almost collapses under the weight of reproach.

There is a Hadith which relates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When the slave-woman of any of you commits adultery and this (offence of hers) becomes clear, she should be flogged (as a prescribed) punishment, but hurl no reproach at her. If she commits adultery again, she should be punished again by flogging, but hurl no reproach upon her. If she commits fornication for the third time and it becomes clear, then he [her master] should sell her, even if only for a rope of hair'.<sup>(1)</sup> In other words, they should not say to her, 'You who have done this or that act'. Rather, let her be penalised only according to the divinely revealed law. But if she does not refrain from this act, then it is better for the owner to sell her. Thus, we understand that a bitter reproach or scolding can give rise to stubbornness.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf *peace be upon him* said: '...Today, may Allah forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the merciful' (*Yusuf:* 92).

At this point, someone may pose the following question, 'Why did Yusuf *peace be upon him* pray that Allah forgive them on that day? After all, they might have sought His Forgiveness earlier!' We answer, 'Yusuf's praying for their forgiveness was uttered within the limits of his knowledge to put his brothers' hearts at peace'. His statement: '...He is the Most Merciful of the merciful' (*Yusuf:* 92) implies Yusuf understood the fact that every form of mercy in this world, including that which a person shows to another, is ultimately derived from the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty*. Yusuf *peace be upon him* made this statement with certitude that his supplication will be answered since he himself had pardoned their past mistreatment towards him; clearly, it befits Allah to forgive them for Allah *the Almighty* is more Merciful to them than *Yusuf*.

The discourse between Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brothers is subsequently focused on their father, Ya'qub *peace be upon him*. Having been informed of what had happened to his father after being separated from him,

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1703.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* said to his brother what Allah *the Almighty* relates in the following verse:

ٱذْهَـبُواْ بِقَمِيصٍى هَـندًا فَأَلْقُوهُ عَلَى وَجُهِ أَبِي يَأْتِ بَصِيرًا وَأَتُونِي بِأَهْلِكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (")

Take my shirt and lay it over my father's face: he will recover his sight. Then bring your whole family back to me' [93] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 93)

Yusuf *peace be upon him* knew that his father used to close his eyes tightly out of grief, and that he was about to lose his sight. He therefore ordered his brothers to take the shirt that he used to wear to his father.

Some books of history relate that the eldest brother who once refused to depart from Egypt and had said: 'I will not leave this land until my father gives me leave or Allah judges for me—He is the best to judge' (*Yusuf*: 80), addressed Yusuf saying, 'Governor of Egypt, I am the one who carried the shirt stained with false blood to my father. As such, allow me to carry this shirt to my father in order for the reward of this action to erase my past sinful deed'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Regarding the shirt which was to be taken to the father, Yusuf *peace be upon him* specifically instructed his brothers to: '...lay it over my father's face: he will recover his sight' (*Yusuf:* 93). Notice that Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not say, 'your father's face', rather, he said: '...my father's face...' (*Yusuf:* 93). This clearly shows the fatherly warmth which Yusuf *peace be upon him* had missed since his absence from his family which caused his father's deep sadness. As for the phrase: '...he will recover his sight' (*Yusuf:* 93), it means that either his sight will be restored or that the father will be able to see Yahudh (Judah) in front of him in full health.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* added: '...Then bring your whole family back to me' (*Yusuf:* 93). This command is a very precise Quranic expression. In other

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi said, 'As-Suddi related that Yahudh (Judah) carried the shirt. The latter addressed Yusuf in the following manner, "I am the one who presented the shirt with false blood (to my father) and caused him so much grief, and I am the one who will carry (this second shirt) to bring him joy and to restore his sight". For this reason, Yahudh carried the shirt'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3593.

words, Yusuf is commanding them to return with anyone who is related to them or who works for them.<sup>(1)</sup> Note that Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not command to 'Bring your immediate families'; this was so that they do not come back with only the people of great standing.

It is also worth pointing out that in his instructions to his brothers to come back to him with their family, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not make mention of his father. This is because he was the governor of Egypt, and such a command necessitated that the father will come. But by not mentioning Ya'qub *peace be upon him* by name, Yusuf *peace be upon him* is, in fact, exalting him.

Allah the Almighty continues:

وَلَمَّا فَصَلَتِ ٱلْعِيْرُ قَالَبِ أَبُوهُمْ إِنِّي لَأَجِدُ رِيحَ يُوسُفَ لَوُلَا أَن تُفَنِّدُونِ ٢

### Later, when the caravan departed, their father said, 'You may think I am senile but I can smell Joseph' [94] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 94)

The verb 'fasalat' (set out) literally denotes that a thing which was attached to another became unfastened. The expressions 'fasalat al-'ir' means that the caravan had left the city and had begun its journey. That is to say that the caravan had left the borders of Egypt and was heading toward Ya'qub peace be upon him. At that time, Ya'qub peace be upon him told his grandchildren who were present: '...I can smell Yusuf...' (Yusuf: 94).

We know that the shirt which was sent with the eldest brother carried the smell of Yusuf *peace be upon him*. However, Ya'qub's grandchildren did not believe him, which is why the latter added: 'You may think I am senile...' (*Yusuf:* 94). In other words, I smell the scent of Yusuf, even if you might call me senile. The word for senile in Arabic is '*tafnid*' which is the period of mental decay which is caused by aging.

Among the remarkable discoveries that modern science has made is that sounds and images leave traces in the air. This is in spite of the fact that our

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi related that Masruq said, 'The relatives of the brothers added up to ninety-three, including all males and females'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3593.

human senses inform us that sounds or images vanish instantaneously in air. In addition, modern scientists are now attempting to use various radiations to piece together the image of, say, a group of people who were seated somewhere one or two hours beforehand. Such attempts prove that images emit radiations and shadows which hover around their source for some time before dispersing.

The same is true for sounds. Modern scientists are trying to piece together the sounds that were emitted in the past. They affirm that nothing in the universe is lost, as everything in the universe is preserved in one form or another.

If images and sounds cannot be lost, the same is true for smells. Note that a dog, for instance, detects a scent from far distances. Nowadays, dogs are even used by police to detect drugs. It is precisely for this reason that dogs are trained to work at airports and the borders of countries. The animals are created with a divinely gifted ability to recognise someone's smell among thousands of other smells.

In addition, modern science, which has been bestowed by Allah *the Almighty* on man, is now searching for a means to construct past images or retrieve sounds from surrounding spaces. Based on these two points, it should not be difficult to believe that when the caravan left the city gates and began its journey back to Ya'qub's home, he was able, through divinely imparted means, to smell the scent of Yusuf *peace be upon him* emanating from the shirt which was carried by the caravan.

If someone should ask, 'Why is it that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* detected Yusuf's fragrance only after the caravan had left the city walls and was en route to him?' We answer: 'This is because when the caravan was moving within the city, the scent of Yusuf's shirt was mixed with other city odours. Indeed, any city has many different smells, and rarely does one smell dominate over others. In contrast, in the open countryside, a gust of wind can carry a fragrance over long distances without being impeded by other smells and obstacles'.

We, Muslims, believe that everything in the universe is conserved in some form and cannot simply disappear; a fact which is proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And most surely there are keepers over you: honourable recorders' (*al-Infitar:* 10-11).

Every action that you carry out is recorded in your book of deeds, which is why your record will be put in front of you and you will be commanded to read it. At that time, your own self will be sufficient as a reckoner against you.

Back to the verse under discussion; those who were in the company of Ya'qub *peace be upon him* responded to his statement by saying:

قَالُواْ تَأْلَدُهِ إِنَّكَ لَفِي ضَلَالِكَ ٱلْقَصَدِيمِ ٢

# But [people] said, 'By God! You are still lost in that old illusion of yours!' [95] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 95)

It is as if they were tired of listening to Ya'qub *peace be upon him* speaking of Yusuf, and thus dismissed his words by retorting, 'How long are you going to be lost in your old illusion?' By using the word '*dalah*' (illusion), they do not mean deviation from the Divine Way of Guidance; rather, they were referring to Ya'qub's actions which are unrelated to piety, such as his extreme love of Yusuf *peace be upon him*, his attachment to him, longing for his return, frequent mentioning of his name and anticipating that he will meet him, etc. Those who were with Ya'qub did not understand his attitude towards Yusuf, as they thought that the latter had died.

Finally, the bearer of good tidings came to Ya'qub *peace be upon him*; Allah *the Almighty* says:

> فَلَمَّا أَن جَاءَ ٱلْبَشِيرُ أَلْقَـنَهُ عَلَى وَجْهِدٍ فَأَرْتَدَّ بَصِيراً قَالَ أَلَمَ أَقُل لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (1)

## Then, when the bearer of good news came and placed the shirt on to Jacob's face, his eyesight returned and he said, 'Did I not tell you that I have know- ledge from God that you do not have?' [96] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 96)

Finally, the bearer of good tidings arrived. According to some narrations, the bearer of good tidings was either Yahudh (Judah) or the eldest brother who refused to depart from Egypt without his father's permission or a solution from Allah *the Almighty* for the problem of Benyamin's detainment.

As we have seen, Yusuf's servants accused Benyamin of theft to realise Yusuf's desire to keep his brother by his side.

So, the bearer of good tidings came to the father with Yusuf's shirt, and he placed it over the father's face as Yusuf *peace be upon him* had instructed. Having done this, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* no longer had any reason to weep, and he became ecstatically happy. He reacted with great joy because during his days of deep sorrow over Yusuf *peace be upon him* when he cried so often that his eyes turned white, Allah *the Almighty* inspired to him that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was still alive, and this resulted in Ya'qub weeping due to his intense longing to see his son again.

Likewise, Yusuf *peace be upon him* had received a Divine Inspiration wherein he was informed that laying the shirt over his father's face will, by Allah's Grace, restore Ya'qub's eyesight. Needless to say, the joy also had a deep psychological impact on Ya'qub's health. Thus, the victory of truth and Prophethood was eventually realised.

Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said: '...Did I not tell you that I have knowledge from Allah that you do not have?' (*Yusuf*: 96) This rhetorical question was not intended to humiliate the brothers, but rather to affirm the veracity of the prophecies and news communicated by Prophets, for the reality corroborated Ya'qub's previous words: 'My sons, go and seek news of Yusuf and his brother, and do not despair of Allah's Mercy—only disbelievers despair of Allah's Mercy' (*Yusuf*: 87).

Therefore, when you receive a piece of information from someone who is infallible, you should not doubt it, for the normal mind grasps the realities which are only within its capacity. However, there are realities that are beyond a person's mental grasp.

Furthermore, when someone infallible speaks to you of realities that are beyond a person's mental grasp, be sure not to dismiss his words, regardless of whether you have understood him or not, and even if his words are beyond your mental capacity to understand.

At this point, Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers confessed their sins; their confession is related in Allah's saying:

قَالُوا يَتَأَبَانَا ٱسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا دُنُوبِنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَطِئِينَ ٧

The [brothers] said, 'Father, ask God to forgive our sins – we were truly in the wrong' [97] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 97)

Thus, the brothers admitted their sins and addressed Yaqub (Jacob) *peace* be upon him with the title of 'father' so that he might pray to Allah *the Almighty* to forgive their numerous sinful acts. After all, the brothers harmed their father and caused him to grieve. Such offenses are not forgiven unless the wrongdoer confesses their sins. Notice that the brothers said, '...we were truly in the wrong.' (*Yusuf:* 97) This statement clearly indicates that they were aware of the right course of action but chose to act otherwise.

Afterwards, Allah the Almighty rstates Yaqub's response, saying:

قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّيَّ إِنَّهُ هُوَ ٱلْعَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ١

## He replied, 'I shall ask my Lord to forgive you: He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful' [98] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 98)

We should notice that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had previously told them: 'You will hear no reproaches today. May Allah forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful' (*Yusuf:* 92). However, in the verse under discussion, their father states, 'I shall ask my Lord to forgive you...' (*Yusuf:* 98). Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* did not say, 'I will soon ask my Lord to forgive you'. The reason is that it takes elderly people more time to carry out an action than youths. That is why their father delayed invoking Allah to forgive them for a later time.

In his exegesis, Imam Al-Alusi explains why the position of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* with regard to asking Allah *the Almighty* to forgive his brothers differs slightly from that of his father, saying, 'Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* delayed asking for their forgiveness because asking for a brother to forgive his siblings is different from asking a father to forgive his

sons. A brother does not have the same rights as a father, and a father's anger is greater than that of a brother.'

Moreover, the sins referred to in the verse are the brother's major sins from which Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* suffered over very long years. Interestingly, some opine that Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* delayed asking for their forgiveness until dawn because Allah *the Almighty* answers the supplications at that time.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the moment when Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was reunited with his entire family after they had moved to his dwelling in Egypt. Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَكَمَّادَخَلُواْ عَلَى يُوشُفَ ءَاوَىٓ إِلَيْهِ أَبَوَيْهِ وَقَالَ ٱدْخُلُواْ مِصْرَ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ ءَامِنِينَ (<sup>11</sup>)

## Later, when they presented themselves before Joseph, he drew his parents to him – he said, 'Welcome to Egypt: you will all be safe here, God willing' [99] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 99)

We know that Yusuf's (Joseph's) grandfather, Ishaq (Issac) *peace be upon him* was not present, and that it is the father's side and not the mother's which predominated during that period of time, which is why the word 'parents' in this verse refers to Yusuf's (Joseph's) father and his maternal aunt because his mother had passed away.<sup>(1)</sup>

It appears that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* received them ceremoniously in Egypt, for they were welcomed by Egypt's dignitaries and officials before they entered the country. This first welcome was intended to alleviate their travel fatigue, and it is during this reception that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* drew his parents to him.

He *peace be upon him* then accompanied his family as they entered Egypt and said, 'Welcome to Egypt: you will all be safe here, Allah willing.' (*Yusuf:* 99) Thus, Yusuf's (Joseph's) family was officially welcomed twice.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi stated that Rachel is the mother of Yusuf (Joseph) and Benjamin, and she died while giving birth to Benjamin. See Al-Qurtubi, Jama' Al-Bayan, 5/3598.

When Allah *the Almighty* says: he drew his parents to him (*Yusuf:* 99), He is describing the warmth with which Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and his parents – who had long been separated – greeted each other. After all, the father was longing to see his son. Moreover, there is no doubt that he had heard from his sons of Yusuf's (Joseph's) high standing and stature. Likewise, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was yearning to meet his father again.

Being left to our instinctive emotions, our reactions when we meet people have no rules. They are emotional reactions stemming from feelings of longing, love, respect etc. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. There are certain individuals that you simply greet with a handshake, while there are others whom you hug and welcome warmly upon meeting them, for you are overcome by joy. All these reactions have no specific rituals. A proof of this fact is that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* drew his parents to himself and hugged them.

An analogous instance from the life of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him took place at the Battle of Badr. Prior to the fight, he was holding a pointed spear in his hand and lining men in rows. He passed by Sawad ibn Ghaziya from the tribe of Bani 'Uday ibn An-Najjar who happened to be standing out of line - in other words, being out of line from the other warriors, and he was making the line of men uneven. Seeing that Sawad ibn Ghaziya was out of line, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him poked him in the belly with his spear and said, 'Stand in line, Sawad.' Sawad replied, 'You harmed me! Yet Allah has sent you with Truth and Justice, so grant me retribution for causing me this pain.' Thereupon, Messenger Muhammad exposed his belly and said, 'Take your revenge,' but Sawad hugged him and kissed his belly. Prophet Muhammad asked, 'Why are you doing this, Sawad?' The latter responded, 'Messenger of Allah, we are where we are – meaning at the threshold of mortal combat – and I wanted my last interaction with you to be for my skin to touch yours.' So, Messenger Muhammad prayed to Allah *the Almighty* to confer His Bounty on Sawad.<sup>(1)</sup>

Allah the Almighty says:

<sup>(1)</sup> See ibn Hisham, Sirat ibn Hisham, 2/626; and ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa An-Nihayah, 3/271.

وَرَفَعَ أَبُوَيْهِ عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ وَخَرُّواْ لَهُ، سُجَّداً وَقَالَ يَتَأْبَتِ هَذَا تَأْوِيلُ رُءْ يَنَى مِن قَبْلُ قَدْ جَعَلَهَا رَبِّي حَقَّاً وَقَدْ أَحْسَنَ بِيَ إِذْ أَخْرَجَنِي مِنَ ٱلسِّجْنِ وَجَآءَ بِكُمْ مِّنَ ٱلْبَدُو مِنْ بَعَدِ أَن نَزَعَ ٱلشَّيْطَنُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ إِخُوَقِتَ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَطِيفُ لِمَا يَشَاَءُ إِنَّهُ، هُوَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ سَ

And took them up to [his] throne. They all bowed down before him<sup>(1)</sup> and he said, 'Father, this is the fulfilment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true and has been gracious to me – He released me from prison and He brought you here from the desert – after Satan sowed discord between me and my brothers. My Lord is most subtle in achieving what He will; He is the All Knowing, the Truly Wise [100] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 100)

Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* took his parents up to his throne because he did not want to be situated in a symbolically superior position. This act reflects his love, reverence, and respect towards his parents.

As for the Arabic word *al-a*'*rsh* (throne), it refers to the seat from which the king handles his political affairs. The family bowed down in worship to Allah *the Almighty* for having been united once again. We should consider that they did not bow down in worship to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*; rather, they bowed down in worship to the only One worthy of that; Allah *the Almighty*.

In the same connection, I say to those who tried to argue about why Ya'qub's (Jacob) family prostrated to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* 'Are you more zealous of caring for Allah's rights than Allah Himself'? In other words, it is Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who inspired Ya'qub (Jacob) and his children to do so.

<sup>(1)</sup> Al-Hassan Al-Basri maintained that the prostration was not in the form that we Muslims know; in fact, it was a custom in which the person saluting would tilt his head forward; such was their way of greeting. Ath-Thawri, Ad-Dahak and others said, 'The prostration resembled the traditional Muslim prostration, the difference being that this prostration was a form of salutation rather than worship. In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi explains that the exegetes of the Quran unanimously agree that the prostration, whichever form it took, was a salutation and not a form of worship.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jama' Al-Bayan, 5/3600.

After all, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who states the fact that Yusuf's (Joseph's) family prostrated to him. Moreover, it is He Who ordered the angels to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him.*<sup>(1)</sup> Why then do some people interpret these verses to mean that the angel bowed down in worship to Adam? The true believer understands that the prostration of the angels before Adam was a form of obedience to a Divine Command. In addition, Adam was created by Allah *the Almighty* from clay and He blew His Spirit into him. Therefore, commanding the angels to prostrate before him is meant to show their gratitude for Allah's creation of humankind.

The same is true for the prostration of Ya'qub's (Jacob) family to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*; it is a form of giving thanks to Allah *the Almighty* for reuniting them. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* states this fact in the verse in question, and He does not declare Ya'qub's (Jacob's) family sinful for doing such an act.<sup>(2)</sup> Thus, their prostration was meant to offer their salutations to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* as he was perfectly capable of returning their greetings in the same way.

Once again, it must be emphasised that their prostration before Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was not intended as a form of worship, for worship is an act that is carried out by an inferior who is trying to approach his superior, but the worshipped being does not reciprocate the worship. If the act of prostration in worship was to anyone other than Allah *the Almighty* then its doer is punished for this misdeed, for prostrating in worship to anyone other than Him *the Almighty* is absolutely forbidden.

Worshiping Allah *the Almighty* implies following His commandments and avoiding His prohibitions. Therefore, the prostration in the verse in question is a group reaction stemming from their gratitude for being granted relief after hardship and sadness. Allah *the Almighty* rewards for such act of worship.

<sup>(1) &#</sup>x27;This is a reference to Allah's saying: 'And when We said to the angels: Make obeisance to Adam they did obeisance...' (al-Baqara: 34)

<sup>(2)</sup> Allah the Almighty has abrogated this (custom) in our Shari'a. Furthermore, He replaced the custom of genuflection with exchanging words of salutation. Qatadah said, 'Such was the salutation reserved for kings in their time, and Allah the Almighty has given this community of the faithful (that is, the Muslims) greetings of peace, that is, As-Salamu `Alaykum, which is the greeting of the people of paradise.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jama' Al-Bayan, 5/3600.

The greeting offered by a servant, which can be reciprocated by another or even answered in a better manner, is something which Allah *the Almighty* does not prohibit and it has nothing to do with worship.<sup>(1)</sup>

We must, therefore, realise that the family's prostration to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* can be reconciled by means of reason which agrees with the language of The Quran, while considering the circumstances of the story.

If we ponder Ya'qub's statement and the sadness that he suffered, as well as Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers' compunction for their past actions and for the hardship that they underwent, we will surely conclude that the prostration was intended to show their gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* Who controls all things. This way of comprehending the matter is better than making unjustified claims. Let us ask the following question, 'Did they perform this prostration without Allah's Knowledge of it'? Of course, they did not.

After this part of the verse, we come across words addressed by Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* to his father, 'Father, this is the fulfilment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true....' (*Yusuf*: 100). The dream referred to in this verse is the first scene in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* relates the latter's words as follows, 'I dreamed of eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them all bow down before me.' (*Yusuf*: 4)

In the verse under discussion, Yusuf (Joseph) said, 'My Lord has made it come true (*Yusuf*: 100). This statement indicates that his dream has been fulfilled. Indeed, Yusuf's (Joseph's) father and brothers realised this when they prostrated to him in salutation and gratitude. As stated above, they– the eleven brothers, the father and the aunt who replaced the mother – did not prostrate with the intention of worshiping Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. Finally, this means that the dreams of prophets are inevitably fulfilled. In the same connection, someone may pose the following question, 'What about the unfulfilled dream of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in which, Allah *the Almighty* 

<sup>(1) &#</sup>x27;Anas ibn Malik narrated 'We asked, 'Messenger of Allah should we bow to each other if we meet?' He responded, 'No.' Then we asked, 'Should we hug each other?' He again responded, 'No.' Then we asked, 'Should we shake each other's hand?' He responded, 'Yes.' This Hadith is narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir and he ascribed it to ibn A'bd Al-Barr in his book At-Tamhid. See Al-Qurtubi, Jam' Al-Bayan, 5/3600.

orders him to sacrifice his son"? After all, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was on the verge of carrying out the command, and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was resigned to Allah's Decree. We contend; 'Only prophets are legally obliged to undertake the commands which are revealed to them in dreams. This is because Satan cannot penetrate their dreams. In other words, prophets are infallible with regards to demonic attacks in the dream-state.

However, if a normal human being were to claim that he had a dream in which he was ordered to carry out some specific action, we would say, 'You are not obliged to carry out this order which you dreamt of. After all, Islamic law does not oblige you to do so, not to mention that Satan is able to penetrate into your dreams.'

In contrast to normal mortals, Ibrahim's (Abraham's) performing the command– which came to him in a dream – of sacrificing his son, and his attempt to do so stem from his legal binding to orders which come to him in dreams.

Allah *the Almighty* speaks of this incident to show us the great tribulation which Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* faced. In addition, this anecdote reveals his utter submission to Allah's Decree and his willingness to meticulously carry out every order. Allah *the Almighty* states this fact in the following verse, 'And when his Lord tried Ibrahim (Abraham) with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said, "Surely I will make you a leader of men."" (*al-Baqara:* 124) The hardest of tests which Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* passed through was to obey the command of sacrificing his son with his own hands. That is why I always insist that only the prophets are obliged to obey the commands that they receive in dreams. Normal people, however, must consider dreams that are contrary to the Divine Way of Guidance to be of demonic origins.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *Glorified is He* continues to state the remainder of Yusuf's (Joseph's) speech, saying, 'and has been gracious to me— He released me from prison...' (*Yusuf*: 100). Here arises the following question, 'Why did Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* not chronologically mention the misfortunes which he had to endure, such as when his brothers cast him in the well'? We contend: 'He did not want to bring up past incidents which would spoil his long-awaited reunion with his family. However, he mentioned other calamities which he endured after the incident of the well,

including his enslavement and incarceration after refusing to succumb to the desires of the governor's wife. He also recalled how Allah *the Almighty* has been gracious toward him and released him from prison. Furthermore, after being liberated, he was blessed in many ways, including his ascension to power.

Someone might also proclaim that the story is not harmonious since some incidents are mentioned while others are omitted. We answer that the story is in perfect harmony because we should make a distinction between historical accounts whose purpose is to relate historical facts and stories whose purpose is to relate morally and spiritually significant narratives of the past.

The verse in question is centred on the union of the brothers, the father, and the aunt. Therefore, there is no need for stating chronological facts which would cause dissention. This is especially true since Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had previously said, 'You will hear no reproaches today. May Allah forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful' (*Yusuf:* 92).

Moreover, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had previously addressed them with benevolence by attributing their misdemeanour to ignorance on their part; a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah, 'He said, "Do you now realise what you did to Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother when you were ignorant?"" (*Yusuf:* 89)

In the verse under discussion, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* evokes the blessings that Allah *the Almighty* bestowed upon him, saying, 'this is the fulfilment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made come true' (*Yusuf:* 100). Furthermore, he gratefully acknowledges Allah's Grace by saying, 'and has been gracious to me— He released me from prison' (*Yusuf:* 100). The previous part of the verse only mentions the grace that was bestowed upon Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him,* whilst the next part mentions Allah's Grace to his family, 'and He brought you here from the desert' (*Yusuf:* 100).

The verb *ahsan* (to be gracious) is sometimes followed by the particle *ila* (to) and thus means that someone has been gracious to me. Other times, it is followed by the particle ba ` as in the verse in question. In other words, the Graciousness of Allah *the Almighty* permeated all aspects of Yusuf's (Joseph's)

life; He made him a ruler and brought his family from the desert.<sup>(1)</sup> On the other hand, when the word *ihsan* is followed by the particle *ila*, this means that graciousness is bestowed specifically upon Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* for only the latter may benefit from it.

To recap, Allah *the Almighty* has endowed Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* with two types of graciousness: one type which is specifically bestowed upon him, and another restricted to his family.

He considered their arrival from the desert as a form of Divine Graciousness because people of the desert live in a secluded and primordial state. They do not settle in a fixed location. They do not belong to a society, nor have solid houses to live in. Furthermore, they subsist on flora and rainwater, and they carry their belongings on camelback, roaming from one region to another. People of the desert are deprived of the blessings offered by civilisation. In urban areas, everything that you need is within your grasp. However, life in the desert compels man to seek his livelihood in different places of the earth. Therefore, life in civilised cities is more settled than life in the desert.

The Arab poet Ahmad Shawqi<sup>(2)</sup> *Allah rest his soul* portrays the difference between life in the desert and in the city in the following fictitious argument between someone who zealously defends life in the desert, and another who is equally passionate about defending city life. The poet says:

'Behold, ibn Jurayj, for I am the arid desert,

And (I carry on) in this parched subsistence.

And (I subsist) from he who is drawing milk from the goats,

And from he who is igniting the fire somewhere else.

(Unlike) those who listen to the songs of Ma'bad and Al-Ghariq,

We are tormented by howling hyenas!

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi says, 'It is related that Ya'qub (Jacob) lived in Can'an, and that he belonged to a people who were rural herdsmen. Some opine that Ya'qub (Jacob) was not born in the desert, but that he moved to the desert where he lived.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3602.

<sup>(2)</sup> Ahmad Shawqi is an innovative poet and was the 'prince of (Arab) poets' of his time. He is still looked up to as the greatest Arab poet of the modern age.

They (city dwellers) eat exquisite meals,

And we drink our livestock's milk.'

Ibn Jurayj is complaining of the hardships and monotony of desert life in which he only sees the usual sights such as of goats being milked and fires being lit. Unlike the people of the city, the desert people are not enjoying the voices of the famous singers of their days. Rather, they listen to the sounds of howling hyenas. The desert people do not eat meals prepared by cooks; rather, they drink milk that is produced by their livestock.

Layla, who is zealously defensive of the desert, then retorts:

'O ibn Jurayj, Hind has wrongly abused the desert!

And (unduly) critical in her judgment was she!

For the desert is naught but the abode of the generous,

And the dwelling place of (men of) pure conscience.

To her belongs the horizon where the sun dawns,

And city dwellers possess the place where dusk begins.

(The desert women) are like sweet basil extending to the horizon,

But (so few are) city women that they (resemble) basil sprouting from a flowerpot!

Consumed by love are they, while the city ladies

Are more attentive to their wellbeing than to love!'

The Arabic word *i`tasafat* in the first line means 'to wrongly abuse'. In other words, Hind has wrongly abused the desert. Then the speaker numerates the virtues of the desert, pointing out that the desert women are like sweet basil stretching as far as the eye can see, while the women of cities evoke the image of a basil sprout growing in a flowerpot or any other container.

Then the poet speaks of the virtues of desert people, and he takes pride in the fact that desert women are passionate lovers who are consumed by their love, even though their beloved cannot assure them material comfort. The poet alleges that the desert woman is so consumed by love that she becomes inflicted with tuberculosis and dies. By contrast, the city women's good health follows her falling in love. Back to the verse in question, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* expresses his gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* for having been so gracious to him and to his family who was brought from the desert to live in the civilised land of Egypt. The newly arrived family beheld the stark contrast between the parched life of the desert and the easy and soft life of the city.

Thereafter, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* briefly mentions the animosity that his brothers had once felt toward him, saying, '...after Satan sowed discord between me and my brothers...' (*Yusuf*: 100). Clearly, this is a conciliatory reference to the conflict between Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and his brothers for he attributed it to the discord that was sown by Satan. In other words, the dispute did stem from a shortcoming within their souls. This verse suggests that the brothers' discord was the result of Satan's whispers that had the effect of a painful prick which triggers the person to act harmfully. This image is derived from a goad with which a horse trainer commands his horse. Unlike a stab, a prick is a poke which stirs someone into action.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* warns us against the works of Satan in the following verse, 'And if a false imputation from Satan afflicts you, seek refuge in Allah.' (*al-A'raf:* 200) Everyone knows that the animosity of Satan towards mankind has long existed, and by seeking refuge in Allah *the Almighty* from Satan, you obtain protection from demonic forces. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'surely, those who guard (against evil), when a visitation from Satan afflicts them they become mindful, then lo! They see.' (*al-A'raf:* 201) This verse clearly shows that when man recalls the animosity between him and Satan, he should safeguard himself against dark satanic whispers by strengthening himself with faith in Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question: '... My Lord is most subtle in achieving what He will; He is the All Knowing, the Truly Wise.' (*Yusuf:* 100) Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* is the Omniscient Who manages all things.

As for the word *lutf*, it implies lightness, and its antonym is *kathafa*, that is, heaviness or density. Something which is *latif* (light) has very light body mass. However, when *lutf* is understood in its aspect of subtleness, one could say that the subtler something is, the more rigorous it is, as it cannot be impeded by any obstacle.

When we consider Allah's attribute of having Subtle Knowledge, we understand it in the sense that there is nothing that can stand in the way of His Divine Will and that He knows the location of all things. Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* is the All-Aware and the Knower of subtleties. Thus, nothing can escape Allah's Sublet Knowledge, nor can anything be hidden from Him.

I repeat, there is nothing in this world which can prevent the Divine Will from unfolding, and Allah *the Almighty* knows the locations of all entities in existence. In other words, Allah's *Glorified is He* Knowledge is absolute. Furthermore, He is All-Wise and handles every event with precision. No person can contribute anything to Allah *the Almighty* for He has Absolute Perfection.

Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* states Yusuf's (Joseph's) prayer in the following verse, saying:

رَبِّ قَدْ ءَاتَيْتَنِي مِنَ ٱلْمُلْكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِن تَأْوِيلِ ٱلْأَحَادِيثِ فَاطِرَ ٱلسَّمَوَتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ أَنتَ وَلِيٍّ فِ ٱلدُّنيَا وَٱلْآخِرَةِ تَوَفَّني مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِ بِٱلصَّلِحِينَ (

My Lord! You have given me authority; You have taught me something about the interpretation of dreams; Creator of the heavens and the earth, You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous' [101] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 101)

We know that Lordship implies creating something from naught, supplying dependent creatures with sustenance and providing a setting in which procreation is possible to ensure the survival of the species. Moreover, these variables must interrelate in a harmonious manner.

Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* created things from naught, ensured the continuation of life by supplying creatures with sustenance and He sustained the life of the human species through marriage and reproduction. In the same connection, we should note that every human receives their share from the bestowal of Lordship, whether he is a believer or a disbeliever. Moreover, everything within creation is subservient to all human beings, for Allah *the Almighty* has brought human beings into existence, and therefore ensured their subsistence.

As Islam teaches us, Allah *the Almighty* not only imparts upon His believing servants the blessings of Lordship but also grants them with the bestowal of Divinity embodied in the Divine Way of Guidance. So, when Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* proclaims, 'My Lord! You have given me authority...' (*Yusuf*: 101), he implies that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who granted him dominance, power and authority. This is so because no one – including the wicked oppressors – can overpower Allah *the Almighty*. It is precisely for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, 'Say, "O Allah, Master of the Kingdom! You give the kingdom to whomsoever You pleases and takes away the kingdom from whomsoever You pleases, and You exalts whom You pleases and abases whom You pleases in Your Hand is the good; surety, You has power over all things."' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) Obviously, the act of granting dominion is never met with resistance by rulers; however, taking away dominion is often resisted by whoever is losing power. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* honours and humbles whom He wills.

When a believer truly grasps the meaning of this verse, he realises with certitude that there is no fleeing from Allah's predestination. The believer will realise that granting or taking away of power are both blessings from Allah *the Almighty*. Likewise, being honoured or humbled by Allah *the Almighty* is a blessing, because humility, far from being a privation, prevents man from falling into vanity and pride and from harming other people's faith.

Concerning the above-mentioned verse, some people said, 'We must refer to an implicit meaning, that is, while the act of granting dominion and honouring is good, the act of taking away dominion and humiliating is evil'. Such people say this because their statement is based on the assumption that this verse contains two blessings and two privations. We contend: 'What you deem to be a privation is in fact a blessing from Allah *the Almighty* since everything He wills is good'.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf's (Joseph's) statement, 'My Lord! You have given me authority (*al-mulk*) ...' (*Yusuf*: 101) requires that we distinguish between the meaning of *al-mulk* and *al-milk*. Everyone possesses certain things such as clothes, a pen, house, furniture etc. Such items are called *al-milk* (possessions). As for *al-mulk* (dominion), it is to have control over those who possess things.

Allah *the Almighty* has granted certain people dominion over His creatures. He firstly granted the people ownership of their possessions and then granted some of them dominion over their possessions. Allah *the Almighty* grants and withdraws power from people in such a way, for power is never absolutely in one person's possession.

Consider, for example, the fate of the Shah of Iran who was invested with tremendous power and ruled over a civilised nation and a powerful army. Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* withdrew power from the Shah through certain people who began to undo the basis for his political authority. Eventually, the Shah was overthrown.

In this fleeting world, you have authority over the outer parts of your body: you command your hand to hit someone, and it does so. Man persists in this state until the Final Day when he has no power over his body. On this day, Allah *the Almighty* has dominance over things Alone. He proclaims in the following verse, 'To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16)

On the Day of Judgment, men of power are stripped of their authority, and dominance belongs to Allah Alone.

Note that aside from *mulk* (authority) and *milk* (possessions), we have the word *malakut* which is the world that is not perceived by our senses. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And thus did We show Ibrahim (Abraham) the kingdom (*malakut*) of the heavens and the earth...' (*al-An'am:* 75).

This verse clearly tells us that Allah *the Almighty* revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the world of secrets that are hidden in His creatures. When witnessing modern scientists uncovering the mysteries of the plant and animal realms, one is bewildered by the precision of Allah's creation.

Moreover, whoever Allah *the Almighty* has granted the subtle knowledge and the insight of the scholars, penetrates the outer world and sees the intelligible realm with the eyes of knowledge. This vision allows him to uncover secrets and unveil hidden truths.

In his prayers to his Lord, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* adds, 'You have taught me something about the interpretation of dreams...' (*Yusuf:* 101).

Here, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is acknowledging Allah's Graciousness to him for having granted him the knowledge of the interpretation of dreams. It is through this knowledge that he *peace be upon him* could interpret the dreams of the two prisoners who were incarcerated with him in jail, as well as the dream of the king which caused Yusuf's (Joseph's) rise to power; a fact which is by no means surprising considering Allah's Almightiness.

Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* gratefully exclaims, 'Creator of the heavens and the earth...' (*Yusuf*: 101). Since Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of all things, it is not surprising that He should teach Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* many forms of knowledge. It is as if Yusuf's (Joseph's) faith had attained the rank in which he knows with certitude the contents of the following verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.' (*al-Mulk*: 14)

In our daily life, we witness inventions benefiting not only the inventor but also other beneficiaries. The inventor of the threshing machine or a plough, for example, instructs us how to use these machines or tools. Clearly, his instructions are meant to ensure that the device operates properly.

Let us offer another example to further clarify this point; when our car breaks down, we call a mechanic to look at it. If the mechanic is a trustworthy person, he informs you of the mechanical problem with exactitude and thus fixes it. However, if the mechanic is dishonest, he will damage engine parts that were intact, and will make unneeded reparations for the car. Thus, we see that each inventor is cognisant of the secrets and intricacies of his invention. Considering this conclusion, what are we to say of Allah *the Almighty* the Greatest Creator of all? Surely, He is the All-Aware and the Knower of all things.

Given what we just explained, why did Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* speak of Allah *the Almighty* as, 'Creator of the heavens and the earth.' (*Yusuf:* 101)? The reason for this is that he *peace be upon him* knows for certain that Allah *the Almighty* has created man, and that man has a beginning and an end. Only Allah *the Almighty* knows when our end will be, for man may die a day old, he may perish in his mother's womb or he may die after having experienced life and its vicissitudes for one hundred years.

In contrast, the heavens and the earth are long-standing creations. The sun has never needed any spare parts, for it has never fallen! The sun heats the earth, while it is far above it. Moreover, it is because of Allah's Will that the sun does not fall upon the earth. Allah *the Almighty* stated, '...And He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except with His permission; most surely Allah is Compassionate, Merciful to men.' (*al-Hajj:* 65) Consider the following verse as well, 'Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of men, but most people do not know.' (*Ghafir:* 57) Man undergoes changes and he dies, but the heavens and the earth, on the contrary, are unchanging, unless Allah *the Almighty* wills otherwise.

Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* continues his supplication to Allah *the Almighty* saying, 'You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter...' (*Yusuf:* 101). Allah *the Almighty* is indeed Yusuf's (Joseph's) Protector in this world for He granted him victory, drew him closer unto Himself and supported him when he was faced with hardship. This verse clearly shows how he is invoking Allah *the Almighty* for His Blessings in this ephemeral world, and for His Reward in the Hereafter.

Since Allah *the Almighty* is Yusuf's (Joseph's) Protector in this world and in the next, the latter also asks, '...Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous.' (*Yusuf*: 101) By asking, 'Let me die in true devotion to You... (*Yusuf*: 101), Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is invoking Allah *the Almighty* to make him a beneficiary of His Reward in the Hereafter, just as he enjoyed Allah's Bounty in this worldly life.

Muslim scholars have remarked that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is unique in having desired to depart this life. After all, when man is granted success in this world, his aspirations are never-ending and he always craves for more bounty.

The annals of Islamic history record that when `Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz,<sup>(1)</sup> the Commander of the Believers, was presented with a soft piece of clothing,

<sup>(1)</sup> He is Abu Hafs, the righteous caliph who ruled over the Umayyad dynasty in Ash-Sham. He was born in 61 A.H. and was raised in Medina and Al-Walid gave its Emirate to him. After Al-Walid, he became a minister for Sulayman ibn 'Abd Al-Malik in Ash-Sham. He then became Caliph in the year 99 A.H., but his reign was short because he died in 101 A.H. at the age of 41. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam, 5/50.

he would ask for one that was even smoother. Likewise, when offered a tender dish, he would demand for another that was even tenderer. However, when he became Caliph, people offered him clothing, but he would ask for clothing that was rougher in texture. This went on to the point that the members of his retinue began to think that he was no longer sound in the way he treated himself. These people did not understand that his soul always longed for better things; when he yearned for the rank of Emir, he was granted it, and when he desired to be Caliph, he assumed that position. Finally, after having ascended to the heights of power, he could long for nothing other than Paradise.<sup>(1)</sup>

One of `Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz's companions, Ma`mun ibn Mahram *Allah be pleased with them* relates that he once entered upon `Umar and found him praying to Allah *the Almighty* for death. He asked him, 'Commander of the Believers, why do you ask your Lord for death when he has made you a cause of such goodness (on Earth)? You have revived the practices of Prophet Muhammad; you have put an end to religious innovations, and your presence is a blessing to all Muslims.'

`Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz responded, 'Should I not be akin to the righteous servant of Allah who, after receiving His full bounty, prayed, '...Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous' (*Yusuf:* 101)?'

We should note that the supplication, '...Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous.' (*Yusuf:* 101) is composed of two parts; the first part is asking Allah *the Almighty* to let him die; while the second is to let him die as one who has submitted himself to Him *the Almighty*.

Clearly, each person dies regardless of whether he asks for death. Therefore, the first part of this prayer is not asked for itself, for each one inevitably dies. Thus, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* asked for the second part of this prayer, namely; to die in a state of perfect submission to Allah *the Almighty*. It

<sup>(1)</sup> In his book, Abu Nu'aym Al-Asfahani relates that 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz said, 'My soul is unrelentingly desirous. Each time the worldly life offers it something, it desires something better. When offered the greatest thing on earth, namely; to be a Caliph, my soul still longed for something superior. Sa'id ibn 'Amir said that paradise is better than being Caliph.' See Al-'Asfahani, Hilyat Al-'Awliya', 5/331.

is for this reason that upon visiting graves we utter, 'May you be safe, O inmates of the abodes of the believers and the Muslims, and if Allah pleases, we shall follow you.'<sup>(1)</sup>

In this connection, if someone were to ask, 'Why does one say 'If Allah wills, we shall follow you,' even though death is inevitable'? We say, 'We say "If Allah wills" out of our desire to join as believers the ranks of the dead who have preceded us'.

Someone may also pose the following question, 'Why would a prophet say to Allah *the Almighty* 'Join me with the righteous' (*Yusuf:* 101)? After all, righteousness is only possible in this world by following the Divine Way of Guidance that a Prophet of Allah is sent with'. We answer, 'The word 'righteous' in this verse encompasses all of the prophets and others who have believed in the Message revealed by Allah *the Almighty*.'

The verse in question brings an end to the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*.<sup>(2)</sup> Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* turns our attention to the moral of the story. This story is different from other Quranic stories because it is completely related in one chapter of The Quran, whereas the rest of the stories are dispersed throughout various places in it.

Another exception to this general trend in the Quran is the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* which is also narrated from beginning to end in one

<sup>(1)</sup> Buraydah Al-Aslami Allah be pleased with him narrated, 'Prophet Muhammad used to teach them (i.e. the companions) whenever they came out to visit the graveyard to say, "May you be safe, O inmates of the abodes of the believers and the Muslims, and if Allah pleases, we shall follow you, we pray to Allah for well-being for ourselves and for you." See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 5/353, 359; and Muslim, Hadith no. 975.

<sup>(2)</sup> Yusuf (Joseph) peace be upon him lived his last days in Egypt, and died when he was 107 years old. In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi narrated that Yusuf (Joseph) peace be upon him was buried by the Nile river in a marble coffin. The reason for this is that each group of people desired to bury him in their graveyard to be blessed by being buried by his side. This escalated to the point where a fight was about to break out. Finally, the people decided to bury him at the source of the Nile, allowing the water to pass over his body and to be diffused throughout Egypt. Four hundred years later, when Musa (Moses) peace be upon him left Egypt with the people of Israel, he exhumed Yusuf's (Joseph's) body from the Nile and transported his casket to Jerusalem where he lies buried with his fathers.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3605.

chapter. Certain critics have superficially observed that the stories of the Quran are redundantly repeated in various scattered thereof. In response to this observation, I always insist that this apparently repetitive narrative is a synthesising of the various events of each story which, if reassembled, would amount to the complete story.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* wanted certain events of each story to be retold for a specific purpose. Generally, the Quranic narratives were revealed to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Throughout his twenty-three years as a Messenger, he suffered great calamities and needed reassurance at every moment. So, Allah *the Almighty* revealed these stories to strengthen his heart.<sup>(1)</sup> In some instances, Allah *Glorified is He* tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* not to be sad, for what he is facing is similar to what the messengers before him had suffered.<sup>(2)</sup>

In fact, one sometimes comes across a single narrative that is made up of two elements, such as the story of the enmity between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And Pharaoh's family took him up that he might be an enemy and a grief for them...' (*al-Qasas:* 8).

In this verse, the hostility is prompted by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him.* About this subject, Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'there shall take him up one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him...' (*Ta Ha:* 39).

Here, enmity is reciprocated because it arises from two parties. In fact, opposition or enmity is not sustainable when there is only one party involved. A short fight may take place when there is a one-sided enmity, but the reciprocal enmity between two parties prolongs the duration of that fight.

A second example is to be found in the same story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when Allah *the Almighty* relates an event which took place in the early days of his life; that is, prior to his mother's casting him into the river in accordance with Allah's Decree. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And

<sup>(1)</sup> Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And all we relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith; and in this has come to you the truth and an admonition, and a reminder to the believers.' (*Hud:* 120)

<sup>(2)</sup> Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And if they call you a liar, truly apostles before you were called liars, and to Allah are all affairs returned.' (*Fatir:* 4)

We revealed to *Musa*'s (Moses') mother, saying, "Suckle him, then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve" (*al-Qasas:* 7).

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* is heartening *Musa*'s (Moses') mother before she casts her son into the river. Allah *the Almighty* is also foreshadowing the incident prior to its unfolding. At the moment she was about to place her son into the river, Allah *the Almighty* revealed to her, 'Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore; there shall take him up one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him...' (*Ta Ha:* 39).

Those who proclaim that the stories of the Quran are told in a haphazard manner are oblivious to the fact that the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* appears in a single chapter of the Quran. Nor do they recall that the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is related continuously and in chronological order, from Yusuf's (Joseph's) first dream to his ascension to power and ending with reuniting with his family.

Furthermore, the story was revealed in one chapter after the disbelievers of Mecca asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about it. They knew well that he was not tutored by a teacher, nor could he read from a book. Furthermore, they were aware of his life before being a prophet; however, when he proclaimed to them that Allah *the Almighty* had revealed the Quran to him, they refused to believe, claiming that he hears anecdotes from hither and thither. Yet, when they asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* to recount them the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* he recounted it in full and from beginning to end.

Concluding the story, Allah the Almighty says:

ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَآءِ ٱلْغَيْبِ نُوجِيهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا كُنتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ أَجْمَعُوا أَمَرُهُمْ وَهُمْ يَكْرُونَ ١

This account is part of what was beyond your knowledge [Muhammad]. We revealed it to you: you were not present with Joseph's brothers when they made their treacherous plans [102] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 102)

The demonstrative pronoun 'this' in this verse is about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. The verse is addressed to Messenger Muhammad

*peace and blessings be upon him.* This verse clearly shows that he was not present with Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers when they said, 'Although we are many, Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother are dearer to our father than we are...' (*Yusuf:* 8).

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has informed him *peace and blessings be upon him* of things which he was not present to witness.

As we have said previously, *al-ghayb* (the unseen) is what is absent from your sight but not from someone else's. Note that this type of *ghayb* is a relative one. However, there is also an absolute *ghayb* which refers to what is absent from your knowledge and from other human beings as well. In fact, there are three obstacles which veil the unseen world from our sight: The first is the obstacle of the past time which you did not experience, or of the future which has not yet come to pass. The second is the obstacle of spatial location. The third is the obstacle rendered by the present moment. In other words, there are things which are currently taking place in one location or another, but you are oblivious to these events by being in a different position in space.

Allah's saying, 'We revealed it to you...' (*Yusuf:* 102) means that Allah *the Almighty* secretly reveals unto you, O Prophet Muhammad, the incident of when the brothers gathered together to decide whether to kill Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* or to cast him into the dark depths of the well.

In this way, Allah *the Almighty* lifted the veil of the past and gave Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* insight into a story which He had not known previously. Obviously, he was not a direct witness of what had happened between the brothers. He was not instructed by a teacher, and nor did he read of this story in a book, for he was unlettered and could neither read nor write.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* describes him *peace and blessings be upon him* as, 'And you did not recite before it any book, nor did you transcribe one with your right hand, for then could those who say untrue things have doubted.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48)

The disbelievers of Mecca were fully aware of Messenger Muhammad's movements – including where he lived, the places he travelled to, and the people he met – prior to his prophetic mission. Had they known that he had

read a book, it would surely have been a reason for them to accuse him of lying. They foolishly claimed, '...Only a mortal teaches him.' (*an-Nahl:* 103). In response to their fallacious claim, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The tongue of him whom they reproach is barbarous, and this is clear Arabic tongue.' (*an-Nahl:* 103) In this way, Allah *the Almighty* refuted their claim.

Furthermore, He has informed Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings* be upon him of many things of the unseen world. We have previously elaborated extensively on verses which state that he was not present when certain events took place. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'This is of the announcements relating to the unseen which We reveal to you; and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Maryam (Mary) in his charge, and you were not with them when they contended one with another.' (*Al-'Imran:* 44)

Another example is Allah's saying, 'And you were not on the western side when We revealed to Musa (Moses) the commandment, and you were not among the witnesses.' (*al-Qasas:* 44) Thus, this verse implies that Messenger Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* knowledge of the above events comes originally from Allah *the Almighty*.

Having received instructions from the Jews, the disbelievers went up to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and inquired about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in their vehemently and obstinately sceptical manner. In response to their inquiry, he *peace and blessings be upon him* related the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in one chapter of The Quran, unlike most of the other Quranic narratives, which were revealed in the form of dispersed narratives.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* related the story in its entirety since they asked for the whole story rather than a specific segment from it. Moreover, the disbelievers expected him to refuse to answer their question out of ignorance, but he answered them in full.

After hearing of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* the disbelievers should have realised that it is Allah *the Almighty* who sent Messenger Muhammad and taught him this story. However, the disbelievers refused to believe. This saddened Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and

so Allah *the Almighty* told him not to be upset or despondent, 'Perhaps you will kill yourself with grief because they do not believe.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement.' (*al-Kahf:* 6) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* explains to him that he should only convey the Message.

Allah has revealed these consoling words to Messenger Muhammad *peace* and blessings be upon him when he realised that the disbelievers were obstinate in their disbelief even though he had satisfied their inquiries. The disbelievers, nevertheless, rejected the Truth; a fact which is recorded in The Quran, 'And they denied them unjustly and proudly while their soul had been convinced of them; consider, then how was the end of the mischief-makers.' (an-Naml: 14) They denied the Message sent to them because they were concerned solely with temporal power. They should have believed in that which Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him had brought to them, but it was stubbornness which came between them and certain truth and faith.

When a person is stubbornly clinging to an idea, neither an undeniable proof nor a flawless logic can persuade them to think otherwise. Similarly, the disbelievers denied Prophet Muhammad's message after having heard the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in its entirety. They wanted to maintain dominion over their helpless servants and to maintain tyrannical control over other people. Since they hated the idea of being equalised with other people, they rejected the religion of Islam because it addresses all of humanity in a just and equal manner.

In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions a principle of universal significance, saying:

## وَمَا أَحْتُرُ ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ (

### However eagerly you may want them to, most men will not believe [103] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 103)

This verse clearly shows that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not be able to guide all the people to Islam, no matter how strongly he might desire it. In fact, he had a burning desire for his people to believe in his Message; after all he was one of them.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* speaks of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers (he is) compassionate.' (*at-Tawba:* 129) Despite Prophet Muhammad's concern for them, they rejected his Message which caused him to grieve.

On the other hand, there is a particular verse that shows what the Jews – who incited some people of Mecca to ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*– are concerned about. Allah *the Almighty* states, 'And you will most certainly find them the greediest of men for life (greedier) than even those who are polytheists...' (*al-Baqara*: 96).

In short, the people of Mecca should have believed in his *peace and blessings be upon him* Message since they were presented with irrefutable proofs that he was indeed a Messenger of Allah.

Back to the verse in question, Allah the Almighty says, 'However eagerly you may want them to, most men will not believe.' (Yusuf: 103) Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse to console Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and to remind him that the impoverished spiritual state of the people of Mecca is not limited to them; rather, it is the state of most people. Here arises the following question, 'Why do most people disbelieve?' The reason is that most people are unable to properly measure that which the Divine Way of Guidance is offering in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. So, when man adopts Allah's Way of Guidance, he must take account of the rewards that he will reap in the Hereafter. In this way, one will fully realise firstly that no matter how much he tries to please his soul with worldly pleasures, their time in this world is confined to Allah's Decree, and secondly that life could come to an end at any moment.Unlike what many people believe, Allah the Almighty did not veil the durations of our lives in this world to be unknown to us. On the contrary, the uncertainty of our life span is a basis for clarity because the possibility of departing from this world at any given moment makes man vigilant regarding their spiritual duties.

Thus, there is wisdom in sudden deaths, for they serve as reminders to man that death has no cause. Rather, death is a cause in itself which should induce piety. Furthermore, this is the case even when death results from sickness or an unanticipated happening. In short, man takes pleasure in this world for an amount of time that has been preordained by Allah *the Almighty*. In contrast to the ephemeral nature of worldly pleasures, man delights in the pleasures of the Hereafter eternally with Allah's unlimited bestowals.

The rewards that the believer enjoys in the Hereafter correspond to Allah's unlimited Omnipotence. In other words, the believer's reward in the Hereafter is not according to the limited capacity of the creature, but according to Allah's Absolute Power.

Consider a person who is oblivious to the reality of the Hereafter, that is, a person who denies the Hereafter and only lives for the pleasures of this fleeting world; we would say to such a person, 'Reflect on what Allah *the Almighty* prohibits, and what He commands you, and consider the fact that these proscriptions and commands do not only apply to you, but that they apply to millions of other believers'.

If you were to carefully reflect on this fact, you would realise that if Allah's prohibitions forbid you from engaging in activities that could harm others, they at the same time prohibit others from doing the same to you. When seen from this angle, the benefits of such prohibitions can be measured in worldly terms, regardless of the religious advantages.

In short, we should consider the above in light of the maxim that 'averting things which cause corruption or harm should take precedence over reaping benefits'. Let us offer an example to clarify this maxim; imagine that a person who loves you is about to toss an apple at you, and at the same time, someone who hates you throws a stone at you. If the two objects were cast at you simultaneously, you should obviously dodge the rock before catching the apple. Thus, we come to understand that 'the act of averting things which cause corruption or harm should take precedence over reaping benefits'.

Man should take account of this principle in all his affairs because some the modern devices, civilizational innovations and scientific inventions which benefit us to a certain extent, had proven to be devastatingly harmful.One example is the invention of the insecticide DDT which killed not only unwanted insects but also important birds.

It is precisely for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge.' (*Al-Isra*': 36) Prior to putting an invention into operation, you must first assess its benefits and harms. Only after these experiments should modern inventions be used.

For example, when installing electricity in their homes, some people place electric outlets far above the ground and beyond the reach of children. The reason for this precaution is to prevent infants from placing their fingers in the sockets and being electrocuted. In fact, some engineers have invented a device which automatically cuts the electric current when electricity comes into contact with a human hand.

This abovementioned precaution is also an example of 'averting things which cause harm before reaping benefits'. In short, one should always be cautious when dealing with modern inventions.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'However eagerly you may want them to, most people will not believe.' (*Yusuf:* 103) When Allah *the Almighty* says, 'most people will not believe' (*Yusuf:* 103), does this mean that the believers are a minority?! We contend, 'No, the believers are not a minority because Allah *the Almighty* is referring to the disbelievers as *akthar* (most/more), which is not only used in comparison with *aqqal* (less) but also with *kathir* (many). That referring to the disbelievers as 'most of the people', does not mean that the believers are the minority.

Consider the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* proclaims, 'Do you not see that Allah is He, Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many (*kathir*) of the people; and many (*kathir*) there are against whom chastisement has become necessary...' (*al-Hajj:* 18). In this verse, the pronoun *kathir* (many) is repeated twice about two distinct sets of people pertaining to the same group.

Thus, in the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* made it clear to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that no matter how strongly he desires for people to believe in Allah's Message, most of them will reject it. The verb used in this verse to show his eagerness is *harasa* which denotes attaching oneself and exerting great effort to retain or accomplish something which we deem to be either beneficial or something which wards a harm. *Al-hirs* therefore denotes the attachment of the soul to an objective and this demands great effort.

Allah *the Almighty* therefore explicitly tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will not guide those whom he longs to be guided. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'If you desire for their guidance, yet surely Allah does not guide him who leads astray...' (*an-Nahl:* 37). This verse clearly shows us that every messenger must be mentally prepared to confront people who will assess the advantages and apparent disadvantages of embracing the Message, and will not take account of the long-term blessings that are brought by believing in the Message. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* explains to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should be mentally prepared to confront similar types of injudicious people.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has brought the Message to them and asked them to believe for their own interests without seeking any recompense from them. If they truly understood this matter, they would have offered him recompense for guiding them to Allah's Righteous Path because a salary is allotted to a person who provides you with a useful service. Furthermore, man makes a point of paying those who offer him useful services. A service is defined in limited temporal and worldly terms, or it stretches out unto the infinite and brings us ease in this world and bliss in the Hereafter.

The Quran relates the following statement which was uttered by all the messengers<sup>(1)</sup> – excluding Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses), *peace be upon them* both, 'I do not ask you for any reward for it...' (*al-An'am:* 90).

Logically speaking, had the people of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reflected on the blessings brought about by his prophetic

<sup>(1)</sup> This statement was asserted by Prophet Nuh (Noah) peace be upon him (Yunus: 72, Hud: 29 and ash-Shu'ara': 109), Prophet Hud (Eber) peace be upon him (Hud: 51 and ash-Shu'ara': 127), Prophet Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him (ash-Shu'ara': 145), Prophet Lut (Lot) peace be upon him (ash-Shu'ara': 164), Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) peace be upon him (ash-Shu'ara': 180) and Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him (Saba': 47).

mission, they would have rewarded him for not only expounding on the nature of reality, man's fate in the Afterlife and the Path to Truth, but also for being a living and exemplary prototype of righteousness that should be emulated.

In our modern world, there are countless families that pay high prices for their children to attend private schools where they learn the basics of reading and writings. What is the adequate price to pay therefore to he who illuminates our spiritual vision and intellectual discernment with Divine Guidance? In short, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* offered us an everlasting benefit, but never asked for worldly compensation in return.

Allah the Almighty says:

وَمَا تَسْئَلُهُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِحْ رُلِلْعَالَمِينَ ٢

## You ask no reward from them for this: it is a reminder for all people [104] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 104)

This noble verse makes it clear that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not ask his people to recompense him for having guided them; for his reward is only with Allah *Glorified is He*. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Or do you ask them for a reward, so that they are overburdened by a debt?' (*at-Tur:* 40) In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* relates the following saying of Prophet Muhammad, 'Whatever reward I have asked of you, that is only for yourselves; my reward is only with Allah...' (*Saba':* 47).

In the above verse, we should take into account that he *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying so, increases his reward; that is, instead of accepting a limited reward in proportion to the capacity of the human beings, he is asking to be compensated by Him Whose Ability to reward is unlimited. One might also say that his work is so great that it can only be rewarded by Allah *Glorified is He*. After all, it is Allah Who has sent him to convey His Way of Guidance to mankind.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse in question, '... it is a reminder for all people.' (*Yusuf:* 104). The Arabic word *dhikr* (reminder) has many connotations. The root of this word is derived from *dhakira* (memory). We have previously explained that humans have receptive faculties embodied

in the sensory organs. The information and the data that are perceived by these senses are transferred to the consciousness. This assimilated data is then processed and contained for some time in one's consciousness. Afterwards, it is transmitted to the subconscious part of the mind until it is prompted by external events to return to consciousness. It is for this reason that you say, 'I remember'! When you recall a long-forgotten piece of information, It is as if the idea was stored somewhere in the mind other than one's consciousness. However, when the information is brought back to memory, it moves from the subconscious level to the seat of consciousness. Therefore, 'remembrance' is the act of recalling information from the subconscious level to the central of consciousness.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, '...And remind them of the Days of Allah...' (*Ibrahim:* 5). In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* commands Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to remind his people about events which took their course according to Allah's Will, as these events are not at the centre of their consciousness.

Moreover, the Quran itself is called a reminder since it reminds every believer about Allah Who has blessed us with His Way of Guidance that leads us to happiness in this life and in the Hereafter.

Therefore, the reminder helps the sensible person, and it is one manifestation of Allah's Mercy toward His creatures, for He has not let man delight in blessings without being aware of the One Who bestowed them.

Allah *the Almighty* has created this universe with meticulous precision wherein man's sustenance is to be found. Furthermore, one of Allah's Graces conferred on the human beings is sending messengers to remind them about His Bounties. Thus, the word *dhikr* which means at once 'remembrance, recollection, meditation, and invocation' points to the fact that man, in his innate nature, should be in constant remembrance and consciousness of Allah *Glorified is He*. However, He has decreed for distracting events to unfold in certain times; and that is why He includes all forms of *dhikr* (reminder) in the Noble Quran.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

## وَكَأَيِّن مِّنْ ءَايَةٍ فِي ٱلسَّمَوَتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ٢

# And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to [105] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 105)

When you hear the word *ka`ayyin* (many), you should know that it denotes a very large number, that is, a number that is so large that it cannot be numerated. A synonym of *ka`ayyin* is the word *kam* (many). It is important to understand that we proceed to count that which we think it is countable, but not, obviously, what is countless. For instance, no one can calculate the grains of sand in the desert, but everyone counts the change from a money transaction. When numeration is impossible it is because that which we are trying to numerate is countless. For example, no one can calculate or determine the number of stars. It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* reminds us repeatedly in the Quran about the blessings that He has showered upon His creatures. He says, 'and if you count Allah's favours, you will not be able to number them' (*Ibrahim:* 34).

In the above verse, the Arabic word *in* (if) introduces an uncertain matter. So, this verse clearly shows that we will not be able to count Allah's blessings – even if we try to – because the Divine Blessings are beyond calculation. We should note that what can be computed inevitably repeats itself. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned only one blessing in this verse, because if you were to contemplate a single Divine Blessing, you would realise that it contains a countless and innumerable number of blessings within its fold.

Therefore, the word *ka'ayyin* is synonymous with *kam* (many times). For example, when you admonish your child to study, you tell him, 'How many times have I urged you to study'? Clearly, you only make this statement when you lose hope. We should notice that the word *kam* highlights the great numerical quantity to the listener and not the speaker. It is as if you were confiding in the listener and urging him to speak truthfully. Or again, it is as if you were recalling your pieces of advice to him and found that you had many pieces of advice to give. This question of numerical quantity implied by the word *kam*, can be answered by the speaker, or it can be posed to the listener to provide the answer. Asking the listener to answer the question of the

numerical quantity of the matter at hand implies that he will confess his misdeeds, and this confession constitutes the key evidence.

When Allah *the Almighty* says 'many' (*Yusuf:* 105), this means that what will follow is great in number. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And how many a prophet has fought with whom were many worshippers of the Lord; so they did not become weak hearted on account of what befell them in Allah's way, nor did they weaken, nor did they abase themselves; and Allah loves the patient.' (*Al-'Imran:* 146) So, we understand that *ka'ayyin* denotes a very large number- so large that one is justified in not attempting to numerate it.

As for the Arabic word *ayat* (verses), it is the plural form of *aya* (a verse) which denotes a wondrous marvel which attracts one's attention. One can say, for example, 'So-and-so is a marvel (*aya*) of intelligence', that is, he is the supreme example of intelligence; or that his intelligence is stunning and outshines that of other individuals.

One may also say, 'So-and-so is a marvel of bravery', and so on. Therefore, the wonderful thing is that which is extraordinary and unforgettable.

Allah *Glorified is He* has filled His universe with wondrous signs from which one derives wisdom. Allah's signs are, in fact, divided into three categories: Firstly, the cosmic signs which we have spoken of earlier. Such signs are wonders and proofs – if contemplated – of Allah's Existence, as He is the One Who fashioned these wonderful signs. Moreover, they point to the reality that He Who created them is of Great Wisdom and Exactness. They also allude to the truth of Allah's Oneness and the necessity of believing in Him.

Allah *the Almighty* has scattered these signs in His universe and He proclaimed through His messengers that He is their Creator. As long as no one objected by saying, 'I am the one who created them!', then this proves that the act of creating belongs only to Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, He is the Only Creator, and all other beings are creatures. Thus, Allah's signs in the universe were created for a purpose and a goal.

In the chapter of *ar-Rum*, we come across verses which encompass most of the cosmic signs. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Therefore glory be to Allah

when you enter upon the time of the evening and when you enter upon the time of the morning. And to Him belongs praise in the heavens and the earth, and at nightfall and when you are at midday. He brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living, and gives life to the earth after its death, and thus shall you be brought forth. And one of His signs is that He created you from dust, then lo! You are mortals (who) scatter. And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect. And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours; most surely there are signs in this for the learned. And one of His signs is your sleeping and your seeking of His grace by night and (by) day; most surely there are signs in this for a people who would hear. And one of His signs is that He shows you the lightning for fear and for hope, and sends down water from the clouds then gives life therewith to the earth after its death; most surely there are signs in this for a people who understand And one of His signs is that the heaven and the earth subsist by His command, then when He calls you with a (single) call from out of the earth, lo! You come forth.' (ar-Rum: 17-25)

All these wondrous signs should lead man, who is living in this world, to the realisation that he is benefiting from this universe according to divine laws upon which man's existence is mainly built. Therefore, man must be aware of the One Who originated these laws.

Having fully realised the existence of a transcendent Being, man should have asked himself, 'What does this Exalted Creator want from me?' The aforementioned signs compel us to mentally deduce the existence of someone who could teach us about the requirements of this Exalted Being. Moreover, when a messenger comes forth and declares, 'Surely, the Exalted Being that you are seeking is called Allah, and He has sent me to order you to worship Him, to follow His commands and to avoid His proscriptions,' you were supposed to believe in his Message.

The second category of signs is those of a miraculous nature which confirm the veracity of a prophet's message. It is behoved upon each messenger to bring forth such miraculous signs to authenticate his veracious transmission of the Divine Message because each messenger is a human being, and he needs a sign which breaks the boundaries of natural laws. Such are the miracles with which the messengers were endowed.

The third category is yet the verses which contain the teachings of The Quran, the final way of guidance.

Such verses are of a wondrous, miraculous nature as well, for you never come across a legal ruling in religion which does not judiciously address one of the many needs of the human soul. Moreover, those who deny religion will resort to religious solutions for many problems they are facing, as there is no solution to such problems outside of religious laws.

The issue of divorce in the Islamic context is a case in point. The disbelievers criticised Islam for sanctioning divorce. They argued, 'This solution to the relation between a man and a woman will be detrimental to family bonds'. However, these people took recourse in divorce after suffering from the vicissitudes of life. Thus, we see that the human mind endorses rulings which were initially opposed. The same applies to usury. The abovementioned people are trying to create an economic system that is dependent on interest to make usury permissible. They contend, 'Nothing should prevent the human mind from drawing from something beneficial'.

Thus, the cosmic signs are wondrous by any measure. In addition, the miraculous signs which were performed by the messengers were supra natural. The same is true for Quranic verses whose rulings protect man from harm. Furthermore, the vicissitudes of life compel those who deny the validity of Islamic laws to resort to Quranic rulings.

The disbelievers, however, are heedless of all the aforementioned types of signs. They reject cosmic signs which, if contemplated, would convince them that there is a Creator. Moreover, they would receive a divine bestowal which would help them in upbringing their families and raising their standard of living.

Let us not forget that all modern discoveries are merely the result of observing external phenomena of the cosmos. I have previously given the example of a man who sat down to cook a meal in a pot. After some time, he noticed that the pot's lid was rising under the pressure of the steam, and so he wondered, 'What is it that compels the lid to rise'? This man dedicated himself to observing the activity in the pot as well as the transformation of water into steam. By means of observation, he was able to discover that when water evaporates, it expands. In other words, water in the form of vapour occupies more volume than water in liquid form. This man's observations led to the discovery of vapour energy which mobilised boats and trains, and which gave rise to an era which is called the 'Age of Steam'. Moreover, the man who observed the pot's lid being elevated by steam pressure coined a principle which is called the 'Archimedean principle'.

Thus, any person who ponders over the universe will discover things which benefit him in this world, just as the world benefited from the observations of some people like Archimedes. Those people put forth their analyses and observations, which were eventually used by scientists to invent devices that benefit mankind.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* does not prevent a disbeliever from inventing what helps humanity so long as he is observing and deriving benefit from cosmic phenomena. Thus, Allah's saying, 'And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by...' (*Yusuf*: 105) means, on the one hand, if you regard these signs as a means for seeking belief in Allah, then they will guide you to have faith in Him. On the other hand, if you look upon them as possible benefits for your worldly existence, then Allah *Glorified is He* does not deprive the disbelievers of the worldly reward for their efforts.

Furthermore, this verse clarifies that we should not heedlessly overlook cosmic signs. On the contrary, man must approach them as an attentive observer. By doing so, the cosmic signs must either lead you to faith which enriches you in this life and grants you an ever-lasting life in the Hereafter, or your observations result in inventions which make you and others happy in this world.

Allah the Almighty subsequently says:

# وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحْتَرُهُم بِٱللهِ إِلَّا وَهُم مُّشْرِكُونَ ٢

# Most of them will only believe in God while also joining others with Him [106] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 106)

Here, we note the various stages of faith which man passes through. The first stage corresponds to the verse, 'However eagerly you may want them to, most men will not believe.' (*Yusuf:* 103) This verse clearly shows that many people will not attain to faith, no matter how strongly Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* desires for them to become believers.

We previously explained that the opposite of the Arabic word *kathir* (most) in this context can be either *qalil* (few) or even *kathir* (most). This is because the faith of a believer can be tainted by a degree of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He*). It is true that they believe in one God, but their belief is not characterised by certitude. Rather, their faith is wavering and they are susceptible to associating gods with Allah *Glorified is He*.

The second stage corresponds to the verse, 'Most of them will only believe in Allah while also joining others with Him.' (*Yusuf*: 106) The polytheists of Quraysh are a case in point; Allah *the Almighty* says about them, 'And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say, Allah.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 87) Allah *the Almighty* also speaks of them in the following verse, 'and if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say, Allah.' (*Luqman*: 25)

Despite such proclamations on the part of the abovementioned people, they have ascribed intercessors between them and Allah *Glorified is He*. They claimed, 'Surely, the angels are Allah's daughters'. In this way, they ascribed partners to Him *Glorified is He*. We should note that this verse refers also to those among the people of the Book, who claimed that Allah *Glorified is He* has a son.

Falling under the same category is also those Muslims who try to gain the favour of men of power by being unduly subservient and crossing all acceptable boundaries of kindness and love. Such attempts to gain the favour of others are disgraceful because they think that the men of power have a say in any harm or aid that comes their way. In fact, this is a form of associating

partners with Allah *Glorified is He*. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; one of these subservient people approaches the one whose favour he is trying to gain and says, 'I would like to ask you to kindly handle this or that affair'. The man of power respond, 'Put your trust in Allah, and He will satisfy your need'

However, the subservient one stoops even lower in his obsequiousness and replies, 'But, I am also depending on your open-handedness for this affair to be handled'. Perhaps the man in a position of power will respond, 'I will take care of your request, and the rest depends on Allah'. When I hear such things, I ask myself, 'What about that which is not 'the rest'? Does it not depend on Allah as well'?!

It may happen that someone may be given his needs, but then it turns out to be harmful. On the contrary, certain desired things sometimes do not come into being, and one eventually realises that it was a great blessing that they were not granted.

A line of poetry comes to mind:

Seek all things in an honourable fashion;

For indeed everything proceeds in accord with Providence

You may hate that Allah *the Almighty* has deprived you of something, yet this very deprivation results in the good that Allah *the Almighty* had predestined for you. Thus, deprivation is viewed also as some kind of bestowal. Hence, it behoves man to always realise that Allah *Glorified is He* is the real Doer and He is the Prime Causer.

I always remind others that when we perform the major or the minor pilgrimage, we walk between *as-safa* and *al-marwa*<sup>(1)</sup> in remembrance of the act of Hajar.

<sup>(1)</sup> As-Safa and Al-Marwa are two mountains situated between the valley of Mecca and the Sacred Mosque. The word as-safa literally means a broad area covered with smooth rock. As for al-marwa, it is a fragile white rock. Al-marwa is also the walkway which is near as-Safa. Specifically, al-marwa is one of the two points that mark the end of the walking between As-Safa and Al-Marwa. See ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-`Arab, under the root safa and marwa.

Having exhausted all her means, she ran between *As-Safa* and *aA-Marwa* asking for water for her thirsty baby. She then found water under the foot of her new born Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*. Having sought sustenance to the best of her abilities, the Provider of all sustenance granted her what she sought. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* did not cause water to spring forth from the points of *as-safa* and *al-marwa*. This was intended to prove to her the truth behind the words of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he left her in that desolate place. Hajar asked him, 'Are you leaving us at this spot out of your own judgment? Or did Allah; order you to do so?' He replied, 'Yes, Allah ordered me to do so,' whereupon she replied, 'In that case, Allah will not abandon us.'<sup>(1)</sup> So, Hajar did the best she could to find sustenance for herself and for her son, but she found water through the Power of the Ultimate Causer.

Allah's saying, 'Most of them will only believe in Allah while also joining others with Him.' (*Yusuf:* 106) requires that we understand how the act of associating others with Allah *Glorified is He* can taint one's faith. We must ask ourselves, 'Since genuine faith exists, from whence does the act of associating others with Allah originate'? Allah *the Almighty* provides an answer to this question in the following verse, 'So when they ride in the ships they call upon Allah, being sincerely obedient to Him, but when He brings them safe to the land, lo! They associate others (with Him); Thus they become ungrateful for what We have given them, so that they may enjoy; but they shall soon know.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 65-66)

Therefore, they were sincere in their faith when they are on the ship, and they began to pray to Allah *Glorified is He* when they were faced with a tempest.<sup>(2)</sup> However, as they approached the shores of safety, they associated partners with Allah *the Almighty* in His Divinity.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi says, 'At that moment, Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him faced the direction of the qibla and supplicated, "O our Lord! Surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, our Lord! That they may keep up prayer; therefore, make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful." (Ibrahim: 37) See Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/3707.

<sup>(2)</sup> Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, 'He it is Who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships, and they sail on with them in a pleasant breeze,=

When a person asks them, 'What happened to you at sea'? They reply that they had taken their precautions and were equipped with safety boats. They forgot, however, that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who saved them. It is thus that the following verse became applicable to them, 'And they set up equals with Allah that they may lead (people) astray from His path. Say, "Enjoy yourselves, for surely your return is to the Fire."" (*Ibrahim:* 30)

In your daily life, you may go out of your way to do someone a favour. But after Allah *Glorified is He* enables you to achieve the task, you cannot find the person who asked you for the favour and he even does not thank you for your favour. When you meet that person, he tells you, 'the favour that I asked of you has already been granted to me by so-and-so'. The reason why he addresses you in such a way is to belittle the grace by which Allah *Glorified is He* enabled you to fulfil his favour, for when he asked you for help, he had to lower himself in humiliation. However, upon the granting of his wish, he acts with the pride of Pharaoh and pretends to have forgotten that he once asked you for help.

Only upon direct contact is the latter's arrogance removed because he knows for certain that you have been kind to him. Despite this acknowledgment and the fact that you treated him kindly, he may still wish for something evil to happen to you. Why is this so? The answer is that this is human nature. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Nay! Man is most surely inordinate because he sees himself free from want.' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7)

At that point, the proverb, 'Ward off evil issuing from someone to whom you have done a favour' is very impressive. This means to be wary of someone's evil by not boasting about the favour you have done to him. This way, he will not cultivate hatred towards you. In fact, the wise person who aids others awaits his reward from Allah *Glorified is He*. He reaps this reward from his Creator at the moment of the righteous act. This person does not

<sup>=</sup> and they rejoice, a violent wind overtakes them and the billows surge in on them from all sides, and they become certain that they are encompassed about, they pray to Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience: If Thou dost deliver us from this, we will most certainly be of the grateful ones. But when He delivers them, lo! they are unjustly rebellious in the earth.' (*Yunus:* 22-23).

expect anything from the one whom he has assisted. This is due to the fact that you cannot know what the beneficiary was thinking at the moment when you were helping him. Indeed, when he realises that you are more welcomed than he is by other people, he may well ask himself, 'Why do they respect this person more than me'? He may even do so even though you are in his presence to help him. That is why people say, 'Do good and then cast it into the ocean'! Out of the undeniable fact that there is no similarity whatsoever between Allah and His creatures, Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who will provide us with reward. Therefore, let your actions be sincere for the Sake of Allah *Glorified is He* and forget that you have done favours to others.

The disregarded favours that you have done are your greatest merits because it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who rewards you from His Bounty for these favours. It is precisely for this reason that you should pay no attention to those whom you have treated benevolently. By doing so, Allah *Glorified is He* will reward you for the good that you have done.

It has been related through tradition that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, 'Lord, do not allow others to attribute false things to me', whereupon Allah *Glorified is He* clarified, 'Musa (Moses), I did not will such a thing for Myself; so why should I will it for you?'

Allah *the Almighty* describes this phenomenon in the Quran in different terms; He says, 'And when distress afflicts a man he calls upon his Lord turning to Him frequently; then when He makes him possess a favour from Him, he forgets that for which he called upon Him before, and sets up rivals to Allah that he may cause (men) to stray off from His path. Say: Enjoy yourself in your ungratefulness a little; surely you are of the inmates of the Fire.' (*az-Zumar:* 8) The moment man is afflicted with a misfortune; he invokes the Lord Who is responsible for his interests, saying, 'Lord, You are my Creator, and You are responsible for my nurturing. I place my trust in You for my wellbeing, so save me from what has afflicted me'. Such a person is analogous to the captain of a ship who is miraculously saved from perishing in a storm, and, once he reaches the shores of safety, he gives credit only to himself for saving the ship.

That is why I always say, 'Believers, take care lest you forget the Bestower and the Ultimate Causer of all things. Moreover, beware not to be deluded by

the accidental causes of bounty, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the Giver of all causes'. I say this lest you do wrong to yourselves by associating partners with Him *Glorified is He*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'those who believe and do not mix up their faith with iniquity, those are they who shall have the security and they are those who go aright.' (*al-An'am:* 82)

*Azh-zhulm* (iniquity) – as we know – is to assign something to the wrong owner. How could one dare to ignore Allah's Graces and Bounties? It is by doing so that one falls into the hidden form of *shirk* (associating others with Allah) which is the greatest of all iniquities. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'do not associate aught with Allah; most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity.' (*Luqman:* 13)

Allah the Almighty then states:

أَفَأَمِنُوا أَن تَأْتِيَهُمْ غَنِشِيَةٌ مِّنْ عَذَابِ ٱللَّهِ أَوْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً وَهُم لا يَشْعُرُون (

## Are they so sure that an overwhelming punishment from God will not fall on them, or that the Last Hour will not come upon them suddenly when they least expect it? [107] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 107)

Did they not consider that Allah *Glorified is He* might punish them in this world with an overwhelming punishment? The Arabic word *al-ghashya* (overwhelming punishment) implies an all-encompassing and surrounding punishment. Or else, did they reckon that death, the Day of Judgment, and its punishments were far-off even though death is prescribed on all people? After all, no one knows his appointed date of death. It is for this reason that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When a person dies, his Day of Resurrection begins'<sup>(1)</sup> So, what is slowing them down from attaining to faith in Allah and having sincere acknowledgement of His Oneness, without ascribing other gods along with Him, before their Day of

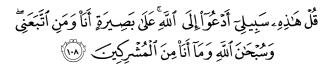
<sup>(1)</sup> In his book, Al-'Agluni narrated this Hadith on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. The rest of the Hadith is as follows: 'Mention death frequently. Surely, if you regard it as something superfluous, it will make your grueling; and if you regard it apprehensively, He will make yours easy. Death is the beginning of one's Day of Resurrection.' See Al-'Agluni, Kashf Al-Khafa', Hadith no. 2618.

Resurrection suddenly irrupts? After all, death and the Day of Resurrection are not preceded by a warning bell.

We also know that those who have gone before us in this life do not wait long for the Day when everyone is resurrected. This is because time moves slowly only for the person who is experiencing events while they are unfolding. A sleeper, for example, does not know how many hours he has slept; he is unconscious and therefore oblivious to the passing of time.

Based on this verse, we deduce that those who have preceded us in this life do not sense the passing of time, 'On the day that they see it, it will be as though they had not tarried but the latter part of a day or the early part of it.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46)

Afterwards, Allah the Almighty says:



## Say, 'This is my way: based on clear evidence, I, and all who follow me, call [people] to God – glory be to God! – I do not join others with Him' [108] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 108)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* commands Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to his people, 'This is my way'. The word *sabeel* denotes a way. Allah's saying, 'This is my way' (*Yusuf*: 108) proves that the word *sabeel* can either take on a feminine form – as in the aforementioned verse– or the masculine form, as in the following verse, '...and if they see the way of rectitude they do not take it for a way, and if they see the way of error. They take it for a way...' (*al-A'raf*: 146).

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim that the calling to which he has been assigned consists in believing in Allah *Glorified is He* the only God. Moreover Allah *Glorified is He* derives no benefit from the way of guidance to which His servants are invited to follow. Rather, this divine way of guidance will enable them to draw benefits for their own lives.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the First Who precedes all things and has no beginning, and He will remain eternally after everything perishes. It is He Who has created all human beings, even if they were to disbelieve in Him. In short, the responsibility of following the divine way of guidance rests on man's shoulders, and whoever wants to believe, let him do so, and whoever wants to disbelieve, let him do so.

Let us cite the following verse, 'When the heaven bursts asunder, And obeys its Lord and it must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2) When the sky split asunder upon hearing Allah's command, this marks the beginning of the Day of Judgment.

Back to the verse in question; Allah's saying, 'Say, 'this is my way: based on clear evidence...' (*Yusuf*: 108) means that based on clear evidence, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* invites people to the way which leads to Allah *Glorified is He* through faith and acceptance of His way of guidance while seeking His Reward in the Hereafter.

The Arabic word *al-basar* (eyesight) –as we know– pertains to the sensorial faculties, while *al-basira* (insight) corresponds to comprehending the abstract meanings.

Sensorial sight does not perform the same function as the spiritual insight, since the latter is a certainty that is associated with a light which instils wholehearted conviction in the human soul. This wholehearted conviction is cast into the heart even though the apparent situation does not compel someone to have conviction.

Consider the example of Musa's (Moses') mother who was inspired by Allah *Glorified is He* to cast her son into the river. Clearly, had she assessed the matter mentally, she would not have accepted to perform such a task. However, it is through the spiritual insight that she consented, since the inspiration is from Allah *Glorified is He* and cannot be resisted by the human spirit.

Therefore, *al-basira* is the certitude and the light which is based on a proof put forth by the heart. The servant with this insight obeys and puts his trust in Allah *Glorified is He*. It is therefore said, 'Faith is obedience based on clear evidence'. We can read Allah's saying, 'Say, 'this is my way: based on clear evidence...' (*Yusuf:* 108) as forming one complete sentence, which is

then followed by, 'I, and all who follow me...' (*Yusuf*: 108). Or again, we can read the verse from beginning to end as one sentence, 'Say, "This is my way: based on clear evidence, I, and all who follow me, call [people] to Allah—glory be to Allah!— I do not join others with Him."" (*Yusuf*: 108).

As for Allah's saying, 'glory be to Allah!' (*Yusuf*: 108), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* is absolutely exalted; there is no nothing similar to Him. Moreover, He, unlike mankind, is not limited in a physical body wherein the spirit is blown. Furthermore, His Actions are exalted –in the absolute sense of the word –above all acts, and no action can be compared to His Actions. So, when you realise that Allah *Glorified is He* hears and sees, you must understand it considering the following verse, 'There is nothing like Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11); nor is there any comparison between Allah's Existence and yours, for His Existence is Eternal – hence without beginning nor end –while your existence is contingent and manifests in the material order which Allah *Glorified is He* created.

Therefore, when some people assessed the wonders of the Ascension and Night Journey according the powers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they neglected the fact that he said, 'I was taken on the Night Journey.'<sup>(1)</sup> In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.' (*al-Isra':* 1)

Considering this verse, you understand that the Night Journey was not made possible through the power of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but through the Power of He Who created the whole universe and whose Power dominates all things. No true believer could associate any deities with Him.

Afterwards, Allah Glorified is He says:

<sup>(1)</sup> The Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abddullah Allah be pleased with them. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no 4710; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.170.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِن قَبْلِكَ إِلَا رِجَالًا نُوْحِيَ إِلَيْهِم مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْقُرَيَّ أَفَلَمَ يَسِيرُوا فِ ٱلْأَرْضِ فَيَنظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانُ عَنقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمَ وَلَدَارُ ٱلْأَخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَذِينَ ٱتَقَوَّأَ آَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ٢

All the messengers We sent before you [Muhammad] were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns. Have the [disbelievers] not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them? For those who are mindful of God, the Home in the Hereafter is better. Do you [people] not use your reason? [109] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 109)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the position of the messengers who preceded Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* states in another verse, 'and nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said: What! Has Allah raised up a mortal to be an apostle?' (*al-Isra':* 94)

Thus, the people referred to in this verse demanded to be sent a messenger who was not a human; a phenomenon which clearly has no precedence. Nevertheless, had it happened previously, they would have contended, 'But, why has Allah sent a non-human prophet to a people before us'? That is why Allah *Glorified is He* wants to bring them back to their senses by stating, 'Say, "Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as an apostle."" (*al-Isra':* 95)

By their very nature, angels are not suited for life on earth, just because they are not meant to serve as moral examples for human beings. Allah *the Almighty* describes the angels in the following verse, saying, '…they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6)

Therefore, they are not meant as models for humans, since an angel is an unseen creature that is not perceived by normal human faculties. Moreover, had Allah *Glorified is He* wished for an angel to be a messenger and clothed the angel in human form, their demand would not have been satisfied.

Another possible interpretation is that this verse is intended to pre-emptively invalidate possible pretexts which later generations would use to justify their actions during the Wars of Apostasy when Sijah claimed to be a prophetess sent by Allah *Glorified is He*. That is why Allah *the Almighty* begins the verse in question with His saying, 'All the messengers We sent before you [Muhammad] were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns...' (*Yusuf:* 109). This verse is intended to make it clear that a woman cannot be a messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*. This is because a messenger is sent forth on a mission to struggle in guiding people to faith through communicating Allah's Message to them. In contrast, the function of a woman is to be a source of tranquillity for her family.

Moreover, one of the prerequisites of one's being a messenger is that he must, at all times, be in a state of ritual purity in which he can worship Allah *Glorified is He.* As we know, a woman no longer has the obligation to perform certain acts of worship during her menstrual cycle. Clearly, a prophetic mission presupposed that the messenger is able to worship at any given moment.

In any case, how is it possible that the abovementioned people ask for a prophetess to be sent to them? After all, Allah *Glorified is He* has not sought the permission of any prophet prior to assigning him to convey His Message. Rather, these prophets were involuntarily charged with the task of spreading the Message. As we know, it is by means of revelation that a messenger receives commands to convey the Message to his people.

As we know, *al-wahy* (revelation) means to communicate something secretly, and it generally refers to conveying a message on behalf of Allah *Glorified is He*. As a matter of fact, the Messenger was not sent forth to communicate his own desires or to establish his own religious laws. Rather, every messenger is responsible for communicating Allah's revelation. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an exception to this rule, for he was appointed by Allah *the Almighty* as a law-giver, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and whatever the Apostle gives you, accept it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep back…' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* refers to these previous messengers as being chosen, saying, 'from the people of their towns' (*Yusuf:* 109). The town in this verse corresponds in our modern context to cities. When you visit the people of the city, you find that unlike the people of the desert, the

former are equipped with many luxuries. The people of the desert might not even have the means to welcome you as his guest, for his goats might be out of milk, or he might not even have goats to slaughter in the first place.

The difference between people of the city and those of the desert is that the former are settled and are able to coexist in a friendly manner with each other. Moreover, their interests are interconnected, they are kind to one another; their knowledge is vast and they are not characterised by the hard heartedness of the latter.

Indeed, the only belongings of a Bedouin are the provisions mounted on his camel. He awaits the advent of rain and seeks green pastures for his goats.

Due to their conditions, people of the city are marked by softness, a wide knowledge and refined mannerisms. Therefore, a messenger was never sent from among the Bedouins, lest he be unduly hardhearted, rude in speech and lacking in conduct and manners.

A messenger of Allah is expected to receive everyone he encounters with kindness, gentleness, and refined manners. For this reason, messengers are generally men of cities, since they are not generally hard hearted, nor are they unaware of matters pertaining to social interaction.

Allah *the Almighty* continues, '...Have the [disbelievers] not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them?' (*Yusuf:* 109) The people referred to in this verse do not believe in the Hereafter to which they will return; and as long as they do not know when they are appointed to depart this world, let them use this physical world as their yardstick; let them roam the different corners of the earth and ponder the destiny of those who previously had rejected their messengers. If they were to contemplate the fates of these peoples, they would realise that destruction and perdition overwhelmed all the disbelievers. Were they to travel through the land and ponder on the bygone events, they would see that the towns of those who hewed their homes in the mountains<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi is referring to the people of *Al-Hijr*. Allah *the Almighty* speaks of them in the following verse, 'And the dwellers of the Rock certainly rejected the messengers; And We gave them Our communications, but they turned aside from them; And they hewed houses in the mountains in security. So the rumbling overtook them in the morning; And what they earned did not avail them.' (*al-Hijr*: 80-84)

were wiped out by Allah *the Almighty*. They would also realise that Allah *the Almighty* punished the tribe of `Ad and the people of Pharaoh. Indeed, if you fear not the Hereafter, you should fear punishment in this world.

Therefore, Allah's saying, '...Have the [disbelievers] not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them?' (*Yusuf:* 109) is an example of cosmic phenomenon in the Quran.

In the days of old, we did not know that there was an atmosphere which encompasses the earth, nor did we know that this atmosphere contains oxygen which is so vital for our survival. We were also ignorant of the fact that the atmosphere is an integral part of our planetary system.

Moreover, when you tread on dry land, the atmosphere is above you; and it is thus that you travel through the earth because that which is above you is also included in the earth. One travels across the earth to discover new places for either contemplating or gaining financial benefits.

Contemplative or spiritual tourism is described by Allah *the Almighty* in the following verse, 'Have they not travelled through the earth and observed how was the end of those before them?' (*ar-Rum:* 9) Allah *the Almighty* also speaks of business motivations for travelling in the following verse, 'Say, "Travel in the earth and see how He makes the first creation, then Allah creates the latter creation; surely Allah has power over all things."' (*al-'Ankabut:* 20)

Thus, spiritual tourism turns your gaze towards Allah's Creative Power, whilst business travel is conducted for the sake of reaping the earth's resources. Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'And whoever flies in Allah's way, he will find in the earth many a place of refuge and abundant resources...' (*an-Nisa*': 100).

Therefore, you have been assigned the abovementioned responsibility, that is, if you do not make a comfortable living in one place, and then seek out other locations; Allah says, 'Was not Allah's earth spacious, so that you should have migrated therein?' (*an-Nisa*': 97) You should invest and strive to ameliorate your standard of living to the best of your ability on the condition that worldly pursuit does not prevent you from contemplating your inevitable meeting with Allah *Glorified is He*.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* continues, 'Have the [disbelievers] not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them?' (*Yusuf*: 109) Alas, if only the forewarning punishment which the deniers of truth were afflicted with were limited to the worldly life, the punishment of the Hereafter is even more severe.

Allah *the Almighty* then continues, 'For those who are mindful of Allah, the Home in the Hereafter is better. Do you [people] not use your reason?' (*Yusuf:* 109)

The descriptions given by Allah *the Almighty* of the destiny of those who denied the truth of Revelation are contrasted by that which awaits the believers. The verse above did not make direct mention of the fate of those who denied the truth; this indirect allusion is referred to in Arabic as *al-ihtikak* which is a kind of ellipsis. For example, Allah *the Almighty* states, 'Do they not see that We are bringing destruction upon the land by curtailing it of its sides?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) Each day, the abode of disbelief shrinks as the realm of faith expands.

Thus, while Allah's punishment is inflicted upon the deniers of truth, and they suffer thereof in this world, the believers are rewarded and so delight in Allah's reward in the Hereafter.

Here arises the following question, 'Why does Allah not say that the punishment that He will afflict upon them in the Hereafter will be more severe than the punishment of this world'? We contend, 'It is by means of simple human thought – deliberation that is not directly related to Allah *Glorified is He*– that they can realise that the punishment of the Hereafter is more severe than the punishment of this world'. Although Allah *the Almighty* does not explicitly mention this fact, He addresses the blessed fate of the believers at the end of the verse in question, 'the Home in the Hereafter is better. Do you [people] not use your reason?' (*Yusuf:* 109)

Given that the disbelievers were punished in this world, and that those who are conscious of Allah are rewarded in the Hereafter, one deduces that the disbelievers will undergo a harsh reckoning. By not referring to this fact directly in the verse in question, man is pushed to examine the Quran closely and thereby understand how the Quranic verses are closely interwoven. Allah says:

حَتَّى إِذَا ٱسْتَيْعَسَ ٱلرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّواْ أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ كَذِبُواْ جَاءَهُمْ نَصَرُنَا فَنُجِّى مَن نَشَآَةٍ وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأَسُنَا عَنِ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلْمُجْوِمِينَ (")

## When the messengers lost all hope and realized that they had been dismissed as liars, Our help came to them: We saved whoever We pleased, but Our punishment will not be turned away from guilty people [110] (The Quran, *Yusuf*: 110)

The Arabic particle *hatta* (until) implies that there is an objective. Moreover, an objective is always preceded by a starting point towards its end. When we say, 'I ate the whole fish including (*hatta*) its head', this implies that I start with eating the fish's body, and that I finished the meal with the fish's head'.

In the verse under discussion, the previous action which precedes messengers' losing hope is crystal clear in Allah's saying, 'All the Messengers We sent before you [Muhammad] were men to whom We made revelations.' (*Yusuf:* 109)

Since it is Allah *the Almighty* the One Who has sent the messengers, their victory was certain. However, victory was slow and the messengers had lost all hope. Thus, this protraction was done on purpose by Allah *the Almighty* because He wants to assign the believers to guide mankind in their lives on earth until the Day of Judgment. Clearly, the one who is destined to convey this divine revelation must be meticulously tested.

The messenger, who serves as a model for his companions and followers, must undergo many trials. Furthermore, only those who endure the hardships and emerge successfully are qualified to carry out the mission of conveying Allah's Message.<sup>(1)</sup>

In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Or do you think that you would enter the garden while yet the state of those who have passed away

<sup>(1)</sup> The following verse provides an example of this, 'So when Talut departed with the forces, he said, "Surely Allah will try you with a river; whoever then drinks from it, he is not of me, and whoever does not taste of it, he is surely of me, except he who takes with his hand as much of it as fills the hand"; but except for a few of them they drank from it. So when he had crossed it, he and those who believed with him, said, "We have today no power against *Jalut* and his forces." (*al-Baqara*: 249)

before you has not come upon you; distress and affliction befell them and they were shaken violently, so that the Apostle and those who believed with him said, "When will the help of Allah come?" (*al-Baqara:* 214) Therefore, a testing period is necessary to distinguish the good people from the bad ones. Let us offer an example to fully illustrate this point; in our daily life, teachers prepare the student academically until he is ready to present himself for the test which proves that he has completed his primary studies. Then, we qualify the student to complete middle school which is followed by his secondary studies, after which he joins university. So, his studies continue year after year until he finally graduates from college. If he wants to continue to earn a Master's degree or a Ph.D., he must exert even more effort.

All this effort is exerted with the goal of making the student fully qualified to bear the responsibilities of his future job. Considering such effort which a student exerts, what are we to say of the effort of a messenger sent to a specific people? It is precisely due to the weight of this responsibility that the Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him* and his followers must be severely tested. In this way, those who will take the oath to convey the Divine Message will be endowed with an unshakeable certainty that the pleasures and goods that they gave up in this world will be greatly compensated by Allah *Glorified is He* in the Hereafter.

In this vein, someone may pose the following question, 'Is it reasonable that a messenger should ever lose hope'? We contend, 'Let us first understand the true meaning of the verb used in this verse to express losing hope, namely; *istay*'*asa*. There is a difference between *ya*'*asa* and *istay*'*asa*. The former is to lose hope of something, while the latter means to insist on losing hope of something'. That is to say that the messengers have not completely lost hope. A person who is utterly despondent is one who does not have recourse to anticipate a brighter future; and only a man who relies on secondary causes, apart from the Original Causer, can be completely cut off from hope.

However, if Allah *Glorified is He* puts certain causes which give rise to hope before the believer, and the causes are subsequently cut off and the desired result is not achieved, the one who believes in Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The causes are not what matters because I am seeking refuge in the Originator of all causes'.

It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says, '...and despair not of Allah's Mercy; surely none despairs of Allah's Mercy except the unbelieving people.' (*Yusuf:* 87)

Hence, we find that the highest suicide rates are to be found among the atheists who disbelieve in Allah *the Almighty*. After all, they do not have faith in a Lord Who is above all causes; the One Who is Able to surpass all natural laws. In sharp contrast, the believer seeks recourse in a strong support, that is, the Infinite Power of Allah *the Almighty* Who creates all causes and is fully capable of shattering all causes.

Here arises a good question, which is 'Why do messengers go to the brink of losing hope'? This is due to their eagerness to be granted victory which pushes some of them to ask for it, just as the believers did, 'When will the help of Allah come?' (*al-Baqara:* 214) Not to mention that those messengers also found out that they had been dismissed as liars, a point which is mentioned in the Quran; Allah *the Almighty* says, '...and realised that they had been dismissed as liars...' (*Yusuf:* 110).

This trilateral root composed of the letters *kaf*, *dhal* and *ba*' gives rise to the verbs and expressions *kadhaba* (to lie) or *kudhiba* '*alayh* which means that someone has been told a lie; as for *kudhiba*, it indicates that the subject has been branded as a liar. As for the Arabic word *al-kadhib* (telling lies), it is a statement that is contrary to the truth. Clearly, a sane person is one who assesses his ideas mentally before expressing them in words. As for one who is misguided and unable to assess his ideas cogently, he typically speaks in a senseless manner. His words are not evaluated mentally, and he is therefore referred to as a foolish prattler.

We have previously explained the exact meaning of the word *as-sidq* (truthfulness), describing it, unlike telling lie, as a statement which corresponds to reality. As for the person who intentionally makes statements which do not correspond to reality, we say that he is an inveterate liar. In addition, those who attribute statements to others while being almost certain that the statements do not correspond to reality, they are indeed lying but do not look upon their lies as falsehood. Finally, a man, who is intent on reporting someone's words with precision and attributes statements to their proper speaker and says, 'so-and-so

told me that...' is not counted among the liars. That is why I always say, 'Religious scholars need to distinguish between the lies of narrators, the error within the narrated statement and the lies of the relator.' Thus, one should blame the liar for a false statement that he intentionally makes. As for the relator of the false statement, as long as he attributes to statement to its correct speaker, he cannot be accused of being a liar.

In the verse in question, we find that it has two different recitations. The first one implies that messengers realised that they had been lied to, whilst the second<sup>(1)</sup> means that they thought that what they were told regarding their victory were lies.

Someone may ask, 'How could the Messengers have such a thought'? <sup>(2)</sup> I contend, 'When a messenger asks his people to believe in Allah *Glorified is He*, he is fully aware of the fact that victory is what will confirm the truth of his message to them. The messenger sometimes has his moments of doubt when he fears that his followers who are fighting by his side will say, 'He has lied to us'!

However, the idea that Allah *Glorified is He* breaks His Promise – Allah forbid – never crosses the mind of a messenger. Nevertheless, the messengers

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi mentions a third possible recitation for this verse; he says, 'Mujahid and Humaid recited this part of the verse as follows: 'Qad Kadhabu' with an open vowel on the letter kaf and the letter dhal. The meaning of the verse would thus be: 'The people to whom messengers were sent thought that the messengers had lied to them because Allah had taken a long time before punishing them, that is, the people (were the ones to lie).' See Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/3611.

<sup>(2) &#</sup>x27;Urwa ibn Adh-Dhubair narrated that when he asked 'Aisha about the statement of Allah, 'Until when the Apostles gave up hope (of their people)' (al-Baqara: 110), she told him its meaning). 'Urwa added, I said, 'Did they (messengers) suspect that they were betrayed (by Allah) or that they were treated as liars by (their people)?' 'Aisha said, 'They suspected that they were treated as liars by their people.' I said, 'But, they were sure that their people treated them as liars and it was not a matter of suspicion.' She said, 'Yes, upon my life they were sure about it.' I said to her. 'So, they suspected that they were betrayed by Allah.' She said, 'Allah forbid! The messengers never suspected their Lord of such a thing.' I said, 'What about this verse then?' She said, 'It is about the messengers' followers who believed in their Lord and trusted them, but the period of trials was prolonged and victory was delayed till they, i.e. messengers gave up all hope of converting those of the people who disbelieved them, which is why they thought that their followers treated them as liars; thereupon Allah's Help came to them.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4695; Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/3611.

may have anticipated that the victory would be granted promptly, but its slow advent was taken to mean that they would never be triumphant. Another possible interpretation is that they feared that others would call them liars. Thus, we find that Allah *the Almighty* tells His messengers that victory would be granted at a certain time which He has appointed. This time is unknown to everyone, for Allah *the Almighty* does everything according to a due measure.

Allah's saying, 'When the messengers lost all hope and realised that they had been dismissed as liars, Our Help came to them' (*Yusuf:* 110), implies that victory is granted to them after they had undergone severe calamities. In fact, the joy experienced by their followers at the moment of triumph can be compared to water that is given to a man who is extremely thirsty. To understand this extreme jubilation, we must imagine how delightful a thirsty person will be upon receiving a glass of water.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that delaying the time of victory causes the disbelievers to be more self-conceited. Therefore, at the moment of triumph, the joy and pride of the believers in their messenger intensifies, while the grief of the disbelievers is also amplified.

Clearly, the victory of the believers implies the defeat of the disbelievers. This is due to the Will of Allah *the Almighty* Who afflicts His chastisement and punishment on those who disbelieve in Him.

Afterwards, Allah the Almighty says:

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأَوْلِي ٱلْأَلْبَابِ مَاكَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَك وَلَكِنِ تَصْدِيقَ ٱلَّذِى بَيْنَ يَكَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ (

### There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand. This revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it; an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe [111] (The Quran, SurahName: 111)

This verse, as we know, is part of the chapter of *Yusuf*. It shows us that if we want to know about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and his brothers, we will find the entire narrative with its objectives, moral lessons

and final outcomes in the Quran. In short, the story of Yusuf (Joseph) contains within its fold that which constitutes the essence of all the stories of the Prophets revealed in the Quran.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And all we relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith...' (*Hud:* 120).

The Arabic word *qasas* (stories), as we know, derives its meaning from the expression *qas al-athar*, that is, to follow someone's footsteps. In other words, telling a story implies following the sequence of events of the narrative without adding or omitting elements. At this point, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand.' (*Yusuf:* 111)

Considering the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...Explain to me my dream, if you can interpret the dream' (*Yusuf:* 43), we know that the root of the word *i*'brah (lesson) is composed of three Arabic letters: 'ayn, ba' and ra'. This word denotes moving from the apparent to the hidden.

The lessons derived from the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* as well as the accounts of other prophets in the Quran help us overcome both the external and the internal challenges which we face in this world and thus avoid falling into base acts.

In fact, we only apply our understanding of the highest meanings of the Quranic stories when we act in an upright manner by following the moral lessons of any of the Quranic stories, and when we distance ourselves from depraved deeds described therein.

Let us offer an example to clarify this point; we often come across characters that oppress others in the stories of the Quran. In fact, the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* specifies the nature of the transgressor who relapses in his wrongdoings. When one of us takes the morals of this story as a guiding example, this helps to refrain from doing wrong to others. Moreover, when you derive from the Quranic stories the moral lesson that the oppressed people will ultimately be triumphant, you should not be saddened if you are oppressed, since you know for certain that, by Allah's Permission, you will eventually be granted victory.

As for the word *i'barah*, it denotes crossing the river from one bank to another. It also denotes the interpretation of dreams. Clearly, 'dreams' which are

seen during one's sleep are metaphorical and their interpretation means to elucidate, to bring them from ambiguity to clarity and to shed light upon them.

Furthermore, we can refer to a tear as *a* '*brah*. Sadness which is concealed within the human soul is manifested in the form of tears.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand.' (*Yusuf:* 111) The lessons of the stories are not understood by some people, but they are only considered by the discerning individual who penetrates into the meaning of things with care. As for the person who heedlessly goes through life, he is unable to draw benefit from such lessons. In this verse, the expression 'those who understand' refers to people of brilliant intellect. You should note that *al*-'*albab* is the plural of *lub* which refers to the essence of what is sought after. As we know, the shell exists to protect the essence within, so the intellect is referred to as *Lub* (essence) because it does away with the external veneers of things and penetrates into the essence and the most exalted aspect of things.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: 'this revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it...' (*Yusuf:* 111) This part of the verse tells us that the revelation which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to the people is not a fabricated discourse. Rather, it is the truth which confirms the previous Books.

The expression used in this verse to describe the Books which preceded the revelation of the Quran is *bayna yadayh*. This expression could be illustrated in the following example: if you are waiting in a line, you refer to the person in front of you as *'bayna yadayk'*, and to the person behind you as *man khalfak*.

We should consider that it is not the Previous Books which confirm the truth of the Quran; rather, it is the Quran which confirms the truth of them. This is due to the fact that the Quran is the 'Guardian Book'; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is before it of the Book and a guardian over it...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48).

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* adds that the Quran is: '...an explanation of everything...' (*Yusuf:* 111). Thus the Quran confirms the truth of the previously revealed Books and clearly explains everything, that is, it addresses everything –down to the minute details– according to its appropriate

nature. That is to say that the Quran is not a compilation of merely general statements; rather, it explains every ruling pertinent to one of the many aspects of human existence.

When we say, 'So-and-so has purchased a bespoke outfit', this means that the outfit exactly fits the buyer's body and suits him well when he wears it. In the same manner, the Quranic rulings appropriately fit their respective issues.

In matters pertaining to creed, we find people who – may Allah protect us from such aberrations – proclaim, 'There is no God whatsoever', while others say, 'Surely, there are multiple gods, since the tremendous variety of creatures in existence could not have possibly been created by a single God. Thus, there is a god for the heavens, a god for the earth, a god for plants and a god for animals'.

To those who believe in the multiplicity of gods, we ask the following question, 'How is it possible that a true God is able to carry out one action but not another?'

Were they to answer that these multiple gods work in collaboration, we would respond, 'Your gods do not have divine attributes whatsoever'. Hence Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'Allah sets forth an example, there is a slave in whom are (Several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition? (All) praise is due to Allah. Nay! Most of them do not know.' (*az-Zumar:* 29)

This verse tells us that when owners of a slave are at variance with one another as to who has the right to give orders to him, the slave lives in a state of distress and chastisement. In contrast, the state of the man who is owned by a single master is completely different, since he heeds the orders of one person and leads a content life.

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the issue of the multiplicity of gods in the following verse, 'Never did Allah take to Himself a son, and never was there with him any (other) god— in that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them would certainly have overpowered others; glory be to Allah above what they describe!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91)

As for the atheist who claims that there is no God whatsoever, to him we contend, 'Is it reasonable to hold that there is no Creator who designed the perfect and precise creation which surrounds us'? Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* 

willed to clarify these creedal matters, namely; the existence of God and His Oneness, to prove that there is no God other than Him.

Therefore, the Quran explains various rulings and gives an appropriate ruling to each matter pertaining to human existence. Therefore, no ruling which is addressed to a particular matter can be transposed to another.

The same applies to the verses revealed in the Quran; some are decisive in their meanings, while others are allegorical. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...they strive with one another in hastening to good deeds...' (*Al-'Imran:* 114). Elsewhere in the same chapter He says, 'And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord...' (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

We notice that the latter verse includes the preposition *ila* (to), while the former one includes the preposition fi (in). This variation is due to the fact that each of these prepositions is inserted into the verses in the light of their appropriate positions within the overall sentence. Thus, the act of hastening to Allah's Forgiveness implies, on the one hand, that its seeker is deprived of the Divine Forgiveness at that moment, but he will eventually attain his goal. On the other hand, the one who strives with one another in hastening to good deeds experiences Allah's Bounty here and now, and asks Him to confer on him more of His Bounties.

We also come across the following verse, '...and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these acts require courage.' (*Luqman:* 17) Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'And whoever is patient and forgiving, these most surely are actions due to courage.' (*ash-Shura:* 43) The former verse specifically involves calamities that are not afflicted by an enemy, such as sickness which is an ailment that is not caused by a foe. In contrast, the latter pertains to harm which comes by way of a malevolent enemy, since the act of forgiving is mentioned.

Let us offer the following example, 'If someone should strike me or do harm to one of my sons, that person would be my foe and an enmity between us would be created. In fact, his very presence before me would kindle ill will in my soul, and I would need a strong will and self-control to constrain the seething ego'. Therefore, this distinction between the two verses is a clear example of the elucidative nature of the Quran.

In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'A Book of which the verses are made plain...' (*Fussilat:* 3). This verse clearly shows that every minute part of the Quran corresponds appropriately to a specific instance for which a certain verse was revealed. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us, saying, 'And do not kill your children for fear of poverty; We give them sustenance and yourselves (too)...' (*al-Isra':* 31) He also says in another verse, '...and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty— We provide for you and for them.' (*al-An'am:* 151) We should consider that each of these two verses is aptly positioned in the Quran that their meanings are interconnected within their respective verses. Moreover, each verse has been positioned appropriately according to the nature of its ruling. Thus, Allah's saying in the latter verse, '...and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty...' (*al-An'am:* 151) implies that poverty exists, and that this person is worried trying to maintain his own livelihood rather than his children's.

By contrast, Allah's saying, 'for fear of poverty' (*Al-Isra':* 31) implies that poverty is non-existent, and that the person fears that he becomes poverty-stricken. Thus, he is anxious about something which has not happened yet.

In short, we find that the Quran specifies rulings pertaining to each matter of human life in this world and in the Hereafter. These Quranic rulings are beyond man's attainment through mental or rational means.

We can properly understand the fact that the Quran is an explanation of everything when we quote the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* relates the words of the hoopoe regarding the Queen of Sheba, Balqis: '...she has been given [a share] of everything...' (*an-Naml:* 23). This verse does not mean that the Queen of Sheba had been given all things of this world. Rather, she was granted all things that could possibly be owned by a queen of her opulence in this world.

Therefore, Allah's description of the Quran as, 'an explanation of everything' (*Yusuf*: 111) does not mean that we should expect the Quran to answer, for example, 'How many loaves of bread can be made out of a certain measure of wheat'? In fact, Imam Mohammad 'Abdu was once asked if the Quran contained an answer to this question. Thereupon, the Imam fetched a baker who answered this question. The inquirer then protested that the answer was

not derived from The Quran to which Imam 'Abdu answered, 'Why do you not recall the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know' (*an-Nahl:* 43)?' So, we understand that Allah *the Almighty* has not neglected anything in the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse in question by saying, '...an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe.' (*Yusuf*: 111)

We know that guidance is the way which leads the believer to what is good. This way is divided into two types: The first pertains to those who have not fallen into harm form committing sins. The second corresponds to curing those who have fallen into the disobedience of Allah *the Almighty*. Let us offer an example to clarify this point; assume that some people are committing misdeeds, and we turn them away from their devious actions and cure them of their spiritual disease. This is an example of how the way of guidance deals with those who fall into sins. Further, the way of guidance is a kind of mercy towards those who have been safeguarded from falling into the spiritual disease.

So, we have two remarks which are pertinent to the abovementioned ways of guidance: The first remark is that the Quranic way of guidance was revealed as a shield for those who have not fallen into disobedience of Allah *the Almighty*. The second one is that this very way contains the cure for those who have already disobeyed Him *the Almighty*.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* identifies those who benefit from the protection and cure of this Quranic way of guidance by stating, '...a guide and a blessing for those who believe.' (*Yusuf*: 111)

Thus, the Quranic way of guidance benefits only those who believe in the uniquely One God Who has created them as well as the world, and Who has also revealed for mankind laws which serve them in their lives. It is logical that the believer should listen and obey Allah's Commands since He has set the Way of Guidance which preserves every aspect of one's life. So, if you are a believer in Allah *the Almighty*, then you should seize the guidance and mercy. We ask Allah *the Almighty* to grant us all of this.

# the chapter of

# ar-Ra'd

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

# المَرْ تِلْكَ ءَايَنتُ ٱلْكِنَبِ وَٱلَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِن رَبِّكَ ٱلْحَقُّ وَلَئِكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (١)

## *Alif Lam Mim Ra,* These are the signs of the Scripture. What your Lord has sent down to you [Prophet] is the truth, yet most people do not believe [1] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 1)

We have previously expounded at length on of the discrete letters with which some verses of the Quran begin. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, *'Alif Lam Mim.'* (*al-Baqara:* 1), *'Alif Lam Mim Ra.'* (*ar-Ra'd:* 1) and *'Alif Lam Mim Sad'* (*al-A'raf:* 1). These examples are among many other instances with which the chapters of the Quran begin. But, what I want to stress here is that the verses of the Quran are linked to one another rather than being disjointed. It is precisely for this reason that one finds that the final letter of each chapter is connected with that which comes after it through the vowel diacritic.

Were we to apply this general principle to the opening verse of the chapter of *ar-Ra'd*, we would have read the first discrete letters by pronouncing each letter individually in the following manner: *alifun*, *lamun*, *mimun*, *rau'n*. However, Allah *Glorified is He* willed for the opening verse of this chapter to be disconnected, so we pronounce each letter in the following manner: *alif, lam, mim, ra*.

It is in this way that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* recited this verse to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so we recite it in the same manner described above.

Allah *the Almighty* continues, 'These are the signs of the Scripture.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 1) This part of the verse tells us that the chapter is among the verses of the Noble Book, the Quran. These verses are added to what has been previously revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Scripture starts with Allah's Saying, 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' (*al-Fatiha:* 1) which is located at the beginning of the Quran, and ends with the last verse of the chapter of *an-Nas*.

Grammatically speaking, *al-idafah* construction, that is, when two Arabic nouns are added together in one construction, takes on three different meanings. Sometimes it can imply the preposition *min* (of), such as 'a dry measure of wheat'. Sometimes, it implies the preposition *fi* (in), as when you say, 'A meeting in the house'. Finally, it could further denote the preposition *lam*, and this can take on two different forms. The *idafah* which either expresses ownership, such as 'The money of Zayd is his property', or that which may designate a specific relationship, such as 'the bridle of the horse'. In other words, the bridle specifically pertains to the horse; notwithstanding the fact that it is not conceivable that a horse would literally own a bridle.

Thus, Allah's saying, 'These are the signs of the Scripture.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 1) refers to the verses of the Quran since the word 'Scripture' in the Islamic context always denotes the Noble Quran.

Consider, for example, when we say, 'So-and-so is the man', then 'so-and-so' is truly the man. It is as if his demeanour is the touchstone by which one measures manhood, or as if the traits of manliness in others do not amount to the same degree of his perfection in particular. Likewise, you might say, 'So-and-so is the poet', that is, he indeed has a unique gift for poetry.

Thus, we come to understand that the word *kitab* (Scripture) in the context of Islamic creed always denotes the Noble Quran. Likewise, when dealing with Arabic grammar, *al-kitab* generally denotes the famous book of the rules of grammar composed by *Sibawayh*, the grammarian.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* continues His description of the Noble Quran, saying, '...What your Lord has sent down to you [Prophet] is the truth, yet most people do not believe.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 1)

Obviously, the ulterior motive pushing a person to turn against Allah *the Almighty* is to acquire something by means of his disobedience of Him. Towards the end of the chapter of Yusuf, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And most men will not believe though you desire it eagerly.' (*Yusuf:* 103) In addition,

He describes the Noble Quran as, 'this revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it; an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe.' (*Yusuf*: 111)

So, we see that Allah does not want to derive any profit from you; rather, He has revealed this Scripture for your own benefit: 'yet most people do not believe.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 1) This verse clearly shows that most people who are invited to faith do not believe that this Truthful Scripture was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from His Lord. This is due to the fact that they did not contemplate its verses; rather, they submitted to their whims and sought after the temporal worldly power while neglecting the fact that this Scripture grants them the best of this world and that of the Hereafter.

Allah the Almighty then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِي رَفَعَ ٱلسَّمَوَتِ بِغَيْرٍ حَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰ عَلَىٱلْحَرَّشَّ وَسَخَرُ ٱلشَّمْسَ وَٱلْقَمَرَ كُلُّ يَجْرِى لِأَجَلِ مُسَمَّى يُدَبِّرُ ٱلْأَمَّر يُفَصِّلُ ٱلْأَيَنِ لَعَلَكُم بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّكُمْ تُوقِنُونَ ()

It is God who raised up the heavens with no visible supports and then established Himself on the throne; He has subjected the sun and the moon each to pursue its course for an appointed time; He regulates all things, and makes the revelations clear so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord [2] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 2)

The Name 'Allah' denotes the Creator of all things who encompasses all the Attributes of Perfection. Thus, when you say 'Allah', it is as if you called Him *Al-Qadir* (the Fully Capable,) *Ad-Daar* (the Harmer), *An-Nafi*` (The One Who benefits), *As-Sami*` (The All-Hearing), *Al-Mu*`ti (The Giver) and all the other Most Beautiful Divine Names.

It is for this reason that Prophet Muhammad said, 'Every action that does not begin with the Name of Allah is cut off from good.'<sup>(1)</sup> This is due to the fact that in such action you do not bring to mind that it is Allah Who has

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. It is narrated as follows, 'Every speech or affair that is not begun by mentioning Allah the Almighty is incomplete or cut off from good.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/359.

made everything possible for you; for ultimately you did not make anything possible through your own power.

Therefore, the true believer embarks upon any task by uttering '*Bismillahi Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim*', that is, 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy'; for it is He Who made all things within man's grasp, and had He not made things subservient to man, they would have never responded to his authority.

Allah *Glorified is He* has made this point clear through many simple examples. We find, for instance, a young child who takes a rope and ties it around a camel's neck, and orders it to kneel. Thereupon, the subservient camel kneels on its four legs, heeding the young boy's command. In contrast, we find a small mosquito may keep a man up all night when it hides between his clothes. The man exerts a great effort to catch the mosquito, yet he may succeed or fail.

Therefore, we realise that things are not rendered easy by man's will or power. Rather, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who makes the creatures subservient to mankind. Furthermore, He says, 'And We have subjected them to them, so some of them they have to ride upon, and some of them they eat.' (*Ya Sin:* 72)

Therefore, when you engage in an activity that requires power, you should say, 'In the Name of Allah, the All-Capable, Who endowed me with some power.' Likewise, before taking part in something which requires money, you should say, 'In the Name of Allah, the Rich, Who granted me some money so that I can handle this affair'.

Each action which you embark on demands power, wisdom, wealth, bliss and other Divine Attributes with which Allah *Glorified is He* makes things possible. Out of His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* willed for every action that we engage in to be rendered easy by pronouncing His Name which encompasses all the Names of Beauty and Perfection: 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy'. It is for this reason that the Divine Name 'Allah' refers to the Creator of all things.

The rest of Allah's Beautiful Names are Divine Attributes; they are only perfect in an absolute sense when they are attributed to Allah, and that is why they are used as Names for Him *Glorified is He*.

The Divine Name *Al-'Aziz*, for example, in its absolute sense, refers only to Allah *Glorified is He*. Nevertheless, we sometimes call a person 'the mighty one or chief of his tribe'. Moreover, only Allah *the Almighty* is *Al-Ghaney* (The Rich) in the absolute sense of the word; however, we say 'So-and-so is rich', and 'So-and-so is poor'.

Thus, these Divine Attributes are employed as Divine Names; when used in an absolute sense, they only point to Allah *the Almighty*.

We have previously explained that the Divine Names pertain either to His Divine Being or to His Attributes. Moreover, if a Name has no contrary, then it pertains to the Divine Being. The Name *Al-'Aziz the Almighty* is a case in point.

However, if the Name denotes both an Attribute and an Action, such as *Al-Mu`iz* (the Exalter), then it must have an opposite pertinent to the Divine Attributes and not to the Divine Being, which in this case is *Al-Mudhil* (who Humiliates).

Were Allah *the Almighty* only capable of exalting, and not humiliating, then He would not be the true God. Likewise, were He only *Ad-Daar* (the Inflictor of Harm) and not *An-Nafi*` (the One who benefits), He would not be the true God. Further, was He only Able to grant relief *(Al-Basit)*, and not Able to withhold<sup>(1)</sup> *(Al-Qabid)*, He would not be the true God.

In short, each of these abovementioned Attributes have opposites, and their effect extends to His creatures. So, for example, Allah is Almighty in His Being; He exalts some people and humiliates some others.

The Name 'Allah' encompasses all of the Attributes of Perfection. Furthermore, there are other Names which Allah *the Almighty* has taught some of His creatures, and others of which we will know– if Allah wills– when we meet Him, '(Some) faces on that day shall be bright, Looking to their Lord.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23)

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'Al-Hulaymi explains that the Divine Name Al-Basit means that Allah outspreads His Bounty among His servants, bestowing it upon those whom He wills, while widening, exalting, favouring, enabling, bestowing and giving far beyond what is needed. As for the Divine Name Al-Qabid, Al-Hulaymi explains that Allah deprives those whom He wills of His Kindness and Favour. He constricts and retains His Bounty, and prohibits and impoverishes whom He wills.' See Al-Qurtubi, Al-Asna Fi Sharh Asma` Allah Al-Husna, 1/360.

Back to the verse in question; we should note that Allah *Glorified is He* begins the verse by discussing the higher realms of existence, and that He does not mention earthly existence; He says, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2).

When employed in a human context, the verb *rafa*'a (to raise up) denotes something that was raised from a lower location to a higher one, as in Allah's saying, 'And he raised his parents upon the throne...' (*Yusuf*: 100). The above verse shows that Yusuf's (Joseph's) parents were in a lower position and Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* raised them to a place of honour that is higher than where they were.

So, was the heaven located in a lower position in space before being raised by Allah *the Almighty*? No, it was not. He has created the heavens in an elevated state.

May Allah have Mercy on our sheikh 'Abd Al-Jalil `Isa, who said, 'When I say "Glory be to Allah Who made the elephant in such a large size", does this mean that the elephant was small, only to be enlarged by Allah *the Almighty*? Or was it created in a large state from the very beginning? Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* has created it, i.e. the elephant in such a big size from the very beginning. So, when I say "Glory be to Allah Who made the mosquito so small", does this mean that the mosquito was large and then Allah *the Almighty* reduced it in size? No, Allah *the Almighty* has created it small in the first place.'

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens with no visible supports...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2), it means that the heavens were created in their elevated state in the first place. It is commonly known that when something is hoisted, it is supported by pillars which maintain its stability in a high position. However, Allah's creation is different, for we see for ourselves that the heaven stretches out to the horizon and it even appears to us that it touches the earth at the horizon, while they, obviously, do not touch. Moreover, we do not find a single human being who, while roaming in any direction, bumps into pillars which he deems to be the supports of the heavens. Clearly, no such thing is visible to the naked eye. So, are there invisible supports; or are there no supports in the first place?

As we said previously, when something is raised, this is because of the existence of something which maintains it in that place or supports its weight. Speaking about the heavens being raised aloft, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except with His permission; most surely Allah is Compassionate, Merciful to men.' (*al-Hajj:* 65)

So, if the heavens are held from above, they are clearly in no need of pillars. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'He withholds the heaven' (*al-Hajj:* 65), it means that He has determined their laws which we have not yet discovered.

Modern scientists have conducted surveys of the earth and of space by means of satellites and other modern inventions, and they did not find any supports which raise the heavens or hold them in place.

Furthermore, architects have tried hard in our modern world to create roofs without supporting pillars. However, to this day, they are still dependent on walls that act as pillars to counter the gravitational pull. So, we conclude that Allah *the Almighty* either maintains the heavens aloft by means of supports that are so subtle that the naked eye cannot perceive them – which is why the heaven appears to be standing in place without pillar support – or that the heaven is raised without any support whatsoever.

As for the Arabic word '*amd* (pillars), it is the plural of '*amud* or *imad* (a pillar). Moreover, the verse in question was revealed as a commentary of the verse in the chapter of Yusuf in which Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it.' (*Yusuf*: 105) In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* explains, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens with no visible supports...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 2).

This verse shows that we do not see these supports because of the limitations of human eyesight. In passing, you should not be surprised by the fact that there are creatures which you cannot see, since the human eye is one of the sensory organs which is governed by its own laws. It is able to perceive things but it is blind to others. Let us offer an example to prove this point; when you are looking at a person who is two metres tall and is walking away from you, you find that he gradually grows smaller until he finally disappears from your sight. Despite the fact that your eye no longer sees him, in reality

he has not disappeared. This indicates that your visual power of perception is bound by certain laws.

Furthermore, there are other laws like the law of hearing, the law of gravity, the law of electricity etc. that we derive benefit from these phenomena without seeing them with the naked eye. Thus, you should not be surprised by the fact that there are things which you cannot see because your power of perception is confined to certain laws.

Allah *Glorified is He* has willed for the truth of this fact to be confirmed by the modern scientists' discoveries in the cosmos. Their discovery of forces, which we used to benefit from without being aware of, proves that man's sensorial perception is not capable of grasping all things. It is in the light of this fact that we may understand why the heaven appears to us to be raised without any visible support, for this either mean that there are in fact supports for the heavens which are not visible to our naked eye, or that it is suspended without any pillars whatsoever.

So, Allah's saying, '...with no visible supports...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2), is an informative statement. Let us give an example from our daily life; when you tell your son, 'I am off to work, be sure to do your homework.' Your instruction 'be sure to do your homework' is a clear directive. This is what we call an informative statement. However, the motivation behind the statement is constructive.

Indeed, a 'constructive statement' can be integrated into an informative statement in certain cases. For example, when you say, 'So-and-so died, Allah had Mercy on him', your prayer: 'Allah *the Almighty* had Mercy on him' is an informative statement, for you let it be known that Allah *the Almighty* had Mercy on that deceased person. You did that even though you cannot be certain of whether or not Allah *the Almighty* bestowed His Mercy upon that person. Nevertheless, you said 'Allah had Mercy on him' with the hope that Divine Mercy is indeed being bestowed upon him. Clearly, you could have said, 'So-and-so died. O Allah, have Mercy on him'; thus, praying for Allah *the Almighty* to shower His Mercy upon the person at hand.

The same is true for the verse, in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...with no visible supports...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2). This part of the verse in question

commands us to consider carefully and contemplate the matter of the heavens' pillars, and to do researches to invent tools that would aid us in perceiving them. Clearly, when a speaker turns your attention to what he has made and urges you to concentrate your sensorial faculties on it, one may deduce that the speaker is certain of what he has made.

Let us offer the following example from our daily life; when you enter a store to buy wool, and the seller hands you a sample. You ask him, 'Is this pure wool?' 'Yes, it is one hundred per cent wool. Give me a lighter and we can set a piece of it on fire so that you can see for yourself', replies the vendor. By analogy, Allah *Glorified is He* is substantiating the fact that the heavens are aloft without any supports, and He is suggesting for you to see for yourselves with your own eyes. You will not find any pillars stretching to the heaven. In fact, your own vision – and that of those endowed with eyesight – which stretches out to the horizons confirms the absence of pillars.

Each person has his own visionary horizon, which is restricted to the limits of his eyesight. Some people have very limited vision and it seems to them as though the heaven met the earth in front of their eyes. To these visually disabled individuals, we say, 'You need medical glasses to increase your eyesight'.

Thus, the visual horizons differ from one person to another. In our common, daily speech, it is said, 'So-and-so has limited 'horizons' (that is, visual capacity) for he only sees objects below his feet'.

Here arises the following question, which is 'If no person is able to see pillars which lift the heavens, will this matter be different for those who will come after us'? We contend, 'Satellites have surveyed the entire surface of the earth from outer space, and none of them have found a single pillar supporting the heaven'. This fact confirms the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens with no visible supports...' (*ar-Ra'd: 2*).

As for the Arabic word *as-samawat* (heavens), it is the plural of *sama*` (heaven), which encompasses everything that is positioned higher than you. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...sends down rain from the cloud...' (*al-Baqara:* 22).

We know that the rain falls from clouds which are high up in the sky and which appear to be suspended from the sky. However, the word *sama*` generally refers to the high heaven which covers the objects beneath it.

Modern scientists failed to reach unanimous agreement when people sought to know the nature of the heaven, whether it has a form or does not have one, and whether it is a large expanse composed of atmosphere and air or not.

Allah *Glorified is He* has scattered proofs of His Existence, Power, Wisdom, and Creative capacity throughout His creation. Having done this, He has placed these proofs, O mankind, in your own being. He states, 'And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

When you ponder on your own soul, you will realise that modern scientists discover new things and marvellous secrets every day, be it in anatomy or physiology, or otherwise.

You will be amazed by your own formation when you see the discoveries currently being made on things that were previously unknown to man. Admittedly, some knowledge of our own formation is known to us at the present moment, but much remains to be understood and discovered in the future.

Discovering what has been unknown in the past leads one to suppose that new things are to be further understood in the future.

When you look beyond yourself, the following verse is pertinent, 'We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth.' (*Fussilat:* 53)

Allah's saying, 'We will soon show them Our signs...' (*Fussilat:* 53) clearly shows that Allah's display of His signs has no end, since the verb used in the verse denotes the future. Furthermore, those who witnessed the Quran being revealed read it in this way, just as we do today. Therefore, until the Day of Resurrection, there will be new signs and bestowals of Allah to be discovered.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the men, but most people do not know.' (*Ghafir:* 57) When you contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth, you will realise that it is awe-inspiring. It is sufficient for you to wonder in bewilderment at your own formation and fashioning even though you are merely a limited individual, confined to a lifetime with a beginning and an end. What are you therefore to say of the creation of the heavens and the earth which existed prior to your own existence, and which will continue after you

are gone until they are finally torn apart by Allah's command?! There is no doubt that the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind, for the heavens and the earth include the entire universe.

When you hear about the creation of the heavens and the earth, beware of getting involved with your delusions and mental appraisals, for such matters cannot be solved in a factory, and it is impossible to conduct analyses to know how the heavens and the earth were created. You should be satisfied with knowing what the Creator of the heavens and the earth demands of you, and what He says of His creation. You should also recall the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge...' (*al-Isra':* 36).

Allah *Glorified is He* has made two matters beyond the reach of the limited human mind, so there is no need for you to preoccupy yourself trying to uncover them. The first one is how man was created, and whether man was originally an ape that evolved into a human being. This matter is not of your concern, so do not get involved in it by making conjectures which may well lead you to deviate from the Truth. The second one concerns the creation of the heavens and the earth. Beware lest you say, 'The earth was originally part of the sun', and other such matters which is not based on factual findings.

Moreover, recall the following verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls...' (*al-Kahf:* 51). Clearly, if Allah *Glorified is He* wanted you to have knowledge of the creation of such matters, He would have made some humans witness their creation. However, He denied us this possibility, and that is why such matters will always contain an element of mystery, and will never be resolved by means of human intellect. The matter of creation is only resolved by means of Divine Revelation from Allah Who has created all things.

Allah *the Almighty* has told you that He created you from clay, and that He blew His Spirit into you. So, you should pay close attention to this Quranic description of the creation of man as well as the entire cosmos.

The miraculous eloquence of the Quran led some people who have undue intellectual ambitions to derive some Quranic proofs of the veracity of the

theories which some modern scientists have put forth concerning the creation of man and the earth. However, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in advance not to believe them. He says, 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls; nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

The Arabic word *al-Mudil* refers to the person who leads people astray and puts forth false information. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clearly states that there will be some people who lead others astray by presenting their speculations which have no grounding.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that no human being ever secretly witnessed the creation of the sun or the earth, and whoever claims to know such things is among the *mudillin*, that is, those who lead people astray. This is because they concerned themselves with things of which they have no certain knowledge. So long as this statement is made by Allah *Glorified is He* we believe that it is ultimately true.

Scientific inquiries have proven the truth of what Allah *the Almighty* says regarding the creation of man. Allah *Glorified is He* first fashioned the cosmos, and then created man as a master in this world. The entire earth is subservient to man, Allah's vicegerent on Earth. Moreover, everything in creation is maintained in order and regulation.

The only disobedient being in creation is man; so Allah *Glorified is He* turns to this rebel and makes him one of His signs so that he may bear witness to the world of the unseen on earth.

Allah *the Almighty* clearly states that He created Adam *peace be upon him* from clay. Man is the progeny of Adam who was fashioned by Allah *the Almighty* and in whom He has blown His Spirit. Having blown the Divine Spirit into Adam, Allah, ordered the angels to prostrate to him, including those who execute Allah's commands and the angels.

This act of prostration is the angels' declaration of obedience to Allah's Will by serving mankind. This is how the story of man's creation begins. The earth is then mixed with water, and so it turns into clay which is then left until it gains a darker complexion and finally dries up and turns into dry clay that is akin to pottery, in which Allah's Spirit was blown.

Furthermore, when man's life comes to an end, the first thing that happens is the exiting of the spirit from the body. Once this happens, the body stiffens, and after returning to the earth, the body decomposes into the soil. At this stage, the moisture of the body is absorbed back into the soil, and the bones remain for some time until they themselves crumble into dust.

It is thus that the destruction of every form takes place. So, that which is the last thing to be constructed is the first thing to be destructed, that is, blowing the Spirit was the last stage of man's creation and seizing it is the first stage of his destruction. Therefore, the truth of Allah's saying is confirmed when we contemplate the origin and ends of human creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the way of creating the heavens and the earth is beyond our mental reach, but He has previously provided us with the proof of His saying by revealing to us how He has created mankind.

Back to the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens with no visible supports...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2). We should notice that the word 'the heavens' is in the plural form. In a different verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'So He ordained them seven heavens in two periods, and revealed in every heaven its affair.' (*Fussilat:* 12)

In the days of old, people used to say that the seven heavens are the seven planets: the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars and Jupiter. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has wanted to invalidate such assumption while its supporters were still alive. Thus, the astronomers have discovered other planets like Neptune and Pluto. This was a divinely willed rebuttal of the assumption that the seven heavens mentioned in the Quran refer mainly to the seven planets.

Admittedly, such assumption was made in good intention and was instigated by a desire to harmonise between the Quran and modern science. However, such people fell short of a deep understanding of the Quran since Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that the sun, the moon and the planets are adornments of the lower heaven, so what are we to say of the nature and beauty of the other heavens?

Allah *the Almighty* continues, '...and then established Himself on the Throne...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2). The issue of '*Al-Istwa*' '*Ala Al-*'*Arsh*' (Allah's Establishment of

Himself on the Throne) is the most important theological issue that was debated by theologians. In order to gain an understanding of any issue, we must analyse the words carefully in order to come to an agreement as to their meaning. After that, we may understand the words in the context of a complete sentence. However, it would be inappropriate for us to sit down and argue over the nature of this sentence without clear contextualisation or agreement on basic definitions.

Let us look at the meaning of the verb '*istawa* as well as the word *al-'arsh* (throne) in the Quran. By following the inductive approach, we will find that these words appear in many verses. In one verse, the verb '*istwa* denotes the attainment of maturity, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when he attained his maturity and became full grown, We granted him wisdom and knowledge...' (*al-Qasas:* 14). This verse tells us about one stage of Prophet Musa's (Moses's) life when he reached full maturity, and was sexually potent to sustain his species. Moreover, if he should get married, he would bear children with similar characteristics. Such are the attributes which define a fully mature human being.

In a different instance, the Quran states, 'The Lord of Strength; so he attained completion, And he is in the highest part of the horizon.' (*an-Najm:* 6-7). The meaning of '*istawa* in this context is 'to rise'; it thus denotes the rising of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* to the horizon's loftiest part.

In a different verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and He directed Himself to the heaven, so He made them complete seven heavens...' (*al-Baqara:* 29). This verse informs us that Allah *the Almighty* directed Himself to the heaven; beware of supposing that this Divine Action is equal to the human action. This is because, as we have previously explained, everything that pertains to Allah *the Almighty* must be understood within the context of the following verse, '...there is nothing like Him...' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Thus, when we say that Allah *the Almighty* directed Himself to the heaven, we should understand this action in a manner that befits Him. Moreover, *al-`istawa'* (to rise) in a general sense differs from the act of establishing oneself on a throne.

Thus, we deduce that *'istiwa*' (establishing oneself on something) can refer to a being other than Allah *the Almighty* – namely; man, or even a king. Moreover, one also finds instances in which *'istiwa*' refers to Allah's directing Himself to something like the heaven, while in some other verses it refers to Allah's Establishment of Himself on the Divine Throne.

Allah's Establishing Himself on the Divine Throne has been mentioned in the Quran seven times, namely; in the chapters of *al-A*'*raf*, *Yunus*, *ar-Ra*'*d*, *Ta Ha*, *al-Furqan*, *as-Sajda* and *al-Hadid*.

Moreover, there are twenty-one references in the Quran to Allah's Throne, and the throne of the Queen of Sheba, *Balqis*, is mentioned four times. Allah *the Almighty* says regarding her throne, 'and she has a mighty throne' (*an-Naml:* 23), 'which of you can bring to me her throne' (*an-Naml:* 38), 'Alter her throne for her' (*an-Naml:* 41) and 'is your throne like this?' (*an-Naml:* 42)

Furthermore, in reference to Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And he raised his parents upon the throne' (*Yusuf*: 100).

You should beware of interpreting *'istiwa*' pertaining to Allah *the Almighty* to mean 'maturity.' This is because maturity denotes a perfection that develops after a certain deficiency.

Thus, meticulous religious scholars, knowing that Allah's establishing Himself upon the Throne was mentioned seven times in the Noble Quran, said:

Passages of the Quran concerning Allah's Establishing Himself upon

The Throne appears in seven chapters. So, count these chapters:

In the chapter of *al-A* 'raf, and in that of Yunus,

And in *ar-Ra*'d and *Ta Ha*. Be certain of your count!

And in the chapter of *al-Furqan*, then in that of *as-Sajda*,

In addition to al-Hadid. Understand this with complete certainty.'

As for the meaning of *'istwa*', the scholars have composed the following rhythmic poem:

'They have composed treatises (regarding the meaning of '*istiwa*') in which four meanings are listen,

Which appear in Al-Faris At-Ta`an

These four definitions are: 'He resided' and 'He ascended'

In addition to 'He is above all imperfections'

In addition to 'He mounted;' this latter being the fourth,

Thus (the poet has) completed this matter and is seeking the protection of the All-Gracious.'

*`Istawa' Ala Al-`Arsh* (ascending to the throne) is the act of moving from one place to another. So, we find that our common definitions of *'istawa*` do not befit Allah's Divine Perfection.

The scholars of religion have differed on this matter. One of them said, 'I will interpret this term to mean literally what is stated by Allah *the Almighty*'.

To those who hold such opinions, we contend by asking the following question, 'Can you possibly overlook the verse which states: 'There is nothing like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Clearly, no one has the right to do such a thing. Moreover, one must interpret every verse concerning the Divine Being in the light of Allah's saying, 'There is nothing like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

It is noteworthy to mention that scholars of precision<sup>(1)</sup> say, 'The act of *al*-'*istiwa*' is evident, the 'how' — that is, the exact nature of *al*-'*istiwa*' is unknown, and inquiring about its nature is a *bid*'a (innovation).' In other words, we know what *al*-'*istiwa*' means, but the way in which Allah does it is beyond our ken. Moreover, to inquire into the exact nature of '*istiwa*' is an (objectionable) innovation

There are many verses<sup>(2)</sup> in the Quran which begin with the True Lord *Glorified is He* saying, 'They will ask you' (*al-Baqara:* 189).

The early Muslims posed many questions to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* but being native speakers of a pure form of Arabic, they understood

<sup>(1)</sup> This most commonly refers to Imam Malik.

<sup>(2)</sup> This type of verse appears fifteen times in the Quran: (*al-Baqara*: 189, 215, 217, 219, 220, and 222), (*al-Ma'ida*: 4) (*al-A'raf*: 187), (*al-Anfal*: 1), (*al-Isra'*: 85), (*al-Kahf*: 83), (*Ta Ha*: 105) and (*an-Nazi'at*: 42).

*al-`istiwa`* as being something that befits the Divine and therefore did not ask about its exact nature.

This question concerning the exact nature of Allah's residing on His Throne was only asked by later generations of Muslims who were arguing over various theological issues contained in the Quran. One of them said, 'I will interpret the Quranic expressions literally.' If Allah says, 'verily He (that is, Allah) ascends,' then Allah ascends. Likewise, if it is stated that He makes *al-`istiwa*`, then I understand this to mean that He makes *al-`istiwa*`.'

To those who hold this opinion, we contend that what you are saying applies to transient existents, but cannot be said of the Unchanged Changer. Moreover, if you look for the meaning of *al-`istiwa*`, it means the order of things depends on Him. Considering this definition, we ask rhetorically: was there a time in which the order of things did not depend on Allah?

We add the following: it is well known that Allah *Glorified is He* has numerous Attributes, which were present prior to Allah's creation of the world and existence. Allah *Glorified is He* has been described as Creator prior to the making of creation. He is the Exalter before the creation of someone who can be exalted, and He is the Humiliator before the conception of someone who is to be humiliated. To Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the Attributes of Absolute Perfection. It is with these Attributes that He created the world. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Our Lord is He who gave each thing its form and then guided [it].' (*Ta Ha:* 50)

Accordingly, we believe that the nature of creation was in the Divine Essence before manifestation. When Allah *Glorified is He* created the heavens and the earth, He projected the Attribute into manifestation. This Attribute of creation which corresponds to Allah as Creator was within the Essence without having an evidence of its existence. And so, Allah *Glorified is He* brought this evidence into being. It is in this way that we can say that the order of things depends on Him.

In short, when one hears the expression *al-`istiwa`* with reference to Allah, it implies an understanding that is proportional to the meaning of Allah's words. This expression therefore applies to the Attributes within the Divine Order, and is distinct from all contingency and determinations.

Moreover, such attributes are to be found among human beings, as the Queen of Sheba of whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And hers is a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 23) This existent is different in nature from a Divine Attribute, since she did not sit on the throne until Allah created it. Nor do worldly affairs succumb to a king or a queen's power without great endeavours and battles on his or her part. Such a person of power may be engaged in battles and wars, and only then do affairs of this world succumb to his will.

And so, the `*istiwa*` of Allah is fundamentally different from that of Allah's creatures, When one comes across phrases that mentioned Allah residing on the throne, we raise Allah above all human actions and state the following formula of transcendence: 'There is nothing like unto Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11)

Allah's `*istiwa*` marks the completion of the abovementioned projection of the Divine Attribute which issues from the Divine Essence. In other words, the conclusion of this issuing forth which takes place at His appointed moment is the ending point of this phenomenon.

As for the word throne, we also come across verses in the Quran which mentions it in reference to Allah. 'And there will bear the throne of your Lord.' (*al-Haqqa*: 17), 'The throne of His almightiness has rested upon water.' (*Hud*: 7), 'so exalted is Allah, Lord of the throne, above what they describe.' (*al-Anbiya*': 22)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the same verse which we are examining, 'and made subject the sun and the moon.' 'Made subject' is defined as the subjugator demanding the subjugated to act according to the subjugator's laws, in such a way that the subjugated loses all individuality that is marked by desire, opinion, and emotion. It is therefore the opposite of free will. A subjugated being has no free will. As for one who is free, he has a choice whether to accept or refuse an order.

We have previously stated that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given man choice.

'Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) Man accepted to

bear the sacred trust and to return this trust to Allah at the appointed time – and not to return this sacred trust prior to this appointed time, when he is supposed to bear its responsibility. There is a clear distinction between returning a trust and bearing it. To clarify this distinction, I have previously given the example of a person who tells his friend, 'I have one thousand pounds, and I am afraid of losing them. So, keep them safely for me, and when I am in need, I will ask you to return them to me.' The trustworthy friend says, 'Hand your money over to me, and I will return it to you upon your request.'

Now this trustworthy friend is being honest with you when you asked him to bear this responsibility. However, difficult circumstances might push him to spend this money, and when the owner asks for it, the former might be unable to pay them back. Thus, the trustee gave you his word when he was entrusted with the one thousand pounds, but he failed to live up to his trust when the time came for him to pay you back.

The trustee should have told his friend when asked to save the considerable sum of money, 'Please leave, for I cannot guarantee to pay you back when you ask me for your money.'

In the above verse, the Quran tells us that when the sky, the earth, and the mountains were offered to carry this sacred trust, they refused to do so. Neither the mountains nor the heavens nor the earth have free will. None of these abovementioned existents are endowed with this power of freewill, and this limitation applies to all the species in creation save mankind. It is for this reason that we do not find any corruption on Earth resulting from these existents that are subjugated to man.

Man, however, accepted to carry this trust, since he is endowed with an intellect with which he is able to think and make choices. Corruption in the world is the result of both this freedom of choice and man's desires. Were man to perform his actions as if he were subjugated and submitted to Allah's norm, his actions on earth would be upright just like that of the other creatures that are submitted to Allah's commands.

Thus, if you want the worldly affairs – over which you have control – to be upright, then you must apply the following verse in which the True Lord

*Glorified is He* says, 'That you not transgress within the balance. And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance.' (*ar-Rahman*: 8-9)

Pay attention to what the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks of you in His religion, for if you apply religious principles to your life, your worldly affairs will be in accord (with Allah) like that of other existents (that are not endowed with freewill).

Our shortcomings result from the fact that we are human beings and perform certain actions out of our own choice which are sometimes contrary to the law of religion. However, if we were to carry out our actions and were attentive to the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'That you not transgress within the balance' then our actions will be in harmony with Allah's religion. Moreover, we will derive joy in our actions just as we derive happiness from knowing that the celestial bodies are created in order and precision.

In short, corruption only results from choices that are contrary to the law revealed by Allah who gave us freewill. If you want to be among those who are chosen by Allah, then you must remain true to the religious norm revealed by Allah, who exalted you by giving you the power of freewill.

We notice that the men of righteousness whom Allah created follow the religion of their Lord. They willingly chose to live in accordance with their Lord's expectations (of man) in those domains wherein choice is possible. And so they lived, as it were, in complete harmony with the divine will. These are called servants, not slaves. All creatures belonging to Allah are slaves of Allah, be they believers or disbelievers, obedient or disobedient of His commands. As for servants, they are the ones who adopt Allah's commands as their choice. Allah says, 'And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace.' (*al-Furqan:* 63) These are the ones who freely choose to live in accordance with what Allah chooses.

Note the True Lord's description of the angels in the following verse, 'Rather, they are [but] honoured servants. They cannot precede Him in word, and they act by His command.' (*al-Anbiya*': 26-27)

If a servant voluntarily chooses to comply with the religion of his Lord, he not only attains the spiritual status of the angels, but also may even elevate to

a superior rank than the angelic one. This is because the angels are subjected to Allah's Commands, while you have the choice to obey or disobey Him. In short, by willingly following the religion of your Lord, you may potentially exceed the rank of the angels.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the verse at hand, 'and has subjected the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term.' (*Luqman:* 29) Running its course for a specified term, we must understand the verb 'run' in the context of this verse to mean 'the shortening of time that it takes to cover a certain distance'. For example, when you want to arrive at a certain destination, you might walk at a slow pace to arrive within say, one hour. However, you could also run to your destination and cover the same distance within half an hour. Obviously, running is noticeable to the observer.

Does anyone notice the sun 'running its course'? No, since this 'running' takes place within the proportions of the sun. This type of running is called 'streamline running'; that is, it is a running that is not perceivable by the naked eye. Note that there is a different kind of moving called movement of leaping and streamlined movement. Take the movement of the hands of a clock, for instance. You will notice that the hand marking the seconds is faster than the minutes' hand which seems to be unchanging although it is in fact in constant movement. You can perceive the movements of the seconds' hand because it moves in leaps. However, you cannot see the movements of the disks inside the clock. Every part of the disk which moves the minutes' hand. And so, the leap-motion of the seconds' hand is rendered into a subtle movement of the minutes' hand.

Now the combined movement of both the seconds' and the minutes' hands of the clock create a subtler movement of the hours' hand. This means that every split second contributes to a slight movement of the hours' hand.

The same applies to the growth of human beings, animals, or plants. You notice that the actual growth takes place without being noticeable to the eye because the growing creature develops in a subtle and imperceptible way throughout the whole day.

If you want to understand this concept in greater depth, look at a shadow. You will notice that the shadow is conspicuous during the rising of the sun, but that it gradually loses its shape as the sun sets.

Notice the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, 'Have you not considered your Lord - how He extends the shadow, and if He willed, He could have made it stationary?' (*al-Furqan:* 45) That is: a shadow is in constant movement and unfixed in one place. Moreover, the perpetual movement of the sun at every moment changes the position of the shadow.

Considering this explanation, we should distinguish between leap-movement of existents and the constant yet streamlined movement of certain things. With scientific progress, we find scientists discussing possibilities such as 'increasing the intensity of the streamlined movement over the leap-movement'.

Returning to the chapter of *ar-Ra'd*, at this point, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, 'and has subjected the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term.'

'Specified term denotes a fixed duration, which can either be a set duration in time or a limited distance in space. In this verse, the word term either means a set duration of the sun and the moon's existence, which will occur on the Day of Judgment when the sky will be rent asunder, the sun, will be rolled up and the stars will lose their luminescence,<sup>(1)</sup> or again, it may denote the daily function of these two celestial bodies.

We have previously discussed that even though the sun sets in one general location, it rises at different points on the horizon. A proof that the sun has varying rising points is that the ancient Egyptians established certain temples with certain windows and openings (in the walls of the edifice).

Each day when the sun rises, it rises at one of the points onto which the windows look. Thus, each day the sun rises at a different point from the previous day, and continues to do so until it completes the cycle and sunrise

Allah Glorified is He says, 'And when the stars lose their light' (at-Takwir: 2), that is, its colour changed and is no longer unobstructed brightness. Or again, the stars scattered about and fell on the Day of Resurrection like hawks attacking their prey. (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 2/155).

takes place at the original point where it started. This sun's cycle continues daily for a set term.

We refer to these points of sunrise as *al-buruj*, that is, signs of the zodiac. We have, for example, the sign of the Ram, the Capricorn, the Bull, the Lion, Virgo, Sagittarius (the Archer) and the Fish. Such signs of the zodiac are used as a means of knowing the weather conditions, including heat, cold, rain, and other matters pertaining to the weather. In short, every sign of the zodiac marks a specific time, and we can identify the weather conditions with precision in relation to this time marked by the rising sun.

Unfortunately, however, certain human actions render difficult the precise measuring of weather conditions on earth through the zodiac points. For example, the burning of forests which consumes so much oxygen that is necessary for man and animals to breathe.

As a result, the ozone layer attempts to maintain its balance by transferring quantities of air from another region to the region where oxygen is being consumed by forest fires, thus causing an imbalance in the temperature scale for a few days.

The atmosphere is also damaged by nuclear experiments that are conducted by countries in possession of atomic weapons. These nations detonate their weapons in the air, thereby creating an instability and imbalance in the atmosphere, which in turn renders the abovementioned zodiac points less accurate means of measuring the changes in temperature.

A poet once listed these zodiac points in the following verses:

'The Bull bore Cancer's axis,

And the Lion gave way to Virgo of the Balance.

Scorpio, the Archer, Aquarius and Pisces,

Never have we known the people of as-suryan)'

'He details the signs that you may, of the meeting with your Lord, be certain.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2) In the opening of this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified the concept of the skies being raised without any (visible) pillars, His residing on the Divine throne, the subservience of the sun and the moon to His commands and how all things run their course for a set term.

All the above-mentioned phenomena require disposal of its affairs after manifestation of power has become evident, for just as He determined all things before creating them, He disposes their affairs with His existence. Allah watches over all things, and He manifests Himself in a different way each day.<sup>(1)</sup> I will cite the following example for the sake of elucidation, and not to draw an analogy between Allah and contingent things for Allah is above all similitude. We say, 'so-and-so first meditated upon something, and then he went to action.' Thought or meditation upon something is to research a certain matter so as to extract necessary information from it. This is akin to gathering grains of wheat and rubbing them against one another in your hand to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Analogously, one can understand the process of contemplation that is demanded of you when researching a topic: you persist at what you are doing until you reach the heart of the matter. Deliberateness is to lose confidence in one's first thought, but considering at the heart of the matter to perceive the possible consequences of applying one's ideas to concrete situations.

Perhaps the ideas that one came up with might save or help in the present situation; however, they may also be injurious on the long term. About this possibility, I always cite the example of the invention of insecticides. Its inventors failed to realize that they were poisonous not only to the harmful insects but also to the animals that helped the farmer. They became so dangerous they were banned. This ban was issued from people who boasted to be greater than all the others on earth for having invented these insecticides. They mistakenly thought that the good derived from these insecticides vastly outweighed the harm that resulted from using them. This means that they did not thoroughly test their new insecticide product. Rather, they created it in a hurried fashion without paying attention to the long-term harms. Clearly, they should have done their research properly before releasing their product into the market since 'deliberation' means to look at something back to front. The

<sup>(1) &#</sup>x27;Abdullah ibn Munib Al-Azdi said, The Messenger of Allah peace and blessing be upon him recited the following verse, '(and) every day He manifests Himself in yet another (wondrous) way.' (ar-Rahman: 29). We asked: 'Oh Messenger of Allah, what way is that (in which Allah manifests Himself?' He responded, 'To forgive a sin, relieve a hardship, elevate some people and down rank others.' Cited by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir) (4/273).

True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Then do they not reflect upon the Quran, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?' (*Muhammad:* 24)

In other words, do not consider only the outward facet of the Quran, but ponder its deeper meanings as well. It is precisely for this reason that 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Deliberate deeply in the Quran.'

In other words, unearth treasures buried within the Holy Book by means of deliberation and close inspection of its verses. After all, deliberation prevents one from erroneous thinking. A simple example (of careful thought) which is witnessed in every household is that we wash our mouths with water to rinse out any food left from the meal. Among these leftovers, we find chunks of food that are somewhat solid.

Then we rinse out the basin with flowing water from the tap, and we are surprised when, after some time, the drain is clogged. When we open the conduit pipe, we find that it is filled with leftovers.

Now when you rinsed out your mouth, you were only thinking about cleaning it. You did not consider that the food crumbs will accumulate over time in the conduit pipe. Had you thought carefully about the consequences of rinsing your mouth in the sink, you would have installed a conduit pipe that is wider than the traditional one. Moreover, you would have set up a larger water-flush that is attached to the sink.

Thus, we understand that deliberate thought pushes you to look carefully into things. You must inspect and examine your subject of inquiry: does it really bring about what your mental calculations have predicted? Or again, does it benefit or harm you?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse, 'He details the signs that you may, of the meeting with your Lord, be certain.'

'Details the signs' means that Allah has laid down an appropriate decree for all things in the universe, By extension, to those people who ask me for a *fatwa* which is in agreement with their own wishes, I always respond, 'We do not create *fatwas* in conformity with your whims. My *fatwas* were constructed (on principles that are) prior (to your whims), and it is you who must conform to their stipulations, rather than tailor the *fatwa's* decrees to conform to your desires.'

I make such statements because life in this world is not the end. Rather, it is followed by another life in which a man is judged for his actions on earth. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And we will regard what they have done of deeds and make them as dust dispersed.' (*al-Furqan:* 23)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'Their deeds are like ashes which the wind blows forcefully on a stormy day; they are unable [to keep] from what they earned a [single] thing.' (*Ibrahim:* 18)

Therefore, you must carry out your actions in this world with the certainty that their ramifications do not end in this world but also have an impact in the life-to-come. For if the earth provides you with temporary comfort or passing hardship, the relief in the life-to-come is everlasting, while the castigation (reserved for the evildoers) has no end.

The True Lord Glorified is He says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى مَدَّ ٱلْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَّسِيَ وَأَنْهَ رَأَ وَمِن كُلِّ ٱلنَّمَرَتِ جَعَلَ فِيهَا زَوْجَيْنِ ٱتْنَيْنِ يُغْشِي ٱلَيَّلَ ٱلنَّهَارَ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَأَيْنَتِ لِقَوْمِ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ٣

# it is He who spread out the earth, placed firm mountains and rivers on it, and made two of every kind of fruit; He draws the veil of night over the day. There truly are signs in this for people who reflect [3] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 3)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* further elaborates on the cosmic signs: 'spread the earth'. In other words, the earth is established and laid out before you. Some people understand the verb 'spread' to mean 'flattened'. We contend that the flattening of something follows its spreading.

It is for this reason that some scholars asked: how does one understand this verse considering those who say that the earth takes a spherical shape?

After all, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states that the earth is flattened and He also says, 'He has spread the earth.' My response to these scholars is as follows: let us first understand the verb spread correctly, and let us understand what Allah means by the earth as well. The latter is that on which you and others stand, and on which creatures live. It stretches northward to the North

Pole, and southward to the South Pole. The earth is spread out no matter at which part of it you happen to be located.

The meaning of 'spreading the earth' is if you were to stand on one point of the earth's surface and walked toward another point, you will notice that the earth is spread out before you and that there is no cliff marking the 'end of the earth'. Now if the earth were 'flattened', then by definition its surface would have an end. We would have those who walk to the end of the earth and say, 'I have reached the limit of the earth's surface, and in front of me there is nothing but empty space'. Obviously, not a single human being has ever rightfully made such a claim.

If a man were to follow the equator, for example, he would keep on walking on land or traversing the sea and the ocean by boat until he reaches his initial point of departure. Thus, we can say that the earth is spread out without any limits; and this is only possible because of the earth's spherical shape. In fact, if you were to follow any of the earth's longitudes or latitudes, you would end up at your initial point of departure.

This was the initial proof presented by scientists for the spherical shape of the earth; that is, prior to coming up with the idea of taking a picture of the earth above the planet's ozone layer. We derive yet another meaning from the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And it is He who has spread the earth' namely the necessity of man's acknowledging the vastness of the earth and, if his circumstances are not favourable, of moving to a different location. Indeed, Allah's Earth is wide-ranging, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?' (*an-Nisa*': 97)

We know that corruption in our modern world is born out of corruption in policies and an escalation in calamities around the world. Political tensions have, as it were, put a limit to the earth's spreading; the moment a person tries to leave the borders of his country, he is confronted with guards and other barriers at the frontier of his neighbouring nation. Everyone has forgotten the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* proclaims, 'And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures.' (*ar-Rahman:* 10) Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has placed the earth at the service of all living beings. If this Quranic principle

is not achieved, the world will stay in a state of conflict. Some countries will lack human workforce and others will have meagre economies due to overpopulation and extracting more resources and energy from the earth than it is meant to provide.

In short, because of the artificial barriers that are drawn between countries, parts of the earth will remain under-populated, while some humans will not even possess a plot of land from which to derive a livelihood. For this dilemma to be solved – as we mentioned in a speech addressed to the United Nations – the following Quranic principle must be applied, 'And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures.' A person whose living conditions are difficult in one part of the earth must be allowed to migrate elsewhere.

Allah *Glorified is He* carries on in the same verse, 'and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers.' And so, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has decreed the specific nature of the mountain. In another verse, He elaborates on the cause for their being firm. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and (are they not aware that) We have set up firm mountains on earth, lest it sway with them.' (*al-Anbiya':* 31) In other words, lest the earth becomes unstable, for were the earth created in a fixed manner, we would not have needed firm mountains to serve as reinforcement. However, the earth's surface by nature is unstable, and it is prone to seismic activity. Were it not for the mountains, the earth's surface would have been less steady.

Someone may ask: what about when we raze mountains to the ground; we quarry some for granite that we use to lay the foundations of buildings in some parts of the world, we extract marble from others to make bathrooms, reservoirs and stairs, and we cut certain types of rock out of mountains to obtain Uranium? We contend: observe the Wisdom of the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He created the earth, and when He ordered the cosmos. Notice that the earth is enveloped in an atmosphere and that it has a bore projecting from the core of the earth to its surface, and that the closer you get to the centre of the planet, the smaller the bore.

The structure of the earth is analogous to that of, for example, a watermelon. If you were to separate the inner core of the watermelon from its outer peel, you would end up with a ball made by the green outer peel, and

another made of the eatable watermelon fruit. Moreover, if you were to create another sphere out of the same red watermelon, you would end up with another ball that has a smaller diameter than that of the green one. The more spheres you make out of the watermelon, the smaller the diameter since you are approaching the centre of the fruit. In addition, the green peel that surrounds the watermelon is similar to the crust which covers the earth's surface. Our planet's crust is composed of solid material, but its core is made up of various substances which may be either in solid or in liquid form.

The more we draw unto the centre of the earth, the more the temperature increases. This is demonstrated by the hot and burning steam which gushes from the mouths of volcanoes.

Out of mercy for mankind, the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed for the core of the earth to be in liquid form, for when we build houses, dig out rocks from mountains, or use materials from mountains for any other purpose we are simply transferring the earth's material from one place to another.

Moreover, when ponderous matter is moved from one location on the earth's surface to another, the liquid underneath the surface is transferred from the region that is bearing more weight to the one which is carrying a lesser load, thus recreating balance within the earth. Were this shifting of liquids inside the earth's surface not to take place, the sky scrapers would simply tumble with the earth's rotations.

The following example makes this concept easier to grasp: if you placed a piece of dough on the surface of a rotating watermelon or that of a ball, the chunk of dough would drop off the surface. Scientists who study the science of motion have explained this phenomenon by showing that due to their rotation; all spherical objects which are in movement generate a force which is called self-centrifuge. The piece of dough – or any object placed on a rotating sphere – causes relatively more density and weight on the surface of the sphere, and is felt at the centre. To maintain its balanced rotational movement, the sphere casts out any superfluous mass accumulated on its surface.

Consequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* designed the earth in such a way that when bisected, the two halves of the earth are always equal in weight

- regardless of the line of bisection and of the shifting of materials on the earth's surface. Hence, the weight of the earth is always in balance because of the shifting of the liquids underneath the earth's surface.

This self-equilibrating mechanism of our planet is a proof of the Glory of the Creator who created the cosmos with such precision. It suffices us to observe the Glory of the True Lord *Glorified is He* who created the mountains as anchors which prevent the earth's surface from shifting. Allah created the mountains and the deserts as sources of livelihood for us when our subsistence is threatened. And so, we extracted raw materials from mountains and exported them to other nations, using their revenue to buy wheat.

We notice around us deserts whose inhabitants, a long time ago, were suffering from thirst and could not even find a tree under which to seek shade. Yet the True Lord *Glorified is He* created wells in these deserts from which petrol comes gushing forth. Thus, we see that every plot of land on this earth is laden with bounty that is equal to other parts of the world, and that Allah has set a time in history in which people may benefit from the bounty of that land. It is for this reason that the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes the mountains in the following way, 'Say, 'Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals?" That is the Lord of the worlds. And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance in four days without distinction - for [the information] of those who ask.' (*Fussilat: 9-10*)

In other words: Allah has bestowed his blessings upon the mountains, which are part and parcel of the earth, and He willed for the means of subsistence to be distributed among the mountains and throughout the earth. It suffices us to know that when rains from the heavens shower down on mountains, the rainwater carries alluvial mud from the mountain peaks to lower regions of the earth, thus fertilizing the soil below.

Moreover, were the mountains not solid, they would have crumbled after a few rainfalls, thereby depriving plants that we cultivate in the earth from the fertile soil which is their source of nourishment.

Nonetheless, Allah *Glorified is He* willed for the weather patterns to unfold successively and to be varied and diversified – ranging from heat to humidity –

causing the earth to crack and the solid surface of mountains to dissolve and pour down with the rainwater. This softened mountain crust then nourishes the soil and makes like possible and allows us to carry on cultivating crops.

Note that Allah *Glorified is He* says in the same verse, 'and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers.' Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* is including two opposites in the same verse: firm mountains, which are solid and stable, and rivers which carry water. A river is that which carries fresh water. In contrast, the sea is a body of salty water. If you were to trace all the earth's rivers, you would find that they empty out into the oceans. Were the opposite to occur, seawater would have dominated fresh water and we would be unable to drink or cultivate land. It is for this reason that the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed for fresh water to be located at a higher level than salt water. After all, fresh water has a function to fulfil before emptying out in the ocean. I give this explanation so that we may grasp the wisdom of the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, 'Between them is a barrier [so] neither of them transgresses.' (*ar-Rahman:* 20)

It is remarkable that the barrier of earth which separates rivers from oceans is slanted. The gradation of this obstacle enables fresh water to travel to the ocean. It is also astonishing that when you dig a hole on the shores of a beach, you sometimes find sweet water.

When we visit the town in northern Egypt on the Mediterranean called El-Arish, we find groves of palm trees bordering the shoreline. Now we know that palm trees need fresh water. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* has endowed this type of palm tree with the quality of being able to draw fresh water from this beach abutting the sea; or again, one has the impression that there might be fresh water undercurrents.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky and makes it flow as springs [and rivers] in the earth.' (*az-Zumar:* 21) Note that in Lower Egypt, some people dig a well and come across fresh water, while others dig wells only to find salt water. This proves that fresh and salt waters underneath the earth are not mixed. Rather, both fresh and salt waters flow through distinct underground channels.

In the same verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the ripening of fruits because of the firm mountains from which soil is nourished, as well as the rivers and tributaries which carry necessary water for irrigation. Thus, the ripening of fruits or crops in general is a natural process. As we know, the fruit or the crop is the incentive for engaging in agricultural activity.

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* keeps on listing the bounties which He bestows upon us. Allah says, 'and from all of the fruits He made therein two mates.'

Note that the True Lord Glorified is He did not create anything without endowing it with the ability to multiply. This fact is confirmed by the following verse in which the True Lord Glorified is He states, 'Exalted is He who created all pairs - from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.' (Ya Sin: 36) For anything to multiply there is need of two corresponding parts of a pair. In the days of old, we used to believe that reproduction by means of grafting was a phenomenon that was particular to plants only. For example, we would graft a female palm tree with a male one. In the animal kingdom, the male animal would fertilize the female. However, we have discovered through modern science that electricity – this example is not exclusive – is also engendered by the meeting of two opposing elements, one positive and the other negative. This principle of duality is also witnessed in other cosmic phenomena. All these scientific discoveries confirm the veracity of the verse in which Allah Glorified is He says, 'Limitless in His glory is He who has created all opposites.' (Ya Sin: 36)

In the same verse, Allah *Glorified is He* continues, 'He causes the night to cover the day.' In other words, the darkness of the night covers the light of day (in a sheet of obscurity). In a different chapter in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'We erased the sign of the night and made the sign of the day visible.' (*al-Isra*': 12) This is in accordance with Allah's Will, 'And He it is who causes the night and the day to succeed one another.' (*al-Furqan:* 62)

If someone were to ask, 'Which was created first, the day or the night?', we would respond, 'From our human perspective, we witness both night and

day successively. Each one carries out its function in one half of the globe, and each succeeds the other. This is what it must have been like when Allah first created the heavens and the earth.

And so, had Allah *Glorified is He* spread out the earth and caused it to face the sun, the day would clearly have preceded the night. However, if the earth were not facing the sun at the time of its creation, then night would obviously have preceded day.' The True Lord clarifies this matter to a certain extent in the following verse in the chapter of *Ya Sin*, 'It is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming.' (*Ya Sin:* 40)

Since they had devised the lunar calendar, we may deduce that the ancient Arabs used to believe that night was created by Allah before day. The month would therefore start at night and not during the day. We know for example that the month of *Ramadan* begins at night. And so, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies the cyclical nature of night and day to the early Muslims to the extent that their knowledge of the solar system permits. Later, we discovered that night and day were created at the same time, thanks to pictures of the spherical shape of our planet. We now understand that Allah *Glorified is He* created the heavenly bodies in this fashion. Thus, the side of the earth which is facing the sun is experiencing daylight, while the opposing side of the earth is covered in darkness of night. Moreover, each of the two sides alternate. It is in this manner that we discovered that both night and day were created at the same time.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* puts emphasis on the Noble Quranic verse by stating, 'Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought.' In other words, man has the duty to study his surroundings in order to arrive at the heart of the truth.

Allah Glorified is He and then says:

وَفِي ٱلْأَرْضِ قِطَعٌ مُّتَجَوِرُتٌ وَجَنَّتُ مِّنْ أَعْنَبٍ وَزَرْعٌ وَنَجِيلٌ صِنُوَانُ وَغَيْرُ صِنُوَانٍ يُسْقَىٰ بِمَآءٍ وَاحِدٍ وَنُفَضِّلُ بَعْضَهَا عَلَى بَعْضِ فِي ٱلْأُصُلْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَأَيْنَتِ لِقَوْمِ يَعْقِلُونَ ١

# There are, in the land, neighbouring plots, gardens of vineyards, cornfields, palm trees in clusters or otherwise, all watered with the same water, yet We make some of them taste better than others: there truly are signs in this for people who reason[4] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 4)

This verse points out details which are referred to in general terms toward the end of the chapter of *Yusuf*, 'And how many a sign within the heavens and earth do they pass over while they, therefrom, are turning away.' (*Yusuf*: 105) Moreover, this verse reminds one of Allah's statements, 'It is Allah who erected the heavens without pillars that you [can] see.' As well as, 'He arranges [each] matter; He details the signs.' Or again, 'And it is He who spread the earth and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers; and from all of the fruits He made therein two mates; He causes the night to cover the day. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought?"

When we meditate upon the verse where the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, 'And within the land are neighbouring plots', we find ourselves falling short of defining the earth properly, for land is the material from which our fellow humans and creatures derive their livelihood. Note that had we tried to give it a more precise definition, we would only come up with one that is more obscure. From this perspective, one could say that the meaning of earth is so evident that it does not call for a definition.

The word 'plots' means that the entirety of the earth's landmass is divided into tracts of land, This sum, entails both the entirety of the soil's surface as well as the distinct tracts of land into which this total is divided.

You have heard of modern scientists speaking of the existence of 'strips of wheat' (that is, a swath of land where wheat grows easily and abundantly) 'banana strips', 'hot regions' and 'cold regions' of the earth. The verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'neighbouring plots' speaks of the dazzling Creative Power of Allah. Even though these tracts of land are neighbouring each other, the climate in which they are located gives rise to immense variation: wheat, for example, can only grow in a particular type of weather, and the same is true for bananas.

And so, the agricultural production that is particular to each region of the world corresponds to the diversity in climate patterns. The earth's soil is not simply one homogenous mass of clay. Rather, each soil is moulded by the climate that surrounds it.

It is indeed stunning to contemplate the earth, for it provides man, as well as other creatures, with the nourishment needed to sustain life on earth. As stated above, the earth is not one homogenous whole; rather, it differs according to varying conditions. Some regions of the world are barren and unproductive, while others are lush and fertile.

In fact, soil fertility differs from one region and tract of land to another. Note that a guava fruit which grows off a particular tree in a particular region differs from guava fruits which grow off of trees in a different region of the world. Likewise, the types of wheat vary from one part of the world to another. People often tell you: 'this is the wheat of so-and-so'. This happens even though all soils are irrigated by the same water.

Modern scientists who deny the wisdom of revelation say, 'This variety within a single species of plants is due to processes of natural selection and preference.' It is as if these modern scientists were oblivious to the fact that a choice requires a chooser, and that the latter demands a brain with which he can make his selection. The same is true for preference or election. Do the seeds have a brain with which they choose and select their preferences? The answer is obviously in the negative.

Modern scientists further proclaim, 'Plants obtain their nutrition through minuscule hair-like tubes.' Now we know that the artificial hair-like tubes in factories are made of a special type of glass. When placed in a water-filled container, the water rises inside these artificial glass tubes to the level of the container.

If we were to accept this position maintained by the abovementioned scientists, how is it tenable that two trees draw the same amount of water and

produce the same type of fruit, while each differs in taste from the other? We contend: each individual tree draws from the earth the amount of nutrition which it requires, and this gives rise to variety among the same species of plants. Yet, all of this happens through the Power of Allah, who determined all things, then guided mankind through revelation.

The earth is made up of tracts of land which are adjacent to each another, and each gives way to a distinct agricultural product. Some atheists might argue that this variety among the same species of plants is simply the result of nature and the climate.

Such people feign ignorance of the fact that 'nature' adds up to the sun which provides light, heat and radiation; the moon which reflects a certain percentage of the sun's light; the stars which act as guiding compasses for those roaming wide open spaces, and wind currents which alternate and have courses that follow different cycles.

Despite the abovementioned phenomena of nature, we find tracts of land which are fertile and productive, and others which are barren and unproductive. Moreover, soil can be red, black or sandy, yet they are all close by one another. Therefore, there must be an All-Powerful Mover and Determiner causing such diversity in creation.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues in the verse mentioned above, 'and gardens of grapevines and crops and palm trees, [growing] several from a root or otherwise.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* first lists foods of secondary importance, namely fruits. Then He speaks of staple crops which are chief providers of nourishment. In fact, we imitate this order in our daily lives: when you are invited for a meal at the house of an eminent person, you find an assortment of fruits placed to the side of the main course.

After mentioning grapes and grain – the latter being a staple source of nourishment, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of date palms. It denotes a type of palm which bears fruit and sometimes accompanies a main course. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '[growing] several from a root or otherwise', one may ask, what does this mean? It means 'two equivalents'. This is clearly demonstrated in palm-trees; you often see one root from which

two or three palm-trees stem. Sometimes, one finds four or five palms growing out of a single root.

It is amazing to consider the fact that each tree draws a certain amount of water from its roots. It also obtains the nourishment which enables it to bear fruits of different forms and tastes. It is precisely this fact which impels us to contend that the speculations made by scientists – who are specialized in botany – that plants draw their nourishment through hair-thin capillaries, is not completely accurate.

If these postulations were true, then the same type of nourishment would be absorbed by the hair-thin capillary roots of different kinds of plants. However, this is not the case, since each plant derives from the soil only the sustenance that is particular to it, disregarding all other types of sustenance. And yet, the fruits produced by each plant are different and diverse. In fact, one finds variety among fruits of the same tree.

Consider, for example, the mango tree or the fruit-bearing palm-tree. You will invariably favour some mangos over others, even though they were born from the same tree. Or again, you might choose dates and turn down others, even though they are from the same palm.

When you buy fruits from the market, the purchase you make is generally determined by either your fondness or your dislike of fruits which have been previously stored and frozen. And so, if you like fruits which have been previously stored, then you will purchase second-rate fruit. However, if you like to enjoy freshly picked fruit, then you will buy only high quality products.

I challenge each of you to stand in front of a fruit store and to pick out fruits which are not good looking and first-rate. Obviously, every person tries to buy the most beautiful and the finest fruit available. Moreover, when he pays, the buyer will generally pay with the oldest paper bill in his pocket and will keep the newly printed-paper bills for himself. Such is the condition which dominates over human nature. Under common circumstances man refuses to accept objects of low quality, and is inclined to keep articles of superior quality for himself.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* proclaims, 'Say [to them], "If you possessed the depositories of the mercy of my Lord, then you would withhold out of fear of spending."" (*al-Isra*': 100)

Indeed, one cannot find fruits that are completely identical to one another. Rather, fruits differ in taste from one type to another. Each is consumed differently: no one eats a whole date, for example. Instead, we eat the date after separating the flesh from the pip. In contrast to the date, the fig is eaten whole, while the apricot is eaten after the kernel is extracted from its centre.

Each fruit has its particular form and standards. Allah did not simply create fruits in a mechanical way; rather, there is a great diversity reflected even in the smallest details of the fruit. When you eat a bundle of grapes, you will find that there is a difference from one single grape to another. Moreover, we not only favour one kind of fruit over another, we also have preferences among the same kind of fruit.

When you come across the follow verse, 'We make some of them exceed others in [quality of] fruit.' Know that there is no matter or thing which is endowed with absolute preference over other things. Likewise, one does not find a thing which is unfavourable in an absolute degree. When one thing is given preference over another, one may understand that the two objects in question both possess redeeming qualities, as well as other aspects which are less preferable.

Consider the following clear example: when we sit around a table, and a turkey is served, your hand might reach for a plate of pickled vegetables before reaching for the turkey. This is because you might desire the plate of pickled vegetables first and prefer to eat the turkey second. Therefore, do not assert that certain things are invariably preferred over others.

The same goes for individuals. Beware lest you think that some people are righteous in an absolute sense, while others are absolutely depraved. Rather, people possess traits which are redeeming and others which are far from being ideal. Consider, for example, someone who owns a sports car and is driving down a road when suddenly his wheel bursts. He then prays for Allah to send him a person who would change his wheel. Sooner or later, a man donned in shabby clothes passes by and is able to change his wheel. In this case, the unkempt man is superior to the man owning a fancy sports car in that he is able to use the spare tire to change the deflated wheel. It is in this way Allah spreads His bounty among His servants, causing people to need and depend on each other. I therefore state: when you recognize your superiority over others in something, beware lest you fall into vanity. Ask yourself: in what way are others superior to you? Moreover, recall the verse in which the True Lord says, '…no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them…' (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

So, the True Lord willed for His bounty to be distributed amongst mankind, so that each may depend on the other, which leads to social integration. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* endows some foods, fruits, and crops with qualities over others. Notice your own reaction when you are presented with a plate of different fruits; you may reach for a banana before an apple. The moment you desire the banana, you assess the qualities of the fruits and compares between them to determine one you prefer most. Clearly, each person is entitled to his preferences and predilections. The True Lord states, '…everything has its measure with Him.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 8)

People are very creative and original in their cooking. People differ in their preference of various kinds of food. You might come across two individuals who love chicken, yet one of them prefers breast meat while the other favours the drumstick. A third person may be fond of pigeons, and a fourth of fish. In fact, you will find diversity in the way people consume fish. Some of them love the fish's head, while others fancy the fish's flesh itself. It is truly remarkable to note that no one knows why there is such diversity in our preferences for various kinds of foods. When you contemplate such things, you might recall the verse in which the True Lord says, 'How can you disbelieve in Allah...' (*al-Baqara:* 28). The question posed in this verse marks Allah's 'astonishment'. Now astonishment is generally a reaction to something, the cause of which is unknown. Is there a cause which is unknown to Allah and which would cause Him to become astonished? The answer to this question is obviously in the negative. Allah *Glorified is He* sure knows the

cause of something in His creation and He knows the reason why certain people refuse to acknowledge His reality. However, Allah reproaches them for their refusal to acknowledge Him. One example which is drawn from our daily life – and to Allah belongs the greatest example – is that you find yourself asking 'how can you insult your father?' to a person who addresses his father disparagingly. This question implies that you are surprised at the refusal of this person to acknowledge his father's rights. The same applies for the rhetorical question: 'how can you refuse to acknowledge Allah?' since *kufr* (the act of covering) and which means in this case 'denying the truth', is not the position that can be held by a sane person. One of my teachers, the esteemed Ahmad At-Tawil,<sup>(1)</sup> used to tell us about one of his teachers who, when reading the verse, 'How can you disbelieve in Allah' *(al-Baqara: 28)* used to say: this verse is addressed to mankind as a whole, since the verse is followed by the generalizing statement, 'when you were lifeless and He gave you life' (*al-Baqara: 28*).

Note that this statement is also addressed to humans at large. Our sheikh would tell us that his teacher spoke of a man-who acted extravagantly against his own soul—was suddenly guided to the path of Allah. When the people who knew him noticed that he had made a complete turn-around in his spiritual life, they inquired as to the reason for his sudden conversion. The man recounted, 'I was resting in a garden one day, and I desired to eat a bundle of grapes. So, I picked a bundle of grapes off the vine. Then, I began to contemplate these grapes, and noticed the thin and delicate covering - referring to the peel enveloping each individual grape - protecting the fruits' juicy flesh. When I put the grapes in my mouth, they became a soothing juice. I was amazed at how these grapes had preserved their coolness and freshness despite the heat of Ba'un (the tenth month of the Coptic calendar.) Then, I looked at the grape seeds which to my senses tasted like musk. I was filled with joy by the taste and beauty of these grapes, when suddenly I heard a voice within me exclaiming, "How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah who created these grapes?" Thereupon, I cried out, "now, oh my Lord. Truly I believe in You.""

<sup>(1)</sup> The story of Ash-Sheikh Ahmad At-Tawil Allah bless his soul

Each one of us has the right to look at something which he appreciates, for he will find that the object of admiration, as it were, asks him: 'how can you refuse to acknowledge Allah who created me? So, each human being is thus asked this question, since there is no human who does not marvel at something in this world. Hence, we can understand the verse in which the True Lord says, 'some of them We make more excellent than others to eat' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4). Anything may be preferred when it is needed and demanded, and anything may be preferred over at some point, even if it is needed by somebody. This variation in preference pertains to eating and tasting.

*Al-ukul* is that which is consumed not only now but also in the future. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...are like a garden on a hill: heavy rain falls and it produces double its normal yield; even if no heavy rain falls, it will still be watered by the dew...' (*al-Baqara:* 265). Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '...perpetual food and shade...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 35). He also says, 'Yielding constant fruit by its Lord's leave...' (*Ibrahim:* 25). *Al-ukul*, therefore, refers to food which is consumed either now or in the future.

The True Lord ends this verse by adding, '...there truly are signs in this for people who reason.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4) Some people think that having a mind implies that man should simply take pleasure in matters of this world, and that the mind grants man absolute freedom. This type of thinking is fallacious. In fact, man has been given a mind and the faculties of reason to comprehend the consequences and final outcomes of every action that he takes in this world. It is the mind that tells man: 'Beware lest this or that matter allures you, for the consequences will be dreadful'. Note that *al-`aql* (the mind) is derived from the trilateral root *ayn, qaf and lam*. We say, `*aqaltu al-ba`ir*, that is, I hobbled the camel.

One of the primary functions of the mind is to sort and to contemplate things so as to extract what is necessary. The mind is also responsible for pondering matters. Cognitive reception and research are mental processes the mind uses to draw out facts and results. Pondering matters of every sort is also a mental process the mind uses to avoid whatever harm they may enclose.

Consider, for example, the medications which some scientists have come up with and which are used in the market for a certain amount of time. After a

while, however, the same scientists declare that these medications are no longer to be used, since their side effects are very harmful. This incident points to the fact that the scientists did not conduct a thorough study of the medications, and that they made certain arbitrary assumptions while lacking full knowledge of their sample.

The True Lord says, '...there truly are signs in this for people who reason.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4) Note that this entails that minds should assist one another to search for the signs of the Lord of all minds. Therefore, no one should make a decision that is based only on his mental faculties; rather, he should consult the opinion of two or three other minds. This way, the person making the decision can consider the possible outcomes of his decision, and so that various minds come together to draw out useful facts which will not cause harm on the long-term. He who relies solely on his opinion inevitably fails and he who seeks the opinion of other men benefits from their mental capacities.

The True Lord says:

If anything can amaze you [Prophet], then you should surely be amazed at their asking, 'What? When we become dust, shall we be created anew?' These are the ones who deny their Lord, who will wear iron collars around their necks and be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain [5] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 5)

*Al-`ajab* (translated above as amazement) is to be astonished by something that you do not know the cause of. Thus, *at-ta`ajjub* (amazement) does not come from Allah, since Allah *Glorified is He* is Omniscient. Therefore, if one comes across a verse from the Quran in which Allah expresses amazement, such as, 'How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah...' (*al-Baqara:* 28), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* rejects that man would disbelieve despite the

existence of proofs. Yet, despite these proofs, some people still refuse to acknowledge divine reality.

The True Lord says, 'If you are amazed [Prophet]...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5). Allah is addressing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was often astonished by the fact that they called him *as-sadiq al-amin* (the truthful and trustworthy one) prior to his receipt of the revelation. However, once he became a prophet, they started calling him *sahir kadhab* (a lying sorcerer). After all, how could he be a truthful and trustworthy man in his core, and once the True Lord charges him with the mission of prophecy, you accuse him of lying? Would it not be more appropriate for you to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had become even more upright? Could it be possible that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had been honest with you, then, suddenly, he lied about the revelation from Allah?

Another source of astonishment is that they denied resurrection after death even though Allah *Glorified is He* laid out the proofs. In the final analysis, it is only the believers who received Allah's revelation with open hearts. They readily believed the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* when he related to them the divine revelation.

The True Lord respects the inquisitiveness of the human mind by the very fact that He put forth His arguments and proofs of His existence, and informed us that He did not fail to accomplish the first creation, and will, therefore, have no difficulty in resurrecting those whom He created in the first place.

The True Lord created us from nothing and on the Day of Resurrection; He will not create us from nothing, but out of something which has already existed. It is therefore unwise for a person to doubt the possibility of resurrection. It is the person who acts extravagantly against his own soul who denies resurrection after death. This is because he is unable to control his passionate soul and thinks that by denying resurrection, he will not have to face his dire fate in the Hereafter.

Therefore, those who act extravagantly against their own souls, contest resurrection The True Lord speaks of this in the following verse, 'They say, 'There is only our life in this world: we die, we live, nothing but time destroys

us...' (*al-Jathiya:* 24). If one of them were only to gain certitude in resurrection after death, he would have turned his back to his vain desires, but he wants to satisfy his worldly passions and vain desires. That is why he and his like say, 'What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?' (*as-Sajda:* 10) By this, they mean that once they die their bodies will return to the earth, turn into particles and dust that are blown in the wind. So how could Allah resurrect them and recreate them in bodily form once again?

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'producing arguments against us, forgetting his own creation. He says, "Who can give life back to bones after they have decayed?" Say, "He who created them in the first place will give them life again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation.' (*Ya Sin:* 78-79)

Some disbelievers said: we will become dust which will blend with the earth. This soil-composed of our desiccated body particles and the soilwill be cultivated, and particles from our body will mingle with the agricultural produce of the land including fruits, vegetables, and trees. Then, a child will eat from a fruit-bearing tree which was nourished by our particles, and some of our particles will penetrate inside this child's body. In short, common sense tells us that our remains will become scattered across the earth. Therefore, how could Allah possibly resurrect us in bodily form? Naturally, such discourse ensues from the words whispered by the devil into the ears of these people, 'The devils incite their followers to argue with you' (al-An'am: 121). I say: suppose someone fell sick and became emaciated. He lost a total of thirty kilograms of body weight. There is no doubt that the lost weight was ultimately returned to the earth from whence it had originated. Now suppose that a doctor visited the patient, diagnosed his illness, and prescribed a medication, and that Allah willed for his health to be restored; and for him to gain back his original body weight. The question is: were these thirty kilograms that he regained, the exact same body mass atoms and particles that he lost originally? The answer is clearly in the negative. Thus, we see that the composition of something is relative, with regard to the components, and this pertains to iron, sodium, magnesium, and other elements.

Therefore, the concept of the reckoning which will take place in the Hereafter is necessary and rational. The True Lord says, 'How can you ignore

Allah when you were lifeless and He gave you the life, when He will cause you to die, and then resurrect you to be returned to Him?' (*al-Baqara:* 28)

So long as there are divine commandments, prohibitions and a spiritual methodology by which man may lead his life, the reckoning of the Hereafter cannot but be true. And if you are astonished, oh Muhammad, by the deniers of Truth and by their false claims, then your feelings are fitting, for such things are indeed astonishing.

When the True Lord addresses mankind, He focuses on a problem which people have doubt about, or matters which no person doubts. To take an example from our daily lives—and to Allah belongs the greatest metaphors —when you address someone about a matter which he has doubts about, you try to validate it from all possible angles. Likewise, there are people who deny resurrection and the Day of Judgment. The True Lord reminds these people of their truth and insists upon the reality of such matters through His prophets *peace be upon them*.

The True Lord, also, addresses mankind concerning matters which they do not doubt, such as death. Allah says, 'Every soul will taste death and you will be paid in full only on the Day of Resurrection...' (*Al-'Imran:* 185). Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I have not known a certainty that is closer to doubt than peoples' certitude of death (the inevitability of it).' Indeed, the inevitability of death is beyond doubt, yet no one contemplates its imminence. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Then after that you will most surely die.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 15) This verse affirms a fact which all people acknowledge to be true. However, because of their heedlessness with regard to death, they act and live in such a way that makes them appear to be deniers of the reality of death. This explains why Allah addressed them in this verse as deniers.

Then He says, 'And then, on the Day of Resurrection, you will be raised up again.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 16) Note that Allah did not say, '*wa la tub'athun'*, that is, 'and verily you shall be raised from the dead', rather He said, '*tub'athun*', that is, 'you will be raised up again'. *Al-ba'th*, (resurrection) is a matter which does not even call for emphasis. The reason for this is that the lack of emphasis on the reality of resurrection in this case accentuates the certainty of being raised from the dead more than words of emphasis could.

This is because death is very obvious, despite people's heedlessness of its consequences. In contrast, resurrection is a reality that is so inexorable that it does not necessitate emphasis.

To take an example from our daily lives—and to Allah belongs the greatest of metaphors—a man consults his doctor, and after the doctor diagnoses his patient, he says, 'go back home, I will not prescribe a medicine for you.' This means that the patient is in good health, and were the doctor to prescribe a medicine for him, it would seem as though he were indeed sick. The same goes for when the True Lord speaks to man regarding something which is evident yet which he denies. In this case, Allah addresses mankind without accentuating the subject of the verse. Allah makes it clear to man that the latter is wrong in denying such truths. As for a matter which they are certain yet heedless of, Allah stresses its exigency so that they may not be oblivious to it.

The same is true when Allah swears by something. Note that we find that Allah *Glorified is He* has sworn by *at-tin* (figs), by *az-zaytun* (olives), by the Quran and by other things as well. However, in other sections of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Nay, I swear by this city and you [Prophet] are an inhabitant of this city [I swear] by parent and offspring.' (*al-Balad:* 1-3) It is remarkable that the answer to this oath is as follows, 'That We have created man for toil and trial.' (*al-Balad:* 4)

Someone may well ask: why does Allah *Glorified is He* say, *la uqsim*, 'Nay, I swear...' (*al-Balad:* 1) followed by an answer to this oath? I contend that the expression *la uqsim*, is a clarification that you do not possess the right to deny what will come in this chapter. Therefore, it was not correct for Allah to swear to you. To make this point clear, imagine that Allah were saying, if I were to swear, I would swear by this, and by that, and by that...etc.

In the verse which we are examining, the True Lord says, 'If you are amazed [Prophet], amazing, too, is their saying "What? When we become dust, shall we be created anew?" (*ar-Ra'd:* 5) In this verse, Allah reminds them of that which they should not have forgotten. Indeed, He created them from earth, and He created clay from nothing. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Were We then fatigued with the first creation? But they are in doubt with regard to a new creation.' (*Qaf:* 15)

Allah is amazed by their condition. It is even more astonishing that they rejected Muhammad after acknowledging his uprightness and experiencing his trustworthiness. In fact, they acknowledged these traits in the character of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prior to his being charged of spreading the Islamic revelation, but they still denied the revelation despite the overwhelming evidence pointing to its truth. The True Lord describes them in the following verse, 'These are the ones who deny their Lord' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5).

In other words, Oh Muhammad, these deniers of what you convey and of the resurrection did not only disbelieve in Allah who ordained man to be His servant, but they also denied Allah's lordship (divine providence), by which He gives provision to the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient and the rebellious alike; and by which He subjugate the means for those who are diligent and pay heed to the more rigorous divine laws in their thorough exertion. By virtue of their diligence, they benefit from divine providence. This ennobling bounty is that which secures man's *rizq* (livelihood). In contrast, the bounties of His Divinity are the obligations concerning worship, which are embodied in Allah's commands (do) and prohibitions (do not do).

Allah *Glorified is He* does not make man accountable for His commands until he attains a certain degree of maturity which qualifies him for this responsibility. This age is defined by puberty, that is, when a person is biologically capable of reproduction. Moreover, the True Lord has given man the right to enjoy the blessings which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon him. Man should have clung to faith as soon as he heard the call of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who spoke on behalf of Allah, since this Messenger was renowned for his veracity and for his trustworthiness.

For this reason, the True Lord described the deniers of faith in the following way, 'These are the ones who deny their Lord...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5). Then, He adds, who will wear iron collars around their necks and be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5)

*Al-ghull* is a neckband that is made of metal and which has handles on both ends, which are used to tie a person's hands. *Al-ghull* also has a grip for the neck which limits the movement of the hands and further debases the captive.

Such are *as-hab an-nar* (the people of the hellfire). The word *sahib* refers to a person that you know to the point that you are connected on the levels of spirit and soul. Bonds between people take on many levels: there are those that you take on as a companion (*tusahib*), others you befriend (*tusadiq*), some you consider as a brother (*tu`akhih*) and some you know superficially without establishing a deep relationship with (*ma`rifa sathiya*).

Thus, there is a hierarchy of connections between two persons. *As-suhba* is a connection and an attraction between two people. Those who have this connection with the hellfire are yearned for by it. Moreover, they also yearn for Hell: each longs to connect with the other. After all, does the hellfire not tell its Lord on the Day of Judgment? 'On the day that We will say to hell: Are you filled up? And it will say: Are there any more?' (*Qaf:* 30) That is, punishment itself longs to reach the person who disobeys Allah's Commands.

The True Lord says following this verse:

وَيَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِٱلسَّيِتَةِ قَبْلَ ٱلْحَسَنَةِ وَقَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهِمُ ٱلْمَثُلَثُ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو مَغْفِرَةٍ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى ظُلْمِهِمُ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَشَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ()

# They ask you to bring on the punishment rather than any promised rewards, though there have been many examples before them — your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing, but He is truly severe in punishment [6] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 6)

*Al-isti jal* (hastening)—here in the verse *yasta jilunaka* 'They ask you to hasten on'—with which the verse above begins, is to ask for something to take place prior to its appropriate time, to shorten the time before it takes place. Indeed, when you are going after something, it takes time to go through all the steps that will lead you to your object of desire. However, when your quest is characterized by *isti jal*, you hasten and try to arrive at it before the time that it would normally require.

In fact, every act of *isti jal* (hastening) or *istibta a*, (slowing/delaying) has its qualities and shortcomings. In the context of this verse, does *isti jal* pertain

to something beneficial? The deniers of truth are hastening the coming of evil instead of that of the good, which proves their defective and injudicious thinking. Such people have previously stated, 'They say, "We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face."" (*al-Isra':* 90-92)

These deniers of truth seek to hasten evil before good. They also sought to hasten for rocks to fall upon them, while ignoring the fact that each form of punishment has a specific duration as well as an appointed time. It did not occur to them to say—instead of adopting the ostentatious attitude captured in the verse above— 'If this alleged revelation is indeed the truth from you, then, O Allah, guide us to it.' Rather, they said, '...O Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 32)

And so, the True Lord sheds light on the spiritual vacuum and the moral corruption which they have arrived at, such that their criterion for judging things have themselves turned to denial of Allah. The greatest testimony of this corruption is their seeking to hasten evil before good. Clearly, when a sane person is deciding between two things, he not only hastens to the good option since it is beneficial to him, but also stays away from the bad one.

Since the souls of these deniers of truth are corrupt, and since the means by which they judge things, namely their intellects, are also in the wrong, the root of this misguidance must be their very rejection of the truth. Hastening evil before good, whether committed by a person or a group, is a proof of foolishness when it comes to discerning between alternatives. If they wanted true beneficial hastening, they would have hastened good rather than evil. At this point, the True Lord says, 'They ask you to hasten on the punishment rather than any promised rewards, though there have been exemplary punishments before them...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6). Why do they want to hasten their punishment? Did they not look at the fate of previous peoples who rejected the teachings of their messengers? When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Beware lest Allah afflicts you with punishment', or again: 'beware from

this or that matter', is this a lie? Why did they not take as an example the fate of the peoples who had previously rejected their messengers?

*Al-mathulat* (exemplary punishments) is the plural of *muthla*. Some, however, say *mathula*. The True Lord tells us, 'If you [believers] have to respond to an attack, make your response proportionate...' (*an-Nahl:* 126). Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'Let harm be requited by an equal harm...' (*ash-Shura:* 40). Thus, *mathulat* is derived from *al-mathal*, (similar), and implies that the punishment in question is proportional to the action that was carried out.

The True Lord says, 'though there have been exemplary punishments before them' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6) meaning that Allah *Glorified is He* has previously inflicted His punishment upon peoples who rejected their messengers. Divine punishment was in the form of eternal damnation when embracing faith by them is hopeless, or inflicting overwhelming force upon them and conquering them.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse, 'your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6). In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* does not hasten to punish those who deny the truth, lest perchance one of them happens to be good at heart. Moreover, Allah was patient with Abu Jahl, and the latter begot 'Ikrama ibn Abu Jahl *Allah be pleased with him* who was a righteous companion of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him.* Allah was also patient with Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* who was once a vicious fighter of the disbelievers but later became *sayf* Allah *al-maslul* (the Unsheathed Sword of Allah).

Accounts of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* relate the way in which `Ikrama ibn Abu Jahl *Allah be pleased with him* fought until he was wounded severely. He looked at Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* and asked, 'Does dying in this manner earn me the favour of the Messenger of Allah?' Other accounts tell us how some of the companions were greatly saddened after one of the Muslim warriors missed the chance to kill Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* during his days of disbelief. Little did the Companion know that the True Lord had destined Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* to embrace Islam and earn the title of *sayf Allah al-maslul* (The Unsheathed Sword of Allah). Thus, the True Lord willed that some of the brave men of Quraysh escape getting killed during their days of disbelief, for He knew that later on they would be among the finest of Muslims.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, 'your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6). Despite their evildoing and transgressions, Allah *Glorified is He* forgives His servants since He is more pleased with a repentant believer than one of you would be pleased when he finds his camel after losing it in a barren; wild land.<sup>(1)</sup>

Therefore, I believe that it is sinful to criticize a person for a misconduct for which he has repented. If he repents for his sins, no one should get involved in a matter which is between him and his Lord.

The True Lord says in this verse, `*ala zhulmihim*, that is, 'despite their wrongdoing'. (*ar-Ra'd:* 6) Some scholars have noted that Allah uses `*ala* (on) instead of *ma'a* (with). Note that `*ala* is composed of three letters, and that *ma'a* is made up of two only. Why did the True Lord replace the shorter word *ma'a*, with the longer `*ala*? There must certainly be a reason behind this use of diction. We opine that the True Lord uses the word `*ala* in the verse, 'your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6), to emphasize that people's transgressions called for retribution, but that Allah's Mercy takes precedence over His punishment. Thus, the word `*ala* connotes *ma'a* as well as conveys that the True Lord *Glorified is He*, determines whether or not someone will be punished, and that Allah's Mercy is greater than the evil of mankind. An example of this is illustrated in the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'they give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves....' (*al-Insan:* 8) That is they

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Muslim in his (Sahih) (an-Naml: 47) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik who related that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Allah is more pleased with the penitence of His servant when he repents, than with a person among you who was traveling across an arid expanse, and his camel ran away with all of his food and water. Having given up hope (of finding his camel,) he walks to a tree and sits under its shade for he has lost hope of retrieving his camel. As he is sitting there in that (despondent) state, the camel stands by his side. And so, he seizes it by the muzzle and out of ecstasy he exclaims (by mistake), "Oh Allah, thou art my servant and I am thy lord!""

have a great love for food, yet their will to be generous and hospitable is greater than their love of food.

However, people should not think that Allah's Mercy always surpasses His punishment, for if those who are presumptuous were to adopt this thinking, and were they to believe that this rule applies universally, it would be a cause for decadence on earth. It is for this reason that the True Lord ends the noble verse by stating, '...but He is truly severe in punishment.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6) In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of inflicting severe retribution. Thus, we note that the verse at hand incorporates both elements of hope and those of fear.

Allah Glorified is He then states:

وَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوَلَا أَنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَةُ مِّن زَيِّهِ \* إِنَّمَا أَنتَ مُنذِرُ وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ ٧

## The disbelievers say, 'Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?' But you are only there to give warning: [earlier] communities each had their guide [7] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 7)

We know that when the compound expression *lawla* (were it not for) is introduced into a nominal clause, it denotes the absence of something. Consider the following sentence for example, '*lawla Zayd* '*indaka lazurtuka* (If Zayd were not at your house, I would have paid you a visit.) In other words, the presence of Zayd is preventing you from visiting the person who is being addressed. However, when *lawla* is introduced into a verbal clause, the speaker of the phrase wishes for a certain matter to subsequently take place, You say, for instance, '*lawla attafta ala fulan*' (If only you were kind to so-and-so). Or again, '*lawla safahta an waladika*', that is, (If only you were to pardon your son). In other words, there is a chance that the desired incident may take place in the future.

Apparently, the disbelievers' words, in this verse state that they are asking for a sign which confirms the truth of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and of the Revelation. It is as if the disbelievers are denying, by these words, the miracle which the Messenger presented to the world, namely the Noble Quran. This is although they are a people renowned for their eloquence, literature, and articulation. The pre-Islamic Arabs had even allotted prizes for literary brilliance, hanging long poems over the walls of the *Ka'ba*. In addition, each of their tribes would take pride in their poets and orators.

And so, when the Quran was revealed in a form that you could relate to and appreciate, and when the Revelation far outshined your literature in eloquence, such that you were unable to come up with a single verse that would match a Quranic one, how did you still deny the truth of Islam? How could you ask for another miracle similar to that of Musa (Moses) or of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*?

You should have cherished the perfect miracle, namely the Quran, which encompasses a spiritual way for those who want to obey Allah's commands until the Day of Judgment. It is foolishness which caused them to ask for a miracle other than that of the Quran. However, they turned a blind eye to the other miracles which the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* displayed. They did not notice that water once flowed from between his fingers; that a small ration of provisions imparted more food than what was needed by a large congregation of people; that a cloud had followed him in the desert and provided shade for him and that the trunk of a palm-tree moaned in an audible voice when he *peace and blessings be upon him* changed the position of his podium after having conducted many a sermon on top of the trunk.<sup>(1)</sup>

However, they may be justified in their demand: being disbelievers, they were not witnesses of these physical miracles. Only those who believed in the Prophet's Message witnessed such miracles. Thus, we see that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not denied cosmic miracles, which take

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Al-Bukhari in his (Şahih) (Al- An'am: 601 Fath Al-Bari), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan Salat Al-Jumu'a), the section ma ja'a fi'l khutba 'ala al-minbar (that which as related during the sermon on the podium), and Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (al-Baqara: 557). The Hadith was related by ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him who said, 'The Messenger of Allah used to preach on top of a tree trunk. However, when he changed to a podium, the tree trunk moaned (in sadness,) and so the Prophet embraced the trunk and it was silent.'

place only once and which are a proof to those who witness it. These miracles took place to strengthen the faith of a suffering minority. When this distressed minority witnessed the water gushing forth from between his fingers, their attachment to him *peace and blessings be upon him* increased in fervour.

However, the disbelievers did not witness these miracles. They should have been content with witnessing the miracle which was described by the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* in the following words, 'the Quran suffices me'.

The Quran is a miracle of a type which you, oh Arabs, were familiar with yet incapable of surpassing. Moreover, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him is a messenger 'from among yourselves'. He was born into your tribe, and he speaks your native language. Moreover, you know well that he was not instructed by a teacher, nor was he known to have preached to you before. He did not compose poetry, nor was he famous for being one of the great Arab orators. Therefore, the True Lord revealed the following verse, 'Say, "If Allah had so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. I lived a whole lifetime among you before it came to me. How can you not use your reason?"" (Yunus: 16) In other words: I have lived among you and I did not speak in poetic Arabic, nor did I compete among the bards in the market places. Therefore, you should have believed that the Quran was the word emanating from the Wise, the Omniscient. Yet, among them were those who said, 'he used to hide his talent and he delayed it from public view until he was ready to claim prophecy'. To these people we contend, is it tenable for a young boy who lost his father while he was still in his mother's womb, and who lost his mother at a young age, followed shortly by his grandfather, who saw many adults around him pass away without any apparent order, sickness or reason, to be certain that he will live until the age of forty so that he may make his literary gift known to the public?

As for those who say that, 'genius only manifests itself at the age of forty', we contend: that everyone knows that genius is displayed toward the end of the second year and the beginning of the third year in a person's life.

Even though you do not accept the miraculous nature of the Quran, the True Lord is causing you to express things which were hidden in your hearts, and He reveals them to mankind in His Holy Book, the Quran: 'They said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?"<sup>(1)</sup> (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) Thus, you—addressing the disbelieving Arabs during the time of the Prophet—have admitted the greatness of the Quran, but you tried to demean its recipient. Allah *Glorified is He* also, says in this verse which we are examining, 'Those who disbelieved say, "Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?"" (*ar-Ra'd*: 7)

Why, then, have you said and admitted that he has a Lord? Should you not have acknowledged his message and testified your faith in Islam? The deniers of truth have previously stated, 'verily, the Lord of Muhammad has abandoned him.' These words imply that they accept that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has a Lord. Why did they recognize Muhammad's Prophecy when he seemed forsaken while rejecting him when Allah's verses were frequently being revealed?

If they were asking to be witnesses of miracles other than the Quran, then know, oh Muhammad, that your Lord is He who grant miracles, and that He decrees—according to what his people excel in—when a prophet should display miracle. Oh Muhammad, you are but a warner—or a cautioner—'...But you are only there to give warning; and every people have a guide.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 7)

Every people have been sent their guides who direct them through signs which correspond to what that in which they excel. The Children of Israel, for example, excelled in the practice of magic, which is why Musa's miracle addressed the Israelites' magic which as we have already stated, was their forte. Or again: the peoples to whom 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was sent excelled in the practice of medicine. Thus, the medicinal aspect of 'Isa's (Jesus's) miracles corresponded to what his people excelled in.

So, every people have a guide, and each prophet performs a miracle that is appropriate to the recipients of that divine revelation. This explains why the True Lord put the disbelievers to silence with His response to their contentions,

<sup>(1)</sup> Al-qaryatan refers to Mecca and At-Ta`if. Many have said, including Qutada, that they meant Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and 'Urwa ibn Mas`ud Ath-Thaqafi. In his Tafsir, ibn Kathir says, 'It is obvious that they mean a man of great standing from one of the two (abovementioned) cities – (Al-baldatayn) (an-Nisa': 127).

'They say, "We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face; or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky— even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read." (*al-Isra':* 90-93)

The True Lord, then, says, 'Say, "Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?" The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, "How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?" Say, "If there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger."" (*al-Isra*': 93-95)

The response from the True Lord is given in the following verse, 'Nothing prevents Us from sending miraculous signs, except the fact that previous peoples denied them...' (*al-Isra*': 59). In other words, a people who preceded you asked for various signs to be sent forth. Therefore, Allah responded to their demands, but they still disbelieved (in His revelation). This is because disbelief wraps a person's mind in obstinacy, for a disbeliever persists on denying the truth.

The True Lord then states:

ٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَحْمِلُ كُلُ أَنْنَى وَمَا تَغِيضُ ٱلأَرْحَامُ وَمَا تَزْدَادُ وَكُلُ شَيْءٍ عِندَهُ, بِمِقْدَارٍ ()

## A God knows what every female bears and how much their wombs shrink or swell – everything has its measure with Him [8] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 8)

To which circumstance is this verse responding? The True Lord wants to emphasize that each people have their prophet, and that His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is a warner. The disbelievers' request to witness miraculous signs is born out of their desire to prove Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be incapable of performing miracles.

Were the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring forth one of the signs which they requested, they would still have clung obstinately to their disbelief. After all, Allah *Glorified is He* is aware of their future actions, since He knows things which are even subtler than the future behaviour of disbelievers. Allah knows—to cite one example—what females bear in their wombs, as well as how much their wombs shrink or swell.

We know that when Allah wills for any female to become pregnant, then she carries the baby inside her womb since *ar-rahim* (the womb) is where the baby rests inside the mother's belly. Allah Glorified is He says, 'and what the wombs lose [prematurely] or exceed' (ar-Ra'd: 8), in other words, the increase or decrease in the gestation period. Or again, this verse may be interpreted to mean babies that do not survive birth because they are born prematurely. Ghadat ar-arhim means the baby is born prior to its full development. For example, a baby may be born with a missing eye or lacking a finger. In contrast, the bodies of some new-borns have added parts, such as an extra finger or two heads. This exceeding (mentioned in the verse above) may also denote an increase in number. In other words, a woman may bear twins or more (such as triplets). This may also denote that the period of pregnancy exceeds the usual nine-months. Thus, we understand that Allah Glorified is He knows how much the wombs may fall short, or the lacking or superfluous body parts of the newborn. This verse may also refer to time, thus denoting that a foetus may be born a day, a month, or two-months old. Note that when a foetus reaches six months, it is not referred to as *ijhad* (miscarriage), but as wilada (parturition).

There are infants that are born after six, seven or eight months of gestation. The period of pregnancy may extend to two years according to Abu Hanifa, *Allah rest his soul*, or four years according to Ash-Shafi'i *Allah rest his soul* to five according to Imam Malik *Allah rest his soul*. This is because the time of pregnancy may increase or decrease in relation to the normal period of nine months.

It is said that Ad-Dahhak was born after being in his mother's belly for two years.<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir ibn Kathir mentions that Ad-Dahhak said, 'My mother gave birth to me after having carried me (in her belly) for two years. She had me when I had reached my second year. (al-Baqara: 502)

In addition, Haram ibn Hayyan<sup>(1)</sup> was born after four years while the mother's family noted the large size of her belly and the suspension of her menstruation. Following the four years of pregnancy, she gave birth to the latter, who was called haram, (old and decrepit man) since he was already a youngster in her stomach.

Thus, we understand the meaning of the verb *taghid* whether it refers to shrinking or swallowing, decrease or increase in either the new-born's body form or gestation period.

The True Lord says, 'and everything with Him is by due measure.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 8) *Al-miqdar* (due measure) refers either to quantity or quality that is spatial or temporal, to talents or unique characteristics.

The True Lord specifies the five fundamental keys known by Allah of the unseen world when He states, 'Knowledge of the Hour [of Resurrection] belongs to Allah; it is He who sends down the relieving rain and He who knows what is hidden in the womb...' (*Luqman:* 34).

Some people have tried to raise objections to the divine Scripture on this issue by pointing to the civilizational and scientific progress that has taken place in the last century. The scientific advances in question merely result in tentative results, and anything which is questionable cannot be presented as indubitable proof. We are here specifically referring to knowing the exact nature of the baby prior to its birth: is it a male or a female? The scientists have turned a blind eye to the fact that science cannot answer if the baby will turn out to be tall or short, intelligent or stupid, unhappy or happy. Up to our own day, doctors and researchers have been unable to come up with a response to such questions, and thus the ambiguity will persist in the years to come.

If you were to ask me: how does the doctor know the gender of the unborn baby in the first place? I would answer in the following: he knows the baby's gender only after the pregnancy takes place. Moreover, he takes a sample from

<sup>(1)</sup> Haram ibn Hayyan Al-'Abdi was a servant of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. He died on a day of severe heat, and when the people attending his funeral) cleaned their hands from the dust of his grave, a cloud came upon them and showered them with rain, which yielded grass on that day. (Hilyat al-Awliya` 2/119)

the liquid which surrounds the baby and analyses it. However, Allah knows such things without taking a liquid sample. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses one of His servants in the following verse, 'Zakaryya (Zechariah), We bring you good news of a son whose name will be Yahya (John)...' (*Maryam:* 7).

Thus, we realize that Allah's knowledge is not dependent upon samples and experiments. His knowledge is pre-eternal and beyond all limitation. He has knowledge of what is inside the wombs of females, their form, colour, gender, intelligence, happiness, discontent, or number.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* wished for the extent of His Power to be revealed by having the wife of Zakaryya (Zechariah) carry Yahya (John) *peace be upon them.* Moreover, it is Allah *Glorified is He* who created Adam *peace be upon him* without a father or a mother. He also created `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* from a mother without a father, and the rest of humanity from both a father and a mother. When Allah wills something, He simply *Glorified is He* says, 'Be – and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82)

One manifestation, as I have previously stated, (of Allah's Power) is when Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* enters upon Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* in the prayer niche, only to find that she had received her food. He asked her, '...how is it you have these provisions?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Her response was, '...They are from Allah: Allah provides limitlessly for whoever He will.' (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

Clearly, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* knew that it is Allah who grants sustenance unto whom He wills. However, this knowledge was at the back of his mind at the time of their encounter. The words uttered by Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* brought this awareness to the forefront of his consciousness. Let it be repeated that, after all, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* knows with certainty that Allah alone grants sustenance unto whom He wills. This statement, transferring this faith-based truth from the edge of consciousness to the centre of consciousness, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* called onto his Lord in the same place, asking to be granted a child. And so the True Lord conveys to him the good tidings of a son who will be born in the near future.

When Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* remembered that he had attained an old age and that his wife is infertile, the True Lord reminded him that granting a boy is an easy accomplishment for Him *Glorified is He* 'This is what your Lord has said, "It is easy for me: I created you, though you were nothing before."" (*Maryam:* 9)

Allah says:

عَالِمُ ٱلْغَيْبِ وَٱلشَّهَدَةِ ٱلْحَبِيرُ ٱلْمُتَعَالِ ()

### He knows what is not seen as well as what is seen; He is the Great, the Most High [9] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 9)

Nothing escapes the Awareness of He who creates all things according to their measure. All that is beyond the reach of man's perception is that which occurs to a person in the future, following his or her birth. Such knowledge is only known to Allah.

It is as if there was a miniature model known by Allah in the first place. If man were to discover it toward the end of his life, he would realize that it matches that which Allah willed and knew in the first place. Indeed, there is nothing which Allah *Glorified is He* is not capable of carrying out. Moreover, as we have previously mentioned, everything has its measure with Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* knows what is not seen as well as what is seen. This means He knows that which is hidden behind the veils of the past and the future, and everything that is beyond the ken of mankind. Allah—in the first place—knows that which man is aware of for His Knowledge is not limited to the world of the unseen. Rather, He knows the unseen and that which is known to man, 'He knows what is not seen as well as what is seen; He is the Great, the Most High.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 9)

*Al-Kabir* (the Great) is one of Allah's Beautiful Names. Some have asked: why is the name *Al-Akbar* (the Greatest) not among Allah's Beautiful Names, though we repeat the formula, Allah *Akbar* (Allah the Greatest) in our daily prayers? I contend: this is because the antonym of the word *al-kabir* (the great) is *as-saghir* (the small). Every creation is small from the Creator's point of view. During the call to prayer, we say *Allah Akbar* because this

expression pulls you out of the work which you—Allah's vicegerent—have been assigned, namely *i`mar al `ard* (building the earth and harnessing its resources) so that you may seek Allah's help during your period of worship and pray to Him to render following His path easy. Thus, Allah grants you the power to achieve what you need in this world in terms of food, clothing, and the covering of one's private parts.

In short, all the above-mentioned actions are required not only in order to maintain a normal life but also in order to worship Allah. Therefore, beware lest you say: 'verily, Allah is the Great One and everything else is small and insignificant'. Things other than Allah are also great since they are blessings bestowed upon us by *Al-Mun*'*im* (the Bestower of blessings). However, Allah is Greater than us, and we bear witness to this when we are asked to pull ourselves out of the world of actions and seek His succour through worship (prayer).

We know that action is required to build the earth and harness its resources, and required for worship. Moreover, you will not have the strength to worship your Lord if Allah does not give you the strength to do so.

Indeed, it is ultimately Allah alone who preserves your strength by providing you with nourishment in the form of food and liquids. Moreover, you will neither eat nor drink if you do not plough, reap, and construct edifices to work and live in. All of this supplies you with the energy to pray, give alms and perform the great pilgrimage. And anything that obligations depend on—to be carried out—is itself an obligation.

I have previously said: verily, when the True Lord calls upon us to fulfil the obligation of the Friday Prayer, He states, 'O Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading — that is better for you, if only you knew.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) Thus, the True Lord pulls us from our daily occupations to perform prayer at a specific time. The True Lord, then, says, 'Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) Allah *Glorified is He* pulls us away from our worldly activities to something which is even greater: performing the canonical prayer.

When the True Lord describes himself as *Al-Mut`aal the Most High* it means that His Divine Essence, Attributes and Acts are above all things of this world. And so there is no essence that is akin to His Essence, nor is there an attribute that is akin to His Attribute or an act that is akin to His Act. Moreover, the characteristics and attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* are only proper to Him, and He never resembles other beings.

Allah Glorified is He continues:

سَوَآَ مِنْكُم مَّنْ أَسَرّ ٱلْقَوْلَ وَمَن جَهَرَ بِهِ وَمَنْ هُوَ مُسْتَخْفٍ بِٱلَّيْلِ وَسَارِبٌ بِٱلنَّهَارِ ٢

### It makes no difference whether any of you speak secretly or aloud, whether you are hiding under cover of night or walking about in the day [10] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 10)

When you come across the word *sawa*`, (it is the same to Him whether) it implies a number that is not less than two. One might say, *'sawa*` Zayd *wa* `Amr (Zayd and `Amr) or, *'sawa* Zayd *wa* `Umar *wa* Bakr *wa* Khalid' (Zayd, `Umar, Bakr and Khalid.)

The meaning of *sawa*` in this context is: so long as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has knowledge of both the tangible and the unseen realms, any secret that is in existence must be known by Allah *Glorified is He* since it is He who said, 'The Most Gracious, established on the throne of His almightiness. Unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, as well as all that is between them and all that is beneath the sod. And if thou say anything aloud, (He hears it –) since, behold, He knows (even) the secret (thoughts of man) as well as all that is yet more hidden (within him).' (*Ta Ha:* 5-7)

In this context, is the *sirr* (secret) information that you convey to someone else in confidence? If one defines *sirr* in this manner, then *al-akhfa* (that is yet more hidden within him) is the information which you are hiding within yourself. However, if one defines as-*sirr* as information which you keep to yourself, then Allah *Glorified is He* is aware of it before you are.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, '...whether he lie hid by night or walk forth freely by day.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 10)

It is thus that the True Lord includes in this verse actions of all sorts. Now an act as we know, is when a sensory organ processes information from external phenomena. The function of the tongue, for example, is to speak and to taste. The hands are made for manipulating physical things, the ear picks up sounds, while the heart is the seat of man's intentions. Moreover, we know that acts either take on the form of speech or of action.

Thus, we find that speech, takes half the role of action, since conveying Allah's Words is a form of speech. Moreover, the functions performed by the sensorial faculties are influenced by the Word of the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to us that every action is related to man's sensorial faculties. Moreover, an act takes place partially on the level of speech, and to some extent on the level of one of the sensorial faculties. This is because the sensorial faculties correspond to man's understanding of divine revelation. It is for this reason that the word '*amal* in the verse which we are examining encompasses both physical acts and speech, 'It is the same to Him whether any of you conceal his speech or declare it openly; whether he lie hid by night or walk forth freely by day.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 10)

A person who hides his evil deeds under the cover of night is necessarily plotting something. It is as if this person wants to listen in secret to every action that is taking place around him, or to spy on his surroundings. Allah not only knows the affairs of such people, but He is also aware of those who walk boldly in the light of day.

The disbelievers should have paid attention to a remarkable fact, namely the Quran's pointing out something hidden within themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...They say to themselves, "Why does not Allah chastise us for what we are saying?" (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

How could Allah be aware of such hidden thoughts without knowing things which are both secret and more hidden?

The True Lord states:

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَتُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ - يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمَرِ ٱللَّهِ إِنّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِمٌّ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ ٱللَّهُ بِقَوْمِ سُوَءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن دُونِهِ مِن وَال (

## Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by God's command. God does not change the condition of a people [for the worse] unless they change what is in themselves, but if He wills harm on a people, no one can ward it off — apart from Him, they have no protector [11] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 11)

The word *lahu* denotes either something which is utilizable or a right. Therefore, when you say '*laka kadha*' (this or that is your right or your possession), it is the opposite of '*alayka kadha*' (this or that is your duty). Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'for each (such person) there are (angels) in succession...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11), it is as if these hosts of helpers work for the benefit of mankind. In other words, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has angels that take turns in guarding mankind and protecting him day and night from things which he is unable to protect himself from if he were to use his own powers.

One statistic which sheds light on this reality concerns people who are bitten by snakes. Studies have proven that venomous snakes generally do not bite them while they are sleeping, but rather when the victims are awake. This means that someone is looking over them while they are asleep. However, when they are in a conscious state, people may behave carelessly and inattentively and are therefore prone to be bitten by snakes.

It is interesting to note that there is a popular idiom which states: 'the eye has its guardian.' We also witness many incidents which seem extraordinary, such as when a child falls from a top floor and is not harmed. The child survives this accident because the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed for His hosts of angelic helpers to protect that child from injury; the function of the former being to protect humans from harm.

Thus, we see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* prepared the world for mankind prior to both his creation and to his being made Allah's vicegerent

on earth. He fashioned the heavens and the earth, subjugated the sun and the moon, brought forth fruits of all kind and caused the night and day to alternate.

All of this was prepared for the vicegerent, namely mankind who represent Allah on earth, prior to his existence. Allah *Glorified is He* is ever watchful over His vicegerent on earth, and He cares for man, not only before his existence but also after his creation. Allah does not simply let man rely on his own limited power to defend himself from harm which he is incapable of stopping. Rather, He places hosts of angelic helpers in charge of watching over him.

The word *al-mu`aqqibat* might denote the angels that watch over man's acts, keeping a record of his good and bad deeds. In fact, *al-mu`aqqibat* could easily perform both actions at the same time: that of protecting him and recording his actions. If the angels write down good deeds in a person's book of deeds, this is clearly to the person's advantage.

Someone may remark: however, these *mu`aqqibat* will not only keep record of man's good deeds but will write down his bad deeds, and this does not benefit mankind. I contend: on the contrary, it is better for us to have a deep understanding of the ways of the Great Law-Giver that is, Allah. We must realise that if man were to know that he will be held accountable for every evil deed, and that these actions are not only counted and inscribed, but that he will hold his book on the Day of Judgment and read its contents out loud, he would clearly stay away from sin.

Thus, when viewed from this perspective, the writing down of evil deeds on the part of the *mu`aqqibat* is to man's advantage. Such angels inscribing keeping record of man's actions can be compared to a student who, while taking his exam, sees an invigilator watching over the class. The student does not loathe the test inspector, since the latter is ensuring that the test-taker receives an accurate score. Without an invigilator others may cheat and therefore have more chances of receiving a higher score and a passing grade than the person who studied for the exam. It is better if all the students are aware of the presence of an alert invigilator, thus spurring them to study for the exam. It is for this reason that I always say: do not hate the fact that you have enemies since a person who induces you to act in a degenerate way is in reality acting hypocritically toward his companions. In contrast to such

hypocrites, an enemy is watching you at every moment, and you are therefore careful not to err.

A poet once said in this context:

My enemies treat me munificently and with kindness,

Therefore, very grateful I am for their assistance.

Indeed, they are like a remedy and a cure for the elderly,

so do not stave off my enemies, oh Compassionate One!

They hunted for my shortcomings, and so I steered clear of them,

Thus, avoiding things which the Arabs deemed disgraceful

Therefore: the recording of good deeds and of sins serves man's own benefit. Moreover, when the angels watch over mankind, they alternate, as it were, in shifts to protect each individual. Hence the Hadith in which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Angels are assigned to watch over you during the night and others during the day. They gather during the Morning Prayer and during the afternoon prayer (*`asr*). Those who spend the night watching over you go back up to Him (that is, up to Allah) – who is most knowledgeable of your state – who asks them, "In what state did you leave my servants?" they respond, "we came upon them while they were praying and we departed from them while they were praying.'<sup>(1)</sup> The angels are, as it were, patrol guards.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...Behold, the recitation (of prayer) at dawn is indeed witnessed (by all that is holy).' (*al-Isra*': 78) In other words: the night angels bear witness to this recitation and they are accompanied by the day angels.<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Muslim in his (Sahih) (632), and Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (555), on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.

<sup>(2)</sup> Cited by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2/474), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (3135), and Ibn-Majah in his (Sunnan) (670). Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him relates that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said regarding the following Quranic verse, '...and (be ever mindful of its) recitation at dawn: for, behold, the recitation (of prayer) at dawn is indeed witnessed (by all that is holy).' (al-Isra': 78), means that Quranic recitation at dawn is witnessed by night angels and by day angels.'

The abovementioned Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* takes account of the temporal movement of humanity. Indeed, each of man's movements and activities takes place between the Morning Prayer and that of the afternoon prayer (*`asr*). After this period of activity, men generally retire to their homes and then go to sleep.

Now these *mu`aqqibat* (or patrolling angels) are both within man's perception and beyond his vision as well. Those who are visible to man perform the task of watch-guards. That is why we find that during the Prophet's migration (from Mecca to Medina,) Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* would sometimes walk in front of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and sometimes he would follow him from behind.

Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* would go ahead of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to ensure that no one was spying on the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* would then survey the land behind the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to make sure that they were not being trailed by anyone. It is thus that Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* ensured the safety of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and protected him from the patrols and from spies.<sup>(1)</sup>

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'For each (such person) there are (angels) in succession, before and behind him: They guard him by command of Allah...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). Superficial understanding of this verse may lead one to believe that these hosts of helpers protect man from that which is willed by Allah. We contend: verily, Allah did not bring down the angels so

<sup>(1)</sup> In his (Sunnan) (2/476), Al-Bayhaqi relates that `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him said, 'By Allah! There is a single night in the life of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him which is worth more than all of `Umar's people combined, and there is a single day in the life of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him which is worth more than all of `Umar's people combined. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him set out on the night of his journey to the cave, with the company of Abu-Bakr Allah be pleased with him. The latter would sometimes walk in front of him and sometimes behind him. He persisted in alternating his pace in this way until the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him noticed him and said, "Oh Abu Bakr, why is it that you at times walk in front of me and sometimes behind me?" He responded, "Oh Messenger of Allah, I think of those that are chasing us, and I walk behind you, then I recall those lying in wait for us, and I walk in front of you."

that they may oppose His Will. The form of protection referred to in this verse is not the act of shielding man from his own passionate soul, nor is it an angelic protection from Allah's Will. This verse in fact means that the angels protect man by the Will of Allah.

This is why we come across verses in the Quran in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'and so, because of their sins, they were drowned (in the great flood) ...' (*Nuh:* 2). In other words, they were drowned because of their wrong deeds. Therefore, do no assert that the angels protect man from that which is willed by Allah, since we know that if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wills for something, it cannot be prevented from happening.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, '...Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

It is Allah *Glorified is He* who created the earth with its diversity; including inanimate things, plants, animals, celestial bodies, and dominions of all sorts. All these components that make up existence were created to serve mankind. Then the True Lord guards man, and cares for him with uninterrupted protection.

However, someone may ask, 'Why do tragedies befall certain people despite the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* said that He protects them'? We contend: these tragedies only happen when man strays from the Way of Allah, since Allah's care is directed toward those who cling to Allah's religion.

Read the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And Allah propounds (to you) a parable: Imagine a town which was (once) secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings: and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all (the evil) that its people had so persistently wrought.' (*an-Nahl:* 112)

Thus, we know that so long as he is walking upon the straight path of Allah, man is cared for, protected, and accommodated even before his birth. However, if a person strays away from the straight path, Allah corrects him with certain morals and lessons so that he may return to the straight path.

Now the change which Allah brings about in the states of men once they change their inner selves include provisions which are engendered by primary sources of sustenance. However, He does not cut these sinners from primary sources of sustenance, such as the sun, the moon, the stars and air, nor does He prevent the earth from gushing forth with water.

Allah afflicts them with things which do not jeopardize the world's existence, such as financial or psychological hardships. It is for this reason that a philosopher once said, 'Verily, Allah does not conform to you, but you should conform to Allah.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has previously stated, '...And he who follows My guidance will not go astray, and neither will he be unhappy. But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me – his shall be a life of narrow scope...' (*Ta Ha:* 123-124).

In our modern world, you witness certain societies which live in luxury, and which supply us with modern technology, yet they live in a state of severe psychological constriction. This proves that material opulence, whether in the form of money or of technology, is not the cause of psychological balance or happiness. The following verse composed by the 'prince of poets' Ahmad Shawqi<sup>(1)</sup> *Allah rest his soul* applies to such societies:

A burden is not something which is carried by back,

A burden is none other than that which is contained in the breast.

Material wealth may be the ultimate goal (of life) in the eyes of some. In fact, a person might be successful in his errant path, earning money and overcoming risks. Yet, despite the money which he might accumulate, he nevertheless is tormented by psychological or physical illnesses.

Thus, we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* changes the states of people, but He does not change. Indeed, He is the Changer and not the changed. The True Lord *Glorified is He* say, 'Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). This sheds light

<sup>(1)</sup> Ahmad Shawqi is among the most famous poets of his day, and was nicknamed the 'Prince of Poets.' He was born in Cairo in 1868 A.D., and died in 1932 A.D. at the age of 64. He was a beneficiary of the Royal Family, and he studied law in France where he explored French literature. His writings include poetry and short stories. (*Al-A* 'lam *Li-Az-Zirikli* 1/136).

on the fact that man's outward facets are dependent on his psychological movements. When the soul is healthy, man is also healthy on the external plane. Likewise, when the soul is ill, the outward plane also suffers.

Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has placed man's body parts and their corresponding functions at the command of the soul. And so, when the soul is in opposition to the path of Allah, the person's tongue also acts in accordance with it; that is, in accordance with the rebellious soul. It is despite itself that the tongue of such a person does not express the truth of divine unity – (at-tawhid) – because the soul which commands it is resistant to faith.

Take, for example, the followers of certain divinely chosen messengers. These followers claimed to be sons of Allah, when in fact Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond such attributions. Now if their souls were firmly rooted in faith, their tongues would have been commanded to utter the formula of divine unity. In fact, the speakers themselves would rejoice in such a testimony. However, in both abovementioned cases the speaker is only expressing the state of his divinely imparted soul.

Thus, the body parts act in accordance with a person's will, and man's body is only freed from the shackles of human will on the Last Day when Allah orders them to bear witness against man at the moment of truth.

At this moment of truth, no one will have control of his body parts. Power on that Day belongs to the One Subduer. On this Day, the individual will not have control over his body parts, and the latter will testify to what they were ordered to do when they were under the person's command. Hence, we know that all change occurs at the level of the soul which has command over the body parts.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* does not interfere in men's affairs except when things are in a dire state, and when all of society becomes decadent. Such is a state when the blaming soul is no longer present in men, and when those who can stop the corruption – even with a word – disappear from this society. This is when the True Lord *Glorified is He* interferes.

Peoples' actions are rectified when they change what is in their inner selves and address the will which has total command over their body parts. Now beware lest you think that there is something to which Allah is oblivious. It is for this reason that Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse, '...But when (once) Allah wills a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

You must consider both sections of this verse together, 'Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11), And 'But when (once) Allah wills a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, '...nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11) Do not think that there is an authority which effects changes without Allah's consent. Such people mentioned in the verse above will not find a single caring individual to stroke them if Allah wills for them to suffer evil. Nor is there someone who could protect them from Allah, who could watch over their affairs, seek the good for them, and stave evil from their path. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11)

Following this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of a phenomenon in creation which has two aspects and which is received in two possible ways. The first possible reaction is that of joy, while the second is fraught with fear. Note that each of these reactions applies on the level of the individual soul and of society at large.

The True Lord Glorified is He states:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُرِيكُمُ ٱلْبَرْفَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنشِئُ ٱلسَّحَابَ ٱلنِّقَالَ (")

### It is He who shows you the lightning, inspiring fear and hope; He builds up the clouds heavy with rain [12] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 12)

Each of us is familiar with lightning. When we see lightning, our response is either one of fear, which is worrisome, or we wish for that which is desired and longed for. In other words, when lightning strikes, we fear thunderbolts, since they generally follow lightning, or we hope for the coming of rain clouds.

It is in this way that a single phenomenon can be the source of both fear and hope. Or again, the reaction of one group of people might be one of fear, while another might be one of hope and desire.

In this context, I always cite the example of an Arab fighter who described his sword as 'victory in the eyes of his beloved, and death in the eyes of his enemies'. Another example which I use to convey the meaning of this verse is a story that was told to me by a ruler of a province called Ash-Shari`a, which is situated between At-Ta`if and Mecca. The sovereign of Ash-Shari`a related to us in 1935 the story<sup>(1)</sup> of a righteous woman called Amena who had memorized the Quran by heart. This woman had two daughters who were both wedded. Each groom accompanied his bride back to his home. One of the husbands laboured in agriculture, while the other was specialized in the fabrication of snares. Amena told her husband, 'Why do you not go check up on our two daughters?' And so, the father went to find out how the two girls were managing. The first person that he met on his journey was the daughter who was married to the farmer. He asked her, 'How are you? And how is vour husband? How are you and your husband's worldly affairs?' She responded, 'Oh father, we both get along well with each other. As for our worldly affairs, pray for Allah to bring rain, because we ploughed the earth and planted the seeds and we are waiting for the sky to bring rain clouds.' And so the father raised his arms to the sky and prayed, 'Oh Lord! I ask you to bring about rain for her!'

Then the father went to the other daughter and asked her, 'How are you? And how is your husband?' She responded, 'We are well. But I beg you oh father, to pray for Allah to prevent the rain from coming. We build the snares from mud, and if it were to rain, our snares would be ruined by the water.' So the father made a prayer for her as well.

Then he returned to his wife who asked him to go and check on the two daughters. He looked perturbed. He said, 'This will be a difficult year for one of them.' Then he told her the story of the first daughter. He added once more, '...and it will be a treacherous year for one of them.'

<sup>(1)</sup> Story of Amena with her daughters

Amena replied, 'If you were patient, I would have told you: 'verily, what you are saying might not be true, for Allah *Glorified is He* has the Power to bring joy to both of our daughters this year if He so wills.' The father asked, 'By Allah! Tell me how this is possible?' 'Did you not read the verse,' responded Amena, 'in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, "Are you not aware that it is Allah who causes the clouds to move onward, then joins them together, then piles them up in masses, until you can see rain come forth from their midst? And He it is who sends down from the skies, by degrees, mountainous masses (of clouds) charged with hail, striking therewith whomever He wills and averting it from whomever He wills..." (*an-Nur:* 43).

And upon hearing this verse, the man prostrated to Allah, grateful for having been given a wife who supports him in his spiritual life. He prayed, 'Oh Allah, prevent rain from pouring down on the first son-in-law who makes snares, and cause it to rain on the farmlands of the second.' And his prayer was answered.

This anecdote sheds light upon the opposing feelings of fear and hope that lightning can give rise to, 'He it is who displays before you the lightning, to give rise to (both) fear and hope...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 12).

Mixed feelings can be experienced either in a single soul, such as when a person fears the advent of thunderbolts but hopes for rain, or as shown in the story above, they can be shared by two different people. One hopes for rain because it benefits him, while the other fears rain because it would harm his livelihood.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* adds, '...And calls heavy clouds into being. (*ar-Ra'd:* 12) We know that clouds are made up of condensed vapour. Moreover, they are either laden with water vapour, or they are light; in which case, they appear as tufts of cotton in the sky.

The Arabs say, 'The bucket which takes the longest time to empty of its contents is the most filled, and the slowest moving cloud is that which carries the most water.'

After lowering a bucket down the shaft of a well, you pull it back up. Now the bucket that is filled with the most water is the hardest to retrieve. As for the empty pail, it is light and easy to draw from the well. In terms of speed, the same applies to heavy clouds which move slowly across the sky, for they are transporting large amounts of water. After this verse, the True Lord Glorified is He states:

وَيُسَبِّحُ ٱلرَّعْدُ بِحَمْدِهِ، وَٱلْمَلَيِّ كَةُ مِنْ خِيفَتِهِ، وَيُرْسِلُ ٱلضَّوَعِقَ فَيُصِيبُ بِهَا مَن يَشَاءُ وَهُمْ يُجَدِلُونَ فِي ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْمَحَالِ ٣

## The thunder sounds His praises, as do the angels in awe of Him; He sends thunderbolts to strike whoever He will. Yet still they dispute about God – He has mighty plans [13] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 13)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has previously spoken of lightning, which emits a great amount of light. In this verse, He is referring to thunder which is heard rather than seen. Now we know that the speed of light is faster than the speed of sound. This explains why Allah mentions lightning in the beginning of this chapter, followed by thunder.

It is interesting to note that when a layman is bothered by someone, he tells him, 'May you hear thunder.' In other words, he is wishing that this person hears the annoying sounds of thunder because they disturb the listener. We must bear in mind that one should not be irritated by disturbing sounds that are emitted by certain elements of the world, especially when these reverberations are glorifying their Lord. Do not think that such elements are not in harmony with the rest of creation; rather they are harmoniously woven into the other sounds of this world.

We commonly understand glorification to be a form of prayer that is particular to a sane person who is capable of speech. However, this form of glorification which characterizes mankind is also to be found albeit on a different level, in creatures of this world. Non-human creatures were also taught by Allah to communicate, just as Allah taught man to convey his thoughts to fellow human beings. Like man, other creatures were also taught to communicate among themselves.

We have all read in the Quran what the ant said upon seeing Solomon's troops, '...O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts crush you without (even) being aware (of you)!' (*an-Naml:* 18) Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* heard the ant's cry since Allah had taught him their

language. We also know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* taught Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* the language of the birds. Allah *the Exalted* said, '...We have been taught the speech of birds' (*an-Naml:* 16). Did Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* not converse with the hoopoe? Indeed, this conversation did occur after Allah *Glorified is He* had revealed the language of the hoopoe to him. The hoopoe told Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* 'I have encompassed (with my knowledge) something that you have never yet encompassed – for I have come to you from Sheba with a tiding sure! Behold, I found there a woman ruling over them; and she has been given (abundance) of all (good) things, and hers is a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 22-3)

Thus, all creatures have their particular language with which they interact in this world. Moreover, a person to whom Allah has disclosed secrets of His creatures is able to understand such languages. Now Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* has been endowed with such gifts, which is why he understood the language of the birds and was able to address the hoopoe in his form of speech. Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* told the latter, 'Go with this, my letter, and convey it to them; and thereafter withdraw from them and see what (answer) they return.' (*an-Naml:* 28)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* acquaints us with the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the Queen of Sheba, Bilqis. We also got an idea of how Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* understood the language of the birds, and how he was able to converse with the hoopoe. We have learned how a person may acquire various languages. When someone lives in a foreign society for an extended period of time, he picks up the local language. Indeed, man is able to learn multiple languages.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* touched on the question of the languages spoken among various kinds of creatures in the story of the ant as well as the story of the hoopoe and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him.* Both the ant and the hoopoe's languages are secondary to human language. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also addresses the question of the existence of a language for each of His creatures in the following verse, '...And We caused the mountains to join Dawud (David) in extolling Our limitless glory, and likewise the birds: for We are able to do all things' (*al-Anbiya*': 79). It is as if the mountains

understood Dawud's extolling of Allah's limitless glory, and were echoing his prayers. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says, 'and for this, behold, We caused the mountains to join him in extolling Our limitless glory at eventide and at sunrise and (likewise) the birds in their assemblies: together they all would turn again and again unto Him (who had created them.' (*Sad:* 18-19)

Allah *Glorified is He* also addresses the earth and the heavens, exclaiming, '...He (it is who) said to them and to the earth, "Come (into being), both of you, willingly or unwillingly!" (*Fussilat:* 11)

Note that they willingly obeyed Allah's command, '...to which both responded, "we do come in obedience."" (*Fussilat:* 11)

Thus, we understand that every species has a special language which is used as a means of communication. We also note that each type of animal produces a unique sound. In fact, scientists are currently studying the sounds produced by certain types of fish such as whales, and are trying to decode their language.

Therefore, when you come across the following words, 'The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise...' (*al-Isra*': 44). You should understand that there is not a single being which does not have a language with which it praises the Great Creator<sup>(1)</sup>Allah *the Exalted* then states, '...But you (O men) fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!' (*al-Isra*': 44)

This is analogous to a person who does not speak English and therefore cannot understand English when he hears it being spoken.

Some have contended: what is meant by 'glorification' in this verse is the glorification made by the inner essence of things to the Creator, and Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that we be incapable of grasping such subtle forms

<sup>(1)</sup> Anas Allah be pleased with him related that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him entered upon a group of people who were seated on their riding animals and female riding camels and he said to them, 'Mount it gently, and dismount it gently. And treat them not as chairs for you to sit upon while conversing in the streets and in the market places, for perhaps that which is ridden is better than he who rides, and more frequent in remembering Allah.' Cited by Imam Ahmad in his (Musnad) (3/439, 440) and ibn Hibban (2002 – Mawarid Az-zam`an)

of divine glorification. I say: verily, modern science has studied and proven the existence of the languages used among different species. Therefore, the very act of communication between the speaker and the listener is the glorification in question. Moreover, these creatures are endowed not only with language, but also with emotions.

We hear of modern scientists who study the emotions that trees have for the person who waters them. An experiment was conducted in which scientists measured the inner vibrations of plants when they were being tendered by a farmer who was responsible for them. When the man died, they (the modern scientists) measured the vibrations of these plants, only to find that they were disrupted. It is as if the plants were mourning the loss of their caretaker. Thus, the scientists concluded that plants also have feelings.

Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has made it clear to us that even inanimate things have feelings. That is why Allah says regarding the people of the Pharaoh, 'And neither sky nor earth shed tears over them...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29).

Indeed, the heavens and the earth were relieved by the disappearance of these evildoers off the face of the earth. In fact, the heavens and the earth are in harmony with the rest of creation in such a way that they do not will anything other than Allah's Will. And so, when a disbeliever comes along and tries to spread his corruption on earth, the heavens and the earth rejoice when he departs, and they do not grieve whatsoever. And since the heavens and the earth do not shed tears over a disbeliever when he departs, one may therefore conclude that they are in fact delighted by his departure. Moreover, they must mourn the departure of a believer.<sup>(1)</sup> This explains the saying of `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* 'When the son of Adam dies, his loss is mourned in two places: one is in the sky and the other is on earth. As for his place on earth, it

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Tafsir, ibn Kathir (4/142) cites Mujahid's commentary on verse 29 of the chapter entitled Ad-Dukhkhan, 'Whenever a believer dies, the sky and the earth cry for forty mornings.' He said, 'And I asked him does the earth cry as well?' 'Are you surprised?' he answered, 'why should the earth not mourn the loss of a servant who filled it with bows and prostrations? And why should the sky not cry over the loss of a servant whose exaltations and glorifications of Allah resounded (in the heavens) like the reverberations of bees!'

is where he used to pray. As for his place in the sky, it is where his good deeds used to ascend.<sup>(1)</sup>

Thus, we understand the meaning of the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And the thunder extols His Limitless Glory and praises Him...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13) as the thunder exalts and extols the name of the True Lord *Glorified is He* in a prayer that is accompanied by praise.

Now, when we extol the Divine Essence as being unlike any other essence, or the Divine Acts as being unlike any other acts or the Divine Attributes as being unlike other attributes, your extolment must be accompanied by praise and gratitude for Allah *Glorified is He*. This is because He transcends all contingent entities, and we must rejoice in our knowledge of His transcendence.

Allah the Exalted says, 'and the thunder extols His Limitless Glory and praises Him and (so do) the angels, in awe of Him...' (ar-Ra'd: 13). Someone may well ask: why is it that the angels are in awe of Allah? After all, the True Lord Glorified is He describes them as those, '... Who do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but (always) do what they are bidden to do.' (at-Tahrim: 6) I contend: verily, the angels are in awe of Allah and of His Majesty. In our daily lives, we are acquainted with people that love their ruler or captain, and whose fear of the latter stems from their awe. What are we therefore to say of the True Lord Glorified is He Who is loved by His angels? Needless to say, they are struck by His Majesty and Absolute Perfection. It is true that the angels are under Allah's command; nevertheless, they fear their Lord Who resides above them. And so, when the angels hear the sound of thunder, they are not afraid of a harm that may afflict them. Rather, they fear for humanity. This is because angels are our guardians, and view their function as vigils over mankind. They worry about harms which may afflict mankind, and they seek forgiveness for those on Earth.<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) (4/142) and attributed correctly to `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him. Ibn `Abbas also relates a similar saying attributed to `Ali ibn Abu Taleb.

<sup>(2)</sup> Allah says, 'They who bear the throne of (Allah's) Almightiness, as well as all who are near it, extol their Lord's limitless Glory and praise, and have faith in Him, and ask forgiveness for=

Therefore, the verse, 'and the thunder extols His limitless Glory and praises Him and (so do) the angels, in awe of Him...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13) clearly denotes that the angels apprehend the possible harms that may be caused by thunder, since they are charged with protecting humanity. However, their fear of Allah stems from their awe before Divine Majesty.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Every morning, when the servants of Allah wake up, two angels descend (upon them) and one of them says, "Oh Allah, compensate he who gives in charity", and the other says, "Oh Allah, lead the miser to ruin."" Someone may suppose that this Hadith reprimands the miser. However, I contend: why do you not read this Hadith as a call to perform good acts (in this world)? After all, the charitable person is compensated for his good acts in the form of good deeds. Likewise, when Allah deprives the miser from his money, the latter is compensated on the condition that he endures Allah's punishment patiently.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse, '...And He (it is who) lets loose the thunderbolts and strikes with them whom He wills. And yet, they stubbornly argue about Allah, notwithstanding (all evidence) that He alone has the power to contrive whatever His unfathomable wisdom wills!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13)

Moreover, painful experiences in this world are necessary, for they serve to remind people of their heedlessness. Picture the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when two of his greatest challengers,<sup>(1)</sup> Arbada ibn-Rabi'a, the brother of Lubayd ibn Rabi'a, and 'Amir ibn Tufayl approached him with the intention of disputing his claims and finding flaws in his arguments or deficiencies in his knowledge. These contenders argued along the following lines, '...What! After we have died and become mere dust and bones, shall we, indeed, be raised from the dead?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 82)

<sup>=</sup> all (others) who have attained to faith, "O our Lord! You embrace all things within (Your) Grace and Knowledge: forgive, then, the sins of those who repent and follow Your path, and preserve them from suffering through the blazing fire!" (*Ghafir*: 7)

<sup>(1)</sup> The story of Arbada ibn-Rabi'a and 'Amir ibn Tufayl with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him.* 

Another argument put forth by these contenders was: if the Prophet's message was true, then why does Allah not hasten to punish them for their wrong actions?<sup>(1)</sup>

These two arguers came up to the, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Is our Lord made of steel or of brass?' They posed this question to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because they were worshipers of stone-idols, and steel or brass are stronger materials than stone. Upon hearing their question, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* made a prayer which brought down lightning that burned them.<sup>(2)</sup> Now the calling forth of lightning in this context is a Quranic symbol, and there must be a cosmic symbol which corresponds to it. And this corresponding cosmic symbol occurred indeed.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...And yet, they stubbornly argue about Allah...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13). Note that arguing about Allah take on many forms. One may argue over His Essence, or His Attributes. Arguments about Allah may also revolve around good and sinful deeds. The contenders referred to in the verse above also argued for the bringing forth of a material proof<sup>(3)</sup> because they were not satisfied with the Quran as a sign of Allah. This is even though the Quran is a miraculous sign of Allah that was revealed in a form that the revelation's recipients excelled in, namely language.

They also argued over thunder, 'Verily, thunder does not have a mind which would enable it to extol Allah, nor are the angels allocated with such a function, so how could they extol Allah?'

<sup>(1)</sup> Allah *the Exalted* says, 'As it is, they say (mockingly), "O our Lord! Hasten on to us our share (of punishment even) before the Day of Reckoning!"' (*Sad:* 16). Allah also says, 'Now they challenge you to hasten the coming upon them of (Allah's) chastisement: and indeed, had not a term been set (for it by Allah), that suffering would already have come upon them! But indeed, it will most certainly come upon them of a sudden, and they will be taken unaware.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 53)

<sup>(2)</sup> This anecdote was cited by Al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsir* (5/3631, 3632) and was attributed to ibn `Abbas. Also, it was cited by ibn Kathir in his *Tafsir* (2/506), and attributed to Al-Wahidi in *Asbab An-Nuzul*.

<sup>(3)</sup> Allah speaks of them in the following verses, 'And so they say, "We shall not believe you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth; or have a garden of date-palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush; or cause the skies to fall down upon us in smithereens, as you have threatened; or (till) you bring Allah and the angels face to face before us; or have a house of gold or ascend to heaven – but nay, we would not believe in your ascension unless you bring down to us (from heaven) a writing which we could read!" (*al-Isra*': 90-93)

However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says He is able to send forth bolts of lightning and has the power to strike whomsoever He wills. And so, bounty is imparted to whomever Allah wills, and harm afflicts whoever Allah wills. Considering this fact, one may ask: how could their arguments stand, after the True Lord *Glorified is He* has created this world? Do you even have time for such contentions which are raised for the sake of argument and sour quarrels? Cleary, an argument as such can be put to good use, but it can also be misused. Note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us, 'And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46). He also says 'Allah has indeed heard the words of her who pleads with the concerning her husband, and complains unto Allah...' (*al-Mujadala:* 1). Clearly, the motivation behind this quarrel is to reach the truth (of the matter.) Allah *Glorified is He* underlines the verse in the chapter of *ar-Ra'd* by stating, 'He alone has the power to contrive whatever His unfathomable wisdom wills!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13)

It is said, 'one person plotted against another'. In other words, he schemed and contrived secretly against him. *Al-mihal* is a scheme or a machination that is secretly conspired. People who seek to resort to such schemes are weak because they are incapable of direct confrontation. That is why they conceal such harmful (and secretive) ways.

This phenomenon occurs between people, since humans cannot perceive the world of the unseen. However, when Allah contrives against a person, no one is able to withstand His plots. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Behold, they (who refuse to accept it) devise many a false argument (to disprove its truth), but I shall bring all their scheming to nought. Let, then, the deniers of the truth have their will: let them have their will for a little while!' (*at-Tariq*: 15-17) This verse points to the fact that Allah's plots are insurmountable. Moreover, they are unknown to anyone; hence the verse, '...Thus have they (always) schemed: but Allah brought their scheming to nought – for Allah is above all schemers' (*al-Anfal*: 30).

They (the schemers in question) were plotting against His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and sought to assassinate him. They came forth with a young man from every tribe, and each was to strike him with his sword at once

so that the blood responsibility would be shared by all the tribes. They lied in wait for him, but the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was being protected. He *peace and blessings be upon him* walked by them inspired by Allah's verse, '...And We have enshrouded them in veils so that they cannot see.' (*Ya Sin:* 9)

Through this event, he made it clear to the enemies of Islam that they will not be able to stop the spread of Islam secretly nor by overt confrontation. Neither plotting against the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him nor lying in wait for him would stop him from accomplishing his mission. Even if they were to seek the intervention of jinn, they would still fail. Indeed, either a person may plot secretly, or he may resort to direct combat. However, when his attempts at destroying his enemy fail, he sometimes resorts to the powers of a different species such that of the jinn. However, even the powers of the jinn were unable to stop the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* for they tried to cast a spell upon him but Allah revealed to him the place where the black magic was hidden. Some of the companions of the Messenger *peace and* blessings be upon him went to the location where the black magic charms were hidden as described by the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. And thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* made it evident to them (the enemies of Islam) that all of their actions would not cause harm to His Messenger peace and blessings be upon him as, 'For Allah always prevails in whatever be His purpose...' (Yusuf: 21). This is how the True Lord Glorified is He was and always will be until He inherits the earth and its dwellers. Furthermore, He contrives whatever His Unfathomable Power wills. Allah says:

> لَهُ دَعَوَةُ ٱلحَقِّ وَٱلَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِدِ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُونَ لَهُم بِنَى ۽ إِلَّا كَبَسِطِ كَفَّيْدِ إِلَى ٱلْمَاءِ لِيَبَلُغَ فَاهُ وَمَا هُوَ بِبَلِغِةِ وَمَا دُعَآهُ ٱلْكَفِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَلِ <sup>(1)</sup>

## The only true prayer is to Him: those they pray to besides Him give them no answer any more than water reaches the mouth of someone who simply stretches out his hands for it – it cannot do so: the prayers of the disbelievers are all in vain [14] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 14)

Allah *Glorified is He* has called upon us to believe in a single God; such is the message of the Ultimate Truth. The beings or powers that men invoke

other than Allah are false deities. Note that the personal pronoun in this case refers to Allah, and it is as if Allah were calling His creatures to repeat and adhere to the formula of Ultimate Truth, namely 'there is no deity but Allah'. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* and His angels have declared that there is no deity other than Him. Moreover, people who are endowed with knowledge also proffered evidence of the Unity of Allah.<sup>(1)</sup> Such is the prayer aiming at the Ultimate Truth. Or again, *lahu* (translated above as 'unto Him') could also denote man who calls unto the Truth. When a person calls unto Allah, it necessarily means that some aspect of his prayer cannot be attained by him individually and is beyond his power. Man, therefore calls unto Allah to assist him in his difficulty.

The act of calling unto Allah is a form of request, with the distinction being that the request varies according to the appealer as well as the nature of the request. Now if the appealer is inferior to the person being asked for a favour, then the request is not referred to as an order, such as 'forgive me oh my Lord'! Such a phrase is not an imperative order but a request or an appeal.

Thus, we see that in the case of an order that is made by an inferior to his superior, it is not called an imperative order but merely an appeal. The intelligent student must pay attention during answering the grammar question, and note that if the request is made by the inferior to his superior, then it is not referred to as an imperative order but an appeal. For example, the servant of Allah calls unto His Lord saying, 'Oh Lord, forgive me!' However, if the person who is appealed to is simply an equal, then he says, *'iltimas'* i.e. 'request'. Or again, if the request is issued by a superior to his inferior in rank, then the request is an order rather than an appeal.

When man calls unto His Lord, this means that the servant has exhausted his possibilities and is seeking the succour of Allah, the Transcendent and All-Powerful. That is why each of us prays to Allah, since Allah *Glorified is He* has the Power to satisfy, without any difficulty, His servants' requests.

Allah says, 'Allah (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)

However, if you make a request to a powerless being, then clearly this request does not benefit the appealer. The idol worshipers used to call unto idols which neither harm nor benefit mankind. A statue can help neither itself nor others for the simple reason that it is made of stone. Clearly, calling unto such idols does not accomplish anything, since these inanimate objects have no power. Thus, we know beyond any doubt that the prayer aiming at the Ultimate Truth is to call unto He Who has Power. As for those who call unto false deities, their prayers remain unanswered. That is why the True Lord Glorified is He says in this verse, 'Unto Him (alone) is due all prayer aiming at the Ultimate Truth, since those other beings or powers whom men invoke instead of Allah cannot respond to them in any way – so that he who invokes them is...' (ar-Ra'd: 14). This is because they do not possess anything in the way of power, since an idol built by the hands of these people is incapable of even hearing the prayers addressed to them. So how is it possible for them to answer such prayers? The True Lord Glorified is He cites an example that is tangible and familiar to everyone. He says, '...So that he who invokes them is but like one who stretches his open hands towards water, hoping that it will reach his mouth, the while it never reaches him...' (ar-Ra'd: 14). When a thirsty person sees water, he stretches his open hands towards it to draw some back to his mouth. However, the water does not reach his mouth since it simply trickles out between the cracks of his fingers. Such is the state of someone who calls unto deities other than Allah, for he has appealed to a thing which does not have the power to fulfil his request. This is what happens when someone makes a prayer to a deity other than Allah; it is a prayer that is in error and is deprived of Divine Grace.

Allah Glorified is He and then says,

# وَلِنَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرَهًا وَظِلَنَهُم بِٱلْغُدُوِّ وَٱلْأَصَالِ ١

## All that are in heaven and earth submit to God alone, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the mornings and in the evenings [15] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 15)

As we know, prostration is a movement that is performed during the canonical prayer. In addition, prayer is the act carried out by the servant when he stands before his Lord and calls upon him. Prayer consists of a series of

recitations and acts which begin with evoking the formula of transcendence *'Allahu Akbar'*, (Allah is the greatest and is greater than the description of Him as the greatest). Finally, prayer is concluded by evoking peace (upon the guardian angels).<sup>(1)</sup> Note that prayer consists of obligations (and may include) supererogatory or other highly recommended acts

Prostration symbolizes man's complete submission before the Divine, for it consists of placing the highest part of the human being's body (namely the forehead) in the place of that which is lowest, namely the human foot. People often say proverbially: 'Do not lift your head above me', in other words, do not act presumptuously, since lifting of the head denotes arrogance, while lowering it through bowing or prostrating is a sign of modesty. And so when Allah says, 'And before Allah prostrate themselves, willingly or unwillingly, all (things and beings) that are in the heavens and on Earth...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15). You must understand that this is what happens in reality. Now if you cannot mentally grasp the full meaning of the prostration which you perform, try to at least comprehend that it denotes ultimate submission and humility before Allah the Commander.

Now you know the world was created through the command of Allah and for Allah. Creation is under His sway, and if man responds to Allah's commands by having faith in Him, then this is for his own good. However, if he does not answer to Allah's commands – just as the disbeliever does – then he will pay dearly for his misconduct. If you were to understand this matter on a deeper level, you would find that the disbeliever rebels against Allah by means of his will which has control over his body. However, his limbs and bodily organs are fashioned by Allah, and each one of them performs its function by Allah's command. Each one of man's body parts heeds the commands of Allah. And so, even if the disbeliever defies Allah in one respect, he is nevertheless in

<sup>(1)</sup> It is related that 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him said that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The key to prayer is (ritual) purification, it is made sacred through evoking the formula of transcendence 'Allahu Akbar' (Allah is the greatest and is greater than the description of Him as the greatest) and is concluded by evoking peace upon man's guardian angels.' Cited by Ahmad in his (Musnad) 1/123, 129), Ad-Darami in his (Sunnan) 1/175), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) 1/8). The latter said: 'this Hadith is the most authentic one of this category and (hasan).

complete submission to Him in another. When Allah wills for the disbeliever to fall sick, is he able to disobey Allah's Command?

The answer is clearly in the negative. Or again, when Allah wills for his heart to stop, is he able to challenge Allah's Will? Of course, he is not able to do so.

Thus, the person who frequently rebels against Allah's command to worship Him, and is accustomed to doing so should try to rebel against Allah's commands which he has no power over. Such a person will be disappointed by his own powerlessness.

A disbeliever must understand that he did not rebel against Allah with his disbelief without Allah having given him the option to do so. A proof of this is that ninety-nine percent of his powers are presided over by Allah, and only one percent of his power is left to his own choosing. It is thus that Allah's command over all things is demonstrated beyond doubt.

The disbeliever's submission – in most cases – or his exceptional defiance of Allah's commands (exceptional since one of the few things in which man has the power to choose is precisely the question of belief or disbelief in Allah) only serves to extol Allah's Limitless Glory. After all, the disbeliever cannot dare defy the commands which Allah has not enabled him to challenge.

Someone may well ask: why did Allah say, 'And before Allah prostrate themselves...all (things and beings) that are in the heavens and on Earth' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15), rather than 'that which is in the heavens and that which is on Earth'? We contend: given that what is in question here is prostration, this verse is a proof of the supremacy of the mind. Allah *Glorified is He* has made prostration in this verse a proof of the fact that all creatures on earth grasp in their own way the truth of Allah's Lordship, and they worship the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And before Allah prostrate themselves, willingly or unwillingly, all (things and beings) that are in the heavens and on Earth' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15). Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* is teaching us that all creatures submit to Allah in prostration, whether willingly or unwillingly, just as the body parts of the disbeliever – which are used by the latter to defy Allah – prostrate to Allah. These limbs of the disbeliever nevertheless prostrate to Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues, '...As do their shadows in the mornings and the evenings.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15) In our daily lives, we often hear people saying, 'so and so is following someone like his shadow', in other words, he never gives him respite, and he follows him as if he were his shadow. We know that the shadow of the human being follows a person's movements. And so we realise that shadows themselves are in submission to Allah, since the people whom the shadows are following are in submission to Allah. In short, a shadow follows your movements, so beware lest you think that the shadow submits to your command. Rather, your shadow submits to the command of Allah *Glorified is He*.

In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* is defining the matter in terms of mornings, and evenings. *Al-ghuduw* is the plural of *ghudat* and denotes the beginning of the day, while *al-`asal* is the period between afternoon prayer (*`asr*) and that of sunset (*maghrib*) prayer. Now when you measure your shadow in the morning, you notice that it is relatively long. However, as it approaches the sun it becomes longer, and as midday approaches it becomes shorter and shorter until it all disappears. The shadow of a person stretches out most noticeably during the morning and the afternoon.

The True Lord states:

قُلْ مَن زَّبُّ ٱلسَّمَوَتِ وَٱلأَرْضِ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ قُلْ أَفَاتَخَذَتُمَ مِّن دُونِدِ ٱوْلِيَآءَ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ لِأَنفُسِهِمْ نَقْعًا وَلَا ضَرَّأَ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِى ٱلْأَعْمَىٰ وَٱلْمَصِيرُ أَمَّ هَلْ تَسْتَوِى ٱلظُّلُمَنْتُ وَٱلنُّورُ أَمَّ جَعَلُواْ لِلَهِ شُرَكَآءَ خَلَقُواْ كَخَلَقِهِ فَنَشَبَهُ ٱلْخَلَقُ عَلَيْهِمْ قُلُ ٱللَّهُ خَلِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ ٱلْوَحِدُ ٱلْقَهَرُ شَ

Say [Prophet], 'Who is Lord of the heavens and the earth?' Say, 'God.' Say, 'Why do you take protectors other than Him, who can neither benefit nor harm even themselves?' Say, 'Are the blind equal to those who can see? And are the depths of darkness equal to the light?' Have the partners they assign to God created anything like His creation so that their creation is indistinguishable from His? Say, 'God is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the All Compelling' [16] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 16)

*Qul* (say) is a command ordering the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to relate (the contents of the verse above) to the disbelievers. In other verses,

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Now if you ask those (who worship any being other than Allah) as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah". How perverted, then, are their minds!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87)

Someone may well ask: why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* provide an answer to the question posed in this verse instead of allowing the disbelievers to provide an answer to this question? We contend: verily, the answer provided by the True Lord *Glorified is He* in this verse regarding who created the heavens and the earth is a more effective answer than that with which they would have come up. To cite an example from our daily lives – and to Allah belongs the greatest of examples – you might ask your youngest son who is quarrelling with his older brother: 'who bought you these new clothes?' The youngest son then trembles timidly for he knows that his older brother – with whom he was quarrelling – is the one who brought the new clothing for his younger brother. At this point, you interject for the sake of emphasis: 'it is your older brother with whom you were squabbling who gave you the new clothes.'

Now when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys to the disbelievers what he was ordered to relate, namely, 'Say 'Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 16), they will be dumbfounded. After that, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* insists upon the words that he was ordered by Allah *Glorified is He* to relate, 'Say, '(It is) Allah...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 16)

Allah's Command to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say, 'Why then, do you take for your protectors, instead of Him, such as have it not within their power to bring benefit to, or avert harm from, themselves?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 16) Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* discloses the extent of their ignorance through the words of Allah *Glorified is He*. Now they (the disbelievers) have previously admitted that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. None of them dared to credit their idols for the creation of the heavens and the earth. At this point, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sheds light, as he was ordered to, on the following matter: indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has created the heavens and the earth, so how could you take for your protectors, instead of Him, false deities which do not have within their power to bring benefit to, nor avert

harm from themselves? A proof of the powerlessness of these idols is that they were constructed by the polytheists and yet have no power over the latter.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, 'Say, 'Can the blind and the seeing be deemed equal? – or can the depths of darkness and the light be deemed equal?' Or do they (really) believe that there are, side by side with Allah, other divine powers...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 16). Clearly, a blind man is not equal to one who sees.

When you come across *em* in the Quran (which is translated above as or do...?), what is in question is a transitive analogy, Allah *Glorified is He* rejects their actions by expressing (as it were) His astonishment. It is indeed disgraceful to hold such a belief: 'Or do they (really) believe that there are, side by side with Allah, other divine powers that have created the like of what He creates, so that this act of creation appears to them to be similar (to His)?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 16) In other words, if these divine powers that have been placed side by side with Allah *Glorified is He* had created something that was equal to Allah's creation, then they would justifiably believe that there are similarities between Allah's creation and that of the partners that they associate with Him. However, these partners that have been placed side by side with Allah *Glorified is He* and which supposedly share in His Divinity do not have the power to create a single thing. So why do they choose them (the idols) as partners unto Allah?

The order from Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is expressed in the following words, 'Say, 'Allah is the Creator of all things; and He is the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 16)

In a different verse, Allah *Glorified is He* comments upon this phrase, 'Behold, those beings whom you invoke instead of Allah cannot create (as much as) a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end!' (*al-Hajj:* 73)

Indeed, these partners that have been placed side by side with Allah *Glorified is He* did not create a single thing, and no one can claim that they even have the intention of doing so. The word *lan* (cannot) emphasizes the fact that even if they were to demand their idols to create something they would be incapable of doing so. This is because negating the possibility of a future event, as expressed by *lan* in the verse above, calls for a challenge:

even though their deities are multiple in number, even if they were to join their 'forces' they would be incapable of creating a single thing.

The challenge continues in the verse, in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And if a fly robs them of anything, they cannot (even) rescue it from him! Weak indeed is the seeker, and (weak) the sought! No true understanding of Allah has they (who err in this way): for, verily, Allah is most powerful, almighty!' (*al-Hajj:* 73-74) In other words, if the fly were to rob them of anything of their possession with one of its hind legs, they would be unable to recuperate it.

Thus, it becomes clear that Allah *Glorified is He* is the only Creator of all things, and it behoves upon us to worship Him solely without attributing any partners unto Him. Moreover, only Allah *Glorified is He* is characterized by Divinity and Lordship. He is the Subduer and the Majestic Who is ever controlling over His affairs. So how could there be another god who is equal to Him? It is precisely due to the characteristics described above that He never has any equal and rival partners.

Allah Glorified is He states:

أَنزَلَ مِن ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءَ فَسَالَتْ أَوَّدِيَةً بِقَدَرِهَا فَأَحْتَمَلَ ٱلسَّيْلُ زَبَدًا رَّابِيَأْ وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ عَلَيْهِ فِي ٱلنَّارِ ٱبْتِغَآءَ حِلْيَةٍ أَوْ مَتَعٍ زَبَدُ مِثْلَةُ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْحَقَّ وَٱلْبَطِلَ فَأَمَّا ٱلزَّبَدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفَآةً وَأَمَّا مَا يَنَغَعُ ٱلنَّاسَ فَيَمَكُكُ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ كَذَلِكَ يَضْرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْأَمْنَال

He sends water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries on its surface a growing layer of froth, like the froth that appears when people melt metals in the fire to make ornaments and tools: in this way God illustrates truth and falsehood – the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind – this is how God makes illustrations [17] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 17)

Moreover Allah *Glorified is He* brings down water from the clouds in the sky. Now we know that particles of water evaporate from the seas, rivers, and plots of land where natural springs gush forth. These particles condense to

form clouds, which pile up on top of each other and, as they pass by a cold region, condense and cause the water to precipitate.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'He sends down from the sky, rain, and valleys flow according to their capacity' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17). The valley is an elongated depression of the earth's surface between two mountains. When rain descends upon a mountain, it flows along these depressions or valleys, each transporting the amount of water that it can bear. It is interesting to note that in His Wisdom, Allah *Glorified is He* determined this quantity of water in such a way as to minimize the rainwater creating floods. If the water carried by these valleys were to flow over them, surrounding villages would drown, the agriculture would be spoiled, and houses would be destroyed. An example of this is the flooding of the Nile which used to occur in proportion with the amount of water that was normally carried by the Nile's valleys. In fact, the people of Egypt were rejoiced by floods when they were within reasonable proportions. However, when the river flooding went overboard, the abutting villages ran the risk of being inundated or wiped out by the floods.

Hence, we find that out of His Mercy, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wills for the water which descends from the sky to be distributed according to the capacities of the valleys; save when He wills otherwise.

In this verse, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wants to draw a parable which is useful for mankind. That is why He cites the falling of rain according to the capacities of riverbeds.

Anyone who observes this amount of rain falling from the sky can notice that rain is in fact cleaning the surface of the earth from shrub and impurities. This extraneous material gives rise to foam on the surface of the river. As the river water pushes onward, it deposits the foam along its riverbanks until the water becomes pure and glistening. 'He sends down from the sky, rain, and valleys flow according to their capacity, and the torrent carries rising foam.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17)

This is a parable that is understood mostly by nomads because they live in areas made up of desert, mountains, and rivers. If this parable speaks mainly to urban people, to what example can city dwellers relate? Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* provides us with a parable that is suitable for city folk. He states,

'...And from that [ore] which they heat in the fire, desiring adornments and utensils, is foam like it.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17)

When you visit the workplace of a metallurgist or a goldsmith – who works with gold and silver – you notice that he uses fire to melt his metals. When exposed to the fire, foam – consisting of extraneous elements which seeped into the metal – is released by the molten liquid, yielding a pure metal.

Likewise, a goldsmith exposes his gold to a flame to remove blemishes. Then he adds other elements which reinforce the gold. The goldsmith may also change the gold from a pure to a sullied state. Note that unalloyed gold is referred to as 24 Karat, and that gold which is of an inferior quality is 21 Karat. An even less refined gold is 18 Karat. In fact, pure gold is soft, which is why other strengthening metals are mixed with it. Having been strengthened, the goldsmith then makes jewellery ornaments from this hardened gold.

The making of jewellery is a suitable parable for people of the city. In fact, those who work with metal also make other instruments, such as swords, which are used by urban people. Now swords, for example must be made from solid metal. Moreover, each instrument that a metallurgist creates is made from a metal that is endowed with an appropriate degree of solidity. When a metallurgist wants to make a sword, he must select a metal with a density and hardness that corresponds to its function as a weapon.

To return to our previous point, the foam that is to be found on the surface of water – the latter originating from rainfalls – is the result of its flowing across the surface of mountains. This water then pours into valleys, and the foam carried by it generally gathers on riverbanks. With time, however, the water which flows becomes purer.

When you look at the Nile River, for example, you observe foam which collects on either side of the river shores. The same is true for the water in the ocean: you often find material that has been discarded from boats floating on the surface, only to be washed on the beaches by waves.

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* has set forth a parable for both dwellers of the desert and city as well. These parables are helpful in their daily lives, and make use of the image of either ornaments that they adorn themselves with or

weapons with which they combat. Moreover, these examples do not exclude other instruments that are used in other daily activities. In short, these examples involve purification of metals and extracting extraneous elements – such as foam – from metals to create jewellery or daily utensils. 'Thus, Allah sets forth [the example of] truth and falsehood. As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth. In this way does Allah set forth the parables.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17)

When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* sets forth the parable of truth and falsehood, it means that Allah *Glorified is He* is selecting elements which benefit mankind and at the same time which prevent him from harm. When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, 'being cast off', it means that He wards it off.

Allah *Glorified is He* underlines this noble verse by stating, '...In this way does Allah set forth the parables.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 17)

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wanted to teach us abstract concepts by means of sensible parables. In this way, man may know that even when injustice prevails and rules temporarily eclipse the truth, it is doomed to be washed away just like foam.

Allah the Glorified and Exalted then states:

لِلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَجَابُواْ لِرَبِّهِمُ ٱلْحُسَىٰٓ وَٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُواْ لَهُ لَوَ أَتَ لَهُم مَّافِ ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَمِثْلَهُ, مَعَهُ, لَافْتَدَوْا بِهِ أَوْلَتِيكَ لَهُمْ سُوَءُ ٱلْجِسَابِ وَمَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَبِئَسَ ٱلْمِهَادُ ۞

There will be the best of rewards for those who respond to their Lord; those who do not respond would willingly give away the earth's contents twice over, if they had it, in order to ransom themselves, so terrible will be their reckoning. Hell will be their home, and their bed wretched [18] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 18)

The first sentence of this verse addresses those who respond to the Lord Who created from naught, and Who provided them with their necessary livelihood and the possibility of survival and reproduction by the wedding of

pairs. If the Lord enjoins them to do something, they must realize that what is demanded of them is for their own benefit, for He *the Glorified and Exalted* has provided them with everything they need in the first place.

Those who respond to their Lord receive a goodly response. After all, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has created this world to be a place of sowing good deeds which are recompensed in the Hereafter. In this world, you are responsible because you have authority over your affairs. However, in the Hereafter, you are commanded by the Lord of all things.

In the here below, you strive, sow, irrigate and reap. Moreover, your living conditions may range from penurious to luxurious according to the way you manage your worldly affairs.

But if you respond to your Lord and follow His path, then upon death you pass on to a new life where, rather than struggling in the world of causality, you live anew with the first cause. A person in this posthumous state is granted anything that his mind can imagine. This is because cause and effect no longer stand in the Hereafter the way they do in this world, rather, you are nurtured by the Divine Essence. He who is provided for by the Divine Essence is Eternal like the Essence Itself. That is why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, 'And as for those who have attained to faith in Allah and hold fast unto Him – He will enfold them within His grace and bounty.' (*an-Nisa':* 175).

Some Quranic exegesis opines that the grace and bounty referred to in the verse above is Paradise. This explanation is acceptable, since paradise is an element of Divine Mercy. However, paradise is eternal as long as Allah *Glorified is He* wills it do remain, while Allah's Mercy is Eternal as a result of Allah's Eternity. Here Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, 'For those who answered Allah's call is bliss' (*ar-Ra'd:* 18).

Allah *Glorified is He* says in a different verse, 'For those who persevere in doing good there is the ultimate good in store...' (*Yunus:* 26).

Now Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has created certain things in this world to make life possible, on the condition that we exert our efforts to earn a living. However, in the Hereafter you are resurrected in a world where everything you desire is at your disposal without having to labour for it. This is bliss.

Admittedly, much of the material world (in modern times) has become more comfortable. Those who travel to developed countries and who stay in fancy hotels are told that they can have coffee by pressing one button, and tea by pressing another.

Moreover, any kind of food you wish is prepared for you by others in restaurants of these developed countries. However, no matter how comfortable the world becomes, it will never reach the point where anything you desire is instantaneously brought before you. Such will only occur in the Hereafter.

Note that the fate of those who do not answer Allah's call is evident. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...And for those who answered not His call, if they had all that is in the earth, and there with the like thereof, they would proffer it as ransom...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 18). In other words, they say, 'take everything that I own and save me!' But their plea will not be answered. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...Such will have a woeful reckoning, and their habitation will be hell, a dire abode.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 18)

This is because reckoning is at times favourable and at others dire. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the expression 'a dire abode' because one of the two individuals (mentioned in this verse,) Allah forbid, will not know what to do when he is cast into the hellfire. This is analogous to a baby who moves around haphazardly in his cradle. Surely, the hellfire is a dire abode.

Allah Glorified is He then states:

أَفَمَن يَعْلَمُ أَنَّمَا أُنزلَ إِلَيْكَ مِن زَّيِّكَ ٱلْحَقُّ كَمَنْ هُوَ أَعْمَى إِنَّا يَنْذَكُرُ أُولُوا ٱلأَلْبَبِ (1)

Can someone who knows that the revelation from your Lord is the Truth be equal to someone who is blind? Only those with under- standing will take it to heart [19] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 19)

The believer knows that the Quran – which bears the path to Allah – was revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* Such a person cannot be equalled with a disbeliever who is described in this verse as, 'One who is blind'.

Knowledge and blindness are contrasted here because the verses emphasize the (God-given) power of insight (which man has into spiritual matters). Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...Only they who are endowed with insight keep this in mind.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 19) In other words, this is directed to men of sound minds who are capable of contemplation, reflection, and discernment.

Speaking of 'those who are endowed with insight,' Allah *Glorified is He* then states:

ٱلَّذِينَ يُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا يَنْقُضُونَ ٱلْمِيثَانَ ٢

### Those who fulfil the agreements they make in God's name and do not break their pledges [20] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 20)

Now, when a man of good judgment gains faith in Allah *Glorified is He*, he knows that he has made a covenant not to worship a deity other than Him, nor to submit, approach, look or expect bounties from anyone other than Allah *Glorified is He*. This is the foremost covenant of faith.

Moreover, the sacrosanct nature of this initial covenant extends to other pledges which are made with either Allah Glorified is He or His creatures. This is because that which springs from the covenant with Allah *Glorified is He* is, by virtue of its ultimate source, analogous to a covenant with Allah *Glorified is He*. If you have faith in Allah *Glorified is He* then you believe in the religion which was bestowed upon His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Moreover, if you are true to His religion, then by extension you are faithful to your foremost covenant with your Lord.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* dictates a specific way by which the believer must go about addressing his most salient and important duties (in life). These decrees are referred to in the passive form; for example, 'Fasting is ordained for you' (*al-Baqara:* 183), 'Just retribution is ordained for you in cases of killing' (*al-Baqara:* 178) and 'Fighting is ordained for you, even if it be hateful to you...' (*al-Baqara:* 216).

All the ordainments are preceded by, 'it has been ordained for you'. The commander of their decrees is Allah *Glorified is He* and He only ordains those who have faith in Him. Therefore, the moment you declare your faith in Allah

is also when you make a covenant with Him wherein you pledge to be faithful to His decrees.

You are free to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* or not to believe in Him. However, when you believe in Him it behoves upon you to obey His commands. In other words, you have assumed a faith-based covenant between you and Allah *Glorified is He*.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'it has been ordained for you' instead of 'I have ordained'. This is because a covenant between you and Allah *Glorified is He* entails that you do not associate partners unto Allah *Glorified is He* and as previously mentioned, Allah *Glorified is He* only addresses His decrees to those who believe in Him. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'they who are true to their bond with Allah and never break their covenant.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 20) In other words, the faith-based covenant substantiated by the responsibilities which you assume.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues describing such people who are true to their covenant with Him:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَا آَمَرَ ٱللَّهُ بِدِءَ أَن يُوصَلُ وَيَغْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ وَيَخَافُونَ سُوَّءَ ٱلْجِسَابِ (1)

## Who join together what God commands to be joined; who are in awe of their Lord and fear the harshness of the Reckoning [21] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 21)

The first bond which Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered to be maintained is the family bond. In other words, to uphold relationships with those whom one is related to by blood, however, if a true believer were to link between the various family groups, he would include all the believers in this family bond. This is because all the believers are (distantly) related by virtue of their remote family bonds. If you know, for example, ten believers, then you relate them through a bond of kinship. If every believer were to do the same, imagine the interrelatedness of these bonds and their harmony. If this scenario were to actualize, you would find that all the believers are included in this (all-encompassing) circle.

That is why we find that Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'I am *Ar-Rahman* (the All-Compassionate,) I created *ar-rahim* (the womb or

kinship) and I designated a name for it which is derived from My Name. Therefore, I will maintain a close relationship with he who maintains close relationships with his kin, and I will sever my relationship with he who cuts his relationships with his kin.<sup>(1)</sup>

I have previously related the story<sup>(2)</sup> of Mu'awiya whose chamberlain came to him announcing that a man at his gate was saying, 'Verily, it is your brother oh Commander of the Faithful.'

There is no doubt that the chamberlain knew that Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan had no siblings, but he did not want to intrude in what the man (at the gate) was saying. Mu'awiya then asked his chamberlain, 'Do you not know my brothers?' The latter responded, 'Thus claims the man (at the gate.)' And so, Mu'awiya gave permission for the man to enter, and he asked him, 'Which one of my brothers are you?' The man responded, 'Your brother from Adam.' Mu'awiya said, 'Ours is a severed kinship, and by Allah, I will be the first to rebind it!'

Al-Fadil ibn 'Ayyad<sup>(3)</sup> entered upon a group of people who wanted to ask him for a favour. He asked them, 'Where are you from?' they responded, 'From Khurasan.' He said, 'Fear Allah and hail from wherever you want!'

Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered us to maintain close ties first with family, then with close ones, followed by one's circle of contacts; circles which become more and more distant. Maintaining close ties with the neighbour is also commanded by Allah and all of this is because Allah *Glorified is He* wants kinship to exist among His creatures. This way, those who are in need may be assisted by those who are well off, and the weak may be protected by the strong. If you uphold close ties with a poor neighbour or someone who is close to you, Allah *Glorified is He* in turn will be close to you.

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/191 – 194), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (1907) who judged this as Sahih'. This Hadith has also been cited by Abu Dawud in his (Sunnan) (1694.) All these citations relate the Hadith through 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf.

<sup>(2)</sup> The story of the man who claimed to be Mu`awiya's brother.

<sup>(3)</sup> He is Al-Fadil ibn 'Ayyad At-Tamimi, the father of 'Ai, Sheikh of the Ka'ba and one of the great servants of Allah and men of righteousness. He was a respected authority of Hadith, and was born in Samarqand (105 A.H.) and lived in Mecca where he died (187 A.H) at the age o 82. (Al-A'lam) (5/153)

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and through him all those who believe in His Message, 'Say (O Prophet), 'No reward do I ask of you for this (message) other than (that you should) love your fellow-men.' (*ash-Shura:* 23) Some people who heard this verse said, 'your strong bonds should be maintained with your close fellow-men.'<sup>(1)</sup> Others contested, 'no, strong ties are maintained (first and foremost) with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since the Quran speaks of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as follows 'The Prophet has a higher claim on the believers than (they have on) their own selves...' (*al-Ahzab:* 6).

Thus, for the believer, upholding strong ties with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* takes precedence over ties with his own fellow-men.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues describing men who are endowed with insight: '...And stand in awe of their Lord and fear the evillest reckoning (which awaits such as do not respond to Him)' (*ar-Ra'd:* 21). Fear is felt by those who may be harmed by something, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* is the Source of fear. In other words: they fear Allah, their King, Creator, and Protector out of awe and reverence.

Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed the most severe punishment (namely, the hellfire) to be a source of fear. You may say, 'I fear Zayd', or 'I fear illness'. In both cases, there is something which you fear and something which compels you to be fearful.

Men who are endowed with insight fear the evillest reckoning of Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, this fear impels them to keep together what Allah *Glorified is He* has bidden them to join, and to stay away from things which may anger Him.

<sup>(1)</sup> In his Musnad (1/268), Imam Ahmad cites a Hadith related by Ibn 'Abbas in which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'No reward do I ask of you for the elucidations and guidance that I have brought to you other than that you should love Allah – Exalted ad Glorified is He – and that you should draw near unto Him through obedience (of His Commands).' Ibn Kathir said in his (Tafsir) (4/112), 'In other words, other than that you should engage in acts of worship which bring into the proximity with Allah in utter humility.'

We know that the evillest reckoning takes place after contesting (man's actions which are being weighed) and after the servant has been granted all his rights. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is so Exalted and will not wrong anyone. However, those who contest their reckoning are those who are cast into the hellfire<sup>(1)</sup>, and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from such a fate for no one is able to withstand such divinely inflicted tortures.

Allah Glorified is He continues describing men of insight in the following verse,

وَٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ٱبْتِغَآءَ وَجَدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنفَقُواْ مِمَّا رَزَقْنَهُمْ سِّرًا وَعَلانِيَةً وَيَدْرَءُونَ بِٱلْحَسَنَةِ ٱلسَّيِّنَةَ أَوْلَتِيَكَ لَهُمْ عُقْبَى ٱلدَّارِ ٣

# Who remain stead- fast through their desire for the face of their Lord; who keep up the prayer; who give secretly and openly from what We have provided for them; who repel evil with good. These will have the reward of the [true] home [22] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 22)

We find that this Quranic verse is more clement in its descriptions of men of insight who remember (Allah) and who recognize His Presence with their intellects and by means of proof. Such people are true to their faith-based covenant by virtue of their belief in Allah *Glorified is He* and in His Unity.

Such followers also adhere to the commands which flow from this creed (of Divine Unity.) Allah *Glorified is He* makes this doctrine of Divine Unity as the basis for establishing (as it were) a contract between Allah *Glorified is He* 

<sup>(1) &#</sup>x27;Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, 'The Messenger of Allah said, "He whose actions are accounted for on the Day of Resurrection will be punished." Having heard this, 'Abdullah ibn Abu Malika asked, 'Did Allah not say, "He will in time be called to account with an easy accounting" (al-Fath: 8). Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him answered, 'That is not the definition of accounting for man's actions rather, what is referred to in this verse by accounting-means to be shown one's actions. Those whose accounts are disputed on the Day of Judgment are punished.' Cited by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2876). An-Nawawi comments on this Hadith: 'It means that most servants (of Allah) will be accounted for with expediency. As for those whose reckoning is drawn out and who are not pardoned, they will perish and enter the hellfire. However, except for those who associate false partners unto Him, Allah pardons and forgives whosoever He wills.'

and the believers, as stated in the following verse, 'Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties (in exchange) for that they will have Paradise. They strive in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. It is a true promise [binding] upon Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 111) This is a deal that is both reciprocal and (characterized by mutual) consent. Or again: it is a pledge between Allah *Glorified is He* and the believers that is reciprocal and characterized by mutual consent. This pledge is substantiated firstly by proofs that are of a primordial order, and secondly by intellectual arguments.

This verse is addressing those who have been patient in adversity out of longing for their Lord's Countenance. Note that patience in the face of adversity is to endure hardships which affect the human soul and cause it to lose its dignified bearing, tranquillity, and felicity. And everything which pulls the human spirit away from its state of harmony and balance calls for such patience.

Moreover, patience refers to the patient believer and the cause of affliction that befalls him and he is patiently enduring. During moments of hardship, the latter can manifest within the soul. For instance, a person may endure patiently the burdensome orders of someone who tells you, 'do this' and 'don't do that'.

Note that to be assigned a duty entails giving up something that you love, and to perform something which can only be achieved through hardship. A person who is being bossed around must obey orders by passing up certain things. All the above calls for fighting against one's concupiscent soul, and the patience that is called for regarding one's own soul depends on the difficulty of the task that one has been put in charge of. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes prayer, for example, as follows, 'And this,<sup>(1)</sup> indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit.' (*al-Baqara:* 45)

This form of patience which we have been speaking of above is patience in the face of adversities which manifest in the soul. However, there is

<sup>(1)</sup> Ibn Kathir says in his Tafsir (1/87), 'And this, indeed, is a hard thing' (al-Baqara: 45), is about prayer. This has been quoted by Mujahid and adopted by ibn Jarir. Moreover, this (expression) possibly refers to the meaning of the verse and is a counsel recommending it (prayer.)'

another type of patience, on your part in the face of a harm that is directed toward you by someone else. This harm also causes you to lose your poise and felicity.

One can divide this type of patience into two categories: the first is when you have an opponent, and the second in which there is no adversary. For example, there is no adversary in an illness which debilitates one's health and causes you pain. However, you will have an opponent when someone, for example, hits you. In this case, the person who strikes you is your antagonist.

For every patient, there is a corresponding faith-driven power which can withstand it. And so, the patience of a person who endures a hardship that is not instigated by an enemy is within reason, since there is no enemy to stimulate his feelings of rage. As for the patience of a person in the face of a person who has caused him pain, this requires a great amount of self-control. Only with this self-restraint will a person not lapse into fury and consider revenge.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* distinguishes between two forms of (hardship): one which afflicts you but is not instigated by an opponent, and another which is caused by an enemy.

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of patience, in which there is no opponent, '... and bear in patience whatever (ill) may befall thee: this, behold, is something to set one's heart upon!' (*Luqman:* 17)

As for patience in which there is an enemy and which calls for repressing one's anger and controlling one's rage, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives – this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon' (*ash-Shura:* 43).

When Allah *Glorified is He* wants you to endure patiently in the face of adversity, it is important to keep in mind that He does not ask this of you alone. He also asks all your adversaries to react with patience to your attacks. It is as if He asked you to endure patiently the harm that others have inflicted upon you; and you are a single individual around whom these individuals revolve.

Asking others to tolerate the harm that you afflict upon them is the peak of social security on the level of the human soul. For if Allah *Glorified is He* asked you to tolerate those who harm you, He also asked everyone else to put

up with you when you harm them. For if you are overcome by haste and happen to wrong and hurt somebody, you benefit from a certain amount of patience on the part of others. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* asked for your counterpart to also bear in patience and to forgive (those who transgress him).

Moreover, if you have an enemy, then patience calls for three levels on your part: initially you endure patiently by means of self-restraint – even though your anger does not disappear. Now if you repress your vindictive instinct and prevent it from expressing your anger by not striking or cursing (your opponent), this is referred to as those who 'Hold in check their anger' (*Al-'Imran:* 134).

The word *kadhm* (anger) is derived from the tying of the water skin (*al-qirba*) which we use to carry water. If we do not fasten it properly, water spills from it. One says, '*kazhama al-qirba*', that is: he tightly fastened his water skin.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* presents the second phase which comes after restraining anger. Allah *Glorified is He* states, '...And (those who) pardon their fellow-men...' (*Al-'Imran:* 134). Here we are at a higher level, namely cleansing one's breast of anger followed by attaining the level of the truthful. The initial reaction of such a (spiritually accomplished) person is not to look (vindictively) toward the person who caused him to become angry. Instead of cursing (his malefactor,) he pardons him and looks upon him with an eye of faith. This faith-driven glance amounts to the realization that he who harms you is actually transgressing one of your Allah-given rights thereby placing Allah *Glorified is He* in your favour and on your side. Thus, we find that whoever wrongs or harms you places you under Allah's care and protection, and you should therefore treat him (your adversary) kindly.

There are various reasons to be patient. Some tolerate others to gain a reputation for being patient and thick-skinned. Such people want to parade themselves as being above worldly tribulations. This type of patience is not born for the sake of Allah's countenance. Rather, it is a patience that is motivated by a desire to be protected from one's enemies. Another type of patience is born because a person has deduced that anger will not benefit him. If such a person were judicious, he would endure patiently for the sake of

Allah's countenance since patience for the sake of Allah's countenance lightens the force of Allah's punishment. He who endures patiently in the face of adversity out of longing for Allah's countenance knows that Allah's Wisdom is above that which caused him harm. If he were to choose between what should have happened and what had happened, he would have chosen the latter. Moreover, he who endures patiently in the face of adversity out of longing for the Divine countenance in fact perceives the wisdom and the causes behind the events which he finds himself in. Such a person says, 'I praise and give thanks to You, my Lord, for everything that You have willed and for Your dazzling Splendour. I praise and give thanks to you with a praise and gratitude that ensue from my contentment with your inexorable decree flowing from Your Wisdom.'

He who bears poverty with patience, and addresses his concupiscent soul by saying, 'Endure with patience until Allah grants you ease', and does not ask others for help, will find that felicity has been brought to him by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Ponder the words of the poet who says:

If you seek money in order to spend it

On the soul's passions in times of hardship,

Then solicit your soul to draw from its rich supply of patience,

And to consecrate (itself to Allah) until the hour of relief (is granted.)

For if you do so, you will prosper, and if you refuse (to act upon your passions,)

Then all impending events will be readily justified.

In other words, if you are drawn to spend money on things which satisfy your soul's lower passions, but (in the last minute) you abstain from such a temptation and are patient, then you are rich (in the sight of Allah) by virtue of your self-domination.

The person who only pays heed to external events is consumed by them. On the other hand, he who sees events considering the divine reality, and says, 'there must be Divine Wisdom behind these (events)', and is patient in the face of adversity for the sake of Allah's Countenance knows that there is a Divine Wisdom which underlies the events of this world. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to receive those who endure hardship out of longing for His Countenance in a glorious station.

Allah's description of men who are endowed with insight continues, '...And are constant in prayer, and spend on others, secretly and openly...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22).

We have commented extensively in the past upon the various dimensions of prayer.

We have said that he who performs his prayers and fulfils its requirements realizes that prayer is a direct link between the servant and his Lord, and that the servant is in His Presence.

Analogously, when a work of art is presented, five times per day, to the artisan (who created it), there is no doubt that the handiwork earns the affection and care of he who designed and fashioned it. Moreover, just as Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond your visual perception, so are the deep reasons for your recovery from times of difficulty.

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us the following: 'When something troubled him, he got up and prayed.'<sup>(1)</sup> One of the remarkable aspects of faith is that Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins you to pray (during certain times of the day), but He does not prevent you for drawing near unto Him at any hour. Rather, you are the one who determines when you will stand between His Hands, at any time, to pray supererogatory prayers after having performed the canonical prayers. Unlike people of worldly power, Allah *Glorified is He* does not limit the amount of time that you can spend with Him privately; rather, you are the one who ends the meeting at the time of your choosing.

Now Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* acquired the qualities of his Lord and assimilated supreme virtues. Consequently, when a person held the hand of Prophet Muhammad, the latter would not (be the

<sup>(1)</sup> Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him said, 'When a matter troubles Prophet Muhammad, he would pray.' Cited by Imam Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/388), and Abu Dawud in his (Sunnan) (1319).

first to) withdraw his hand from the person who shook his, until the former withdrew his hand.<sup>(1)</sup>

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And spend on others...out of what we provide for them as sustenance.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22)

In other words, you should focus on the money that the person is receiving from you. Rather, understand that if you reach a state in which you are dependent on (the generosity of others,) you will be provided for. This is true insurance. Moreover, a person who is afraid of not being able to provide for a child after his death will find the following verse to be particularly pertinent – on the condition that he is raised in a society in which faith is still a living reality – 'And let them stand in awe of Allah, those legal heirs – who, if they themselves had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account – and let them remain conscious of Allah, and let them speak (to the poor) in a just manner.' (*an-Nisa':* 9)

This way, an orphan will not feel abandoned, nor will a parent fear for the wellbeing of his children, or will anyone be discontent with (or have any doubts regarding) Allah's Power to do what He wills. Allah *Glorified is He* is establishing economic equilibrium when He asks us to give money in charity. Note that money that is meted out in charity is cash that is extra, or which has reached the minimum amount of property (or money that is) liable to payment of the *zakat*. It is for this reason that you should manage your worldly affairs in a productive manner; in such a way that others may benefit from you and so that you may have money to allocate for charity. Finally, your wealth should be enough to sustain you and others.

There are those who give in charity from what Allah *Glorified is He* has provided for them as sustenance. Such people reserve enough money to sustain their livelihood, and give the rest to charity out of longing for Allah's Countenance. This is because he has absolute certainty that there is deity who is the All-Capable and can support his livelihood. In fact, the assurance which is in Allah's

<sup>(1)</sup> Anas ibn Malik said, 'If a slave girl belonging to the people of Medina took the hand of the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad, he would not retrieve his hand from hers until she had taken him to wherever she wanted in the city to (ask Him for) a favour.' Cited by Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) (1398), and by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (33/174, 216)

possession (in the form of money to be dispensed in the future and bounties to be rewarded in the Hereafter) is far greater than what he owns.

Recall when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* about his spoils: 'What did you do with (your spoils,) oh Abu Bakr?' He responded, 'I gave all of my spoils away in charity.' Then the Messenger asked, 'And what did you retain?' 'I retained Allah and His Messenger', responded Abu Bakr.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad asked 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* 'And what did you do, oh 'Umar (with your spoils)?' He replied, 'I gave half of it to charity, and I kept the other half for myself.' It is as if he was telling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'if there is something that you would like me to spend the other half on for the sake of Allah, then I will do so'.

Thus, we have seen examples of those who charitably offer of that which Allah *Glorified is He* has given them, and an example of someone who gives to charity everything that Allah *Glorified is He* has provided for him; namely Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him*. We also find those who offer of that which Allah *Glorified is He* has provided them with, and who are ready to provide the rest if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deemed that someone needed charity.

Among the teachings of Islam, we find that whoever takes care of an orphan should not take any of the latter's money if his patron happens to be wealthy. However, if the orphan's patron is poor, let him partake of his

<sup>(1)</sup> This anecdote was cited by Al-Kandahlawi in *Hayat As-Sahaba* (2/137). Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi, Ad-Darami and Al-Hakim relate that 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* once ordered us to give (of our possessions) for the sake of charity. This coincided with an amount of money that I happened to possess, and I said (to myself), "Today, if any, is the day that I will surpass Abu Bakr (in generosity.)" And so I gave up half of my money, and Prophet Muhammad asked me: "How much did you set aside for your family?" I answered half. Then Abu Bakr came and gave away everything that he owned. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "What did you set aside for your family?" I said, "I will never surpass Abu Bark in anything.""

ward's property in a fair manner.<sup>(1)</sup> Someone may well ask: why should a poor person oversee an orphan's property? I contend: so that he (the poor person) does not deprive society from the benefit of someone who has experience raising children. Therefore, if a poor person has experience in raising children, let him partake of the orphan's property in a fair manner. We note that Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...But let them have their sustenance therefrom...' (*an-Nisa':* 5). He did not say 'and have their sustenance thereof'. In other words, take from what belongs to their stored possessions to ensure his or her sustenance.

Thus, we understand how a believer should spend on others of what has been allotted to him from Allah *Glorified is He*. There are those who donate everything that belongs to them since they are sure of the provisions which will be granted from their Lord. Others, however, donate some of what Allah *Glorified is He* has given them. Such people might be overtaken by an impulse of open handedness and generosity and in such a state, would provide for everyone who asks. Consider, for example, a person who sits in his granary and seeks to give in the way of charity on the harvest day; he gives everyone who asks (for help,) until he has nothing left.

That is why we come across verses in which Allah says, '...And do not waste Allah's bounties: verily, He does not love the wasteful!' (*al-An'am:* 141)

Here we find a description by Allah *Glorified is He* of those who donate out of yearning for Allah *Glorified is He* 'And are constant in prayer, and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them as sustenance...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22).

A secret form of charity is recommended, while spending on others openly is a conspicuous good deed. The reason for this (difference) is that when you only donate secretly, people may get the impression that you are

<sup>(1)</sup> Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, 'And test the orphans (in your charge) until they reach a marriageable age; then, if you find them to be mature of mind, hand over to them their possessions; and do not consume them by wasteful spending, and in hate, ere they grow up. And let him who is rich abstain entirely (from his ward's property); and let him who is poor partake thereof in a fair manner. And when you hand over to them their possessions, let there be witnesses on their behalf – although none can take count as Allah does.' (*an-Nisa'*: 6)

rich, or you may develop this reputation and they speak badly of you. However, when they witness you spending on others and giving money to charity, they know that you are giving Allah *Glorified is He* His due, thereby encouraging them to donate from the Bounty that Allah *Glorified is He* has given them.

Deciding on whether to spend on others secretly or openly is a decision that is left to the individual's discretion. Some people donate money to their country, and these donations are spent according to the country's policies. Having donated to their country, they secretly give money to the poor. This is what it means to spend on others openly and secretly. Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned both secret and open forms of charity, since He does not want to deprive His servants of His bounty for any reason. Someone may interject: 'Verily, this or that person spends on others out of pride!' I contend to whoever speaks in such a way: did the poor not benefit from the proud man's charity? Indeed, he did, and no one should pass judgment on the level of intentions.

Allah continues, 'And (who) repel evil with good' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22). Repelling is to fend off something with force. In other words, they forcefully fend off evil with good. Now the quintessential good deed is belief in Allah *Glorified is He* by virtue of which one fends off the sin of disbelief. Or again, to repel evil means to repel a sin which you have committed by repenting for that sin. This is (a possible interpretation of this verse) because penitence is a good deed. Moreover, when you see something which is evil and (therefore) sinful, you repel it with goodly advice.

Or again, the meaning of the verse could be if you were to commit a sin and to follow it up with a good deed. Clearly, absolute perfection only pertains to Allah *Glorified is He*. Suppose that someone committed a grave sin in one way or another, in this case Allah *Glorified is He* bids him to fend off this evil by carrying out a good deed to counter balance it. Allah says, 'For, verily, good deeds drive away evil deed' (*Hud:* 114).

Contemplate the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* when he told Mu`adh<sup>(1)</sup> *Allah be pleased with him* 'Be conscious of Allah wherever you

<sup>(1)</sup> He is Mu`adh ibn Jabal Al-Ansari, the foremost Imam in the science of the permissible and the proscribed in Islamic law. He was one of the most beautiful men, and he witnessed=

are, and follow up a sin with a good deed so that your sin may be erased by the good deed. And treat people with good manners.<sup>(1)</sup> That is why you find that most acts of charity in society do not ensue from a refined person who does not commit sins. After all, there is no sin that is compelling such a person to carry out good deeds in the hope of erasing transgressions.

When a sin disturbs the offender's conscience, – (the reason for the latter's compunction being) that he is unable to repel it since he has committed it – the latter tells himself: 'verily, I will build a school.' or 'I will build a mosque', or 'I will create a hospital' or 'I will spend on the poor'. Thus, we find that most philanthropic activities are carried out by those who have committed (grave) sins; for men know that no one can perform anything without Allah's awareness. He who commits a sin must feel guilty. This guilt in turn drives him to the point where he feels compelled to do good deeds with the hope that they might replace his offences.

To repel evil with good can also mean to control your anger and to forgive when you have been wronged by someone else. By doing so, you will have treated him with goodness and compassion. You find that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Repel thou (evil) with something that is better – and lo! He between whom and thyself was enmity (may then become) as though he had (always) been close (unto thee), a true friend!' (*Fussilat:* 34) If you have tested this in your own life by treating an enemy with kindness, you will find that the latter also responds with compassion and becomes a true friend.

However, there are those who say: 'I have tried this and it came to no benefit'. I respond to these contenders: you thought that you have repelled evil with something that is better, while in reality you were focusing on your reaction toward your enemy. Thus, you did not truly repel (evil) with something that is better. Instead, you were merely testing Allah's words, and you lost the power of sincerity, and the enemy thus remained hostile toward you.

all the battles of Islam – (al-mashuhid) –, and was sent by Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him as a teacher and jurisprudent for the people of Yemen. He died victim of a plague which struck the Levant on the 18th year of the Islamic calendar at the age of 34. (Al-Isaba 6/106).

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/228, 236) and Abu Nu`aym in Hilyat al-Awliya` (4/376), and related by Mu`adh Ibn Jabal.

However, if you were to repel (evil) with something that is better, you would find that the Quranic verse contains the entire truth. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* does not state something in the Quran which can be contradicted in His creation. A poet says:

Oh you who are disturbed by (hostile) actions from him or her,

Pay your ransom 'with something that is,' until we may behold 'and lo! He.'

In other words, oh he who is bothered by an enemy, you must sincerely repel evil with something that is better until you notice that that enmity which was between you and what Allah Glorified is He states in the verse, 'And lo! he between whom and thyself was enmity (may then become) as though he had (always) been close (unto thee), a true friend!' (Fussilat: 34) Allah Glorified is He continues, '...It is these that shall find their fulfilment in the hereafter' (ar-Ra'd: 22). This verse is referring to those who are spiritually advanced and who are endowed with insight. Such people are characterized by the following nine traits: they remain true to their bond with Allah, they do not betray their pact, they keep together what Allah Glorified is He has bidden to be joined, they stand in awe of Him, they fear the most dire reckoning, they are patient in adversity out of a longing for their Lord's countenance, they are constant in prayer, they spend on others secretly and openly and they repel evil with good: these shall find their fulfilment in the hereafter. Thus, *al-'uqba* is that which follows in the wake of something. Note that the abode of the world is followed by the abode of the Hereafter.

That is why Allah Glorified is He expands on al-`aqiba in the following verse:

جَنَّتُ عَدْنِ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَن صَلَحَ مِنْ ءَابَآيِهِمْ وَأَزْوَجِهِمْ وَذُرِيَّتِمِمْ وَٱلْمَلَتِيكَةُ يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِم مِن كُلِّ بَابِ (")

They will enter perpetual Gardens, along with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and descendants; the angels will go in to them from every gate [23] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 23)

Thus, for those who are endowed with insight, the abode of the Hereafter which follows this world consists of gardens of perpetual bliss. Note that

*al-`adn* from *(jannat `adn)* in the verse above denotes something which is perpetual, while *jannat `adn* are gardens of perpetual bliss. In contrast, this world is not everlasting.

Moreover, every form of felicity in this world is followed either by death or by challenges of life. As for the perpetual gardens of bliss, they are the abode of permanence since `*and* denotes being forever in the gardens.

As for *al-jannat* (gardens), they denote gardens which have trees, fruits and everything that the soul may possibly desire. Note that these gardens are not the dwelling places of the people of paradise. Rather, there are dwelling places in those gardens, as shown by the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss' (*at-Tawba:* 72).

Thus, *al-jannat* are the gardens in which there are homes. In this world, we witness villas which are surrounded by gardens. What are we then to say of the goodly dwellings which Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for us in the middle of heavenly gardens? We must understand this considering the description of Paradise provided by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the part of Allah *Glorified is He* in the following Qudsi Hadith: 'I have prepared for my righteous servants that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and which has never been desired by the heart of a person.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* exposes the fulfilment of the Hereafter as being: 'Gardens of perpetual bliss, which they shall enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses, and their offspring...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 23).

The gardens of perpetual bliss are populated by men of insight and their parents who are righteous followers of Allah's way. If someone were to ask: and where are the mothers? I would contend: when counterparts are mentioned in pairs, the male always takes grammatical precedence. That is why the verse denotes both the mother and the father. After all, did Allah *Glorified is He* not say in the chapter of *Yusuf*, 'And he raised his parents to the highest place of honour' (*Yusuf*: 100)?

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2824), Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2/466), and Abu Na`im in Al-Hilya (2/262) this hadith was related by Abu Hurayra

These are the ones who enter paradise among the men of insight who are characterized by the nine conditions which we previously spoke of. Have the parents, spouses and offspring achieved these nine prerequisites?

We state: verily, Allah *Glorified is He* treats His creatures in this world in accordance with the emotional attachment that bonds (the latter) with his children. Now we love our children, spouses and parents, and so long as we love them, and so long as the latter are righteous to the extent that they can be, then Allah joins them with their loved ones. This explains the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* proclaims, 'And as for those who have attained to faith and whose offspring will have followed them in faith, We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste: (but) every human being will be held in pledge<sup>(1)</sup> for whatever he has earned.' (*at-Tur:* 21)

Here the Quran touches on a subject that can be grasped by the mind, namely uniting one who is complete with another who is lacking. If the latter were equal to the former regarding deeds performed in this world, then this (uniting) would not be called a proper unity. Each person is granted his rightful compensation (in the Hereafter). Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* has laid down one condition for uniting offspring with their parents, or (conversely) joining the parents with their offspring in paradise, and that is faith. Further, He has made it clear in this verse that the parents are distinguished by their faith-based deeds, since Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...And We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste...' (*at-Tur:* 21).

Allah *Glorified is He* did not combine and average out the (numerous) deeds carried out by the father with those of the son who did not perform any (good deeds in this world.) This is not the way of Allah *Glorified is He* because He does not wrong the parents or the sons who perform good actions. Moreover, if this were to be the case (on the Day of Reckoning,) then the uniting of the parents with their children in paradise would not be considered a proper unity, since the latter involves compensating each person for their actions. Having done so, Allah *Glorified is He* in His Generosity, unites the parents and the children within the limits of a proper unity, on the condition that the person who is being united (with his parents or offspring) be a believer.

<sup>(1)</sup> In other words: he has a pledge with Allah so that he is reckoned for whatever he has earned. (*Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*) (1/278).

Thus, we understand the verse in which Allah Glorified is He says, 'And as for those who have attained to faith and whose offspring will have followed them in faith' (at-Tur: 21). In other word, offspring, spouses, family and parents who believe in Allah Glorified is He. However, he who is united with his loved ones is united by virtue of Allah's Generosity. Allah Glorified is He does so to please the hearts of the believer (in paradise) when the latter sees his children - who (as we said) were believers in the first place - with him. This is the zenith of justice. Why? The example which I always cite in this context is as follows: imagine that a father has meticulously ensured that he feeds his family only of that which is legally permissible in Islam. At first, this person might live in constraint and hardship. At the same time, you might find the dishonest person's offspring leading a life of ease and comfort. Thus, the children of the impious father enjoy the pleasures of life because they are being fed from illicit sources, while the trustworthy father is suffering and may even be accused of narrow-mindedness for respecting Allah's commands and for refusing to eat from what is prohibited (by Islamic law.) Moreover, the latter's children may lack some luxury in their father's lifestyle because he abides by the Islamic economic rulings. Therefore, Allah the Almighty will have them join their father into his dwelling in Paradise, where neither the children nor their father will lack anything.

Thus, the children are finally granted true, everlasting happiness. This is the fruit of a believing man's struggle to live righteously; this indeed happens even though some people in this life have accused him of being rigidly narrow-minded.

Someone might yet question, 'does not the matter of uniting the person with their offspring in paradise contradict the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, '...a father shall not make any satisfaction for his son, nor shall the child be the maker of any satisfaction for his father.' (*Luqman:* 33)? In fact, there is no contradiction whatsoever. After all, Allah, the Lawgiver, commands us to pray the funeral prayer for the believing dead person to bring mercy upon them. Due to the deceased's belief, Allah *Glorified is He* adds all the Mercy He wills to their good deeds because of the funeral prayer, which is performed by Muslims.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They will enter perpetual Gardens, along with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and descendants; the angels will go in to them from every gate.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 23)

The Arabic word *zawj* (spouse) denotes either a man's wife or a woman's husband. So, it is actually a common mistake to say *zawja* to denote a wife. The correct term in Arabic is *zawj*;<sup>(1)</sup> it is a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'And his wives (*azwaj*) are their mothers...' (*al-Ahzab:* 6).

So, in the perpetual Gardens everything is systematic. There are various gates that will be open; each corresponding to a different form of obedience that is divinely recompensed. For example, certain people will enter through the 'gate of prayer', while others will enter through the 'gate of *zakat* (prescribed alms)' or through the 'gate of patience'. The various gates may also be corresponding to rewards of good deeds, not the deeds themselves. They may be portals through which the dwellers of the Gardens receive the blessings of Paradise. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say, "This is what was given to us before; and they shall be given the like of it.""<sup>(2)</sup> (*al-Baqara:* 25)

As a gate remains open, fruits and bounties are brought forth in various forms. Sometimes mangos, for example, might be brought through a gate and maybe followed by apples. As I mentioned, these gates either to correspond to the divine rewards or to forms of obedience performed in this world. Moreover, the verse under discussion declares clearly that the angels come in from every gate. So, what do they say to the people of paradise?

Allah Glorified is He relates what they are going to say:

<sup>(1)</sup> The word zawj (spouse) denotes both male and female for the people of Hijaz. However, the word zawja is used by Bani Tamim who would say, 'She is his wife (zawja).' Al-Asma'i said, 'Only the word zawj is valid in Arabic.' He supported his opinion by the Quranic verse, "...dwell you and your wife (zawj) in this garden...' (al-Baqara: 35). He was told, 'Indeed, Allah says so. But did He say, 'Never use (zawja) for wife?' Thus, Al-Asma'i's opinion is considered too stern. See, Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, under zawj.

<sup>(2)</sup> One interpretation is that they enjoy each meal so much that they are delighted to see their favourite dishes again. Another interpretation is that the food of paradise resembles the delicacies of this world in appearance.

سَلَمٌ عَلَيْكُم بِمَا صَبَرَتُمْ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى ٱلدَّارِ

# P Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast. What an excellent reward this home of yours! [24] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 24)

Here, peace denotes an unchanging state of tranquillity and contentment which is contrary to worldly peace, which is often disrupted by the vicissitudes of fortune. But you, believers who have been admitted into Paradise, are spared such vicissitudes of fate. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described the situation after the Reckoning as either: 'Forever Paradise or forever hellfire.'<sup>(1)</sup> Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the bounties of Paradise as, 'Neither intercepted nor forbidden.' (*al-Waqi'a*: 33)

There are two types of angels: First, there are roaming angels who are preoccupied with invoking Allah *Glorified is He* and they do not realise human existence, nor are they even aware of the story of creation. Moreover, they are completely disconnected from everything that occurs in the world, for their consciousness is immersed in the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. Such are the exalted angels who are referred to in Allah's following question to Satan when he refused to prostrate to Adam; 'Are you proud or are you of the exalted ones?' (*Sad:* 75)

The 'exalted ones' here refers to the angels who were not commanded to prostrate and who have no relation to the creation of man; those angels whose only role is to utter the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. The second type of angels is those who carry out the commands of Allah *the Almighty*. We know that Adam and his descendants came into existence after Allah *the Almighty* had prepared all sustenance; the earth was created, the sky was raised, the

<sup>(1)</sup> The Hadith is narrated by At-Tabarani in his book Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir and Al Awsat and narrated by Al Hakim who authenticated it on the authority of Mu`adh ibn Jabal who was sent by Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to Yemen. When he arrived, he said, 'O people, surely the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him informs you that the ultimate return is to Allah, and to Heaven or to Hell. Such a state is perpetual and without death; it is a station with no exit and with bodies that do not deteriorate.' See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir and Al-Awsat; see also Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 1/83.

stabilising mountains with their provisions were fashioned. The sun, the moon, the stars, the water, and the clouds were all brought into being for Adam even before Allah *the Almighty* created him.

These kinds of angels that carry out the commands of Allah *the Almighty* have a relationship with man, Allah's vicegerent on earth.<sup>(1)</sup> They are the ones<sup>(2)</sup> to whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Bow down before Adam' (*al-Baqara:* 34). Moreover, they are the ones who have to do with the affairs of human beings. They unconditionally obey the commands of Allah *the Almighty*. Among these angels are the guardian angels whom Allah *the Almighty* describes in the following verse, 'Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by Allah's Command.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11)

This verse clearly shows us that the command is issued by Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, after they fulfil their function as guardians and watchers over mankind, and once they will have nothing more to record in man's book of deeds after the final Reckoning and rewarding of the Day of Judgment, these angels will enter upon the people of paradise carrying Allah's Bounties and Rewards. Their exclusive function is to take care of man, Allah's vicegerent on earth.

Moreover, when Allah *Glorified is He* includes a word in the Quran, – taking into consideration its illustrative and explicatory function within the Holy Scripture – it thereby carries the meaning which He intends for it. The word *salam* (peace) is a case in point. Allah *the Almighty* relates how Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and the angels, who were his guests, greeted each other, saying, '…They said Peace (*salama*). Peace (*salam*), said he…' (*Hud:* 69). It would have been more fitting for him to respond by saying *salama*.

<sup>(1)</sup> The term *khalifa* is normally translated as 'vicegerent' or 'deputy'. While this is one meaning of the term, its basic meaning is 'successor'– the Quran often talks about generations and individuals who are successors to each other.

<sup>(2)</sup> In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir explains that the angels, who were commanded to prostrate before Adam, are the same angels that were sent with Satan to fight those who spread corruption throughout the earth and caused blood-shed before Adam's creation. The angels and Satan chased them to islands in the sea and over mountain cliffs. Satan was taken over by pride, and Allah Glorified is He has seen the vanity in his heart, while the angels could not. Ibn Kathir provided evidence to that with a long Hadith narrated by Ibn 'Abbas and recorded by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari in his Tafsir. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 1/75.

However, this response brings out a subtle point regarding faith. *As-salam* in this verse does not end with an open vowel, rather, it , grammatically speaking, ends with the vowel 'u' rather than with 'a'; so why? This is because angels are in a permanent state of peace *(salam)* which is why Ibrahim's (Abraham's) answer to their greeting is better than the greeting with which he was addressed. In other words, when we greet other people, we say *salama*, implying that we wish their state to be one of peace. However, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* realised that peace is a permanent state for the angels and so he used the word '*salamun*'. Similarly, when the angels enter upon the blessed servants of Allah *the Almighty* in Paradise, they say, 'Peace (*salamun*)...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 24).

Grammatically speaking, *salam* is in the nominative case– (marfu')– since peace is a permanent state for the believers in Heaven. Moreover, the angels greeted them in this way because they know that peace is eternal in Heaven, and unlike worldly peace, it is not susceptible to change. The peace of the people of paradise is the result of their steadfastness and perseverance in the worldly life, as Allah *Glorified is He* relates that the angels will tell the dwellers of the paradise, 'Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 24) Steadfastness/Patience is conjugated in the past tense. This is the appropriate tense to use here, since the believers were patient in this world, and the time requiring patience ended with the lifting of human responsibility after the coming of the Hereafter.

Here, the believers dwell in the abode of heavenly reward which is why it is appropriate for the verb *sabar* (to remain steadfast) to be conjugated in the past tense. After all, they were patient in the face of adversity in this world which is the abode of duty. Moreover, they endured the pains and the divinely willed trials which afflicted them.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 24) Steadfastness is also one of the abovementioned nine virtues of the people of understanding. Steadfastness in this verse is mentioned in the past tense even though they are still residing in the world where man is responsible for his own actions. Note that the meaning is broadened to include a wider range of possibilities by virtue of the present tense, exactly as

Allah *the Almighty* says, '...those who fulfil the agreements they make in Allah's Name...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 20). This is a matter which calls for constant renewal. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and do not break their pledges...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 20); He also says, 'Who join together what Allah commands to be joined...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 21) and, '...who are in awe of their Lord and fear the harshness of the Reckoning...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 21). Thus, we see that all these verbs are conjugated in the present tense, and that the tense switches to the past in the following verse, '...And those who remained steadfast, seeking the pleasure of their Lord ...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 22); so why?! He who contemplates these verses realises that all the above-mentioned qualities depend on steadfastness. It is as if steadfastness took precedence over all these actions. In fact, it underlies all the above-mentioned covenants with Allah *the Almighty*.

Thus, in the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the past tense when relating the angels' conversation with the people of paradise to turn our attention to this hidden meaning.

Thus, using the verb *sabra* (to remain steadfast) in the past tense is appropriate in the context of the verse, since the angels greet them in the abode of eternity. Moreover, out of the fact that Allah is the One Who speaks here, He is shedding light on the beauty that surrounds these believers in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes this noble verse by adding, '... What an excellent reward is this home of yours!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 24)

The Arabic word 'uqbah denotes that which follows in the wake of something. Furthermore, when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of matters related to faith and the qualities of the believers who embody spiritual virtues, He does so with the aim that the human soul longs to be among them. In doing so, the soul must shun those things which are contrary to virtue. Let us offer an example to clarify this point; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Most surely the righteous are in bliss.' (*al-Infitar:* 13) This verse is followed by mentioning the opposite fate of the wicked people, 'And most surely the wicked are in burning Fire.' (*al-Infitar:* 14)

When one assesses the fact that if the former would have been in the burning fire if not truly righteous, he recognises what a blessing Allah's guidance is, for it is owing to His guidance that they are people of faith.

Thus, we are faced with two matters: evading harm and obtaining benefit. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says of the hellfire, 'And there is not one of you but shall come to it; this is an unavoidable Decree of your Lord.' (*Maryam:* 71) This verse tells us that we will all see the hellfire. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'You will see it with the eye of certainty.' (*at-Takathur:* 7)

In this way, every Muslim may know, before entering paradise, what the blessing of faith has brought about. Therefore, he will comprehend that Allah *the Almighty* has protected them from the torments of hell, and has bestowed upon them a heavenly blessing. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* fended off that which causes pain and imparted them with that which delights. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, '...Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185)

Having described the people of insight with the above-mentioned qualities, Allah, then sheds light on the vices of their opposites, saying:

> وَٱلَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ ٱللَّهِ مِنْ بَعَدِ مِيتَنْقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا آَمَرَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِ أَن يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ أَوُلَيْكَ لَهُمُ ٱللَّغَنَةُ وَلَمُمْ سُوَءُ ٱلدَّارِ ٣

# But there will be rejection for those who break their confirmed agreements made in God's name, who break apart what God has commanded to be joined and who spread corruption on earth: theirs is the dreadful home [25] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 25)

Someone may well ask, 'Did these people mentioned in the verse above believe in Allah, but subsequently broke a covenant with Him after it had been confirmed?' We contend, 'It may be that they used to have faith in Allah *the Almighty* but then ceased to believe in Him. Another possible explanation is that this verse refers to the pre-eternal covenant that man made with Allah *the Almighty*.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes."" (*al-A'raf:* 172)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that those who break their covenant with Him after its establishment and confirmation through cosmic signs, which point to the reality of a Single Creator, are, '...breaking apart what Allah has commanded to be joined...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 25).

Their opposites are men who are endowed with insight and who join what Allah has commanded to be joined. As for these disbelievers, they break their covenant with Allah *Glorified is He* and '...spread corruption on earth...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 25). Here, we should note that Allah *the Almighty* does not contrast every sinful act carried out by the disbeliever with the good deeds of the men of insight. For example, He does not say, 'And they fear not their Lord', since the former do not believe in Allah *the Almighty* in the first place, nor does He say, 'and they fear not the harshness of the Reckoning', since they do not also believe in the Resurrection.

Thus, it becomes clear to us that every word that is mentioned in the Quran fulfils a specific function and has been placed in its appropriate location within the Revelation.

Spreading corruption on earth, as we know, is to spoil what is good on it. To clarify this point further, we say, 'You were born into a world which had been created and prepared to ensure your survival. The earth provides you with nourishment, water, oxygen and other bounties. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* has made the reproduction and survival of the human species possible through marriage between man and woman'.

The act of spreading corruption on earth is therefore to corrupt that which is good. We often repeat the following, 'If you do not know how to improve something which is already good, then leave it in its original state and recall the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge...' (*al-Isra*': 36). Therefore, you should not look to the immediate benefits of something. Rather, examine its long-term effects; do they bring about harm or benefit?

After all, long-term harm may become manifest or discernible only gradually. However, once entrenched, you cannot get rid of its insidious effects. At the end of the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says, '...upon them shall be curse and theirs is the dreadful home.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 25)

We should note that this verse is expressed using the emphatic letter *lam* which connotes that Allah's curse yearns for them just as a master yearns for his slave: '...theirs is the dreadful home.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 25) This verse makes it clear that they will be punished in the hellfire – we seek refuge in Allah *the Almighty* from the hellfire! Allah says:

# ٱللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَآهُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَفَرِحُواْ بِٱلْحَيَوَةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَمَا ٱلْحَيَوَةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا فِي ٱلْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا مَتَنَعُ أَنَّ

# God gives abundantly to whoever He will, and sparingly to whoever He will – and though they may revel in the life of this world, it is but a fleeting comfort compared with the Life to come[26] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 26)

The Arabic word, *al-bast* means to grant in abundance. Religious scholars have debated extensively over the meaning of *ar-rizq* (sustenance); is it only that which is within the limits of what is lawful from the viewpoint of Islam? Or is it any source of a person's wellbeing, regardless of whether that source is religiously sanctioned or not?

Some scholars said, 'Strictly speaking, *ar-rizq* is sustenance that is derived from a legitimate source'. Others yet contend, '*Ar-rizq* is any source of wellbeing – be lawful or unlawful – because if you confine the sustenance to the limits of Islamic law, then where does a disbeliever derive their sustenance from'?

Does Allah *the Almighty* not address the arrogant people saying, 'Say, "Who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth?"" (*Yunus:* 31) He also says, 'Surely Allah is the Bestower of sustenance, the Lord of Power, the Strong.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 58) Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And in the heaven is your sustenance and what you are threatened with. And by the Lord of the heavens and the earth! It is most surely the truth, just as you do speak.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 22-23)

Thus, after having granted us substance, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Do this' and 'Abstain from that'. So, when Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Allah gives abundantly to whoever He will, and sparingly to whoever He will' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26), this implies that He extends His Bounty to whoever He wills.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '...gives sparingly to whoever He wills.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26) This statement shows that Allah *the Almighty* grants sustenance according to the needs of the individual. The Arabic word *al-qadar* denotes dividing something according to a certain proportion. So, Allah *the Almighty* imparts His Bounties upon the needy person according to the latter's needs. Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded us to give alms to the poor; yet the latter generally remains in a state of poverty because he only receives what meets their basic needs.

There is another possible interpretation of *yaqdir*; it could denote that Allah *the Almighty* constrains the sustenance of someone. When He constrains the sustenance of a poor person, you should not think that this constraint is not to their benefit. After all, being granted a large sum of money may lead the latter to disobey Allah *the Almighty* and it is therefore a blessing that he remains poor.

Yet a third possible explanation is that *yaqdir* means to constrain the sustenance in a general sense, a meaning which is deduced from the saying of Allah, 'Let him who has abundance spend out of his abundance and whoever has his means of subsistence straitened to him, let him spend out of that which Allah has given him.' (*at-Talaq:* 7) Since Allah *Glorified is He* has granted the latter ample means; this means that He has willed for him to meet his needs.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *Glorified is He* continues, '...they may revel in the life of this world...' (*ar-Ra'd*: 26). Naturally, those who are wealthy will rejoice in the life of this world. However, the believer looks at his wealth and says, 'This is but one of the attractions of this world, but what Allah *the Almighty* has in store for the believers is greater and everlasting'.

In contrast to the believers, the disbelievers said, 'Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Allah *the Almighty* responds to them in the following verse, saying, 'Will they distribute the mercy of your Lord? We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and We have exalted some of them above others in degrees...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

When you seek to define the number of individuals who have been given an abundance of wealth, and those whose means are limited, you will not find

a fixed answer. This is because the ever-changing circumstances of this world could impoverish a rich person, or they could enrich a poor one.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* has assured the allotted substance of every individual, regardless of whether he is a believer or a disbeliever, an obedient servant of Allah or a disobedient one. Each one of us who is born into this world has personally benefited from His Divine Bounties. If a person's means of sustenance are lacking, this is simply because he neither benefited from nor took advantage of his Divine allotted sustenance.

Ironically, a disbeliever may know how to obtain and benefit from their share in this world more than a believer.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Whoever desires the gain of the Hereafter, We will give him more of that again; and whoever desires— the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the Hereafter he has no portion.' (*ash-Shura:* 20)

Thus, constraint in one's livelihood only exists because of what Allah *the Almighty* has willed. For example, a person may harvest his land, exerting much effort in watering and ploughing it. Suddenly, a storm or an icy wind may blow through, consuming and spoiling the crops. This deprivation is a reminder to mankind; the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has deprived this person of their harvest is a hidden blessing. This trial draws man attention to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* may take away one's sustenance so that he does not depend only on the apparent means of sustenance. Moreover, a person's sustenance may be granted in another region, and it may even take on a different form: 'Allah gives abundantly to whoever He wills, and sparingly to whoever He wills—and they revel in the life of this world…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26).

Rejoicing for one's abundant wealth is neither forbidden nor prohibited by Islamic law. However, what is proscribed is conceited happiness, like that of Qarun whose story is recorded in the Quran, 'Surely Qarun was of the people of Musa (Moses), but he rebelled against them, and We had given him of the treasures, so much so that his hordes of wealth would certainly weigh down a company of men possessed of great strength. When his people said to him: Do not exult, surely Allah does not love the exultant.' (*al-Qasas:* 76) This verse refers to the conceited exultation which Allah *the Almighty* does not love. Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, 'Say, "In the Grace of Allah and in His Mercy— in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather." (*Yunus:* 58)

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* makes mention of their happiness as well as the cause of the disbelievers' exultation, namely; the worldly life. It is thus implied that this worldly life is a foolish reason to rejoice, since it could be taken away from them, or they could be taken away from it when death overtakes them. However, the happiness of the Hereafter is different; it is the real, everlasting happiness. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, '...in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather.' (*Yunus:* 58)

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to a comparison between the happiness of the worldly life and that of the Hereafter, saying, '...though they may revel in the life of this world, it is but a fleeting comfort compared with the Life to come.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26)

A person's *mata*` (fleeting comfort) denotes the luggage that a traveller prepares prior to a short trip. For example, a traveller may pack some clothes and personal tools into a small suitcase before embarking on his short trip.

A person of insight is one who takes into consideration the highest degree of what he can attain in this life; he may learn until attaining to the peak of knowledge, and he may travel across the earth. However, he must die. Therefore, the believer associates his actions in this world with the consequences of the Hereafter, thus attaining true bliss. The true believer strives to save his soul through Allah's Mercy; for, being Divine, His Mercy is also eternal. Moreover, a true faithful person knows for certain that any objective that is not permanent is not a worthy one.

Therefore, the world as such is not a worthy objective for the believer, which is why the only true objective for him is to dwell in Heaven eternally, and to avoid eternal hellfire.

Allah the Almighty then says:

وَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوَلا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَةُ مِّن رَّبِيَّةٍ عَلَى إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَاءُ وَبَهْدِيَ إِلَيْهِ مَنْ أَنَّابَ (")

# The disbelievers say, 'Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?' [Prophet], say, 'God leaves whoever He will to stray, and guides to Himself those who turn towards Him [27] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 27)

We know that when the Arabic word *lawla* is followed by a nominal clause, it has a function that differs from its function when it is followed by a verbal clause. For example, when we say, 'Were it not (*lawla*) that *Zayd* was at your place, I would have visited you'. *Lawla* here signifies the precluding of something from happening because of another cause. Moreover, when we say, 'Why do you not (*lawla*) revise your school work', it denotes encouragement to do the act.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Why did they not (*lawla*) bring four witnesses of it? But as they have not brought witnesses they are liars before Allah.' (*an-Nur:* 13) In this verse, *lawla* is followed by a verbal clause.

So, Allah *the Almighty* commands us to contemplate the greatest sign which was revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* namely, the Quran. By contrast, the disbelievers asked – untruthfully – for a tangible miracle after the revelation of the Quran. By doing so, they were lying and contradicting themselves. After all, they said, 'Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Thus, they admitted that the Quran represented the supra-human summit of linguistic eloquence, and wished for this Sacred Scripture to have been revealed to one of the eminent men of the two cities – *Mecca* and *At-Ta`if*.

Moreover, it is they who said, 'You to whom the Reminder has been revealed! You are most surely insane.' (*al-Hijr:* 6) Thus, they once more deny the miraculous nature of the Quran even though it was revealed to challenge them in the field in which they excelled. After all, the pre-Islamic Arabs were great connoisseurs of Arabic literature, elucidating language and eloquent speech. They would also set up markets in which their poets would display

their linguistic productions in the form of eloquent prose and poetry. In short, the pre-Islamic Arabs had a sharp ear for spoken language.

Here, nevertheless, they are asking for a cosmic sign such as the one which was revealed to the previous messengers. They forgot that a sign of this nature is limited to the time of its manifestation, and that only the witnesses of such miracles - or those who are informed about them from a trustworthy source - believe in them.

However, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to establish order in the lives of people until the Day of Judgment, and had Allah *the Almighty* provided him with a cosmic sign, its efficacy would have been limited to the duration of its manifestation.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* has willed for him to bring forth a miraculous sign which would remain until the Day of Judgment, not to mention that he also brought forth tangible miracles. His tangible miracles include: the gushing forth of water from between his fingers,<sup>(1)</sup> the small ration of food which fed an entire army, the cloud which followed him throughout his journey to provide him with shade, the tree trunk which moaned so that he would stand on top of it during his sermon and the lizard which approached and greeted him.<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> In his book, Al-Bayhaqi mentioned that Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Allah be pleased with him related that this miracle occurred on the day of the Pact of Hudaybiyya. The people told Messenger Muhammad, 'We do not have any water to drink or to make our (ritual) ablutions with, except for the water that is before you. So, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him placed his hand in a container, and water gushed forth from between his fingers like springs.' See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala`il An-Nubuwwah, 4/116.

<sup>(2)</sup> In his book, Al-Bayhaqi narrates: "Umar ibn Al-Khattab relates that a man from the desert told Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him "By al-Lat and al-'Uzza, I will not believe in you until this lizard believes in you by declaring faith explicitly." So, he pulled a lizard from its hiding place and set it in the hands of the Messenger of Allah, who said, "O lizard!" Thereupon the latter responded to him in a clear Arab tongue which could be heard by everyone, "At your service and I do as you wish, O master of mankind till the Day of Resurrection!"- He asked, "Who do you worship, o lizard?" The latter responded, "He Whose Throne is in the heaven, and Whose Kingdom is also in the earth, and Whose Path is laid down in the sea, and Whose Mercy is in Paradise, and Whose Punishment is in Hell." Prophet Muhammad asked, "And who am I, O lizard?" "You are the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds, and the seal of the Prophets. Successful is he who has faith in you, and miserable is he who does not believe in you." Dala'il An-Nubuwwah, 6/36.

All these are cosmic miracles which are indubitable proofs of the truth of Prophet Muhammad's Message for those who witness them. The same applies for the miracles of the previous messengers. Had the Quran not recounted them, we would not have believed in them. Moreover, the cosmic signs which the previous messengers came with served as a confirmation of their truthfulness in what they conveyed to their respective people.

Allah *the Almighty* has explained this to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in His saying, 'And nothing could have hindered Us that We should send signs except that the ancients rejected them.' (*al-Isra': 59*) This verse clearly tells us that the previous messengers, who were sent to their respective peoples and who brought about miraculous cosmic signs, were also accused of mendacity. Likewise, the people of Messenger Muhammad said, 'We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us. Or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out. Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us).' (*al-Isra': 90-92*)

In another verse of the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And even if We had sent down to them the angels and the dead had spoken to them and We had brought together all things before them, they would not believe unless Allah pleases, but most of them are ignorant.' (*al- An 'am:* 111)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that they are submerged in stubborn defiance and will not believe in Prophet Muhammad's Message. Moreover, their challenges are weak excuses which they gave to avoid believing in Allah *the Almighty*.

In the verse in question, the disbelievers asked, 'Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 27) Thus, they admit that Prophet Muhammad has a Lord; a point which clearly contradicts their accusations of being a sorcerer, or that he – Allah forbid – is a liar. When the revelation temporarily ceased to descend upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* they said, 'Surely, Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him.'<sup>(1)</sup> Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* 

<sup>(1)</sup> In his exegesis, Ibn Kathir relates that Jundub ibn `Abdullah Allah be pleased with him said, 'Jibril (Gabriel) was slow to descend with the revelation to Messenger Muhammad =

revealed the following verse, 'Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased, and surely what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before. And soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well pleased [5].' (*ad-Duha:* 3-5)

These verses clearly assured Prophet Muhammad that the revelation of the Quran would continue. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has exposed the falsity of their claims throughout the years of Prophet Muhammad's mission.

Here, the disbelievers insist on being presented with a miraculous cosmic sign that is tangible to and perceived by the physical senses. As we have previously pointed out, the word *aya* (miraculous sign) is used to refer to either a cosmic miracle which points to the existence of the Creator, or to a verse of the Quran which explains the Islamic teachings. However, the Quranic verses were not the type of signs that they were demanding. Finally, a miraculous sign could refer to a miracle which confirms the authenticity of the Islamic Revelation.

Their asking for various tangible miracles to be displayed before them was a proof of their rejection to the verses of the Quran. This demand proves their foolish response to the indubitable confirmations of the veracity of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* After all, the Quran itself is a miracle as well as a divine way of guidance.

As we have previously explained, miraculous phenomena typically manifest in a domain in which its witnesses excel. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* does not bring forth a miracle in the area in which they have no experience but rather in an area in which they excelled.

Thus, those who practiced sorcery<sup>(1)</sup> were challenged by a miracle from the same kind of that in which they excelled– through a divinely sent messenger.

<sup>=</sup> peace and blessings be upon him and so the idolaters said, "Muhammad has been forsaken by his Lord", which is why Allah the Almighty, revealed the following verse, "I swear by the early hours of the day, [2] And the night when it covers with darkness. Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased." (ad-Duha: 1-3)' See Ibn Kathir, Tasfir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 4/522.

<sup>(1)</sup> What is meant here are the sorcerers of Pharaoh. Allah *the Almighty* narrates the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his confrontation with Pharaoh's sorcerers, saying,=

In addition, those who had deep knowledge of medicine were sent a Messenger<sup>(1)</sup> who worked miracles in the field of their expertise.

In the same way, the major miracle of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was manifested in a domain in which the pagan Arabs excelled. It is no less remarkable that the Quran is at the same time a miracle and a Path to Allah *the Almighty* unlike the previous miracles displayed by the previous Prophets which were bound to time.

Despite all of this, the disbelievers of Mecca rejected the Message of Islam, and were not content with the Quran as a miracle and guidance to the straight path. Instead, they asked for a miracle which agrees with their passionate souls, and that is why they went astray. Allah *the Almighty* then says, '[Prophet] say, "Allah leaves whoever He will to stray, and guides to Himself those who turn towards Him."" (*ar-Ra'd:* 27)

This verse should be carefully reflected, since some people try to do away with human responsibility by claiming that it is Allah *the Almighty* who denies guidance to the disbelievers. We contend, 'If we carefully examine the verses of the Quran, we will find the statement in which Allah *the Almighty* says, '...Allah does not guide the unbelieving people.' (*al-Baqara:* 264) Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '...surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 51) Similarly, He says, '...and Allah does not guide the transgressing people.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 108)

According to these verses, we fully realise that the past actions of the evildoers result in their deprivation of Allah's Guidance. By virtue of their belief in the divine message, man – who is duty-bound to Allah's Exalted

<sup>&</sup>quot;Musa (Moses) said to them, "Cast what you are going to cast." So they cast down their cords and their rods and said, "By Pharaoh's power, we shall most surely be victorious." Then Musa (Moses) cast down his staff and lo! it swallowed up the lies they told. And the magicians were thrown down prostrate; they said, "We believe in the Lord of the worlds: The Lord of Musa (Moses) and Haroun." (ash-Shu'ara': 44-8)

<sup>(1)</sup> This is about 'Isa (Jesus) peace be upon him son of Maryam (Mary) peace be upon her. Allah the Almighty tells him, '...and when you determined out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission, and you healed the blind and the leprous by My permission; and when you brought forth the dead by My permission...' (al-Ma'ida: 110).

Rulings –benefits from Allah's Succour. However, a person who rejects divine foundations of these teachings is denied the assistance of Allah *the Almighty*.

As for those who turn to Allah *the Almighty* He guides them and helps them in every way. In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* resumes His descriptions of the serenity which is granted to those who turn to Him, saying:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَتَطْمَعِنُّ قُلُوبُهُم بِذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِحْرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطْمَعِنُّ ٱلْقُلُوبُ ٢

# Those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of God – truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace[28] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 28)

The meaning of *al-itmi nan* is the peace and serenity of the heart, as well as its satisfaction with a firm belief that is no longer questioned by the mind.

We know that man is endowed with sensorial faculties which gather data from the sensorial world. Moreover, he is endowed with a mind which absorbs, identifies, and inspects this data. Following the process of assimilation, the mind assesses whether this collected information is true or false, thereby deriving some clear facts which one keeps in this heart and adopts as a creed. In this way, the data that is collected through the senses plays a central role in developing a person's belief system because the information that has been accepted by the mind has attained to a level similar to that in which a lover is inclined to seek after his beloved.

Thus, a person's beliefs pass through many stages before their final crystallisation in the heart. Beliefs start out as a sensorial recognition, followed by mental contemplation and verification of the matter. Finally, these truths settle in the heart in the form of belief. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...whose hearts find peace...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28). The peace of heart that is mentioned in the verse above springs from certitude in one's belief. However, the heart may undergo different trials and phases which shake one's faith. We say to the person who goes through such challenges, 'You have not given the Lord His due, so you are to be blamed for any hardship that befalls you. If you would realise that not only your shortcomings but also that what befalls you is the result of your

own acts. As for trials which befall you without any fault on your part, you should know that they are due to Allah's predestination, which He decreed out of His Divine Wisdom and which you might not be aware of it. Furthermore, these trials are in your own ultimate interest'.

Therefore, accepting one's fate is to your spiritual advantage if the ego is not involved. However, it is to your disadvantage when the ego is involved.

If you were to count the benefits that result from divinely willed hardship, you would realise that they far outweigh their harms. Let us offer the example of a youth who prepares his lessons and is ready for a test, but is then unable to take the test because of an illness which suddenly befell him.

This youth tried his best, but Allah *the Almighty* has willed for this illness to befall him for a divine wisdom. Perhaps Allah's Will was to ward off the envy of the student's neighbours, or the envy of those who resent his mother or father. It may be that Allah *the Almighty* wanted to protect him from self-conceit and corruption–lest he believes that his livelihood is dependent on phenomena of this world and not on the Original Causer. Further, delaying your interests for the sake of satisfying Allah's commands can be for your own good. Thus, the human being who has faith in Allah *the Almighty* must be consciously connected to the Original Causer; he must rely only upon Him. Furthermore, he must realise that reliance upon Allah *the Almighty* implies performing outward action as well as having inward trust in the heart. After all, putting one's trust in Allah *the Almighty* pertains to the inner activity and state of the heart and not only to outward action of the body.

Let each one of us turn our attention to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* may deprive us of certain worldly objects in order to prevent us from being beguiled by them. It is in this way that your faith, and that of others, finds its equilibrium.

You may find an intelligent young man who is fully capable of grasping his field of studies. However, he does not obtain the grade point average that allows him to join the college he was hoping for. Nevertheless, he prostrates before Allah *the Almighty* in gratitude for what he has been granted, and in resignation to what He has predestined and willed. In return, Allah *the Almighty* grants him success to a different college where he flourishes, only to become one of the eminent experts of his new field. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, '...and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you, and Allah knows, while you do not know.' (*al-Baqara:* 216) Thus, regardless of the vicissitudes of this world, serenity will fill the hearts of those who accept the fate that Allah *the Almighty* has willed for them, and recall that they have a Lord Who is above all worldly phenomena.

In this way, the heart finds rest in the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, the earthly causes lose their glamour because if they are ineffective, Allah, the Original Causer, is not.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* discusses the doubt that is cast by the disbelievers. Now when Muslims hear of these doubts, certain thoughts and questions may well rise: 'Why did Messenger Muhammad not present a miracle that is perceptible to the physical senses, just like the previous messengers? After all, had he done so, this problem would no longer exist, and the disbelievers' stubborn rejection would cease'. However, these questions do not shake the faith of the true believers whose hearts are at rest in the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. That is why He says in the following verse, 'Those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28)

The Arabic word *dhikr* (remembrance) has multiple meanings. Sometimes this word denotes the Book, that is, the Quran; Allah says, 'Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its Guardian.' (*al-Hijr: 9*). Other times, it denotes celebrity, fame and distinction; Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people, and you shall soon be questioned...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44). This verse tells us that revealing the Quran to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a great honour for him that will be recorded in the annals of history. Likewise, it is a mark of distinction for the Arabs that the Quranic miracle was revealed in their language.

Furthermore, *adh-dhikr* may denote recollection. Allah *the Almighty* says, '...but You made them and their fathers to enjoy until they forsook the reminder, and they were a people in perdition.' (*al-Furqan:* 18) This verse clearly shows that they forgot the calamities of the previous communities

which should have served as lessons for them. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* made religion triumphant despite their opposition.

*Adh-dhikr* can also denote all that is revealed by Allah *the Almighty* through one of His messengers, '...so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43)

Moreover, *adh-dhikr* can refer to any good fortune that is imparted by Allah *the Almighty*. It is also used to signify the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* always; Allah says, 'Therefore remember Me, I will remember you...' (*al-Baqara:* 152). This verse implies that we should remember Allah *the Almighty* through acts of obedience, and He will remember us with His Bounties and Rewards. In short, the word *adh-dhikr* encompasses many different meanings, yet we find our rest in each one of them. For example, when *adh-dhikr* denotes the Quran, it gives rise to serenity of the heart.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O you who believe! Remember Allah, remembering frequently, and glorify Him morning and evening. He it is Who sends His blessings on you, and (so do) His angels, that He may bring you forth out of utter darkness into the light; and He is Merciful to the believers.' (*al-Ahzab:* 41-43)

Indeed, every verse of the Quran used to comfort Messenger Muhammad by affirming that he is faithfully communicating Allah's Message. Indeed, Muslims were an oppressed minority who were capable neither of self-defence nor of defending their families. In such circumstances, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs.' (*al-Qamar:* 45)

'Umar<sup>(1)</sup> *Allah be pleased with him* asked, 'What host will be routed? We are not even able to defend ourselves, and some of us have immigrated to Abyssinia out of fear of repression.'

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Ibn Kathir who ascribed in to Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of `Ikramah who said, 'When the verse, "Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs." (al-Qamar: 45) was revealed, `Umar said, "What host will be routed?" (That is, which group will be defeated?) `Umar continued, "And on the day of the Battle of Badr, I witnessed the Messenger of Allah putting on his coat of mail and saying, 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs.' (al-Qamar: 45), and on that day, I understood the meaning of this verse." See Ibn Kathir, Tasfir Al-Quran Al-`Adhim, 4/266.

After some years, however, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* set out for the Battle of Badr, and identified the places where the prominent leaders and notables of Quraysh would fall. He *peace and blessings be upon him* would say, 'This is where so-and-so will die, and this is where so-and-so will die.'<sup>(1)</sup>

The Quran also foretold the way in which these notables, such as Al-Walid ibnul-Mughirah, will be slain; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'We will brand him on the nose.' (*al-Qalam:* 16). After being killed, Al-Walid's head was brought forth and it was discovered that he was indeed struck in the nose just as the Quran had prophesised.

Here, we should pose the following question, 'How could Prophet Muhammad determine where and how these disbelievers die'? Such power only ensues from Allah *the Almighty*. It is He who informed him *peace and blessings be upon him* of the following: 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs.' (*al-Qamar:* 45)

Moreover, this verse gave assurance to his *peace and blessings be upon him* followers who do not have knowledge of the unseen world, and who have no knowledge of how a disbeliever or a tyrant dies. Nevertheless, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* foretold how these disbelievers were to die even though he and his followers were in a weak position.

These fulfilled prophecies offer a definitive proof that he *peace and blessings be upon him* draws his strength from the Knower of the unseen worlds.

Therefore, Allah's saying, 'Truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 28), means that the hearts find their rest with the Quran and the truthful information therein, which confirms that Prophet Muhammad was a faithful Messenger for his Lord, and that the Quran is not contrived by him; rather, it has been revealed by Allah *the Almighty*.

It is thus that the believers received Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and accepted the authenticity of the revelation which he related.

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 3/219, 258; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1779.

For example, even before listening to the Quran, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* told him *peace and blessings be upon him* upon expressing his fears that the being who was visiting him might be a jinn, 'You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones. By Allah, never will Allah disgrace you.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Similarly, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* is a case in point. He believed that Muhammad was a messenger sent by Allah as soon as he was told so. Thus, we find that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had good qualities, and Allah *the Almighty* had bestowed upon him exalted virtues which led everyone around him to immediately believe everything he said.

We also notice that many of those who believed in Prophet Muhammad's Message did not attain to faith because of their attraction to the Quran, but because they believed that he would never lie to them. Moreover, his life prior to receiving the Revelation is miraculous. His pre-prophetic life led the first of his followers to believe in him.

As for the disbelievers, they were affected by the Quran, and their hearts inclined towards it.<sup>(2)</sup> However, they wished that it had been revealed to someone other than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

<sup>(1)</sup> This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari in seven locations of his book, and was also narrated by Muslim on the authority of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 160. Tahmilu al-kall means 'you support the weak'. It also denotes helping the poor, orphans and the needy; Tuksibu al-Ma'dum) means to recuperate the lost money. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was lucky in his trade. Taqri ad-Dayf means to feed the poor as if they were guests; and (Nawa'ib Al-Haqq) refers to misfortunes which come about sooner or later. See Al-Nawawi, Al-Minhaj, 2/561; Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari, 1/24.

<sup>(2)</sup> In his biography of the Prophet, Ibn Hisham relates that Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, Abu Jahl ibn Hisham and Al-Akhnas ibn Shorayq went out one night to listen to what Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was reciting while he was performing the night prayer in his house. Each of the three men hid in a corner listening to him, and neither of them was aware of others' hiding places. They remained there listening to him throughout the night, and when dawn arose, they departed. On their way back, they crossed paths and reproached each other saying, 'Do not return to listen to his recitation of the Quran, for if one of the fools among your people were to spot you, he would have doubts =

When the believers found that the Quran informed them of unexplainable circumstances that they experienced, and when they witnessed the unfolding of events which were predicted in it, they gained certitude that the Quran was not a product of Prophet Muhammad, but rather than it was revealed from his Lord *Glorified is He*.

It is for this reason that when the disbelievers raised their lies to cast doubt on the veracity of Messenger Muhammad's prophethood, the Quran puts the believers' hearts at rest, so that the lies of disbelievers do not have an effect on the sincere believers.

Moreover, the believer recalls Allah *the Almighty* through the blessings which he receives in this world and takes heed of every event he experiences and of every verse revealed in Allah's Book. Having attained to true faith, the believer's heart is at rest in the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* when he recites the Quran.

Furthermore, the believers at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* remarked that the prophecies which he foretold them had gone beyond their immediate surroundings, and had stretched to the outside world of his time; his prophecies spoke of Persia in the east and of Byzantines in the west. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had foretold the victory of Rome over Persia when Allah *the Almighty* revealed the following verse: 'Alif Lam Mim. The Byzantines are vanquished. In a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome, within a few years.' (*ar-Rum:* 1-4) Show me an ingenious power in the world which can determine the result of a battle between two clashing conflicting empires, and which can specify who will be victorious. Moreover, how is it possible that such an ingenious power can determine who will be defeated after a period of time which ranges from five to nine years?

<sup>=</sup> regarding you. Then they left. But on the second night, each of the men returned to their hiding places and they remained there listening to Prophet Muhammad until dawn. After leaving, they met once again on the road and exchanged the same words that they had the previous night...' And the same happened on the third night. See Ibn Hisham, As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah, 2/315.

There are also the world events which were beyond the ken of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but which were accurately expressed in the Quran.

All these proofs give peace of heart to the believers that the Quran is truthful and is revealed by Allah *the Almighty*. This fact is confirmed by the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah— truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28)

We know that the world had been prepared to host the first human being, namely, Adam *peace be upon him*. All necessary provisions were arranged for him, and man's life depended on Allah's Bounties, from which we receive our livelihood and raise our standard of living according to the effort which we exert. If our actions in this world were righteous and our faith in Allah *the Almighty* was strong, we experience the loftiest form of life after death. Having depended on Allah's granted sustenance in this world, the pious people live in the Hereafter in paradise which was created by Allah, the Establisher of all causes. So, Allah's saying, 'Truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28) means that the peace appeases all hearts. After all, there is a corner within the heart of each person which experiences distress. Upon invoking Allah *the Almighty* however, one will inevitably find rest and peace of heart.

The orientalists tried to give rise to a controversy over this verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28). They asked, 'How is it possible that the Quran alleges that the remembrance of Allah grants peace of heart when it states in another passage, "Those only are believers whose hearts become full of fear when Allah is mentioned." (*al-Anfal:* 2)? Which of the two verses is true'? Had the orientalists examined the Quran with an accurate knowledge of Arabic, they would have realised the difference between Allah's saying, 'Truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28), and His saying, 'Those only are believers whose hearts become full of fear when Allah is mentioned.' (*al-Anfal:* 2) The latter verse indicates that if Allah *the Almighty* was mentioned in front of men who were at that moment heedless

of Him, they turn their attention to the Divine reminder with awe. Another possible interpretation is that Allah *Glorified is He* is addressing all His creatures, taking into account their instincts, emotions and individual circumstances. There is no perfect human being, and each person has a flaw, save those who were made infallible by Allah *the Almighty*.

Now when a man remembers his sinful shortcomings, he goes into a state of awe. Conversely, when he remembers Allah's Mercy, Forgiveness and accepting the repentances, he finds peace of heart.

Allah says:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا ٱلصَّلِحَتِ طُوبَ لَهُمْ وَحُسُنُ مَنَابٍ (")

## Those who believe and do righteous deeds: joy awaits these, and their final homecoming will be excellent [29] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 29)

The Arabic word *tuba* (joy) is derived from *tayyib*, that is, that which is agreeable. This verse shows us that the believers who do righteous deeds will receive something that is delightful in every aspect; including form, colour, taste, disposition, and the pleasure which it induces. Thus, everything that they desire will be found delightful. It is as though all delightful things are at their disposal.

Allah's saying, '...and their final homecoming will be excellent.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 29), means that the believer's final homecoming to Allah, Who created and granted them sustenance, will be excellent. He returns them to Him so that they live by Him *Glorified is He*. All of this is done through the force ensuing from the divine command: 'Be, and it is'.

After this verse, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he is a messenger among many messengers. Now every messenger who was sent to a community is endowed with the power to work a miracle that surpasses the greatest accomplishments of his community in a domain wherein they had excelled. Allah *the Almighty* had sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with a miracle that was fitting for his people. After all, the pre-Islamic Arabs had excelled in

articulacy, rhetoric, and oral literature. They were also renowned for reciting long poems, the most famous of which being *Al-Mu`alaqat As-sab`* (Seven Hanged Poems). They also held literary markets, such as *Suq`Ukazh* and *Dhi Al-Majaz*. That is why the miracle of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him is supported with was in the same field in which his people had excelled, so that it may be an undeniable proof and an unsurpassable miracle. Moreover, had the miracle not taken the form of that which they excelled in, they would have argued, 'We have never laboured in something like this before, and had we done so we would have surpassed your so-called miracle'.

Thus, it becomes clear to us that each messenger is sent forth with a miracle that challenges his people in their field of expertise. Moreover, the distinction of the miracle of Messenger Muhammad has been firmly established. Thus, we see that sending Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the Quran – even though it did not convince the disbelievers – was in accordance with the principles of the Divine Revelation which dictated all the Revelations.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says:

كَذَلِكَ أَرْسَلْنَكَ فِيَ أُمَّةٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهَا أُمَمُ لِتَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَهُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ بِٱلرَّحْمَنِ قُلْ هُوَ رَبِّي لَآ إِلَهُ إِلَّهُ هُوَ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ مَتَابٍ 🖤

So We have sent you [Prophet] to a community – other communities passed away long before them – to recite to them what We reveal to you. Yet they disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy. Say, 'He is my Lord: there is no god but Him. I put my trust in Him and to Him is my return' [30] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 30)

This verse made it clear that as Allah *the Almighty* sent Prophet Muhammad to your community, just as Allah *Glorified is He* had designated other messengers to other previous communities. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* has not sent forth a miracle which did not correspond to what the community had excelled in, so that none of them would contend that the miracle that the messenger had displayed had taken shape in a domain that they were not accustomed to; and had they laboured in it, the messengers would not have surpassed them.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So we have sent you [Prophet] to a community-other communities passed away long before them...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 30), this means that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been sent to his community just as other messengers have been sent to theirs.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* cites a Divine Name which they should have grasped its true measure, namely, *Ar-Rahman* (the Lord of Mercy). Note that Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, 'They disbelieve in Allah'. Rather, He says, 'Yet they disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 30) After all, they live – despite their disbelief – by the bounties of Allah, the Lord of Mercy. All their surroundings, sustenance, and sources of pleasure are His bestowals. Despite benefiting from Allah's bounties, they do not act in accordance with any of the divinely-ordained commands. It would have been more befitting for them to acknowledge the bounties which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon them and to believe in Him. After all, Allah's Divinity requires that we worship Him.

Now Allah *Glorified is He* mentions His Name *Ar-Rahman* (the Lord of Mercy) which indicates that He reaches out to the disbelievers with goodness and generosity. In return, they should have acknowledged these divinely bestowed bounties which were given to them, whilst they have neither might nor power. They should have contemplated these generous bestowals and declared their turning to Allah *Glorified is He* in worship. Moreover, they should have dutifully observed the demands of servitude to Him.

During the Pact of Hudaybiya, negotiations between the Muslims and the disbelievers of Quraysh took place. Despite having forbidden Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from entering Mecca, the disbelievers of Quraysh assented to signing a pact with him. By signing a treaty with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they acknowledged him and his companions as a power which engaged in give-and-take truces. That is why Abu Bakr said, 'There was no greater victory for Islam than the victory of Hudaybiya.'

At Hudaybiya, Quraysh began to acknowledge Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his *ummah* (the followers of Islam). Moreover, they ensured an extended armistice which enabled Messenger

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions to extend their influence among the surrounding tribes of Quraysh; as expeditionary forces of the Muslim army were dispatched and accompanied by callers to Allah's religion. Accordingly, the tribes embraced Islam one after another. Thus, Hudaybiya was the greatest triumph of Islam, for Quraysh had been pacified and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers began to call the surrounding tribes of Quraysh to embrace Islam.

Yet, people did not fully grasp the greatness of the relationship between Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Lord. For servants of Allah *Glorified is He* always rush things, and Allah *Glorified is He* does not act in response to the winds of human haste. Rather, He allows for things to take their natural course, letting events unfold according to His Will.<sup>(1)</sup>

Now when the time came for the pact between Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Quraysh to be signed in Hudaybiya, 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* began to write the formula of the treaty. He wrote: 'This is what Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, has agreed to.' But Suhayl ibn `Amr dissented and said, 'Had I borne witness that you are the Messenger of Allah, I would not have fought against you. Nay, but write: 'This is what Muhammad ibn `Abdullah and Suhayl ibn `Amr have agreed to.' However, the companions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* insisted that Muhammad be titled 'Messenger of Allah'. Nevertheless, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By Allah, I am truly the Messenger of Allah, even if the people of Quraysh denied me. Write Muhammad ibn `Abdullah.'<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> On this subject, As-Suyuti cites in (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) (7:509) a prophetic tradition among which is the account which Al-Bayhaqi attributed to `Urwa Allah be pleased with him. He recounts that some companions of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'By Allah, this is no victory! We have been barred from the House of Allah and our offerings had been prevented from reaching their place of sacrifice...' And so Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him answered back, 'Mistaken are your words. This is the greatest of victories, for the idolaters have consented to turn you away from their land peacefully, seeking a truce with you, and inviting you to return to the House of Allah in the future. And Allah has granted you victory over them, and He has returned you to your homes in good health, laden with booty and with Allah's reward. This is indeed the greatest of victories.'

<sup>(2)</sup> Cited by Ibn Hisham in his (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya) (3/317).

Ali ibn Abu Talib, however, insisted that Muhammad be titled 'Messenger of Allah'. At that moment, Allah *Glorified is He* inspired His Messenger to tell Ali *Allah be pleased with him* 'The same will be demanded of you, and you will consent.' And so, when Ali *Allah be pleased with him* became the caliph after Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman Allah *be pleased with them* and the battle between Ali and Mu'awiya was waged, and it was followed by an agreement by both parties to sign a treaty, the scribe of the treaty's terms wrote: 'This is what 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb, the Commander of the Faithful, has agreed to.' But 'Amr ibn Al-'As, who was the deputy of Mu'awiya, retorted: 'Write his name and the name of his father, for he is your commander and not our commander.' At that moment, Ali remembered what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The same will be demanded of you, and you will consent.' And 'Ali consented and said, 'Erase 'the Commanders of the Faithful', and write this is what 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb has agreed to.'<sup>(1)</sup> Thus, the statement of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was realised.

Among the events which deepen the faith of the listener is the story of `Ammar ibn Yasir *Allah be pleased with him* who fought among the ranks of `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* in his battle against Mu'awiya *Allah be pleased with him*. `Ammar ibn Yasir was slain by Mu'awiya's troops. Thereupon, the Muslims cried out, 'May Allah be merciful to `Ammar. He will be killed by a rebellious aggressive group.' This is what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had proclaimed. Thus, the Muslims understood that the unjust party was that of Mu'awiya, and many Muslims who were fighting for Mu'awiya switched to the ranks of `Ali ibn Abu Taleb. When this happened, `Amr ibn Al-`As went to Mu'awiya and said, 'something has occurred in our army, and if it continues no one will fight on our side anymore: we have killed `Ammar ibn Yasir, and the companions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* cited his saying, 'May Allah be merciful to `Ammar. He will be killed by a rebellious aggressive group.' Our fighters have understood that the unjust party is ours.' Now Mu'awiya was very cunning, and he replied, 'Go

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Ibn Kathir in (Al-Bidayah wa An-Nihayah) (7:287), published by Dar Ar-Rayyan Li At-Turath, First edition, 1988, The events of year 38 A.H.

around the army and declare, 'Nay, he who sent him out to fight is the one who killed him'; namely, 'Ali. When this statement reached Ali, he retorted, 'Who killed Hamza ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib, who was sent out to fight by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?!'

Returning to the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So We have sent you [Prophet] to a community–other communities passed away long before them...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 30). Here, it means that Allah *Glorified is He* has sent you, Muhammad, with a miracle which corresponds to what your community has excelled in. Therefore, to ask for anything else would amount to ignorance of the reality of Revelation and adopting a stubbornness which only distances them further away from faith.

Allah's words, 'Yet they disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy. Say, "He is my Lord..." (*ar-Ra'd:* 30) mean that when they declare their disbelief in Allah *Glorified is He* you, Messenger Muhammad, should confront them with a declaration of faith in Him by stating, 'He is my Lord: there is no god but Him....' (*ar-Ra'd:* 30) Now the word 'my Lord' is consistent with the Name *Ar-Rahman* (The Lord of Mercy) Who showers us with all His graces. Moreover, He nurtures me, and were He to only create, nurture, bestow me with life, and sustain me, these would have been sufficient reasons for me to worship Him alone without associating any partners with Him.

Were man to associate false deities and partners with Allah *Glorified is He*, he would turn to a certain deity, and at other times to another one or even to a third. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has wished to grant peace to man by disassociating him from this dispersion through the doctrine of His Oneness.

Moreover, the Quran was revealed to give rest to hearts and to serve as a reminder: 'Allah puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to Allah, though most of them don't know.' (*az-Zumar:* 29) Thus, the Quran sets forth two scenarios: The first scenario is one in which a man is a servant to more than one master, and these masters are all at variance with one another. The second scenario is of another man who is owned by one master. Human intellect must

undoubtedly know that it is better to have a single master than to have many, for the multiplicity of masters results in corruption and ruin. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins: Allah, Lord of the Throne, is far above the things they say.' (*al-Anbiya*': 22) Moreover, a sane person is one who only submits to a single master whom he deems to be trustworthy. In our daily lives, we say, 'Whatever decision so-and-so makes, I am content with, for I have entrusted him with this or that'. Moreover, none of us submit to another person unless we know that he is worthy of such a trust. The latter must be sincere, strong, and capable of fulfilling his duties.

During the violent clash against the notables of Quraysh, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'In Allah have I put my trust.' Now this is a testimony that he has relied upon the Mighty, the Trustworthy, and the Wise. Notice that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, 'I put my trust in Him'. Rather, he said, 'In Him have I put my trust' (*ar-Ra'd:* 30). The difference between the two expressions is great. When you say, 'In Allah have I put my trust', you limit your trust to Him alone. However, if you were to say, 'I put my trust in Him', then you may add or include several other parties in whom you place your trust as well.

It is for this reason that we say, 'It is You we worship.' (*al-Fatiha:* 5) Thus, we limit worship to Him alone, thereby excluding all other objects of worship. Were the order of this expression reversed as 'We worship you', adding further objects of worship would have been possible. So, the expression of the verse is limiting the worship to Him. The same is true for putting trust in Allah *Glorified is He*.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "He is my Lord: there is no god but Him. I put my trust in Him and to Him is my return.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 30) In other words: I do not receive orders from anyone but Him, and my ultimate return is to Him.

Allah says:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ قُرْءَانَا سُبِّرَتْ بِدِ ٱلْجِبَالَ أَوْ قُطِّعَتْ بِدِ ٱلْأَرْضُ أَوْ كُلِّمَ بِدِ ٱلْمَوْتَى بَل لِتَّهِ ٱلْأَمَرُ جَمِيعًا أَفَلَمَ يَأْتَضِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓ أَنَ لَّوْ يَشَآهُ ٱللَّهُ لَهَدَى ٱلنَّاس جَمِيعًا وَلَا يَزَالُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا تُصِيبُهُم بِمَا صَنَعُوا قَارِعَةُ أَوْ تَحُلُّ قَرِيبًا مِّن دَارِهِمْ حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ وَعَدُ ٱللَّهِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُخْلِفُ ٱلْمِيعَادَ (")

### If there were ever to be a Quran with which mountains could be moved, the earth shattered, or the dead made to speak [it would have been this one], but everything is truly in God's hands. Do the believers not realize that if God had so willed, He could have guided all mankind? As for the disbelievers, because of their misdeeds, disaster will not cease to afflict them or fall close to their homes until God's promise is fulfilled: God never fails to keep His promise [31] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 31)

The Arabic word *law* (if) is a conditional particle that is followed by a conditional statement which requires a response, Here, Allah Glorified is He does not draw the logical conclusions of this statement, rather, He leaves the listener to do so through his discernment. Even if such a sentence construction would sound lacking when uttered by a human speaker, it is not the case when issued by Allah Glorified is He; this expression is perfect by virtue of the Perfection of its Speaker. As stated, Allah Glorified is He has left the answer to be discovered by the intelligence of the listener of the Quran who contemplates its meanings, and recalls - alongside this verse- the verse in which Allah Glorified is He says, 'Even if We had sent down to you [Prophet] a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say, "This is nothing but blatant sorcery." (al- An'am: 7) The same is true for Allah's Words, 'Even if We sent the angels down to them, and the dead spoke to them, and We gathered all things right in front of them, they still would not believe, unless Allah so willed, but most of them are ignorant [of this].' (al- An'am: 111) To conclude: when analysed in the light of other similar verses, one can discover the answer to the conditional clause in the verse which we are examining. The meaning is as follows: If there were ever to be a Quran with which mountains could be moved, the earth shattered or the dead made to speak, they who are bent on denying the truth would still refuse to believe in it!

It is related that some of the idolaters of Ouravsh, such as Abu Jahl and 'Abdullah ibn Abu Umayya sat by the Ka'ba and sent for Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. 'Abdullah addressed him, 'If it would please you that we should become your followers, then make the mountains of Mecca move for us through by the Quran. Remove them so that the land of Mecca may increase, for it is a small tract of land. And cause springs to gush from it and rivers to flow through it, so that we may plant and cultivate. For you are not- as you claimed -lesser in your Lord's Eyes than Dawud (David) when He subjected the mountains to follow him and subjected the wind to us so that we carry out our affairs, and trade our goods in the Levant and return on the same day. After all, the wind was subjected to Sulaiman (Solomon), son of Dawud (David) peace be upon them, and you are not lesser in the Eyes of your Lord than Sulaiman (Solomon). Bring back to life the bones of your grandfather. Or whomever you wish among our dead that we may ask him, 'Is it true what you say or is it false?' After all, 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* raised the dead, and you are not inferior in the Eyes of your Lord than him.' And so, Allah Glorified is He has revealed this verse and the one that preceded it in response to their challenges.<sup>(1)</sup>

They provided all these pretexts for cutting themselves from faith; for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has worked a miracle which manifested in a realm in which they had excelled, and the Quran was revealed to him bearing the Message of Allah until the Final Hour.

They asked for the mountains of Mecca to be removed to increase the width of the valley to farm and to cultivate. They also demanded that the earth be shattered, that is, for one piece of land to be severed from another. Such geological activities would normally happen by digging a water channel. The disbelievers also said, 'We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us.' (*al-Isra':* 90)

By *taqti* al-ard, (severing of the earth), they mean the shortening of the distance between one region and another, allowing for the walker to rest at

<sup>(1)</sup> Cited by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5:3655). The author stated: the meaning to the effect of what was mentioned by Az-Zubayr ibn Al-'Awwam, Mujahid, Qatada and Ad-Dahhak. See: (Asbab An-Nuzul) (p. 157, 158).

many stops, as the traveller covers a certain distance bit by bit until he reaches his final destination. Moreover, the length of each person's journey varies according to his strength and means of transportation. The wealthy individual prefers to cover longer distances during his travels, since he owns steeds that can travel lengthily with ease. As for a person who does not have a mount, he prefers to travel shorter distances so that he may pause for rest.

We notice this phenomenon in our modern age: with the increase of luxury, cars are now able to travel from Cairo to Alexandria without stopping. In the past, however, cars were obliged to stop midway to allow travellers to rest. The same happened in the Kingdom of Sheba –Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...but [still] they said, "Our Lord, make our journeys further apart!" They wronged themselves...' (*Saba*': 19). In other words: they asked Allah *Glorified is He* to render the distance between one place and another far, so that the wealthy traveller may enjoy seeing the landscapes during his journey.<sup>(1)</sup>

We also notice that the idolaters of Quraysh were insistent in asking for supernatural miracles. They went so far as to ask for the dead to be raised in Allah's following words, 'or the dead made to speak' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31). Some of them asked for Qusay ibn Kilab, the great grandfather of Messenger Muhammad and of the tribe of Quraysh, to be revived. They wished to ask him, 'Are Muhammad's claims true?' But it is important to understand that the Quran was not revealed for such matters, and even if He was to satisfy their demands, they would not attain to faith.

The primary purpose of the Quran is to be the final path, suitable for all ages. This, precisely, is the miracle of the Quran.

<sup>(1)</sup> That is because Allah *Glorified is He* has blessed them by making the villages conspicuous and the distances between them short. He, therefore, says, 'Also, We had placed, between them and the towns We had blessed, other towns within sight of one another to which they could travel easily–Travel safely in this land by night and by day.' (*Saba':* 19). But they also asked Allah *Glorified is He* to make their travel distances longer. They said: 'But [still] they said, 'Our Lord, Lord, make our journeys further apart!' They wronged themselves, in the end, We made their fate a byword, and scattered them in countless fragments. There truly are signs in this for every patient, thankful person.' (*Saba':*19).

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'but everything is truly in Allah's hands' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31). The word *amr* (one matter) implies that there is but a single subject in this verse, while *jami'a* (all) means multiplicity. Thus, we realise that the multiplicity of divine messages and miracles points to the fact that all matters pertaining to these Messages are issued from Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, it is He Who has chosen the miracle that is fitting for the people to whom the Messenger is to be sent.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, 'Do the believers not realize that if Allah had so willed, He could have guided all mankind?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31) It has been said that the verb *yay*'*as* means 'to know', is an expression that is peculiar to Quraysh. In other words, this verse denotes: 'Do believers not know that these disbelievers have not been guided because Allah *Glorified is He* has not wished for them to be guided'?

The believers wished for the notables of Quraysh to embrace Islam so as to relieve the Muslims from the pressure under which they were. This way, the disbelievers would not repress them, nor would they stifle their earnings or oppress their families.

Now Allah Glorified is He makes it clear that what is at issue is not related to the believers' wishing for them to adopt their faith. Rather, faith is something which requires man to cleanse himself of the false beliefs that occupy his heart, and to look at things objectively. After this objective analysis of reality, the concepts which he has gained certitude of must penetrate his heart. Thus, the heart would be occupied by that which is noble so that no false creed find its way into one's heart, only to be replaced by another and so that one's heart may not abandon his faith. Allah Glorified is He says, 'Allah does not put two hearts within a man's breast. ' (ar-Ra'd: 31) The heart-container is exactly analogous to the physical container: it can never be filled by two different bodies. So when two bodies meet in the container, the stronger one drives out the other. Suppose, for example, that we have a container that is filled to the brim. If someone tried to place a small metal ball inside this filled container, an amount of water that is equal in volume to the metal ball will spill from the sides. This is what happens in a material container, and the same is true for the spiritual container. That is why Allah Glorified is He says in a Divine Hadith: 'Love for Me and love for the world do not meet in one heart.'

Thus, we realise that there is a space for spiritual meanings just as there is one for physical objects. And if you – earnestly – seek to assimilate the correct creedal concepts within your heart, you must first drive out the contradicting concepts from that cardiac space. Afterwards, you must evaluate the extent to which these concepts are true in the light of indubitable proof. Only then must you assimilate within your heart whichever view you find to be supported by coherent reasoning and strong proof.

The disbelievers did not follow this course of action. Instead, they went on in their state of falsehood and stubbornly clung to their corrupt creed. As for the person among them who embraced Islam, he pulled his heart away from his old beliefs. He did not insist on his former creed; rather, he studied and compared the pagan beliefs with Islamic ones, and so he hurried to embrace Islam.

As for the person whose heart was filled by the former corrupt creed, and yet he seeks to assimilate the Islamic doctrine into his heart, he will fail to attain this spiritual state because his heart is taken up by the old creed.

If you, Messenger Muhammad, want them to believe, and then know that it must issue from their will power. Moreover, they must drive out the corrupt beliefs from their hearts and seek the sounder and the better of the two creeds.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us how to easily attain these realities. He tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Say [Prophet], "I advise you to do one thing only: stand before Allah, in pairs or singly, and think: there is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet]."" (*Saba':* 46) In other words, say, Prophet Muhammad, to those who deny you: 'I offer you one counsel'. Now you do not give genuine advice to a person unless you want him to be on the right path. This fact explains the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him: he is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 128)

That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wants you all to be believers. That is why he calls you to stand before Allah *Glorified is He* and for no other eminent individual besides Him. This is because the glory of

every person will be taken away no matter who that person is. You should not tell yourself, 'Verily, I and the servants will be of equal standing'. Rather, you should stand before Allah *Glorified is He* in pairs, that is, in the company of another person. Or again: that others may stand up in pairs to discuss with their partners. During this discussion, no one should have a pre-conception, but all should focus their thoughts only on Allah *Glorified is He*.

Moreover, each of you may inquire: this is Muhammad, these are his traits, he accomplished this and that, and the Quran which he delivered says this and that etc. Upon sincere examination, each one of you will find himself guided to the Truth, either on one's own initiative, or jointly with the person with whom one is discussing and examining the history of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Message which he brought with him.

When two people are holding a discussion, neither will fear that the other will surpass him. However, if a third person were added to this discussion, each discussant will take pride in his opinion while rejecting the other individual's outlook. Moreover, he fears to be considered as defeated in the discussion, and does not allow himself the risk of being belittled by anyone else. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...stand before Allah, in pairs or singly, and think: there is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet].' (*Saba':* 46) Madness denotes the state mental disorder. In other words, a person who is demented and acts in a way that is not accepted by the rational mind.

Allah *Glorified is He* combines between the one's mind and his character saying, 'Truly you have great moral character.' (*al-Qalam:* 4) It is sometimes said, 'So and so has a good moral character'. In other words, he possesses traits which rank him among those of the most exalted and noble virtues. Such virtues include truthfulness and trustworthiness, and they are determined by mental deliberation. Clearly, it is the intelligence which determines whether sternness, gentleness, or wisdom, for example, should be employed in a particular situation. All these matters are determined by the mind.

Now an exalted moral conduct does not have roots in a mad man because the latter cannot make a wise choice in the face of multiple options. That is why he is held accountable neither by us nor by Allah *Glorified is He*.

And when Allah *Glorified is He* commands them to inquire as to whether Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* suffers from mental disorder, He knows in advance that they admit that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is endowed with a perfect nature. By way of proof, it is sufficient to mention that they used to entrust him with their most important possessions. Another confirmation of the exalted nature Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is that the various tribes accepted him as an arbiter when they quarrelled over how to rebuild the *Ka'ba*.<sup>(1)</sup>

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Noon; By the pen and all they write! Your Lord's grace does not make you [Prophet] a madman.' (*al-Qalam:* 1-2) Thus, we realise that the disbeliever was not going to attain to faith and that Allah would not have guided them because they were not in the least prepared to receive guidance. It is as if – Allah forbid – they were obsessed with disbelief, and Allah *Glorified is He* has sealed their hearts and they had their disbelief increased. And so the disbelief in these hearts will never get out nor will the external light of faith enter them.

Now some of the Muslims thought that the disbelievers' rejection of the Message of Islam would take its toll on the believers because their oppression of the Muslims would grow stronger. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear to the people of faith that His victory is imminent when He says, 'As for the disbelievers, because of their misdeeds, disaster will not cease to afflict them or fall close to their homes until Allah's promise is fulfilled:

<sup>(1)</sup> At the time, Prophet Messenger peace and blessings be upon him was thirty-five years of age. That is, this incident occurred five years prior to the beginning of his Prophethood. The tribes of Quraysh argued among themselves over who would have the honour of placing the sacred black stone in its place. They were even on the verge of drawing arms, when they gathered in the Sacred House to discuss. Abu Umayya ibn Al-Mughira told them to nominate as a judge the first person to walk through the gate of Bani Shayba. And surely enough it was, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him who walked through this gate. When they saw him, they exclaimed, 'This is the trustworthy one. What a joy! This is Muhammad!' And so he said, 'Fetch me a piece of cloth.' When he was brought one, he placed the stone on the cloth, and said, 'Let each tribe hold a corner of the cloth, and raise it together.' And so they did, and when they reached the recess for the rock, he positioned it with his own hands. Then the construction was built around it. See (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya) by Ibn Hisham (1:196, 197).

Allah never fails to keep His promise.' (ar-Ra'd: 31) In other words: be at peace, believers, for the state of the disbelievers will not carry on much longer. On the contrary, disasters will afflict them in their own homes, and they will witness with their own eyes how faith will spread into their strongholds. The realm of faith will expand, the territory of the disbelievers will shrink, and Allah's victory will then take place. Surely enough, the victory of Allah Glorified is He took place, and only those who proclaimed, 'There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', remained on the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, this verse predicted the advent of hope after despair so that the latter would not overwhelm the psychological states of the Muslims. Allah Glorified is He has also answered the prayer of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when he called upon Him saying, 'O Allah, cause them a famine like that (which broke out at the time) of Yusuf (Joseph).<sup>(1)</sup> And so, the notables of the disbelievers were slain one after the other, but their opposition towards the Muslims continued. This hostility grew to the extent that the daughters of Messenger Muhammad *peace* and blessings be upon him were married to the sons of Abu Lahab. But when Prophet Muhammad declared his prophethood, Abu Lahab and his wife said, 'Our sons must divorce the daughters of Muhammad.' When the first son divorced the daughter of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him he prayed to Allah Glorified is He saying: 'As for me, I ask Allah to set His dogs upon him.'(2) At this juncture, Abu Lahab, the disbeliever, said, 'Muhammad's prayer against my son occupies my mind and troubles me, and I fear sending him on a trip to the Levant, lest Muhammad's prayer come true.'

It would have been suitable for him not to worry. And so the time for his trip to the Levant came, and Abu Lahab departed with his sons. And when it came time for sleep, Abu Lahab ordered men to stay up guarding over his son. It is as if the men around him were like the Bar Lev Line that was built

<sup>(1) [</sup>Narrated by Al-Bukhari]

<sup>(2)</sup> Cited in full by Al-Bayhaqi in (Dala`il An-Nubuwwa) (2:338,) and related by Al-Haythami in (Majma` Az-Zawa`id) (6:19) and attributed to At-Tabarani who said, 'It is related by Zuhayr ibn Al-`Alaa', and cited by Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) (2/539.) and authenticated it from a Hadith narrated by Abu `Aqrab. This Hadith was deemed good Hadith by Ibn Hajar in (Al-Fath) (4:39).

by Israel on the Suez Canal to muffle the cry of victory that was carried by the exclamation: 'Allah is the Greatest!' And when it dawned, they discovered that a monster had torn the son of Abu Lahab to pieces. People said that Abu Lahab feared the prayer of Muhammad, and despite this, it was realized. One person said, 'But Muhammad prayed that a dog would tear him to pieces. He prayed, 'May you have one of the dogs of Allah devour you'; and he did not say, 'you will be devoured by a lion'. But the one who overheard him retorted, 'If one dog were attributed to Allah, does it mean that it is a 'dog' in the sense that we are familiar with? What is attributed to Allah must be a huge beast.'

Thus, a calamity has befallen the man who stubbornly clung to disbelief, and Allah's following words came true, 'As for the disbelievers, because of their misdeeds, disaster will not cease to afflict them or fall close to their homes...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31). Indeed, they were deeply sunken in their disbelief and opposition to Islam. Therefore, a disaster afflicted them. Note that *al-qar'a* is that which knocks fiercely upon the door of someone peacefully resting in his house. It is from *al-qar'a* that *qara' al-bab* (to pound on a door) is derived. Moreover, there is a difference between knocking on the door and pounding on it.

Allah's words, '...or fall close to their homes...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31), are clarified by the Treaty of Hudaybiya which was Allah's good news for the Muslims: the disbelievers were now obliged to negotiate with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he began to send envoys to the surrounding regions of Mecca. Soon, the tribes presented themselves in crowds before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to declare their belief in Islam. The news that the continuing spread of Islam reached Quraysh, only to be followed by the catastrophic news of the entry of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* into Mecca. Finally, Allah's promise that the disbelievers of Quraysh themselves would enter the fold of Islam was fulfilled.

Or Allah's promise in his words: '...until Allah's promise is fulfilled...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31), signifies the advent of the Day of Resurrection on which Allah's promise to punish the disbelievers with what they deserve will come true.

These last words are a source of comfort for those whom Allah *Glorified is He* addresses in the beginning of the verse saying, '...Do the believers not realise?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31) Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* does not break His promise so He

concludes this verse by saying, 'Allah never fails to keep His promise.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31) We know that the word *wa'id* (promise), generally refers to a latent good, while *wa'id* (threat) often connotes an evil that will take place.

A poet once said:

And when I give my word to cause him hardship or promise him something good,

I certainly fulfil my word and break my promise!

Thus, the threat always denotes something evil, while the promise refers to something that is good. Nevertheless, some Arabs use the two words interchangeably. Or again, we could say that the believers understand this verse to mean that Allah *Glorified is He* will grant them victory through the calamity which will befall the disbelievers. This calamity might also alight around their homes. Through this promise, Allah *Glorified is He* encourages the believers to be more patient while at the same time conveying ominous tidings to the disbelievers.

Allah's words, 'Allah never fails to keep His promise.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31), is a Quranic fact that will certainly be realised, regardless of the age or epoch, on the condition that Muslims adhere to the stipulations of their faith. This matter differs from the auspicious or dreadful promises made by man. After all, an individual can either make a promise, or threaten someone else, but the vicissitudes of life, and its ups and downs may prevent him from fulfilling his promise or carrying out his threat. On the contrary, a promise made by Allah *Glorified is He* is different, since His promise is an absolute one. This is precisely the meaning of, 'Allah never fails to keep His promise.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31).

Afterwards, Allah Glorified is He says:

وَلَقَدِ ٱسْتُهْزِئَ بِرُسُلٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَأَمْلَيْتُ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ثُمَّ أَخَذَتُهُمْ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عِقَابِ ٢

Many messengers before you [Muhammad] were mocked, but I granted respite to the disbelievers: in the end, I took them to task – how terrible My punishment was! [32] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 32)

One can say, 'He derided so-and-so'. As for, 'He mocked so-and-so', this denotes that someone asked someone else to deride a certain person. This

individual bears not only his sins, but also those of the person who asked him to disparage a certain person.

Allah's words, 'Many messengers before you [Muhammad] were mocked...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 32) mean that it is not something new that some disbelievers adopt such attitude towards you. Consider for example Al-Hakam ibn Abu Al-`As, the father of Marawan,<sup>(1)</sup> who used to mock the gait of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who used to walk as if he were descending from a high place,<sup>(2)</sup> with his eyes always pointed to the ground. People were unaccustomed to this humble bearing, for they would saunter about arrogantly displaying their physique.

Once, when Al-Hakam imitated Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the latter perceived him through the eye of the insight and He said, 'Remain as such.'<sup>(3)</sup> As of that day, Al-Hakam's gait became disfigured while that of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* continued to reflect his serenity in Allah *Glorified is He* and personal humility.

Moreover, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* banished Al-Hakam to At-Ta`if where he herded goats.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did waive this punishment; neither did Abu Bakr<sup>(4)</sup> nor `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah *be pleased with them* 

<sup>(1)</sup> He embraced Islam on the day Mecca was conquered, and he lived in Medina. He was banished by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to At-Ta`if but was brought back to Medina during the Caliphate of 'Uthman. He died on the 32 nd year after the *Hijra*. (*al-Isaba fi tamyiz as-Sahaba* 2: 28, 29).

<sup>(2)</sup> It is narrated that 'Ali said, 'When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* walked, it appeared that he was descending from a high place.' Ali says, 'I did not see anyone like him *neither before him, nor after him.'* [Narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/96, 116) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3637) who deemed this Hadith to be good and sound].

<sup>(3)</sup> Consult (al-Isaba fi tamyiz As-Sahaba) (2:28, 29). Al-'Asqalani related the Hadith of 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr who said, 'Al-Hakm ibn Abu Al-'As would sit near the Prophet, and when the latter spoke Al-Hakam would make a mocking gesture, and when the Prophet noticed him he said, 'remain as such.' And thus, he remained until his death.' Al-'Asqalani said: 'the chain of transmission is open to debate.'

<sup>(4)</sup> At-Tabarani relates in a Hadith of Hudhayfa: 'When Abu Bakr assumed political leadership, he was asked to permit Al-Hakam to return to Medina. The latter replied: 'I am not one to undo a knot that was tied by the Messenger of Allah.' Cited by Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani in (Al-Isaba) (2:28).

during their caliphate. However, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan pardoned him, for he was one of his relatives.<sup>(1)</sup>

'Uthman ibn 'Affan swore, 'By Allah, I asked permission from Messenger Muhammad to pardon him, and he responded: 'if one day you have the power to pardon him, then do so.' So when I became ruler over the Muslims, I pardoned him.

Years later, 'Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan assumed leadership of the Muslims, and he had a son, Al-Walid, whose horses would compete against those of Yazid ibn Mu'awiya's sons. One day, the sons of Yazid tried to win this competition by cheating, so they placed an object which hindered the horse of Al-Walid.

Soon, a quarrel broke out among the two parties, and Al-Walid insulted the sons of Yazid. Thereupon, the sons of Yazid went to 'Abd Al-Malik to complain about his son's offenses. However, the speaker who was complaining often made grammatical errors when speaking in Arabic. 'Abd Al-Malik said to him, 'Why does your tongue not articulate correctly?' The complainer replied sarcastically: 'By Allah, I am fond of the eloquence of Al-Walid.' By this he meant that the tongue of the son of 'Abd Al-Malik is no less articulate than that of the plaintiff, for both spoke falteringly and often made grammatical mistakes.

`Abd Al-Malik retorted, 'Do you dare insult me by mocking my son 'Abdullah who cannot speak without making grammatical mistakes? Lo! His brother Khalid is articulate.' He continued, 'Be silent, for you were not part of the caravan or of the troop!'

This is an expression – that we continue to use – which was passed down to us through the tribe of Quraysh, for it was governed by two sources of power: firstly, the caravans which refer to the trades carried out through the caravans which were coming from the Levant and were led by Abu Sufyan. Secondly, the troop which refers to the group of people who set out to save Abu Sufyan at Badr, and who were led by `Utba. So the son of Yazid said, 'And who has more right to claim the caravan and troop than me?' By this he meant that he was the grandson of Abu Sufyan through his father, and of `Utba from his mother.

<sup>(1)</sup> In (Al-Isaba) (2:28), Ibn Hajar related that he was the uncle of `Uthman ibn `Affan.

Then he added, 'But perhaps you had better speak about the disgraces, the little flocks of goats and At-Ta'if. May Allah have mercy upon 'Uthman who exonerated your grandfather and brought him back from exile.'

Moreover, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* has told Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'We are enough for you against all those who ridicule your message.' (*al-Hijr:* 95) It is as if a divine punishment befell any person who derides Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Many messengers before you [Muhammad] were mocked, but I granted respite to the disbelievers: in the end, I took them to task—how terrible My Punishment was!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 32)

For you, Messenger Muhammad, are not the first one to be sent with a message and you have an exemplary model in the messengers sent before you. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* promises you: '...but I granted respite to the disbelievers...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 32). In other words: Allah *Glorified is He* has given rein to the disbelievers. Let it be stressed that what is meant here is not that sins of the disbelievers are left unpunished; rather, what is meant is that the punishment is put off to a later time so that they commit more sins. For example, you may overlook a person's transgressions two or three times, but then you punish him at an unexpected moment.

If such types of reprisals occur among human beings, what are we to say of the boundless power of Allah *Glorified is He* Who says, 'But We lead on those who reject Our messages, step by step, without them realising it' (*al-A'raf:* 182). Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'The disbelievers should not think that it is better for them that We give them more time: when We give them more time they become more sinful— a shameful torment awaits them.' (*Al-'Imran:* 178) This is precisely analogous to someone who sets a trap for his enemy into which to fall. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Many messengers before you [Muhammad] were mocked, but I granted respite to the disbelievers: in the end, I took them to task—how terrible my punishment was!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 32) The expression 'How terrible my punishment was!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 32) puts in plain words that it is a tremendous retribution; that is why Allah *Glorified is He* elsewhere in the Quran says: 'The wicked used to laugh at the believers —

they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them, joke about them when they got back to their own people, and say, when they saw them, "These people are misguided," though they were not sent to be their keepers –so today the Believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36) Thus, those who mock the messengers will be severely punished.

Afterwards, Allah Glorified is He says:

أَفَمَنْ هُوَ قَابِهُمْ عَلَى كُلِّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ وَجَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ شُرَكَاءَ قُلْ سَمُوهُمْ أَمْ تُنَبِّعُونَهُ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ فِ ٱلْأَرْضِ أَم بِظَنِهِرٍ مِّنَ ٱلْقَوْلِ بَلْ زُبِّنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مَكْرُهُمْ وَصُدْ أُواْ عَنِ ٱلسَّبِيلُ وَمَن يُضَلِل ٱللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ (٣)

Is He who stands over every soul marking its action [in need of any partner]? Yet they ascribe partners to God. Say, 'Name them,' or, 'Can you tell Him about something on the earth He does not know to exist, or is this just a display of words?' But the things they devise are made alluring to the disbelievers and they are barred from the [right] path: no one can guide those God leaves to stray [33] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 33)

Someone might ask, 'Since Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Is He who stands over every soul marking its action...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 33) should He not cite the opposing possibility, namely, is He like he who does not stand over every soul marking its action'?

We answer this inquirer as follows: one of the glories of the Quran is that it gives space, when possible, for the mind to infer meanings according to its own capacity.

Thus, He puts forth statements which call for reflection, deduction, and research, so that man may be conscious of the fact that he is in the presence of the words of his Wise Lord. That is why 'Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* says, 'Plumb the depths of the Quran.' Or again: examine it closely so as to extract its inner treasures.

We know that the expression 'to stand for something' implies that Allah *Glorified is He* has authority and control over all things, and that He is aware of all concealed objects. Note that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the imagery of 'standing' in this expression, so that we know that He does not passively manage the affairs. Rather, we insist, He watches over things actively, and for Him all things are clear rather than hidden. Moreover, He stands over every soul marking its action, whether it be good or bad. However, you idolaters can neither cause harm nor benefit to your own souls without Allah's permission. Thus, could a sane person possibly equate He Who watches over every soul with any existent that does not?

Despite the arguments that we have put forth, there are those that are described by Allah *Glorified is He* in this verse above as, 'Yet they ascribe partners to Allah.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 33) In other words: they have associated partners – who do not even have control over themselves, and therefore do not have any authority over others – unto He Who stands for every soul. Moreover, one of these idols may even crack, and its worshippers exclaim that their deity has fissured and needs nails to be fixed! So how could they possibly equate this idol with Allah *Glorified is He* the Infinite, Whose Power is unlimited?

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Yet they ascribe partners to Allah.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 33), this proves that the implicit text of this verse goes as follows: 'Is He equal to the one who does not stand over every soul'? Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is unlike these impotent idols, for He oversees every soul: yours, that of others and of every human who has lived or will come to be.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* follows this sentence by stating: 'Say, "Name them," or, "Can you tell Him about something on the earth He does not know to exist, or is this just a display of words?"" (*ar-Ra'd:* 33) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* commands Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask those who disbelieve in Allah, 'Cite the names of those whom you worship aside from Allah'. These deities are mere rocks, and rocks do not have any specific names. However, they have given names, such as Al-Lat, Al-`Uzza and Hubal to their deities; names which do not add any power unto these idols. After all, these rocks have no power whatsoever. And had they named the idols themselves, they would have attributed them to `Amr ibn

Luhay who brought them to Quraysh in the first place.<sup>(1)</sup> However, the names were given to these idols when they were carved.

A true deity is not named by anyone save Himself. However, since the idol worshipers are clearly lying, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asks them to name their deities. He asks them, 'Will you inform Allah, the Creator of universe, of something which He is unaware of in His universe, which He has created from nothing'?

Allah *Glorified is He* knows everything that He has created, whereas you worship mere idols whose names are just a display of words. That is, the names of your idols are meaningless, for they gave names to things which had neither inner reality nor power. The idol worshipers are content with mere exterior objects, while the named is non-existent.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But the things they devise are made alluring to the disbelievers and they are barred from the [right] Path.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 33) In other words, they thought that they were deceiving Allah *Glorified is He* and they claimed that their idols were deities. However, the statues were far from being so.

Allah *Glorified is He* then states, 'No one can guide those Allah leaves to stray.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 33) In other words, the punishment which they suffer from in this worldly life is a means of protecting society from corruption. Moreover, they must be punished in this world, for he whose punishment is delayed until the Hereafter necessarily experiences a foretaste of the punishment which will befall him in the Hereafter. Thus, the punishment of this world serves to protect the movement of this life. This explains the laws set to be applied to wrongdoers. Additionally, those who commit criminal acts are afraid of being

<sup>(1)</sup> Ibn Hisham said in (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya) (1/77): 'Some erudite men related to me that 'Amr Ibn Luhay left Mecca for the Levant to carry out some of his affairs. There, he saw the 'Amaleeq worshiping idols and asked them, "What are these idols that I see you worshiping?" They responded, "These are idols which we worship. We pray to them for rain and so we receive rain, and we pray to them for victory and we are granted victory." He said, "Will you offer me one of them that I may bring it to the land of the Arabs so that they may worship it?" So they gave him a statue called Hubal, which he brought to Mecca where he erected it and ordered the people to worship it and glorify it.'

witnessed in action. If someone were to spot the criminal in action, he would report him to the police. By this way, the wrongdoer is punished for his crime. Accordingly, justice is maintained in this life.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter *of al-Kahf*, '[Prophet], they ask you about Dhu Al Qarnayn. Say, "I will tell you something about him." We established his power in the land, and gave him the means to achieve everything. He travelled on a certain road; then, when he came to the setting of the sun, he found it [seemed to be] setting into a muddy spring. Nearby he found some people and we said, "Dhu Al-Qarnayn, you may choose [which of them] to punish or show kindness to." He answered, "We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their Lord He will punish them [even more] severely."" (*al-Kahf*: 83-87) In other words, he has been entrusted to rule over these people, and he exercised his authority on the basis of reward and punishment. He who did good deeds will receive a goodly recompense, while he who misbehaves will be castigated. Thus, we understand that worldly punishment is necessary for maintaining a balance in life and for protecting society from the oppression of those who do not believe in Allah *Glorified is He*.

That is why Allah says:

لَمُّمْ عَذَابٌ فِي ٱلْحَيَوةِ ٱلدُّنِّياً وَلَعَذَابُ ٱلْآخِرَةِ أَشَقُّ وَمَا لَهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَاقِ 🖤

# There is a punishment for them in this world, but the punishment of the Hereafter will be harder – no one will defend them against God [34] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 34)

These idolaters who do not believe in the Hereafter are punished in the life of this world by killing, captivity, calamities and overwhelming disasters. Moreover, their punishment in the Hereafter is even more severe than that of this world. This is because they have no one to protect them or to stand between them and Allah's punishment.

In contrast to the fate of the disbelievers, Allah Glorified is He says:

مَّثَلُ ٱلْجَنَّةِ ٱلَّتِي وُعِدَ ٱلْمُتَّقُونَ تَجَرِي مِن تَعَنِّهَا ٱلْآنَهُ أَ أَحُكُهَا دَآبِعُ وَظِلُهَا تِلْكَ عُقَى ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوْأُ وَعُقَى ٱلْكَفِرِينَ ٱلنَّارُ ()

Here is a picture of the Garden that those mindful of God have been promised: flowing streams and perpetual food and shade. This is the reward that awaits those who are mindful of God; the disbelievers' reward is the Fire [35] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 35)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* is the primary source Who promises those who are mindful of Him to be rewarded with the paradise. Moreover, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* related this promise which in turn was passed on by the religious scholars who convey the teachings of the messengers.

Now when you notice that an action is performed by many doers, you can search for the primary one. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah takes the souls of the dead...' (*az-Zumar:* 42). In a different verse of the Quran, He says, 'Say, "The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you..." (*as-Sajda:* 11). Thus the act of taking the souls is ultimately attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* and to the Angel of Death. Specifically, the task of taking lives has been assigned to the Angel of Death by Allah *Glorified is He*. So, attributing this task to the former clearly demonstrates to whom Allah *Glorified is He* has assigned this task.

In certain instances, Allah *Glorified is He* specifies the original source of the command ordering the angel to perform his function of taking life.

In this noble verse, we note that Allah *Glorified is He* states, '...those mindful of Allah have been promised...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 35). This clause is in the passive voice in which the subject is not mentioned. Now we know that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also made promises. Consider, for instance, the account of the allegiance of *Al-'Aqaba* when he accepted the allegiance of *Al-'Ansar*. They told him, 'Claim whatever you wish for yourself,' and so he made his claims. Then they asked, 'And what do we have in return for this?' He replied, 'You shall have Paradise as a reward'<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1) [</sup>Narrated by Ahmad]

Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him made this promise because he knew well that the action that they performed could only be adequately recompensed by paradise. It was conceivable that anyone present at Al-'Aqaba was putting his life at risk after pledging allegiance to Messenger Muhammad *peace* and *blessings* be upon him. Had he assured them a worldly pleasure, to be allotted in the future, the one destined to die before the realization of the recompense must benefit in some way from his promise. That is why he promised them to be rewarded with that which never runs out: Paradise. In the verse which we are examining, Allah Glorified is He says, 'Here is a picture of the Garden...' (ar-Ra'd: 35). In other words, He is only drawing a parable because the expressions that we use to communicate correspond to certain meanings that we know beforehand. However, if there are bounties in the Paradise which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has perceived, we do not have any words to express these bounties. That is why Allah Glorified is He draws parables, making use of worldly pleasures that we perceive, while excluding the irritating or repelling factors from these pleasures.<sup>(1)</sup>

Thus, we know that there is a distinction between 'the parable of Paradise' and 'Paradise'. A parable is that which provides me with a description of a reality that I do not grasp. One might define drawing a parable as the act of describing an unknown entity with one that is known so as to attain an adequate conceptualization of the former. For example, when you tell a friend, 'Do you know so-and-so'? 'No', responds the friend. So you say, 'He is similar to so-and-so that you know'. You use parables to point out similitude between an unknown and a known entity, thus bringing an image to the mind of the listener.

Messenger, Muhammad explained the following Quranic verse, '... [in the Paradise] all that their souls desire and their eyes delight in.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 71) He added, 'Therein there are bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard

<sup>(1)</sup> Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure...' (*Muhammad*: 15). In another verse, He says, 'A drink will be passed round among them from a flowing spring: white, delicious to those who taste it, causing no headiness or intoxication.' (*as-Saffat*: 45-47)

and no human heart has perceived.<sup>(1)</sup> Upon contemplation of these noble prophetic words, you will realise that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentions the pleasures in an elevating order. The clause 'That which no ear has heard' was inserted, because he knows well that images perceived by the eye are limited in comparison to the sounds perceived by the ear. After all, the ear detects that which the eye does not perceive. It hears that which others see in addition to what you see. To explain further, the ear hears the close and distant phenomena, conveying their sounds and discerning between their various sources. However, the eye is more limited than the ear because of the distance of its perception is proportional to the power of one's eyesight. In sum, the blessings of the paradise surpass all the above.

Finally, the loftiest manner in describing paradise comes through his words, 'And what no human heart has perceived.' The word 'thoughts' encompasses more than what the ear and eye can perceive. Indeed, the thoughts can be things which do not exist in reality. Thus, we apprehend the incapacity of language to express the delights of paradise. No one of us has directly witnessed the blessings of paradise. Therefore, as long as none of us has seen paradise, and as long as Prophet Muhammad said, 'Therein lie bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has perceived', then we must be aware of the limitations of language in expressing the wonders of paradise. When Allah Glorified is He wants to describe such things, he employs parables rather than direct descriptions. This is because He knows that our language expresses things of this world and lacks the words to depict the pleasures of paradise. That is why Allah Glorified is He states, 'Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure...' (Muhammad: 15).

Although Allah *Glorified is He* presents an example, He clears it of all earthly impurities we know. Flowing water, for example, is generally fresh and pure, but when it stills, it quickly alters and degenerates. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that waters of Heaven never alter and that the paradisiacal rivers are free from all corrupting agents. Similarly, the taste of

<sup>(1) [</sup>Narrated by Muslim]

the rivers of milk never changes. Milk, as we know is the staple of Bedouins. They milk their cattle and store its yield in canteens for long periods. This causes the taste of their milk to change. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* presents the example of rivers of milk whose taste never alters.

The parable of purified honey is also noted in this verse. Honey, as we know, was originally produced by bees dwelling in mountains before being cultivated in bee farms. Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'And your Lord revealed to the bee saying: "Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build" (*an-Nahl:* 68). When entomologists studied the early developmental stages of bees, they found that bees dwelling in mountain caves first made honey. Bees after being acclimatized and kept in beehives and apiaries then produced honey. Moreover, the entomologists identified the type of honey by burning the different types and the carbon released identified the dating of each type of honey. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that there are rivers of purified honey in paradise and thereby, offers us the best of honey without its undesirable elements.

Moreover, Allah asserts that there are rivers of wine. However, heavenly wine differs from that of this world, as it does not affect the lucidity of the mind. The wine of this world is not tasteful to those who drink as it contains alcohol that stings and burns the mouth. That is why you notice that those who drink it swallow it quickly not to feel its sting in their mouths and to let it travel directly to the stomach causing irritation. Unlike beverages such as mango, orange or sugarcane juice, which the soul finds them tasteful and those who drink them do so slowly to enjoy its taste in their mouths. Allah *Glorified is He* states that wine rivers of Paradise have no bad effects (*as-Saffat:* 47). This means that Allah took all the offensive elements which are found in the worldly wine.

Therefore, when you hear the description of paradise, know that it is merely an approximate depiction since it is impossible to portray the delights of Paradise, as we have no words that can express it. It is completely unknown to us. Allah only addresses us using words that we know, thereby, He gives us some examples to get an approximate idea of paradise. Speaking about the rivers of paradise, we know that water was the lifeblood of Arabs during the time of revelation of the Quran. Did they not ask the Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him* to make rivers gush forth aplenty (*Maryam:* 90-91)? We find that Allah *Glorified is He* uses to different expressions regarding the rivers of Paradise in the Quran. The first expression is *tajri min tahtihal anhar* which is cited in the verse we are studying (*ar-Ra'd:* 35). In a different expression, Allah says, *tajri tahtahal anhar* without using the preposition *min.* The difference between these two phrases implies the abundance and perfection of water in Paradise. This means that the expression *tajri min tahtihal anhar* clarifies that the sources of these rivers are directly below Paradise and so the waters never dry up.

It is said that the difference between the rivers of this world and those of Paradise is that those existed on earth flow in furrows with banks preventing the ordinary rivers from overflowing. In contrast, rivers of Heaven flow freely without banks preventing them from overflowing. In addition, you find flowing rivers of wine running on the surface of Paradise without being mixed with the flowing rivers of water or milk. All these marvels are the creation of Allah, the Wise and fully Capable.

As for the second expression which is *tajri tahtahal anhar*, it means that their sources are not directly situated underneath; rather, they gush forth in abundance from a place that is unknown to you. After all, Allah is Capable of everything.

Allah goes on His description of the Garden saying that its fruits are perpetual. The Arabic word *al-ukul* which is translated as fruits, literally refers to that which is eatable. Allah says, 'Yielding its fruit in every season by the permission of its Lord.' (*Ibrahim:* 25) In other words, Heaven never runs out of food. We know that man eats with an eye to satisfying his hunger. Once satisfied, he might demand for the food that is in front of him to be taken away until, once more, he feels hungry again. Those who love eating might comment saying that they feel a bit angry because they got full. Such people are fighting between a craving ego and an unquenchable stomach. It is as though they wish to consume food without ceasing.

When Allah *Glorified is He* proclaims that the fruits therein are everlasting, it caught the attention of the Byzantines who were rulers of a great empire

that was brought to its feet by the nascent Islamic civilization. The Byzantine emperor sent an envoy asking for a representative of Islam who could explain the verse where Allah says its food is perpetual (ar-Ra'd: 35). A Muslim scholar was sent to the inquiring Byzantines and was asked, 'Your Quran claims that the fruits of Paradise will be everlasting, while we both, the Muslims and the Byzantines, know that when you take something from any mass, it must decrease in quantity. How is the fruit of Paradise everlasting?' The scholar responded, 'Fetch me a lamp.' They fetched him a lamp, which he lit in front of them and asked each of them to bring his lamp. When they did, the scholar ordered each to light their lamps using the flame from the first lamp. At this point, he asked them, 'Did the act of lighting your lamps attenuate my flame?' They responded negatively. 'Thus, Allah presents the example of the everlasting fruits of Paradise,' responded the scholar. Obviously, they should have realised that the lamp's flame draws its strength from the oil stored therein. Thus, the lamp is sustained by the oil, whereas Paradise is sustained by Allah.

Once, someone asked if we defecate in paradise. Another scholar responded, 'No, we do not.' The inquirer continued, 'so what happens to the remnants of the food that we eat in Paradise?' The scholar said, 'the remnants of paradisiacal food are similar to the remnants of the nutrients that are consumed by a baby in its mother's womb, which are burned in the placenta. A baby is in the womb of its mother is constantly growing depending on nutrients from the mother which are transferred through the umbilical cord.

All these analogies are mere approximate reflections of paradise. They help us close the gap between what we know in our daily lives and that which Allah has prepared for those who are conscious of Him. Indeed, He is the Sustainer of all things. Now, Allah goes on saying that the shade of Paradise is perpetuating as well (*ar-Ra'd:* 35). This means that food and shade are both available and everlasting. To shade is to keep a source of light from reaching a place or to hide a place from direct contact with the source of light. Clearly, no one knows whether there will be a sun in Paradise or not since the human mind is incapable of imagining such a heavenly sphere. After all, it is one of the creations of Allah and He is the Capable of everything.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'As for those who disbelieve in Our communications, We shall make them enter fire; so oft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the chastisement; surely Allah is Mighty, Wise.' (*an-Nisa*': 57) Moreover, Allah says, 'And extended shade' (*al-Waqi'a*: 30).

Allah goes on saying, this is the requital of those who guarded [against evil], and the requital of the unbelievers is the fire.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 35) This calls for those who fear Allah, shelter themselves from the Divine Attributes of Majesty, do not come close to the things, which Allah has proscribed and you follow His Path. You will find that Allah will recompense you with His Attributes of Divine Perfection and Beauty by giving you abode into the Garden, which He had promised you. Thus, if you find that your religious duties are taxing, know that the reward of your efforts is a most beautiful one. You believed your Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said, 'Paradise is surrounded by hardships and the Hell-Fire is surrounded by temptations.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Rational people, on seeing a religious duty limiting their freedom, bear in mind the reward of their efforts. Similarly, when they notice something that appears, at first glance, to be an urgent desire, they bear in mind the punishment that such a passionate desire will provoke and stay clear from it. In addition, either the reward hereafter or it the punishment can take place abruptly for death knows no rendezvous. We believe the words of our Prophet when he says, 'Death is resurrection, so he who dies, his resurrection starts.'<sup>(2)</sup>

This way, Allah *Glorified is He* aggrandises the reward of the Allah-fearing believer such that he yearns to perform righteous deeds and endures the hardship of his duties to be rewarded the best of rewards. This prize of the Hereafter is the ultimate compensation for the good deeds preformed in the worldly life. The ultimate goal of existence is to reach a goal that has no subsequent and the goal of eternal life has no subsequent. Since paradise

<sup>(1)</sup> Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi.

<sup>(2)</sup> Cited by Al-'Ajluni in (Kashf Al-khafa) (Hadith number 2617) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik. The Hadith continues as follows: 'Remember death frequently, for if you remember it in a state of wealth, it will disturb your transient peace of mind, and if you remember it in a state of deprivation, recalling it will relieve you.'

guarantees eternity, it is therefore, worthy of being the goal of a believer and the recompense for both his righteous deeds and conformity to the duties of faith exactly as the hellfire is the end of the disbelievers and deniers of truth. They witness the goodly recompense of the believers and their own dreadful fate. This scene is a double torment, for they witness the reward of the people of faith and the punishment that is their due. That is why Allah says, 'and the requital of the disbelievers is the fire.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 35)

Then Allah Glorified is He says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيْنَهُمُ ٱلْكِتَبَ يَفْرَحُونَ بِمَا أَنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنَ ٱلْأَحْزَابِ مَن يُنكِرُ بَعْضَهُ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أُمِرْتُ أَنَ أَعْبُدَ ٱللَّهَ وَلَا أَشْرِكَ بِهِ إِلَيْهِ أَدْعُوا وَإِلَيْهِ مَنَابِ ٣

## Those to whom We sent the Scripture rejoice in what has been revealed to you [Prophet]; some factions deny parts of it. Say, 'I am commanded to worship God, and not join anything with Him in worship: to Him I call [others] and to Him I shall return' [36] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 36)

We know that Islam was preceded by two religions which are Christianity, the religion of the Christians who are the followers of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and before it was Judaism, the religion of the Jews who are the followers of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Moreover, each of these two religions is endowed with a Holy Book. The Gospel is the Scripture of Christianity and the Torah is the Scripture of Judaism. Furthermore, the Quran is the guardian and seal of the scriptures. It is the scripture of Islam. There are also other Holy Books such as the Scripture of Ibrahim (Abraham), the Psalms of Dawud (David) *peace be upon them*, and so forth.

The recipients of the Torah and the Gospels should have maintained their belief in the grace of heaven and the blessings emanating thereof. Moreover, Allah had previously accepted the solemn pledge of their prophets concerning this as Allah says, 'And when Allah made a covenant through the prophets: Certainly, what I have given you of Book and wisdom-- then a messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you must believe in him, and you must aid him. He said, "Do you affirm and accept My compact in this [matter]?" They said, "We do affirm." He said, "Then bear witness, and I [too] am of the bearers of witness with you." (*Al- Imran:* 81)

Thus, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* willed that each previous religion should receive the next one by believing in it. Moreover, the Holy Scriptures of each religion insist upon the necessity of accepting the forthcoming messenger so that no struggle between the abrogating and abrogated religions ensues. Therefore, anticipating a future revelation is in the very nature of every religion. In addition, when the new religion comes, it is wholly accepted and not seen as opposing the previous one.

Since the religion of Islam marks the end of the long line of messengers, then the previous revelations most certainly anticipated its advent and commanded every follower of the previous revelations to adhere to it. Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Nuh and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Ibrahim and Musa and 'Isa that keep to obedience and be not divided therein.' (*ash-Shura:* 13)

Here in this verse, Allah proclaims that the People of the Torah and of the Gospels rejoice in the Quran, which you have received. One only celebrates something when it causes the achievement of something delightful, which is necessarily pervasive and famous. They rejoiced in what was revealed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* because it confirmed the prophecies foretold in their Scriptures. This means that their Holy Books were true and subsequently that the messenger of the final revelation spoke the truth, thus, they should have been first in hastening to recognize him. After all, happiness is a demonstration or a means of expressing the ecstasies of love, and one rejoices upon the fulfilment of an anticipated blessing.

It is for these reasons that they should have hastened to embrace the new religion and declared their conversion to Islam as did Ka'b Al-Ahbar, 'Abdullah ibn Salam and Salman Al-Farisi, who wandered long distances searching for the true religion. Those mentioned above are just a few examples of the people who desired to express rejoice and acceptance of the blessing of the coming of the final Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. They pledged their allegiance to the new Messenger as foretold in the previous Scriptures. They

declared their enmity to those who did not celebrate the new Messenger and who subsequently altered their Holy Books out of greed for worldly influence.

Moreover, those who embraced the religion of the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* knew well that the deniers of the prophecy of Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him* had cheated themselves and deceived others. They knew that they produced passages which were not part of the original revealed scriptures to their messengers, such as proclaiming that Allah has sons, exalted and beyond such false claims is He.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And those to whom We have given the Book rejoice in that which has been revealed to you, and of the confederates are some who deny a part of it. Say, "I am only commanded that I should serve Allah and not associate anything with Him, to Him do I invite [you] and to Him is my return."" (*ar-Ra'd:* 36)

Such is the impartiality of the Quran. It does not reject the previous Holy Books as such: rather, the Quran rejects the falsification of the creeds. It also stands against the stance of those who distorted it and falsely alleged that Allah had sons. The corruption of the texts of Old and New Testaments did not cause the Quran to reject the Holy Scriptures totally; only the falsified passages were rejected. Thus, the Quran confirmed that which belongs to Allah and to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and denied the falsifications introduced by people who sought worldly power, claimed sanctity, traded in forgiveness, sold paradise, heard to peoples' confessions and other things which were not originally part of a Holy Book.

When Islam came to forbid these scriptural forgeries, they fought for the power with which they traded in things, which are foreign to religion. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* orders the Prophet to say, 'Say, I am only commanded that I should serve Allah and not associate anything with Him.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 36) This testifies that the forgers of the previous Holy Scriptures and those who deny the Oneness of Allah were addressed by the Quran in an incontrovertible manner. In other words, The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is asserting that there is a religion that was chosen by a divine Mentor and that He did not choose an object of worship based on personal

proclivities. He is, rather, a divinely sent Messenger, who is honoured to affiliate himself with the command which was revealed to him from heaven and not to associate partners unto Allah.

We notice that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would get furious regarding that which is Allah due, but He is indulgent on personal matters. That is why the Prophet was not riled when certain heretics proclaimed that they believed in Allah, Heaven, revelation, and all things pertaining to religion except Him. Clearly, had he been involved on a personal or egoistic level, he would have been infuriated. This is proved by the supportive sentiment expressed by Him for the Byzantines, who were believers in a divinely revealed Scripture, when they countered the Persian polytheists, who did not accept any religion from Heaven. He was saddened by the defeat of the Byzantines and so the verse of Allah Glorified is He was revealed, as a consolation, foretelling a victory of the Byzantines within a few years: 'Alif Lam Mim. The Romans are vanguished, in a near land, and they, after being vanguished, shall overcome, within a few years. Allah's is the command before and after; and on that day the believers shall rejoice, with the help of Allah; He helps whom He pleases; and He is the Mighty, the Merciful.' (ar-Rum: 1-5) The latter were dearer to the heart of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him than other factions. That is because they were followers of a divinely revealed faith. Therefore, he wished victory for them on hearing that they were threatened by an evil one. Moreover, Allah gave him good news of their victory within a few years. For the victorious Byzantines carry the scent of righteousness even though they did not believe in the Messenger of Allah.

When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said that he had been commanded to worship Allah and not associate anything with Him, it means that he shall worship Allah alone, without compromise and that He shall call others to worship Him alone. After all, the Prophet knew very well that he and every person shall return unto the Lord. None can escape his Lord and Creator and each person must therefore, prepare for this ultimate encounter.

Allah then says:

وَكَذَلِكَ أَنزَلْنَهُ خُكْمًا عَرَبِيًّا وَلَبِنِ ٱنَّبَعْتَ أَهُوَاءَهُم بَعْدَمَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَلِيّ وَلَا وَاقِ ٢

## So We have sent down the Quran to give judgment in the Arabic language. If you were to follow their desires, after the knowledge that has come to you, you would have no one to guard you or protect you from God [37] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 37)

Allah *Glorified is He* alludes to sending forth of the previous messengers with miracles willed only by Him, through using the word thus at the beginning of the verse. In other words, as we have sent previous prophets with miracles, thus, we send you O Muhammad as well. When we hear the expression *anzal nahu*, (We revealed it), we know that there is an elevated place from which something descends to a lower level. This theme is commonplace in both physical phenomena and metaphorical speech. In fact, there might be something existing on earth and have not reached the sky, but Allah still uses the word reveal as the case of iron (*al-Hadid:* 25). This is a revelation because Heaven originally determines it even though it belongs to the earthly realm.

The Arabic word *al-hukm* (true judgement) refers to the meaning and content of the Quran. The act of revelation in this context refers to the Quran which is a Book and it comprises both form and content. Allah chose to portray the Quran using hyperbole so that the description represents the Quran itself. In other terms, He revealed the Quran as a true judgement and this means that the Quran itself is a true judgement. To elaborate on this point further, in Arabic, when you describe a judge, who is impartial, you would say he is *`adl* (just). In other words, it is as if the judge were the very embodiment of justice or that every aspect of his is fairness. Here, Allah is stating that the Quran is the just and true in judgement (*ar-Ra'd:* 37).

Allah says that the Quran is in Arabic because the tongue with which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* addresses people listening to what he says must articulate in the Arabic language. That is why Allah says in a different verse, 'And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people, and you shall soon be questioned.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44) In other words, the fact the Quran was revealed in the tongue of the Arabs is a great honour for you and

for your people. The Quran has preserved Arabic in its pristine and refined state. Other languages of the world, however, splintered, at first, into dialects and each established as independent languages afterwards. Consider Latin, for example. Most European languages were driven from it including English, French, and Italian. Each of these developed as an autonomous language with its own rules. In fact, English has branched off into British English, which is spoken by the British and Americans.

If we Arab Muslims were to communicate by means of our different dialects, we would fail to understand each other. Thus, we refer to classical Arabic when we wish to communicate with each other. What happens in the lands of North Africa? One finds a person raised speaking French or speaking a language that gathers different dialects and languages including Berber, French and vestiges of classical Arabic. When you speak to a North African in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, he does not understand. Nevertheless, he can converse with you in classical Arabic since he has a natural receptivity for the language.

Thus, we have seen how the Noble Quran preserved the Arabic language and the Arab tongue. Therefore, among the meanings implied by the statement of Allah: 'And thus have We revealed it, a true judgment in Arabic' is that the Noble Quran preserves the Arabic tongue. Allah continues saying, 'and if you follow their low desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you shall not have against Allah any guardian or a protector.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 37) That is a speech addressed by Allah to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* reveals to the Prophet the harms and dangers of following desires. Furthermore, this verse points to the fact that the religions that were revealed to Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*, which preceded the Messenger of Allah, are no longer in their original states. They were tainted by desires and were no longer preserved in the original form in which they were revealed from Allah.

That is why Allah says in another verse that if the truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens and the earth would have been ruined (*al-Mu'minun:* 71). In other words, were Allah to abide by their passions, the order of the universe would surely have fallen into ruin. Did they not ask the Messenger of Allah to, 'cause the skies to fall down upon them fragments' (*al-Isra':* 92)? Had Allah responded to such requests; would the heavens not fall into ruin?

Thus, having been revealed from Allah as a true judgement, knowledge and an easy-to-understand way of life since it is in their language, as well as, it contains the right way of life until the Day of Resurrection and a way to access true happiness in this life and the Hereafter, no one should follow his inclinations as desires and inclinations differ from one person to another.

The speech is addressed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* however, it is addressed to his *ummah* implicitly. Furthermore, he who follows his own caprices shall not have Allah as his Supporter, Grantor of victory or Protector from His retribution that is represented in torment in this world and hellfire in the next.

Allah Glorified is He goes on saying:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لَمُمُ أَزْوَجًا وَذُرِّيَّةً وَمَاكَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَن يَأْتِيَ بِحَايَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ لِكُلِّ أَجَلٍ كِتَابٌ (٣)

## We sent messengers before you and gave them wives and offspring; no messenger was given the power to produce a miracle except with God's permission. There was a Scripture for every age [38] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 38)

O Muhammad, you are no exception with regard to having wives and offspring. This verse is a refutation of those who wondered how the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ate and walked in the markets (*al-Furqan:* 7). There are also those who asked, 'Why does the Messenger marry women? Is it not more befitting of him to dedicate himself wholly to spreading his faith'? People of such claims did not take account of the previous messengers. Had they done so, they would have found that most of them married and bore children.

Moreover, when the life of the messenger is closer to the lives of his followers, he thereby, becomes a role model to be emulated. After all, an exemplar is one who displays traits that can be imitated. So, when the life of a messenger resembles that of any other human in its general features, such as carrying out the function of father or husband, then the paradigm becomes manifest for his followers. We know that there were people who went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* asking for permission to

dedicate themselves wholly to acts of worship like fasting, prayer and celibacy. However, the Prophet proscribed this lifestyle and said, 'I fear Allah more than you do, and I am most obedient and dutiful among you to Him, but still I observe fast and break it; perform prayer and sleep at night and take wives. So, whoever turns away from my *Sunnah* does not belong to me.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Allah *Glorified is He* goes on saying, 'it is not in [the power of] a messenger to bring a sign except by Allah's permission; for every term there is an appointment.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 38) This means it was not for anyone to propose the miracle that this or that messenger will bring forth. No messenger had the freedom to choose the nature of the miracle that he would produce. With these words, Allah *Glorified is He* puts an end to the query of polytheists about asking for miracles done by the Prophet. After all, every prophet was sent forth for his time and people. Moreover, each miracle was the choice of Allah and each messenger carried out the commands of His Lord. It is not the place of a messenger to suggest a miracle because the Exalted Creator knows best what fits such an environment of a messenger.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that every term has a decree. This means that each revelation has its messenger and that each message has its station and miracle. If this is so then do not question Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* nor the message that Allah chose for him nor the time, place or accompanying miracle. One may wonder whether there is any type of change that takes place after Allah says that. The answer is yes, there is an alteration. Notice the following verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says:

## يَمْحُوا ٱللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيُثْبِثُ وَعِندَهُ أَمُّ ٱلْكِتَكِ ٢

## God erases or confirms whatever He will, and the source of Scripture is with Him [39] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 39)

The act of passing away of something, as we know, means abrogation, while establishment of something means that Allah confirms what He wants constant. Some people erroneously understood that every ruling revealed in the Quran was intended to be forever valid. However, on the practical level,

<sup>(1)</sup> Narrated by Al-Bukhari

as these people claim, it became clear that some decrees had to be changed by others under Divine sanction and for the benefit of humankind.

We say, no, it is not so. Rather, these rulings were transitory in nature and were binding for a certain period only. That is why Allah says that He has the basis of the Book which is the Guarded Tablet where the temporary rulings were inscribed. Upon the termination of their appointed times, these temporary decrees were replaced by other rulings. Based on this understanding, we can state that there is no such thing as abrogation of rulings, for abrogation means removal of a decree at a certain time. In reality, no rulings are removed at a certain time, but rulings are given a determined period of validity and once that period comes to an end, it is replaced by a new ruling. I say this to draw the attention of scholars of religion for the need to sit together and study this matter. To preclude any disagreement whether there was abrogation of rulings or not, I say, let us define abrogation first. That is because there are those who opine that certain rulings should have been valid forever and were changed by others for the sake of human wellbeing.

Overall, no ruling removed another and intervened just like that. Rather, all the rulings were determined in pre-Eternity. It is based on this that we argue that no rulings were ever abrogated, although the divinely appointed time of certain decrees to come to an end and be replaced by rulings which are pre-determined to let men abide by them. Therefore, we can say that there is no such thing as abrogation.

Let us look at the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Whatever communications We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it.' (*al-Baqara:* 106) It is clear from the words and meaning of this verse that abrogated rules are replaced by better or similar ones. Therefore, there is no abrogation per se. In fact, we have rulings that perform their respective functions for a certain period. They are replaced by an improved or akin ruling when a new time that requires a new ruling comes. This new ruling, however, is in conformity with considerations of public interest as well as Allah's objective.

Someone may say that it is better as long as Allah intends to bring forth a verse that is more beneficial to mankind than the abrogated or forgotten one,

then why does He reveal rulings that are similar to those destined to be abrogated in the Quran? That is because when a new decree that is more suitable to your interests comes, you might have no problem, however, when it corresponds to the latter verses, then our faith is truly put to the test. An example is the command to change the direction of prayer toward the *Ka'ba* after facing the direction of Jerusalem in prayer during the initial stages of the revelation. Clearly, there is no physical hardship in this command. Yet it tests the commitment of the believers to the new command through abiding by the newly revealed, yet determined in pre-Eternity divine command. This tests the strength of a believer's faith in the Regulator's desire to direct the Muslim's practices in that course.

Similarly, during the pilgrimage, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* kissed the black rock and stoned the rock which symbolizes Satan. Now we perform these rituals out of desire to emulate the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Both objects are mere stones but we, nevertheless, perform these rites *of Hajj* to heed His instructions. Therefore, kissing the black stone and pelting the rock symbolizing Satan is done out of desire to obey the commands of our leader, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'eliminates what He wills or confirms, and with Him is the basis of the Book.' This means that Allah ends the period of the former ruling, which ends in the Guarded Tablet and lays down the new law. One revealing example is the ruling against alcoholic beverages. Allah *Glorified is He* dealt with it within the abilities of the society. The vital principal, after all, was to accept the Islamic creed. Only once this had taken affect could other rulings be laid down.

There is a difference between creeds, which is the principle, and rulings, which express abiding to the creed. Rulings regarding creed were permanently binding. However, rulings such as prohibiting alcohol were gradually instituted according to the mores and customs of the people. Allah *Glorified is He* first restricted the times when alcohol could be consumed. After that, the prohibition and the command to shun and stay away from alcohol altogether were set forth.

To take an example from our daily lives, one may come across someone who wants to stop smoking. Such a person might begin by decreasing the number of cigarettes that he smokes daily, until finally he is able to refrain from smoking altogether.

Speaking of intoxicants, we find the Quranic verse, 'And of the fruits of the palms and the grapes- you obtain from them intoxication and goodly provision.' (*an-Nahl:* 67), here, Allah is reaffirming his blessings to humankind. However, the people of intuition take account of the fact that He did not describe intoxicants as a goodly provision as He referred to dates and grapes, for their consumption does not incur any harm on man.

Thus, the people of intuition may surmise that a dictate proscribing the consumption of alcohol may be imminent. Later, Allah Glorified is He advances the following admonition: 'They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say, "In both there is a great sin and benefit for men, and their sin is greater than their benefit."" (al-Baqara: 219) Thus, Allah Glorified is He makes it clear that intoxicants and games of chance cause more evil than good for man. Following this revelation, Allah brings the following preliminary ruling to light: 'O you who believe! do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated until you know [well] what you say.' (an-Nisa': 43) The intention behind this edict is to lengthen the time between each drinking session, so that no one drinks throughout the day and for a portion of the night. This is a way to accustom the believers to teetotalism. Finally, the complete banning of intoxicants took effect with the following verse: 'O you who believe! do not forbid [yourselves] the good things which Allah has made lawful for you and do not exceed the limits; surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits.' (al-Ma'ida: 90)

Thus, we see that the banning of alcohol took place gradually according to the social norms of pre-Islamic Arabia. In other words, intoxicants were proscribed slowly and piecemeal.

Therefore, we understand that abrogation denotes the ending of a rule's period and the beginning of a new one. This means that the first edict was not one destined to be valid for all ages, annulled and replaced with another. Rather, the period of the first ruling, determined in pre-Eternity, came to an end and a new one was instituted.

Thus, there is no space for arguing over the meaning of abrogation. That is Allah *Glorified is He* ascribed the annulment and establishment of edicts to the Mother of the Book, where the assigned periods of legitimacy pertaining to various rulings and the time when their replacements shall be revealed are specified. As long as matters are determined in pre-eternity, those who object that Allah cannot vacillate on a matter, must realise the fact that the annulment of old rulings and the affirmation of new ones do not constitute an oscillation on the part of Allah. Oscillation means that one undertakes an action, realises its flaws and replaces it with a new one. However, Allah *Glorified is He* did not come to realise the flaws in His rulings or His verses once they were revealed to the Prophet, but He determined all things in pre-Eternity in the Mother of the Book. He prescribed a period of validity, that is, a beginning and end of every rule.

In addition, the meaning of the verse could expand to include the abrogation of one revelation with another that it is the abrogating verse will have erased one thing and confirmed another. Everything that is bound to changes for the better, elimination, and confirmation is positive when this change is brought about by the Watcher, the Ever-Present: 'He utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand.' (*Qaf:* 18) In other words, Allah is able to command those two observers to confirm the obligations and prohibitions and to disregard things which are permissible. Moreover, He is the One capable of erasing sins as He sees fit and He can confirm the repentance of His servants.

Then, Allah Glorified is He says:

وَإِن مَّا نُرِيَنَّكَ بَعْضَ ٱلَّذِى نَعِدُهُمُ أَوْ نَتَوَفَّيَنَّكَ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ ٱلْبَلَغُ وَعَلَيْنَا ٱلْجِسَابُ ٢

## Whether We let you [Prophet] see part of what We threaten them with, or cause you to die [before that], your duty is only to deliver the message: the Reckoning is Ours [40] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 40)

This verse identifies the mission of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* namely conveying the way of Allah and letting he who wishes to believe do so and letting he who wishes to disbelieve do so. However, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of His Messenger saying, 'Certainly a Messenger has come to you from

among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers [he is] compassionate.' (*at-Tawba:* 128) This verse made the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* clung to the guidance of every member of his people. He wished that everyone be guided to the straight path. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* speaks to His Messenger in another verse: 'Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement.' (*al-Kahf:* 6)

In other words, you are not responsible for their faith and do not need to grieve if they refuse to join the ranks of the believers. All that is required of you is to call and preach them to the necessity of belief. Furthermore, it is Allah, Who will hold them accountable for their actions, either in this world by overlooking their sins and casting them aside, or in the Hereafter by hurling them into the hellfire.

We understand from the verse we are discussing, that good messages increase with the passing of time, while evil callings eventually fade out. Those who call unto good love yearn to see the fruits of their message. However, in some instances, the time needed for these results to emerge exceeds the lifetime of the preacher. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells His Prophet, 'And we will either let you see part of what we threaten them with or cause you to die.' In other words, plant the seeds of the message and do not concern yourself with reaping the fruits thereof. When you devote yourself wholly to sowing the seeds of the message, you will find that the rewards and fruits come forth when Allah wills them be that during your own lifetime or after your death.

If you were to examine the callings that are proclaimed around you, you will find that they are sustained by supporters or enthusiasts. Moreover, the sponsors of these missions might be impatient to see the fruits. Were they to wait and let the subsequent generations do so; their missions would have been accomplished posthumously.

In rural areas, we observe a farmer planting the earth and we can tell his intent whether he is working for himself or for someone who will reap the fruits of his efforts after him by the way he performs his task. One who plants wheat, for example labours faster than one who plants a date palm or a mango tree which bear fruit long after being planted. This period may reach seven years in some cases. Thus, the fruits of his efforts are enjoyed by future generations. In fact, we enjoy the fruits of trees that were planted by people who have passed away. Those planters thought of those who will succeed them. Such person who performs this action necessarily has an abundance of the earth that he laboured. After all, a person who does not possess an abundance of land thinks only about himself and his dependents and that is why he plants crops that will bear immediate fruit However, one who possesses an abundance of earth and patience to act according to long-term goals devotes himself to the well-being of those who will come after him. He returns the favour of the past generations who laboured for him by endeavouring for those who will succeed him.

The mission of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness to the fact that he did not seek out immediate benefits. We find that his mission met one challenge after another. He faced affliction, oppression, and hostile efforts after having spoken about his revelations to his closest kin. Yet the message of Islam began to spread among the kinsfolk and clan of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* until it prevailed over the very hub of disbelief that is, Mecca was established as the sacred House of Allah as Allah has willed. The Arabian Peninsula submitted to the divinely ordained way of life. Then the Messenger sent out epistles to the kings and Caesars, each including the formula: *aslim taslam* (submit to be in safe).

These epistles bore witness to the universality of the Islamic revelation, in accordance with what Allah *Glorified is He* said to His Messenger that he is a Messenger to humankind at large (*Saba':* 28). Thus, people understood the difference between his message and the previously revealed messages. As for Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was sent to the people of `Ad (*al-A'raf:* 65). In addition, Allah says that He sent Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* to the people of Midyan (*al-A'raf:* 85). And Musa (Moses) to the children of Israel. (*Al-'Imran:* 49)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has specified the time and place of the religions that were revealed prior to the mission of Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, the case is different when Allah sent forth Muhammad as a messenger for humankind at large. Allah knew from pre-Eternity that this religion namely, Islam would be the seal of religions. That is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sent to the rulers of his time an invitation to embrace the final revelation. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* placed his

successors in charge of this mission. The Arabian Peninsula, which was once made up of multiple contending tribes, was finally united under the banner of 'There is no deity but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.'

Each tribe would not oblige itself to worship the deity of the other tribe and each tribe would not require itself to raid the other tribe. The state of affairs was never united, nor were they permanently settled except in certain villages. Most were roaming Bedouins who carried their dismantled tents on camelback in search of grazing fields and water for their goats and livestock. They had no form of national affiliation, for the tribes were often engaged in vicious confrontations, some of which would last for up to forty years.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* could channel their skills, accoutrements and equipment into bringing about victory for the religion of Allah. While preparing battle or electing members to be part of raiding parties, he would find fully trained fighters at his disposal. When he called them to fight for Islam, he did not train them for all of his followers were skilled warriors. It is thus that the various tribes became a single community, after having been united by Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, in a unity of complete creed and under the banner of Islam.

This unlettered community was described by Allah as follows: 'He it is Who raised among the inhabitants of Mecca a Messenger from among themselves.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2)

Being unlettered was an honour for them, lest anyone say, 'the newly converted Arabs are possessors of a civilizational flowering originating in an urbanized society'. Indeed, the unletterdness of the pre-Islamic Arabs was astounding, for the legislations which ensued from their community did and continue to inspire the wonder and respect of other societies. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* destined the *ummah* to assume the banner of the Divine Message for the world.

After the revelation of the verse, 'This day have those who disbelieve despaired of your religion, so fear them not, and fear Me. This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3)

Some individuals understood that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was announcing his imminent death to his followers. After he left this world to

heaven, his Companions spread Islam throughout the globe. Within half a century, the Islamic world comprised of two wings: one stretching east and the other stretching west. It defeated the two most powerful contending empires: the Persian civilization and the Byzantine Empire. After fighting both empires at the same time, whole societies began to embrace Islam as a way of life. People turned to the new religion, ascertaining its miraculous nature, which they felt through not only the demeanour of those who propagated the Quran and its Message, but also by way of the just rulings on life as laid out in the revelation.

Thus, they realized that the miracle of the Quran lies in its appeal to the mind and that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Seal of Messengers, who was not granted an enduring miracle that is perceptible by the senses. Now if the Quran amounts to a miracle for the Arabic speaking people, among whom the Messenger of Allah was sent on the other hand, the Quran for those who did not understand its language was a miracle in its justice and the values springing from it. People at large were rushing to Islam due to the powerful backing of its faithful adherents and the force of its appeal to the non-believers as they observed that there is no difference between ruler and the smallest minion under his authority and tasted the inherent justice and equality of all men proclaimed by the new faith.

Islam was not only a miracle for the community in which it was revealed, but for the world at large. The following statement by Allah *Glorified is He* is continuously reaffirming itself: 'We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth.' (*Fussilat:* 53)

We hear of a great modern western thinker declaring Islam even though he never read the Quran. He just examined the principles laid down by Islam and the inherent solutions therein which subsequent civilizations and lawgivers worldwide were unable to solve. Moreover, it is well known that these laws were revealed to a Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* who belonged to an unlettered society, which only excelled in eloquence and literature. However, these divinely revealed laws provide solutions to problems that torment the world at large. Furthermore, we have seen how a scholar sought to identify the hundred greatest men in human history and how he ranked Muhammad

*peace and blessings be upon him* foremost among them. This scholar has not read the Quran, rather, he analysed the impact of the application of the Quran. After recognizing the great value of the Quranic way of life, we find that he grows to admire the Quranic text itself.

Consider, for example, the studies conducted by the Germans on man's sense of touch and the process by which physical pain is felt. These studies sought to explain why it is that a person becomes happy when his skin encounters a soft surface and why one is disturbed by the feeling of a harsh surface. Research went on for years. The Germans wanted to understand how and where the feeling of pain is engendered. Does it occur in the brain, or not? They finally concluded that the feeling of pain is engendered by every person in the skin and that there is a layer of sensitive cells located directly under the skin. That is why when a person is pricked by a pin; pain is only felt at the place where the pin pierced through the skin.

This fact caught the attention of one of these scientists who proclaimed that the Quran spoke of this fact in the following verse, 'so soft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the chastisement.' (*an-Nisa*': 56) If their skins were to be burnt off completely, the punishment would cease to be painful. That is why Allah replaces their skins with new ones, so that the suffering may continue. This is but one of among many of the discoveries found in the Quran.

Among the contemporary examples of discoveries related to the criminal science is the story of a young Muslim from the Egyptian province of Sohag. He went to Germany to pursue a Ph.D. degree in law. During his studies, they were once examining the matter of misusing right, deeming the solution, supposedly found in the modern West, to be one of the greatest legal accomplishments of the twentieth century. The young man clarified to them that Islam had already treated this problem and found its appropriate solution fourteen centuries ago. He told them the story of a man who went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'so and so owns a palm-tree that grows in my courtyard. He enters my house frequently under the pretext of caring for it. Sometimes he claims to want to pollinate it, reap its fruits or else to make sure it is in good condition. This went on to the point where the tree became his chief preoccupation.

The man complained to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was bothered by the man's intrusion upon the sanctity of his private life. So, the Messenger sent for the owner of the palm-tree and informed him that he had three options, to either donate the palm to him, which was the pinnacle of generosity, or sell it to him or cut it down.' Thus, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* employed what was later to be called 'misusing of rights'.

In England, they discovered that commercial law was filled with loopholes. Engagement in the market place, for example, would require a degree of flexibility on the part of the merchants. One merchant would send a message to another asking to borrow one thousand pounds and another paying off his debt or exchanging. The harsh reality is that some merchants deny the existence of their debts. In the days of old, when a merchant wanted to take a loan from another fellow merchant, he would write out the loan in the form of an official agreement.

However, in day-to-day activities at the market, this may not necessarily be the case. Someone may need cash urgently, for example, and his counterpart trusts that he will pay him back and settle the loan. In fact, the latter may eventually need the former for quick cash and trusts that the one he borrows money from today will lend him cash later on. This is the origin of what is called a commercial loan, where the debts are recorded in a roster so as to ensure that such transactions are legalised and not forgotten.

A young Muslim, who was pursuing his studies on a scholarship there, explained to his colleagues that Islam devoted a lot of attention to the issue of monetary loans to the degree that the longest verse of the Quran is that which lays down the way to go about distributing a loan and started translating it to them (*al-Baqara:* 282).

It may appear that only a creditor is protected by this verse, whereas in fact the borrower is safeguarded as well. This is because when a borrower knows that a loan is documented, he will strive to pay it back on time. Moreover, this verse ensures that deceitful people are not granted a chance to escape from repaying a loan. Thus, the Quran protects both the creditor and the borrower, so as to ensure the continuity of commercial activity in society.

Allah, notwithstanding, does not exclude faith-driven generosity and chivalry to exist in a spirit of friendship and brotherhood. So, if you have a

relative or a person to whom you are close, and you trust that he will repay his loans, then Allah *Glorified is He* tells you: 'But if you decide to trust one another, then let the one who is trusted fulfil his trust; let him be mindful of Allah.' (*al-Baqara:* 283) With this verse in mind, the one entrusted by another person carries a feeling of shame and makes every effort to pay back his debt. Allah *Glorified is He* adds: 'But if the merchandise is there and you hand it over, there is no blame on you if you do not write it down.' (*al-Baqara:* 282)

Thus, Islam came out with laws which could not have possibly sprung from an unlettered community, for these laws were centuries ahead of their time. They are laws which emanate from a divinely revealed and final religion. This is why when I was asked about Islam's position towards progress and retro-gradation, I retorted, 'The analogy itself is flawed, for it is impossible to compare mere human thought with that which was revealed by the Lord of all humans. If people of the world, whether they be in the east or west, seek that which is best for their lives and discover that the roots of that good are in Islam, then this stands as evidence to the fact that the world inclines towards moderation.

This was manifested, for example, during the bloody communist revolution in 1917. The revolutionaries said that it is the dawn of communism. Yet, the system fell after the society became ossified and stagnant, was along with being overcome by fear of the regime of the ruling communist party. We also notice that capitalism and its aggressiveness is becoming tempered, entitling the worker to his rights and to insurance. Thus, the world is moving towards moderation to which Islam calls.

Indeed, Islam was revealed by an All Knowing who is aware of all passions of the human soul and all phases of history. It is for this reason that we come across instances in which Allah *the Exalted* consoles Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was hurt by an insult that was cast against the message which he brought forth. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would take no notice of anyone trying to harm him personally, and he would never get angry as a result of an attack directed at him personally. However, if someone were to insult his message, his anger would manifest itself as a result.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded to those who stood against his message with preaching. Those who believed in his

message from amongst them attained the sweetness of faith. As for those who rejected his message, calamities befell them from all sides. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* witnessed some of the deaths of those who rejected his message.

Thus, we find Allah *Glorified is He* telling His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Either We shall take you away and punish them– indeed We will or We shall let you witness the punishment We threatened them with; We have full power over them.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 41-42) In other words, Allah *the Almighty* will either join Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the highest company, along with taking revenge on those who confronted him or else He will let Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* witness their punishment with his own eyes.<sup>(1)</sup>

It is as if the above verse explains the following verse in which Allah says: 'Whether We let you [Prophet] see part of what We threaten them with, or cause you to die [before that], your duty is only to deliver the message. The Reckoning is ours' (*ar-Ra'd:* 40).

No matter how grave, the punishment of this worldly life — as we believe — will not reach near in severity with the punishment of the Hereafter.

Afterwards, Allah Glorified is He says:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوُا أَنَّا نَأْتِي ٱلْأَرْضَ نَنْقُصُهَا مِنْ أَطْرَافِهَا وَٱللَّهُ يَحَكُمُ لَا مُعَقِّبَ لِحُكْمِةٍ وَهُوَ سَرِبِعُ ٱلْجِسَابِ <sup>(1)</sup>

Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders? God decides – no one can reverse His decision – and He is swift in reckoning [41] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 41)

The Arabic word *Yaraw* (they see) in this verse denotes 'they know'. Allah *the Exalted* however, does not employ this latter expression since the knowledge in

<sup>(1)</sup> Ibn Kathir said in his (Tafsir) (4/128): 'Allah has not taken the life of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him until He has given him the joy of witnessing the fall of his enemies; and has given him power over them and given him what was cached behind their fortresses. This was the opinion of As-Suddi and it was favored by Ibn Jarir. '

question may entail knowledge of the unseen. In contrast, the expression 'they see' means that they know what is described in the verse above with the certitude of an onlooker or a direct witness, for the eye does not deceive.

If Allah *the Almighty* reveals a verse in which He informs us of an event which took place in the past or will take place in the future, and He employs the verb 'to see', then this means that we must believe in such event with the certitude of a direct witness. This is due to the fact that Allah's Words are more certain than our own eyesight, and His Knowledge is more exact than that which our eyes perceive.

Allah *the Exalted* has previously<sup>(1)</sup> told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, and it is impossible for him to have witnessed what had happened to the army of the elephant. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believed what was revealed to him as if he had seen it with his own eyes.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Do you not see how your Lord lengthens the shade? If He had willed, He could have made it stand still.' (*al-Furqan:* 45) When the Quran speaks of things pertaining to the world of the unseen, the verb 'to see' is used, as in Allah's Words: '[Prophet], if only you could see the wrongdoers hang their heads before their Lord ...' (*as-Sajda:* 12). When addressing contemporary circumstances, the Quran states: 'But do they not see?' (*al-Anbiya':* 44)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) This utterance addresses the contemporaries who witnessed the Quranic revelations. Furthermore, in this verse, the word 'land' is undefined, for when we seek to describe it, our thoughts might turn toward the surface on which we stand. A broader definition, however, may encompass the sphere-shaped planet in which humanity as a whole lives.

<sup>(1)</sup> By *sabaqa* (a verb denoting the occurrence of something in the past) the eminent sheikh Sha'rawi means the time and place of the revelation of the chapters of *al-Fil* and *ar-Ra'd*, and not their order in the Quran. The chapter of *al-Fil* is Meccan, whereas *ar-Ra'd* is Medinan.

Yet, 'the land' may refer to a specific plot of land where an incident unfolded, such as the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of Qarun: 'We caused the earth to swallow him and his home.' (*al-Qasas:* 81) Allah *Glorified is He* says of the earth as a whole: 'Allah has made a promise to those amongst you who believe and do good deeds. He will make them successors to the land...' (*an-Nur:* 55). Naturally, they will not accede to power all over the earth. Nevertheless, they will have control over it.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '... So let her graze in Allah's land.' (*al-A'raf:* 73) Thus, we understand that 'the land' denotes a plot of land of a special incident. However, when referred to in general terms, it refers to the earth as a whole. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He set down the earth for His creatures.' (*ar-Rahman:* 10)

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* tells the children of Israel: 'After his death,<sup>(1)</sup> We told the Children of Israel, "Live in the land."' (*al-Isra':* 104) Despite the fact that He has told them in another verse: 'Go into the holy land which' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21). After having named a land for them, the Most High has used the word 'land' in general terms in order to confirm that it is not His Will for the children of Israel to have a homeland. Moreover, they will remain in diaspora for having refused to enter the land which was previously designated to them. They said, 'We will never enter while they are still there.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 24) This is why Allah *Glorified is He* states elsewhere in the Quran: 'We dispersed them over the earth in separate communities.' (*al-A'raf:* 168) In other words, Allah rendered the unity of each of their lands separated from the other lands. Such is the state of the Jews around the world today, for they are to be found in particular neighbourhoods in every country, and they did not integrate themselves into their respective societies.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) This verse is addressed to the tribe of Quraysh, for they were endowed with the power that was centred in Mecca. After the advent of Islam, they found that their situation was changing day by day, for every day a tribe would present itself to Prophet

<sup>(1)</sup> In other words: after the drowning of Pharaoh. 'the land' in this verse denotes Levant and Egypt. Cited by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5/4067)

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina to declare its faith and pledge allegiance to him. This is how the circle of disbelief shrank before their eyes until they themselves declared their embracing Islam.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* willed for the lands of disbelief to decrease, while the lands of faith expanded. Moreover, they saw this unfold before their eyes, but they did not draw a lesson from the fact that the message of Islam was expanding, and would never recede, for no territorial expansion would take place without the existence of a powerful person therein.

Moreover, when a person of power shrinks the territories of disbelief, he simultaneously enlarges the sphere of faith. This was the case until Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed the following verses: 'When Allah's help comes and He opens up your way [Prophet]. When you see people embracing Allah's faith in crowds, celebrate the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness. He is always ready to accept repentance.' (*an-Nasr:* 1-3)

Now, there are certain people who are sincere in their devotion to the religion of Allah and who try to prove that His religion contains some meanings of certain facts which have not been discovered yet. For example, they proclaimed after man's ascent to the moon that Allah *Glorified is He* has spoken of this when He says: 'Jinn and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so. You will not pass without Our authority.' (*ar-Rahman:* 33)

They said that the authority referred to in this verse is that of science. However, what are they to do with the verse which follows the aforementioned one: 'A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you, and no one will come to your aid.' (*ar-Rahman:* 33) Does this mean that He has allowed the ascent (to the moon) through the power of knowledge, as they proclaim? To such people we say that we are grateful to you for your attempt to establish a link between modern scientific phenomena and the Quran. However, where is the moon located with regard to the regions of the heavens and the earth?

It seems like an extremely small a place in comparison to the vast universe. How can the moon be compared to that star called Sirius or the series of spatial bodies called 'Andromeda'? Or again, how can it be compared to the Milky Way which fills outer space? When you look at the stars above you, you find that they are one hundred light years away. Now, if your purpose is to link the authority of modern science to the Quran, then you need to be cautious. After all, if you were able to pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth with the authority of science, then Allah *Glorified is He* would not have followed the above mentioned verse by the following Words: 'A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you...' (*ar-Rahman:* 33).

If you were to ask, what the value of the verse which speaks of this authority is, the answer is that it was revealed because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had told the people of Quraysh that he had ascended to the heavens. In other words: he had ascended through that authority of Allah *the Almighty*.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) The word 'borders' denotes that all forms have a length and a width which determine its surface area, as well as a height which determines its volume. Furthermore, we know that every length has two endpoints and that the endpoints of all surfaces are made up of a number of sides.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: '... of its borders?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) In other words: every point in the circumference of the circle is considered a side. The meaning of this is that Allah *Glorified is He* has willed for the territory of the disbelievers to close in on them, and for the realm of believers to surround that of disbelievers from every side. Furthermore, this statement suggests that the event at hand only recently took place and it was not the case before that event.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: 'Allah decides, and no one can reverse His decision.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) In other words, the subject has been decided and settled. Moreover, in our daily lives we say, 'This subject has been concluded since the chief leader has passed his judgment on it.'

In juridical cases, we find a decree issued by the lower court and then the court of appeal supports the judgment or rejects it. One does not say that the court of appeal has reversed the decree of the lower court. Rather, we say that the judge has issued a decree which accepted or declined the decree of the lower court. What are we then to say of the Decree of Allah *Glorified is He* Who never becomes oblivious, and from Whom nothing is hidden, nor can anyone reverse His Decree?

An example that is pertinent to this is what Allah *Glorified is He* says of Sulaiman (Solomon) and Dawud (David) *peace be upon them*: 'And remember Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon), when they passed judgment regarding the field into which sheep strayed by night and grazed. We witnessed their judgment [and made Sulaiman (Solomon) understand the case [better], though We gave sound judgment and knowledge ...' (*al-Anbiya':* 79-89). This story stems from a disagreement which broke out as a result of a person's sheep that strayed into the field of another. They sought the judgment of Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*, who decreed that the owner of the sheep must relinquish his flock to the land owner.

Meanwhile, our master Sulaiman (Solomon) was seated listening to the conversations. He interjected, 'No! It is the owner of the sheep who must relinquish his flock to the landlord for an assigned period during which he may benefit from its milk and yield. Let him profit from it until their owner harvests the land produce which was eaten by the sheep.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and We made Sulaiman (Solomon) understand the case [better] ...' (*al-Anbiya*': 79-89). This is the meaning of a legal appeal. This term, after all, does not imply that a judge in the court of appeal defames the former judge. Rather, it amounts to a quest for the core of justice. If a case were to be assigned once again to the former judge, he might decree the same judgment of the court of appeal, after reconsidering the whole circumstances which surrounded the case.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Allah decides...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41). When Allah *Glorified is He* issues a judgment, there is no possibility of appeal. This is the meaning of His Words: '...no one can reverse His decision...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41). It is as if this wise verse foretold the possibility of appeal that was established by our man-made legal system. None can reverse Allah's Judgment, for one who reverses a judgment must have more knowledge than the judge. Moreover, the former must have insight into things to which the latter was oblivious. Indeed, none is the Overseer save Allah, and none is capable of knowing all things except Him.

<sup>(1)</sup> See Ibn Kathir's exegesis (3/186), as well as (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) of As-Suyuti (5/645).

The flaw of every legal judgment is its implementation. In the reality of our daily lives, we find that those in whose interest decrees have been issued have trouble in executing them. This is due to the fact that the judge who issues the decree and the one who executes it are on different grounds; the former belongs to a government department, while the latter belongs to another.

In contrast, the Decree that is ordained by Allah *Glorified is He* is implemented by His Power. None has absolute power save Him. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and He is swift in reckoning.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) It is as if Allah *the Exalted* were making us aware of the fact that fair judgment must be implemented swiftly.

Moreover, we witness in our daily lives the affliction suffered by those who have just decrees. If we were only to hastily put into practice such decrees, the hearts of the members in society would be at peace.

We notice the widespread tribal loyalties where people seek retaliation by their own means as a result of long delays of a judge's decree. Indeed, legal investigations and decrees often take years to be brought to a close which causes hatred to build up. However, if a judge's decision were to be implemented upon establishing the identity of the murderer in the midst of the heated emotional reactions to the brutal crime, then the number of personal retaliations would decrease, and people would be appeased.

Afterwards, Allah Glorified is He states:

وَقَدْ مَكَرُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَلِلَّهِ ٱلْمَكْرُ جَمِيتً لَيْعَلَمُ مَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُ نَفْسٍ وَسَيَعْلَمُ ٱلْكُفَّرُ لِمَنْ عُقَبَى ٱلدَّارِ (")

Those before them also schemed, but the over- all scheme belongs to God: He knows what each soul does. In the end, the disbelievers will find out who will have the excellent home [42] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 42)

In this verse, Allah speaks to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to all listeners who behold the host of previous messages. A beholder will find that every community which received a messenger had schemed against him and conspired to invalidate its messenger's call. No community has ever

benefited from such schemes or machinations, for all of the heavenly messages were triumphant in the end.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has written, "I shall most certainly win, I and My messengers."' (*al-Mujadala:* 21) He also says: 'Our Word has already been given to Our servants the messengers. It is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41)

When Allah *the Exalted* puts forth a Decree, He does so through the Quran. Moreover, it is He Who has preserved the Quran, and there is no worldly affair which can abrogate a Quranic ruling. If you examine the stories of all messengers, you will find this principle clearly manifested. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* has emphasised this principle in the preserved Quran, and He has preserved it only on the basis that created beings cannot violate its rulings.

Indeed, every community has schemed against its messenger, but overall scheme belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah's subtle plans are better for humanity than the machinations of those communities, and His are the triumphant schemes. Moreover, if such was the fate of the previous messengers, then your destiny, Prophet Muhammad, must be different. After all, you are sent for all of humanity, and no messenger will come after you.

Such verses concerning the inevitable triumph of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and of his Call were reassuring for him. For Allah *the Most High* overwhelms all machinations devised by His created beings, and He has the Power to thwart such schemes.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse: 'He knows what each soul does.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 41) He knows the created beings' inmost secrets—be they good or evil—which the eyes do not perceive. Moreover, He protects whom He wills from the schemes of conspirers, and He casts His Punishment upon those who maliciously plot against messengers and believers.

Undoubtedly, disbelievers will know that their fate is hellfire, along with how dreadful the dwellings which they will enter on the Last Day will be. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* grants victory to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this worldly life, while disgrace will befall disbelievers therein.

Thus, their retribution in this world is both being disgraced and increasing in their knowledge of the punishment which will be inflicted upon them in the Hereafter.

Allah Glorified is He brings chapter ar-Ra'd to a close with the following verse:

وَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَسْتَ مُرْسَلًا قُلْ كَفَى بِٱللَّهِ شَهِيذَا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَمَنْ عِندَهُ عِلْمُ ٱلْكِنَابِ ("

# They say, 'You have not been sent.' Say, 'God is sufficient witness between me and you: all knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him'[43] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd*: 43)

We take the claim 'You have not been sent ...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43) to mean that disbelievers obstinately refuse to admit the prophethood of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* It is as if all of their aspirations revolved around denial of the fact that he is a messenger who is singled out by Allah *Glorified is He* with the final message. The proof of this is that they said, 'Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Then they proclaimed: 'Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 32) In other words: they are receptive to the idea of having a messenger being sent forth to them. What they reject, however, is the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* This is why Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* This comparison of the setting the setting the truth of the setting the sufficient witness between me and you. All knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43)

A witness, as we know, causes the balances of justice to incline to the right side. When an issue that demands a decree comes up in our worldly lives, we refer it to a judge who would say, 'Bring me the witnesses.' The judge then interrogates the witnesses so as to make a judgment based on their testimonies. So what are we to say when the Witness in this verse is Allah *the Almighty*?

But we may ask if Allah *Glorified is He* bears witness in the ordinary sense of the term? Who would He utter His testimony before? After all, disbelievers reject Allah's Words which were revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and* 

*blessings be upon him.* We contend that Allah *Glorified is He* has brought him forth with a miracle which proves beyond doubt the truth of his message that he has delivered on behalf of Allah *the Exalted* this miracle is supernatural in character. Indeed, Allah *the Most High* has entrusted this message to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and caused it to flow from his tongue. This means that He has testified to Prophet Muhammad's truthfulness.

Now a miracle is a phenomenon which disrupts natural order, along with being manifested through the Divine Will at the hands of a person who is sent forth by Allah *the Almighty*. This miracle amounts to the statement: 'My servant has truthfully conveyed My message.'

When a miracle is willed by Allah, it is manifested in the full—and not limited—sense of the term. One example of a manifest miracle is the fire into which Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was cast. Had the Divine intention behind this happening been simply to save Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from the fire, then this could have happened in a thousand different ways. For example, rain could have poured down from the sky, or else Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* could have fled and they would have been able to capture him.

However, after having caught him, tied him up with a rope, and cast him in the fire, Allah *Glorified is He* has showed them that through His Command the fire would not burn Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Rather, the fire would be cool and safe: 'But We said, "Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim (Abraham)"' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43).

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has disrupted and altered the natural laws, so that the veracity of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) Divine message could be confirmed beyond doubt. To restate, Allah's disrupting of the laws of nature proves the truth of His Prophet's message.

He states in the verse which we are examining: 'They say, "You have not been sent." Say, "Allah is sufficient witness<sup>(1)</sup> between me and you..."' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41).

The testimony of the veracity of the Message conveyed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is expressed in the fact that he was

<sup>(1)</sup> In other words: I rely upon Allah, the Witness of both of us. He witnesses my delivery of His Message, and your lies, o fabricators of lies. See Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) (2/521).

brought up among the people of Quraysh, but he had not uttered a single letter which could be designated as eloquence, a sermon, or poetry for the first forty years of his life. After all, it is impossible for the signs of genius to be delayed until the age of forty.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* willed for the Quran to be conveyed by the tongue of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at the age of forty, so that he could spread the message to all of humanity. This in itself is a testimony by Allah *Glorified is He* to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad's message.

Allah *Glorified is He* adds: '... all knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 43) The Scripture, in this context, refers to the Quran. He who recites the Quran with close scrutiny can clearly see its inimitable nature, and he who contemplates its meanings and analyses its style realises that it stands as a testimony to the veracity of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah's Words, '... all knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43), could be referring to those who knew the prophecies concerning the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the Torah and the Gospels. This is due to the fact that the description and the attributes of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are contained in these Holy Books which had preceded the Quran. In fact, 'Abdullah Ibn Salam,<sup>(1)</sup> who was a rabbi of the Jews said, 'Verily, I knew Muhammad when I saw him just as I know my own son. In fact, my knowledge of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him, 'Messenger of Allah, verily my soul inclines toward Islam, but the Jews are given to lies, and if I were to declare my Islam, they would insult, curse and accuse me of false things. I would like you (therefore) to ask them about my status.' So, Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him* called forth the leaders and elders of the Jewish community. They suspected that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might

<sup>(1)</sup> He is 'Abdullah ibn Salam ibn Al-Harith Al-Isra'ili, Abu Yusuf: a Companion who embraced Islam upon the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to Medina. His [pre-Islamic] name was Al-Hasin and so Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him renamed him 'Abdullah. He witnessed the conquering of Jerusalem with 'Umar, and lived in Medina until his death in 34 A.H. (Al-A'lam li-Az-Zirikli 4/90)

incline towards them and would cease to call them to Islam. So, they came to him, and he asked them, 'What have you to say of Ibn Salam?'<sup>(1)</sup> They showered their praise upon him and spoke of him in the highest of terms.

At this point, Ibn Salam proclaimed, 'Now I stand before you, and I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' So they began to slander Ibn Salam, and the latter told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Did I not tell you that the Jews are a lying people?'

Moreover, we know that those amongst the people of the Book who would rejoice by the revelations given by the Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are forty individuals amongst the Christians of Najran, thirty-two Abyssinians and eight Yemenis.

We also know that those who denied the Call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to discourage each other from listening to the Quran. The Quran relates their words, 'Do not listen to this Quran. Drown it in frivolous talk. You may gain the upper hand.' (*Fussilat:* 26) This means that they were certain that the act of listening to the Quran affects the soul by reviving the primordial nature of man which yearns to believe in Allah *the Almighty*.

As for those who are endowed with knowledge of the Books that foretell the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they know that the news of his arrival and his description are contained in their Books. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those We gave the Scripture know it as well as they know their own sons, but some of them hide the truth that they know.' (*al-Baqara:* 146) He also says: '... even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it: Allah rejects those who disbelieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

<sup>(1) [</sup>Narrated by Al-Bukhari]

# Index

## Chapter of *Hud* (Continued)

apter of <i>Hud</i> (Cont	inued)	1	
Verse 61	7	Verse 93	73
Verse 62	10	Verse 94	74
Verse 63	11	Verse 95	81
Verse 64	12	Verse 96	88
Verse 65	14	Verse 97	90
Verse 66	17	Verse 98	91
Verse 67	18	Verse 99	94
Verse 68	18	Verse 100	94
Verse 69	20	Verse 101	95
Verse 70	27	Verse 102	97
Verse 71	29	Verse 103	100
Verse 72	30	Verse 104	102
Verse 73	31	Verse 105	102
Verse 74	35	Verse 106	104
Verse 75	36	Verse 107	105
Verse 76	37	Verse 108	107
Verse 77	38	Verse 109	108
Verse 78	39	Verse 110	110
Verse 79	42	Verse 111	113
Verse 80	42	Verse 112	118
Verse 81	43	Verse 113	121
Verse 82	45	Verse 114	123
Verse 83	46	Verse 115	130
Verse 84	52	Verse 116	133
Verse 85	58	Verse 117	140
Verse 86	60	Verse 118	143
Verse 87	62	Verse 119	147
Verse 88	67	Verse 120	151
Verse 89	69	Verse 121	156
Verse 90	69	Verse 122	159
Verse 91	71	Verse 123	160
Verse 92	72		

Chapter of Yusuf	171	Verse 36	271
Verse 1	173	Verse 37	274
Verse 2	183	Verse 38	275
Verse 3	188	Verse 39	277
Verse 4	196	Verse 40	278
Verse 5	199	Verse 41	281
Verse 6	204	Verse 42	284
Verse 7	206	Verse 43	286
Verse 8	211	Verse 44	288
Verse 9	215	Verse 45	288
Verse 10	217	Verse 46	290
Verse 11	218	Verse 47	293
Verse 12	219	Verse 48	294
Verse 13	220	Verse 49	296
Verse 14	221	Verse 50	297
Verse 15	221	Verse 51	301
Verse 16	224	Verse 52	302
Verse 17	226	Verse 53	303
Verse 18	228	Verse 54	307
Verse 19	233	Verse 55	309
Verse 20	234	Verse 56	312
Verse 21	235	Verse 57	314
Verse 22	238	Verse 58	315
Verse 23	240	Verse 59	316
Verse 24	245	Verse 60	319
Verse 25	252	Verse 61	319
Verse 26	253	Verse 62	320
Verse 27	254	Verse 63	320
Verse 28	254	Verse 64	321
Verse 29	255	Verse 65	321
Verse 30	256	Verse 66	322
Verse 31	259	Verse 67	323
Verse 32	264	Verse 68	326
Verse 33	267	Verse 69	327
Verse 34	269	Verse 70	327
Verse 35	269	Verse 71	329

## Index

V	220	V	2(0
Verse 72	329	Verse 92	360
Verse 73	330	Verse 93	362
Verse 74	330	Verse 94	363
Verse 75	331	Verse 95	365
Verse 76	332	Verse 96	365
Verse 77	334	Verse 97	367
Verse 78	337	Verse 98	367
Verse 79	338	Verse 99	368
Verse 80	339	Verse 100	370
Verse 81	342	Verse 101	378
Verse 82	343	Verse 102	386
Verse 83	345	Verse 103	389
Verse 84	347	Verse 104	394
Verse 85	349	Verse 105	396
Verse 86	350	Verse 106	401
Verse 87	352	Verse 107	406
Verse 88	355	Verse 108	407
Verse 89	357	Verse 109	410
Verse 90	358	Verse 110	415
Verse 91	359	Verse 111	419

		1	
Chapter of <i>ar-Ra'd</i>	427		
Verse 1	429	Verse 14	510
Verse 2	431	Verse 15	512
Verse 3	454	Verse 16	515
Verse 4	462	Verse 17	518
Verse 5	470	Verse 18	521
Verse 6	476	Verse 19	523
Verse 7	480	Verse 20	524
Verse 8	484	Verse 21	525
Verse 9	488	Verse 22	528
Verse 10	490	Verse 23	539
Verse 11	492	Verse 24	544
Verse 12	499	Verse 25	548
Verse 13	502	Verse 26	550

		-	
Verse 27	554	Verse 36	598
Verse 28	559	Verse 37	602
Verse 29	567	Verse 38	604
Verse 30	568	Verse 39	605
Verse 31	574	Verse 40	609
Verse 32	583	Verse 41	617
Verse 33	587	Verse 42	623
Verse 34	590	Verse 43	625
Verse 35	591		